THE EARTH SHAKERS OF MADAGASCAR

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THE EARTH SHAKERS OF MADAGASCAR

**AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF
AUTHORITY, FERTILITY AND CREATION**

OLIVER WOOLLEY

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NOTE ON DIALECT, TRANSCRIPTION AND ORTHOGRAPHY

The people of Madagascar all essentially speak one basic language, Malagasy. However, this language is by no means standardized throughout the island and many dialects are spoken. Malagasy is more of a 'linguistic ensemble' (Verin 1975: 167) than a single language and different dialects display significant variations. Derived from Maayan of Borneo, Malagasy speech has been shaped over the course of more than a millennium through contact with other Indonesian and South Asian cultures and through engagement with Bantu, Arabic and European influences. Over this period, the language of the island itself has refracted into three broad bands: the Merina-Betsileo centre, the east and north coasts, and the west and south (Allen 1995: 121). The people living in the area under study, the land of Sahafatra in south-east Madagascar, think of themselves as speaking a dialect distinct from that found anywhere else on the island. Living as they do at the geographical and cultural crossroads of the three language 'bands', they incorporate elements of all of them, although the east-coast influence is most strongly felt. For political as much as linguistic reasons, the people of Sahafatra particularly contrast their own local way of speaking (*fiteny-paritra Sahafatra*) with the official, standard Malagasy of the highland Merina people, which is used as the language of bureaucracy and as a nationwide *lingua franca*.

The fact that the land of Sahafatra is situated at a cultural crossroads has influenced the make-up of the language considerably. The Sahafatra dialect has much in common with other east-coast dialects (notably the accent and vocabulary), the dialect of the Bara to their immediate west (where 'l' replaces the standard Malagasy 'd' in many words) and the highland dialect. It also incorporates extensive borrowing of French words (from colonial times) that have been 'Malgachicized'. However, despite the mix of influences, the language can still be represented

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satisfactorily using standard Malagasy orthography, the basic conventions of which I outline below for those unfamiliar with the script:

the alphabet is based on the Roman system introduced by British missionaries in the eighteenth century

‘o’ is pronounced like ‘u’

‘j’ following ‘n’ in the middle of a word is pronounced like ‘z’

For those familiar with standard Malagasy it might be helpful to outline some of the basic variations from the Sahafatra dialect. Obviously, many words are completely different, or are the same but have different meanings. Nevertheless, there remains a large body of words that are essentially the same but which are written or pronounced slightly differently. With reference to these shared words the Sahafatra dialect tends to differ from standard Malagasy in the following ways:

words are shortened by dropping ‘na’ at the end (e.g. *razana* becomes *raza*)

sounds are simplified (e.g. *dia* becomes *da*)

consonants are cut out (e.g. *aiza* becomes *aia*; *izaho* becomes *iaho*)

the ‘m’ sound is often dropped (e.g. *mpanjaka* becomes *panjaka*; *sempotra* becomes *sepotra*)

‘s’ is pronounced as a ‘sh’ sound

the ‘v’ sound is changed to a ‘b’ sound (e.g. *avo* becomes *abo*)

‘a’ at the end of a word becomes a ‘y’ sound (e.g. *misaotra* becomes *misaotry*)

PROLOGUE: SETTING THE SCENE

I first visited the 'Wasteland', the setting for this book, on a reconnaissance trip to Madagascar undertaken with Fiona Wilson in 1994. Taking advantage of a six-month exploration of the island intended to identify potential field sites, we had decided to try to track down this somewhat mysterious and intriguing area known locally as Sahafatra. I had first heard the name back in London from one of my supervisors, Maurice Bloch. He mentioned a region in the south-east of the country, which he in turn had learned about from a man teaching in one of his own fieldwork areas, Zafimaniry-land. According to this informant, who was originally from the Wasteland itself, the people of Sahafatra were little known and merited study, not least because they practised a strange system of rotating kingship. Pathetically excited by this exotic-sounding institution and by the fact that the area appeared not to have been written about, I decided to make further enquiries. Reassured to find only a few vague references to Sahafatra in the available literature, I added the name to my mental map of places to visit on the forthcoming trip. Now in Madagascar and having ended up in Farafangana, which we surmised to be the nearest major urban centre to the target zone, we proceeded to quiz the locals as to the whereabouts of the elusive Wastelanders. Suddenly, and somewhat to our dismay, we found ourselves loaded without explanation onto a little Mercedes Unimog truck heading inland for the small town of Vondrozo.

Eight hours later, long after darkness had fallen, we were still travelling, all the time wondering exactly where we were going. The late rains had turned the dirt road into a treacherous morass and every few minutes the truck, which was all the while threatening to topple over, had to be dug out of trouble. Eventually, a few kilometres short of our objective, the truck went one manoeuvre too far and did finally overturn. Fiona, who was on what became the top side of the cab, found herself

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rapidly making friends with the driver, while I ended up buried underneath all the goods and people being carried in the back. Uninjured, but groaning to make sure I was not forgotten, I tried to wait calmly as I and the other trapped passengers were slowly disinterred. Feeling rather sorry for ourselves, we abandoned the truck and set out under the gently falling rain to finish the journey on foot, eventually arriving in Vondrozo after midnight. As helpless foreigners we were shepherded into the compound of Monsieur Seng, one of the Chinese/Malagasy traders in the town, in order to ask for shelter. Although it was the middle of the night, a room was immediately vacated for us and we gratefully collapsed, muddy and exhausted, into bed.

Despite our slightly inauspicious arrival, the generosity of spirit with which we were received became the enduring hallmark of our stay. Monsieur Seng fed, housed and entertained us over the five days we used to make a preliminary exploration of the region, and everywhere we went during that time we were welcomed into people's homes to eat and talk. Guided by Gervais and Pascal, the son and son-in-law of a local teacher, Narcisse, we had met in Farafangana, we set out to get to know the area. Each day we would head off in a different direction to explore the beautiful but empty countryside that stretched away to the north and south of Vondrozo. Our guides took us to visit their kin, who were to be found in nearby villages sheltering under the shadow of a steep and forbidding escarpment. At each village they helped explain that we were interested in learning about the local way of life and that if all went well we might return to live there. Everywhere we went large numbers of people would assemble to welcome us, eager to be introduced and to tell us something of themselves. They expressed a sense of difference to the surrounding peoples that made a strong impression on us. Their warmth, the rapidity with which they picked up on what we wanted to do and their enthusiasm for the project won us over. So much so that, when we eventually left, I was almost certain I would return.

When I did return to Vondrozo about 15 months later, it was alone. Fiona and I had decided that it was probably best if I did fieldwork by myself. After all, we naively reasoned, what would she do all day, every day, if she came? My first month in the Wasteland was full of feverish activity. Not only was I homesick and anxious to get going on 'real' fieldwork, I had also managed to arrive at the height of the ceremonial season. Almost the first thing I did was to track down Gervais, one of our guides from the previous year, in order to ask him if he wanted to work with me again. He, being somewhat at a loose end and eager for an excuse to explore the area, agreed. Gervais was almost the ideal

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candidate to act as guide. He was not born locally but, while working on a road-building project, had met and married a local woman called Solange. They, along with their two small children, Gerald and Marie-Ange, now lived permanently in Vondrozo, running a little *hotely*, where people would come to meet, eat and drink.

Gervais's situation, both marital and occupational, gave a good balance to the research as it allowed him to be treated as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. As an 'insider' he was part of a large and welcoming extended family spread over the countryside in whose life we were free to participate. And yet, as an 'outsider', he was always a bit removed from the action, curious, like me, as to the local way of doing and saying things. Of particular importance was Gervais's intelligence and his enjoyment of the challenge of learning and teaching at the same time. It proved invaluable to have someone skilful and patient to act as an intermediary, someone who was able to bridge the gap between the local dialect and the official Malagasy that I was initially more familiar with. The fact that Gervais was also educated enough to understand the type of knowledge that I was looking for was an additional bonus: when others could find no alternative way of explaining something, Gervais normally could.

Having cleared the proposed research with the *Commandant de Brigade*, whose menacingly polished black shoes and habit of chain-smoking struck fear into all those who met him, we got started almost immediately. Gervais helped me find a room to rent in town and insisted on sleeping there too, to protect me from the old landlady, whom he feared was a witch. Every day we ventured out into the countryside on foot to see whatever was happening. We visited the most important villages and introduced ourselves to the local leaders. We dropped in on Gervais's kin and began to pick up on the family gossip. We learnt about farming and joined in to help when we could. We discussed the fluctuating prices at the coffee market. We attended moonlit circumcision ceremonies, the installation of new 'chiefs' and commemorations of the dead. At the beginning, it was hard to understand what was going on but we went anyway and asked questions of anyone willing to listen. We covered many miles together and spent many nights in each other's company as guests in distant villages. Over the weeks, what had initially been a temporary arrangement gradually turned into a permanent bond. Gervais became not only my guide, but also my research assistant and friend. Without him I would have accomplished very little. Over the next month we tried to demarcate the field of research. Apart from day-time reconnaissances made from Vondrozo, we also travelled hundreds

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of kilometres in broad loops mapping out the villages and territories of the clans claiming to be Sahafatra and sleeping in whatever village we found ourselves as darkness fell. The groundwork completed, we returned to Vondrozo to take stock.

By this stage, I was lonely and missing Fiona terribly. I was overwhelmed by the friendliness of almost everyone I met but I was also overwhelmed by being the continual subject of intense scrutiny. As people looked at me, commenting on my difference, so I felt different. Although I felt close enough to my Malagasy friends to be moved to tears by events on various occasions, I never actually felt myself to be one of them, as I had imagined I would before commencing fieldwork. The realization that my life simply did not depend on the same things theirs did came quickly and affected me deeply. Even though I farmed with people, my life did not depend on a successful harvest. Even though I learnt to appreciate the power of their leaders, I was not entirely subject to their authority. Even though I could see the many charms of Malagasy women, I could not imagine myself marrying one. Renewed reflection led me to the conclusion that I should be there to try to share, experience and appreciate their lives rather than to prove my ability to be accepted literally as one of them. My conveniently changed perception of fieldwork allowed me to give in to my loneliness. I travelled to Farafangana and telephoned Fiona to ask her to join me in the field. Happily for me she agreed.

The arrival of Fiona and her full participation in the fieldwork was a great joy for me. Not only did my loneliness evaporate overnight, but the whole nature of fieldwork changed. Being able to share the experience made it real in a way that it had not been before. Fiona's warmth and empathy earned us many friends, and her perceptiveness and powers of description brought them to life for me. While I always tended to look at events and people in a rather over-selfconscious anthropological way, Fiona saw them vividly for what they were. Whereas my notebooks are full of laboured factual descriptions and the mechanical details of rituals, Fiona's are loaded with atmosphere, evoking what it was actually like to be there. Her human approach turned informants into people, and events into significant moments in these people's lives. The fact that I was not alone, but was rather part of a community of two, explains my schizophrenic use of 'I' and 'we' throughout the text. I make no apologies for the inconsistency because it represents the actual state of affairs on the ground. Out of 16 months' fieldwork, Fiona was present for a year. It is clear, then, that most of the important work was carried out together and merits the use of 'we'. Otherwise I use 'I'. However, it is not quite

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so straightforward. Some of my interpretations and assertions Fiona would not necessarily agree with, in which case I use 'I' whether she was present or not. To try and be too precise on this point would be ridiculous; I simply wish to make clear that, although the final conclusions are mine, fieldwork was carried out as a couple. This work is the result of that joint effort.

EVERYDAY LIFE

During my initial reconnaissance I had discovered that the people of Sahafatra consisted of many clans spread out in exclusive territories across the region. Since I was interested in studying the interaction between clans as well as the make-up of individual clans, I decided we should locate ourselves in a neutral and central position. Vondrozo, as the local administrative and market centre, situated in the midst of the clans, seemed the obvious choice. It acted as a magnet for all the local clans, and lay within easy striking distance of several of them. Consequently, we had access to all the clans without being exclusively affiliated to any single one of them. Vondrozo also acted as the major node of the informal information network; if a major event was happening in the countryside we would always hear about it in advance when the organizers came to buy provisions and spread the word. Our presence in town therefore ensured that we did not miss any important events.

Luckily, a small house right in the middle of town, opposite two of the three major shops, came up for rent just before Fiona arrived. It sat on a stone and concrete base, had wattle and daub walls coated with more concrete and a tin roof that made it frighteningly hot in summer. All these features were considered to be luxury. It consisted of three rooms and two views. From the front window you could watch the world go by on the central thoroughfare, while at the back you could sit quietly looking into the coffee bushes that led down to the well. We moved in immediately and tried to make ourselves comfortable. We turned the rooms into a bedroom (with *in situ* mosquito net), a room for receiving visitors (covered with traditional reed mats) and a kitchen where we cooked on a small charcoal stove. We commissioned a little wooden stall to be built at the back so that we could take bucket showers, and we had an outdoor fireplace covered so that we could cook rice properly over the heat of a real wood fire. All the furniture and utensils that we needed were lent to us by the ever-kind Mama Tang, a Chinese/Malagasy trader living across the road, who mothered us like the children she

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never had. A local girl, Mena, helped us every day by collecting water and filling our plastic storage barrels, by doing our laundry and by hunting out and buying elusive products like chickens, meat and vegetables from the market. As we became better known, people began to knock on the door to sell us local products: eggs, milk, freshwater prawns, hedgehogs, guinea fowl.

In effect, we were the only Europeans in town, since Père Rafaely, the Polish Catholic priest, was widely regarded as having 'gone native'. He, though friendly, pretty much kept himself to himself. Except for one brief introduction in the rectory and a Chinese-style Christmas dinner we all attended at Mama Tang's, we never really had a chance to talk. Occasionally, we would see him emerging from what he called the 'foreigners' shop (the one owned by Mama Tang!), clutching a packet of Gauloises. At other times, we might catch a glimpse of his bearded, begoggled face and his combat trousers flashing by as he sped off on his motorbike to visit a village in the back of beyond. Otherwise he was an invisible presence.

The consequence of our perceived singularity was that our moving in caused a commotion. For the first few weeks we had no privacy whatsoever. Perfect strangers walked in unannounced, plonked themselves down on our matted floor and waited to be entertained, while children crowded round the window and simply stared, however much I tried to admonish them. Eventually Mama Tang, seeing our dilemma, sent one of her workmen round to build a fragile wooden fence round the house with just a little entrance gate for visitors. With this acting as a psychological barrier to complete strangers, things soon calmed down. Even so, our other-worldliness never ceased to amaze people. In one unfortunate incident we were spotted bathing in one of the rivers a few miles out of town. The man who saw us was so amazed at the spectacle of these two white forms that he ran away and spread the story that Mary and Joseph had fallen from the sky back to Earth. The story spread all the way to Farafangana and pious pilgrims began to arrive in Vondrozo in search of a living miracle. Only after several weeks, when police intervened to dispel the story, did the flow of pilgrims stop.

The nature of the way we lived informed the way we did fieldwork. As an independent household, our social life depended on visiting others and on being visited ourselves. This was never a problem and we rapidly built up an extensive network of friendships with people from at least five clans, spanning about 20 villages. The truth was that, although we lived in town, our social life revolved around these surrounding villages

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where we were involved in reciprocal relationships, taking and receiving gifts, right from the start. By the end, if anything, it became a burden to have such a large group of friends, because they expected us to visit more often than we realistically could, and were hurt by our long absences. Having our own house also taught us the difficult skill of giving as well as receiving hospitality. It was not always easy to interpret what exactly people required of us. As we discovered, hosting is a fine art which depends as much on supplying a rice meal as it does on conversation. Market day, when all our friends tended to descend on us at the same time, often the worse for wear, could be a very stressful time, so much so that, to my shame, I sometimes had to shut up the house and pretend we were not in.

We would normally be woken up at about 5.30 in the morning by the light and the noise of the cocks crowing. After our ablutions we would eat some sort of rice-breads, bought from a nearby stall or commissioned in advance, accompanied by coffee with condensed milk, while deciding how we were going to spend the day. Inevitably, Gervais would come round to discuss the latest news, tell us of any impending events or places of interest he had heard about and help finalize a plan of action. Once we were all agreed, we would shut up the house and go over to the shop to perform our morning greetings and to buy a small gift for whoever we were going to visit. This usually consisted of something regarded as a treat: a few leaves of tobacco, a packet of biscuits or a small quantity of locally distilled rum sold illegally from under the counter. We would then leave town, greeting the many acquaintances who happened to cross our path, before breaking into the countryside proper.

Walks along the rural paths were always very peaceful and companionable. They were a good time to reflect, to chat with Gervais and to question him on any matters that had been puzzling us. Laden only with a satchel containing notepad and camera, and an umbrella to protect against fierce sun as well as torrential rain, we found the walks not normally too taxing. Even so, they were undeniably time-consuming, as they often involved climbing and descending innumerable hillsides and crossing rice paddies and rivers on awkward stepping stones or primitive 'bridges' made of single, slippery tree trunks. The round-trip journey time to the villages we visited varied between about one and six hours and, over the whole fieldwork period, I estimate that we traversed several thousand kilometres.

The hours and kilometres spent travelling were never boring, however, and probably taught us more than any other single aspect of fieldwork.

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We always took the opportunity to stop and talk to the people working in the fields, and to pass the time of day with those we met heading in the opposite direction. The nosey local custom of always asking you where you were going to and coming from along with the specific purpose of your journey proved endlessly informative and entertaining once we adopted it for ourselves. It soon became a habitual game to guess the intentions of oncoming columns of people. By reading into what they were carrying, what they were wearing, the order in which they were walking and the make-up of the group, we became quite good at surmising, even from a distance, what they were on their way to do. Since everyone criss-crossed the landscape on foot, the sum of our chance encounters allowed us to build up a picture of the full range of human purposes motivating such journeys. Most commonly, people were going to market or the fields, but they were also off to marriages, funerals, public debates, circumcisions, celebrations of the dead and so on. Many invitations to events stemmed from these random encounters. Repeated journeys not only allowed us to register these patterns of movement and motivation but also enabled us to see how the crops were coming along through the course of the whole year, and how individual homesteads were developing. We often fantasized about building our own homestead as we noticed ideal spots en route, and enthused about the apparent potential of the land. When we finally came to a village, it was often what we had seen and heard on the way that provided the major topics of conversation.

On arrival, we would enter the house of whoever happened to be our friend in that particular village, go through the expected formal greetings and present our gift. For the rest of the day, as long as we were welcome, we tried to join in with whatever was going on, which normally involved chatting, cooking, eating and drinking, and generally participating in the comings and goings of the house. At certain times of the year we might all go to the fields to help transplant or harvest rice, to help trample a paddy or to learn how to plant manioc or to prune coffee. At other times we might all attend a family ceremony or go off to a larger festival in a neighbouring village. Most important, however, was the fact that, on every occasion, whatever we did, we were party to the unfolding dramas thrown up by complicated family dynamics in operation within the house.

It is hard to convey the wonderful cosiness of these smoky houses and the intense sense of inclusion we felt inside them. By being in completely open one-roomed households for hours on end, waiting with increasingly numb behinds for the obligatory communal midday rice

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meal to be prepared, we learnt how different types of people tended to react and respond to the demands they put on each other. Since it was the duty of local leaders to host strangers, it was these men who tended to become our friends. This meant that we inevitably learnt a lot about the nature and structure of authority. After all, the best informants, the rulers themselves, were obliged to take care of us! Of particular interest was the way other guests, messengers, subjects, relatives and tribute payers approached and handled these men, who were often regarded as powerful and potentially dangerous.

Eventually, as evening beckoned, we would take our leave and head back 'home' to Vondrozo, chewing over the happenings and gossip of the day on the way. We tended to arrive at our little house, tired out from our efforts, in the early evening. The remaining daylight would be spent writing up notes, buying anything we needed for supper and talking to anyone who happened by. When darkness fell at about 7 o'clock it signalled that the 'public' part of the day was over. No one would visit now unless it was an emergency, as they were all shut up in the domestic worlds of their own houses. I might nip out to buy a beer, cooled in the kerosene-powered fridge of Mama Tang, and have a chat in the shop. Then we would light the candles (or the pressure lantern if I was feeling energetic) and settle down to some relaxed cooking, with the radio in the background to keep us company. By about 9.30, exhausted, we would climb under the mosquito net and fall asleep.

Although most of our days were spent as has roughly been described above, there were many exceptions. For example, whenever there was an important event occurring outside Vondrozo that lasted longer than a day, or that was difficult to reach, we would pack a rucksack, set out early and spend a night or two there in a hut set aside for guests. On these occasions we would tend to ask more formal questions concerning the event and would ask permission to take photos. Every now and again I would record some singing or a blessing, although I kept this to a minimum, as it always seemed to inhibit people and make them behave very unnaturally. Every couple of months or so we would take a 'break' somewhere else in Madagascar to refresh ourselves. When we returned, we often did so by foot, exploring the regions around, and entry points to, the Wasteland. We walked between Vondrozo and the port of Farafangana several times. We walked north from the rural market of Vohimary to Vondrozo. We once came from Ambalavao, through the forested escarpment, to Karianga and on to Vondrozo, following the tobacco sellers' trail from the highlands. And, after Fiona left, I rode a bicycle from Ihosy to Ivohibe and on to Vondrozo along with the

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long-distance cattle-herders from the Bara country who were heading for the slaughterhouses of the coastal towns.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF FIELDWORK

During the first months we were in the Wasteland, Fiona and I took the opportunity to ask everybody about everything. As privileged outsiders we were allowed to be present at most events and we were immediately forgiven for any social gaffes we made. In order to learn the language properly and discover further avenues for inquiry, we had to be brazen, so we did not hesitate to embark on any topic of conversation. However, after a while, when we had mastered some social conventions, we became more reticent.

It was not that it was rude to ask direct questions, just that it made us, as questioners, the centre of attention. As fieldwork progressed, I found that I was less inclined to ask direct questions and more inclined to take a back seat as a silent observer. In the end, many of the most interesting conversations I heard happened in spite of my being there, rather than because I was there. Having mapped out the basic 'mechanics' of living in the Wasteland, what was done when and how, I became more concerned with the theory and the 'poetics' of life, the deeper reasons why things were done. Indeed, the best reason I can now see for staying for so long was that, by the end, I felt I was beginning to understand some of the unexpressed, underlying, implicit motivations for people's actions.

Although the claim to be able to 'read' unspoken motivation can never be fully realized or justified, it is only by striving towards that end that an interpretation of people's behaviour can have any meaning. By attempting to explore hidden motivation, as well as to describe action, I hope to convey the richness and complexity of peoples' lives, a richness and complexity that might otherwise be obscured by the harshness of their unforgiving and never-ending subsistence lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION: THE WASTELAND, ITS PEOPLE AND HISTORY

This book is about the leaders, including those called Earth Shakers, who hold power in the part of south-east Madagascar known as the Wasteland. The Wasteland (Sahafatra) lies in a largely forgotten corner of the island and consists of a small territory of approximately 40 by 65 km, sandwiched between flat marshy coastal plains to the east and a steep forested escarpment to the west. From above it appears as an expanse of deceptively small hills, their curvaceous geometry giving the impression of an endless sea of overturned, velvet-covered egg-cartons. The hills are mostly bare, and their untouched smoothness lends such a virgin quality to the land that, from a distance, nobody would suspect that anyone was living on their grassy slopes.

On closer inspection, however, the impact of human habitation becomes perceptible. A patch of burnt and cleared scrub, a whiff and thread of smoke in the air, the lurid green flash of a rice paddy, a red line of trodden earth where a path contours the valley, a thin voice carried on the wind. With a little more attention, other more subtle signs of life can be detected: a certain unnatural symmetry on the hillside where manioc is planted, a tuft of trees on top of a ridge where a village is growing up, the mixed hues of the canopy of a coffee forest, the trembling of banana plants making a noise like rain. As one learns to read and interpret the land better, even more initially invisible features become apparent: villages hidden in the trees, mango groves shading rice terraces tumbling down hillsides, overgrown standing stones astride high ridges and cavern-like tombs hidden under desolate outcrops of rock. And yet, in spite of these tangible, if somewhat camouflaged, signs of human activity and endeavour, the land remains undeniably, terribly empty.

This perceived emptiness is not just something experienced by newcomers, it is a defining feature of the territory recognized by the

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inhabitants themselves, who talk about the land as still being 'young and unformed' (*mbola tanora, mbola tsy namboarana*). Although men and women are in the process of gradually taking possession of the land through settling and farming it, they have so far, by their own admission, only scratched the surface. Outsiders refer to the settlers as the 'tireless ones' (*betsirebaky*) because they are thought of as intrepid pioneers in a 'new land' (*tany vaovao*), but the locals are more equivocal about their position and prefer to call themselves 'Wastelanders' (*Sahafatra*). For them this term captures an important feature of their lives, namely the interminable struggle they feel themselves to be engaged in with the 'harsh and unforgiving land' (*tany mafy*). They feel their destiny to be so wrapped up with that of the land that they identify themselves totally with it, adopting the term used for the Wasteland for themselves. The Wasteland and the Wastelanders are therefore, in a sense, a single conceptual entity. The Malagasy term used to identify them can be used interchangeably to refer to the land, to the people inhabiting it or to the combination of the two. Although for the purposes of clarity we must differentiate between the different meanings, referring to the Wasteland and to the Wastelanders as and when appropriate, the fact that both meanings are contained in a single term, *Sahafatra*, demonstrates an important truth: the inseparability of the land and the people. This unqualified inseparability, representing an ongoing and intimate connection with the land, is a critical feature of what it is to be a Wastelander.

The Malagasy word for 'wasteland' (*Sahafatra*) literally translates as 'empty place'¹ but represents what the locals prefer to describe as 'a place without food' (*tsy'sy hany*). The term conveys the image of a wilderness, a savage and harsh place associated with hardship and danger. This is the impression that the original migrants, those who would become the Wastelanders, must have had of the area. To them the land they arrived in must have represented the Malagasy equivalent of a desert: an 'uncultivated area' (*tsy nambole*) or, more specifically, a world 'without rice paddies' (*tsy'sy tani-kosy*). In their eyes it was therefore a 'wasteland'. Within this 'wasteland', however, lay what they were looking for, an 'empty place' that they could make their own. For although the landscape of the past was a bare slate, it also represented a contoured and watered surface upon which they could impose their plans. The land was only barren in the sense that it was 'unworked'. Considering that it was a well-watered and potentially fertile piece of land, this state of affairs entailed almost criminal neglect in the eyes of hungry and landless farmers. For this was no Sahara, but a potential granary to feed

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thousands. The potential of the land along with its actual sterility was captured by the idea of a 'wasteland'. The land was not intrinsically worthless, it simply had no value until it had been worked and transformed by human labour. Without human input the land would remain in its savage state and would be 'wasted'. Hence the idea of the Wasteland, which still persists, was born.

The overall perspective of the modern-day farmer has not changed much from that he imagines his ancestors to have had before him. As he looks down from a hilltop he still sees the promised land spread out before him. He does not see scenery but sees a land waiting to be worked, full of unlimited potential and great danger. One day I was standing with Iaban'i Zafitala beside his homestead, gazing out at the Wasteland stretching into the distance. Invigorated by the view, I was foolish enough to say that the land looked 'beautiful' (*tsara tarehy*), a nonsensical comment to him, and one that begged a contemptuous look. In an effort to redeem myself I tried again, this time by saying that the land was 'pleasing' (*mahafinaritra*). This was obviously less objectionable because it only provoked a blank response but still seemed only to be taken as a passing comment on my current state of mind, to be humoured, rather than as a proper value judgement worthy of acknowledgement. In a final attempt to win approval, I raised my gaze from my feet to the horizon and affirmed that the land was 'vast' (*malalaka*) and 'inexhaustible' (*tsy mety ho lany*). At last Iaban'i Zafitala smiled. Now I was beginning to talk his language because, for him and the other Wastelanders, the land is not a backdrop to life, it is life. It is the canvas, not the picture.

The land is not something to be toyed with or joked about. Rather, it is a rich and powerful resource to be controlled, mastered and fought over. After all, to a committed (almost messianic) rice farmer an empty valley is a seductive sight, an unsolicited invitation begging to be taken advantage of. In this wilderness the potential for growth and plenty is laid out for all to see: valleys waiting to be terraced, rivers ripe for channelling, marshes oozing to be drained. And the Wastelanders are only too aware of this potential. The promise of the land is dazzling to them, like a taunt. The disparity between the potential embarrassment of riches afforded by the land and the actual state of poverty farmers often find themselves in is a constant source of amazement, sorrow and disappointment. On many occasions people expressed their confusion to me, scratching their heads in bemused wonder as they surveyed the profusion of growth on the land before lowering their gaze to their children, dressed in rags and reduced to eating insects and wild fruit to

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satisfy their hunger. The only way the Wastelanders can get their heads around this apparent paradox is to think of their work on the land as 'unfinished' (*tsy vita ny asa*). It is this sense of incompleteness that drives them on to greater efforts, that gives them a measure by which to condemn or value their fellows and that provides the impetus for their descendants to move out and open up new country. '*Miasa sinitra! Asika an' tonda*', they never tire of saying. 'We must work! Let's go to the fields.' But this sense of incompleteness does not simply generate a pure unalloyed work ethic, however. Admiration for the man who gets things done is tempered by fear that one might not quite be that man. Consequently, as we will see, there is an uneasy relationship between an ethic promoting ever-increasing production and expansion and a mania for enforced redistribution and contraction.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CURRENT REALITY

There is almost no literature directly relating to the Wasteland and the Wastelanders, so placing them in historical context is problematic. Not only are primary sources scarce, they also have to be interpreted carefully due to their provenance. Prior to the 1898 take-over by French colonial forces, the Wasteland was largely avoided by potential authors because, lying as it did outside the control of the dominant pre-colonial power, the Merina state,² it was reputed to be particularly dangerous. This means that the few accounts that do exist from that time tend to be peripheral or based on hearsay rather than on first-hand experience.³ Missionaries and explorers operating in the vicinity simply travelled from Merina fort to Merina fort,⁴ often with an armed escort, in order to avoid the so-called 'bandits' and 'rebels' said to be endemic to the region.⁵ After the French conquest and the prolonged troubles involved in pacifying the region, the Wasteland became even more of a backwater, as it was of no particular commercial or strategic interest to anyone (Rafidison 1986; Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 85). Consequently, once again, no detailed accounts of the area were published. Attitudes have not changed much today and even now the Wastelanders are still largely unknown both in academic circles and in Madagascar as a whole.⁶ In the regional capitals Farafangana and Vangaindrano (which are less than 80 km away), the Wastelanders are, for the main part, unheard of. On the national stage they appear to be completely insignificant. So who exactly are the Wastelanders and just what is the Wasteland?

At first glance, it appears that the Wastelanders are a purely geographical ensemble formed from groups with very different ethnic

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origins, who do not mix and who have precise frontiers and distinct traditions (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 84). This idea is reinforced by the continued infighting and cattle-raiding between groups, and by the lack of any major urban concentrations (Vondrozo itself, the administrative centre, has only about 1000 inhabitants), a situation resulting from the independent and territorial nature of the clans (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 84). From the 'outsiders'' point of view, then, the Wasteland is a realm of identity confusion, a patchwork collection of disparate groups (Marchand 1901: 481) claiming diverse origins. As such it was the despair of French colonial administrators searching for any means of indirect rule (Gallieni 1908: 267) through which to administer their 'politique des races'.⁷

Despite appearances to the contrary, however, the idea of Sahafatra as a land and as a people has been around for a long time. The Wasteland itself has existed as a roughly bounded region for over 180 years and, despite repeated attempts at colonization by the Merina,⁸ and successful 'occupation' by the French, still regards itself as unconquered 'sovereign' territory. Indeed, what is most striking about those who now regard themselves as Sahafatra is the fierce independence they express with respect to the surrounding groups. They are insistent that they are 'in no way the same' (*tsy mitovy*) as the neighbouring Bara, Tanala, Betsileo, Antaimoro, Antaisaka, Antaifasy or Zafisoro groups, and emphasize that they are 'very different indeed' (*fa hafa da hafa*) from all of them. Adoption of the term 'Sahafatra' by the constituent clans expresses the fact that they feel they have more in common with each other than with those external groups encircling and encapsulating them. Although the constituent groups do not appear to have developed a very high degree of inter-clan communal organization, they do display a remarkable coherence in terms of lifestyle and cultural values. It is this that keeps the term 'Sahafatra' alive and averts potential total identity confusion. People who think of themselves as of the Wasteland share loyalty to an idea without being exactly clear as to what that idea comprises.⁹ As we will see later, the most important feature they feel they share is an attachment to a common type of land and to an authority system which is informed by their relationship with that land and the other constituent groups inhabiting it.

THE CONFUSION BETWEEN LAND AND PEOPLE

The term 'Sahafatra' has not consistently signified a single clear entity as what it has represented has changed over time. It is, therefore,

important to understand the historical development of the term in order to appreciate the present-day connotations of what it is to 'be' Sahafatra. The first recorded mention of Sahafatra was made by Leguevel de Lacombe in his book *Voyage à Madagascar et aux Îles Comores (1823 à 1830)* published in Paris in 1840. To him the *Chaffattes* (Sahafatra) were a savage, miserably dressed people, who lived in clusters of ramshackle huts and farmed the poor soil of the hills. Most of his account is taken up describing how he had little opportunity to talk to the *Chaffattes*, since they always fled on hearing of his arrival. The fact that he was riding a strange beast (his horse) combined with his alien white features was enough to terrify the locals, who, he discovered later, had a prophecy that they would be destroyed by such a man (Leguevel de Lacombe 1840: 238–43).

Lacombe's somewhat marginal encounters were almost certainly a part of the failed Merina campaign to pacify and subdue the region. In the attempt that Lacombe was involved in, the Merina armies advanced as far as the mountain Madiorano, overshadowing Vondrozo, before being repulsed by Sahafatra warriors. Two subsequent Merina military expeditions were equally unsuccessful. Although they were able to set up military posts and capture slaves, they were unable to subdue the belligerent (if not unsurprisingly 'shy') Wastelanders, who managed to retain their independence (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 84). The effective resistance of the Wastelanders to the might of the Merina state suggests that, over 180 years ago, there was some form of political organization coherent enough to group and co-ordinate the forces in the region. However, in spite of this evidence for the existence of a political as well as a social and geographical grouping as early as 1820, it still seems likely that this first identification of the Sahafatra as a 'people' is somewhat flawed. The reason for this actually lies in the name 'Sahafatra' itself which, rather than being the type of name given to a people, is, literally, a description of a type of landscape.

The term 'Sahafatra' has been translated variously¹⁰ but essentially denotes what is perceived to be a 'barren area'. When we asked friends to explain the meaning of the word now, they also gave a variety of answers¹¹ but, as has previously been mentioned, most often spoke of the word as meaning a place where, in the past, 'there was no food' (*tsy'sy hany*). This fits in with the basic dictionary definition of an undeveloped area¹² and belies the clear-cut existence of a people. What 'Sahafatra' represented was a particular environmental setting, not a definite socio-political grouping. This view is strengthened by the fact that, according to current oral histories, the ancestors of the

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present-day inhabitants only migrated to the area about seven generations ago.¹³ Since the clans were all recent arrivals and since they all claimed to have come from different directions,¹⁴ it seems very unlikely that there was enough time for them to form a sustainable political grouping before the campaign of which Lacombe was part arrived on the scene.

The resistance to the Merina should, therefore, most probably be put down to a temporary and fragile alliance between diverse migrant collectives. It appears that Lacombe confused the people with the land. His use of the term 'Sahafatra' may be an early instance of a tendency within academic circles to label Malagasy peoples according to, and corresponding with, the type of ecological niche they inhabit (Eggert 1986). What Lacombe failed to recognize was that, although the land was classified as being of one type, the inhabitants were of many different types and did not necessarily form a single political entity. The fact that the inhabitants did eventually come to feel connected to each other, through a shared experience of the environment they all held in common, is something Lacombe could not have anticipated at the time and represents a later development that I will explore shortly.

THE FRENCH COLONIAL INTERPRETATION

When the French colonial forces arrived they did not make the same mistake as Lacombe. The initial maps they made (from 1895 onwards) did not recognize the existence of a separate group known as Sahafatra but listed individual clans instead. The French administrator Marchand's article 'Les habitants de la Province de Farafangana' (Marchand 1901) lists many of the clans currently resident in the area and provides a reasonably accurate map of their relative locations.¹⁵ Some years after this article was published, when more ethnographic data had been collected, the supposed origins of each clan and their 'ethnic' affiliation to one of the larger recognized cultural groupings were added to such maps. The region was, thus, artificially and conceptually split by the French, with maps incorporating detailed pie charts being used to signify how the territory was divided between Tanala, Antaisaka, Bara and even Antandroy groups heralding from different corners of the island.¹⁶ Even later, the French colonials coined the term Bara-Sahafatra (a term some of the people reportedly applied to themselves (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 83)) to denote the clans in the vicinity of Vondrozo. They seem to have belatedly acknowledged the fact that a major difference existed between the Tanala to the north and the so-called 'Bara-Sahafatra' to

the south. Bara-Sahafatra is a term that older people still often use to refer to themselves, although the history surrounding the label has become confused. The term essentially recognizes that many of the constituent groups of the people of Sahafatra are thought to herald from Bara-land to the west; it also recognizes, though, that a new local, non-Bara, identity was forged at some point along the way, transforming these old allegiances.

I have the impression that the French, having accepted that the people around Vondrozo did not fit into the already demarcated ethnic groups, resuscitated the already existing term 'Sahafatra' for their own ends, in order to help pacify the region. According to clan leaders themselves, the area was strife-torn with inter-clan fighting before the arrival of the French. The French proceeded to broker peace by various means: by moving isolated villages to lower ground closer to Vondrozo and the major access routes; by taking the highest point in Vondrozo away from the Tevongo clan to show who was master; and even, some say, by introducing aspects of what is now considered 'custom' (*fomba*). Regrouping the disparate clans under the one label, 'Sahafatra', may have been another strategy to impose their domination. Whatever the motive, the reintroduction of the term was so successful that, by the time Deschamps and Vianes conducted their survey of the area in 1959, the other contending terms had been completely displaced. They confidently referred to 'les Sahafatra' (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 83) and drew up the most accurate and complete map of all the clans that constitute the people of Sahafatra that exists to date. Their map clearly demarcated a Sahafatra territory for the first time, thereby initiating the creation of an independent Sahafatra identity. The end result was that the people of the administrative district of Vondrozo began to think of themselves, in some sense, as Sahafatra, as Wastelanders.

Contemporary usage has become more complex, and now the term connotes the land or the people interchangeably. As the clans became more associated with the land and with each other, the distinction between the two uses began to lose its relevance. The label has now turned active: it is used to emphasize the *connection* between the people and the land and to appeal for unity among the constituent groups. Thus, in an inter-clan debate, speakers wishing to encourage honourable and reasonable behaviour from all the participants might talk of 'we Sahafatra' (*atsika Sahafatra*) in the same breath as alluding to 'our land of Sahafatra' (*tanintsika Sahafatra*). What was initially a description of the landscape has become a political tool (see Deschamps 1936: 205-6) to be used as and when convenient.

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SAHAFATRA AS A CORPORATE GROUP

The Wastelanders are considered by some to be the nineteenth, as yet unrecognized, 'tribe' of Madagascar, there being 18 official governmentally sanctioned divisions. The fact that a local paralegal law-enforcement system, known as the *Dina* of the Sahafatra, has been instituted has strengthened this idea of Sahafatra as a corporate group. The *Dina* is a system of administering justice through which local groups take the business of catching and judging 'criminals' into their own hands. In the current climate of insecurity, with cattle-rustling running out of control in central and southern Madagascar, *Dinas* have gained enormous influence in the region. Cattle-theft was certainly a major problem in the Wasteland during the fieldwork period and we would often be woken up in the middle of the night by alarm calls and the stampede of thundering feet as people set off in pursuit of stolen cattle. The creation, in 1989, of the *Dina* of the Sahafatra to counter this problem has put the Wasteland on the map, so to speak, raising the profile of the grouping as a whole. This new conception of Sahafatra was concretely realized in 1996 when a commemorative stone painted with the names of the constituent member groups (*firaisa*) was erected for the *Dina* in the village of Analavaky (clan Masitafika), near Vondrozo.

Membership of the *Dina* of the Sahafatra has, however, also confused matters because the membership does not accurately tally with the traditional idea of what groups go to make up Sahafatra. Traditionally, it was the groups living in the administrative district of Vondrozo, close to Vondrozo itself, who most strongly considered themselves to be Sahafatra. Peripheral clans who lived further away from Vondrozo or in close proximity to other groups, such as the Tanala and the Antaisaka, were variously included and excluded and tended to look to different administrative centres such as Vohimary, Mahazoarivo, Karianga, Mahatsinjo and Mahatsinjobe. *Dinas*, however, do not respect such formulae and are not concerned about cross-cutting traditional allegiances. Like pressure groups, they try to attract as many members as possible, wherever they may come from, in order to make themselves more powerful. The result of this is twofold. Firstly, groups that positively assert that they are Sahafatra can and do actually choose to become members of a different *Dina*. The Tsaretry clan, for example, which unequivocally affiliates itself with the Wastelanders, has chosen to join the *Dina* of the Tanilo because its policies are thought to be better, in the sense that criminals are treated more harshly. Secondly,

groups that have nothing to do with the Wasteland can and do join the *Dina* of the Sahafatra, for different but comparable reasons. Consequently, there is no direct correlation between *Dina* membership and enduring association with the land or people of Sahafatra. The groups traditionally regarded as Wastelanders do form the core of the *Dina* of the Sahafatra but they are not its sole constituents.

Overall, then, it is clear that 'Sahafatra' is a flexible and multivocal term whose meaning(s) has changed, and is still changing, over time. It is a term that, in spite of its malleable nature and uncertain origins, in spite of the fact that it is sometimes remembered and sometimes forgotten, still appears 'meaningful'. This is because, apart from its straightforward interpretation (a loose confederation of groups¹⁷ centred round Vondrozo, the territory they inhabit and the particular environmental nature of that territory), the term also captures the sense of historical involvement between the clans. Although there is no consistent, uniting history shared by all Wastelanders, the most critical and emotive episodes of their past are held in common and are felt to be important. All the clansmen know that their ancestors were migrants to the area; they all know that the clans fought one another over the land; and they all know that a permanent truce was called explaining why they now live side by side as neighbours, wet-rice farming in relative peace. So, even though people may prioritize a local identity (family, housegroup, clan) over a regional one (Wastelander) (Covell 1987; Eggert 1981), the term 'Sahafatra' retains relevance.¹⁸ It is resonant for local people because it conjures up a particular shared way of life and a peculiar shared history, both of which are intensely valued.

It is worth remembering that people will say that they are Sahafatra even though it becomes evident on further questioning that they have no *precise* notion of what this means historically or geographically. To an extent, then, we must accept that people 'are' Sahafatra just because they say they are, just because they feel themselves to be members of a set of clans without exactly knowing why. Currently the local actors are very much emphasizing their Wasteland identity. While national government continues to lose relevance and local means of maintaining order consequently increase in importance, the term 'Sahafatra' continues to experience a renaissance. Obscure hinterlands such as the Wasteland are largely ignored and, because of the collapsing infrastructure and an ineffectual administrative system, have to come up with their own means of governance (Cole 1996). Hence the rise of *Dinas* and the promotion of a heightened Wasteland identity, graphically illustrated during the fieldwork period by the painting of the words *Tranom-pokonolona*

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Sahafatra (Wasteland council chamber) on the run-down meeting hall in Vondrozo in 1996.

THE CLANS

Having accepted that it is impossible to be categorical on this issue, my research suggests that there are 13 independent clans (aggregations of people claiming descent from or affiliation to a single founding ancestor) who regard themselves as Wastelanders. These are: the Tevongo; the Masitafika; the Vohilakatra; the Antsoro; the Tsaretry; the Tesonjo; the Antevatobe; the Lohanosy; the Hova; the Hovalahy; the Zafinivola; the Antemanara; and the Antemahatsinjobe. All these clans are arranged in a loosely defined patchwork of territories centred around Vondrozo, each territory being governed by a clan whose members, owing to their uncontested dominance in the area, have the right to call themselves 'owners of the land' (*tompontany*). It is generally acknowledged that the Tevongo clan arrived in the area first. They are, therefore, considered to be the most senior group and their leader, in theory, the most significant individual in the region. However, in practice, not only are there few occasions when Tevongo rank can be called upon, other groups also contest their right to exercise even this nominal seniority.

The blessing of the new hospital for Vondrozo, for example, became a highly contentious matter. The Masitafika argued that since, geographically speaking, Vondrozo was in their territory, it was their right to administer the blessing. The Tevongo countered this by reasoning that, since all the clans were going to use the facilities, they should be allowed to give the blessing as representatives of the whole set of clans. The matter was further complicated by the fact that it was not universally agreed who the head of the Tevongo clan was. Having met and talked to the elderly man whom a number of people had named as the head, I was surprised to be told by members of another clan that there was a rival Tevongo candidate who also claimed to be the leader. The lack of public duties associated with the role had allowed this confusion to arise, as there had been few occasions when this leader could exercise his perceived authority. When the old man died yet another candidate turned up at my house, announcing himself to be the one and only successor. The irony of this whole episode was that the hospital, even though it was finished, was never finally blessed by anybody. In fact, during my stay the hospital was never used as such because, much to the chagrin of the local populace, it was commandeered by the mayor for use as an office.

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The controversy over the hospital led to discussions about the nature of the relationship between the Tevongo and the rest of the clans. Tatahira (a Masitafika man) contested that, although the Tevongo were, as the first inhabitants, ritual owners of the land, the subsequent 'incomers' had autonomy within their own perceived territories. Thus, while the other clans did not dispute the Tevongo's symbolic seniority (*voaloha ny Tevongo; zokin-olo ny Tevongo*), they considered their own dealings to be beyond the Tevongo's jurisdiction. This arrangement was defined for me by Tatahira, who said that the Tevongo 'ruled the land' (all the territories falling within 'the land') which each clan ruled the territory defined by its own 'tributary' (*vava-rano*). The de facto situation resulting from this reasoning is that clans, by and large, run their own affairs.

The relationship between the clans is far from straightforward, however. It is widely acknowledged that inter-clan warfare was only brought to an end when the French arrived in the region at the turn of the century and residual tension still persists. The Masitafika and Vohilakatra, for example, were said to have fought seven times before the 'foreigners' mended their differences and made the fighting stop (*Infito ny ady ny Masitafika sy Vohilakatra. Tonga ny vazaha da namboatra ny ady; tapitra!*). The warring of the past may have turned into a distant memory but competition between clans remains. Since *all* the clans were involved in the fighting, no clan or village escapes the negative opinion of its neighbours. The sum of these prejudices has led to the creation of various stereotypes for the clans, a few of which are sampled below to give an idea of rivals' characterizations of each other.

The Tevongo, who pride themselves on their Christian rectitude, are cast as a weak, ineffectual people, lacking vitality and leading upright, austere lives in isolated homesteads. A discussion about inter-clan rivalry in the home of the *rangahy* (old man) at Masimboay (clan Vohilakatra) led to hilarity as a narrator recounted the disastrously unsuccessful farming techniques of the people of Tsaragisy (a Tevongo village). There was unconcealed mirth at the idea of the Tevongo's never-ending quest to find a homestead that will yield them ten sacks of rice annually. The Masitafika, in contrast, are perceived by other clans to be quarrelsome and untrustworthy, and are presented as unreformed robbers who reject the Church and continue to practise polygamy. The Masitafika themselves, as self-confessed 'bon-viveurs', not unreasonably take pride in this buccaneering reputation. Their neighbours, the Vohilakatra, are thought of as proud, aloof and independent and, preferring to concentrate on their own affairs, distance themselves from Vondrozo. They enjoy the reputation of being strong enough to stand alone. The Antsoro,

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isolated in their mountain strongholds, are also thought of as powerful but in a different, more negative way. They are said to be suspicious of strangers, unwilling to welcome them into their houses, and are feared because they are seen as antisocial and because they are thought to pose a military threat to the other clans. Past Antsoro forays into Vondrozo, designed to bolster their authority in the administrative centre, are still talked about today. The Lohanosy, tucked away in the marshland, are presented as guardians of 'traditional custom' (*fomba*). Visitors to their territory never fail to comment on the size and robustness of their Big Houses (ceremonial houses that act as a centre for authority) and their strict adherence to 'traditional ways'. The Antevatoibe, masters of the northern marches, continue to be associated with the wild men of old, the bandits known as the *Mavorongo* who resisted all outside authority and who were never subdued. As inheritors of the rebel mantle (people continue to talk in hushed tones of their infamous past), they are thought of as unruly and anarchistic and are, if possible, avoided. The Tesonjo are associated with the impenetrable semi-forested niche they inhabit. The fact that they are perceived to be on the periphery allows them to be portrayed as country simpletons, but it also lends them an air of mystery and magic. Consequently, although jokes are made at their expense, they are thought of as experts on wood and herbal medicines.

These are just some of the stereotypical characterizations that the clans present of each other. Casting each clan individually serves to maintain the perceived differences between them and allows the members of each clan to think of themselves as having a distinct and separate identity from that of their neighbours. In spite of these self-styled and somewhat exaggerated differences, the clans do all admit to holding one specific unitary tradition in common: they share a universal 'ancestral taboo' (*sandrana*) on killing or eating a small, prickly, hedgehog-like creature called a *tsokina* (Ruud 1960: 76–110). Although people are not very explicit on why this should be the case, the taboo itself looked at in context is instructive.¹⁹

The *tsokina* is just one of three types of Malagasy 'hedgehog' found in the area (the others being the *tsora* and the *trandraka*); however, it is the only one that is taboo. What, we might then ask, is the difference between the animals that should make this so? The difference that people highlighted was not a physical one, but a behavioural one: when it thundered (*migodo*) and the animals rushed out of their burrows to look for worms, they behaved differently when faced by danger. Both the *tsora* (the smallest) and the *trandraka* (the biggest) would flee when in peril, whereas the *tsokina* (of middling size) would stubbornly roll up

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into a ball and stay put. The only explanation I was ever given for the taboo was that this behaviour paralleled that of the Wastelanders themselves, who have always refused to be pushed out of their homeland and who would rather brave any danger with their 'spikes' out, so to speak, like the *tsokina*, than flee. If this interpretation has any merit then the *tsokina* serves as a sort of totemic animal, left alone by the Wastelanders out of a sense of fellow feeling.

Whatever the truth of the matter concerning the totemic 'hedgehog', it is evident that there is no single way of talking about clan relations. Different idioms can be utilized depending on the circumstances and depending on what aspect of a complex relationship it is desired to emphasize. In general terms, it would probably be most accurate to say that the Wastelanders view themselves as a loose family of 'like' clans, related more by fellow feeling than genealogy. This idea posits some connection, but a connection that can be played up or played down. It is a suitably vague term for what is a very indefinite and flexible web of relations. The idea of a family of clans is strengthened by the surface similarity between members of different clans. It is important to realize that no one could identify someone else's clan simply from their physical appearance. Clans do not have distinguishing physical characteristics and they do not dress in a particular way that marks them out, so clan membership can only be positively identified by asking someone what village they come from. This physical sameness is unifying in a sense but it is also regarded as problematic. It troubled the Wastelanders we knew that external likeness was no guarantee that a person was really of like 'kind' (*raza*).

THE FOCUS OF STUDY

In a large part, this book is an attempt to develop what it means to be of Sahafatra, what it means to be of the Wasteland. However, since it is only in very rare circumstances that the clans that go to make up the Wasteland form a unified whole, it is important to recognize right from the start that certain of the constituent parts have been singled out for special attention. The clans most easily reached from Vondrozo (generally those falling within a 25-kilometre radius) will be the most prominently featured: the Tevongo, the Masitafika, the Vohilakatra, the Antsoro, the Tsaretry, the Lohanosy, the Antevatobe, the Tesonjo and the Hova. Not only did their proximity to the town in which we were based allow us to visit them regularly, gradually building up a network of friends and informants, but also Vondrozo acted as a magnet for

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them and provided us with an opportunity to observe a different set of relationships and interactions taking place in a novel setting away from the everyday village environment. These closest groups were not only selected as the central focus of the study as a matter of convenience, however. For reasons that should already be becoming apparent, it became clear that they also formed the core of what it was to 'be' Sahafatra, to 'be' a Wastelander, being most active in the creation and maintenance of that identity. As has been noted, several other groups (the Zafinivola, the Antemanara, the Hovalahy and the Antemahatsinjobe) fall under the Sahafatra umbrella but their allegiance to the uniting ideals is less concrete and less certain. These clans play a more peripheral but nevertheless important role in the collective entity.

Vondrozo itself is not the subject of this study, but it is the backdrop against which its many dramas are played out. Apart from being a stage for various performances, Vondrozo is also a measuring stick against which people gauge their own lives in the countryside. To appreciate fully its importance one must recognize the extremely limited knowledge the Wastelanders have of the outside world. I specifically and repeatedly questioned people about the geography of Madagascar outside their local area and about the wider world beyond, and never ceased to be amazed by the parochial outlook I encountered. Although some members of the older generation had travelled within Madagascar to look for work in their youth and others had even served in the French army during the World Wars, the knowledge gleaned from these adventures was partial and disjointed. Since labour migration is now uncommon and since those few who do leave tend never to return (except in a coffin), there is currently little first-hand knowledge of the rest of Madagascar. Although it is generally recognized that Madagascar is an island (which is what makes it such a complete and satisfying cosmos to its inhabitants), the overall picture of its shape and form remains hazy. A small proportion of people might know the whereabouts of one or two important regional towns that they had once walked to; several friends might, in collaboration, even be able to construct a very approximate geography of Madagascar. However, beyond this image of a unified and water-bounded homeland, most individuals only have a fragmentary picture of the island's detailed physical make-up.

Madagascar itself is thought of as existing in glorious isolation and everything outside it is perceived to be part of France. For most rural people around Vondrozo this was the important dichotomy: you were either Malagasy or you were French. The indoctrination was almost complete as I discovered when, on declaring that I was from England, I

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was inevitably asked where that was in France. The concept of 'France' seems to act as an umbrella term encapsulating everything outside Madagascar. Consequently, all foreigners, even the traders of Chinese and Indian descent, are perceived as Frenchmen. Foreigners in general, whether they be French, Chinese or Indian, tend all to be thought of in the same way – as rich, capable, exploitative and powerful – anyway (Bloch 1971: 30–2). On a global scale, a similar simplification takes place. Not surprisingly, the fact that the earth is a rotating sphere hurtling through space is treated with alarmed disbelief; it simply does not fit into the Wastelanders' perceived experience of the world. For people who spend their lives trying to anchor themselves successfully to the land it is disturbing and nonsensical to think of the earth as a movable object. Those who have not been taught otherwise at school choose to conceive of the earth as a solid flat plate, a far less worrying and far more culturally satisfying theory.

The fact is that the majority of the rural population have never even seen the sea which lies less than 80 km to the east. For most of them, Vondrozo will be the largest town they see in their lives. So, even if Vondrozo is objectively just a messy, litter-strewn, overgrown outpost in the back of beyond, to many people it is the ultimate metropolis. Vondrozo is not an important setting simply because it is the biggest, though; it serves many important practical purposes too. Most importantly, it is a market and administrative centre where local people congregate and come into contact with the national government. In practical terms it is the place where you get your cattle ownership papers sorted. It is where the paralegal cattle protection co-operative (*Dina*) meets. It is where village teachers pick up their monthly pay packages. It is where the government tribunal is held for cases that cannot be solved by customary law (*didin-draza*). It is where you visit the doctor in the hospital; where military selection takes place; where you shop for all the household supplies you need; where you sell your cash crops and surplus rice. At the emotional and experiential level, Vondrozo is the embodiment of an endless Saturday night. It is often where the action is. It is where young men come in search of a girlfriend or a wife or a fight. It is where you come to drink on the quiet or eat rich food in a *hotely* (small eating establishment) or be entertained. It is where you window-shop and buy yourself treats. It may be where you visit a big church or where you give birth. It is where national celebrations take place, politicians speak and you vote. Town is where you meet the people you would never have an excuse to see otherwise. It is regarded as different, dangerous and happening, and people tend to love it.

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Vondrozo is also full of echoes from the past, historical associations relating it both to the first recognized settlers and to the French, and is consequently thought of as a centre of power. The initial migrants, the Tevongo, are thought by all the clans to be the original 'owners of the land' (*tompontany*) on which Vondrozo is sited by virtue of their early arrival. They staked their claim to the area by placing themselves on the highest point in the vicinity and declaring themselves to be the most senior of them all, honorifically calling themselves 'Grandfather' (*iababe*) in relation to any newcomers. By selecting a location in the shadow of Be Zavona, the misty forested escarpment out of which all the streams emerge, they made a symbolic bid to corner the most vital resource: water. In an additional attempt to consolidate themselves, the Tevongo placed the tomb of their greatest founding ancestor (*razam-be*), Rabolobolo, on a subsidiary hill not far away. This tomb now finds itself in the middle of Vondrozo in between the French-built *Résidence* (Governor's house and administrative headquarters) and the gendarmerie. The general theory of Malagasy power that those who control the dead have authority over the living has tremendous implications for this placement. The fact that the French deliberately chose to build their headquarters on this spot demonstrates how they were, in effect, trying to appropriate the traditional seat of authority. Opinion differs as to whether they succeeded or not. Some say it is self-evident that they did because they were so dominant during the colonial period (1898–1960), others that they did not, thereby explaining why they were eventually forced to leave after Independence.

Whatever the truth of the matter, there is no doubt that during their brief sojourn the French radically remodelled intergroup relations and dramatically transformed the landscape. As well as effectively pacifying the clans, the French ambitiously set out to remodel the land. With Malagasy labour they built roads, erected bridges and laid down telegraph lines where there had been nothing before. They introduced coffee and the varieties of tree required to shade it. They taught people how to tend the coffee groves and operated a co-operative to buy the produce. They introduced fruit trees to provide sweet nourishment and to shade the rice paddies. They built small dams to flood the valley bottoms. They brought sugar cane and showed people how to distil the crude rum now known as the 'mother-of-all-alcohol' (*endrin'i kalola*). They mass planted eucalyptus trees to provide sustainable fuel and prevent soil erosion. They planted pines as windbreaks and for picnic spots. They built their *Résidence* at the highest point on a strategic crossroads and

even framed it with four towering palms as a silent demonstration of power, symmetry and grace.

Much of what the French achieved has now disappeared so what remains today is not a full heritage but a residue and a reworking. The roads have deteriorated beyond recognition but are still major thoroughfares. The telegraph poles stand naked, like carelessly hammered nails littered across the landscape, and now act as signposts to short cuts away from the road. The eucalyptuses, still a useful fuel source, lie butchered, twisted and burnt. The rest remains more or less as it was, although visible French influence continues to diminish. The French approach to land management has proven so alien to the Wastelander mentality that their heritage is inevitably slightly disfigured and deformed each day, subject as it is to the irresistible forces of Malgachicization.

The emergence of Vondrozo as a locality is symbolic of this struggle between the past and the present and lends a certain piquancy to wandering about the town today. The name Vondrozo itself is a contentious issue, with different accounts of its derivation competing for legitimacy. One version posits a French connection. When the French arrived, they proceeded to prettify and domesticate their surroundings. One of the ways they did this was to plant beds of roses. Curious children would go and play in the European-style gardens and would return home bearing trophies of rosebuds and flowers. The mystified parents would ask where they had got them from and the children replying literal-mindedly, using their newly learnt vocabulary, said: *voany-d-rosy*, which means 'fruit-of-the-rose'. By a slight transmogrification, Vondrozo (or should it be 'Rosebud'?) came into being. This *Just So Story* has a rival, however, as one of the Tevongo lineage names is Antevondrozo, which means 'those that come from Vondrozo'. Since the Tevongo arrived long before the French a definite confusion arises. The question is, who borrowed the name from whom?

This competition for the rightful 'ownership' of Vondrozo is complicated by the fact that most people do not even refer to the town by that name at all. 'Vondrozo' represents both the town and the whole 'district' (*fivondronana*) it administers and is therefore not a particularly accurate or specific term. Most people prefer to talk about *lapaositra* which means 'the post (office)' and obviously has French connotations (Feeley-Harnik 1991b: 231–301). Or they say they are going to Ankadibe, the name of the *quartier* holding the market place, which is the nucleus of the town. Ankadibe, which means the 'big ditch', is also part of another group's arrival myth. The Masitafika say that one of their heroic ancestors stored his ill-gotten gains (slaves and cattle raided

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from neighbouring groups) here. The irony is that this place, the Big Ditch, where the booty was stashed, is the modern-day source of all good things: the market place. This enduring connection to the past means that the Masitafika, who have designs on becoming the most influential clan themselves, can also lay claim to be 'owners' of the town in a meaningful sense. The three-way competition between the French, the Tevongo and the Masitafika is constituted in the very make-up of the town. As people come to Rabolobolo's tomb with offerings of money and rum to beg for healing (*fahajanga*) and blessing, as Rabolobolo himself reputedly walks the streets at night frightening folk with a noise like a crackling fire, as the French *Résidence* remains standing proud, as the roses flower in profusion all year round, as the Big Ditch market place swings into action day in and day out, so is the drama played out.

VONDROZO-VILLE

Vondrozo town itself comprises about 1000 people arranged around a crumbling core of official buildings centred on the crossroads. There is a market place, a town hall with an office for the mayor, a hospital, a post office, two junior schools (and a *lycée* currently not in operation), a gendarmerie (with barracks and a prison), a house for the deputy who sits on the national assembly and an official *Résidence* for the president of the local administration. Around and interspersed with this core are the private houses, most importantly the three Chinese/Malagasy-owned shops, the Protestant and Catholic churches, two video salons and a few little *hotely* and roadside stalls. Most of the other houses are private homes strung out along the two roads in a sort of ribbon development. On the outskirts of town are a couple of satellite villages and scattered all around on little paths are various homesteads. The official buildings tend to be built out of reinforced concrete with tin roofs and are in a semi-dilapidated state. Two of the shops are real tin shack affairs, consisting entirely of nailed-together corrugated iron sheets and planks made from the trunk (*vata*) of a local type of palm tree (*ravinala*), while the third is a grand two-storey structure. The churches are serious edifices with towers and bells (the Catholic church even stretches to some stained glass, an organ and a rose garden), but both smell of rats, bats and decay. The ordinary houses tend to be of a mud-and-wattle type construction with plastered walls and concrete surrounds with thatch or tin roofs, while the houses on the periphery tend to be made entirely of planks drawn from the Traveller's palm (*ravinala*).

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The inhabitants of the core area are of very diverse origins ranging from all over Madagascar. The resultant *mélange* of functionaries, gendarmes, shopworkers, stall-workers, teachers, doctors, manual labourers, merchants, precious stone dealers and so on never act as a corporate group. As outsiders to the region they look after their own interests first and foremost. Their key allegiance in Vondrozo is to their immediate family and an informal society of those heralding from the same point of origin – a sort of brotherhood of place if you like. There is virtually no integration of these people into the life of the countryside. Even the forces of law and order are reluctant to go outside town. They only venture out if under direct orders to do so and then only unwillingly. As outsiders they have very little to gain and everything to lose (their lives, for example, when chasing armed cattle-thieves) by involving themselves with the locals. They prefer to keep to themselves, maintaining a low profile until their tour of duty is over and they are reposted.

The people who come to the town from far away merely for the purposes of work or a career are not committed to the region or the land in the same way as the locals. They distance themselves from the agricultural way of life and thereby alienate the rural population. To an extent, the urban population sideline themselves by their parochial outlook, becoming virtually invisible to the country folk, and only taking real shape occasionally as obstacles to be negotiated. The other inhabitants, those more on the periphery, are coming from the opposite direction. They are ex-country folk who have moved into town. They tend to be better educated and wealthier than their rural ‘cousins’ but manage to keep a foot in both camps. They still farm the land but they also act as middlemen for produce and run small-scale businesses of their own. In a way, they are the intermediaries that make more effective communication possible between the rural and the urban. Relatives and friends from the ‘sticks’ will always drop by and visit them and, assuming them to be more knowledgeable on certain ‘city’ matters, often ask advice about how to go about such-and-such a procedure.

The amenities in the town are very limited. Despite the existence of standpipes there is no running water, as the pump and water tank have long been in disrepair. Water is collected by women from a nearby well, using plastic buckets carried on heads and in hands, while washing is done in the nearest stream about 200 metres away. In order to bathe, most people have a favourite spot within a couple of kilometres which they frequent. The wealthier shopkeepers, on the other hand, send their lorries to the nearest pure water sources (rivers emerging from the forest about 11 km away) and stock up on water, which is stored in

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huge plastic barrels to be used for cooking and showering. There are only about five indoor toilets in Vondrozo, all of the long-drop variety, and they are located in the shopkeepers' compounds, the gendarmerie and the *Résidence*. The rest of the population have to take their chances in the daily dawn run into the coffee bushes or take advantage of a journey outside town to enjoy the privacy of the wilds. Electricity is supplied by an old generator that runs from 6 to about 9.30 each evening, barring breakdowns, diesel shortages or impending storms (in which case the generator is immediately shut down to protect the system). Even when the generator is going the town remains remarkably dark, as only about 20 houses are connected up and most of the bulbs in the street lamps are broken. The rest of the inhabitants use little oil lamps made out of old tomato-concentrate tins, with an oily rag serving as a wick. If there is a major event, the organizer will try to beg or borrow one of the few Petromax pressure lanterns circulating round the town.

As must now be clear, Vondrozo, once a strategic staging post on the French-engineered Route Nationale 27 between the coast and the interior, is fast becoming a mouldering backwater in terms of trade and government. The traders and administrators complain about the lack of communication with the outside world. Under the French, they say, they could set out after work, drive the 68 km to the regional capital Farafangana, catch a film and still be back in time for the evening meal. Under the French, they could talk to their relatives by telephone anywhere on the island. Under the French, they could drive into the interior in an ordinary Citroën car to take a picnic at the weekends. Under the French, the access routes for trade were open and bush-taxis and buses ran a regular service and so on.

But everything, they lament, has changed. The road to the coast is now virtually impassable even in a four-wheel drive vehicle. Any journey requires a team of several 'boys' to help dig the vehicle out of the worst quagmires and literally to rebuild the bridges where the wooden supports have rotted, broken or been stolen for use in house construction and even then is likely to take about nine hours. The road into the interior is a deceptively good dirt road for 13 km but then it rapidly deteriorates as it enters the forest until it finally peters out into an overgrown path a few kilometres further on. It is impossible to ride a bicycle on this old Route Nationale, let alone drive a six-tonne lorry up it. As for the telephones, they have been out of action for years. The telegraph poles remain standing lopsidedly but the lines are long gone, either brought down by cyclones or pilfered to make washing lines for nearby villages. Telephone bills are still delivered for line rental and the ten or so phone

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owners in the town still pay them in the hope that one day they will be reconnected. However, the only sign of hope is the continued arrival of the rather slim island-wide directory with their names and numbers still in it. The only service actually in operation is a two-way radio at the post office and the gendarmerie to be used in cases of emergency. The post still goes but is unreliable and time-consuming. A courier departs on foot once a week to deliver mail to the sorting office in Farafangana. This journey takes a minimum of two days each way and can take considerably longer if the courier is waylaid or decides to visit family members along the way.

Despite this isolation, or perhaps in certain measure because of it, Vondrozo remains a central focus for the local populace. It is as if, as the outside world recedes, the local clans attempt to reclaim what they feel is rightfully theirs. None of the surrounding clans has a dominant influence in the town so it has become a neutral no man's land, a convenient arena for low-key competition. People ostensibly come to go to the market and the shops, but they also come to see and be seen. Men, in particular, like to show off and march about self-importantly, grabbing key positions around the central thoroughfare and greeting everyone in sight. Women like to wear their smartest clothes and gravitate towards the market and shops to catch up on the latest news. Everybody is lively in town. It is a place full of energy, a place to relive past victories and plot future ones. Nevertheless, however much pleasure is taken from visiting town, it remains as a distraction, a diversion from and contrast to the nitty-gritty of everyday life. The Wastelanders may share a common metropolis but what really bonds them is the way they see the land that stretches away forever outside the city precincts.

ARRIVAL AND SETTLEMENT

The stories of settlement in the area are various and inconsistent but all the present-day inhabitants agree that their forebears were migrants who arrived in the 'empty' (*foana*) and uncultivated Wasteland about seven generations ago, somewhere around the year 1820. The initial migration to the area is said to have been made up of small groups consisting of ambitious homesteaders, marauding bands of warriors and ex-slaves on the run, all of whom, having stumbled across the Wasteland, decided to stay and settle. They shared a certain perspective in the sense that they were all 'outsiders coming in' (*olo avy an-davitra*), essentially refugees lost in space, searching for fertile land. Marchand, a French commentator writing at the turn of the century, imagines the mood well. 'The family

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heads, tired of cultivating an ungrateful soil and dreaming of fertile rice paddies laid out beside large rivers, left in search of the promised land and stopped where they found rich pastures for their herds, extensive marshes to sow their rice and elevated hillocks on which to perch their villages' (Marchand 1901: 485, my translation). What the groups carried with them was a desire to attach themselves to places and people, to create islands of plenty and security in a terrestrial sea of scarcity and pirates.

Since that initial wave there has been a remarkable history of growth. Out of the few hundred original migrants the population has inexorably increased, reaching 25,000 in 1959 (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 83) and over 60,000 in 1994 (*La Tribune de Madagascar*, June 1994), the figures more or less doubling every quarter of a century. The vast majority of this burgeoning population, in spite of their proximity to small urban centres, have chosen to live in the countryside. By nature proud, independent and rural-minded, towns merely represent an occasional pastime for clan members. The centre of their world remains the clan territory where they practise a mixture of agriculture and pastoralism. The flat valley bottoms are flooded for rice cultivation, the steeper slopes are used for manioc, coffee and pepper and the grassy savannah-like hillsides are grazed by herds of cattle.

Although the clans all claim descent from different founding ancestors and therefore think of themselves as totally independent of each other, they all, as we have seen, nevertheless identify themselves as Wastelanders. This mutual identification is based on a shared commitment to the territory and a shared obsession with exploiting it for the purposes of wet-rice farming. This commitment was inevitably heightened by the severing of each clan's links with its past. Recognizing that they could not be of 'here' and 'there', the settlers cast off the mooring ropes of their roots and set to building a new life in a pool of equally determined neighbours and rivals. The fact that no clans maintained significant connections with groups outside the Wasteland created a situation that encouraged both bonding and division, a sometimes uncomfortable state of affairs that still persists today.

In the present day, the Wastelanders, as a combined set, are boxed in by a combination of natural barriers, ethnic 'shifts' and politico-administrative boundaries. Perceptions of the surrounding groups are key to the Wastelanders' understanding of their situation, an understanding based on a combination of cultural and ecological contrasts. Marking the absolute western limit of the Wasteland is the rippling blue streak of the steep, thickly forested escarpment, which runs unerringly

north-south like a massive handrail. Except for a few unclear paths and timber camps (manned by itinerant Betsileo workers from the highlands to the west), it is largely impenetrable and uninhabited. Beyond, or 'behind the forest' (*ambadika ala*), as the Wastelanders say, live the Bara, famed for their obsessive love of cattle (*tia aomby loatra*) and their reputedly incestuous marriages²⁰ (Elli 1993: 74-81; Huntington 1978; 1988). They are thought of as unruly and uncouth, are considered to be cattle-thieves and, as far as the Wastelanders are concerned, are not to be trusted. To the north is what appears to be a solid wall of rock topped with clouds. This natural barrier marks the entrance into Tanala country, where those known as the 'people of the forest' lie hidden away in their mountain fastness (Beaujard 1983b). The terrain here is particularly difficult to negotiate as are, purportedly, the strange inhabitants, who are known for their potent charms and magic,²¹ who travel with their spirit familiars and whom it is therefore best to avoid. To the east is a deserted strip of no man's land known for its barrenness. It is an 'empty quarter' to which convicted criminals are condemned by the prison service either to grow their own food or to starve. Anyone fool enough to attempt to cross it unaccompanied is likely to fall victim to its reputedly brutal and starving desperadoes. Further east, past the dead zone, live the Zafisoro and Antaifasy, antisocial rivals involved in an 'interminable feud' (*adin-draza*) for the rich soil of the river basins stretching across the coastal plain to the sea. And to the south the land opens out into a broad, flat plain until it reaches the mighty Mananara river. The plain is peopled by the Antaisaka (Deschamps 1936; 1938), who strike fear into the hearts of the Wastelanders because of their bellicosity, their number and power and their expansionist tendencies.

This shared experience of containment, of being boxed in and trapped, has affected inter-clan relations in two contrasting ways: united opposition to outside threats has promoted co-operation and an increased sense of shared identity whereas competition over resources perceived of as limited has led to distrust and animosity. Consequently, relationships between Wastelander clans can seem fickle: one moment they will fondly be calling each other 'brothers' (*ampirahalahy*) while the next they will be cursing each other behind each others' backs over some perceived slight or injustice. The enduring sense of difference between clans, which is occasionally exaggerated by the aforementioned internal rivalries, stems from the fact that they all migrated to the Wasteland at different times and from different places.²² This meant that no clans shared any ancestors or origin points and that no clan claimed to be autochthonous. 'There simply weren't any people here

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before' (*tsy nisy olo taloha*), explained Iaban'i Kazafy. This not only made the clans different from each other, however, it also made them equals. Since no clan could justifiably claim seniority by virtue of the fact of being autochthonous, they all started on an equal footing.

Independence was maintained by adopting a strict policy of separatism, each clan representing an autonomous and self-sustaining unit. Separatism was further reinforced through the practice of strict endogamy, each clan marrying within itself. The only exception to endogamy was the 'taking of women by force' (*misazo vady*) from other groups. These women captives, poached from other clans, effectively became the property of the marauding clan and were taken as wives. With the exception of these violent encounters and equally bloody territorial confrontations, the clans were effectively closed to each other. The result of this isolationist attitude, buttressed by stubborn belligerence, was equality. Clans preferred to compete with arms rather than to accept the possibility of subordination or enslavement. Even today, in contrast to neighbouring groups, the Wastelanders never utilize the idiom of slavery to describe any of the contemporary relationships to be found within the territory.²³ The fact that the process of settlement was not a peaceful one is recognized by all the clans but, as they see it, it was this willingness to fight that guaranteed their freedom. Consequently, the period of interminable conflict that lasted until the French arrived to colonize and pacify the region is remembered with not inconsiderable pride. Nowadays the clans interact relatively peacefully, but during this confrontational period all the competing clans had in common was a shared attitude towards the land that they were warring over.

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INTRODUCTION

1. According to the Abinal–Malzac dictionary *saha* means *la campagne* (the country) or *les champs* (the fields) and *fatra (na)* means *un espace découvert, dénudé dans la forêt ou au-delà de la forêt* (a clear space in or beside the forest). Thus *Sahafatra* essentially denotes a clear space, an empty valley or an uncultivated area near to, or in, a forest.
2. The area was associated with the ‘people of the forest’ (*Tanala*) who were thought of as ‘uncivilized’. The land they inhabited was perceived by outsiders to be ‘wilderness’ (*efitra*), overrun by bands of robbers (Knight 1893). For the highland bearers of early missionaries and explorers it was a region full of terrors, ghosts and witches, to be passed through as quickly as possible on the way to ‘civilization’. Their fear seems to have been rooted in the archetypal characteristics attributed to the Tanala who, in accounts of the time, always seem to be referred to as heavily armed, wild or barbaric (Knight 1893; Sibree 1876: 38). The true opposition here seems to be between *Tanala* and *Merina*, most strongly signified by the contrast of the forest with its ‘rank growth’ (Knight 1893: 397) and the open country of the high plateaux.
3. For example, see the description given by James Sibree (of the London Missionary Society) of his journey through south-east Madagascar (Sibree 1876) for a peripheral view of the lands outside Merina hegemony. See also the description of a journey made between Fort Dauphin and Fianarantsoa made by the missionary E. F. Knight for a similar view (Knight 1893). A slight exception to the general trend is provided by the missionary C. Collins (Collins 1897), who provides a genuine eyewitness account of a village within the land of Sahafatra. He visited what is the present-day territory of Sahafatra (although he misidentified the people as Tanala) and met the then ‘king’ of the Antevatohe clan, Tsimivony. What is interesting about this account is how Collins describes an independent, militarized and strongly fortified ‘kingdom’, reinforcing the idea of small autonomous territories.
4. The major Merina forts were located at Vohipeno, Mahamanina, Ankarana and Vaingaindrano.
5. These rebels/bandits were known as *mavorongo* (yellow-heads) by the Merina because of their strange hairdos. ‘On les appelait autrefois “Mavorongo” (cheveux jaunes, ou gris; parce qu’ils les portaient en boules graissées de suif

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mélange d'argile)' (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 84). Collins (1897: 353) provides a graphic description of this hairstyle, which was peculiar to the region at that time. 'Their hair is arranged by means of evil-smelling fat into six or eight balls about the size of a small orange. These balls, when hard, are of a greyish tint and as solid as wood, indeed resounding quite as much. When their hair is freshly arranged, one may see the beaux of the village strutting about as proud as peacocks.' Knight (1893: 396) also describes *mavorongo* hair. 'Their coiffure is not elegant in European eyes: their black hair is twisted up into a number of balls – about the size of a billiard ball – which are thickly plastered with fat and white earth.' Because of its pejorative connotations, the appellation *mavorongo* is nowadays largely disowned (although it is still whisperingly associated with the Antevatofo). However, the hairstyle is occasionally recreated when dressing the dead body of an important leader before burial in the tomb; 'les cheveux sont encore parfois mis en boules et oints de terre (à la mode des ancêtres)' (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 86).

6. The only mention of more than a few lines that I have found in the literature referring to Sahafatra is a six-page section in the Deschamps and Vianes book on the peoples of south-east Madagascar (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 83–9) which provides an uncertain, sketchy and generalizing account at best.
7. The French colonial administration patented its own methods for the creation and investment of meaning. Their inability or unwillingness to understand important themes in Malagasy culture led them to introduce the *politique des races* (Covell 1987: 15), a system of indirect rule that implicitly assumed that there were traditional institutions of authority through which to channel power. This policy required the French to find (or nominate) 'traditional' leaders to rule as intermediaries. The underlying principle was that all 'native' groups should govern themselves under the umbrella-like supervision of the French authorities. The weakness of the policy lay in the fact that there were not always 'traditional' leaders *in situ*. In these cases the French had to create leaders where there were none before. Not surprisingly, the new leaders were not necessarily respected or obeyed by the people they were nominally meant to represent as there was no 'traditional' basis for their authority. The policy was to be assisted by the transplantation of Merina *fokonolona* (village councils that had already been transformed into an arm of the state) into new areas, for the purposes of enabling the collection of taxes and the extraction of *corvée* labour. The whole system was to be policed by regional administrative posts, operating in accordance with the 'oil spot' (*tache d'huile*) principle, that theorized that power should diffuse outwards from the centre (Thompson and Adloff 1965: 15). The result of this combination was, in effect, to split up the people ruled into bounded groups, who were then perceived in terms of race or tribe. The research of the Académie Malgache, set up to operate in conjunction with the colonial administration, reinforced these ideas during the process of collecting basic data on the population, deemed essential for the effective management of French rule (Thompson and Adloff 1965: 15). The problem with the French boundaries, often based on crude geographic criteria, was that they were not representative of the significant symbolic divisions in Malagasy life. The resulting group labels (18 officially recognized by the Malagasy government, the Sahafatra not being one of them) are a mess. Some were derived from the pre-colonial empires, some were survivals of earlier traditions, some

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- were mistakenly taken from early travellers' naive accounts (see Eggert 1986 on the Mahafaly) and some simply created by the French administration.
8. 'Si les tribus des bords de la Renana ont été assujetties par les Hova [the term for Merina at that time], celles qui se trouvaient au sud de cette ligne: Hovalahy, Hova [not the Merina but a local clan], Ivatobe, Antevongo, Vohilakatra, Sahavoay, Tsiaretra, Antsoro, échapperent à toute domination. Bien plus, les commerçants Ambaniandro [another name for the Merina literally meaning 'under the sky' and referring to the height of their homeland] qui voulaient aller trafiquer dans leurs villages, étaient obligés de leur payer un droit de passage pour n'être pas inquiétés dans leurs opérations' (Marchand 1901: 482).
 9. Bearing in mind the confusion created by labels attributed by external agents, the uncertainty of the principles that lead to the generation of these labels and the multiplex meanings attached to any particular one, it does not seem sensible to attempt to define labels such as 'Sahafatra' in rigid, univocal terms. It is more constructive to look at specific labels as part of a more general set in order to examine how they are used as flexible tools for identity construction, and more specifically how they are utilized in different ways, for political purposes as well as for purposes of identification. Such an approach reveals important themes underlying Malagasy life. Group labels in Madagascar display three key themes. These are: environment (the nature of the area inhabited or of the land from whence one came or the technological specialization practised); ancestry (either specific or as part of a dynastic heritage); and characteristics relating the group to, or distancing it from, other political entities (expressions of group solidarity, physical characteristics, actions that mark one out, administrative divisions). The three themes demonstrate the existence of different priorities for different peoples, some concerned with their relationship with the land, others with their dynastic heritage and yet others with what they do.
 10. Decary mentions the Sahafatra and describes them as *les gens des clairières* (the people of the clearings): 'Cantonnes sur les bords du haut Manampatrana, au pied des montagnes, les Sahafatra (gens des clairières) forment une petite tribu de 25 000 âmes; ils se rapprochent beaucoup des Tanala par leurs caractères et leur genre de vie. D'après leurs traditions ils seraient originaires du pays Mahafaly; ils considèrent en tout cas comme indépendants de Tanala et affirment que le sol sur lequel ils vivent leur a toujours appartenu' (Decary 1951: 9). Despite their protestations of independence, Decary compartmentalizes the Sahafatra with the Tanala and therefore assumes, without justification, that they live in clearings in the forest rather than in clear open spaces. Grandidier also classified them as Tanala, and Deschamps, following this lead, makes the same assumptions: 'Il semble que cette région ait été boisée autrefois comme le pays tanala et quasi déserte. Les immigrants y sont venus pour faire des tavi [slash-and-burn agriculture], puis, une fois la forêt détruite, s'y sont stabilisés avec des rizières. On compte généralement 4 ou 5 générations depuis la venue du premier ancêtre' (Deschamps and Vianes 1959: 84). I believe the classification of the Sahafatra as Tanala to be mistaken; of all the clans only two (the Tesonjo and the Antemahatsinjobe) claim Tanala roots; the rest claim diverse origins from as far afield as the present-day territories of the Mahafaly, Bara, Betsileo, Antaisaka, Antaimoro, Antaifasy, Sakalava and Antandroy. Their association with the forest seems to have no basis in reality apart from this imaginary and fictitious affiliation, attributed by foreign authors, with the Tanala.

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First and foremost, there is no evidence that the area was heavily forested. From the earliest descriptions onwards, the region has been described as an empty place (by outsiders and through the oral histories of the people of Sahafatra themselves). Secondly, the present-day people of Sahafatra do not talk of a heritage of slash-and-burn agriculture (*tavy*) and do not talk of ever having lived in the forest. The forest has always been a natural barrier marking the west of their territory, and a place where the brave go to collect medicines or hunt wild boar, but it has never been their home. Thirdly, the people of Sahafatra do not have a positive affinity for the forest, but are rather very afraid of it, the 'wild animals' (*biby*) that roam it and the ghosts, shades and spirit familiars that haunt it. So, if anything, the people of Sahafatra (like the Zafimaniry described by Bloch (1995a)) have negative feelings towards the forest. Unlike the Zafimaniry, however, their lives are not dedicated to cutting it down. Even so, they share with the Zafimaniry the attitude that that is just about all it is good for. The irony is that the lives of the Sahafatra are, in fact, dedicated to creating forest; not forest like the wild inhospitable forest to the west, but man-made domesticated forests to shade their coffee, their villages and their rice paddies and to provide many varieties of fruit. The people of Sahafatra are engaged in filling up the empty landscape they inherited, regenerating their own environment rather than appropriating and destroying another.

11. A story I heard once, but which was never corroborated by any other contemporary informant, told of how Sahafatra is the name of a river, to be found in what is now Zaramanampy territory, beside which the Vohilakatra lived before they moved to their present location. Deschamps and Vianes (1959) also tell of such a river, a tributary of the Manambato. However, I never heard this explanation repeated again and it cannot therefore really be said to have any significance for the general population.
12. The idea of an extended area ripe for development is reinforced by the fact that the major river at the heart of the territory is called the Manampatra (*manana* + *farana*), which means 'to stretch out into open space', and which therefore conveys the same sense as Sahafatra. The river is only given this name when it emerges from the forested escarpment to the west, the upper reaches in Bara-land being referred to by a different name. This suggests that the name of the river is referring to the open landscape through which it flows in its final stages on the way to the sea.
13. Deschamps' and Vianes' estimate, made in 1959, that the original migrants had arrived about four or five generations before, fits in roughly with my estimate of seven generations, made in 1996.
14. According to Deschamps and Vianes (1959: 84–6) many of the clans have clear origins: the Antevatobe are said to have come from Africa (they note that they are particularly black) and then to have been a part of the kingdom of Fiherena on the west coast; the Hova are said to herald from Ambava-Hova in the district of Benenitra in present-day Bara-land; the Lohanosy supposedly come from their parent Lohanosy group neighbouring the Zafisoro; the Antsoro are meant to have come from the valley of the Sahatsoro, a tributary of the Itomampy; the Tevongo (now divided into two groups, one to the west of Vondrozo and one in the coastal zone between the Vohilakatra, the Sahavoay and the Zaramanampy) are said to have originated in Mahafaly country, arriving in the land of Sahafatra by way of Ivongo to the south, near Vaingaindrano; the

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- Masitafika are also meant to herald from Mahafaly; the Vohilakatra claim their ancestor came from overseas, through Mahafaly and then to Ilakatri in Zaramanampy territory, before arriving in their present territory; the Tsaretry are said to be a mix of people from Mahafaly, Betsileo and Antaifasy; the Antesonjo derive from the Tanala of Ikongo and came to the land of Sahafatra after being vassals to the Zafinivola to the south of their present location; the Antemanara are thought, like the Tsaretry, to be refugees, in their case coming from Mahafaly, Betsileo and Antaisaka. The Antemahatsinjobe are thought to herald from Antaimoro and Tanala. The Hovalahy are said to be Tanala of Karianga, forced out of their original territory. Other peripheral groups, such as the Vohitsidy and the Zafinivola, claim origins from Antaisaka, Antanosy and Antandroy. The data I collected in 1996 roughly tallied with the above 'histories'; however, people were very vague about where they had come from outside the land of Sahafatra and were not particularly concerned about it. Questions about origins were always referred upwards to elders and seniors. At first I thought this was merely secretive, but later I came to the conclusion that people really did not know, and simply assumed their leaders would know, even though this was not always the case.
15. See also Elle's map published in 1906 (116–23) which is very similar but which includes the previously omitted Masitafika clan.
 16. See the maps which form part of the survey of the province of Farafangana published in the *Bulletin Économique de Madagascar, Quatrième Trimestre* (1921: 221–41).
 17. Many Malagasy group labels have arisen as a result of the political formation of kingdoms and the absorption of other peoples into these kingdoms. For example, all the Bara kingdoms to the west were constructed out of a mélange of peoples (Bastard 1904: 391; Boin 1897), the word Bara coming to represent all those falling under the hegemony of the dominant Zafimanely clan in the early nineteenth century. The term 'Sahafatra' is an exception to this general rule, because those referred to by the term were never unified within a single kingdom.
 18. 'Variations in the basic Malagasy culture do exist, but the different dimensions do not co-vary or constitute cultural wholes connected to specific local groups ... In general, locality and extended family are more important bases for solidary action than ethnicity' (Covell 1987: 12). This assertion, supported by ethnography from across Madagascar, provides the basis for any analysis of larger-scale political formations on the island. The inward-looking nature of Malagasy social groups suggests that broadly applicable group labels, such as Sahafatra, refer to contingent, somewhat artificial, political constructs.
 19. See Lan (1985: 22–4) for the subtleties of clan affiliation through animal taboos.
 20. It is generally thought that the Bara favour marriage with a first cousin which is unacceptably close (*mifankariny loatra*) for the Wastelanders, who think that only at least third-generation descendants of brothers/sisters should marry. Anything closer than this is thought of as incestuous and is referred to as a 'Bara marriage' (*fanambadia Bara*). Even if the third-generation rule is satisfied, a *fafy* (atonement) to remove the danger of any perceived incest should, ideally, be completed. Marriage of third-generation descendants is known as *mifamala*, which literally means 'to be separate from each other'. This is why they can safely marry. However, such a marriage is also known as *misaviky*, which means

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- 'to seize strongly with the arms', 'to cling on to', and as *mifampasaky*, which means 'to search for each other with the hand'. The two contrasting types of terminology demonstrate the fine balance between keeping kin apart and holding them together. The Wastelander ideal seems to involve expansion tied to security.
21. In Tanala country you find many unmanned stalls beside paths. This strange and untypical arrangement is only possible because their magic powers are held in such fear that everyone leaves the correct money in spite of the absence of a stallholder.
 22. See Note 14 above.
 23. It is interesting that, in 16 months of fieldwork, I never heard anyone talk about slavery once with reference to contemporary Sahafatra. I imagine that the idiom of slavery is so severely underdeveloped because slavery itself is so unthinkable. No one would countenance being anyone else's slave; hence the issue is marginalized. The actual situation in the Wasteland is particularly notable because a hierarchical ethos in Madagascar is almost always linked to concepts of 'slavery'. Not very far to the north-west, recent research shows how villagers in control of land are explicitly recreating 'slaves' now, in the modern age (Sandra Evers: seminar paper presented at LSE, 1997). What is remarkable, then, is that, even with the atmosphere of intense rivalry predominant in the Wasteland, there appear to be unstated rules or boundaries preventing competition from being pursued to the point where ancestries and social worth are denigrated by referring to people/lineages/clans as 'slaves' (*andevao*). This is not to say that the idiom of slavery is non-existent in the Wasteland, however. As we will see later in the book, the idea of temporary 'enslavement' is used to help explain the means used to carry out the formerly traditional practice of raising commemorative stones to dead leaders. It will become apparent, though, that even this example of 'slavery' is subversive in the sense that it actually serves to ensure that no one remains as slave to anyone in the long term.

CHAPTER I

1. I follow Bloch and Parry's definition of 'fertility' as 'fecundity' or 'productive-ness' (Bloch and Parry 1982: 7).
2. See Fox (1987: 174) on how in the Austronesian world social identity is not necessarily given at birth.
3. Tangentially supporting evidence for the existence of anti-descent organization within Madagascar can be found in the writings of Middleton (1988). Her work on the Karembola, although stressing descent, recognizes the critical importance of anti-descent relationships, most notably those involving the funerary priests (*tsimahaivelone*) who perform the rituals descent group members cannot (Middleton 1988: 543).
4. Bloch shows how highland kings harnessed elemental forces associated with autochthons, such as flowing water, to demonstrate their dominion of the land and to extend their rule over different subject peoples (Bloch 1986: 43–7).
5. See Feierman (1996) for a comparable Tanzanian example and Lan (1985) for a Zimbabwean case.
6. 'Ritual regicide – killing the king to save the kingship – is inscribed in the logic of this type of politico-religious institution' (Adler 1982: 181).

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7. 'The logic of a hierarchical system does not admit the possibility of exact peers in status. Yet people who are close in status are effectively status-peers. Neither is willing to admit the superiority of the other. As a result their relation is unstable and inconclusive, characterized by competition and opposition rather than by unity and solidarity. It approaches a contest in its structure and meaning' (Errington 1989: 141).
8. See Humphrey (1995) for a Mongolian parallel consisting of chiefs with a narrow view of nature concerned with descent, and opposed shamans concerned with broader sets of elemental forces.
9. See McKinnon (1991: 63–106) on 'world-building' in the Tanimbar islands.
10. See Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995) on what 'landscape' is.
11. In the Abinal–Malzac dictionary *Zanahary* is translated as 'Dieu' (God) or 'créateur' (creator). However, Bloch's treatment of the word is more in accordance with my approach: he talks about how the Zafimaniry interpret *Zanahary* as the amoral and capricious environment (Bloch 1995a).
12. *Zanahary* is of the same order as the amoral force of 'Divinity' described by Lienhardt, the 'Divinity' which not only provides the gifts of children and cattle to the Dinka but which also strikes them down (Lienhardt 1961: 23). Unlike 'Divinity', however, which is removed from the earth and the realm of men (as a consequence of the severing of the rope connecting Earth and Sky recounted in Dinka mythology), *Zanahary* is very much part of the everyday world. *Zanahary* is therefore more contiguous with man than Lienhardt's 'Divinity'.
13. Linton, one of the first trained anthropologists to survey the region, introduced some of the problems encountered when trying to describe *Zanahary* in his perceptive but limited account of the religious practices of the 'East Coast Culture Area' of Madagascar. 'This is the name given to a power above the ancestors, from whom they derive their powers. In this region *Zanahary* is poorly personified and the natives are not sure if he is one or many. Some claim that every gens, person and even animal has its own *Zanahary* ... He is the source of good and evil. Dualism is lacking' (Linton 1928: 372).
14. The existence of *Zanahary* in all aspects of creation should not lead us to believe that *Zanahary* is a god-like creator figure comparable to the Christian God (*Andriamanitra* – literally 'the sweet smelling noble'). *Andriamanitra* and *Zanahary* represent radically different outlooks, the former a recent alien importation and the latter the cornerstone of a more traditional world-view.
15. In the Wasteland, *Zanahary* does not represent the 'corpse in the house' as it does for the Karembola of the deep south of Madagascar (Middleton 1988). What is interesting is that, although dead bodies are not thought *specifically* to represent what the Karembola term the 'corpse God' (*Zanahary*), the dead person is said to have 'gone to *Zanahary*' (*lasa Zanahary*).
16. See Errington (1989: 35) for a similar south-east Asian view of how 'cosmic energy suffuses and animates the world'.
17. The root of the word *fahany* is most likely *maha ahy*, which literally means 'make me'. It can be understood then that the concept of *fahany* refers to construction of self.
18. I use the word 'orientation' in a general sense here because, although both people and things have an 'orientation', the 'orientation' of people, animals, birds and insects is far more active and self-aware than the passive,

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unselfconscious 'orientation' (perhaps better termed 'code') of trees, crops, stones and other objects. The major distinction between these two sets is that people, animals, birds and insects have a *fanahy*, whereas trees, crops, stones and other objects do not. The two sets are, however, not categorically different because there is no clear demarcation made between them as living and non-living things: a tree is alive in the same sense that a bird is alive. To what extent something is living is therefore not directly correlated with its self-awareness/active nature. What we have is two overlapping paradigms, one concerned with 'aliveness' and the other concerned with 'active self-awareness'. If we combine the two paradigms, we get what I have termed 'orientation', which is a slightly blurred concept.

19. See Lambek (1992) for a complementary view of taboo as an internal means of embodied social identification as well as an external construction. 'Being a person entails resisting a total inward collapse, that is, resisting the rejection of all material connexion with the outer world. Thus, exchange and taboo, openness and closure, engagement and resistance, must be understood conjointly. Taboos help to regulate the boundaries of inner and outer worlds. They provide a concrete and material means to carve out and connect personal and social spaces and to grant such spaces the legitimacy offered by both objectified public rules and immediate bodily experience' (Lambek 1992: 262).
20. Such a strategy indirectly obeys the general principle, put forward by Graeber, governing taboos in Imerina, namely that 'the power to impose restrictions (*fady*) is ultimately continuous with the violence through which these restrictions are enforced' (Graeber 1995: 266). The only difference lies in the fact that the violence referred to by Graeber stems from angry or vengeful ancestors, whereas the violence in the Wasteland case is largely amoral and simply results from incompatibility within the *Zanahary* system.
21. See Thomas's work (1997) on the Temanambondro, where he talks of the river estuary beside which they live as a 'great root'.
22. See Middleton (1995: 223–33) on umbilical cords and origin points.
23. If a woman throws the cord, it is said that the baby will be 'soft-headed' (*malemy loha*).
24. The presence of the ancestors in the water jealously guarding the cords of their descendants makes it a dangerous place for strangers to go, as the water is infused with their power. When an Antaisaka man washed his face in a Tevongo pool, for example, his face was scarred as if he had been washing in battery acid, not water.
25. 'C'est surtout dans cette partie de l'Île [the south-east] qu'on pouvait constater la difficulté de prendre à Madagascar des mesures administratives d'ensemble et d'adopter un système unique d'exercice de notre souveraineté vis-à-vis de populations essentiellement différentes par leurs traditions, leurs caractères et leurs aptitudes à la Civilisation. À l'inverse du pays sakalava où notre action pourrait s'appuyer sur l'autorité des chefs traditionnels, nous nous trouvons là en présence de peuplades à l'état d'extrême division' (Gallieni 1908: 267).
26. A *ziva* is a pact between clans that promises solidarity, mutual assistance and perpetual peace (see Cole 1996; Feeley-Harnik 1991b: 115–33). Networks of *ziva* relations (*piziva*) increase social cohesion and make it safe to travel without fear of attack in what was previously 'enemy' territory.

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27. The *fanopa* is the mechanism through which *ziva* work. People implicated in a *ziva* relationship *mifanopa*: this means that they can curse each other as much as they like as long as they do not actually come to blows (*mahazo miteny ratsy fa teny avao; tsy mahazo miady*). See Elli (1993: 83) on similar *vala valy* relationships among the Bara.
28. An *opa* is a curse, generally involving accusations of incest or wishing someone dead by violent means. Since *opa* are 'bad words' (*teny ratsy*) linked up with sex, honour and death, the concept covers anything rude, blasphemous or inappropriate.
29. If members of different clans that fought in the past want to get married, a special ritual, known as a *botro*, has to be performed. This is because clans that have fought in the past are categorically not kin, and non-kin may not marry. The purpose of the *botro*, which involves the sacrifice of a cow given by the man, is to make the couple kin (*hava*), thereby allowing them to marry. The *botro* is likened to a special type of atonement (*fafy*), unblocking the way between past enemies. The cow is offered up to the ancestors and the force of creation (*Zanahary*), and its blood is daubed on the foreheads, behind the ears and on the bellies of the couple. A formulaic blessing is then recited: *Da hatsara an'azy io; da hasoa an'azy io; mba hiteraka io; mba hibaby. Ho lelahy; ho viavy; afaka io ra ny aomby io ifady; tsisy koa fady* (Let this make him good; let this make her good; let them have children; let them cradle them. Let there be boys; let there be girls; this cow's blood frees the taboo; there is no more taboo).
30. Marrying 'too close' (*mifankariny loatra*) and marrying 'too far away' (*mifankalavitra loatra*) are both undesirable. As has already been noted, marrying 'too far away' involves doing a *botro* (see note above). Marrying close can also cause trouble: if you marry someone who is 'too close', you commit incest, thereby putting yourself, your partner, your children and both families in mortal danger of divine retribution. The only way to attempt to redress the situation (apart from separation) is to perform a special ritual of atonement known as a *tony* (peace). Only if this is successful can one then start on the official marriage process, which involves the standard ritual of atonement (*fafy*). The ideal marriage is, thus, a balance between inside and outside, marriage with kin but not with close kin (see Huntington 1978). Only if there is the correct 'balance' is a simple, straightforward *fafy* needed; if the 'balance' is wrong a *botro* or a *tony* is required as well.
31. This could be interpreted as a modern version of capturing wives, with young men competing to win over women from other clans so as to guarantee a surplus. However, although 'stealing' (*mangala*) a wife at market may be depriving someone else and advantaging your own clan over others, this is not how it is generally thought of. The union is publicly construed in terms of personal love (*fitiava*) and compatibility, not clan competition.
32. 'Testers' (*pifanange*) are almost always men.
33. Given their concern with *panjakas*, the Wastelanders carry out very little, if any, discourse on hierarchy and equality in terms of the traditional Malagasy vocabulary of rank (*roandria, andriana, vohitse*, etc.). Even the 'customary' terms for 'commoners' or 'subjects' of *panjakas* (*vohitse, vahoaka*, etc.) seem to have been largely replaced by an imported Merina colonial administrative term: *fokon'olo*. Studious avoidance of the employment of the fixed terminology

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of rank results from a political ethos based on equality in the long run. Hierarchy may be countenanced in the short term (hence the obsession with *panjakas* and the nature of ruling) because everyone knows that this hierarchy is impermanent, fluid and relative.

CHAPTER 2

1. To court (*mifapila*) involves the boy giving little gifts to his girlfriend (*sipa*) such as small amounts of money, plastic jewellery or a ring. If a girl is wearing a ring it does not signify that she is married but that a boy is interested in her. People will ask her where she got it from (*peratra tamin'ia?*) and she will most likely give an arch reply. She in turn demands that her boyfriend (*sipa*) wear an article of her clothing to demonstrate his commitment to her. It is therefore not uncommon to see boys wearing women's wraps (*salova*) and even lipstick and jewellery at circumcision parties where they are meeting their girlfriends.
2. 'Women are never fully incorporated into their husband's family or descent group unless by endogamy they belong already. Otherwise they remain more closely tied to their own kin group than to their husband and his' (Southall 1986: 420 with reference to general Malagasy custom).
3. If a woman has lived with her husband for many years and has grown-up children by him, she becomes a valued member of the community she has moved into. Even if her husband dies or leaves her she may well stay put in her adopted village. It is the presence of her children that makes this appropriate as is made clear by the fact that, when she dies, her body is still taken back to her father's household. If the children are old enough when there is a separation the man should in theory take them, especially the sons. However, he may only do so if he pays sufficient compensation, likened to wages (*karama*), for the effort involved in the raising of the children. As many men are unable or unwilling to come up with satisfactory compensation (at least one cow per child), women often retain de facto custody of their children.
4. Although a father loses some control over the children of his daughters who marry out, they are still very actively thought of as his descendants (*taranaka*). Thus, despite the heavy patrilineal bias, there is still a strongly cognatic view of relatedness. This is demonstrated by the fact that all grandchildren, whether they be through sons or daughters, should attend rituals or celebrations held by their grandfather (*iababe*).
5. *F*: Finaritra *S1*: Ie. *F*: Akory anareo masa, etoa avao, anontany abo koa, da akory aby koa eny izay? *S1*: Ahay da soa avao, da tsisy maresaka, da anareo aty abo koa? *F*: A da tsy manahy, mbola mangi, da anareo abo koa? *S2*: Da anay aby izay, da akory aby anareo iny? *F*: Da izy aby izay. *O*: Da anay aby izay. *S1 + S2*: Da izy aby izay.
6. There are some uxorilocal marriages but these are extremely rare and undesirable from the man's point of view. If a man moves to his wife's village, he is thought of as a non-achiever (*tsy maharonga tena*) and is often effectively treated as a serf by his father-in-law.
7. The equivalent to a *kombohitra* for the pastoral Bara herders is a temporary cattle camp known in the local dialect as a *kombohitsy* (Elli 1993: 34).
8. In real life, as opposed to an imaginary world, Fathers try to lay claim to as many descendants as possible. Although patrilocal residence is preferred, who

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- is and who is not a descendant is judged by cognatic reckoning independent of where someone may happen to live. Therefore the offspring of sons who homestead far off and the offspring of daughters who marry away (and all their respective descendants) are all counted as descendants of the original Father figure. In addition, 'outsider' women marrying 'in' are adopted as daughters and become kin (*hava*). They are known as 'our people' (*olo aminay*) by members of the patrilineal descent group. In a way they are substituting for the real daughters who have left, replacing them in the imaginary constitution of the body as imagined by Iaban'i Zafitala.
9. A contradiction between homesteading and the 'filling up of the body' of a village is apparent here, because if everybody went out to homestead the 'body' would forever be being 'emptied'. However, it is the insoluble nature of such contradictions that makes ideals (ignoring the contradictions) so appealing. As I have already noted, it is equally idealistic to imagine all daughters staying in the village. This, though, does not prevent people from fantasizing about such a scenario. It should also be pointed out that the contradiction between homesteading and 'filling up the body' is not as great as it seems. It is true that, if all sons went out to homestead, the ideal would be shattered. However, what is actually imagined is one Father's particular homestead and its development into a village. From the point of view of the 'imager' (the Father who heads the homestead), there is no contradiction here. He starts a homestead and simply desires that all his descendants stay and build it up. The contradiction only arises because the sons have a different outlook from that of their Father. They, too, are eager to create something of their own rather than be a part of someone else's creation. Thus they also would like to break off and homestead. It is the conflicting priorities of Fathers and sons that give rise to the contradiction and that make the ideal unrealistic. In a way, then, the ideal also serves to mask and deny the inevitable tension between Fathers and sons.
 10. Tracing ancestries is made more problematic by taboos on naming dead ancestors. Names of ancestors are treasured and should remain hidden so that enemies outside the clan cannot use their names to utter excessively strong and personal curses (*opa*), which would inevitably provoke unwanted violence.
 11. The Malagasy word *piambina*, which I have translated as Minder, is derived from the verb *miambina* which means 'to look after'. The verb can be used with reference to anything that needs taking care of but is most commonly used when referring to houses, children or cows.
 12. This should not entirely surprise readers familiar with the literature on Madagascar. Beaujard, for example, in his account of the development of Tanala royal structures, records the election of an elective system whereby certain types of *panjaka* can be chosen (Beaujard 1983a: 321). What is particularly interesting is that his material echoes the Wasteland case in that not all *panjakas*, but only certain types of *panjaka*, may be chosen.
 13. The term 'Fertile' comes to mean 'palace' by a process of logical extension. As was mentioned in the introduction, people rule because they are perceived to provide fertility. A Fertile is thus inhabited by default by a ruler and becomes recognized as a palace.
 14. One of his responsibilities is to provide a reliable taster for public events. It is appropriate to take a small consumable tribute when visiting a senior *panjaka* (normally wine (*divay*) or rum (*toaka*)). However, since the preferred method

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- of sorcery in the Wasteland is poisoning, a taster is needed to sample the gift before serving it.
15. Bearing in mind the inseparability of the Fertile and the senior *panjaka*, the Wife of the Fertile is also in a sense wedded to the *panjaka*. It is therefore the job of the Wife of the Fertile to behave like a male wife, tending to the needs of the *panjaka*.
 16. Although the roles of Eye of the Water and Wife of Misfortune are completely separate, both positions may be combined and held by one person.
 17. The idea of the 'people's choice' is confusing here. Although it is explicitly stated that all the people (*vahoaka*) choose the *kobatany*, it emerged on further questioning that it was a council made up of the Minders of the One House of the Belly that made the final decision. Although this seems to go against the idea that the *kobatany* is elected by the people, this is not really the case since Minders of the One House are seen as the natural and legitimate spokesmen for their subjects. If they operate autocratically and not in broad accordance with the wishes of their subjects, they will themselves be removed from office.
 18. The idea of being able to choose anyone is also slightly misleading. Although the choice is, in principle, 'open', the vast majority of *kobatany* are already Minders of the One House when they are selected. This is not really surprising, because someone who is already a Minder of the One House already has a proven track record as an effective ruler, unlike an ordinary citizen. However, it does underline how ideology and practice are not identical. Despite protestations of 'open' choice, two extra provisos must also be made here. Firstly, sons of incumbent *kobatany* cannot inherit their father's position; and, secondly, some lineages in some clans are actively ruled out because their forebears proved ineffective or unjust leaders (see Chapter 3 for more detail on these points).

CHAPTER 3

1. The distinction is clearer conceptually than in practice. This is because those who have not yet had, or who cannot have children, are also sometimes given teknonymical names: a young man may be known as 'father' of one of his elder brother's children, and a childless woman may be known as 'mother' of one of her sisters' offspring.
2. This principle of the inseparability of the producer and its product extends into the realm of nature: bees and honey are both known by the same term (*tantely*), as are mango trees and mangoes (*manga*). The inseparability of father and child is also emphasized by their sharing of food: although the father will eat from a separate plate from his young children, he will give (and they will learn to ask for) some of his own food to them during the course of the meal. Father and sons share sustenance and therefore substance in an act of commensality.
3. The number of Earth Shakers is therefore permanently fixed, as no new positions are created.
4. The same is true for the term *rangahy*, meaning old man, which is also applied to senior *panjakas*. A *rangahy* is an old man who has produced many children and who has also, in a sense, moved beyond kinship. The term *rangahy* is not just used to refer to old men, it may also be used to refer to anything that is past its productive best but which is still regarded with fondness. For example, an old date palm no longer producing much fruit, but still towering proudly in the

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centre of a village, might be called a *rangahy* while being patted affectionately, as if it were a real person. The term *rangahy* conveys permanence and enduring fertility. The *rangahy* himself is no longer fertile but he has produced much of that which still is fertile today.

CHAPTER 4

1. Alternative ideas about 'testing' are to be found in the literature on Madagascar. Middleton talks of how the Karembola of the deep south enjoy regulated 'testing' between groups who regard themselves as equals (*mpirahambane*) within their own confederacy (1988: 121–68). However, Karembola 'testing' is strongly connected to culturally elaborated notions of honour and shame (*henatse*) and aims to create dependency. It cannot be said to be productive of authority and of life in the same way as in the Wasteland.
2. See Kent (1979: 84–8) on similar seventeenth-century Antanosy attitudes.
3. Cattle trading was often carried out by individuals slightly disillusioned by traditional ways. A man we knew was so saddened by the inexplicable loss of two young wives to illness that he turned to cattle trading, in a sense opting out of village life. He was easily spotted because of the untypical all-denim outfit he sported. However, he was a hard man to track down, because most of his time was spent on the move with cattle in tow, or in Farafangana spending his profits and brokering new deals.
4. Their strength and vigour is demonstrated before they are sacrificed when young men risk serious injury in order to tease and taunt them, tweaking their genitals and riding on their horns, before wrestling them to the ground (*mitolona*). A cow that puts up a fight is admired for its spirit. At a funeral, unlike at other sacrifices, the cow is left unmolested before it is killed.
5. *Panjakas* are therefore always victims, unlike many divine kings who only become victims if they fail in their duties (see Simonse 1992: 372–3).
6. See Feierman (1996) for comparative literature on the leader as hostage in Tanzania. According to Feierman, when the new king was announced the subjects were allowed, once, to make their demands clear. They shouted: 'Give us rain. Give us bananas. Give us sugar cane. Give us plantains. Give us meat. Give us food. You are our king, but if you do not feed us properly we will get rid of you. The country is yours; the people must have their stomachs filled. Give us rain. Give us food ...' (1996: 46).
7. It is interesting to note that the 'choosing' of a *panjaka* is all part and parcel of his 'capture'. The word for 'chosen' (*fidina*) is interestingly loaded in this context. As in English, to be 'chosen' normally has positive connotations. To cast the process of selecting a *panjaka* as 'choosing' presents it as a privilege, masking the negative side. What is good for the 'choosers', though, is not necessarily good for the 'chosen' one, since the 'choosers' simply look for the juiciest picking to consume. The euphemistic terminology hides what is really going on.
8. One of these lineages, the Zafitarosy, is actually barred not for bad behaviour but because it is the ritual elder brother (*zokin-olo*) of the Antemahavelo Belly (*troky*). Its members are considered to be advisers and are assigned the duty of selecting prospective candidates from the eligible lineages. They nominate someone who gains the position of Earth Shaker as long as he is generally regarded as acceptable.

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9. See de Heusch (1985: 103–7) for a comparable example of Swazi subjects controlling their king.
10. See Simonse (1992: 214–31) on how the tension underlying the relationship with the king unifies the people.
11. The 'raising up' of the wife, known as the *aka-bady*, makes the marriage official, and is paralleled with the 'raising up' of the *panjaka* (*sandratra panjaka*).
12. If there is a marital dispute, it is always the husband's family that must provide the cow needed to encourage a reconciliation. Likewise, it is the husband's family who must give a cow to the wife if they want to have rights over and above her to the children.
13. See Feeley-Harnik (1982: 36) for comment on other Malagasy royal regalia, specifically the emblematic 'long iron' (*vy lava*) of the Sakalava monarchs.
14. The *soto mena* is used to mark people out and distinguish them from others in some way. This is demonstrated by the fact that, when the *soto mena* is used in the circumcision ceremony (*fora*) for male children (the only time the cloth is used in a ceremony not specifically related to *panjakas*), it serves the same purpose. At this event, after the children have been circumcised, they are dressed in a *soto mena* before being ritually seated three times on a sacrificial cow's forehead (*pandan'aomby*). The *soto mena* makes visible the change in status, as a relatively ungendered boy becomes a member of the exclusive society of men. In the same way as the *soto mena* singles out men from boys (and women) at circumcisions, it singles out *panjaka* from ordinary men later on in life.
15. See Kent (1979: 84) for a seventeenth-century Antanosy equivalent.
16. The Old Woman is only required to give the same number of cattle as Earth Shakers; however, as the most senior and apical head he will have to sponsor more communal clan feasts than anyone else.
17. See Beaujard (1983a: 310) for confirmation of the regional importance of this month.
18. Minders of the One House of some clans may not wear the *soto mena* at this point, it being a privilege reserved for Earth Shakers.
19. The type of cloth depends on the seniority of the *panjaka*. Earth Shakers wear very fine, multicoloured, striped, well-finished and tough silk cloth known as 'red cloaks' (*lamba mena*), 'great cloaks' (*lamba be*) and 'cow cloths' (*lamban'aomby*). More junior *panjakas* wear cloth which is less decorated, thinner and unfinished, with untied ends (*tsy fatorana ny kofehy*), known as 'broken silk' (*vaky landy/sarimbo landy*).
20. The inside/outside distinction is not however the only consideration. For the Masitafika clan it is customary for the Earth Shaker of each Belly to be crowned by a sister's son (real or classificatory) from a higher-ranked Belly. The most senior-ranked Belly is crowned by the second-ranking Belly because there is no one higher. Thus, if the Renifatsy are being raised up, the Andrahamoky crown them; if the Andrahamoky are being raised up then the Andrambaharo crown them; if the Andrambaharo are raised up then the Andrahamoky crown them. Bottom-ranked crown middle-ranked, while first and second share reciprocal duties. One should be crowned by a senior whenever possible and, failing that, by the highest-ranking person available.
21. Minders of the One House of some clans may not perambulate, this being a privilege reserved for Earth Shakers.

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22. *Zanahary* atsinana, *Zanahary* avaratra, *Zanahary* atsimo, *Zanahary* ankandrefa, any ao tany masy laha teo ane. Angeha anao aty hira namboaranay; anao namboatra tana, namboatra tomboky amin'ny olom-belo etoa. Itoa lonaky nahatsanganay, nahatsanga ny tany, nahatsanga ny olo amin'ny asa, ho soa, ho tsara! Avy atsinana, ankandrefa, atsimo, avaratra, izay nangeha *Zanahary*. Ato koa ny Masitafika: Ramahafasa, Rasoza, Andrambaharoy, Tebiso, Renifatsy, Andrahamoky. Navory etoa troki-olo isak mana-tany. Manome aomby, hahalany aomby atsika, tsy manahy na tamana na vositra lelahy. *Zanahary*, mienga avaratra, mienga atsimo, mandehana, mandeha koa atsinana, ankandrefa, ambe vava-rano. Te-inominao ity aomby ity, ity toaka ity. Da izany io.
23. See Elli (1993: 96) for the Bara equivalent.
24. See Beaujard (1983a: 311) for an exact Tanala parallel.
25. A point of view shared exactly by the Tanala (see Beaujard 1983a: 323).
26. See Errington (1989: 10) on invisible potency.
27. See Middleton (1988: 8) for a similar Karembola concept of 'tiredness'.
28. See de Heusch (1985: 99) for more on symbolic regicide.
29. See Errington (1989: 139–41) on comparable centrifugal and centripetal forces in south-east Asia.
30. See Simonse (1992: 191–213) for examples of antagonism between the king and his people in Sudan.

CHAPTER 5

1. I translate the word *panabaka* as 'warrior' because *panabakas* were likened by Wastelanders to members of an 'army' (*miaramila*). In the past, Warriors (*panabaka*) were also known as *fanalolahy*, a term which denotes agile and able persons.
2. The Wastelanders practise 'boxing' (*moraingy*), in contrast to their neighbours to the west, the Bara, who practise 'wrestling' (*ringa*).
3. Another ad hoc explanation given by informants for the name *panabaka* is that they are people who are in a transitional stage, a status likened to a ferry (*bac* in French) crossing a river.
4. Each clan has at least one Chief of the Warriors (*panjakan'panabaka*) (also known as *panjaka ny kidabo*) and most have a Chief of the Warriors for each Belly. The Masitafika are slightly odd in that only two out of three Bellies have a Chief of the Warriors at any one time, the positions rotating between Bellies (*isan tao miova ny panjaka ny kidabo*). In general, Warrior Chiefs only serve a short term of between one and three years, unlike senior *panjakas*, who tend to serve for much longer periods. This is so that several people may get an opportunity to 'rule' and so that there can be more practice holding the appropriate ceremonies.
5. A very apparent area of contested identity is to be found in the competing cravings of mother and baby. During pregnancy, mothers experience cravings for certain unspecified types of food. As it is believed that the physical characteristics of a baby may be determined by the food the mother eats during pregnancy, it could be said that the cravings of the mother have a tangible effect on the baby. At a seemingly common-sense level, it is said that a mother who eats fattening foods like bananas, biscuits and milk will have a big baby. However, if we examine another case, it becomes apparent that it is not only the nutritional quality of the

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food that affects the baby but also the associations of the food. Thus, if a woman has a craving for a certain type of food and eats large quantities of it, the baby may take on aspects of that food. For example, if she eats crab the baby may develop claw-like arms and may scuttle along or drool saliva copiously as a crab does. It is clear that the effects of the food extend far beyond the consequences of mere caloric intake. A baby can take on the physical appearance of the food, the habitual behaviour of the food or any abstract qualities associated with the food. The implication is that the cravings of the mother determine the nature of the baby. However, the issue is not that simple. Complications arise when trying actually to attribute agency to the cravings. Since it is the mother who feels the cravings and who can actually be seen to satisfy them, it is often assumed that she is the source. This is not in fact necessarily the case. Many people hold that it is the baby who is channelling its own cravings through the mother. This suggests that the child is not randomly influenced but is merely heightening tendencies and characteristics that are already there in a sort of manipulative self-determination. Some people say that the baby must have the food it wants while it is inside the stomach; this makes it 'strong' (*manavady*) and prevents it from getting annoyed and miscarrying itself. So the baby already has a strong personality which is expressed in needs and desires that demand to be satisfied. Cravings are interpreted as a sign of the individuality of the baby. This individuality may even extend to acute selfishness: if a baby craves endless fattening foods, it is recognized that it is putting the life of its mother in danger, as its increased size will make for a difficult labour. The contested nature of cravings expresses an important contradiction in mother-child relations. The fact that the agency is in doubt and can never be definitively attributed provides a dramatic example of the inseparability of the two; the potentially negative consequences for either party, on the other hand, illustrate a conflictive divide. Ideas of connection, co-operation, communication and competition are all contained in the idiom of craving.

6. See Feeley-Harnik (1982: 34) for details of 'sharpness' among Sakalava royalty.
7. See Errington (1989: 26–7) for how relatively equal positions within a flexible hierarchy lead to uncertainty and conflict.
8. See McKinnon (1991: 259–60) on named houses.
9. See Simonse (1992: 233) on this as a strategy for producing followers.
10. See Bloch (1981b) on Sakalava polygamy.
11. See Wilson (1992: 84–5) on Tsimihety cattle-rustling.
12. 'Sans boeuf pas de rite possible, pas de vie sociale possible' (Faublée 1954: 85).
13. The clan representatives and the president of the *Dina* are hardly ever drawn from the pool of existing *panjakas*. The skills needed for the *Dina* jobs are thought to be of an entirely different nature from those required of traditional leaders. Therefore, it is inappropriate to choose from amongst the same candidates and almost never occurs. *Dina* representatives do not have to be rich in cattle, but they do have to be cunning and to 'know how to sweet talk' (*mahay mamaha teny*). Unlike traditional *panjakas*, *Dina* representatives are rarely trusted. In fact, it is rumoured that many of the senior figures are famous ex-cattle-thieves themselves.
14. The charter does not exist as a piece of paper; however, the rules, standard punishments and agreed levels of compensation for different crimes are publicly recited at each general meeting.

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15. One *ariary* is worth five *francs malgaches*. At this time there were about 5000 *francs malgaches* to one pound sterling. The maximum fine was thus about £45, a huge amount by local standards.
16. The *Dina* of the Wasteland is made up of the following *firaisa* (administrative districts): Vondrozo, Mahatsinjo, Mahazoarivo, Andaka, Ambohimana, Maropaika, Trotroky, Iabohazo, Tovogna, Mahazaza, Horombe, Ifatsy, Agnakara, Sovelo.
17. These are: the Tevongo (those from the Apataka region as well as those living around Vondrozo), Masitafika, Vohilakatra, Lohanosy, Hova, Hovalahy, Antevatobe, Antsoro, Antemahatsinjo, Anterenana, Antanalambolo.
18. The major *Dinas* in the region are: the *Dina* of the Bara to the west, based in Maropaika and Ivohibe; the *Dina* of the Tanilo (covering the Antaisaka, the Zaramanampy and several Wasteland clans, namely the Tsaretry, Tesonjo and Antemanara) to the south, based in Anilobe and covering the regions of Vaingaindrano and Midongy; the *Dina* of the Sahavoay to the east; the *Dina* of the Zafisoro around Tainganony, also to the east; and the *Dina* of the Antaifasy around Farafangana.
19. The weapons people carried varied from antiquated rifles (with corks jammed in the barrels to stop water entering) to machetes, axes and spears. The rifles were mostly carried for show as, even when they worked, ammunition was expensive and hard to come by.
20. One such dispute arose between the villages of Tsaragisa (clan Tevongo) and Madiorano (clan Antsoro). The two opposing parties blamed each other for losing the tracks. Only after extended mediation by the *Dina* of the Wasteland (which argued that the villages 'should not fight' (*ka miady!*) but 'should work together' (*tokony hifanaraka*)) was it agreed that each village should pay half the compensation owing to the *Dina* of the Tanilo.
21. This last cow was referred to by the Tanilo as the 'washing of the spear' (*sasa-lefo*), suggesting that it atoned for the crime and allowed the issue to be forgotten.
22. The version of events presented here is designed to give a flavour of *Dina* debates. It is, however, a gross oversimplification. Actual debates stretch out over several days; not only does everyone get their say, there is also a certain amount of gamesmanship and brinkmanship involved. In particular, the defendants turn up late in the day to minimize the time they can be cross-examined and to wear out and frustrate the plaintiffs. As the afternoon wears on, the defendants also call off the discussion early, saying that it is 'very dark' (*mizi-be*) and that 'evening has already arrived' (*efa hariva ny andro*) in order to force the complainants to stay another day away from home. These tactics are designed to soften up the plaintiffs, encouraging them to accept less. In this particular case, the tactic worked in one sense and backfired in another. The visitors became so tired that they eventually accepted a small number of low-quality cows in order to get away; however, they had been delayed so long that their *vatsy* (food supplies) had run out. The president of the *Dina* of the Wasteland was so 'ashamed' (*menatra*) and 'angry' (*vinitra*) that he forced the culpable villages (those that had lost the tracks), who had delayed payment on purpose, to pay two hundred *kapaoky* (condensed milk tins) of rice to the guests in 'compensation' (*faham-bahiny*). Only once this was sorted out could the official handover of the compensatory cattle take place.
23. Professor Zafy Albert during our time in the field.

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CHAPTER 6

1. See Lienhardt (1961: 303) on the association between Dinka Spear-masters, who are sacrificially buried alive, and the earth.
2. See Astuti (1995a: 101) on the *hazomanga* for a Vezo example of people becoming things.
3. See de Heusch (1982: 281) for an example of alternative but similar methods of associating a leader with the nation by distancing from personal kinship ties.
4. Since the territories of each Belly do in fact overlap, this interpretation is slightly imperfect. In theory, only the Old Woman, who undeniably rules the whole clan territory, should be able to represent the land. However, in the eyes of the people, the Earth Shakers, who are almost in the same position, possess this quality also.
5. In this section, I have talked about how the Earth Shaker is like the land. It should not be forgotten that Minders of the One House are also like the land, just to a lesser extent. The transition from Fathers through Minders of the One House to Earth Shakers is gradual and not clear-cut. Different characteristics are exaggerated at each end of the scale, with a sliding transition in between.
6. See Bloch (1986: 74–8) on how water is powerful for the Merina.
7. The Tanala interpretation of the perambulation at a royal enthronement likens it to a whirlpool (see Beaujard 1983a: 314).
8. The idea of harnessing the ‘force of creation’ is not unique to the Wasteland in Madagascar. Of particular note is the striking resemblance between the source of power accessed by the ‘raising up’ of the *panjaka* and the source of power accessed in the *bilo* possession ceremonies practised by the Bara peoples to the west. The *bilo*, as described by Huntington (1988), harnesses the force of natural growth prominent at springtime, when fresh pasture emerges and green shoots sprout. As with the ‘raising up’ of the *panjaka*, humans access non-human fertility for their own ends. This similarity between the *bilo* and the *sandratra panjaka* may not simply be a coincidence; it is interesting that present-day Bara-land is where many of the clans of the Wasteland are said to originate from. It may therefore be justifiable to posit a historical cultural connection between the practices. A connection appears even more likely if we examine the word *sandratra* more closely: I have translated *sandratra* as ‘raising up’ with reference to the artificially elevated status of the *panjaka*. It may, however, also refer to the ‘raising up’ of the force of creation from the land, making it even more directly comparable with the *bilo*. This interpretation is made very plausible by the use of the word *sandratse* in south-west Madagascar: *sandratse* (which is a dialectal variation of *sandratra*) is used in that part of the island to describe ceremonies explicitly referred to as *bilo*.
9. This is an interesting divergence from the commonplace ethnographic examples in which mediums are possessed by royal spirits (see Lan 1985: 44–71 for a case in point). What we have here is a significant variation: a royal figure is possessed by an impersonal entity.
10. See Lambek (1981: 107–23) for the healing aspects of possession.
11. *Zanahary* can be reached in other ways but not under control, as when the *panjaka* is raised up. When, for example, the storm-medicine is made and the medicine man (*ombiasy*) appeals to *Zanahary* for mercy from the bad weather,

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there is immediately great danger. Although the intercession is thought to be efficacious in the long term, the immediate reaction of *Zanahary*, which is said to have been 'touched' (*tsapaina Zanahary*), is to brew up a violent storm. The medicine man does his best to calm the storm by appeasing *Zanahary*, but it is not really in his power to contain it.

12. See Simonse (1992: 231) on the many ways a king is the 'centre' of society.
13. See Atkinson (1989: 14–15): 'Wana shamans derive their power from extra-societal sources but to succeed as shamans they must bring personal powers back from the peripheries to the heart of the community.'
14. This is unlike systems in which ancestral order is in part constituted by denigrating the biological role of women in reproduction (see Bloch 1982; 1987a on the Merina case).

CHAPTER 7

1. See Lan (1985: 32) on royal *mhondoro* spirits in Zimbabwe becoming the source of the fertility of the land itself.
2. Part of the reason for this is that it is very unfortunate for a senior *panjaka* to die while in office. As I mentioned earlier in the book, the ideal is for a *panjaka* to hand on his position before he dies.
3. For a direct equivalent, see Feierman (1996: 46) on the Shambaai of Tanzania.
4. See Feeley-Harnik (1986: 170) for the equivalent Sakalava royal burial.
5. This is an example of 'negative predation': denying enemies their corpses to prevent them recuperating the life-essence they contain (Bloch and Parry 1982: 8).
6. Such stories are regularly disseminated on national radio, especially with reference to the east coast of the island.
7. Minders of the One House cannot however be promoted to Earth Shakers, as this would devalue the suffering endured by living rulers.
8. Ordinary funerals are highly social events and attendance of even distant kin is often obligatory. For small clans, such as the Masitafika for example, funerals have to be attended by a representative member of every household, non-attendance being punished by a fine. Such draconian measures are impracticable for the larger clans and attendance is less strictly enforced.
9. This was the funeral of Iaban'i Fianar, in the village of Miarinarivo, clan Vohilakatra. He had been a senior *panjaka* for three whole 'cycles' during his lifetime, an achievement that was regarded as a remarkable feat, explaining why he was held in particularly high esteem even though he was no longer in office when he died.
10. When a senior *panjaka* dies, his funeral should be attended by all the other senior *panjakas* (i.e. Minders of the One House and Earth Shakers) of the clan. Each Big House should bring tribute in the form of a ceremonial cloth (*lamba mena*). In order to maintain secrecy, these gifts must be hidden within bags while in transit.
11. For an interesting comparison, see Lan (1985: 39) on the lion spirits of the royal ancestors in Zimbabwe.
12. See Middleton (1988: 454–5) for a Karembola parallel.
13. See Simonse (1992: 396–7) on kings turning into divinity at the end of their 'victimary' career.

NOTES

14. For opposing views of the symbolism involved in the dynamics between boys and girls during the burial process, see Huntington (1988) for his interpretation of Bara funerals, and Bloch and Parry (1982) for their reanalysis of his work. Although both views in a sense oppose male and female fertility, Huntington argues that male and female fertility are creatively combined in the burial process, whereas Bloch and Parry argue that they are actively separated out. For Huntington, female and male elements must be combined in the tomb for it to be productive. For Bloch and Parry, the world of biological reproduction, signified by women, must be banished from the patrilineally organized tomb, in order to show that it is the ancestors who are the real source of fertility, not women. The Wasteland case is more in line with Bloch and Parry's interpretation than with Huntington's, since men and women are strictly segregated in the patrilineally organized tomb and since only men, never women, actually ever enter the tomb to dispose of the bodies. However, the strict opposition is less elaborated than for the Bara, perhaps because fertility flows not only from the ancestors but also more directly from the land. Accessing fertility from the land requires more gender complementarity than does accessing blessing from the ancestors.
15. In theory, the meat should taste bad to relatives of the deceased. The *panabakas*, however, eat it with apparent relish.
16. Each tomb is divided up into three parts: one for women in the south-west, one for ordinary men in the north-west and one for *panjakas* in the east. The *panjakas*' remains may be put in 'caskets' or 'coffins' (*vata*) belonging to their Belly (*troky*) once they have dried out. The occasion of another funeral is used as an opportunity to transfer the bones.
17. See Bloch (1971: 138–71) for details of Merina secondary burial.
18. See Feeley-Harnik (1986: 170–1) for discussion of 'hot' (dangerous) and 'cold' (life-giving) funeral ceremonies.
19. See Graeber (1995: 271) for an alternative interpretation of Merina tombs as memorials to powerful individuals.
20. The new leader was being put in place directly in order that he should be able to direct affairs over the course of the next few days. This accounts for the unusual timing of the raising up in the middle of the night. It was essential to finish it before outsiders started to arrive.
21. A traditional type of Malagasy dancing found especially in the highlands.

CONCLUSION

1. Readers should be aware of the existence of an extensive anthropological debate on the nature–culture divide, which is only touched on in this conclusion for reasons of space.
2. The Wastelanders do not see *Zanahary* as a limited good. Rather, they are simply concerned, like the hunter-gatherers described by Woodburn (1982), with 'appropriating nature'.
3. See Thomas (1996: 29) for a similar view on the Temanambondro of south-east Madagascar.
4. See Errington (1989: 285) on the creation of potency through performance.
5. McKinnon's observation on the nature of ruling in Tanimbar is particularly applicable in the Wasteland: 'the highest nobility represents ... the value of an achieved permanence in an otherwise mobile world' (McKinnon 1991: 275).

NOTES

6. He must be a 'man of prowess' (see Atkinson 1989: 10).
7. See Feeley-Harnik (1991b: 303–400) for comparable Sakalava transformations.
8. 'Etymologically, the concept of the "environment" refers to that which surrounds and, therefore, strictly speaking, an environment incorporates just about everything, except that which is surrounded' (Cooper 1992).
9. 'Yet life, growth, and productivity are made possible not only by the processes of differentiation and separation that extend life out from the source, but also by the processes of re-composition and encompassment that ground the source of life' (McKinnon 1991: 277).
10. 'Ce pouvoir créateur du mpanjaka dérive de sa nature divine de <olo masy>; il paraît lié à une conception cosmique de la personne <royale> et du sacrifice où le Souverain Suprême offre son être pour la Création. À travers la mort rituelle du sacrifiant, tout sacrifice tend à reproduire ce sacrifice original, le <roi> représentant le Demiurge' (Beaujard 1983a: 312).

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