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Introduction

When I first met Dadilahy during my first period of fieldwork among the Vezo of Madagascar back in 1989, he was very old and, like most old people, had plenty of time to spare. He liked to tell me stories about his past adventures at sea, about sea turtle hunting, about the first Europeans he had met. He soon realized, however, that we also shared an interest in the process through which Vezo people come to be related to one another, and so we also spent a great deal of time talking about filongoa (relatedness). Dadilahy knew a lot about filongoa, because his great age meant that he had been able to follow its creation and expansion over many generations. Most of the time, he made me look at filongoa through his eyes, from his particular point of view; in doing so, he conveyed his strong feeling of self-admiration and satisfaction at seeing how many descendants he had accumulated during his life.

Dadilahy's view of filongoa was oriented in one particular direction. He no longer had parents or grandparents above him, and he had very few surviving siblings around him; but he had a vast number of descendants below him. His sight, therefore, always moved downwards at his children (anaky), at the children of his children (zafy), at the children of the children of his children (kitro), and so on. In fact, Dadilahy liked to impress me by reciting the whole list of Vezo terms used to designate one's descendants down to the sixth generation (anaky, zafy, kitro, zafiafy, zafindohaliky, miny), despite admitting that no one will ever live long enough to see the birth of all of them.

This, however, was not such a big problem, since Dadilahy could boast a vast number of descendants just by looking at the two or three existing generations below him. The reason why he had so much to show for himself was that in claiming his descendants, he drew no

distinctions between male and female lines of filiation and therefore included in his sight not only his own children, but also all of his brothers' as well as all of his sisters' children; both his sons's and his daughters' children; both his grandsons' and his granddaughters' children, and so on. All of these were his descendants because either himself, or someone he was related to, had contributed to their generation.

When I returned to the field five years later, Dadilahy was dead. His funeral, I was told, had been a happy event which did not mourn his death but celebrated his long life, the success of which was embodied in his many children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who accompanied him, dancing and singing, to his tomb.

From inside the walls of his tomb, Dadilahy has a very different vision of relatedness from the one he shared with me. This is because he has now become part of 'one kind of people' (raza raiky): inside his tomb, he is with the children on his father's but not those on his mother's side; he is with his brothers' but not his sisters' children; with his sons' but not his daughters' children. Since I last saw him, Dadilahy's expansive and inclusive view of filongoa which used to please him so much, has been dissolved by death.[1]

This essay is an exploration of Dadilahy's different views of human relatedness during his life and after his death. Following his past and present gaze, I will reconstruct three different perspectives: one held by Dadilahy's descendants (which Dadilahy once held when he was a young man); one which Dadilahy enjoyed as an old man; and one which is what Dadilahy is left with now that he is dead. One could economically label what one sees from each of these perspectives as kindreds, cognatic descent groups, and unilineal descent groups. But the problem with such formalization is that kindreds, cognatic and unilineal descent groups have often been treated in kinship theory as forms of social organization that are fixed in time and place -- the Iban have kindreds, the Maori have cognatic descent groups, the

Tallensi have unilineal descent groups. My contribution aims to show instead that they are three transformative stages in the process of making human relatedness, all of them co-existing among the same people: the Vezo of Madagascar. This discussion will offer a new perspective on debates which flared among kinship theorists in the 50s and 60s, and which most recently have been revisited by Marilyn Strathern (1992), showing the close connection between the process that goes into making social persons and the process of creating, multiplying and curtaling human relatedness.

Kindreds and cognatic descent groups

Dadilahy's view of the relatedness which was being produced all around him when he was still alive, is well captured by an analogy drawn by Unggat, one of Freeman's Iban informants. To illustrate the amazing extension of a person's kindred, Unggat likened bilateral kinship to the making of a casting-net which, when finished, is conical in shape. At the start the net is a very small cone, but as the knotting proceeds, and one circle of mesh loops is succeeded by the next, it increases in size until its final circumference is measured not in inches but in fathoms. In the same way, kinsfolk whose forebears were once closely related, grow further and further apart, until in the end they do not even know that they are related (Freeman 1970: 68).

While Unggat, who was at the time a young man, regarded himself as one of the many people positioned along the widest and most peripheral circle of mesh loops, ignorant of many of his actual relations, Dadilahy, following the same analogy, used to position himself at the very apex of the small cone out of which the casting net had grown, and he regarded all the people reached by his net, no matter how far away they stood from the original cone, as

his descendants. In this sense, the Iban image of the casting net seems particularly appropriate in conveying Dadilahy's desire to 'catch' as many descendants as he possibly can. Also, the image usefully underscores the structural equivalence of all the knots and mesh loops that make up the final conical net, and thus the fact that Dadilahy's vision of the relatedness he has created grows and expands bilaterally and inclusively, drawing no distinctions between the different (male or female) lines of filiation.[2]

Yet, Freeman's interpretation of Unggat's analogy was different from my own, as I try to imagine how the same casting net would look from Dadilahy's perspective.[3] Freeman used Unggat's net to the same effect as the other famous Iban image of the cognatic kindred: the concentric ripples made by a stone flung into a pool, which eventually become indistinguishable from the surrounding water (Freeman 1970:69). The point here is that although bilateral relations theoretically extend indefinitely outward, in practice the ties of relationship become gradually but inevitably attenuated, since people are unable to follow up the infinite ramifications of their relations, as this would involve remembering ever more distant forebears.[4] Thus, when the ripples reach far out and are no longer perceptible on the surface of the pool, people become strangers to one another. The image of the ripples vanishing into the surrounding water is conveying the same ignorance of existing (but no longer traceable) relations which was expressed in Unggat's image of the casting net. There is however a significant difference, left unexplored by Freeman but crucial to my analysis, between the expansion of the concentric ripples and the widening of the circumference of the casting net. And this is that one image is flat and expands outwards from its centre, while the other is vertical and expands downwards from its apex. In kinship terms, this means that the first image is ego-centred and refers to the kindred as defined by Freeman, while the other is ancestor-focused and refers to a cognatic descent group (by definition[5] not a corporate group,

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whose membership is n̲o̲t̲ exclusive; see below).

The distinction between tracing relations from ego as opposed to tracing them from a common ancestor, was crucial to Freeman's understanding of the kindred as a cognatic c̲a̲t̲e̲g̲o̲r̲y̲ (the category of people whose shared characteristic is that they are all related cognatically to the same individual), which he emphatically contrasted to the kind of corporate group created by tracing unilineal descent from an apical ancestor. The implication of Freeman's analysis is that kindreds and unilineal descent groups cannot be found in the same society;[6] but what about cognatic descent groups, which, like their unilineal counter-parts, are ancestor-focused?[7] Can they co-exist with kindreds, and if so how?

I already suggested the answer to this question when I pointed out the different perspectives taken by a young man like Unggat and a very old man like Dadilahy with regard to the same casting net. From the point of view of Unggat, placed as he is on one of the widest circles of mesh loops, the net has grown so big that its conical shape seems almost irrelevant. Unggat's point is that people like him can only have a partial view of the net; what matters to them is the flat expanse of relations (their personal kindreds) which they did not themselves generate, but at whose centre they now stand. By contrast, from the point of view of Dadilahy who regards himself as the first and generative loop, the net can be admired in its entirety, and from this perspective its conical shape becomes its most salient feature: as far as Dadilahy is concerned, what matters is that he is at its apex, and that he regards himself as the original generative source of all the people caught in it.

The existence of either kindreds or cognatic descent groups is therefore a matter of perspective. Which perspective one takes depends on the kind of person one is. Crucially, it will depend on whether one has lived long enough to see oneself reproduced in one's children, in one's grandchildren, in one's great-grandchildren..., so as to be able to imagine

oneself as a generative (ancestor-like) source of relatedness. In this respect, perspectives can change gradually and according to context: on acquiring children, parents will begin to imagine themselves as the generative source of their small group of descendants; but in other contexts they will themselves be subsumed as descendants of a larger cognatic descent group which originates further back in time. Also, when still active, mobile and enterprising, a young or middle-aged person is likely to privilege the flat, expansive and ego-centred view of relatedness, reaching out for cooperation and support to its ascendants, its siblings and its descendants alike (ie to its personal kindred), rather than focusing on the latter alone as Dadilahy does.

There is therefore a great degree of continuity between Unggat's and Dadilahy's perspectives -- between cognatic kindreds and cognatic descent groups. There is nonetheless one moment when the interests of those who hold one perspective appear to clash with the interests of those who hold the other. And this takes me back to Unggat.

As mentioned earlier, Unggat used the image of the casting net to emphasize that in the Iban system people who are distantly related will eventually cease to know that they are, and will consider themselves as strangers -- further away from the original cone, people grow further apart from each other, until they do not even know that they are all part of the same net. To this, Dadilahy would have responded that so long as the original cone holds, all the other knots will also hold together. In other words, so long as someone as old as Dadilahy is alive, he will be able to tell his many descendants that they are part of the same net. Thus, while Unggat emphasized the inevitable loss of potential relatives through ignorance, Dadilahy made the point that the number of relations a person has depends upon the memory of older men and women who know how people were related in the past, and how these past relations extended and grew into the present. Not surprisingly, Dadilahy took great pleasure

in telling stories to his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of how certain people come to be related to one another ('what makes them related', mahalongo an-drozy). For his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Dadilahy's good memory meant a far greater number of relatives around them; for Dadilahy, his good memory meant an even greater number of descendants below him -- an even greater 'catch' into his net.

In most cases, both of these outcomes were highly appreciated by Dadilahy and his descendants alike. My informants never tired of priding themselves on the very large number of relatives the Vezo have -- in other words, on the extension of their personal kindreds. Anywhere they go, they can always find people who are their grandparents, parents, siblings, children or grandchildren as the case may be, and they will always find somebody who will host them, and feed them as relatives do (did I realize how convenient it is to have relatives in all the villages along the coast when one travels by sea?).[8] There is nonetheless one significant exception to the general enthusiasm for one's many relations, and this is when one is trying to find a marriageable partner.

Unlike the Iban who prefer marrying their close kin, marriage for the Vezo should only occur among people who are unrelated, called 'different people' (olo hafa). This means that the web of ego-centred relations grows even faster and extends even further than among the Iban, and this is precisely why the Vezo generally prefer absolute exogamy -- for in their view, it does not make sense (tsy misy dikany) to marry someone who is already related (fa longo), for this would waste the opportunity for one's offspring of doubling their number of relatives by turning previously un-related people into kin (see below). The Vezo, however, are also aware that having so many relatives makes it very difficult to find 'different people' to marry (maro mare longonteña, tsy misy olo hafa: one's kin are far too many, there are no different people left).[9]

It is on this point that Dadilahy's good stories of how people come to be related to one another become problematic for his descendants; it is on this issue that Dadilahy's perspective clashes with theirs. This is because while Dadilahy's desire is to 'catch' as many descendants as possible into his net, that of his descendants is to find people who are left out of it whom they can marry. The clash of interests is only resolved with Dadilahy's death, when some of his stories will be forgotten so that, as Unggat had it, some of Dadilahy's descendants will never even know that they are related. In some ways, this periodic loss of knowledge is a good thing (raha soa) for, as people point out, it makes it possible to marry a relative without even knowing it.

In fact, this is what would happen anyway, even if all of Dadilahy's stories were remembered, for even his knowledge was necessarily incomplete. On one occasion, after lecturing me once more about the vast number of kin that the Vezo have, Dadilahy offered his general view on the pervasiveness of human relatedness: 'people are really just one people, but it is marriage that separates them' (olo raiky avao, fa fanambalia ro mampisaraky). Although Dadilahy felt he could not explain this statement any further,[10] I am inclined to interpret it in this sense: his knowledge of how people are related to one another was so broad, that he could see (or was able to imagine by extension) that everyone is in fact related to everyone else; people are just one vast related family. If this is so, marriage can never occur among 'different people', and in fact it is marriage itself which separates people, by creating the 'difference' that is necessary for an exogamous marriage to occur.

Let me explain this with one example. Lefo and Sary are related (ampilongo), as they are both descendants of Dadilahy.[11] Nonetheless, they live together and have had a child together. Despite her fondness for Lefo, Sary acknowledges that her marriage is not good (fanambalia ty raty, tsy soa) because she has no in-laws: 'I don't have a father-in-law, because

my father-in-law is already my father, my sister-in-law is already my sister' (<u>tsy mana rafoza zaho, ka rafozako mbo babako, velahiko mbo rahavaviko</u>). Yet when I told Sary's father that his daughter had no in-laws through her marriage with Lefo, he replied that this was mistaken (<u>diso io</u>), because Lefo's father <u>is</u> now Sary's father-in-law and Lefo's sister <u>is</u> now her sister-in-law. Thanks to the marriage, Lefo's father, who was previously Sary's father, is transformed into her father-in-law (<u>babany manjary rafozany</u>). In this case, it is the act of marrying that makes Sary and Lefo and their respective kin -- <u>who were related</u> -- <u>unrelated</u>, 'different' from each other. In the same way, according to Dadilahy's view, all Vezo people, who are really just one people, <u>become</u> 'different' through the act of marriage. And yet, this difference is established only to be re-transformed into relatedness at the next generation.

The Vezo emphasize that marriage does not erase the 'difference' between oneself, one's partner and the partner's kin. Hence, one's in-laws do not become one's kin. On the other hand, if 'different people' generate children, they establish new relatedness. Since both parents are related to their offspring, all those who are 'different people' with respect to the parents become related with respect to the children: parents-in-law become grandparents, sisters- and brothers-in-law become mothers and fathers (<u>laha latsaky anaky teña, rafozanteña manjary longon' anakinteña</u>, 'if one has children, one's parents-in-law become one's children's kin').[12] This transformation of 'difference' into relatedness explains why 'people's kin increase all the time' (<u>longon'olom-belo mihamaro isanandro isanandro</u>), for each new generation of children is bound to have more kin than their parents' generation.

Vezo marriage can thus be said to oscillate between the creation of 'difference' and the creation of relatedness. In the first instance, marriage is the artifice whereby 'difference' is created within the universe of relatedness; in the second instance, marriage transforms the 'difference' created at one point in time into new relatedness for the generation at the next

remove. This recursive feedback allows one to emphasize one of the two elements while ignoring the other, for each of the two poles (relatedness and 'difference') logically includes the other. It is for this reason that Dadilahy was able to place so much emphasis on the <u>creative</u> aspect of marriage, for it was this that allowed him to claim an even larger 'catch' of descendants.

It was noticeable that Dadilahy tended to disregard the 'difference' that existed between himself and the people who had generated his descendants through marriage; he disregarded the fact that his children's, grandchildren's, great-grandchildren's spouses were <u>not</u> his descendants, and included them in his sight as if they were his own people. Thus, when he talked to them and about them, he insisted that they were <u>not</u> his children-in-law, but rather his children (<u>tsy vinantoko ty, fa anako, zafiko</u>); similarly, he did not like to be referred to as their <u>rafoza</u> (father-in-law), for in fact he regarded himself as their father. He explained that marriage is an exchange of a woman for a man (<u>ampela takalo johary</u>), in which the two sides say to each other: 'here is my child, it is not mine but it is yours' (<u>anako ty tsy anako, fa anakinao</u>).[13] Hence, a son-in-law becomes like a son, a daughter-in-law becomes like a daughter, while a father-in-law becomes a father, a mother-in-law a mother.[14]

For Dadilahy, therefore, marriage was a way of acquiring other people's children -- of increasing the catch in his net. Understandably, he was far less anxious to surrender his own; despite the alleged equality of the exchange, he took without ever giving any away. Dadilahy, of course, was not alone in carrying out this act of plunder. Those from whom he took were simultaneously taking his children away from him: they insisted, just like he did, that marriage had transformed their children-in-law into their children.

The point is that such multiple and overlapping claims over the same people are a characteristic feature of Dadilahy's vision of relatedness, as well as of the vision of many

other old men and women who, like him, imagine themselves as the generative source of their numerous descendants. Inevitably, when casting their net over their own children, over their (own or classificatory) sisters' and their (own or classificatory) brothers' children, over all of these children's children, and over all of their respective spouses... each of these old men and women 'catch' people who are also simultanuosly 'caught' by other nets whose origin lies elsewhere. This is because each of these old men and women are only one of the multiple sources which have contributed to the generation of their descendants, so that when Dadilahy's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren look upwards at their ascendants, they find that the path that leads them to and past Dadilahy is only one of the many that they can follow. Their view branches out and expands in all directions: it moves upwards on both their father's and their mother's side, and moves back through their four grandparents, their eight great-grandparents, and so on. Thus, although it pleases Dadilahy to look down at his grandchildren as if they all 'belonged' to him -- 'look, these are all my children (anako), my grandchildren (zafiko), my great-grandchildren (kitroko)' --, his grandchildren do not in fact 'belong' to him any more than they 'belong' to any other of their many grandparents.

This is of course what happens in those non-unilineal systems of descent which occupied the minds and the writings of so many British kinship theorists in the 50s and 60s. The problem they faced was to explain how unrestricted descent groups of the sort envisaged by Dadilahy could be transformed into discrete groups of the sort created, simply but ingeniously, by unilineal descent. How, in other words, membership of non-unilineal descent groups could be effectively restricted through non-kinship criteria (such as choice of residence or actual land holding) so as to sort people out into de facto discrete and non-overlapping groups.[15]

What is striking when one re-reads this literature with Dadilahy in mind, is that this

particular preoccupation with restricted group membership, is totally foreign to him and to all the other elderly men and women who, like him, are pleased by the sight of their many descendants. This is because what they are all seeing through their gaze is not a corporate group, membership of which must be, in principle or in practice, asserted univocally against competing claims; what they are all seeing and admiring through their gaze is the making of their mature, fully developed and wholly realized person: a person who has been successful in multiplying itself into such a vast multitude of descendants. There are moments, of course, when the inclusive vision of these old men and women is realized in practice, when all their descendents gather around them for one of the ritual undertakings which require the mobilization of all of one's relations. In those moments, the casting net described by Ungatt unfolds before their eyes, as they sit and admire its formidable extension.

Unilineal descent

Now that he is dead, Dadilahy no longer enjoys the sight of his many descendants. Next to other bodies, he now rests within the walls of a tomb. He has become a member of a <u>raza</u>. To understand, or rather imagine, Dadilahy's new existence, I first of all need to introduce this new term -- <u>raza</u> -- and explain its different meanings. These depend on whether <u>raza</u> is employed in the plural (<u>valo raza</u>, eight <u>raza</u>) or in the singular sense (<u>raza raiky</u>, one <u>raza</u>).

The Vezo, like other people in Madagascar, say that 'living human beings have eight <u>raza</u>' (<u>olom-belo valo raza</u>). When I asked what the word '<u>raza</u>' meant I was given a superficially simple definition: 'people of the past who are dead' (<u>olo taloha fa nimaty</u>). To state therefore that living people have eight <u>raza</u> means that they have eight (dead) great-grandparents, four on their mother's and four on their father's side; <u>olom-belo valo raza</u> is thus a statement about people's multiple sources of generation.

In another context, however, the term raza is used to define a single entity. This occurs when the Vezo refer, once again, to dead people, but only to those who are buried in the same tomb; in this instance, a plurality of individuals ('people of the past who are dead') which in life possessed many raza are grouped as 'one raza', as 'one kind of people' (raza raiky).

One way of imagining Dadilahy's present existence is to consider the effects of the transformation of 'plural' into 'single' raza, and the drastic loss of relatedness that this entails. As we have seen, towards the end of his life he had come to acquire an ever increasing number of descendants, gathered indistinctly from all sides (including his descendants' spouses). Acting like the ancestor he was soon going to become, Dadilahy looked down at his descendants and liked to think that they were all 'his' grandchildren. With death, however, Dadilahy's vision was suddenly curtailed. As he was lowered into his tomb, he became part of an exclusive and bounded group, a group made up of only 'one kind of people' (raza raiky). From now on, his sight will only reach those descendants who are or will be buried with him: the children on his father's but not those on his mother's side; his brothers' but not his sisters' children; his sons' but not his daughters' children. Death, in other words, disposes of Dadilahy's cognatic descent group, and forces him into a different kind of kinship order: unilineal descent.

This order is created through a restrictive choice -- the choice of one raza among the many that living people have -- which is the effect of the transition from life to death; for whereas a living human being can be related to many different raza, the dead cannot belong to eight 'single' raza all at once. That raza membership is and can only be exclusive is self-evident for the Vezo: the reason is that raza membership is membership of a tomb, and since corpses cannot be cut up into pieces, one party taking the head and the other the feet (tapa roe, raiky mahazo lohany, raiky mahazo tombokiny), one can only be buried inside one tomb

and only belong to one 'single' raza: either 'here' or 'there'. Non-exclusive relatedness (on which Dadilahy's inclusive vision of his many descendants depends), and exclusive belonging to 'one kind of people', thus pertain to two different and incommensurable domains of existence, to two different and incommensurable types of person.

I suggested earlier that the view over human relatedness which Dadilahy shared with me before his death revealed his mature and fully realized person, multiplied and refracted in his many descendants. What Dadilahy lost at death are these almost infinite refractions of his own self onto other people; for now he can only look at himself through those descendants who belong to him by being the same as him. As he enters the tomb that contains 'one kind of people', he becomes the same as all the other members of that kind -- the same, unitary person. In the process of operating this closure -- from plural to singular, from infinite refractions to single reflection -- membership of the single raza is established, and with it the existence of a corporate, discrete, bounded group which did not exist in life,[16] and which must be kept separate from it.[17]

The transition experienced by Dadilahy is of some theoretical importance in kinship studies. Marilyn Strathern (1992) has suggested that the reason why cognatic kinship proved so problematic for British anthropologists in the 50s and 60s was that it failed to create 'society': instead of creating groups and establishing boundaries, it produced overlapping webs of relatedness. Given the assumption that 'groups were the vehicles through which societies presented themselves to their members, then without group membership what was a person part of?' (Strathern 1992:80). However, in so far as cognatic kinship was also considered to be a universal, natural feature of human relations, linked to the universal recognition of both maternal and paternal parentage, it became the background against which unilineal descent groups could emerge, as one line of filiation was chosen at the exclusion of

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the other. As Strathern suggests, in kinship theory of the 50s and 60s the transition from the undifferentiated field of cognatic kinship to the social difference brought about by unilineal descent amounted to the creation of society out of nature (Strathern 1992:88; see also Edwards and Strathern, this volume).

Dadilahy offers an interesting perspective on these questions, for his long life and his final death both resolve and re-instate the classic problems associated with cognatic kinship and cognatic descent. In life, Dadilahy resolved these problems by being a different kind of person from the one envisaged by unilineal descent theory: not determined by membership of one group, of one kind of people, but constituted through the multiple, infinite refractions of himself onto the many descendants captured in his cognatic net. In death, however, Dadilahy somewhat vindicates the preoccupations of so many kinship theorists of the 50s and 60s, by proving that cognatic kinship and cognatic descent are ineffective when it comes to establishing exclusive membership of a bounded group; in joining his tomb and the raza therein, Dadilahy is forced to opt for unilineal descent. In this case, however, unilineal descent does not so much create society out of nature; its realization marks instead the painful intrusion of death into life.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In this essay, I have presented three points of view from which Vezo people at different moments of their lives (and deaths) look at human relatedness. Following Dadilahy's gaze through time, we have seen how cognatic kindreds transform themselves into cognatic descent groups, and how these in turn are transformed into unilineal descent groups through an act of closure. This transformative process is marked by continuities as well as discontinuities. Most notably, while we have seen that death engenders the most radical break

and painful loss in Dadilahy's view of the relatedness he had created throughout his life, one cannot fail to notice how, as an old man, Dadilahy began to act as if he already were an ancestor. For in his old age, he no longer looked at the vast but flat expanse of relatedness <u>centered</u> around him, but began to look downwards at all the descendants grouped <u>below</u> him. In this sense, Dadilahy's cognatic descent group represents the critical conversion point between cognatic kindreds and unilineal descent groups, sharing bilaterality and inclusiveness with the former, and a vertical orientation with the latter.

The general point underscored by this type of analysis is the intimate connection between the changing nature of the person through time -- through life and death -- and the particular perspective people take over human relatedness, which in turn determines and shapes the changing nature of their selves. This means that if we are to understand how people come to be related to one another, we cannot restrict our analysis to any one moment in time. For even if relatedness is created through shared links of procreation, as it is among the Vezo, the best part of the story is what comes after that initial moment of instantiation. And for this, we will need to describe, analyze and understand how human relatedness grows, ages and dies along with the growth, aging and death of the people who have created it.

Notes

[1] My description of Dadilahy's vision inside the walls of his tomb should not be taken literally. Dadilahy never described to me what his experience was going to be like as a dead person, nor did others discuss their own or other people's future existence in the tomb. What I say about Dadilahy's curtailed vision of filongoa as he is lowered in his tomb, is based on my interpretation of the ritual activities Vezo people endure in order to keep the dead happy and separate from life; what these occasions reveal is the acute longing felt by the dead: longing for life and for the very many descendants they could claim as theirs in life (cf. Astuti 1994, 1995).

2. Crucially, the image of the net captures something different from the standard geneological diagram which, as argued by Bouquet (1996 and this volume), reproduces an 'arboreal' vision of kinship as pedigree. I was reminded of the difference between the expansive image of the net and the vertical image of the tree when I first approached Dadilahy with an A4 notebook in my hands, and asked him to tell me about all the people he was related to. Dadilahy looked at me with disbelief: how could I ever imagine that my little pieces of paper could ever be enough to contain all of his relatives?

3. I should add that my reading of Freeman's interpretation of Unggat's casting net differs from that of Errington 1989: 244ff.

4. Grandparents for second cousins, great-grandparents for third cousins, great-great-grandparents for fourth cousins, and so on. Cfr. Freeman 1961:206-7 on XVIII century English lawyers' fascination with the geometrical progression through which the kindred achieves its 'amazing extension'. On the notion that bilateral kinship extends forever outwards to include all humankind, see also Edwards and Strathern (this volume).

5. A descent group whose non-exclusive members are the descendants of an apical ancetor/ancestress through any combination of male or female links of generation.

6. Freeman thereby distinguishes 'the kindred, as an undifferentiated category as in bilateral society', from cognatic kin as an internally differentiated category, existing in societies with unilineal descent systems', and argues that 'whenever, in a society, special functions attach to either agnatic or uterine kin in contra-distinction to other cognates, this renders impossible the existence in this society of undifferentiated bilateral kindreds' (1970:204).

7. The distinction between ancestors-focused descent groups (whether unilineal or cognatic) and ego-focused kindreds, is most clearly drawn by Fox 1967:163-9.

8. For a similar appreciation of the almost infinite extension of bilateral kinship, see Bodenhorn (this volume).

9. In this context, I have heard more than once the suggestion that perhaps other people in Madagascar have better 'ways of doing things' (fomba) than the Vezo since they allow children of brothers to marry (a practice which was otherwise considered to be 'pointless').

10. Dadilahy's statement could be interpreted as meaning that marriage is divisive because some people, normally one's daughters, are 'lost' as they move out to follow their spouses. Given the context of the conversation, and the fact that daughters or sons who move out at marriage remain within dadilahy's inclusive vision of filongoa (see below), I find this interpretation unconvincing.

11. Sary and Lefo are ampilongo because Dadilahy is both Sary's father and Lefo's grandfather; Dadilahy's mother was the sister of Sary's father, and Dadilahy's father was the brother of Lefo's grandfather. According to this reckoning, Sary is Lefo's mother; however, Sary and Lefo can also be considered siblings (the father of the mother of the father of Sary's father was a brother of the father of the mother of the father of Lefo's mother).

12. Cf. Carsten 1997, ch.8 for an extensive discussion of how the paradoxical nature of affinity among the Malays of Langkawi (ie that affines should be indistinguishable from consanguineal kin, while at the same time remaining distinctly affines) is largely resolved through the sharing of grandchildren by the two sets of parents-in-law (bisan): 'it is through shared grandchildren that the relation between bisan -- a relation of affinity -- is actually transformed into one of consanguinity' (1997:241).

13. For a fuller discussion of equality and hierarchy in marriage, cf. Astuti 1995, ch.4.

14. See Bloch 1995 on how Merina marriage should be seen as an act that creates double filiation, rather than affinity.

15. Some perceptive comments were made in the course of these often heated discussions. Most notably, one finds the suggestion that the contrast between the rigidity of unilineal descent -- in which membership is established at birth once and for all, with no need of 'realizing' it through one's behaviour -- and the flexibility of cognatic descent -- in which restricted membership to one's descent group is achieved through the exercise of individual choice -- may have been overdrawn, given that even in strictly unilineal descent systems a degree of ambiguity with regard to group membership is likely to remain (Firth 1963), and that even in these systems birth only ascribes a potential status to the child which needs to be realized by assuming appropriate obligations and exercising corresponding rights (Forde 1963, in polemic with Leach's distinction (1962) between individual choice of filiation and the automatism of descent).

16. However, one's membership of the raza one will join in death is prepared during one's lifetime. As discussed extensively in Astuti 1995, a person's place of burial (whether in mother's or father's tomb) is established through the performance of the ritual of soron'anake, performed by a father for his children. Through this ritual, 'one doesn't buy the child's mouth or the child's flesh; what one buys are the child's bones' (tsy mivily vavany, tsy mivily nofotsiny, fa taola iñy ro nivilin'olo). If the father fails to perform soro, the children may thus live with him -- as mouth and flesh--, but their bones will not be buried in his tomb (they will be buried in their mother's tomb).

17. Cf. Astuti 1994 and 1995 on the emphasis the Vezo place on the separation between life and death.

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