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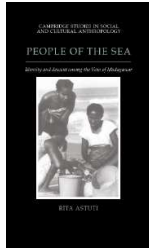
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People of the Sea

Identity and Descent among the Vezo of Madagascar

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8 - Working for the dead pp. 123-152

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8

Working for the dead

The tombs in which the dead are buried and through which they become members of the 'single' *raza* are built by living people through work (*asa*) which they perform because the dead desire nice, clean, proper 'houses' (*trano*).¹ If the living fail to carry out the work, the ancestors will make known their discontent. This will begin with a visitation of dreams and minor illnesses, in response to which the *hazomanga* may try to talk to the ancestors to reassure them that the desired work will be undertaken soon. If the promise is not kept, however, the ancestors may get very angry (*meloke mare*) and 'make people die' (*mahafaty*).

Although the living work for the dead out of a sense of duty and under duress, the desires of the dead coincide in a subtle way with those of the living. For the dead, the performance of the work is a way to be remembered and be taken care of by their descendants; for the living, working for the dead provides a form of blessing (*asantsika ro tsipiranontsika*, our work is our blessing), because when the ancestors are happy they stop interfering with the life, dreams and health of their descendants. In other words, working for the dead is another way of *separating* life from death.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the intrusion of death into the village is dealt with: by joining the disruption and 'hotness' caused by the presence of death, the living restore coolness in the village as they deliver the deceased to its tomb and *raza*. Having successfully separated death from life, however, the living are still faced with a problem, which is that 'the dead feel a longing for the living' (*olo maty manino an'olom-belo*). This is a very dangerous kind of longing, which may prompt the dead to come back to trouble their descendants, causing them to die (*mahafaty*); the greatest danger comes from those with the strongest longing, people who,

like Dadikoroko, died in old age and left behind them large numbers of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. These older people long for all that which they have lost as they entered the 'single' *raza*; as they lie with only 'one kind of people', they long for all the other 'kinds' they left outside their tomb; they long for the undividedness of *filongoa* which they experienced when they were alive, and which they enjoyed for the last time during their funeral (see pp. 121–2 above).

From inside their tombs, therefore, the dead not only want to be remembered and looked after by the living; they also want to remember life.² As we shall see below, the work that the living perform for the dead is not simply a way of showing that they remember and honour them, but is just as much a means of appeasing, if only momentarily, their longing for life and for their living descendants: during the work, the dead are brought back in contact with life and are offered a spectacle of the life they have left behind.

As the living entertain their dead ancestors in this manner, however, they also create those material objects – the tombs – which divide the dead among themselves and make them into members of separate, 'single' *raza*. Like the act of burial, therefore, the work performed by the living creates and realizes descent among the dead. It therefore seems paradoxical that the moment when the dead are brought back in contact with life and are offered the possibility of enjoying once more an unrestricted sight of *filongoa* should also be the moment when the transition from life to death and from *filongoa* to the 'single' *raza* is re-enacted. A further paradox comes from the fact that when the living work for the dead in order to make them enjoy the undividedness of *filongoa*, they are forced to experience the divisiveness of the *raza* – the same divisiveness that the tombs create among the dead. This is because the work for the dead is the responsibility of people of a specific 'kind', the living people who will be buried in the tomb under construction and will join the *raza* there. These people are known as the 'masters of the work' (*tompon'asa*), whose leader is the *hazomanga*. Although as living people they are not members of the *raza* yet, as 'masters of the work' they act collectively as those who will join it.³ When the 'masters of the work' are planning the work and putting aside money for it, their reference to 'our work' (*asantsika, asanay*)⁴ draws a clear distinction between themselves and everyone else. It is a distinction that is not normally made, because membership of the *raza* is not yet relevant for the living; but when people act as 'masters of the work', they recognize and activate the shadow of the 'single' *raza*. Not surprisingly, the organization of the work makes the 'masters of the work' hot (*mafana*), whereas those who are not involved stay nicely cool (*manintsintsy*).

This chapter analyses the work that the living perform for the dead, and describes the complex interplay between the desires of the dead and those of their living descendants, between the task of bringing the dead close to life and that of separating life from death, between recreating the undividedness of *flongoa* for the dead while casting the shadow of the 'single' *raza* over the living. These complexities are acted out on two separate ritual occasions. I introduce these acts with a brief description of the objects that the living build when they work for the dead. I follow this with a few remarks on those aspects of the two rituals that are similar. I then proceed to examine each ritual in its own right.

Betania's eastern cemetery (*an-dolo-be*) is surrounded by a thick and thorny forest crossed by several narrow paths leading to the tombs. The paths are protected by a number of taboos or restrictions (*faly*); for example, they cannot be cleared of any obstruction, not even of the many thorny branches that make walking difficult and painful. The tombs are therefore invisible until they emerge suddenly a few metres away from among the vegetation. Although they are ordered along a north-south axis on a narrow and slightly hilly strip of sand, the cemetery has a chaotic and crowded appearance and there is hardly any room to move around in. Forest shrubbery encroaches on the tombs, sometimes even growing inside them.

Tombs come in different styles. Some are simple fences (*vala*) bounding some land where the dead bodies are buried, not very deep; a number of crosses with the name of the deceased are stuck in the sand. The fence and the cross are made of either wood or cement. The fence measures approximately 3 m by 5 m and is about 1 m high. Alternatively, there are large concrete 'boxes' (*sasapoa*) half-sunk in the sand and surrounded by a concrete fence. Elsewhere the tomb is a heap of stones covering some coffins, with crosses sticking up between the rocks.

On the basis of my informants' statements and explanations of Vezo customs (*fombam-Bezo*), the typical Vezo tomb (at least in the area where I lived) appears to be the *vala*.⁵ *Sasapoa*, which seem to be a recent innovation, are considered a 'good thing' (*raha soa*) because they allow many people to be buried together; the bodies are laid inside the 'box' without a coffin and therefore take up much less space. However, to start a *sasapoa* implies exhuming previously buried bodies, and since exhumation is taboo for most Vezo this kind of tomb is rarely built. Heaping stones over the dead is considered unusual in Betania, but is more commonly practised in Belo (where a fence is nonetheless built around the stone mound) and is

said to be quite common in Tulear; people in Betania see it as the practice of outsiders (*vahiny*).

Although I came to consider whitewashed concrete fences as the cemetery's most prominent feature, such fences are in fact built to replace pre-existing wood fences, and wood is therefore as much or more a part of the landscape. Besides the wood fences that are still in place, wooden remains of dismantled tombs are scattered along the cemetery borders, and other wood fences are in the process of collapsing. Wood fences can be made with roughly cut poles hewn directly in the surrounding forest, or with boards and carved poles that are built into elaborate structures, sometimes with sculptures standing on top of four or six of the main poles.⁶ Fences of the first kind are temporary structures, built at the time of burial if a place in an already established (concrete) tomb is unavailable; in due course, the temporary fence is dismantled and the concrete one is built in its place. The same occurs for the crosses; a first, temporary wooden cross will later be replaced by a concrete one. Fences of the second kind are regarded instead as a feature of the past before concrete came into use; they are thought to belong to people whose descendants have moved away, for otherwise the wood would have been replaced.

As this description suggests, the work performed by the living for the dead consists in substituting concrete for wood. First, the concrete fence is built (*asa lolo*); then, all the wooden crosses contained in that tomb are replaced with concrete ones (*asa lakroa*). Although the two rituals are sometimes performed within a short interval of one another, they constitute distinct enterprises, and it will usually take many years after the fence is built for the wood crosses inside it to be replaced with concrete ones. The completion of the work, when the tomb has been cleared of all the rotting wood, produces a strong sense of accomplishment. The dead are imagined to be pleased with their new, nice and clean house, while the living can also be said to appreciate the aesthetic values of the tombs and crosses they build for the dead. Each of the three times I took part in an *asa lolo*, and once the work had been completed and people began to disperse to go home, I was called over by some men and urged to admire the result: I was expected to agree that the fence was beautiful and good (*soa*); to ask why a concrete fence is *soa* would have been offensive. In fact, on observing the effort and care with which men dug the sand to lay solid foundations, I realized that the beauty of concrete fences is that they stand straight, firm and even on loose and shapeless sand. Concrete crosses are similarly admired for being big, heavy, solid objects, in stark contrast with the flimsy wood crosses they replace.

Concrete is considered a 'good thing' (*raha soa*) because it lasts a long time (*maharitsy*).⁷ The dead are thought to like it because it extends their material presence in the cemetery. Older people would often point to a small baby, a grandchild or great-grandchild: thanks to concrete, they would say, when the child was grown up and they were long dead, she would still be able to see her grandparents' tomb and the crosses with their names. The living, however, appreciate the durability of concrete because it allows them to build an even firmer barrier between themselves and the dead: their expectation is that, once wooden fence and crosses have been replaced, the dead will have no reason to complain about their 'house' for a very long time, and so keep at a distance from their living descendants. The durability of concrete can thus be seen as articulating the paradox between the dead's desire to be remembered by the living, and the latter's desire to be forgotten by the dead.⁸

The only drawback of concrete is that it is very expensive (*sarotsy mare*), and therefore adds considerably to the already notable costs of organizing the work for the dead. Cash is needed not only to buy building materials but also to provide food and plenty of rum for the participants and to pay for the diviner's counsel. Although the cost of building materials is normally higher for building the fence, the cost of food and drink is considerably greater for the cross ritual because many more people are invited to attend.

The 'masters of the work' begin to collect money among themselves by subscription (*cotisacion*, Fr. subscription, quota, share) months before the ritual is performed.⁹ Each person's contribution is carefully annotated in a notebook, as are (or should be) all expenses. Contributions (*enga*) of money, cattle, rum or beer are also expected from everyone invited to attend the last stage of the cross ritual, when the crosses are taken to the cemetery. In one case, total expenditure for the two rituals was 707.620 FMG,¹⁰ plus two head of cattle and one case of beer. Of this sum, 151.000 FMG, the cattle and the case of beer were received as *enga*; the contribution of the 'masters of the work' was therefore just over 550.000 FMG.¹¹

This huge sum of money (approximately the value of 1100 kg of Spanish mackerel, nine canoes, four large bulls or 600 kg of rice) 'comes from the sea' (*vola bakan-drano*) (see above, p. 53). Although one contribution to the *cotisacion* came from Marofasy, a young Antandroy man employed by a local retailer, the work's success was always stated to depend on fishing. In fact, such 'big work' (*asa bevata*) could only be accomplished by very successful fishing. This is the reason why the rituals are performed towards the end of the cold season during September and October,¹² for the best

fishing period occurs during the preceding months when earnings are likely to be high. When my family began to plan the two rituals, everyone repeated, as if to ward off bad luck, that the work would be done at a certain time if *Ndrañahary* (the creator) protected them and helped them to 'see' a lot of fish (*mahita fia maro*); family members who failed to contribute to the *cotisacion* were told disapprovingly: 'And yet you catch plenty of fish every day' (*kanefa, mahazo fia maro isanandro isanandro nareo*).

The willingness and ability to gather such large sums of money may seem surprising if we remember that a fundamental trait of Vezo identity is the inability to 'manage money' (see above, ch. 3). While the work was still in its preparatory stages, my family endlessly discussed the best way to achieve the necessary savings. They finally agreed that the five brothers and sisters, their mother and older sons and daughters would pay their quotas in small instalments; the cash was to be collected and kept at the *hazomanga's*, the eldest brother's house. Many of them failed to contribute, however, claiming that they were keeping the money at home and would hand it over once they had saved the full amount. Although they never said so to his face, it appeared that they did not trust the *hazomanga*, or rather that they took it for granted that in need he would be willing to use the collective fund for private purposes.¹³ One of his sisters, however, dismissed this apparent suspicion as an excuse by her relatives to shirk their duties, and told them that she doubted that they would ever succeed in saving any money if they kept it at their own home. The only way to save the necessary sum, she said, was to set aside 1000, 500 or even as little as 200 FMG from their daily earnings and to remove it immediately from their house, this being the only way to avoid spending the money on food, snacks, rum or clothes. Although this woman often exhorted her relatives to be wise, most of the time she charged them with being the opposite (*tsy mahihitsy nareo!*).

Discussions in my family suggest that people are aware that in order to meet their responsibilities towards the dead, they are forced to plan and save. While it was taken for granted that the 1000, 500 or 200 FMG to be set aside daily for the work on the tombs would otherwise have been spent in immediate gratification, people also recognized that to spend money in such a way is incompatible with their duty towards the dead. In other words, in order to succeed in building a permanent and lasting tomb the living have to abandon their customary Vezo behaviour.

Although in practical terms this argument is straightforward (tombs are expensive and people must save money in order to build them), its ideological implications are more interesting, for it appears to be drawing a

clear distinction between two opposite 'transactional orders'.¹⁴ The first order is the concern and defining feature of the Vezo as living people; the second pertains to relations between the living and the ancestors. By stressing that they *must* save money only when they have to build tombs and crosses, the Vezo draw a sharp contrast between 'working for the dead' and 'keeping themselves alive'. This contrast is yet another way of formulating and creating the separation between the living and the dead. The difference between life and death can be understood in no better way than by looking at the outcome of the two 'transactional orders': permanent, lasting concrete fences and crosses on the one hand, transitory, sensual gratification on the other.

As with all other major undertakings, a favourable day (*andro soa*) must be chosen for things to go smoothly and safely during the ritual's performance, and a diviner (*ombiasa*) is consulted for this purpose (*mila andro*, 'to ask for the day'). Although people will often hazard a guess whether a day is favourable or not, the matter is so 'difficult' (*raha sarotsy*) that no-one wishes to hazard a mistake. In fact, while it is advisable to undertake all activities concerning the ritual and its preparation on 'good days', it is crucial to do so for the more 'difficult' acts. For the *asa lolo*, for example, the bricks for the fence can either be moulded at the village or can be bought ready made. In the first case, the diviner will certainly be consulted; in the second, people may trust their own judgement as to the right day for buying the bricks and carrying them to the village. If the building materials are taken near the cemetery before the ritual, however, the day for doing so must be chosen by a diviner.

A further essential requisite for the ritual's success is a specially prepared medicine called *fanintsina*. The medicine, which is prepared by the diviner a few days before the work is done, is used in both rituals prior to leaving for and on the way to the cemetery; it is made each time with a special combination of ingredients dissolved in water. The fact that the medicine's effectiveness may vary is often commented on at the end of the ritual: if no fights break out, no accidents occur and everything goes smoothly, people say that the *fanintsina* was good (*soa*) and strong (*mahery*).

The root of the term *fanintsina* is *nintsy*, which means 'cold'. When I asked whether *fanintsina* is meant to keep people 'cool', my friends would explain that *fanintsina* is meant to prevent fights among the participants and to counter people being silly (*adaladala*) when they drink too much rum. Hence, large amounts of *fanintsina* are sprayed over the crowd when the dancing and singing gets too excited or when arguments between drunk

men flare up. *Fanintsina* is also used by the 'masters of the work' just before they leave for the cemetery. Everyone – man, woman and child – must get their share; following the diviner's instructions, people either sip the medicine a set number of times or smooth their hair back with it, or do both. The ancestors also get a share of *fanintsina* when the *hazomanga* sprinkles it over their tomb to ensure that they behave well while the work is under way.

The *asa lolo*

The day when the work at the tombs takes place must begin with informing the ancestors. On one occasion the announcement was made first in the *hazomanga's* house at the village and was then briefly repeated at the cemetery; but usually it was uttered only in front of the fence that had to be rebuilt. The main purpose of the announcement is to inform the ancestors about what will happen so they will not be surprised (*tsy hotseriky nareo*).¹⁵ At the same time, the *hazomanga* asks the ancestors to recognize their descendants' merits for not forgetting them and for looking after them. Finally, the *hazomanga* asks the ancestors to protect the living as they approach the ancestors' home in order to dismantle it and build a new and better one.

Once a tape-recorder was taken to the cemetery to make the dancing 'riper'. The *hazomanga* was especially concerned that the ancestors should be given due warning, telling them that

they [the ancestors' descendants] are really happy because they have got this thing, this 'electrophone', a thing of whites; they're showing it to you because they're happy. We're informing you, the ancient *raza*, so that you won't be surprised and won't say: 'How is it that when these grandchildren, when these children get something, they don't remember us?' [As you can see] this is not true, because we are now calling you and informing you.¹⁶

The *hazomanga* was not worried that the ancestors might dislike the tape-recorder; rather, he was concerned that they might think that they had been forgotten and were being excluded from the living people's fun.

On arriving at the cemetery, the *hazomanga* sprinkles a few drops of *fanintsina* inside the tomb where the work is to be done. The old wood fence is dismantled and the men begin to discuss the building of the new one; they estimate how large a fence can be made with the number of available bricks and how to design holes in the walls so as to save on materials and make a larger or taller fence; they jot the figures down by scratching white marks on their skin with a twig. Most men just carry the building materials, for only a small number in the village (always the same individuals at each

ritual I witnessed) have the necessary building skills and stay sober enough to raise a straight wall. Meantime, some young boys clear a shaded area under the trees, where the elderly and those who early on stop pretending to be of any use in the work can sit. Most men will eat their meal in the shade, whereas the few employed in building the fence tend to eat where they are, sitting on the top of the dead and leaning over the crosses.

The women's task is to help cook and distribute the meal. They usually arrive at the cemetery later than the men because they have to wait at the village for the women who, first thing in the morning, leave for the market to buy rice, meat, onions, tomatoes and *tsaka* (green, pungent leaves) for the communal repast. When the women accompanied by children arrive at the tombs carrying pots, buckets, plates, spoons and food, they clear an area and transform it into a kitchen. When the food is ready, the women dish out rice and meat on big plates, the number of spoons on each plate indicating how many people should eat out of each dish. The men, who are served first, often hide a spoon so as to increase their individual portions, and send a young boy over to the women to show that their plate is still full of rice but has no more meat or broth in it. The women give generous portions, but they also make sure that enough food is left for themselves. On one occasion, when the men were overly insistent in asking for more food, the women hid a small pot of meat and broth under a basket; when the men demanded more broth they were shown the big, nearly empty pot and were told to be content with what they had.

The food cooked at the cemetery is meant to make people full and should be good, tasty (the meat is cooked with onions, tomatoes and *tsaka*) and plentiful. At one *asa lolo*, the main attraction and source of amusement and laughter was a woman who, holding a spoon in each hand, stuffed herself with rice and meat, screwed up her eyes and made silly faces.

If food is an important element of the ritual, rum is essential. The work cannot be accomplished without rum because, as I was told, Malagasy people can work very hard but they need to be supplied with liquor. Although the 'masters of the work' are expected not to drink much before the work is finished, there will always be some members in the family, both men and women, who drink heavily from the start and get scolded by their 'wiser' relatives.

Much of the interaction between women and children on the one hand and men on the other concerns rum. In theory at least, the source of drink should be only one, a few plastic canisters supervised by a trustworthy man and kept where men sit and work. Only one bottle is passed around, and is refilled from time to time. The bottle tends to be monopolized by the men:

only rarely is a young boy sent to offer a round of drinks to the women. The latter complain strongly and make a great fuss over how much each of them gets when the bottle finally reaches them. After a while, however, those men who are too drunk to get more drink from the 'official' source come over to the women to beg for a little more, for everyone knows that the women always have a small supply hidden among their pots and buckets. For my family's *asa lolo*, the women's secret reserve was bought by the *hazomanga's* wife with money I had contributed to a last-minute *cotisation*; since the *hazomanga* was absent, his wife took the money without registering it among the official contributions, at the same time asking for my assent and complicity in this little bit of fun the women were going to have.

Having fun at the tombs is important. Although the Vezo say that they are not very good at making 'ripe' feasts, people do not find it hard to amuse themselves. Above all, they enjoy dancing, and they found that having a tape-recorder helped a lot. Their favourite dance is *minotsoky*, which consists of rotating and thrusting the pelvis back and forth, faster and faster, preferably against and in unison with someone else's. Its sexual overtones are too obvious to be dwelt upon, and partly for this reason, adults have few opportunities when dancing *minotsoky* is considered appropriate.¹⁷ The *asa lolo* is one.

People stay at the cemetery, dancing and drinking, until the building of the fence is completed. After the meal, having cleared up and packed the cutlery and utensils brought from the village, the women have time to look more closely at the new fence together with the rest of the crowd. The few men still at work are pressed to join the dance, and the others dance next to them inside the fence. When the construction is finally over, the sand inside the fence is swept even and clean and the tools have been gathered together, someone asks for silence and attention. As the noise of the crowd slowly dies down, someone who is known to be a good orator gives a short speech. After announcing that he speaks in the *hazomanga's* stead, he thanks the crowd for their contribution to the completion of such a 'big work' (*asa bevata io*); had it not been for their help the work could not have been successfully undertaken. *Ndrañahary* (the creator) is also thanked, for without *Ndrañahary's* help people would not have been strong enough. There have been no obstacles to the work, everything has gone well and has been done well from morning to eve; there have been no fights or disagreements, only play and banter. Now it is time to disperse and return home (*dia ravo tsika zao holy*).

The crowd now breaks up and heads back to the village; some people are so drunk that they need help to do so, others have to be dragged back home.

Back at the village, all feasting, dancing and drinking must normally stop. On one occasion, however, things were not called off, the *hazomanga* himself encouraging people to look for new batteries for the tape-recorder and giving money to buy more rum; the crowd regrouped around his house. But later that evening people came to announce that a young man, a classificatory son of the *hazomanga's* wife, had died of tetanus in Belo. Since both the *hazomanga* and his wife were too drunk to receive the messengers, the *hazomanga's* eldest sister, who had disapproved of her brother's behaviour all along, forced the feast to an end: she took the batteries out of the tape-recorder and shouted that people were to return home, for things were now over (*fa vita*). In the aftermath of this incident, she found countless opportunities to recriminate over her brother's behaviour. That his wife had been unfit to listen to the announcement of the death of a son showed unmistakably how wrongly he had behaved. In particular, he had been unwise (*tsy mahihitsy*) in bringing back to the village what should have ended at the cemetery: 'once it's over it's over' (*lafa vita, fa vita*). In her view, it was no coincidence that the news of the boy's death had come when it had.

Let us briefly summarize the sequence of events of the *asa lolo*. The living, who are responsible for building nice tombs for the dead, must enter the cemetery to do so. Several precautions are taken to do it safely, by choosing a favourable day for the work and by using *fanintsina*. The ancestors must also be informed about what is going to happen to their 'home'; in addition, they are asked to protect the living who prove, by looking after them, their remembrance and care. Many people are invited to the *asa lolo*, more than are needed to carry out the work itself. When the men arrive at the cemetery, they dismantle the old wood fence and proceed to build a new concrete one; the women follow them a while later with food for the communal meal. People eat and enjoy large quantities of tasty food; there is plenty of rum. While the fence is being built, most people (in a state of lesser or greater drunkenness) dance around it and have fun. Once the work is completed, people are thanked for their help in undertaking such a 'big work' and everyone returns home. The ritual is over.

The core of the ritual occurs between the dismantling of the old fence and the completion of the new one. Having ensured that a favourable day has been chosen, that the ancestors have been informed and that the tomb has been sprinkled with *fanintsina*, when the fence is dismantled the living seemingly suspend all the caution, hesitation or reticence that they normally feel in coming into contact with the heat of the cemetery. They walk, dance,

stamp their feet, drink and eat inside the tomb and over the corpses of the dead.

People are aware that this behaviour is 'surprising' (*mahatseriky*). Not only did they tell me that my friends abroad would be surprised to see pictures of the *asa lolo* and hear that the people I had lived with in Madagascar dance and eat inside the tombs; they also warn and exhort their own ancestors not to be surprised by this behaviour. Indeed, they often seemed as surprised themselves by what they did as they expected my friends and feared their ancestors would be.

The cause of the 'surprise' can be seen to be that the *asa lolo* upsets and temporarily destroys the normal distinction between the cemetery and the village, between the dead and the living. During the *asa lolo* the living bring within the bounds of the cemetery what is normally outside it. They take life, and with life they take breathing, cooking, eating, drinking, dancing and a large crowd of people. They invade the cemetery with life.

Although the ostensible reason for doing this is that the living must provide the dead with a new and clean house, by invading the cemetery the living also respond to the dead's desire to remember life. Thus, when the participants stamp their feet as hard as they can and dance erotic dances on top of the dead, they imagine that the dead underneath them enjoy the feast – indeed, if they did not, the living would be 'dead on the spot' (*maty sur place*). Similarly, they imagine that the dead like having the tape-recorder blast music over their heads for they desire to share in live people's activities and fun, and it is for this reason that the *hazomanga* made sure that they did not feel excluded. As long as the old fence is down and the new one has not been raised yet, the dead can also be tantalized with a glimpse of *filongoa*; for a brief lapse of time, their sight can extend once more to include *all* the people who participate in the work as their descendants.

But while the moment when the old, flimsy fence is dismantled marks for the dead the beginning of their spectacle of life, for the living it marks the beginning of an emotionally charged contiguity with the dead. When the fence is removed, no barrier is left to separate the living from the dead.¹⁸ By taking down the barrier which marks the boundary between death and life, the dead are allowed to enjoy life and a sight of *filongoa*; at the same time and for the same reason, the living run the risk of 'enjoying' death and entering the 'single' *raza*. The living endure this frightening prospect because they hope that by pleasing the dead they will be left alone and will not be pursued by the dead people's longing for life. But they also actively respond to their proximity with death by devoting all energies to making themselves as alive as they possibly can.

During the *asa lolo*, what the living perform over the dead persons' bodies and inside their tomb is more a parody of life than a representation of its 'coolness'. Thus, for example, although live people in their village homes eat food that is as tasty and satisfying as that which is eaten around the tombs, they do not deliberately make fools of themselves by stuffing their mouths with two spoons and making comic faces. When people invade the cemetery, they seem to be doing something more than simply staging a spectacle of life for the dead: they exaggerate their liveliness, they overstate the fact that they are 'living people' (*olom-belo*) rather than dead. This fact is crucial. In the same way as Dadikoroko was proved dead by the contrast with the vitality enacted around her during her funeral (see above, pp. 119–22), during the *asa lolo* the living demonstrate that the ancestors are dead by contrasting the latter with their liveliness, at the moment when their customary distance and separation is temporarily transformed into frightening and 'surprising' proximity. When the living eat their food inside the tomb and stamp their feet over the corpses, the dead underneath are proved to be dead: they cannot partake in the meal, join in the dance, or respond to the rhythm of the music and to the provocations of *minotsoky*. They remain silent and motionless, listening to life filtering through the sand.

The spectacle of life for the dead and the near hysterical display of super-vitality by the living last only as long as it takes to complete the new fence. Then the living, carrying their pots, buckets and empty canisters, return home, to the 'real' coolness of their village. The dead are left behind inside a new, firmer and more permanent barrier, once again contained and constrained inside their 'single' *raza*.

The *asa lakroa*

Building the concrete fence is only the first stage of the work the living perform for the ancestors. It is followed by the cross ritual, in which all the wooden crosses inside one tomb – the tomb of 'one kind of people' (*raza raiky*) – are replaced with concrete crosses. The *asa lakroa* lasts longer, involves more people, costs more and is more elaborate than the building of the fence.

The ritual (see Fig. 4) lasts between five and seven days according to the diviner's instructions on favourable days. It starts when the crosses are moulded at the village (*manily lakroa*) by a small crowd which is invited to undertake the work and is fed by the organizers. On the following days, the names of the deceased are engraved on the crosses, the wood moulds are removed and the crosses are painted. On the afternoon before the day they

Fig. 4 The cross ritual

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
<p>MANILY LAKROA</p> <p>moulding of crosses at the village</p>	<p>crosses are left to dry</p>	<p>crosses are left to dry</p> <p>names are engraved on crosses</p>	<p>wood moulds are removed</p> <p>crosses are painted</p>	<p>guests begin to gather</p> <p>3 o'clock MANANGA LAKROA</p> <p>crosses are raised</p> <p>ENGA</p> <p>contributions paid to 'masters of the work'</p> <p>SAKAFO</p> <p>communal meal</p>	<p>ATERY AN-DOLO</p> <p>processions carry crosses to the cemetery</p> <p>FA VITA</p> <p>ritual is over people disperse and return to village</p>
NIGHT	NIGHT	NIGHT	NIGHT	NIGHT	
<p>MIARITORY</p> <p>wake with few people (only 'masters')</p>	<p>MIARITORY</p> <p>wake with few people (only 'masters')</p>	<p>MIARITORY</p> <p>wake with few people (only 'masters')</p>	<p>MIARITORY</p> <p>wake with a few more people ('masters' and friends)</p>	<p>MIARITORY FISA</p> <p>wake and feast with huge crowd</p>	

are carried to the cemetery, the crosses are raised (*mananga lakroa*); immediately after, the participants' contributions (*enga*) to the ritual are presented to the 'masters of the work'. In the meantime, women cook huge amounts of food for the crowd. Between the day when the crosses are first moulded and the day when they are removed from the village, wakes are held near them. To begin with, the wakes are held only by the 'masters of the work', but on the last night the wake becomes a major event that is meant to entertain a large crowd. At dawn of the final day the crosses are carried to the cemetery (*atery an-dolo*). The procession can either be very quiet and uneventful or frenzied and wild, according to the status of the dead person whose cross it is. When the crosses reach the cemetery and are placed inside the fence, the crowd is thanked and asked to go home. The ritual is over.

The work starts with the building of the crosses (*manily lakroa*). The building materials and tools are collected in advance next to the house that will provide the stage for the entire process before the crosses are carried to the cemetery. Although the crosses are usually built at the *hazomanga's* house in virtue of his role as 'master of the crosses' (*tompon' lakroa*), other people can beg (*mangataky*) and obtain (*mahazo*) the cross or crosses¹⁹ from him. In one instance, a son begged his half-brother (same father but different mothers) for his mother's cross. The *hazomanga* replied that had it been someone else, he would not have surrendered the cross, but that since the request came from someone who had been generated (*anaky naterany*) by the woman whose cross was being built, he would give his assent and his blessing.

The people invited to take part in the work arrive in a trickle early in the morning. Men and women gather in different areas near the house where they will perform their different tasks, the women cooking and the men building the crosses. Under the shade of an improvised awning, the men divide into small working groups, each of whom is responsible for making a wooden mould. Although I never followed the men's work closely, I overheard them discussing the crosses' plan and design. Shapes range from a traditional Latin cross to a diamond-shaped object with quite elaborate ornaments; sometimes bold and innovative designs are rejected because of their technical impracticality. The main consideration, however, is that the dead person's seniority be reflected in the shape and size of their cross. Children's crosses should be short, narrow and with few frills; the children's grandparents' and the parents' crosses must be much taller, wider and heavily decorated. The identification between the cross and the person it represents is made explicitly when the crosses are built, and we

shall see in fact that the crosses *become* these people during the ritual, their size, weight and beauty re-creating the bodily presence of the dead among the living.

When people reach general agreement about the crosses' dimensions each party starts on its own work. Due to the limited number of tools available and the small number of skilled carpenters, most work is done rather confusedly by sharing out both tools and skills between the different groups. When the frames are finished, concrete is poured inside and is reinforced with metal rods. Although many more people are involved in this work compared with the building of the fence, just as in the *asa lolo* a large number of them gradually drop out of the task.

As usual, the women are in charge of cooking the meal. When those who have been to the market return with the ingredients, the other women begin to winnow rice, cut up meat, dice tomatoes and onions, and clean bunches of *tsaka*. Fires are lit and pots of rice and one with meat are lined up under the sun; women have their own awning to which they retreat after tending the fire and supervising the cooking. The cooked food is served to the men, who stop working, eat and send back their empty dishes. It is now the women's turn to be fed.

Once, owing to the late return of the women who had gone to the market, the crosses were almost finished by the time the meal was over, and most people dispersed immediately after eating. Another time things were better organized and the meal was served much earlier. A record-player had been set up under the men's awning and, after the meal, women and children began to dance; the men were clearly shy, and only a few of them danced following pressing invitations by some of the women.

Although rum is available, it is not provided in the same quantities as for the *asa lolo* and it would seem that no-one expects it to be plentiful. Once, when the crosses were being moulded at my family's *hazomanga*'s, I volunteered to buy some extra rum; later I was privately asked by one person to do so a second time. After this I realized that the 'wiser' members of my family had disapproved of my initiative, since they did not think it necessary for anyone to get drunk.

My impression during this first stage of the cross ritual was that work, food, dancing and rum were 'neutral' and no different from normal life. The reason for this is that the crosses are still unfinished and what they will become is still absent. The crosses are yet to be 'activated', they are yet to acquire the double imagery of dead bodies and live ancestors that I discuss below.

Once the crosses are ready, they are carefully moved to a central point of

the yard east of the *hazomanga's* house. They are lined up on the ground next to each other, with the senior person's cross to the north and the others ranked southwards in descending order of seniority. The point of the cross is always oriented eastwards and its base westwards, which is how dead bodies lie during funerals and inside the tombs. Sometimes a kind of protective fencing is built around the crosses with a few wooden poles and coconut palm branches; during the hottest hours of the day, canoe sails are raised as an awning so as to avoid the concrete cracking in the sun. After a day of drying, the names and, if known, the dates of birth and death are engraved on the crosses, preceded by French expressions like *ici gît, ici repose*. The inscriptions are made by a relative of the dead person, typically by young people known for their good calligraphy, and are not set off in a ritual manner.²⁰

As far as I could understand, the choice of when the wood frames are to be removed is determined solely by the time it takes for the concrete to dry thoroughly. Although no formal gathering is called for this occasion, all the family members try to be present when the frames are removed and the operation's success or failure becomes manifest. If a part of a cross breaks or cracks, this is interpreted as a sign that the deceased is unhappy and angry about the living people's doings (*hadisoa*). In the case of a woman whose body was 'begged' by her husband and was then granted to her children (see above, p. 96), one of her cross's decorations broke off. Her father and brothers, who were all extant, had previously expressed their discontent for the fact that the woman's husband had taken more than fifteen years to build the concrete cross for her, and the crack in the cross (which was later carefully repaired) demonstrated to the onlookers that the woman herself was also unhappy about the delay.²¹

After the frames have been removed, the crosses are given two coats of paint: front and back white, the sides a light blue or green, the lettering in black. While they stay at the village the crosses will thus be shiny, bright and clean; some will lose much of their paint during 'ripe' processions on the way to the tombs, when they will get covered with dirty hand-prints. If there is any fresh paint left over, the cross may be given a quick coat as it stands inside the tomb; otherwise it is left as it is. Although people complain that, as with everything else they buy, the quality of the paint has deteriorated while increasing in price, they do not seem to mind about the cross's appearance at the tombs, nor do they think the dead mind either – probably because the dead are more interested in the dancing and are prepared to put up with cheap paint that does not dry properly and peels off too easily.

When the paint is dry the crosses are left lying on the sand; the fencing built to protect them when the concrete was still soft and the paint wet is dismantled. Everything is ready for the final stage of the ritual.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the day indicated by the diviner, the 'crosses are raised' (*mananga lakroa*) in descending order of seniority to a standing position with the help of a wooden framework built previously for this purpose behind and east of the crosses themselves; the side of the cross bearing the dead person's name faces westwards. This operation is performed by men. A small crowd gathers in a semi-circle around the crosses as they are raised up; when they are all standing they begin to sing church hymns.

The raising of the crosses arouses intense emotions among the onlookers. The people most closely related to the persons represented by the crosses are often moved to tears; if this occurs, they will immediately be exhorted to stop. As the cross of the woman who had died giving birth to her eleventh child was raised, more than fifteen years after her death, her children were visibly moved. The woman's husband later explained to me that raising dead people's crosses in this way is a 'very good thing' (*raha soa mare*) for two reasons: first, because people who were unable to get to the funeral in time – who 'did not catch the corpse' (*tsy tsatsy ny faty*) – can compensate for this by seeing the dead person's cross; second, because the children who have not known their mother in life now have the opportunity of seeing her (*farany fa hitan-drozy nenin-drozy*, 'at last they see their mother').

The reasons this man gave that render the cross ritual a good thing (*mahasoa azy*) indicate that the ritual rests on a fundamental paradox. The first justification implies that the ritual re-enacts the funeral; in this context, the cross is a substitute for the corpse. The second justification, however, is that the children see not their mother's corpse but their mother (*nenin-drozy*). In other words, the man was stating that the cross not only substitutes the woman's *dead body*, but also recalls her presence as a *living person*. This paradox is expressed in the process of raising the crosses from a flat to a vertical position. Lying flat on the sand, the crosses are substitutes of dead bodies; as such, it would make little sense to raise them from that position. By raising them to a standing position, they and those they represent are brought back to life: hence the emotionally charged atmosphere among their living kin.

The dimension of life incorporated in the crosses is crucial to the cross ritual's general understanding. Two seemingly incompatible performances are going on at the same time: the dead are brought back to life, and their funeral is re-enacted with a mock corpse. One reading of this is that the

Plate 4 The raising of the crosses (*mananga lakroa*)



living can be moved to perform mock funerals for mock corpses only if they have first re-created the image of live bodies and lively lives; the case of *Be-nono* (the cross with concrete breasts) which I discuss below lends support to this interpretation. A second, complementary reading is that the contrasting imagery conveyed by the cross – both live ancestor and mock corpse – accommodates the contrasting desires of the dead and the living. Whereas the dead are given an opportunity to savour and remember life as part of the service they expect from the living, this opportunity is granted by re-enacting a funeral which ends, as all funerals do, with the dead within their tombs and the living in the village.

Before developing these ideas any further, however, let us briefly return to the course of events that follow the raising of the crosses. Through a description of the wake and of the processions which convey the crosses to the cemetery, we shall get a clearer understanding of how the dual, conflicting imagery of the cross is expressed and confronted.

After the crosses have been raised, the onlookers present their contributions to the ‘masters of the work’. The *hazomanga* and one or two other senior men, usually his brothers, sit in his house, while small parties of men (women are seldom included) queue up outside waiting for their turn. As one group leaves, another asks for permission to enter and is invited inside. The visitors sit down, chat a few moments about the weather or about their journey; then, with a sudden change in his tone of voice, the senior visitor hands an envelope with some money to the *hazomanga*, who receives it with thanks. After some further small talk, the group leaves and another one comes in. A deep sense of boredom transpires from the entire procedure.

As soon as one lot of visitors leaves the house, the envelope is opened, the money is counted and the sum is written down in a notebook together with the donor’s name. Contributions can vary considerably, from a minimum of 500 or 1000 FMG to sums in the range of 20,000–30,000 FMG. *Enga* can also be in kind: a head of cattle, one or more canisters of rum, or one or more cases of beer. Their value differs considerably,²² but they share the manner in which they are given to the ‘masters of the work’.

The giving of *enga* in kind gives rise to a frenzied procession, similar to the bull-fights that occur during funerals of old people. If the *enga* is an animal, it is forced to stage a mock bull-fight with a long rope tied securely around its horns, while the crowd runs, dances, sings, claps, laughs, shouts and screams around it. If the *enga* is a case of beer or a jerrycan of rum, it is secured to a pole and is carried by an excited group of youngsters who will also act out mock bull charges and feints against the crowd. This game will begin at some distance from the house where the *hazomanga* is receiving the

enga and will make long detours before finally reaching its destination. To begin with, the procession includes only the *enga*'s contributors, but soon more and more people (including many of the 'masters of the work') are drawn into it. As the crowd approaches the *hazomanga*'s house and the crosses, a leading member of the group presenting the *enga* is borne in triumph waving two sticks with paper notes stuck on them; this money is also part of the *enga*.

Who contributes what and how much plays an important role in defining relationships among the living. In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that the moment when the *enga* are handed over establishes the distinction between the 'masters of the work' and the rest of the crowd. I pointed out earlier the divisiveness of this distinction, which is forced on the living by the work they perform for the dead. Through this distinction the 'masters of the work' constitute themselves as the 'kind' of people who will be buried in one tomb and will join the same *raza*, and contrast themselves with the people who will be excluded from that tomb and *raza*. By paying *enga* participants in the ritual differentiate themselves from the 'masters of the work' who contributed instead to the *cotisacion*. The people who pay *enga* are further distinguished by the fact that the *enga* in kind are customarily paid by the 'masters of the work's' in-laws ('sons-in-law', *vinanto*, and 'fathers-in-law', *rafoza*). As was discussed above (see pp. 69–70), this is a very delicate moment in the relations between wife-givers and wife-takers; and although the end result is equality ('no-one is below, no-one is above'), the actual handing over of the *enga* expresses in an acute, even aggressive form the (contextual) hierarchy between the two sides.

The aggressiveness and divisiveness that are experienced by the living are concealed from the sight of the dead. The *enga* in kind, which for the living are the most divisive kind of offering, are those the dead who are being brought back to life are imagined to enjoy most, for the mock bull-fights enacted for the *enga* in kind are the first act in the spectacle of life that the dead are there to receive. The divisiveness experienced by the living is transformed into a loud and irresistible occasion to sing, dance and to parade in front of the crosses a crowd of undifferentiated people which includes even the 'masters of the work'. Thus, while the living experience differentiation because of the dead, it is to fulfil the dead's desire to be brought back to life that the divisiveness that the dead and the *raza* momentarily impose on life must be concealed from their sight.

While the *enga* are being handed over, the women begin to cook large quantities of rice and meat. Although the 'masters of the work' achieve

fame through lavish consumption, the success of the occasion is shared by all the participants through their contribution of *enga*; the sharing of the food neutralizes the distinction between the 'masters' and the rest. By the time the food has been distributed the paying of the *enga* is over. The distinctions among the living are no longer visible; standing erect in the middle of the crowd, the living-dead-as-crosses are able to enjoy the sight of what can be imagined to be an undifferentiated, undivided, immense crowd of descendants. It is this view over the living's *filongoa* that the dead miss from inside their tomb and their 'single' *raza*.

Each night, between the day when the crosses are moulded and the day they leave the village, wakes are held at the place where the crosses are kept. Except for the last night, only the 'masters of the work' are expected to attend; friends, neighbours and good singers are welcome to join, but no formal invitation is issued. The first days, people gather for the wake and pretend very hard that they are 'enduring the absence of sleep' (*miaritory*; see above, pp. 110–11). They sing a few songs, but the crowd soon falls silent; most people eventually tiptoe back home, leaving only a few to stay sleeping outdoors. However, activity picks up as the final wake approaches. The night before the last is usually a true wake, including the customary singing and a fairly generous distribution of rum. Finally, the last wake is a major social event involving a considerable crowd, far exceeding any funeral gathering. People coming to the wake have high expectations, for it is understood that the 'masters of the work' are responsible for providing a good night's entertainment, typically by distributing large quantities of rum and by renting a *baffle*, a huge tape-recorder fully equipped with screeching loudspeakers and a limited number of tapes.

Within the general context of the ritual, the cross wakes appear to be a replica of funeral wakes. Despite this similarity, which people freely recognize, the two events also differ fundamentally. Early in my fieldwork, I was warned never to take a recording of the singing at funerals but to wait to do so at the cross ritual, for whereas people at funerals are sad (*malahelo*) and it would therefore be improper (*tsy mety*) to record their voices and cries, people at the cross wakes are happy (*falifaly*) and thus it does not matter (*tsy mañahy*) if one records their songs. Despite this, however, and despite the presence of the *baffle* at the cross wake, I was reassured that 'people's singing doesn't change, it's just the same' (*fihiran'olo tsy miova, fa mitovy avao*) at the two types of wake.

What this implies, that the cross wake transforms the funerary wake into its opposite, a sad occasion into a happy one, is not in fact entirely accurate.

On the one hand, as we have seen, not all funerals are sad occasions. During the funerary wake for Dadikoroko (the old woman whose funeral moved people to happiness; see above, pp. 118–22), for example, I asked whether I could record the singing, clapping and yelling that accompanied the dances; after some thought, it was agreed that I could do so because the crowd was happy. On the other hand, not all cross wakes are happy events. In the same way that sadness and happiness during a funeral depend on the dead person's status, the mood that prevails during a cross wake depends on the status of the cross. This status is always intrinsically ambiguous.

At one level, the status of the cross is that of the dead person that the cross represents and personifies. At a more abstract level, the status of the cross derives from which of the cross's two images, of a live ancestor and of a corpse, the organizers and participants of the ritual wish or are asked to emphasize during the ritual itself. In order to understand how the choice between the two images is formulated, we must return to the final wake's entertainment and to the *baffle*.

During the months leading up to the cross ritual, my adoptive family held endless meetings to discuss, and often to argue about, the renting of the *baffle*. I soon grew tired of listening to the discussions; besides dreading the screech of the loudspeakers, I did not think that a night of Malagasy pop music at full blast could be regarded as a feature of note of the cross ritual. Only later did it occur to me that if so many meetings were being held to discuss the issue of the *baffle* there must have been something of interest about it. The renting of the *baffle* was highly controversial. Some people were opposed because they thought that it was too expensive, but this argument was curtly dismissed as a manifestation of stinginess. One woman's objections were rather more interesting. As the mother of the only child buried in the family tomb, she voiced the opinion that it was improper to have music and dancing when one of the crosses was that of a small child (*aja mbo kelikely*); since remembering her child made her sad (*malahelo*), she wanted people to sing hymns rather than dance during the wake. This objection was clearly taken seriously, and supporters of the *baffle* had to resort to the argument that a wake without music was in danger of being deserted. In the end, the family decided to rent the *baffle*, one of the brothers managed to get a bargain price for it, the crowd was large and the wake loud and successful.

On another occasion a similar argument to that of the child's mother met more understanding, possibly because four out of six crosses were for small children, and the wake was held without any music. As a result, the participants complained loudly of boredom and lack of rum; but although

the crowd was listless, the singing lasted the whole night. The reasons for holding such a quiet wake were similar to those adduced by the woman in my first example. On this occasion, the organizers chose to emphasize the second image of the cross representing the children's corpses, and participants in the cross wake were accordingly asked to perform a *de facto* funerary wake.

Yet this is only one side of the story. The other image of the cross, that of a live ancestor, was allowed to take shape in a second, 'alternative' wake held alongside the 'official' one I just described. The protagonist of this alternative wake was a cross representing an old woman. Her name inscribed on the cross was Nentiko, but throughout the ritual she was called *Be-nono* (big breasts), for the cross was adorned with concrete breasts, the size of the halved coconut shell with which they had been shaped, with the areola carefully painted black and the nipples red.²³

The final wake was to be held on Friday, and the formal invitation to it was sent out late on Thursday afternoon. Since it was rumoured that the Friday wake would be a quiet affair, with no music and dancing, some friends suggested that if I wanted to see a 'ripe' wake I should go to the Thursday wake and avoid the one on Friday. That Thursday night far more people than is customary for a penultimate wake gathered at the house where the crosses were. They had come to have fun with *Be-nono*.

Because it was only the eve of the final wake, there was no Petromax lamp lighting the yard; people gathered in the darkness and appeared to be restless as they waited for something to happen. Eventually some women began to sing church hymns, and this seemed to break the ice. Groups of young men began to dance *gañaky* among themselves (see above, p. 119), but as soon as some women started a dance of *minotsoky*, they broke off to join them. Some of the refrains (*antsa*) that accompanied the dances were invented for the occasion and were dedicated to *Be-nono*. The dancing, singing and drinking continued the whole night.

Although the crosses were still in a corner of the yard and would be moved to a more central position only the following day, that Thursday night people found them already standing. This fact is very significant. I suggested previously that crosses lying flat on the sand represent the dead corpses, whereas by raising them the dead person is brought back to life; consequently, had *Be-nono* still been lying on the sand on the eve of the final wake, she would have missed the dances and singing in her honour. By raising the crosses a day earlier, furthermore, the organizers divided the wake (if not the entire ritual) into two separate events, one centred on *Be-nono* and the other centred on the children's crosses. On this occasion,

the duality of the cross's imagery was formally and explicitly acted out by confining the two contrasting images, that of a live ancestor and that of a corpse, to two separate wakes – one in which people were asked to be sad, and the other in which they were expected to have fun.

Carrying *Be-nono* to the cemetery was the most frenzied part of the ritual. I explained above how the wake on the final night had been very quiet and boring, entirely devoted to the crosses of small children. At about two o'clock in the morning, however, it was rumoured that *Be-nono* might be taken away to the sand hills just west of the village in order to have some 'ripe' celebrations. Although this expedition was forbidden by the *hazomanga*, who feared that people might get too excited and drunk and that 'big trouble' (*istoara bevata*) might ensue in the dark, he granted that *Be-nono* be carried to the sand hills at dawn.

At the break of dawn *Be-nono* was taken away. She left the courtyard heading westwards in the opposite direction to that of the cemetery. A smallish crowd accompanied her, mainly young men, children and a few women, said to be in a joking relation (*ampiziva*) with the 'masters of the work', hence with Nentiko too; among people linked by this relationship everything is allowed and everything must be endured. Initially at least, only these people were thought to dare (*mahasaky*) taking Nentiko on her eventful tour, suggesting that the treatment Nentiko was going to receive raised a certain degree of apprehension and fear;²⁴ once the initiative was taken by the *ampiziva*, however, many more people joined in, including some of the 'masters of the work' and, as we shall see, including Nentiko herself who was thought to have taken over the living to have them do what she used to like when she was alive.

Be-nono's procession was frenzied from the start, and became increasingly so each time the men carrying the cross on a run stopped and stuck *Be-nono* in the sand: with the crowd pressing around them, they danced *minotsoky* with her, rubbing themselves against her and tweaking her nipples. When *Be-nono* reached the top of the hill, the crowd stopped. The dancing went on, but something was clearly missing. The crowd had kidnapped *Be-nono* and was waiting for ransom in the form of rum. Eventually, one of the *hazomanga*'s younger brothers came with a group of relatives to rescue the cross and the crowd. He came balancing a bottle of rum on his head in triumph. The first nip of rum was poured over the cross's breasts; everyone else then had a share. *Be-nono* could then return to the village and start her long and tortuous journey to the cemetery accompanied by what was now a very large crowd of people.

If one allows for the difference between a cross and a coffin, *Be-nono*'s

procession to the tombs was analogous to that of Dadikoroko's corpse (see above, pp. 120–1).²⁵ *Be-nono*'s journey progressed as a series of spurts and sharp jolts; each stop was the pretext for more rum and for a new round of erotic dances and performances. As the cross moved on, the carriers battled for *Be-nono*, pushing and pulling for leverage and a hold.

Those people who had carried the children's crosses in quiet, straight and uninterrupted procession to the tombs had to wait for a long time before *Be-nono* finally arrived. After a few final stops at the edge of the cemetery, *Be-nono* moved close to her fence and in a last, frantic run was delivered to her tomb. The young men who took her inside the fence to stick her upright in the sand gave her a final go of *minotsoky* and some more rum. The *hazomanga* then asked them to leave. The usual thanksgiving speech praised the crowd because no fights or accidents had occurred and exhorted it to return home peacefully and quietly. The ritual was declared over. As the living headed back home, *Be-nono* and the other crosses were left behind inside their fence.

A few days after the ritual was concluded, I asked the *hazomanga* and his wife who had organized it about the 'meaning' (*ino dikany?*) of the breasts on Nentiko's cross. They answered that Nentiko was a 'great-grandparent' (*dady-be*) who had 'brought up many people' (*namelo olo maro ie*); she had had many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren; the breasts were a 'playful joke' (*kisaky*).²⁶ When I asked whether Nentiko had actually had big breasts, they laughed and told me that that was beside the point. So, what was the point?

We saw earlier that the dead feel a longing for the living. I argued above that during the *asa lolo* the living respond to this longing by bringing life into the cemetery. In the course of the cross ritual, in a different spatial context and through different ritual devices, the living similarly stage for the dead a spectacle of the life they have lost but still long for. In Nentiko's case, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren decided that she deserved a special treatment, because she had been such a wonderful parent. And so, on the cross that was to bring Nentiko back to life, they stuck concrete breasts, which represented Nentiko as the prolific source and support of many descendants. While it is hard to surmise what Nentiko would have thought of the breasts herself, it is easy to say what effect they had on the crowd that surrounded her. Like the pop music that usually accompanies a final wake, *Be-nono*'s breasts gave additional zest to the dances, clapping and inebriation, and became the main focus of attraction for the large crowd that closed in around the cross. This crowd is what Nentiko longs for

Plate 5 *Be-nono*, the breasted cross, has finally been delivered inside her fence



inside her fence: it is the life that she left behind her when she died, and which has since then reproduced, increased and multiplied itself. The breasts were a means, a highly successful one, of offering Nentiko a particularly pleasurable sight of life and of the undividedness of *filongoa*.

Yet in the end, after a long, wild night of amusement, Nentiko's cross was taken out of the village and away from life; Nentiko was carried to the cemetery and back into her fence. After opening a window on life in the village, that window was shut. The spectacle of life reverted to a funeral in which Nentiko was proved once more to be dead, and *Be-nono's* concrete breasts were proved to be only a 'playful joke'.

Nentiko was thought to have enjoyed the feast and to be happy as a result; the living had visibly enjoyed it too. We can now see that the force of this ritual lies in the fact that it draws together the dead and the living, pleasing the former without forcing the latter to feel the fear raised by the *asa lolo*. Indeed, we can assume that the cross ritual makes the ancestors even happier, for instead of hearing the display of life from inside their tomb, they are brought back to life right inside the village where they can dance with the living; the living in turn are less fearful, because they dance in the village with concrete crosses rather than at the tombs over the bodies of the dead.²⁷

The dead are so involved in the celebration that they direct the living people's performance, their dancing, running and singing. In response to my admiration for the crowd's behaviour, I would be told that the dead person whose cross was being carried had liked to dance and drink and that she had been very good at both. I mentioned in chapter 7 that Dadikoroko also had been a very good dancer in her lifetime and that she had been a 'great devil'. When her cross left the courtyard on its journey towards the cemetery, people found it almost impossible to carry. Because of its unusually large size, the cross had been tied to a wooden stretcher to allow more people to carry it, but the poles kept breaking and the ropes coming loose. Large amounts of medicine (*fanintsina*) were sprinkled on the crowd and cross. Yet even after the stretcher had been repaired the procession did not increase its pace, obstinately making detours, pushing and tugging the stretcher, and stopping for more rum. I was told with great satisfaction that all these delays went to prove what a 'great devil' Dadikoroko had been and still was (*devoly be ie*).

If the ancestors are able both to affect and to enjoy the dancing, drinking and delivery of their cross to the cemetery, it remains to be explained how the living manage to bring their spectacle of life to an end by fencing the crosses inside the tomb and abandoning the dead in the cemetery. To do

this, we must return to the dual image of the cross and to the presence within the same ritual of crosses that project different images.

I have argued above that the cross projects two images, that of a corpse and that of an ancestor brought back to life. The image and the feeling of life first take shape when the cross is raised up and people see the person the cross represents; and then when people are taken over by the deceased who makes them dance, run and drink with its cross. The image of the corpse is established instead by means of the ritual's structure, which follows step by step the structure of a funeral; right from the start, when the crosses first appear in the village and people around them begin to 'endure the absence of sleep', the crosses are treated as substitutes of dead bodies.

In the example I just recalled, these two images were separated into two distinct events. Despite this separation, the two events reacted on each other. On the one hand, the devices whereby *Be-nono* was endowed with life also established, by contrast, the image of death which upheld the performance of her and of the other crosses' mock funeral; as noted earlier, people must first be able to imagine that a concrete cross is a live person before they can be moved to perform a mock funeral for it. On the other hand, the presence of the children's crosses and the special emphasis on their representation of corpses forced *Be-nono* to her final destination in the tomb. *Be-nono* could enjoy such an extreme degree of vitality, because the representation of death through the children's crosses ensured that Nentiko be brought back to life *in the context of a funeral*, thus ultimately ensuring that the cross be delivered to Nentiko's tomb and her life be brought to an end. Although there exists no doubt in people's minds that a cross's only destination is inside the tomb, the cross ritual plays on the possibility of bringing the dead back to the village and to life, and at the same time establishes a device for sending, or returning, the dead and their crosses to where they belong.

While the image of the cross as a mock corpse and the overall structure of the ritual are important features for prescribing the crosses' final destination, one should also bear in mind that the procession leading *Be-nono* (or the cross of any old person such as Dadikoroko) to the cemetery was strikingly similar to the *funerary* procession for old people. I suggested this similarity above, but I wish to add a few comments.

Although it is undoubtedly more comfortable, both physically and emotionally, for the living to carry a piece of concrete than a decomposing corpse,²⁸ the dead person whose cross is carried in triumph years after her death passes through a very similar experience to that which she had when she left the village for the cemetery the first time. As argued in chapter 7, the

joyful funeral held for old people is meant to celebrate their life, rather than their death; the living celebrate the fact that the dead person has lived long enough to see a great growth in the number of descendants, generation after generation. In the course of the cross ritual, these ancestors – the old people – are offered a new, updated vision of the life they left behind when they died, a life that has increased and multiplied ever since their death. In order to please the ancestors, as many people as possible must attend the wake and participate actively in the procession (it is often pointed out that far more people attend the cross ritual than the funeral). The great, wild crowd surrounding Nentiko's and Dadikoroko's crosses proved that both of them had been and are still 'great-grandparents', who gave life to many descendants whose number keeps expanding. It becomes clear then why the crosses of dead children receive such a different treatment. If the cross ritual is an occasion for the dead to remember life, children have seen too little to have anything to long for and to want to remember – they can thus be carried fast, with little fuss and excitement, straight into their tomb.

The analysis of the cross ritual has shown how the ancestors are offered an opportunity to remember and to enjoy life, and how they inevitably get pushed back and are abandoned, lifeless, in their tombs at the cemetery. The cross ritual has the same plot as the *asa lolo*, except that the spatial opposition within which the plot unfolds is inverted. In the *asa lolo*, the living bring the village into the cemetery, and then leave taking life back with them; the ancestors are spectators who can play only a limited role as active participants, for at most, they hear the stamping of feet above their dead bodies. In the cross ritual, the ancestors return to the village, stand upright, dance, run and drink rum; they take over the living so that they can do what they used to like as living people. Both rituals respond to the longing that the dead feel for life, but in doing so they also create the very source of this longing: they realize descent and the division that descent engenders among the dead, they create the 'single' *raza*. Both rituals act out the contrast between life and death, between the village and the cemetery, between *filongoa* and the *raza*. Both rituals provide the same solution, that the two worlds that are brought together for a while ultimately be kept separate.

The solution, however, is not conclusive. The longing of the dead for life is never fully and permanently appeased; it could be so only if the rituals, instead of a 'playful joke', actually gave life back to the dead. It is the dead's lifelessness and the divisions established by the rituals which endlessly draw the dead back to the living.