Between Birth and Bones: Not-Knowing in the Madagascar Sand

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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April 2020

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT …… iii

ACKNOLEDGMENTS …….. iv

I ……... 1

II …….. 30

III …… 57

IV …… 84

V …….. 111

BIBLIOGRAPHY …….. 203

Abstract

This dissertation puts not-knowing, from the Gasy 'tsy mahay,' in conversation with technologies of power and legacies of colonialism founded in knowledge accumulation and production. Based on twenty cumulative months of fieldwork in the Southwest coastal region of Madagascar, this text combines ethnographic fiction and theoretical mosaic as a means of pushing the questions underpinning this research into methodology and representation. Thus, at all levels, I question how knowing has informed anthropology and how not-knowing might lead to anthropological projects that resist and refuse the prioritizing of truth. Not-knowing encompasses a wide range of practices geared towards reducing, restricting, or withholding knowledge from others as well as from oneself. Rather than approaching not-knowing as a lacuna, a deficit, or something to overcome, this dissertation follows the ways the people I worked with in Belo relate to it. In doing so, I build a narrative and theoretical arch rooted in lies, misdirection, ambiguities, and various other forms of avoiding the power of confessional politics.

Theoretically, I draw a line, though not always a straight one, between ethnographic material, bio/necropolitics, debates juxtaposing epistemology and ontology, and the decolonial writings of scholars of color. Reading not-knowing through scholarship on opacity, refusal, and disorientation, I join a chorus of writers and scholars who seek ontological alternatives to biopolitics and necropolitics, to the discounting of particular lives, and to the modes of truth making and knowledge production that sustain these. Ultimately, I do not present not-knowing as a solution to these forms of power and oppression, but turn to ethnographic examples of staying with the tensions presented by a refusal of ordering. Thus, this dissertation stays with the indeterminacy of not-knowing as a means of calling forth what I learned in the field without fixing the people I learned from to and through the lessons.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation and recognition for the community of people who took me in, guided me, taught me, played with me, protected me, lied and disoriented me, but most of all treated me as more than a guest, if not altogether Gasy. By this I mean, I thank them for giving me more than I could or did ask for every time they held me accountable even when it led to tensions, every time they acted towards me as a person rather than a researcher and expected me to do the same for them with all that that entails. More than their agreement to work with me on this project, a project that it goes without saying belongs to them as much as me, I thank them for their incessant sincerity, opacity, and care. Tena misoatra marina aminareo.

I had the great privilege of preparing for and writing this dissertation with the support of a committee willing to let me take creative and theoretical risks. I could not have imagined or executed this project without their mentorship and confidence in me. To my chair, George Mentore, thank you for challenging me at every turn while still reminding me to trust myself and my work. I rejoice in the echos of you I find in myself as I continue to try to understand and better appreciate the nuances and complexities of your teachings. Thank you Jim Igoe for sharing with me your critical appreciation for theory and how we use it to do anthropology. You have so diligently and patiently helped me to express myself, to question the impact of my words, and to reassess my priorities as a scholar. Thank you China Scherz for your endless enthusiasm and championing of what I do, for always showing up for me, and for your deep commitment to teaching and modeling thoughtfulness in both professional and intellectual pursuits. Kandioura Drame, thank you for helping me to think literature anthropologically and anthropology literarily. Last but never least, though you could not see me through to the end, my deepest gratitude to you, Roy Wagner, for

taking me under your wing, for teaching me to listen, to tell stories, and to obviate, and for helping me feel ok with getting lost and taking the scenic route.

I feel a great honor to have gone through my program with a cohort of incredibly strong women and unquestionable pros. I could not have gotten here without their friendship, their expertise, and their determination keeping us all on track. Thank you all for seeing me through this. Tracie Canada, my greatest ally, you made this all doable. Bremen Donovan, my reminder to try new things, you made this creative. Xinyan Peng, the standard, you made this look easy. Leah Esslinger, my conversationalist, you made this like home. I also want to recognize the full group of graduate students in and beyond the University of Virginia who helped me thrive. They created communities of thought, engagement, and compassion for which I will remain eternally grateful. Thank you to Jack Stoetzel, Dio Kavadias, Jacqui Cieslak, Julia Haines, Mac Garcia, Irtefa Binte-Farid, John Favini, Ida Hoequist, Saad Quasem, Erin Jordan, Eniola Afolayan, Jeremy Sorgen, Lauren Sutherland, and Raphaêlle Rabanes.

I have studied anthropology for over a decade and, in that time, had the opportunity to work with a wide range of anthropologists from different traditions, institutions, and subfields. They have each contributed to the bricolage of influences and aesthetics that have made me into the practitioner I am today. Thank you to Kath Weston, Lise Dobrin, Adria Laviolette, Ira Bashkow, Richard Handler, Fred Damon, Edith Turner, Kwame Otu, Mukulika Banerjee, Rita Astuti, Jovan Lewis, and Kristen Drybread. A special and most profound thank you to my first mentor, Michael Taussig, for sticking with me all these years and continuing to read, push, and inspire me.

Graduate school also taught me that anthropology does not start or end in the classroom, the conference, the article, or the book. A number of graduate students and scholars have led the way for me, collaborated with me, and incited me to think and work alternatively, beyond

academia, and with and for broader publics. Thank you in this regard to Cristiana Giordano, Bianca Williams, Sophie Chao, Keisha John, Marios Falaris, Beth Derderian, Josh Rivers, Shelmith Wanjiru, Anar Parikh, Tariq Rahman, Althea SullyCole, Benjamin Bean, and Tristan Jones.

I also extend my appreciation to the University of Virginia and the Department of Anthropology for supporting me financially and academically and for having a program very invested in their graduate training. This project would not have happened without many months spent in Madagascar, learning Malagasy and doing fieldwork. These make all of the other challenges of pursuing a doctoral degree worth it and possible. Thank you to the Buckner W. Clay Endowment and the Gerszten Endowment for funding the various stages of my research.

I will finish with some words for my family and friends who have shared in all of the ups and downs leading up to and throughout my journey towards this dissertation. To Steve, my father, my intellectual muse, thank you for raising me to love learning, for taking long walks, and for a lifetime of wisdom. To Erna, my mother, thank you for carrying me into this world and through it, for living in the fifth standard deviation, and for exceptionally proving the rule by actually reading, understanding, and copyediting this dissertation. To Julien, my partner and best friend, we did it! Thank you for supporting me et de m'avoir supporté. To my brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, and friends, thanks for all the love and home you have given me on my winding way here and for years to come.

At every private and public event I attended in Madagascar, a moment would come when somebody would stand to make a short speech, a *kabary*. Often these involved public thank yous that have inspired me in writing these acknowledgments. I do not know how to give a skilled kabary, but despite my failures in Gasy oratory styles, I hope you will all accept my deep appreciation for the part you have played in helping me achieve a PhD based on that not-knowing.

I

"An oral ruttier is a long poem containing navigational instructions which sailors learned by heart and recited from memory. The poem contained the routes and tides, the stars and maybe the tastes and flavours of the waters, the coolness, the saltiness; all for finding one's way at sea" (Brand 2011: 212).

"Brand's 'Ruttier' does not contain conventional navigational instructions to country and safe landing (could it? Those of us in the wake cannot use such conventional means); it does not contain what present/future migrants might meet, refuse, and remake on and in their journeys. The 'Ruttier' takes as ground that first plunge into unbelonging, reframes as gift that absence of country. I read the 'Ruttier,' then, as a way-making tool and a refusal of nation, country, and citizenship"
(Sharpe 2016: 107)

The grains of sand[1] slipped between their fingers as they lifted their hands, leaving only bits of charcoal, cigarette butts, and empty, aluminum snack bags. With one side of the fence removed,[2] the courtyard lay expansive, as if the facade of a demarcation between families dropped away and all that remained: endless sand, hard and hot, sweeping through and between hardening houses, flowing under foot and water, covering hardened, dry bones. Low hanging, sunken tarps obscured the sky. Sometimes propped up by a mast or long stick in the middle, they brought comfort, like the slow rise and fall of breath. During the day, the tarps gathered everyone together under their shade. At night, lit by the yellow glow of bulbs hanging like ripe fruit below deep branches, they kept the warmth and song low to the ground, winding its way through the sand,

between balls of children huddled under blankets, between men, leaning up against the house, their legs outstretched and their arms reaching for another swig of rhum, between rounds of rummy turning through the night and stoic women sitting upright, wrapped in sarongs, keeping company for the dead. Full. Full and bursting. Bursting not up, for the South wind to carry away as it hurried overhead, gusting and sweeping, keeping everyone away from the sea. Not up, but out. Bursting out, out through the night, through the village, through the sand, waking all those that might have slept and then gently rocking them back to slumber in the warmth of the funerary choral.[3]

Sun had broken through the sleepless night. The attendees had dispersed. They left cigarette butts and empty, aluminum snack bags. They left behind bones, where dinner had been served. Bones, stripped of their meat, cleaned, hard, and white. They spat them out. They threw them to the side. Bones atop the sand. Bones, cigarette butts, and empty, aluminum snack bags. The grains of sand slipped between their fingers as they lifted their hands, leaving behind only the larger pieces of the evening's activity. They threw them away. They left the bones. In the sand, clean, hard, and white.

Finishing, they looked[4] momentarily at the swept yard. A look that might have passed for just a turn of the head. They saw the expanse of sand laying before them, only moments ago littered with the refuse and residue of the preceding night.[5] Though stripped of its material remembrances, in the sand, they saw that night and those that came before it, awake in the wake of death. Still before it had cradled their mother's lifeless body, the sand had raised that woman. They saw their mother in it. Sitting hard and stiff, day in and out. Sifting rice, descaling fish, laughing. They saw their mother sleeping in the afternoon shade, raising them. As a young woman, their feet tip-toeing in the moon chilled sand as they said goodbye to a late night lover. As a child, giggling and screaming as they tested how far they could run over the smoldering grains under the wet weight

of February sun or kicking up dust trying to learn a new dance. There their mother sat. A baby, flopping over as if by accident to sneak a mouthful of sand while their own mother looked away. They looked at that freshly swept sand for a moment.[6] Then, walked away.

By that time, the men had finished bleeding, skinning, and cutting apart the cow, in the other yard where the cooking took place. Most of the unusable parts already buried in the sand, a handful of women prepared the meat and cleaned intestines. Peterô's mom sat down on the *tihy*. Picking up a *sahafa*, they filled it with three *kapoaka* of rice and began sifting. A short, pretty woman, thin to the point of resembling a child.[7] Their daughter, reached almost the same size at twelve years old, or maybe eleven. The smallest of their family, but not so much shorter than everyone else, their slender body gave them a childlike appearance. They hated it, of course, preferring a stronger, thicker, more curvy body. They even had one in years past, they once said, pulling out a picture from before they gave birth. The sound of regret filled their voice as they fussed over the way their clothes lay on their, now, thin body. They did not look short with a thicker body, they insisted. Besides their height and weight, however, a person could not mistake them for a child. The skin on their face smooth, dark, and serious. Their eyes, hands, and shoulders old, hard, composed, calm. A full grown woman, strong but wild, unpredictable to the point of danger.

Most of the time, they laughed. They made faces and jokes, called out to young boys on the street as they walked by in the night looking for girls or for someone to see them. "Nice pants," they shouted at the boy. "You look real good in them! Show me some of your dance moves. Oh! Oh! Oh! Yea, you know dancing."[8] As the boy moved on down the street into the shadows of night or the light of the next bar, the woman turned to the others. Their spouse's brother, that one. They hate their backpack. What a meaningless fashion statement. They had not yet finished laughing as the next group of boys came into view, and again they treat the women to a ballet of quick moving,

bent legs and gyrating shoulders at the urging of the woman. Some years passed, this same woman killed a man. While living in town, they stabbed a man in the street. Pregnant at the time, a sight hard to imagine on such a small frame, it drove them crazy, so that one day, they took to the street barely clothed and killed a man.[9] Their brother worked for law enforcement in town, back then. They got them out of prison and sent them back home, here. To look at them now, a mother, a head of household, a hard worker, and a good friend, you would never know. Only that laugh remained, and they let one out that morning as they sifted the rice.

They needed only to sift one or two bags of rice to combine with the those left over from the days before. The work would not take long, and they chatted through it tranquilly. The morning moved around them sitting on the *tihy*, sifting. By the time they finished, other women would have washed all of the plates, bowls, and knives used to prepare the beef, lit twelve fires under twelve large pots of rice, gone to the market for tomatoes, garlic, onions, and maybe beans, paid a couple of boys or *jokera*—depending on who came by first—to refill the water barrel, and started cooking the beef stew. Other woman would have joined in the work, sitting up against the surrounding houses, first in a row against them, then gradually spreading out as the sun stretched the shade further out across the sand. Under the tarp, on the *tihy,* the sun's movement mattered less than the undulating flicks of rice. Pushed up into the air, the wind caught their stray husks, yanking them into a swirl towards the ground. Children gathered around the circle of sifters, their hands darting towards discarded grains of unhusked rice. They shrieked and cooed over their growing stashes until their glee turned to bickering, and a mother or two reprimanded and dismissed them. None left quietly, reminding and negotiating for the women to take over their collections on their behalf. Sit well! Sit well, all of you! The children sat quietly for a moment, but soon returned to eagerly trying to snag fallen grains. Get out of here! They scattered, reconvening behind the house to

squabble and play in peace.

The women made no effort to collect any scrapped grains for their children, allowing them to mix in with the empty husks. They would put all of it together in a bucket for Jôsin's pigs when they finished. They did just that before sweeping away the husks that had slipped through their hands and the grains of sand that had blown on to the *tihy*, or crept on under feet, or kicked on by rowdy children. They swept it away, making room for the women who cooked. Between now and lunch, most of the work involved sitting, waiting, attending. The women did this work diligently. Only bad people did not attend, did not sit, did not do the work, the work that those before had done. Simple people attended. They did the work for each other, each other for them, them for each other. Peterô's mom returned to their own kitchen after finishing with the rice. Hosting required another kind of work all together. Left sitting in the shade, the other women kept time to the boiling of rice water and the growing number of houses in the yard with their sides adorned with attendees. When they overtook the sun, finding nowhere else to do the work of mourning but the heating sand, the time had come for the service. The beef needed to sit a little longer, though, and some concern brewed over whether they had enough meat for everyone gathered. They began.[10]

Nenibe's sisters stayed sitting on the *tihy*, where their children brought them stacks of enamel bowls. They opened up a bag of still steaming cooked rice, and dug into it. With each scoop, they filled two or three of the bowls, spreading them out until they filled the *tihy*. One of those who had brought the plates took a handful of spoons and added three to each full bowl of rice, breaking it up with one of the spoons as they did. Another woman joined them while two others began bringing bowls of stew. The sisters spooned chunks of meat and beans over each serving of rice, pouring the leftover broth over them too, before sending the bowls back for more

stew. Some of the women who lined the houses and filled their shade stood, encouraging each other to do the same. Going to the *tihy*, they knelt to pick up a bowl each, and single file made way towards the men. The first women in the line knelt a second time at the first bunch of seated men, placing their bowl on the sand, but quickly the younger men stood too and formed a line of their own such that the two lines would meet and hand off a bowl in the middle between where the women sat and where the men sat. Empty handed, the women returned to the *tihy* for another bowl, and the sisters accelerated their scooping, dishing, pouring. They called for more spoons. More bowls. No cleans ones remained. A young man came asking for water. Another brought a stack of dirt dishes. Lana came asking for another plate of food. The women tended to the first two and ignored Lana. A lull in the passing of bowls left time for dish cleaning. Time for the meat to cook a little longer. Time for more young men to bring over more dirty dishes in exchange for buckets of hot rice water and small enamel mugs. Time for Lana to ask for more food a second time. A lull like the recession of a wave. The one after a series of large swells. The recession that lets the *laka* through, its sails down, out of the bay, out to sea.

They began again. Clean bowls. Clean spoons. One of the men kept count of who had yet to eat and relayed it back to a woman who responded that they needed more plates. Another man brought more plates and an empty bucket with mugs inside. The lines of men and women kept turning. The sisters kept scooping. The stew dwindled. They might not enough for that evening. The movement of the women's lined halted. The men reversed, returning with full plates. They had served everyone. The women took a couple of the bowls back, leaving the rest for the young men, who immediately sat in a circle a little ways off to eat. The line turned, shifted directions, caught up by a gust of eastern wind. A few of them went to the closest seated women, others to those farthest away. The service continued. One bowl for every three people, and they needed

water. More spoons. The rice tasted dry. More roux. Had everyone gotten served over here? A man came by to let them know that a couple newcomers had just arrived who needed food. Five of them. They sent the man back with two bowls and continued weaving through the yard where the women sat, tucked between and behind houses, wherever the most shade fell, sprawled out across the sand, stretched down the alleyways. Some of the attendees ate quickly, returning their empty bowls and leaving before the service ended. Some finished, but stayed, pretending they had not yet eating, asking for more. Some ate twice, pouring their bowls out into another and remarking on how their group had not received enough plates, or meat, or roux. The meat ran out. By the time the women serving sat down around the *tihy* to eat, themselves, they had mostly beans and bones in their plates. They did not get enough sauce. It lacked salt anyway. Lana still asked for more, so somebody gave them some rice and beans. The buckets for Jôsin's pigs overflowed with uneaten rice. Discarded bones speckled the yard. In the sand, clean, hard, and white.

Cleaning quickly followed eating. All of the bowls, mugs, and spoons passed through basins filled water and soap. They dripped with oil, stuck with grease. Only two half empty packets of detergent remained to clean everything. Even the sponges soaked with stew fat like clay and wax. On the ground, a couple of women went through four table high stacks of large pots, scouring them with sand until they shined as if never used. The *tihy* needed sweeping. The tarp drooped, but it only needed to last through the evening. After tonight, in the morning, they would bury Nenibe. Out across the water. Not everyone cleaned. Most sat together chatting. They would not sleep this long passed noon. They wouldn't play *ramy*, saving for the night's game. They chatted, relaxed, waited out the few hours until the time to start the rice cooking came again. Cilivia's mom did not stay long. They could open the store for a few hours that afternoon. Hitô's mom spoke loudly, though few listened. They drank more than usual over the last few days, attending to the

dead, throwing away sleep for them, singing all night. Now, they railed against something and made sex jokes just quiet enough for only the women spread out around the yard to hear. A couple of people responded, egging them on with insults and jabs. They went back and forth until somebody yelled for all of them to quiet down. Like that, they lolled through the rest of the early afternoon.

At three, they began again. They relit the logs from that morning, replaced the pots, clean and again filled with rice and water, on the stones that, like the logs, had not moved, and they sat back down. Soon the yard would fill again. Some of the same women might come back, but mostly those who had sat with the other dead, to the North, they would come. They would come to sit, to work, to attend, as those they attended had for them time and time again. They did this work diligently. Only bad people did not attend, did not sit, did not do the work. Simple people attended. They did the work for each other, each other for them, them for each other. They kept time to the boiling of rice water and the growing number of houses in the yard with their sides adorned with attendees. When the sun dipped behind the *voanio* trees so that shade covered all of the sand, the time had come for the service. Some concern returned over whether they had enough meat for everyone gathered. They began.[11]

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They cleaned again. Only this time, the last time, they moved the stacks of wood, the stones for holding the pots. They moved the table on which the had wasted dished. They moved the *tihy* into the yard closest to Nenibe, readying it for the night, the last night. They called over their spouses and brothers to take down the tarp, to take down the mast that had held it up. They moved the cooking pots back into their homes. They did the same with the bowls at spoons. They swept the yard, digging a hole in which to bury the ashes, cigarette butts, and empty, aluminum, snack bags, only to find those very same things already buried there from another funeral. They left the bones. In the sand, clean, hard, and white.[13] The bones, all that remained when they left the yard as the sun set. Empty. It had done its work.[14]

Night covered the courtyard where Nenibe lay, its darkness held at bay by the canopy of tarps. A chorus of voices accompanied it. When had they arrived? Together, perhaps. The last

purple glows of the setting sun, the first silent call to which all subsequent hymns responded.[15] Who first heard that call? Who first responded with a long call of their own? Leaned up against the house to the East. Their whole body covered in layers of blankets. Barely distinguishable from whomever sat next to them on the *tihy*. In the shadows.[16] Them? A round, heavy, jolt from somewhere within the growing crowd of men to the North. The one in the red shirt, maybe. Or the owner of the thatch boutique? Them? Whoever had started that night's antiphon, their voice now blended in and out of all the others such that the question mattered little like asking the exact moment when the sky turned from day to night. As soon as one hymn ended, a beat, barely a breath, and the next would begin. Women carried hymnals, flipping through them for hymns they might have forgotten.[17] They called out the numbers of the hymns or the first lines, waiting for the chorus to answer, for the next song to begin. And so it went. On and on. One song turning to the next. Swirling and twisting through the clumps and crowds of mourners. That unquiet night. Lana sat alone in the middle. An empty circle surrounded them. They hollered and belted out notes, their voice rising above the others. Occasionally they whipped from one side to the other causing those closest to them to flinch and giggle under their breath. They too offered up songs to the dark, but as with the other rhum drinkers, nobody returned their call. It did not stop them. Even as others drifted in and out of sleep, a person could always count on rhum drinkers to sing through the night.

Over by the small fires where large cauldrons of coffee and tea cooked, a group of young and drunk men boisterously played *doma*. From time to time, one or another of them interrupted the flow of chatter to lend their voices to the chorus or to take a drag of a cigarette. One of them who won fifteen thousand or so stepped away from the game for a moment to see what went on at the *ramy* tables. They did not have enough to risk the high stakes table. The third round just started on the other table. They did not catch the first round though, so they would have to wait another

full set of three after this one. How much to play? Five thousand. The crowd around the *ramy* tables had grown. Not all of them wanted to play, but between the glowing heart of the chorus and the *doma* game that marked the last tarp before the open sky, the *ramy* tables pulsed with the coziness of day spilled over into night, with the excitement of throwing away sleep muted by the demands of death, with the movements of hosting, with the silent satisfaction of a well played hand, with the determination to not succumb to tired eyes or warm sand. Should they want, anyone could leave, go home, get warm in their bed, go to sleep, just for a couple of hours, lulled by the hymns they had left. They could, but they did not. They huddled together. They sat next to their children sleeping in a row under thick blankets, every so often tugged in one direction or another to cover toes or elbows that escaped. They sang. Sipped tea, or coffee, or most often rhum. They pulled their winter coats up around them. They dealt cards. They heckled other players. They would stay up through the night, throw away sleep, keep company to the dead. One last time. Until the morning.

The first round came. Players rotated out and into the game. A visitor, a sister, shuffled the cards. Holding the deck in one hand, they pulled at the cards with the other, slapping those that came out back into the others such that most ended up on top of the deck. They did it four or five times. Some people consider three sufficient, but nobody pressed them to hurry. Extending their hand to the right, they offered the deck to cut before dealing, counting under their breath. *Iraiky… roa… telo.* Returning to *iraiky* when they got to ten. The players picked up their cards, some one by one as they arrived, others all at the end. A couple of them counted. Fourteen. I have thirteen. I have twelve. Just give them your last card. No, not possible. They already picked them up. Everybody tossed their cards back into the middle. If anyone felt relieved, they did not say so. Some muttered under their breath about how they had had seven cards in hand or two jokers. The

visitor dealt the cards again. Everybody counted. The previous winner began play, turning over the card they had placed face down under the deck to reveal an eight of spades. Jokers: red eights. They drew the first card from the deck, glanced at it, and placed it face up in front of their neighbor with a flick of their wrist.

Cilivia's mom sat behind Hitô's mom, watching over their shoulder.[18] They had a joker that they slipped behind the queen of diamonds. They also had a queen of clubs, a ten of diamonds, both nines of diamonds, a seven of diamonds, a six of spades, a five of hearts, both fours of clubs, a two of spades, and a two of diamonds. In that order. Mavina's dad passed them an eight of spades. They picked a card from the deck. A king of spades. They passed one of the two nines of diamonds. Cilivia's mom looked up as a new hymn began. They joined in. Hitô's mom did too. The visitor as well. *Mipetraka agny ambony.* Mavina's dad passed a king of hearts. Hitô's mom picked the two of clubs. They passed one of the fours of clubs. The moved the three twos to the left of their hand, slipping them behind the queens. They only needed a jack of diamonds to get seven. They did not need the king. If they got a queen of spades then they would have three queens. What use for the king then? What use for the king without the queen? Mavina's dad passed a queen of hearts. Hitô's mom took it and passed the seven. A place at the high stakes table opened up. Cilivia's mom asked for their change from the low stakes table so they could go play at the other. Not possible. No change. Give them back the 5,000 and they can get 2,000. Where? In their house. Not possible. No matter, leave it. Somebody else took the place at the other table. Mavina's dad passed a four of heart. Hitô's mom took it and passed the six of spades. The visitor got seven. A quad of sixes and eight, seven, six of diamonds. Before the round came back to Hitô's mom, the turn ended. The woman from the North had two jokers but also wanted seven.

The woman to the left of the winner collected the cards and shuffled them. The winner cut

the deck. The dealer dealt the cars. Thirteen. The winner turned over the face down card revealing the joker, red queens, and play began again. Cilivia's mom had regained their seat behind Hitô's mom. A *doma* player momentarily occupied it after Cilivia's mom had stood to go to the other table. The man, drunk, did not stay long, though, so Cilivia's mom watched over shoulder again as Hitô's mom picked up their cards one by one. Ace of hearts. King of clubs. Three of spades. Nine of hearts. King of hearts. They placed the kings faced down on the ground. Eight of diamonds. Six of spades. Queen of hearts. They placed it down with the ace. Five of clubs. Five of spades. Down went the fives, the six, and the three. Nine of clubs. Down. Three of hearts. Down. Nine of clubs. They collected all of the cards back into their hand and organized them, slipping the queen behind the kings. King of hearts, king of clubs, nine of hearts, nine of clubs, six of spades, five of spades, five of clubs, three of hearts, ace of hearts, eight of diamonds, nine of clubs. An alright hand. Mavina's dad had already passed them their first card, a queen of clubs. Hitô's mom drew from the deck. They passed a nine of clubs, adding a three of clubs between the five and other three. As the chorus's last note dissipated into its own resonance against the air, the voices of the *doma* players rose to meet it, filling any possible silent lull. Lana laughed a rejoinder. Their voice crackled, strained, and slurred the barely recognizable first notes of one of the more popular songs. Nobody joined them. Mavina's dad passed a nine of hearts. Again the woman drew from the deck. An eight of diamonds. They passed it. Sitting next to Nenibe, leaned up against the house to the Northeast, Tantine sang over Lana. Other voices quickly joined. A seven of diamonds from Mavina's dad. A seven of hearts from the deck. A seven of hearts passed. The cards turned. Passed. Drew. Few of the players spoke much, though a couple of them sang. A couple of onlookers commented from time to time. Cards turned. A queen of spades, a four of hearts, an eight of clubs, a four of hearts, an eight of diamonds, a nine of spades, a six of spades. Nobody had gotten seven

yet. They played silently, passing cards, drawing cards, throwing cards.

The tea and coffee boiled. Peterô's mom stood from the high stakes table. They needed people for serving. Over by the pots, a couple of women already filled small enameled metal mugs on trays. Binô's mom went to serve. As did Hitô's mom, handing their cards to Cilivia's mom, who insisted they had not seen anybody else's at the table. The women took trays and began weaving through the seated guests. They bent low, balancing the trays in their extended hands low so as not to offend. *Azafady*. *Azafady*, they said softly as they stepped from one empty swatch of sand to the next before finding a place to kneel. *Dite?* They held out their tray to each person in the small group they knelt beside. When everyone had taken a mug or expressed a preference for coffee, the woman stood and gently stepped their way to the next bunch of attendees. Again, they knelt. *Dite?* Again they offered the tray. Again some took mugs and others did not. When they tray emptied, they made the round again, crouching to collect empty mugs, which they returned to the women by the boiling cauldrons. Once refilled, the woman took the tray again through the crowd. *Azafady. Azafady*. *Dite?* They served everyone in this way, the singing men, the rhum drinkers, the *doma* players, the *rami* players, the mothers, the children who had not yet gone to sleep, the singing women, the visitors, the owners of the land. People needed to drink because they sang for a long time. It dried their mouths and made them tired. Once the service ended, Hitô's mom returned to the *ramy* tables. Cilivia's mom still played, but the other players had switched in and out. Which turn? Two. Did I win? You got seven. Who won? Delicia's mom. The singing had not stopped, though some voices had dropped out to sip their tea or coffee. The chorus continued. Taking the place behind Cilivia's mom, the woman joined it. They did not belt the hymn. It flowed softly from their breath, almost a hum.

As the night drew on, the chorus grew louder. It echoed through the streets, beyond the

tarps, as if singing itself back to itself. Calling and returning across the village. Only as the volume rose and rose, two hymns became distinct, breaking apart from each other as they came closer together. Between the attendees the singing continued, growing to welcome the arriving voices, whose own hymns soon overtook the night just outside the courtyard fences.[19] They paused. Silence fell. Someone hushed the *doma* players. Cilivia's mom passed a four of spades after drawing a jack of clubs from the deck. The outside chorus resumed, and the first of them stepped through the gate. Like drops of water turning to an afternoon rain, they entered, filling every empty patch of sand, sitting tight together to make room. Mothers nudged the blankets under which their children slept. Some chastised their children for sleeping in the first place. Groggy eyes and heads peeked out, slumping into a sitting position to make room, pulling the blankets tight around them or tugging them from whomever did. If the *doma* players did not actually quiet down a bit, the newly arriving chorus certainly drowned them out. They reinvigorated the yard, making it seem as if the hymns before had been only a gentle whisper or skipping stereo. They barely paused between songs, stringing together the most popular, singing vigorously their commiseration. *Ambony ô. Ambony e. Mipetraka agny ambony.*

A man stood as the last hymn ended. *Azafady. Azafady*. They began to speak in a calm, steady voice.[20] With the singing quieted, the players' jokes and jabs came flooding back in until somebody hushed them. Quiet. Quiet. Somebody speaks. Even once they had calmed down, some even turning their attention to the speaker, the man's talk remained barely audible to them, out where they played, on the edge of the night. Did they need to hear to know? How many of these had they already heard? Still, the *doma* players hushed and turned their attention for the first time towards the middle of the courtyard. The cards continued to turn at the *ramy* table. In silence. Seven of hearts. The man's voice rose slightly as they explained how both groups would stay up

through the night. Three of diamonds. The speech continued, as if spoken only to a single person or intimate circle. Jack of hearts. A woman put down seven, six of diamonds, spades, and clubs, and jack, queen, king, ace of hearts. They passed a five of hearts. The man spoke on. Queen of spades. A couple of words drifted through the air to the ends of the yard. A two of clubs. The soft cadence of speech turned into a music of its own. Nine of hearts. A quiet respite. Two of spades. Respectful company. Five of spades. What we do. King of diamonds. The man sat back down, and immediately, the courtyard filled with singing again.

A gust of wind from the South caught the tarps, causing them to lift and billow. A second tea and coffee service began for the guests. *Azafady. Azafady. Cafe?* Little room remained to navigate[21] between everyone, so as the women came through carrying hot trays, the guests shifted and squeezed together. They passed the small, blue-rimmed mugs down from person to person to reach a singer squeezed between others with no nearby empty sand. Once finished, they passed them back to the woman with the tray who remained fixed in what little place they had found to kneel down. A group of men inebriated on rhum called for some coffee for themselves. Visitors giggled. Somebody passed them a mug, though they neither sang nor came with the visitors. The request could not go unrecognized. Those who ask, receive. All the while, the singing continued, one hymn bleeding into another, the songs they had sung before, and now, through this night. *Ambony ô. Dite*? *Ambony e*. *Cafe*? Jack of diamonds. *Mipetraka agny ambony*. Five of spades. *Dite*? *Cafe*? Three of spades. *Ambony ô*.

The other man stood. *Azafady. Azafady.* The singers again fell quiet. Someone hushed the *doma* players, again. Again, the *ramy* continued in silence. A responding *kabary*[22] began. In the same intimate voice, the man spoke from the circle of hosts that had formed as they moved closer to each other to make space for the visitors. Maybe they began with the thank yous, but their voice

drifted off as Cilivia's mom turned to listen to the whispered jabs at the drunk men asking for coffee. They held back laughter, returning their attention to the orator. Or perhaps to their cards. The turn lasted for some time. Nobody had seven yet, and few cards remained. A player reached out and spread the rest of deck out. Six cards. They would return to them. One more turn around the table. They drew a card, but did not get seven. They reached over and spread around the cards of some of the other players. Both jacks of spades had dropped. The same with the sixes of hearts, the two of hearts, the aces of clubs and spades, and the kings of diamonds. Not many moves left. They passed the ace of hearts. The next player drew and passed a joker. As did the next. The next got seven. The next two had already taken their cards. The first also passed a joker. The second passed a five of hearts. Only one card left. A ten of clubs. Not enough. The man finished speaking and sat down. The singing resumed. The rummy bet doubled, and the first turn began with the same players. Those waiting on the sides would wait a bit longer. Who had won the turn before? Some of guests had already began to stand and file out of the courtyard. They continued to sing. The hosts stayed silent, but as the guests wound their way back home, their song became fainter and fainter like water dripping from a cracked bucket, emptying, drying.

The yard did not stay quiet for long. *Ambony ô*, called out the man in red. *Ambony e*, the rest replied. The children crouched back under their blankets and drew close to each other, until they again turned into an indistinguishable, covered heap. If they had not kept playing throughout, the *doma* players would have gone back to playing. They could go back to playing without getting hushed. Their numbers had dwindled as the night made its way towards day break, so though the players still left grew louder, they seemed only like a dim murmur out by the embers under the empty cauldrons. The hosts sitting in the yard filled back in the empty sand left by the departed guests, stretching out their legs, moving in from perimeter. A few had dosed off, leaning up against

a house or fence. Nobody roused them. Lana had never moved from their spot. There they remained, still occasionally flopping from side to side, still singing intermittently with everyone else, intermittently singing their own hymn, ignoring giggles and disapproving glances. At the low stakes table, another turn finished without a winner. They doubled down again. This time around, nobody had dropped seven either, so it too had doubled. The low stakes heightened, and the players quieted in concentration as Cilivia's mom dealt the next hand. To their right, Hitô's mom turned over the joker, a four of clubs. They had a good hand: Ace, king, queen of clubs, eight of hearts, seven of hearts, seven of clubs, five of clubs, four of clubs, four of diamonds, five of diamonds, two of diamonds, nine of spades, queen of spades. Another player had seven in hand, though. The pot stayed in play, though. Having reached 8k, the real game still lay ahead such that the silence continued as the cards passed from hand to table, table to hand, deck to hand, and hand to table again.

After a couple rounds of hymn, people began to stand, drawing their sarongs tight around them. Their time had come. A few of them would stay behind, those who slept, the elderly, the children. The players at the high stakes rummy table already stood, but those at the other had not yet. The pot had not dropped, and nobody would risk losing it. Even those with bad hands kept turning their cards, building something out of very little. One of them commented that they only just got three cards. Another that their split had fallen. Let's go. Let's go. They would not, calling out for those already leaving through the gate to wait. They would not wait either. The cards turned, but the night turned too. It came running up on those cards, from over the shoulders of the players. Some players would not go. They did not speed up the play despite the incitement of those that did. Too much money rested on this hand to let somebody else take over or maybe to miss out on the excitement, but the courtyard had nearly emptied out. Singing still echoed back in from those

that congregated just beyond the gates. From elsewhere in the village the beginning of the procession might still go unrecognized without the sight of that empty yard. A dangling moment. Not yet altogether there. The *ramy* players took advantage of that lapse in time's judgement, moving their cards as only people who know can. Still, the pot would not fall. Stubborn. The cards for some fell at the hands of others. jokers lay deep in the stack. The rounds slipped by, and the sounds of the procession drifted further from them. Now, they marched on in those empty allies between courtyards of the living, calling out to their destination and calling back to those that lingered behind, a reminder of their responsibility. Cilivia's mom drew a card and immediately passed it. A three of diamonds. The tension rose. One of those deeply buried fours had surfaced. Unless their deck could only yield the dregs of jokers. Only Hitô's mother did not reach for the joker on the top of the deck. Instead they picked up the sludge to the audible shock of the other players and those onlookers who had not already left with the procession. They did not know *ramy*. One round later, they won the turn with a seven of spades. They immediately stood, asking for their money. Others stood as well. Some to leave. Some to snag a spot at the table in the third turn. The house did not have change, but Hitô's mom demanded. Let's go. Nobody else would wait this time. The house did not have change. Forty thousand of that 10k belongs to me. They could not wait. A debate over the count erupted at the table as the women ran out into the night.

They laughed as they ran passed the market trying to figure out which way the procession had gone in time to catch up. The thrill of the empty night and cold sand exaggerated the rhum they had sipped from a bottle passed around earlier in the night, now empty too, lying somewhere in that cold sand. This way. No, this way.[23] They sing down this passage. This way will get us there quicker. We should get there with them. Let's sing too. *Ambony ô. Ambony e. Mipetraka agny ambony*. They made their way single file down a passage singing, that one towards Tantine's house.

They could not yet see the group that must have passed through this way they discerned. They began to hear their singing, though, over their own. They laughed more as they tried to switch songs to match the group off in the distance, picking up the pace as the destination drew closer faster than the procession. Then they saw them. Straggling youth catching a moment to flirt in the dark. Let's go, let's go, they joked as they caught up to them. Now singing in unison with those that went on ahead of them, they quickly overtook the budding couples. A couple of them teased and joked as they did, causing the youth to avert their eyes or jest in turn, to the delight of their intended partners. As distance grew again between the procession and those eager for the intimacy of night, they continued to called back and forth to each other. Shouldn't you sing? I don't know this song? You didn't learn in church. I forgot it. Come up here with the rest of us and I'll teach you.

The passage broke open onto the beach, where the moon shown in the even shades and highlights of its waxing and waning, neither flooding the ocean in a day-like glow nor obscuring it in blinding darkness[24]. The tide cinched the beach to where it could not hold many more people than the passageway. It reached capacity before the *ramy* players came out into it, so that the straggling youth did catch up to them after all, at least those of them that had not dipped into another alley along the way. Though some of the young men pulled at the wrists of a couple of the young women, urging them to turn back, to slow down, the women began to sing, joining their mothers and sisters in the crowd outside the gate. When the song ended, they paused. Took a beat. Took a breath. The wind sang in their absence. In the silence that waited for them inside the fence. Someone called, to the singers or to the hosts, only the singers replied and stepped through the gate. Small groups of attendees dotted the large courtyard. Dispersed across the sand, they barely resembled the group that had filled every inch of Nenibe's wake. They did not need to move to

make room for the newly arrived guests, who filed into the middle of the yard and sat down. Though numerous, they did not fill the yard either. Only their song could do that, rousing drowsy eyes, strengthening them to make it through this last night.

Few people turned towards the growing crowd. They moved little. Nobody nudged the blanket piles that remained motionless in the sand, immune to the new voices in the yard. Not everyone had succumbed to the aging night, though. With the pillars of the houses as their backbones, the oldest mourners welcomed their guests with the resolutely opened eyes of years of sleepless nights. No dark corners hid *ramy* or *doma*. The silence between songs filled not with playful banter but with the silent noisiness of the night, the chatter of stars and wind. They pushed it out, that silence, the silence of the living, who sleep comfortably through it. Tonight, a night for the dead, had no room for silence or sleep. Dead need company, in that place between above ground and below, between the living and the ancestors, life and time. Underground, they keep company with each other, as one. Above, they neither wake nor sleep, and they demand the living throw away sleep with them. There, they sat, those living, throwing away that sleep with resilience or rhum. The night resisted them, losing momentum, slowing, dragging its feet towards a morning that retreated as if a fishing net had caught the sun just beyond the horizon some time the night before. The tarps drooped like the eyelids under them, almost grazing the heads of those that still sat up, and the white of the lights streaked dull and hard across drained faces, washing them out even more. Washing them far out to sea. Far out across the water to the island. That island to which they would turn in a few long hours to bury the dead. They sank, slumped, allowed the night, the light, the waves of song to wash them out, to carry their bodies off. To sleep. Then, with the next breath, the next crest of the chorus, they returned. Their eyes lifted to find the courtyard no longer empty. No longer alone. Here, their guests filled the yard before they had all slipped off to the sea.

Their singing sounded of recent *ramy* wins, of a stolen kisses, of grief, of exhaustion, of company. Their singing sounded of return, of shared loss, of revival. Their singing that only an hour earlier sat silently listening, now it silenced in turn. Awoke in turn. Brought strength in turn. Filled in turn. In turn, a man stood with the last verse. *Azafady. Azafady*. None of them would sleep that night, host and guests a like, for they all attended the dead. They had spread the word around the village that a death had occurred in their family, and they had heard the word from others that a death had also occurred in another family. So, they visited each other in the night, both groups mourning, sleepless, doing the hard work of caring for the dead, of insuring they would not lie alone. One person alone cannot do this work. One family alone cannot do this work. So, as their hosts had before, they had come now, for they heard the word of death. They heard the song, and they thanked their hosts for it, offering them that same support in return. Tomorrow morning, they would bury the dead in the tombs across the water. The protestant priest would give a short sermon in their courtyard at 5:30 a.m. The man sat down into the rising song, that came up so fully this time that it roused some of the sleeping hosts from under their thick, blanket, cocoons. Their ridged sleeping bodies crumpled in ways only the living can, supple, and soft, like the bows of still green trees. They sat without words, and propping themselves up with arms or against houses, moved seamlessly from sleep to waking.

Deep in the recesses of the largest house's porch, another man stood after the third hymn had already begun. At first, nobody heard their soft excuse me. Instead a ripple moved through the crowd from those who first noticed the only standing person in the yard through to the back rows of guests up against a pile of uncut wood towards the far east of the yard. Quiet down. Quiet down the ripple said. Someone speaks. The man did not wait for silence. They had almost finished by the time all of the guests had ceased singing and turned their attention towards the speaker. From

over by the wood pile or next to a small group of drunk hosts, the man's words went unheard. Unlike the songs that dared to enter every house across the village as if they came from just outside their doors, the man's words did not leave that courtyard. Measured and easy, they did their work unpretentiously. The work needed doing. They did it, with care, with the steady hand of experience and time. Their voice equally steady, they persisted from the shadow of the porch. The group of drunk men, also practiced in the work of the dead, quieted for a moment, suddenly aware of the silence around them. It did not last long. They began to sing even before the guests, who sitting next to them, had to look back to the speaker to confirm that they had not stopped speaking and that the time to sing had not arrived. The rhum drinkers did not look around, singing only for the dead. Between the speaker and the singers, the guests sat, quietly, listening, giggling, smirking, whispering, waiting, still.

When their turn came to sing, they did not join the rhum drinkers. The speaker's voice slipped into silence, but not many people heard. They kept listening to the silence. A moment or two passed before the first call came. Against the clatter of cups, trays, and cauldron, of women getting the service ready, of shuffling to make room, the call came out. As the chorus rejoined, nobody could hear the rhum drinkers anymore. Only those closest to them might have noticed the slightest dissonance caused by the rise of the rhum drinkers' songs as those of the guests fell. They echoed each other, over by the lumber. Rising and falling out of sync and together. They pierced through. Then covered each other. The crackled, scratchy caw of the one complementing the robust, hearty rigor of the other. They sang together, simultaneously. Calling to the dead. Returning to each other. They sang together even as the guests stood. They sang. As the yard emptied step by step. They sang. As the one grew farther and farther away, the other grew more audible in the now open sand, though less audible to the guests weaving back through the alleyways. Until only

silence echoed between them.

The *ramy* players no longer found themselves towards the back of the group. Somewhere in the middle or towards the front, they returned to their game, intermittently singing with the group and joking with each other. Spread out in single file lines through narrow corridors or in groups of a few people making their way across the central square. The singing never stopped though different voices came and went from it as the whole group moved across the village, some returning towards Nenibe, others returning home, taking advantage of the night's movement to sneak off to sleep. The group dwindled and dwindle, but the *ramy* players kept on. The singing kept on. Arriving back in the courtyard, they saw that the numbers there had dwindled as well or fallen asleep. Over by the now snuffed out fire pits, the *doma* tables sat empty. Most of the players that had stayed behind had gone home. The rest had moved to the *ramy* table, where cards still turned. Five of clubs. Six of clubs. Six of diamonds. Queen of hearts. Under the tarps, mostly blankets remained. Under those, only the night knew who remained. A few people still resisted, persisted, singing, sitting. They too supported themselves with houses and rhum, hardening them, holding them up against the weight of their eyelids.

Hitô's mom went straight to the *ramy* table, reminding the house that they still had 8k in the game. Another player said they had it in the *iraiky aly* tucked into their sarong. What turn? First. They sat down behind the player with their money and watched the game over their shoulder. As did the other returned players. A few of them wanted to start a high stakes table up again, but not enough players agreed. Hitô's mom said they would play at a high stakes table if they could get their money, but the other player did not agree. Nobody had change for the bill. The owner of the cards might want to play high stakes, but they had not come back yet. They broke off from the group while heading back to go buy more rhum, *pecto*, and *gouty*. When they finished, they would

play. Maybe. The talk about the new table continued as the cards turned. How many players did they need? Could they play seven or ten with only four players? What about three? The owner of the cards arrived as the second turn finished, but they did not go straight to the game. As they passed out the new refreshments, the card players continued their debate. Where did Cilivia's mom go? They would play. What about Mavina's mom? Why don't they just start a second low stakes table? The third turn came to a close, so as the debate continued, the players switched in and out of the game. Hitô's mom gave their money to the house. Unless they won it back, they would not leave this table for another. They dropped out of the debate and turned their attention to the cards. The cards turned.

They turned until morning. Long after the singing had slowed to an occasional flare from a group of still upright rhum drinkers or a solo wail to hold back tears from sister still vigilant by the house from which Nenibe would soon emerge. The cards turned, like the earth dipping eastward to the sun, the spines of the forest trees reaching out to cut the net open to release it. There it came. Not enough to light inside the houses or under the blankets. Not enough to reach around the house to the porch where the rummy players turned the cards. They played on until one of the sisters stood. With eyes that had not closed, they rose with the sun. Time had come. They went into the house to prepare the body. Blankets stirred. The cards stopped turning. The house distributed money. Peterô's mom rekindled the fire and started the water boiling. People needed tea, coffee, and *menakely*. People who filled the courtyard as if they had never left in the night. Everyone emerged. The sand filled. The grains slipping between the little space that remained.

Nenibe had already come out of the house, in the casket the men had finished the day before, covered in a plain white cloth with embroidery details around the edges. The pastor, who arrived early, began speaking immediately after making their way through the growing crowd.

Standing next to Nenibe, they read from the bible as more and more people came to the yard. The tea service had halted when the pastor began speaking, so those who arrived late, though they arrived early, might not get the strength they needed. Still drunk, still tired, or still hungry, the night stayed with them. As the sermon went on, a few of the attendees snuck around the back to where they had played *doma* the night before. Perhaps between the end of the pastor's speech and the departure of the dead, they would have time to eat their tea. Slowly a crowd grew around them as more people arrived but could not find a place closer in. Though the morning wind carried the pastor's voice away from them such that they could not hear if it had fallen silent, they saw the end of the sermon in the standing of many of the attendees. Some of them stood as well, their fists clutched around rolled up 100 Ar and 200 Ar bills. They joined the procession towards the bowl sitting next to the casket. They moved slow, crunching their necks, backs, and knees under the lowest sags of the tarps. They wound through the yard in the passage made between the seated by those who had stood first and already returned to seating. Continue in a line even after they had released their hand above the bowl, they only broke from the flow to regain their seat as others took their place in waves rising and receding through the yard until everyone had passed Nenibe for the last time. The pastor left. By the cauldrons, a few people asked for tea and *menakely.* The rest of the yard sat. Still.

Nenibe's spouse stepped out of the house to the South. A bend in their back from courtesy, age, or pain, they made their way through the crowd. Arriving at their spouse's casket, they reached out across it for the palm string in the outstretched hand of their *velahy*. As their hand clasped it, they had already turned and begun walking away. They did not stop walking. The palm string broke. Their marriage ended.[25] Over.

The brothers lifted up the casket and set off walking at a quick pace with the ground falling

away under their weight, covering their feet. The courtyard emptied out, person by person, till only sand and houses remained, covered in bits of charcoal, cigarette butts, and empty, aluminum snack bags. They made their way through town, the casket barely in view over the bobbing heads of the crowd as they tried to keep up. The pace, steady but not hurried, set the beat for the chorus of women's voices rising up in swells and reaching out to lap at the heels of the head of the procession. *Up, above*. A voice cried out. *Up, above*. The rest responded. As the hymn echoed through the group, a few women began to speed up their pace. Room on the *laka* fills up quickly. People who want a spot must push ahead. They did. The *laka* with Nenibe filled first. It had already set out for the island by the time most of the women arrived at the shore. Those that wanted to go with it, pulled up their sarongs and, wading into the water, squeezed their way onto *laka* that sunk slowly into the wet sand until they could not move.

Another *laka* waits down the shore. Nobody moved. They had a place in this *laka*, a sure thing even if it could not move. We can come back for you. Somebody needs to get out. Just to push off. Cilivia got out. Immediately, whatever place they had occupied filled with the relief of the bodies around it. Binô's mom too. Another deep sigh. And Mavina's mom. Out of the way. Out of the way. The women made their way down the shore to catch the other *laka*, if one even really waited down there. Nenibe's casket rocked over slow waves in the distance,[26] now almost half way to the other shore. The *laka*, though just taking off, could still catch it or even overtake it. They had strong, drunk men rowing hard and the songs of women like northern wind.

Most people did not go.[27] People cannot always see a place on the *laka*. People have children to take care or work to do. Some people just do not want to go. Some people go. Some do not. They might not want to go that far. It depends on the person, if they want to or not. Some people go. Some do not. For no reason. It does not matter. Maybe they have young children. If the

family does not have *laka*, they have to ask other people for them. Sometimes, they do not have enough *laka*. Too many people in *laka* can lead to problems. It just depends on the person. Some people want to go. Some do not. Cilivia's mom and Hanicia's mom did not go. They walked home in the mid-morning sun, quiet and chatting.

II

"Those that'll tell don't know, and those that know won't tell"
(Da Mayor in Lee 1989).

"Saisir les ombres afin d'y dépouiller les mots lourds de silence et d'oubli. Y découvrir des mots tus et ensommeillés.

Dire. Nommer. Être…"

(Raharimanana 2003: 192).[28]

They played *ramy* every day.[29] Everybody did. In every courtyard. At every *kermesse*. Under shade, behind house, behind curtains, sheets, tarps, in the sand, at a table, on a *tihy*, a piece of cloth, a blanket, a sarong. They played for five hundred, for one thousand, for five thousand, for fifteen thousand. They played without seven, with seven, with seven and ten. It depended on the players or the place. They always played with seven at the *kermesse*. If they had money, they played with ten. If they did not have money, they only played for five hundred or one thousand. They used to play for 10,000 Ar, with seven and ten, in the little house where Peterô's mom used to sell rhum. A long time ago. Maybe three or four years ago. It made them all poor. Made them fight with their spouses and sell all of their furniture. Except when it made them rich. When they won, they won a lot of money, 100k, maybe more. Hitô's mom sold their living room to keep playing the game. The whole set, a palisander living room. They sold it to Hanicia's dad. They had a matching bed too, but the man did not want it. They sold it to Delicia's mom with the sheets and matching curtains. Two days later, they started winning again. They won so much that they wanted

to get their furniture back. Delicia's mom agreed because they needed money to play, but Hanicia's mom did not. The woman barged into the house and tried to take the furniture. Their brother forced them back out. They tried again and again, every day, for days. After a week, they kept trying, until Hanicia's mom had had enough.

That afternoon, as the cards turned, nobody spoke except Hitô's mom. They railed, uninterrupted. Didn't they know that the woman's father had given them that living room just before they died? They had in their house their whole lives. A good set. From town. Handmade. Palisander. Now everybody wants leather living room's, but a person cannot get better than a well made, palisander one. What else? It matched the bed. The same person made them both. Their father ordered them together. The cushions matched the bedding and the curtains too. A complete set. They didn't even want the bed or the curtains. What for? Just the living room? What for? At the end of the third turn, they tried to join the game, still ranting. Cilivia's mom won that round with three eights, three kings, the jack, ten, nine, and eight of spades, two tens, and a joker. Their sister, to their right, didn't want to leave the game though. They had gotten both seven and ten with four queens, three jacks, and a staircase in diamonds. They didn't want to let Hitô's mom in the game. They talked too much.[30] They won too much. They drank too much. It didn't matter. They had to leave the game. Hitô's mom sat down at the table, wiggling their way in, picking up the cards dealt to Delicia's mom. They did not miss a beat in their complaints. Now they didn't want them to play. They must fear losing. They didn't minding taking the woman's money and their furniture when they lost, but now that they won, nobody wanted to let them in. They just wanted their money and their living room. The living room from their father. Who needed that more than them? Not Hanicia's dad. Not their mom either. Did they not already have a living room? A leather one? Maybe they broke it and wanted a better one for cheap. On and on they went. They won seven

on the first turn and ten on the third turn. They won the pot twice in the next round. They won twice in the next round, but left when Cilivia's dad won to their right.

Waiting for the next round, they continued talking off to the side, though most people only paid some attention, muffling laughs at some of the more clever insults and accusations. The fault belonged to the wife. The man would have taken the money and given back the living room. The woman did not agree, though. They just wanted to spread problems. What for? Maybe they wanted problems for their spouse to get them back from spending all their money on lovers instead of their wife. How would a living room help them with that? They should have taken the bed.[31] Hanicia's mom came charging through the gate as those words met quiet smiles from the *ramy* players. They went straight for Hitô's mom, grabbing for the woman's hair. They reeled and stumbled to their feet, still talking. The players leapt between the two women, holding Hanicia's mom back, who tried to get around them as Hitô's mom who fell back to the ground beginning to whimper. They only wanted their living room back, and now they got hit for it. Hanicia's mom went for them again, slipping passed the those that retained them. Go ahead! Hitô's mom invited a beating. They did not get it. Hanicia's mom fell to ground, overcome. Their body stiffened, and they cried out in agony. As the other women crowded around them, splashing them with water, and slapping the woman's rigged arms and legs, Hitô's mom kept talking. The women urged them to stop. To quiet down. To leave. They tried to make Hanicia's mom drink, but their jaw remained clenched. Eventually they regained presence, drenched in water and sand, needing help to bend their legs and stand.

A long time before. They kept playing for fifteen thousand for some time after that. Not anymore. They did not have enough money to do so, anymore. Now, they played for five thousand, without ten. Less ambiance, but they still played every day. Peterô's mom still bought the cards

and ran the game, every day. Their child, who did not go back to town after burying Nenibe, kept count. They stuck each person's bid in the sand and wrote the turns they'd played under the bills. They did it the same way their mother did. Only, they let everyone who asked play on the first turn. Those who ask, receive. Though true that too many players asked for the turn after only playing one round, Bastieno's mom could not refuse their sisters and mothers. Their mother complained every evening when their take disappointed them, but they did not take over from their child. They chastised them. They carried on about the players who asked for too many turns. During the game, they said nothing, though. Like their child, they would not refuse.

Bastieno's mom played well, that day. They won 6,000 Ar. They had won more but lost a lot of it to Cilivia's mom. The woman played for only a couple hours, leaving right after winning. They had a schedule. Leaving, they took with them a lot of the money that had turned through the game that afternoon. It would not come back that day. Maybe tomorrow. Today, the other players could not win their money back. They played on until sunset. They played to play. Bastieno's mom did well. The rest did not. Peterô and Mavina's moms played for almost an hour after the other players went home. They called over Mavina to hold up a cellphone flashlight as the day's light dimmed and the moon's still dragged its feet to the East. They could win some of their money back even though the pot had slimmed with only three players still turning cards. Mavina's mom played first. They drew the three of hearts and passed it. Peterô's mom drew the three of spades and passed it. Bastieno's mom drew a card, kept it, and passed the two of hearts. Mavina's mom picked it up and passed the three of diamonds. Peterô's mom drew the queen of clubs and passed it. Their child drew and passed the ten of diamonds. The other woman drew and passed the seven of spades. Peterô's mom picked it up. They immediately passed the ace of hearts, keeping up the pace to not lose their lead against the setting sun. That ace of spades made Bastieno's mom win the round.

Four of diamonds, three of diamonds, two of diamonds, ace of diamonds, ace of hearts, ace of clubs, a *quadry* of kings, and *try* of sevens. The other two spread their cards out. Mavina's mom only needed one more card to win, a seven of clubs, a queen of hearts or diamonds, or a jack of clubs. They still complained as Peterô's mom gathered up the cards. They shuffled them, pulling a clump from the bottom of the deck and slapping it back into the rest so that some card jammed their way between others and most ended up on the top of the deck. They held out the deck for the next player to cut, dealt the remaining cards, and the game began again. Again. Again. Mavina teetered back and forth. The cell phone drooped in their hands. Their mother reprimanded them.

The cards turned. They played again. And again. The money turned as well. Just enough to keep them all playing. Peterô's mom won the next turn. Then Bastieno's mom won again. Mavina's mom won the next two. The next two went to Peterô's mom. Bastieno's mom won after that. With only three players, they did not play with seven. They only won 3,000 Ar with each round, five thousand of which they themselves had bid, so in the end, they only won 2,000 Ar with each round. That money kept turning. From one woman to the next, it turned like the cards. Nobody kept count, they each put their bid in the middle of the table as they played and picked up their winnings as they made them at the end of each turn. The same money, the same bills, shuffling between them, sometimes squeezing its way into the hands of a new owner, but mostly ending up back where it started. All they could do, play until the cards turned out right, the money shuffled just so, so that last 6,000 Ar would end up with them. They played until the cellphone battery died. Again, tomorrow.

They did like that. Every day. They played *ramy* every day, after lunch. Between meals. After work. Between work. As work. Sometimes, they played in the morning, but not often. They had too much work in the morning. Some work took only a few moments, dishes, sweeping. Some

took time but ended early, selling *dite* and morning food, weighing sea cucumbers. Some took all morning, laundry, selling rhum, running a store. Rarely did enough of the women have enough time in the morning to play. They worked. Mavina's mom nearly filled the west-most part of the courtyard with wide, plastic tubs, some with cracked rims or large cracks running down the middle, others nearly brand new, from the last *kermesse*. Beside the tubs, they piled the clothes they had to wash that morning, theirs, Cilivia's mom's, and Delicia's mom's. They poured out half of one of the jerrycans their spouse had filled that morning and ripped a packet of *Kline* into it. Starting with the heavier clothes and the dirtiest, they scrubbed and scoured them with the brush until the water turned brown. They hung the clothes up on hedges and poured the water under them. They filled the tub again and started the next batch, moving the clothes through the different tubs, washing, scrubbing, rinsing. It took them all morning. Each time the cracked tub filled to spilling with cleaned clothes, they took them to the rope they had criss-crossed across the yard, propped up with long, smoothed, branches when they sagged too much between houses. They filled quickly as well, so the woman hung some of the clothes over the sheets and *lambahoany*. By the time the tub spilled over again, the sheets had dried and some of the lighter clothes with them. They took those down and hung the newly cleaned ones up, then went back to cleaning the rest. Their child knelt beside the tubs, insisting that they knew how to clean as well and should get clothes of their own to clean. They grabbed at some of the clothes, pulling them through their fists to make suds and a squishing noise, demonstrating how well they washed. When the woman finished, they plopped the child into one of the tubs and filled it with some of the still clean water. The child played more than they washed themselves as their mom set about cooking rice for noon.

Hitô's mom made their way between the hanging laundry, ducking under tank tops and passing along the aisles made by the sheets. *Hôdy*. They knocked on the side of house as they

approached. *Mandroso*. The visitor dropped into a low squat, their feet flat on the ground but the whole rest of their body hovering just above the sand as if they neither arrived nor left. They had not come to chat or gossip, sprawled out on a *tihy*, as they often did. They needed rice. Just a *kapoaka* or two. Whatever the woman could spare. Or money to buy the rice. They did not have enough to cook for their children. They felt very hungry. As they said it, they sat all the way down, tucking their feet back and to the side and placing their hand on their lower abdomen.[32] The other woman did not respond. They kept cooking, not looking at their guest as they went about their working. Occasionally, they spoke, but only to instruct their child to clean their legs, or back, or to stop pouring water out onto the sand. Hitô's mom kept talking. They just wanted a little rice to cook. They already had *laoka*, some sweet water fish, but no rice. They did not have any money to buy it. With so many mouths to feed. They all needed rice. Living people must eat rice. For strength. For force. They needed the strength to make all their children grow strong. *Andao*. They went into the house and brought out a couple of *kapoaka* of rice in a small basket bag. Their guest took it, holding the receiving hand with the other hand.[33] They thanked their sister, and left to cook.

People had noticed that the woman's belly looked bigger. They talked about it. Just a few comments and questions in hushed tones or when people found themselves alone. They ate more, did they not? Did they eat oil? A person saw them eat fried fish, maybe. They still bought *menakely* each morning. Though, the last two days, they had bought *mokary,* instead. Their husband left on a their *botsy* months ago, though. Did they have a lover? So the talk went. People talked. Every now and then. As people do. They always talk. Talk just to talk. Talk like that. It did not much matter. All that talk. It had no value. It did nothing. Made nothing. Just talk.[34] Still, people talked about the woman. Gossiping, hypothesizing, eking out new details, withholding the information they already had. Nobody knew anything, but they still began to form a story with all of the pieces.

Though nobody showed their cards, but a good player could figure out which cards their neighbor wanted from the ones left face up on the table.[35] Even if it meant reaching across the table to spread out the cards in front of another player, uncovering some of the cards dropped early on in the game and covered over by the subsequent play in a long turn. The woman must have gotten pregnant[36].

It showed. They also confirmed it, themselves, some time after all the talk[37] had begun. Standing from the *ramy* table at the end of the round, they tightened their sarong. They wore it high, almost up to their breast, not across their waist as they had before. As they opened it briefly, in the process, the other players caught a better glimpse of their belly. Indeed, it had grown. The woman arched their back a bit, and placing their hand across their lower abdomen, pulling in the sarong to hug the new roundness of their body, they laughed and exclaimed *be voka zaho.* With whose child?[38] With Cilivia's dad's. Did they not all already know? The two of them slept together every night. Or maybe every noon. Whichever Cilivia's mom did not want. After all, as big wife, they chose what they wanted. Now Cilivia would have a little brother. Hitô's mom pulled at Cilivia's dad's arm, though the man did not move, continuing to play the cards as if nothing happened around them. Come. Come, the woman insisted. Their lover preferred to play cards, though, to the delight everyone watching.

Delicia's mom had also gotten pregnant. They told[39] most of the other women after the first month or so. They did so quietly, tucked into other conversation during lulls in morning work or evening visits. Nobody had much to say about it with the exception of a couple of hushed commentary about how Zaina had not even started school yet. They started walking less than a year ago still. Delicia's mom liked children, though. They already had four, and they had the money to take care of them, with the store. Delicia's dad worked hard as well, selling fish and sea cucumbers in town. They also liked children. They wanted more and more, each time. The same

love of children, both of them. It surprised none of them that they would have another child so quickly. They wanted another boy because they had only had one of the four. Maybe this time. If not, maybe next time. They would most likely have more later. Like people before, who used to have eight or nine children. Now most people only had two or three. Maybe they couldn't afford it. Where did all the money go? Madagasikara has so many resources, so much wealth, but the people don't have any money. Where did it all go? People worked hard, but they couldn't find jobs. They did not need money to have kids. People could always find a way to care for their children, but they did not have children when they spent their time looking for work, looking for money. So they said. Only politicians made money, these days.

Every year, big boats from *andafy* come fishing in the ocean. The *vazaha* say that the boats do not have permission to come so close to the shore. They complain to the gendarme and call the government, but the boats come every year. Always from elsewhere. Not Gasy boats. Gasy people do not even work on them. They catch up all the fish in big nets,[40] so that fishing at the same time as those boats gives a worse yield than fishing during the strongest southern wind. When the *vazaha* complained, they sent someone to the boat. They had permits to fish close to the shore, permits from the government, from the capital. Like that, the politicians, the highland politicians, stole the money and the wealth from the rest of the gasy people and sold it *andafy*. A person could make money net fishing. They could make money diving. They could make money collecting sea cucumbers or octopus. A person could make money buying fish, drying it, salting it, and selling it in town. They could make money selling sea cucumbers or octopus.[41] People could make money all these ways, but a person could make the most money selling permits straight to the big boats and selling contracts straight to governments from *andafy*. Only politicians had permits and contracts to sell. They sold the fish, sea cucumbers, and octopus with permits from the highlands,

from the capital. They sold them without ever knowing the sea.

A long time before, people from the highlands had come to the village.[42] Before, everybody lived elsewhere, across the water, on the island, near the dead. For that reason old families still bury their dead on the island, but visitors bury their dead to the West or to the North. The people from before eventually moved to the land where the village still sits. They built their homes there. They fished and lived on the sea. One day a war came. People from the highlands who wanted the land. When they came, all the Vezo got in their boats and went out to sea or to the islands. Every person left.[43] The highlanders followed them. They went far our because the tide had emptied out the most of the bay. They did not know the sea. They did not know the tides. They did not know how to swim, or use *laka*, so they went as far out as they could. Only they did not have knowledge about the way the water comes back in. It came back in from behind them, wrapping them in, cutting them off from the shore. They did not know how to swim. Those from the highlands, who did not know the sea. They died. Caught in the ocean by the rising tide. They drowned. The ocean did not want them either. Their bodies did not go out to sea. They washed up on the shore or came out where they had died when the tide went back home. Nobody buried them. They died far from their land, far from their people. Nobody buried them in this land that did not belong to them. Their bodies rotted on the shore. For weeks. The whole village stunk of rotting corpses. Nobody touched them. Even the ocean left them to rot, in the sun, on the sand, lapped at by the comings and goings of the sea.[44]

Eventually, people from the highlands would find other ways to steal the land, like *vazaha*[45], with politics, with papers, with contracts, with surveys. People from before did not have a lot of money, but they had many children. *Vazaha* stole them as well, though. Now, people had neither money nor children. Only a few, who really loved children had eight or more. Where would

they all live? The different courtyards around the *hazomanga* had filled up over the years. Before, only the *hazomanga* had concrete floors and a tin roof. *Dadilahy*'s children only built thatch houses. Their children built wood houses in the place of those thatch houses. Their children built new wood houses or fixed up their parents with concrete floors and tin roofs.[46] The courtyards filled with each generation, and now little room remained for the next. How could eight children live in one house? How could they build new houses for each of them? Many of them moved away, for work, for marriage, for youth, but the land belonged to all of them as it had belonged to their parents and their parents' parents. Sometimes people fought over the land. When somebody expanded a fence too far or built a wood house on land that had belonged to someone else. Only, they never fought for long. The fences expanded. The wood houses stood. Family should not fight, and they definitely should not fight over land that belongs to all of them. People could have three children or eight if they wanted. Every person had that freedom[47]. Children mattered most. They would share the land, as people always had. What good would it do them to make plans now? It would only serve to take away the freedom of those children, to makes plans for them, plans they would have to live by, plans they would have to adjust to, plans that would become obligations, problems forced onto them. Plans only lead to problems. To forced head aches. To roadblocks and obstacles from the obligation to stick to the plan.[48]

Josina had also gotten pregnant. Not for the first time, but their other children died.[49] The first one died still in their womb. The next one died after five months. It got diarrhea. It stopped nursing. They took the baby to the hospital, where the doctor gave it two shots. They did not work. The baby died. Some people whispered. They blamed an animal for the death of the baby. Josina saw an animal the night the baby got sick. In the corner of the house. It came towards them and the baby in the bed. They screamed. They called for help. They tried to protect the baby. Their

mother heard them first. They ran to them, took the baby out of the bed. Others joined them, awoken in the night by the cries. They crowded in the room and in the doorway. One of them took the baby, so that Josina's mom could climb into the bed with their child who had not yet regained consciousness. They propped them up, poured water on them, slapped their arms and legs. The woman came-to quickly, crying out for their child. They sobbed and screamed. They had seen animals before, from very young. They cried in fear for some time with their mother cradling them. The animal came for their baby, still soft and weak. Their grandmother prepared medicine for the mother and baby. They burned herbs and sprinkled clean water around the house. The woman and the baby wore the medicine on their foreheads for a week, but the baby stayed sick the whole time. People blamed the animal.

Others blamed the cold.[50] That year, the South wind blew strong in the dry season. Cold air filled the nights, so even adults slept under layers of thick blankets. All day and night, they wrapped the baby up to keep it warm. They rubbed coconut oil all over its body. The oil created a barrier, keeping the heat in. They rubbed it on the baby's head before putting on a little knit hat. They rubbed in on the baby's chest and down its arms, under a t-shirt, a long-sleeve, and a sweater. They kept the baby wrapped in blankets, and at night, they went into the house early as the wind picked up, shaking the branches of the palm trees like a toy rattle. The baby still got cold. It got sick. Vomited. Stopped nursing. They took it to the nuns' dispensary for medicine. The baby got better with the medicine. It ate again. It stopped vomiting. Only, a few weeks later, it got sick again. People blamed the cold.

Now, they had gotten pregnant[51] again. They did not tell anybody, but any person could see. They must have had only three or four months left. They did not eat any oil, not even *mokary* because they needed a little oil in the pan to cook. They ate rice and drank tea in the morning. They

ate fish cooked in salted water, corn, and manioc. They tired of it, but persisted. They did not accept food from anybody or shake hands with anybody. They went to a woman who knew medicines, a woman who knew lots of things.[52] They did not tell anybody, but any person could see. If they cared to look, but they did not. They did not need to pay much mind to the woman's pregnancy. Only the woman knew.[53] Only they carried the baby.

Josina came in the morning to buy *dite* and *menakely* from Cilivia's mom. They lived far, with their father's family, so they did not come to play *ramy* in the afternoons with the other women. From time to time they did, but not every day like the others and less now that they carried a baby again. When they lived in the *hazomanga* before giving birth the last time, they could play *ramy* every day as well. Now, they lived too far. Sometimes they would buy used cards from Peterô's mom to play in their own courtyard. When they would give birth again, they would move into the *hazomanga* again. They would play in its courtyard again. Until then, they only came in the morning for *dite* and gossip. Every morning. They did not always get news, but they always got *dite*. Every day. Every day.

Cilivia's[54] mom sold food in the morning. A tall, white woman with strong hips. They had learned how to cook in town when they worked at a hotel run by *vazaha*. They learned to cook *vazaha* foods for tourists. They met a man there. A *vazaha*. The man knew the owner of the hotel. They lived near to each other *andafy*. In a big house. Not in Paris, but to the South. The man took Cilivia's mom there to marry them. They lived their for almost a year. They gave birth to Cilivia *andafy*, but the woman did not like living there. The man had other children from another wife. They fought with Cilivia's mom. They did not take care of Cilivia. The woman did not work. They did not know their neighbors because nobody spoke with them. Their spouse bought them things, but they did not give them money. They did not let them control money. They did not go out much,

either, because the man worked all day and only wanted to watch canal+ after work. When the woman's own mother died, Cilivia's mom took the child and went home for the funeral. They did not go back. The man used to send them money for Cilivia, but their children made them stop. The woman moved into their mother's house. They used the money from the *vazaha* to put in concrete floors and a tin roof. In the morning they sold *dite*. Every day, they sold out. They worked hard. More so when the man stopped sending them money. They struggled for years, alone with their child. In their mother's house.

Cilivia did not remember their father. They only saw the man a few times after they returned home. They would take the child on vacations when they came to the island for business. To the North. To the East. Cilivia had seen more of Madagasikara than their mother, but they did not remember. Their only memories of a father all involved their mother's new spouse. Cilivia's mom met their new spouse a few years back, playing *ramy.* The man came up from the South to stay with their brother who weighed fish. They lived to east because the brother had married one of Civilia's mom's sisters. One day, the man came looking for a *ramy* game because they had heard of one in the yard of the big blue and white house. They played every day. Cilivia's mom did too. Soon they started coming for *menakely* in the morning too. The man liked the woman because they could see that the woman knew how to work hard. The woman liked the man because the man had money and played *ramy.* Many women had spouses who did not like *ramy,* who did not want them to play, who fought with them over money, who beat them if they caught them playing. Cilivia's mom did not need a man like that. They wanted to play *ramy* every day. They wanted freedom. The man raised the child, paid for their school, for their clothes. They kept working with their brother. They worked on the boat, transporting the fish to town that their brother weighed. They went back and forth, gone for days at a time. They made good money. Cilivia's mom sold *dite*,

every morning. They both played *ramy*.

The woman woke up with the first cock's crow, before the sun. When in town, the man helped them to start the fire on the charcoals and heat the water. The woman prepared the dough the night before. They needed to have everything ready in time for those who went out to sea early in the morning. They needed to have everything ready for those went out collecting sea cucumbers. By eight in the morning, they had sold out. Every day, the same clients came. Some only wanted one or two *menakely* and a small cup of tea with three spoons of sugar. Other clients sent their children before school with a basket or a bowl to fill, with big mugs to hold tea for a whole family. Every morning, they had to wait, when too many of them arrived at once. This one wanted ten. That one wanted eight. Another wanted four, but they came last and preferred to wait for a fresh batch instead of taking the few that still remained in the big bowl on the table, cooled off from earlier that morning. Children waited quietly, meticulously counting each *menakely* when their turn came and then counting the money they received in change with the same diligent concentration of someone who had learned from a good scolding. The adults that had to wait, or chose to eat at one of the tables set up for them, chatted together. Josina chatted with them while they waited for eight *menakely* and five *dite*. Every day, the same clients, the same wait, the same count. Cilivia's mom sold out by eight in the morning.

After that, they still had work to do. They rinsed out all of the pots and bowls used that morning and stacked them on the kitchen table. Cilivia would wash them when they got home for lunch. They had also swept the house before going to school. Mavina's mom washed their clothes. Not every day. Not even once a week. Sometimes, many weeks went by and the clothes piled up. Cilivia washed their own clothes for school, but Mavina's mom washed the whole pile. Still, work remained for Cilivia's mom every morning. They needed to cook lunch, so they needed to buy

ingredients. They had not gone to the market in months. They could not remember the last time. Women passed by every day with fish to sell. They could always find a child to go to the market for them. Mavina's mom sold tomatoes, onions, and garlic when they or their spouse went to town. The woman could always find an alternative to going to the market. They did not need to go themselves. They had seen it many times before, always the same. Beef, if a person sold beef that day, to the left at the entrance. Further down the table, women sold fish. Rarely, nobody at all sold fish. Other times, they sold only a few fish, from the day before or otherwise unappealing. During the rainy season, they sold crab and shrimp in addition to the fish. If a person sold pork, they sold it further down the table, in the far corner, next to the back door. Across from the pork, Cassindra's mom had set up a restaurant. The rest of the tables, sold vegetables. Always tomatoes, garlic, onions, ginger, carrots, green onions, bell peppers, potatoes, manioc leaf. The same every day. Some months the market filled with mangoes. Other months, a person could find apples and bananas almost every day. White beans, red beans, Lima beans, black eyes peas, peanuts, lentils. Every day, the same. Squash, baobab, leeks, coconut, plums, Cilivia's mom did not need to go to know[55] if a person did or did not sell them at the market. They need only ask a young woman on their way back from the market. Nothing new ever happened at the market, so they did not go. They did not need to go, they needed something new. They wanted something new. They looked for something new.

Hitô's mom still went every day to the market. Mavina's mom went with them when they did not sell their own tomatoes. Cilivia's mom asked them to buy for them on most days. They called out as the two women passed by. Did they go to the market? They always got the same answer, but they asked every time nonetheless. Even if the woman did not go to the market, if they went on a mission, if they went to a lover, they would not have said. They always went to the

market, and they always bought something for Cilivia's mom if they asked. In their youth, before they had children of their own, they bought things for Cilivia's mom too. Now they had children, but they still went to market. Maybe[56] they had lovers who lived near by or maybe they liked going far. Only they knew. Hitô's mom always came back with a bottle of rhum. Mavina's mom always took Mavina and left the child with their in-laws, who sold at the market. The child could have gone alone, though, and Hitô's mom could buy rhum from Hanicia's mom, next door. Maybe they still lived their youth. Only they knew.[57] In any case, they had the freedom to do as they pleased. They went to market every morning. They bought for Cilivia's mom whenever they asked.

They wanted fish that day, but they heard from other women coming back from market that nobody sold that morning. As they tidied up after their morning service, they kept an eye out for anyone carrying fish through the alleyways, but the morning grew old. They would not get fish that morning. They called out to Delicia as they came back from the market carrying a couple cuts of beef. How much had they spent on the meat? Did they see any good fish? How much meat remained? Did their mom still have Lima beans?[58] They gave them ten thousand to bring back a *kapoaka* of beans from their mom and tomatoes, garlic, and onions from Mavina's mom. They would ask Hitô's mom to get them some beef to add to the beans. As they waited, they poured three *kapoaka* of rice into the *sahafa* and set about picking out the pebbles. They sifted out the husks into another *sahafa* for the ducks and poured the clean rice into the pot to rinse and cook. They spent the rest of the morning cooking lunch. As it stewed, the woman sat alone on their porch, listening to the radios blaring and the younger women laughing across the courtyard.

After lunch, everybody slept. Some hard headed children tried to spend the hour before going back to school playing instead, but their mothers called to them from inside their houses. Living people must sleep. *Ramy* players did not sleep, more hard headed than children. Peterô's

mom, who always ran the table, came first. If other players had not already arrived, they waited on the *tihy*, almost closing their eyes. If only a few players arrived, they called out to the others. *Fa lera!* If they still did not come, the woman sent a child who had not yet heard the call of their own mother to go knock on the doors of the missing players. They might start playing with only three players, but Peterô's mom often did not want to. They could not collect on turns with only three players. With Bastieno's mom staying with them, they did not have to wait for players. Hitô and Mavina's moms came quickly, or did not need to come at all, having eaten with Peterô's mom at noon. With four people, they could play. Cilivia's mom never took long either. Delicia's mom came later. They did sleep, unlike the rest. Usually, a couple of other people came to play. Jôsin's mom came from time to time with Josina. Bîno's mom. Cilivia's dad played when they came to town. Delicia's dad. Bîno's dad. Sometimes new players joined for months at a time, but then stopped. Sometimes a brother or a sister would come from far, over the summer on vacation from school, to visit a parent, for a family event. They played too. Some of the younger women came just to watch. They did not know how to play. They sat off to the side or looked over the shoulder of one of the players. Babies, toddlers, and young children came as well, in their mothers' arms or following close behind. They lapped at the backs of their mothers who sat in a circle, unmoving, around the cards. They would come, clinging, hanging off of necks and backs, swirling their way between players, under arms, and into laps. Then out again they ran, taking with the smaller babies who could not yet walk. They played in the sand surrounding the game with the extra cards that their mothers threw their way each time they opened a new deck. With scraps they found in the sand or with each other, they played, until they came rushing back in to hang on necks or return a crying baby to nestle in the lap of its mother like a tide pool as the waves retreated.

Josina came to play that day, without their mother. They came more often now that

Bastieno's mom had come back to town. They grew up together. Peterô's mom raised them for a few years, but when Bastieno's mom left for school in town, Josina moved back home. Now they only saw each other when the woman came back to visit. For family events, for vacation, to visit their mom, when they gave birth to Bastieno, now. Such similar children, and now so similar as adults. The same laugh. The same spirit. The same heart. Sisters of the same kind. Josina came to see Bastieno's mom every morning after getting *menakely* and every afternoon. They played *ramy* even though they did not have a lot of money. They knew how to play well. Well enough not to lose too much. Bastieno's mom did not go to visit Josina, though, because they lived too far. If they had another reason to go to that part of town, they might have stopped by to visit on the way, but they had not seen a path there yet. It did not matter. Josina came by every morning and afternoon. In the morning they came on their way back from buying *menakely*. In the afternoon, they played *ramy*.

When Delicia's mom joined the game, their *lambahoany* wrapped high under their chest, Josina laughed. A table of pregnant women. *Azafady*! That did not include Peterô's mom. Did they not have a child on the way, as well?[59] Just a belly full of rice and money. Did they not love the children of their children as their own? And what of Hitô's mom? They got rid of their baby last night on the beach. How big? Big! They could barely get it out. How hard? A rock. All dry rice. No *sosoa*. Did they cry? Ha! Not at all. They did not want any more kids. What about the father? Who now? Cilivia's dad? Cilivia's mom would not let them take the baby. It smelled too bad. Aahaaaa iiiheeeee. The women cried out in laughter, clapping their hands and shaking their heads. Not possible. True. Their baby died. Maybe if they won, the baby could come back. If they lost, they could ask the winner for rice, and the baby could come back too. What if they the did not win or lose? Then the baby would stay dead.

The woman's spouse did not like when they drank rhum or played *ramy*, but they worked on a *botsy.* When they came to town the woman did not play or drink. They did not even watch the game. They stayed home. They slept at noon. In a warm bed. Before, the man came back more often. Now, they came back only once a year, in the rainy season. They worked further north and never came this far south on their routes. Before, the woman went with them on the *botsy*. Before giving birth to Hitô. They did not drink back then, except on the 26th and for New Years. On the *botsy*, the men brought twenty jerrycans of rhum. They drank every night. Drank for the ambiance, to stay warm. Some of the women drank too. When they had Hitô, they stopped drinking and moved home. The man did not come back for almost two years. They worked so hard. Some said they would not come back, that they had taken another wife, that they had other children. They came back, though. They always did. When they did, the woman did not play *ramy*. They did not drink.

As the women around the *ramy* table laughed, a telephone rang. They all fell silent, directly, as the woman answered.[60] *Alô. Tsy misy. Ino vaovaonao?* The cards turned in silence. The woman moved the four of spades from their discard pile over to the side and placed the five, three, and two of spades along side it with a *try* of jacks. All the while, they balanced the phone between their ear and shoulder, speaking casually. No, they did nothing. Just sat at the house. Just them, alone. Bastieno's mom lay down their winning hand. Four aces, three eights, three sevens, and the seven, six, five, and four of clubs. Hitô's mom, still on the phone, collected all the cards and began to shuffle them. What kept making noise? Oh nothing. A child playing *tantara*. After dealing, they signaled to Mavina's mom to take their hand for the turn. They moved away from the table to finish the conversation. They needed money from the man. For Hitô's school and a dress for the 26th. No, they had not paid the school with the money from last time. They had to go to the hospital

for their foot. They got three shots, fifty-thousand each. How much does that leave? They walked all the way back to their house to finish the conversation as the cards continued to turn. Mavina's mom played the next two turns for the woman, but took their place when the next round started. The game did not last long passed sunset that night. As night arrived, a couple of the women went down to the beach together. Others left even earlier to have time to go to the market, hoping to find fish that had come in that evening. They had seen some passersby carrying *Lanora* and *Venja*. When only three players remained, the game ended. Again, tomorrow.

They ate in the night, dark shadows in the sand in front of houses. Sometimes they ate in silence, speaking only a few directions to their youngest children in low voices. Sometimes they talked across the yard to each other. Sometimes they brought their food to each other's *tihy* and ate together. Some did things one way. Others did things another way.[61] The bars, theater, and dancehalls already covered the air with music and Kung Fu loud enough to drown out their generators cranking and sputtering. They broke no silence, stepping in only to replace personal radios shut off as portable dvd players and televisions came on. The yards cleared bit by bit, first of children, then adults. They all went inside. At ten, the generators died, and with them the music and movie, so the yards fell silent until the morning. Eventually, only errant, wild dogs and spouses sneaking off to lovers remained, crossing the sand in silence. Like that, the day went. Nothing new. Just the same, same every day.

How many months had gone by, and the woman's belly had not grown? People began to doubt whether they carried a child or not.[62] Nobody stopped giving them food when they asked for it, though. They still ate oil, but they had done the same with their other pregnancies. A hard headed woman. A hard woman. They had given birth before many times. They knew how to do it. The first time, they almost cried. It hurt. They paced up and down the house. Every time a person

came in, they clenched their teeth and smiled. They pretended that it didn't hurt at all, but when the person left, they nearly cried. A girl, the first one. Their mother raised the child. People said the second one would hurt less. They also said boys hurt more. The woman gave birth to a boy the second time. It hurt less. A strong woman. They did not clench their teeth or pretend. They danced the whole time. They joked and laughed. When they gave birth the third time, they only went to the hospital at the last moment. They danced all night and walked to the hospital in the morning. They did not cry, then, and they would not cry when they gave birth again. If they gave birth again. After the third baby, they got pregnant again, but they got an abortion. Then, they had another abortion. They had not carried a baby to term since. They wanted one, but they could not get pregnant anymore.

After eating, Peterô's mom swept the house and the yard. They borrowed a rake from Delicia's mom for the larger scraps. They raked them into a plastic basket. As they lifted it, the sand and smaller scraps fell through the holes, leaving only the bits of ripped cards, baobab seeds, and cigarette butts that the woman threw out in an old rice sack. The rest of trash, mostly bits of charcoal, they scooped up with handfuls of sand, letting the cleaned sand slip back through their fingers. They spread the little piles formed from the sifting back out across the yard. They swept the entire yard, from their porch to the fence. *Ramy* left a mess every afternoon. The woman did not like mess. Meticulous and clean, they kept the sand in their yard almost as yellow as if they had dug it up from deep below the greying top layer.[63] The afternoon dirtied again, each day, but the woman persisted. They collected flowers from around town, from Jôsin's mom, from Binô's mom, from the nuns, from their in-laws. They filled their porch with flowers, lining the house. They kept their flowers tidy as well, pulling out sprouted rice grains as they sat on the porch. Other than the aloe, the flowers served only to decorate. They wanted as many varieties as they could

find. Some grew easily, outgrowing their jerrycans within a few months. Some grew slowly and died quickly, but the woman tended to them well. Even their millionaire flourished. They kept them all on the porch, not wanting to risk putting them further out in the yard where they would feed the goats and chickens.

When they finished their morning work early, the woman went to their sister's store. They pulled up a chair on the porch with the other woman as they worked. *Ino vaovao? Tsy Misy, Maresakanoa? Tsy misy.*[64] They watched them weigh sea cucumbers, clean the toddlers dirty shorts from the day before, or serve clients. They watched them get their hair braided, or they got their own hair braided, or braided hair themselves. The woman used to get paid to braid hair, when they lived in town, 5k, sometimes 10k. They could only make five thousand at best in the village. Most of the time they made even less. They did not braid hair often, and they did not ask for money when they did. They did not want people to know that they knew how to braid really well. They did not want people asking them for braids every day. They used to braid every day. They hurt their hands. They hurt their back. When they came home, they did not want to braid for so little money. They collected sea cucumbers with their sisters. They hurt their backs, too, but they did it together. They made good money, but they worked hard. When they could not find sea cucumbers, they fished, out on the shore. They worked hard, before. Their heads worked too, worrying about money and food, worrying about their children. Now, they played *ramy.* They did not have to think so much anymore. They still worked, though.

The woman watched the other woman clean the shorts in a small basin. If clients came, they helped them, so the woman could keep working. They used to work at the store until their mom died. They learned how to keep count there. They did it well. The price of rice had gone up. It always did that time of year. One *kapoaka* cost 500 Ar. A quarter of oil cost 1,200 Ar. Cookies

cost 100 Ar for a small pack and 200 Ar for a double. The same for chips and crackers. In between clients, the two women chatted. They talked about passersby. They talked to passersby. They greeted those they had not seen in a few days. They asked for news. Nobody ever had any news. They talked about Hitô's mom. Who had fathered their baby?[65] No, they could not have gotten pregnant. Maybe they had a lover. Who? The one from before. They went south five months ago. The woman could not have gotten pregnant that long ago. Their belly had not grown. They lied. They joked[66]. They needed money. Their spouse would not send them any. They drank too much. The man must know they spend their money on rhum. They had not bought rhum for months, though. Where did their money go then? A woman[67] came by. *Salamale*. *Aia! Ino vaovao? Tsy misy.* They ran their hands through the rice, lifting it, letting it rain through their fingers. The woman sold rice near market. How much? 550 Ar. They nodded and kept on their way. Delicia's mom carried the basin of dirty water to the edge of the porch and threw it into the street. They filled it with the clean clothes and took it out back to hang them. Peterô's mom waited with the store.

Delicia came out onto the porch before their mother had gotten back. They carried their sister with them in one arm and a string of fish in the other. They hung the fish up in the kitchen and put the child down on the porch. Eight bags of rice had come in the day before on a *botsy*. The *jokera* had stacked them in the store house on a couple of wood crates. Delicia and their mother carried one down to the back of the store, that morning. Now, Delicia opened that bag. They took the *kapoaka* from the bag of rice out for sale and used it to pour five *kapoaka* from the new bag into a *sahafa*. They cleaned and sifted the rice, poured it into a pot, rinsed it, and put it to boil. Coming back out on to the porch, Delicia's mom commented on the rice husks. So many. Which rice did it come from? They went and looked in the newly opened bag. Bad rice. Where did it

come from? *Andafy.* It did not look like Gasy rice. So many husks. They pulled some into a *sahafa* and sifted it. Husks flew up into the air, separating from the rest of the rice and drifting down like crashing waves onto the porch. They could not sell the rice like this. They needed to clean it if they wanted to get a descent price. They handed the other *sahafa* to Delicia. Peterô's mom took one as well. The three women sat there, floating the rice up off the edge of the *sahafa*, watching the husks fill the porch as they separated from the rice. They continued their talk. What about the woman's baby? It made their spouse happy. They really wanted another baby even though Zaina had only just started talking. Now, they did not need to keep asking. They had not talked to each other for months before the woman got pregnant. The man wanted another child. The woman did not. When the woman first told their spouse they would get what they wanted, the man did not trust them. They wondered who had gotten the woman pregnant if the two of them had not spoken for months. They fought about it even though they both knew the truth. Living people should only fight about lies.[68] If they fight about truths, they will break up. The porch filled. Delicia's mom stopped sifting. They prepped the fish, gutting them and descaling them with a knife they sharpened on the edge of the step. Some of the scaled popped up and out of the basin, mixing in with the husks that clung like termites to their glistening, wet, sides. They wanted fried fish for noon, the good ones, with pepper. Peterô's mom stayed until they had cleaned all the rice and filled a new bag with it. They went home after. Their daughter had also made fried fish, and they wanted to play *ramy*.

They ate together with Mavina's mom. Their daughter had made coconut squash. They said that they had not seen any good fish at the market. Delicia had found very good fish. Maybe they did not get it from market. Maybe someone brought it in later in the morning. They let it go. The squash tasted delicious. Bastieno's mom knew how to cook. Josia arrived as the women finished their lunch. They gave them a small bowl of squash and what rice remained. As the woman ate,

Peterô's mom set up the *tihy* in the shade across the yard. They covered it with an embroidered sheet and dropped the cards down on top. They had played three days with those cards and their corners had begun to fray and bend. Their edges filled with dirt, and they felt like dry paper. The woman called out to Hanicia to go buy a new deck before the bodegas closed for siesta. When Binô's mom arrived before Hanicia had returned, they decided to start playing with the old cards anyway. Eventually the child returned with two decks. Where did they get these from? They had bought the wrong cards, the green ones. The bodega had already closed. What about the thatch store? Peterô's mom sent them out again. They needed to go quickly and return the bad cards. They could find the good, red ones at the thatch store. By the time they returned, enough players had come to start a second table with the new cards. The other table kept playing with the dirty cards. The woman kept count for both tables, collecting turns from both. Both tables played passed sundown, then merged into one as players began to take their leave, before dissolving at last into the night. Again, tomorrow.

Delicia's dad sat inside the store going over the accounts they kept in a school notebook. After the early evening rush of customers buying rice, flour, and sugar, only a few people would stop in for cigarettes and lighters. They might buy a cookie or two or a couple of incense sticks. They might buy *pecto* or caramels. Mostly easy, cheap things. Delicia could have managed if not for the cigarettes. They could never get the count right for the different brands, and they forgot the lollipop for 50 cents too often. Either way, Delicia could not have watched the store. Out on the porch, they cooked dinner. They cared for the toddler. They looked for young men passing by in the street. Delicia's mom sat at the back of the porch. They had not looked for men passing by in years, except to make fun of them with Peterô's mom from time to time. They sat to the back of the porch,[69] having cleared it of the sacks of rice and corn shortly after sunset. Nobody would

come looking to buy rice this late. If they did, they would only want a couple *kapoaka*. Delicia's mom sat back and waited. Every night Mavina's mom came after dark to watch the passersby. On this night, Delicia's mom had a plan.

They stood as soon as the woman arrived. Did they want to get fried fish and meat skewers together? The woman did not like eating in the street. Who knew what people put in that food! Delicia's mom insisted. Come. Come. Delicia's rice almost cooked. They fried fish too. The woman wanted skewers, then. Or maybe soup. Come. The night grew late. Hitô's mom did not want to eat street food. The woman spoke softly. They had to go get their shot. They could not tell the man, who wanted another child. They told everyone they expected a child, but they just wanted their spouse to stop asking.[70] Come. The woman consented, but they would not eat street food. Delicia's mom called out to their spouse. Did the man want skewers and *paty*? *Lasopy*? They hurried off with small bowls, headed north towards the market. They would not go straight there. As the night and busy street created a cover for them, they dipped into an alley going east. They came back, not long after, carrying two bowls of soup and ten skewers. Delicia had finished cooking fifteen fried fish and a full *kapoaka* of rice for each person. The woman would eat their dinner a little later. First, they shared the soup and skewers with their spouse, sitting together in the door of the store. They had to eat, after all, with the baby in their belly.

III

"[O]ne cannot 'unsettle' the 'coloniality of power' without a redistribution of the human outside of our present descriptive statement of the human, Man, and its over-representation (outside the terms of the 'natural organism' answer that we give to the question of the who and the what we are)"
(Wynter 2003: 268).

"As if indeed 'truth was a woman,' and he was a woman, too, knowing what not to know"
(Taussig 1999: 108).

"We ain' ignant—we jes doan know"
(Cudjo Lewis [Oluale Kossola] in Hurston 2018: 19)

After tea, the woman had still not come out of their house. The doors locked[71], the windows shut, people began to talk. They might have left. In the night. On a *laka*? Or on Jasmina's boat. Did Jasmina's boat go? One of them heard it had broken a couple of days earlier and never left town. A car also went into town early that morning. Maybe Peterô's mom went with it. Maybe they just took their daughter to the local hospital during the night. Maybe they had birthed the baby already, right here in town. Not possible. How many months along? Nobody knew for sure, but their belly did not look big enough for the time to have come already.[72] Maybe they had a problem. They had eaten oily foods late into their pregnancy, and nobody knew who might have wanted ill to befall them. Somebody should at least check at the hospital. No, they would have called out in the night if they went to the local hospital. They went to town, for safety. When the sand remained

unswept it confirmed that the woman had gone. They never left the yard unswept. They must have left in silence. At least, they did not seem to have told anyone they planned to leave. It did not matter. It only mattered that they did not know who would run the *ramy* table.

Everybody went about their morning work. They swept, opened stores, weighed sea cucumbers, salted sea cucumbers, did laundry, went to market, sent a child to market, cooked, sat, chatted. They bought tomatoes and onions from Mavina's mom, who brought them back from town and sold them cheaply. They also sold jujubes, manioc leaves, sugar, and rice. From time to time, they brought back fingernail polish, bowls, flowers, cutlery, or the latest fashions. They made a lot of money on satin bedding and lace curtain sets before new years. Their spouse's father owned a *botsy*, and their spouse worked on one. They would come home soon, from that work, because they missed their daughter who they hadn't seen since before the baby could walk. When the *botsy* passed through town, the woman went up to meet the man and came back with goods to sell. They made a lot of money that way, but they had to give half of it to their in-laws. Sometimes they gave them tomatoes, garlic, and onions instead. Their spouse's sister sold them at the market, where they had a table. They sold them for almost twice the price. The woman sold them cheaply from the window stand of their courtyard, though, and they usually sold out within a few days. If they sold manioc leaves, everybody in the surrounding courtyards ate manioc leaves as their *loaka*. If they sold jujubes, everyone's pockets and sarongs bursted with jujubes. If they sold tomatoes, everyone ate their fish sauced or cooked white beans. On that day, they only had a few tomatoes left, a couple garlic that sold out quickly, and small onions that they sold three for 200 Ar. What money they made that morning, they would double in *lôtô* that afternoon. Nenibe ran the *lôtô* game, and though they had to go far to play, a person could make more money with *lôtô* than with *ramy*. It only cost 100 Ar for two boards, and the take depended on the number of boards at play

regardless of how many the winner had. It required going early to get boards before they ran out, but they had heard from other women that they could make five or ten thousand.

Those that finished their work, came to sit with the woman by their stand, sending away any children that followed close behind, shuffling their feet to keep up. A couple of the hard headed ones did not heed their mothers' dismissals. They plopped themselves down in laps or hovered just over their mothers' shoulders. Those that wiggled around too much or played too close by received sharp reprimand to sit well or go away. They did neither or both, but whichever they did, they did not do it for very long. Between chides and tomato clients, the women sat. Quiet. Slow. Across the yard, their sister moved between basins, scrubbing in one, dunking in another. They lay some of the clothes that needed extra work out on their shrubs, those shrubs that never bloomed, always well kept by the passing goats when nobody sat in the yard to shoo them away. When the water got too dirty, they threw it out in those same flowers. A ridge of sand kept the water in, sinking it down into the ground. They cleaned quickly, stopping only to go to the well to refill their buckets with fresh water or to hang the clothes up on the lines they had strung across the yard. They might have listened to the talk of the women by the tomato stand, if they talked much, but other than an occasional question about where Peterô's mom had gone, only the sounds of neighboring radios blaring kept company for the wind shaking through the *voanio* trees. Thus went the morning until a casual comment or a profitable sale turned into an opportunity for a story or gossip. The mood shifted.

One of the women had gone on a *botsy* some years back with their spouse. They ran into bad weather south of Maintirano. Still far out to sea, they spent a week in the rain. They couldn't cook. The boat tossed from side to side. They had to go out in the pouring rain to relieve themselves, getting thrown back and forth across the deck. Another woman, who also accompanied

a spouse, got sick. The whole week, they vomited and writhed in agony. They could not get dry or warm. That woman had come from inland, a Sakalava[73] maybe or a Betsileo[74], to marry a Vezo man. They did not know the sea,[75] but they worried their spouse would take other women, so they went on every trip. They got so sick. For the whole week. Vomiting. Their hair a mess. Easier to have let the spouse sleep with someone else than to go on all of those *botsy* trips. They all laughed. The woman telling the story confirmed that they did not get sick,[76] but they did suffer. They couldn't go outside without getting drenched, so they didn't go outside. Sitting in the cabin all day and night, tossing back and forth. They could barely walk when the rain finally let up and the winds died down. They stood to demonstrate, tottering back and forth in the sand like a rhum drinker, their legs bowed and wobbly. When the boat docked, that other woman still vomited and the narrator still could not walk straight. They teetered towards the edge of the boat, but in trying to climb out, their knees gave out and they crumbled to the ground like a dried sarong fallen off of the clothes line. Letting out a sigh and wistfully gliding their head and eyes east, they collapsed in the sand to the rising laughter of the other women. Aaaaaaahaaa Iiiiiiiihheeeee they shouted in unison.

They all bought fish from a woman coming by on the way to the market. They cleaned, scaled, and cut them together in the yard, keeping the conversation going. They would all cook the same sauce, buying the largest onions left and what tomatoes had not yet bruised. As much prepping as they could, they did together. The stories of seasickness flowed. Of eating salted fish for days. Of running out of rice. Or water. Of dry, crisp waves. Of wet nights. Of long distant memories stretched so far out across the sand and sea that they resembled a passing *botsy* on the horizon. Popping up out of the swells of time,[77] moving with them while standing still at any given moment of attention. One by one, the women went home to start their rice cooking and, then,

returned. No need to miss conversation to sit by cooking rice. Children came home from school in time to take over the work, anyway. They did. Those that could. While their mothers sat in the shade, leaned up against the house,[78] in the sand. So went that morning. The same as every morning.

When they came back to the yard in the afternoon, the windows of the house sat open. The curtains billowed and whipped in the doorways. The woman stretched out on a sarong behind the house in the dull, gray sand. Where had they gone? All morning. To town? Impossible. They went north. Looking for men. All morning. Maybe they made plans for that night. Maybe they found a lover to keep them warm through their spouse's long absence. Would their spouse ever come back? How many years now? For now, the woman lay alone. In the shade. Waiting for the afternoon. For players. For *ramy*. For the everyday. All came. Like every other day. The afternoon came. *Ramy* came. Players came. Person by person. Joining them in the shade. As if their doors had never locked. As if shut windows had never provoked whispers of an imminent birth. Nobody needed to buy new cards or go play *loto*. They need not go anywhere.

The grains of sand slipped between their fingers as they lifted their hands, leaving only bits of charcoal, cigarette butts, and empty, aluminum, snack bags. Again, they scooped from the pile of sand and trash they had swept up. Again, the grains rained back down. Again, they scooped. Again, the grains. Scoop. Grains. Scoop. Grains. The soft, hot, morning sun came across the sand towards them. Those bits of charcoal made the ground so hot, black in the sun. Fire in the earth. The grains of sand slipped through their fingers, and they threw the rest. How clean the sand looked every morning. They could dance in it. When they replaced the sand floors in their house with concrete ones, little bits of charcoal and wood squeezed to the top as the dried[79] concrete. They erupted at the surface, leaving little pot marks. The wood bled a deep red when squeezed, staining

the concrete. Though they poured water over the floor as it hardened, the blood kept returning. Little bits from the sand. Impossible to get them all out. Every morning, they sweep[80] the sand.

Finished, they sat down in the shade against the house. Nothing else to do. They waited for a child to come by or a younger woman on their way to the market. They wanted fish or squash if available. They saw their sister across the way getting ready to wash clothes. They heard the drunks filing in for morning rhum at the bar next door, and they listened as their other sister weighed and bought sea cucumbers. Two kilos at 2,000 Ar. One kilo six at 3,000 Ar. Seven grams at 4,000 Ar. How much is that? 600, 1,000, and 10,000 Ar. Do you have change? Hold on. They weigh the next person. 400, 3,000, and 10,000 Ar. Your 3,000 is with them. A person could make a lot of money selling sea cucumbers if a person knows how to get them.[81] They wanted to go get sea cucumbers. They used to go, in their youth, before. Go out getting sea cucumbers in the low tide. They had fun. All of them out there, together. Hard work, but they did it together. Now, they don't have friends, but they want to go. They took their daughter with them as a child. Did they remember? Their child did not remember. That past lay blurry before their eyes.[82] The child lived far away, now.[83] In town. They sold sim cards and cell phone credit on the street, wearing a bright yellow and green vest. They married a man from the North, who also lived in town, maybe working as a gendarme. They would move back here soon. A job would open up at the police station. They just needed to finish getting their paperwork ready in town.

The two women sat together in the shade.

They waited for a child to come by or a younger woman on their way to the market. They wanted fish.

Hitô's dad came into the yard, pulling a pig by a rope. A *vazaha* pig. It shrieked and resisted. The man tied it up to a fence post and set about their work. The woman watched them dig out three

holes in corner of the yard. They broke apart old doors, windows, a part of the chicken coup, the long post that the women used to prop of drooping clothes lines. They hammered out old rusty nails, or hammered them down if they would not come out. They plunged the shovel into the sand again, between the fence and the three holes now filled with hardwood posts and sand packed so tight that even the strongest person could not dislodge the posts from it. The further down they dug, the fresher the sand, until they cleared away all of the charcoal-grayed top layer. Over the damp, yellow depth, the man erected a platform from the old scraps of wood they had amassed. Around it, they hammered the remaining planks between the posts, between the posts and the fence. Above them, they affixed a woven mat, caked with mud and weather passed. Even pigs needed shade. This one would give birth. Pigs could make a person a lot of money. They called out to a couple of *jokera* drinking rhum at the bar to come help them lift the pig into the pen.

As the man set out to leave, the woman called them over. How much did their work cost? It depended on the work. To replace the roof with a tin roof. They needed to replace some of the boards of their house as well, and they wanted a termite treatment on the lower half. They negotiated prices. The baby would arrive soon, and they wanted the house repaired before. Did they already have the materials? When would the baby come? In two months. They talked over the details for some while as the sun made its way under the awning of their porch. When the woman they had sent to the store came through the gate carrying *taboara*, the man stood. They had to go. *Andao. Andao*. They could do the work. *Eka. Andao*.

One morning, when their child had gone up to their in-laws, when they had finished sweeping and washing the dishes from the night before, when nobody gathered in the neighboring courtyard and their sister weighed sea cucumbers, the woman sat alone, as they often did. The same. The same.[84] They sat on their plastic chairs, stacked two or three high. They sat in the sand,

on a *tihy* or sarong. Sometimes the laid down. Sometimes they leaned against the house. They sat in the shade, until it turned to sun. They sat still. They still sat, when the time to start cooking came. Still, they sat. They would go ask for food later, not wanting to cook that day. They stayed[85] sitting instead, looking at the *hazomanga*, whose southwest corner made up the Northeast corner of their yard. Most of its walls no longer stood, and only half of the roof, rusty, cracked and leaky. Of the walls that still remained, the wood had turned an almost white grey like the concrete on which they stood, smooth and chipped from use. People did not live there anymore, but when they came to town, they always stayed in the half that still had walls. For visits, for marriages, to sell fish, for funerals, for *lakroa*, to buy fish, for births. Brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers. All those who had gone far. For marriages, for work, to catch fish, to sell fish. They all stayed in the house when they needed to. It stayed standing. There in the sand. Unbreakable. Seeing their oldest brother outside the house, the woman called them over. The man sat with their sister. Do you see, the house needs work. It needs a new roof. It needs some of the planks replaced. They agreed. With what money, though? They discussed the price. They discussed the work. The house needed work if people wanted to keep staying there. In that sand. On their land[86].

Hanicia and Cilivia interrupted their talk as they came through the yard on their way home. They bickered. More and more loudly. For what? Money. For all to hear. One lent money to other to play. Now, they wanted it back. Only the other claimed they had already paid it back. No they had not. Their voices grew louder. People came to look, but the child's father quickly stepped in. They went into the house, coming back out with their ray tail whip. They cracked it in the air. Quiet. Quiet, both of you. How now? Do you not feel shame? Arguing like that with your sister. How now? Sit still, both of you. They huffed and turned back towards their house. Their daughter followed close behind. Left, Cilivia slumped in the sand beside their Nenibe. Hanicia

called them a liar. Did they lie? No. They paid the money back, yesterday. How much? 100 Ar. For what? *Try*. For a game. Childish. They insisted they did not lie.[87] Quiet. Quiet your mouth. Did they not feel embarrassed? They covered their face, hiding the tears that welled in their eyes. A whimper betrayed them. Did they cry? They did not answer. For what? For 100 Ar. For a game? For what? They looked up, their eyes now full of tears. They did not lie. Quiet. They needed to quiet their mouth. Acting crazy like that. Crying. Whimpering. They did not know how to debate. They just got emotional. Crying. For what? Nenibe no longer spoke directly to them. They rose from their seat. Lecturing, they did not look at the child, who did not look at them either. What meaning? Fighting with their sister, their family. For what? 100 Ar. Crying. Over words. Just talk. It had no meaning. They could not take a debate. Crying like that. Fighting, fighting just to fight. Crying just to cry. Talking just to talk. None of it had any meaning. 100 Ar. If they would fight with their sister over 100 Ar then they should not play *try.* It had no value. Like that. Like that they chastised the child.

When they finished, they told them to go get lunch with two spoons. They moved the *tihy* to the shade that had made its way clear across the yard, skipping over the treeless middle part criss-crossed with empty clothes lines. Hitô's mom joined them with a plate of rice and a bowl of meat stew, calling to their child who scurried behind them. Mavina's mom came shortly after. They carried another plate of rice and a bowl of small fried fish. Cilivia returned as well carrying the same and two spoons. They all ate together. They shared their various *loaka* with each other, spooning sauce onto their rice from the meat, spitting small fish bones out into the sand. The women asked about the fight. Cilivia said nothing. Nenibe said that they did not know. They did not speak more about it.[88] The conversation turned to other things while the plates and bowls emptied. Cilivia cleared them all and brought the cards out. For the rest of the afternoon, the cards

turned. The players turned. Hitô's mom lost fifteen thousand. Delicia's mom lost 10k. Cilivia's mom also lost 10k. Mavina's mom lost twenty-thousand. Peterô's mom broke even, only because they collected turns. They might have made money, but everyone kept asking to play the turn, claiming they had lost money. They did not cook again, that evening, but their daughter brought fish back from their in-laws and cooked it in between rounds of *ramy*.

One morning, when their child had gone up to their in-laws, when they had finished sweeping and washing the dishes from the night before, when nobody gathered in the neighboring courtyard, and their sister weighed sea cucumbers, the woman went into the stand where they had sold *dite* and *menakely* some time before. The dug up the old benches and tables, taking them apart into scraps. Finished, they pieced them back together into single planks held up by one or two posts of different heights. They dug holes around the yard and placed the new platforms in them. One by the kitchen. Two by the shower. Two more at the edge of their porch. They did not fill in the holes. Instead, they stepped back and looked at the arrangement, pulled them all out of the holes, and built another platform. They dug new holes. Planted the posts again. The new one by the kitchen, four around the porch, one by the gate. They stepped back. Rearranged. Like that. They spent the morning like that. Their child watched from the shade, taking out their braids. When they decided on a place for the platforms, they filled in the holes in which the post sat with sand, kicking in the piles, shaking the posts a little, sticking the shovel head straight down into the newly filled hole, again, until the posts did not move as in set in stone. Then, they started all over with the flower pots. Setting them up on the platforms, stepping back, rearranging.[89] The cactus moved from the kitchen to beside the door, and landed on the edge of the platform by the gate. They put the *Miliaradera* by the door and *Boganvila* by the kitchen, then moved it to the North, then to the gate as well. A couple of the flowers they split and repotted into cracked buckets or sawed-off

jerrycans. The flowers that chickens and goats did not eat went on the lower platforms or stayed along the side of the house. The rest went up high, where only hard headed goats would try to reach them after wandering into the yard when nobody looked. Eventually, satisfied, hot, tired, or hungry, the woman stopped working. They spread the *tihy* out in the shade across the yard, and sat.

After tea, the next morning, the woman had still not come out of their house. The doors locked, the windows shut, they must have gone early with their daughter out to their in-laws. Nobody talked about it or paid much attention to the empty house. Like any other day, like every other day, they all went about their morning work, sweeping, cleaning dishes, selling tea and breads, washing clothes, weighing sea cucumber, selling tomatoes. They kept gossiping in the shade. They kept drinking rhum. They kept sitting, raising children, watching passersby, sifting rice, waiting for someone going to market who they could place an order with. The locks on the doors of the house, the closed windows, they changed little. The days remained the same. The same. Just the same. Every day. Every day.

The flowers surrounding the empty house, those that survived passing goats and chickens, the flowers wilted in the heat. Nobody watered them. Flowers have little value.[90] They cannot buy food. They only decorate. Yet, these flowers did not even decorate anymore, dropping petals and leaves, turning yellow and brown. They might not recover if nobody tended to them soon, but the woman might not return for weeks. Nobody had heard anything from them since they left. They did not know if their daughter had given birth.[91] Like with the flowers, though, they paid little mind to the birth. It did not make their heads work for it would happen when it happened. They would know when they knew. When the baby came home, with their mother and their mother's mother, then they would know. When the flowers get water, if they ever do, then they would see if

they would decorate the house again.[92] Until then, They could not know and it did not make their heads work.

Money made their heads work. The South wind preventing fishing made their heads work. Hard headed children made their heads work. Other things too. Things only they knew.[93] Leave it. Only they knew, and it did not matter. They used to worry more. Their heads worked more. When they went every day to get sea cucumbers. When they lived out on the islands. When, still young, they did real work but had little money. Now, they worked in the morning, but in the afternoon they played *ramy*. Playing, they did not need to think anymore. Their situation had much improved. They needed only worry about angry spouses who did not want them to play. They needed only worry about nobody running the table. For at least a week, with the woman gone, nobody had run a table. Not a table with seven, at least. One woman ran a table for five hundred with some old, dirty cards. Nobody wanted to buy new cards for a five thousand dollar table, and not enough people wanted to play. When the woman first went to town, another tried to run a table, but nobody came out at noon. They sat alone in the empty yard, waiting. They called out to their sleeping sisters. Only silence answered. Better to sleep in a cool house with a spouse than to sit in the hot noon sand alone. They did. *Ramy* could wait. It did not. When they came back outside, the younger women had already started up the low stakes table.

The next day, nobody came out at noon again. In the late afternoon, the young women played again. Again, they bid only five hundred. The day after that, the same. Then again the same. Every day, they slept at noon. Every day, they played *ramy*. Every day, the same. Hitô's mom did not play. They did not even watch. Nobody saw them in the yard until after sunset every day. Maybe they spent the afternoon with Delicia's mom, who also did not come to play. After four days, Mavina's mom did not play either. They had run the low stakes table, but on the fourth day,

like the other two women, they did not come out of their house after sleeping. The other women called for them, but they did not answer. They wanted the cards, but Mavina's mom's doors did not open. They almost turned to other activities until Binô's mom came with the cards. They had gotten them that morning and would run the table. For a cut, of course. Where did the owner go? With Hitô's mom. Over at Delicia's mom's? No. To Nenibe's. To play *loto.*

On the fifth day, Cilivia's mom left to play *loto*, too. Boards only cost 100 Ar. A person could win a lot of money. More than in low stakes *ramy*. What too? Everybody had gone to play, which made it more fun. Low stakes *ramy* lacked ambiance, but *loto*, if a person knew how to play four or six boards at once, *loto* could win them a lot of money. Later in the afternoon, once the game filled, a winning board could bring in 2,400 Ar. Mavina's mom brought home 6k the other day, and Hitô's mom had not lost money yet. They had to go far away, though. Across the main street and two compounds over from theirs, Nenibe ran the game outside of their house to the East. Still, people went to play. The skinny, white[94] woman who ran the family clinic usually managed the money, and their colleagues came from all over town to play. Sister's who had moved far away to live with their spouses came to play. Jôsin's mom's oldest children came to play, but secretly so their mom wouldn't know what they did every afternoon. They might bring their children, who sat shyly close to them, not yet sure enough to cause a fuss or go play with their brothers and sisters running around on the other side of the yard. Mavina's mom's spouse would not want them to go so far, but they had left again for town some time ago. Maybe Hitô's mom's spouse would feel the same way, but hard headed, Hitô's mom paid little mind. They often went far. They drank rhum as they pleased. They played *ramy* every day, and now they played *loto*, too. A long time before,[95] the gendarmes arrested them for theft. Their spouse did not leave them. Not even after their mother-in-law begged the man to move back home. Not even when the woman spent all of their money

on rhum and *ramy*.

Cilivia's mom went home late that day as the game dragged on until long after the sky had filled with clouds painted pink, purple, and the darkest blue. They did not have time to cook the coconut breads they had sold every afternoon for the last month. They did not want to make them for the morning because nobody bought the *menakely* when they could buy *tepla*. They could sell out of *menakely* in the morning and *tepla* in the afternoon, which they had done for the last weeks. When they first started making the *tepla*, they made them with the *menakely* in the morning, but they lost money because they could not sell them all. Following those first few weeks, they stopped making both in the morning. *Tepla* need to rise twice, once as dough and again once rolled and cut. It took the woman hours to cook a batch each afternoon, so they could only play *ramy* either right after eating at noon or later once their cooking had finished. They left early to play *loto,* that day. Low stakes *ramy* lacked ambiance. Especially if they could not play for long to make time for cooking. They had to cook the *tepla* in the afternoon because they could make more money selling them separately from the *menakely* in the morning. When they sold both in the morning, nobody bought *menakely*. They did not come home from *ramy* in time to cook that day, though. They played until well after all the *laka* had come back from sea, their sails brought down, their hulls emptied, and their contents weighed.

The next day, the woman went to play *loto* again. They did not make *tepla* again. They made money. More money than playing *ramy*. More money than selling *tepla*. The next day, they made *tepla.* Instead of sleeping. Instead of going to the game early to make sure they got as many boards as they could play. Instead, they made *tepla*. The dough rose all morning, and after their noontime meal, the woman began rolling it out. On a round cutting board that wobbled if a person did not know how to use it, with a small pestle for garlic and ginger, the woman rolled the dough

into thin strips, which they then cut up at a slight angle making an assortment of rounded parallelograms and oblong triangles. Piece by piece, they filled a *sahafa,* every now and again taking it over to the table to lay the raw *tepla* out on a clean *lamba* to rise again. If the table filled, they spread another *lamba* on another table and kept going. At some point along the way, they must have added coals to the stove and put the oil to heat because no sooner had all the surfaced filled with *tepla*, the woman had already put the first batch in to fry. The oil bubbled. The *tepla* swelled. Little air pockets formed inside them and hard crusts outside. The woman piled them into a large plastic box and glass salad bowl and set out. When their spouse asked where they headed off to, the woman gestured towards the main road and said they could make more money selling on the street or by the market.

Hanicia's mom called the woman over as they came out of the alley way on to the main street. They wanted a couple of *tepla*. Did the woman have any juice? No, they used up all the ice a few days ago. In a few days, they would make more. They bought four *tepla* for when their children came back from school. Delicia's mom also called out to them, wanting to know what they carried. They also bought a few breads for when their children and spouse came home, two for themselves to have with tea, and for the toddler, and the oldest, out back, washing dishes. The woman sold the rest at the *loto* game, where they again stayed until after the moon and its spouse appeared across the sea in the dimming sky. They returned home with empty box and bowl. A successful afternoon selling on the main road or near the market. They would do the same the next day and the day after, sell on the main road or near the market, come home with empty box and bowl, make more money playing *loto* than selling *tepla.* A couple of days later, as Hitô's mom helped the woman carry a full box and bowl out of the courtyard, the woman's spouse poked them in the ribs. Did they not want to go play *loto*? Maybe they would go by themselves later, after

helping the woman sell the *tepla*. So it went. They did like that until the spouse left for town. The man would come back with a full ice chest, and the woman would sell juice with the *tepla*.

The phone rang in an empty house. Nobody heard it behind locked doors. Not the *ramy* players outside. Nobody heard it over radios blasting *kilalaky* and variety. Not Delicia's mom pouring *kapoaka* of rice into a sarong made into a bag for a Masikoro man back from selling ducks. It rang two more times before going silent. Delicia's mom did not notice the missed calls for a few hours. When they did, they quickly sent a child to go buy credit, but the child took their time, going all the way to Pascal's because they sold the best candy, the ones with the chewing gum inside. By the time the woman called the number back, nobody answered. It only rang. They called three times, but no answer. They took the phone out to the front with them while they sold, waiting for it to ring again with news from town. Only, they never heard it ring. The children flooded the streets, trickling home from school. The *loto* players passed by on their way home too, carrying empty boxes. The woman's spouse came home from the sea. Still the phone did not ring. Not until they went inside, hours later, did they find their child had taken the phone after school to take pictures and videos in the yard. They better take it back inside and charge it. Hard headed child. Did they want a smack? Every day. Playing with the phone. Taking pictures. Running down the battery. Mmh. Truly hard headed. Go. Go quickly. Worthless pictures. They best delete them and plug the phone in. The child ran off as their mother went back out to close the store. Only much later did the woman find the phone set on a table, unplugged, dead. They would not get news that day.

In the morning, they called again. The call went straight to message. Again. Again. Their sister's phone must have also died. So it went. Like that. The two woman did not talk to each other until after the *loto* players had left to play, carrying full boxes of *tepla*. Not until the children had

gone back to school after siesta. Not until Delicia's dad had left for the sea. *Ino vaovao? Tsy misy. Ino vaovaonao? Tsisy koa. Maresake? Tsy misy.* Peterô's mom had news. Their daughter gave birth. To a boy.[96] They had left the hospital and gone back to Tantine's house, but they could not leave to go home yet. They would look for a way home soon. Good news. The women did not speak long. Both had work to do. Diapers needed washing. A Masikoro waited for rice. The woman needed to go to the market. The other needed to give the toddler a bath. Their daughter needed medicine. They needed to sweep the porch and send their oldest to get fish. What else? The both had work to do. They did not speak long.

Hitô's mom came down the alley way in the mid afternoon, their gait somewhere between a stride and a sidle. They had not drunk in at least a month, but their walk always revealed their habit. Their flip flops sunk a little too far into the sand with each step, but they maintained enough of a buoyant trot to keep from flipping it up around them. Delicia's mom watched them lightly trudging towards their porch. They pulled one of the white, plastic chairs up to the front, where they could sit with their sister and watch the passersby. They did not have enough money to keep playing *loto* and nobody paid their turns. They always paid for the children of Jôsin's mom, but when they won, they never paid for the woman's turns. The woman from north of the mayor's office kept winning. The tall black one. The one married to Fano. Anadora's dad's brother. They worked at the clinic. They won four times, maybe. They cheated. Telling their friends which numbers to call. The rest of them just lost, or at least didn't win enough to pay for each other. All of them except Jôsin's older sibling, but they did not pay for everyone, not even everyone who paid for them every day. The woman had had enough. They did not want to play *loto* anymore, but nobody ran a *ramy* table worth playing. Up north, a woman did. Too far. What about Nenikely? They had stopped. The woman would keep playing *loto* until Peterô's mom came home. What talk

from town? Their daughter gave birth. A boy. When? A week on Tuesday. When will they come back? The woman did not know.

They sat sipping tea as the afternoon meandered on. Between conversation, they called hellos to women walking by, scooped rice and dried corn, sold cookies and chips to children coming home from school. They bought fish from a woman on their way to sell the days take in the market, and they sent Delicia to buy garlic and ginger to fry them with. When they returned, the woman took their part home to start the cooking. No sooner had they left, a scream ricocheted down the alley way, bouncing off the tall branches of the fences and into the main street. Like thunder, two women came quickly after, pushing and pulling at each other. They did not get far out into the main road before a crowd formed blocking their path. Delicia's mom stepped off their porch to get closer as the crowd grew and visibility shrank. The women spat insults at each other, stepping back and forth towards one another until they erupted into thrown fists and grabs at freshly braided hair, calming down with heaving breaths and muffled remarks about the stench of the other's vagina. The crowd moved with them, closing in for moments of verbal sparring and leaping back when words cascaded into blows. They fought over a man.Their lover. To the dismay of both women, convinced that the man belonged only to them. As the fight rolled through town towards the market, Delicia's mom abandoned the trail of spectators. Delicia did not know how to keep count at the store,[97] so the woman could not leave them alone to manage things for long. They arrived at the same time as Hitô's mom coming through the house from the courtyard in the back. A fight just went by. Where? Down there. The woman did not stay, but ran down the road to catch what remained of the spectacle, shouting to their sister to tell their child to go home and fry the fish if they saw them.

On their way back, they crossed paths with Cilivia's mom, coming the back the long way

from the *loto* game to give the impression they came from the market by entering their courtyard from the West. Let's go. They handed the woman an empty cooler and took the bowl off their head to carry it in their newly freed hands. Coming from the market? No, from the fight. How so? Two woman fighting over a man. Do you see, that short woman with the large butt and that skinny, Masikoro woman who lives by the school. The one who sells jujubes. At the school? By the market. They fought in front of the people. Fought over a man. A visitor. From the South. Who lives out there. On the little island. You see, that one who drinks rhum. Don't they have a spouse? Yes, but they stayed down south this year because they just gave birth. Now, these women fight over who gets to take the place of that one's lover. For what? They both tisked and shook their heads. What else? Just that. The woman had gone home early that day. They began to complain about the cheating at the *loto* game and injustice of Jôsin's sisters, but they cut the conversation short as they neared the gate. Entering the yard, they found Cilivia's dad waiting for them on the porch. From where do you come? Selling *tepla*. At the market? The woman raised their eyebrows subtly in confirmation and went about continuing the cooking that Cilivia had already started. If the woman had sold in the market, why had the man not seen them there? When did they go to the market? A short while before. Did they see the fight? Yes, but they didn't see the woman. The woman saw the fight, too, but did not see the man. The man acted as if the woman had gone to play *loto*. The woman insisted they had seen the fight at the market, describing the women involved and the man they fought over. Hitô's mom left as the argument grew.

Their own spouse had not yet come home and their rice had not yet cooked, so they did not go home, but made their way instead back to Delicia's mom's to watch the *sumanjara* parade through the streets looking for lovers and laughs. The woman sat on the porch with their spouse eating soup and kebabs from the stand across the way. *Mandroso*, they offered food to their sister.

Mazotoa, their sister declined, sitting down on the ground. The woman offered them a chair, but they declined again, too tired to sit up high. Delicia tended to the cooking, fanning the flames, frying the fish, stirring the wet rice. They also tended to the toddler, carrying the child on their hip, walking them up and down the street, playing with them. All the while, they kept an eye on the young men passing by. They had already showered and put on a fresh evening outfit, their shorts resisting the cool night wind. Every now and again their eyes flitted away from the sizzling oil and towards some group or another. An ex? A lover? A prospect? Only they knew. They paid little attention to the conversation of the adults, who in turn paid little attention to them. Only recently did they move up to live with their father. After they decided to leave school, their mother sent them to live with their father who had remarried. Growing up, they had always acted towards their father as a brother given the same woman raised them both,[98] but they learned a few years back that the mother that birthed them had died in child birth[99] and that their father had asked their mother to raise them as their own. Their mother did, so that their father could finish school. They never did. A long time had passed since they had lived under the same roof, on the same land, in the same sand, but when they left school and their brother got married, their mother told them to go live with their father. The same kind of hard head both of them, and their mother had had enough of hard headed children.

Cilivia's mom came a little late that night, carrying their large empty cooking pot and Eau Vive bottle. The *botsy* carrying their flour and sugar had not yet arrived, so they continued to lose money by buying the ingredients they needed locally. Delicia's dad went into the shop to fill their order, while they took a seat in the chair that the owner of the house offered them. *Maresake? Tsy misy, Ino vaovao nareo? Tsy misy.* They did not want to play *loto* anymore because of the distance. They should all play *ramy* again. The woman would buy the cards. They could play on their porch.

They could play for five thousand or, better still, for 3k, with seven and ten. Do they remember when they used to play for 10,000 Ar? It made them all poor. It made them all suffer. They fought with their spouses. They lost money. They sold their furniture, their rings, their earrings. They sold everything to keep playing. It made them crazy. Tomorrow they should play *ramy,* again. With seven and ten. With whom? They needed more players. They did not want to play *loto*, anymore. Delicia's dad brought the pot and bottle back out, now full of flour, sugar, and cooking oil. Did they see the fight?[100] What fight? People fought. Yea right! In the street, in front of the whole population. Those two women who both slept with that man who lives out there on the little island, the one who drinks. How so? They fought over the man. Pulling hair. Hitting each other. Swearing at each other. Their voice lowered and they looked to see that Delicia had walked away with the toddler. Vagina this and vagina that. They swore at each other. Doing like this. Doing like that. Where? By the market. The man saw them on their way back from the sea. They acted as if someone would call the wife of the man from the South who drank rhum. Too much rhum. It spreads problems.

The woman stood to leave. Their rice had cooked. *Misy vaovao*. They had news. Petera gave birth. To a boy. When? Almost a week ago. They had returned to *Tantine's* house. When would they come home? The woman did not know yet. *Eka*. What time would the movie start, that night? At eight. Cilivia's mom left. Hitô's mom did as well. Delicia returned from carrying the toddler in the street, laughing at the calls of a young man they looked back over their shoulder at. Their rice had cooked as well.

Another three weeks passed, before they brought the baby home. Hard to find a way back to the village from town, even in the dry season. A southern wind kept the *botsy* from leaving port. They spent the night in a hotel next to the port after a captain said their *botsy* would leave at four

in the morning with the tide. Half way down the canal, the ship stopped, though. The tide had not brought in enough[101] water, and the women, cold, clutching the baby wrapped in layers of thick, brown and yellow, floral, fleece blanket, the women disembarked onto a dugout canoe and made their way to the deep, muddy shore behind one of the luxury hotels that sandwiched the one road down the peninsula. They looked for the *taxi brousse* behind the Hotel Vezo, but the last driver had already left and would not return for a few days. Many *vazaha* left in SUVs, every day. The hotel owners must have opened the roads, but they could not find any Gasy people[102] going, yet. A school teacher went down to administer the Brevet, but the man drove a pick up truck and only had space in the back. Delicia's mom received each of these updates, but they meant little. They did not tell the others, watching them every afternoon as they came and went from the *loto* game.

After losing for a few days, they started winning again, and talk of a *ramy* game ceased. Delicia's mom could not go play *loto*, though. They could not go that far and still keep an eye on the store. They could play *ramy* in the courtyard or next door until three, but *loto* started too late and too far away. They could even let Delicia open the store in the afternoon or keep it in the early, slow hours, but they needed the money they made at the store to buy the sea cucumbers that they sold in town. Delicia lost them money if they let them keep the store for too long. They could serve one customer looking for one thing, but they lost count if a person ordered more than one thing, they did not scoop rice or corn fast enough, and they did not remember the prices of all of the items. They did not know how to keep the store, so they lost money.[103] The money their mom might make playing more *ramy* could not offset the loss from leaving the store closed or leaving Delicia alone in it for too long. Still they left them alone from time to time, and had them help during the busiest hours. They could sell cookies, crackers, and candies to children. They could sell laundry detergent and castor oil. Until the time came to wash the dishes from lunch, to go to

market, to cook dinner, or tend to the toddler, they could help their mother run the store. They did.

The woman went to play the low stakes game the next day, during lunch. They called out to the others to join them as they left for *loto*, but they did not. Come on. They insisted. They offered to buy cards. The others kept on their way, carrying full containers of *tepla* to sell at the market. The wind had turned. Their spouse did not go to sea. The woman could play *ramy* all afternoon, but low stakes lacked ambiance. They did not play seven. Most of the players did not know how to play the game. They did not know which cards to throw or which to keep. Some did not see when they had a staircase or that the card they waited on had already fallen. When they won, they won by chance. If they played high stakes, the woman could make money. They did not, though. The woman played anyway. They all did.

When they tired of the game, the woman went to sit in the shade of the porch with Cilivia's dad. They did not play, either. They did not have money. What about their spouse? The man gave the woman a short look and a smirk. Somebody had told the woman that their spouse sold out their *tepla.* Every day. At Nenibe's.

The next afternoon, Cilivia's mom sent a child to buy cards, the red ones. While they waited for the child to return, the woman opened the large window in the fence of their yard. On the table below it, they placed the glass bowl with *menakely* left over from that morning and the thermos, newly filled with tea, the rest of which simmered in the kitchen. Oil sat still and hot in the pot over the coals outside, ready for the first batch of *tepla*. When the child returned, Cilivia's mom gave them a fresh bread and sent them out again, this time to get Delicia's mom, Hitô's mom, and Mavina's mom. They played *ramy* that day. Cilivia's dad played as well. As did Delicia's dad. The next day, two women from the *loto* game joined. Then, Jôsin's mom came with their grandchildren. Every three turns, the players switched in and out of the game. Only the winner of the third turn

stayed in the game. Some of them asked for the owner of the cards to buy more, so they could start a second table. With Cilivia's mom only playing some of the rounds, while they cooked and sold, they did not have enough players to warrant a second game. Some of the players wanted a second table so they could play for fifteen thousand instead of five. Though Cilivia's mom also said that they wanted to play with seven and ten, they did not send a child for more cards.

Still bundled up in blankets despite the warmth of the sun having set in over the ride from town, the baby arrived home in the arms of its mother, under the umbrella carried by its grandmother in their hand that did not contain the rest of their luggage. They arrived home to a locked house. Both houses in the courtyard, locked. The store, locked. Delicia did not wash dishes in the yard, either, or sit out on the porch. Only wilted flowers waited for them, decorating nothing. No value. The house smelled of the dust that floated in the streaks of sunshine that came through the roof. Petera and the baby waited outside while their mother swept the house, changed the sheets, and made the bed. When the woman came out, they went inside. Petera's mom went straight to work, to the market, to cooking, to taking care of their child and grandchild.[104] Nobody had taught them how, but they had seen it done and done it before. They did what their mothers had done, what their mother's mothers had done.

Every morning, the house filled with women. They sat on the floor, all those mothers, mothers of mothers. The baby, all rolled up, slept on the bed, or got passed around until it cried out for its mother's breast. They told each other stories. News from town. *Dahalo* kidnapped a woman from the little island. The gendarme could not catch them because they knew their way through the mangroves. They held the woman for ransom for days. Everybody lived in fear. Stories from childbirth. Delicia's mom recounted how they had paced back and forth for hours waiting for Delicia.[105] Every time a person came into the room, they ground their teeth and smiled, but as soon

as they left the woman cringed in agony. They did not cry though. When they gave birth to Delicia, their first, they did not cry or scream. They just ground their teeth. Giving birth to a boy hurt more, though. Stories about *ramy* and *loto*. Stories about women fighting in the street over rhum drinkers. They all sat together on the floor of the house. Keeping company with the new born.

In the afternoon, Peterô's mom sat in the yard on a *tihy*. The first time, they brought their cards, but nobody came. Not to play. A couple of the younger women came to visit their sister, between rounds of *ramy*. The woman did not go outside, but they craned their head to get a glimpse, through the door, of the *ramy* in the next yard over. Between the rise and fall of the curtain filling with the light, afternoon breeze, they could almost follow the game. They did not play with seven. They must play for less than 500 Ar. Binô's mom won the first turn. Delicia, the second. Mavina's mom won the last one. They fought over who had to leave for the next round. Hitô's mom wanted to join, but they had only just come. Delicia refused to stop playing. A game with seven might have better entertained the woman. A game in their own yard might have strained their neck less. Instead, the only game they could see lacked intrigue, and only their mother sat in the otherwise empty yard. They did not know why their mother did not go to play *ramy* with everyone else. Only they knew that. Every day they called out to women passing through to join them for *ramy*, but every body already played elsewhere. Mavina's mom ran the low stakes table, but they played most days at the higher stakes tables. Cilivia's mom ran two high stakes tables. Peterô's mom stayed in their courtyard, left behind.[106]

After less than a week of neck craning and stubborn yard sitting, the woman informed the others that their daughter would move back to their spouse's house that day. After tea, everybody made their way to the house. The woman's in-laws already filled the porch. The woman came out, carrying the baby. They sat between their spouse and other child. Their mother, too, sat up against

the house. And their parents in-law. As guests arrived they went down the line, bending to shake hands with each person sitting against the house, including a gift of money in the handshake with the mother. At the end of the line, they took a seat where they could find space, the women at the foot of the porch, the men in the shade of the large tree. Babakely brought our their radio. Delicia and Hitô's mom's served rhum. As the music took over the air from the sounds of more distant radios, Binô's mom let out a shout. Hopping to their feet, they twirled their sarong into a thin strip and tied it just below their hips. Mavina's mom quickly followed suite, stretching out their arms to entice some of the men to join them. Soon, dust joined the music filling the air as the *kilalaky* began. In a circle, they took turns leading the dance. Some of them, knew how to better, dipping low into their squat, their backs straight, their heads bopping, and their arms hitting each beat hard. Others, though they did not know how to dance well or had already drunk too much, made the crowd laugh. They teetered around the circle, falling behind. The dancing never stopped as new dancers stepped in when tired ones sat down or took a break for a drink. Everybody took a turn in the circle, young and old. Children danced in an over exuberant staccato, almost beating their way through. A couple of them really knew how to dance. The adults ran over and stuck small bills in their hands and pants. A couple of them broke into the *décalé* they had choreographed for the 26th. The grandparents danced, some of them stiffly but with the confidence of their years to playfully challenge the best of the younger dancers. Some of them, still young themselves, regaled the others with a rare performance.

The whole event ended before 10 am. A few of the women helped to pack up Petera's things. They all went with them back to their spouse's house, even those of them with nothing to carry. They found something, a pot, a blanket, a lamp. They all carried something, even those of them with nothing to carry, bundles of clothes, a small bag of charcoal, bedding, a mosquito net,

the umbrella, the baby. They left their mother's home. Again. As they had when they got married. As they had when they had their first child. And, now. They left to go home, again.[107]

IV

"Cette nuit, soulèverai un pan de l'horizon, en détacherai la mémoire de nos ancêtres. Elle sera diffuse, voilée dans les brumes de l'océan. Elle sera opaque, gorgée par le sel et l'effervescence des vagues. Konantitra lira sur ma peau l'histoire qu'elle voudra éternelle mais qui en vérité se désagrégera avec ma mort. Notre histoire est celle de la trahison de nos souverains. Notre histoire est celle de la cupidité de nos conquérants. Esclavage. Unification de l'île. Protectorat. Pacification. Notre histoire est celle de notre mort"
(Raharimanana 2003: 126)[108].

The woman did not plan on going that evening. Not even to the ballet. Too far away. They did not like going to things.[109] They did not like eating with other people or dancing in front of other people. None of the rest of them planned on going either. They might go the next morning, to put the *botsy* down. What time would the tide go home? Their brother would put their own *botsy* down in a couple of days anyway. They had not yet received an invitation, but they had heard one would come soon. They would have to go to that one because their brother had built that *botsy*, their fourth. They would go to the ballet. They would stay up all night. They would put the *botsy* in the water[110] in the morning. Not today, though. Today, they planned to play *ramy*. They went over to Cilivia's after lunch. The game had already started. What turn? Second. They sat behind Hitô's mom in the chair with the broken arm rest. They had a good hand. One joker, three, two, ace of hearts, ace of spades, king of hearts, king of spades, three sevens, jack of clubs, ten of clubs, five of spades. After a few times around the table, they got the king of clubs. They threw the five. The next time around, they got the queen of hearts. They looked around at the cards that had already dropped. They asked Cilicia's dad to look at their cards. They had the queen of clubs. It

did not work for them. The woman passed the ace of spades. When the cards came back again, Cilivia's dad did not pass the queen. They pulled the ace of diamonds from the deck. Catching a glance of shared frustration with the woman behind them, they passed the card on. The ace of hearts came up next off the top of the deck. Another frustrated glance. The other queen of clubs dropped. Still, Cilivia's dad did not pass the card. The deck got low. How many left? Maybe only two more times around the table. They got a red six next, joker dregs. They passed it after checking to see that the player to their right had passed the five of hearts and the seven. With only five cards left, the players all reached for theirs from the deck. Only Hitô's mom did not. They wanted that queen of clubs. Did the man have a joker? They did. Tucked behind their last card, they pulled it out and put it down face up on the table. Hitô's mom pulled the last card from the deck. A queen of diamonds. They, too, discarded their joker as Binô's dad already leaned in to collect the game. No winner. They doubled up. Who had gotten seven? Jôsin's mom. Cilivia's mom tossed a five thousand across the table. They read the count. Hitô's mom, two. Jôsin's mom, last. Binô's dad, four. Cilivia's dad, eight. Hanicia's mom, anti. The pot doubled. How much? 2,000 Ar for seven, 6,000 Ar for the pot.[111]

Binô's dad shuffled the cards. Hanicia's mom cut the deck and pulled out the joker, a two of spades. Binô's dad dealt the cards. As soon as they finished, Hitô's mom dropped seven cards on the table. Queen of diamonds, queen of heart, queen of clubs, four of diamonds, three of diamonds, two of diamonds, ace of diamonds. In hand. It did not much matter. The real money, the pot, still hadn't fallen. The woman had seven, but with a big tear. They would have a hard time killing the hand with their joker locked in a *quadry*. They had another *try* in hand, but the rest of the cards had no value. They quickly picked up another *pera*, but not quickly enough. Jôsin's mom got the pot. A double. Cilivia's mom passed them Binô's dad's finished 5k. First turn. Hanicia's

mom stood. Mavina's mom took their place. Hitô's mom, one. Joôsin's mom, last. Binô's dad, last. Cilivia's dad, eight. They wanted to play the turn. *Eka*. Only seven. Mavina's mom, anti. They passed ten thousand across the table. The new round started. Cilivia's dad got seven. Mavina's mom got the pot. Hitô's mom, two. Jôsin's mom, anti. Binô's dad, anti. Cilivia's dad, six. Mavina's mom, one. Only one table turned cards. Not enough players came for a high stakes table. Cilivia's mom did not play. They cooked. They cooked and kept count. Most players must have gone to the ballet. Maybe. Jôsin's mom wanted to go too, but they did not have friends to go with. Mavina and Hitô's moms played *ramy*. Cilivia's mom cooked. Delicia's mom still slept. Jôsin danced in the ballet. The woman had to go. They would play until then. Maybe Hanicia's mom would go with them.

Delicia's mom never came to play that day. Jôsin's mom left early. The men went to work on the beach.[112] Cilivia's mom, still fried *tepla,* but their table needed players. Only two women still there, not enough to play for seven. Binô's mom sat out in the yard. They watched the game from afar, but did not play. The women called to them. They did not play? They did not know how. Come. They could learn. How much did they play for? Five thousand. The woman did not have money. Would they play for 500 Ar? With seven? They could not play seven with only three players and a 500 Ar bid. They would play for 100 Ar? They did not have money. The players agreed. That or they would not play. Hitô's mom dealt the cards. Mavina's mom cut the deck. They played first, drawing a card from the deck and passing it to Binô's mom. They drew a card from the deck and passed a card from their hand, which Hitô's mom immediately picked up. They picked up every card the woman passed them. They won that turn. They won the next two turns as well. On the next turn, Binô's mom lay down their cards. Four kings, three aces, three fives, three eights. *Tsy mety*. They did not have a staircase. They needed a staircase to kill the hand. They picked their

cards back up. They did not win that round either. Or the next. They stopped playing. Why? They lost all their money. One more. Hitô's mom paid their turn. They won that turn. With two jokers, a hard turn to lose. Cilivia's mom finished their cooking. They had sold most of the *tepla* already to people heading to the ballet. The rest, they put in a covered tupperware out on the table next to the *menakely* left over from that morning. They could play, now.

They wanted to play for five thousand. As did Hitô and Mavina's moms. Binô's mom moved back from the table. They watched the rest of the game over shoulders. Their children came home from playing out by the church, dirty with sand dust. They climbed into their mothers lap, wiggled their way into the woman's arms. They wanted to go to the ballet, but they could not with such young children. They watched the game instead. Cilivia's mom shuffled the cards. Hitô's mom cut the deck and pulled out the six of clubs, which they placed face up under the remaining half of the deck in the center of the table. Cilivia's mom dealt quickly. They did not count out loud, but they did not get the count wrong. Thirteen. They placed the remaining cards on the top of the deck in the middle of the table, and picked up their own hand. Mavina's mom had already passed them a six of spades. They drew from the top of the deck. A queen of hearts. They kept it and passed the five of hearts before putting their hand in order. They put the eight of hearts and eight of clubs together and slipped the nine of hearts behind them. In front of them they put the three twos, the ace of diamonds, and the three of diamonds. In front of those, the two of spades and the jack of spades. In the back of their hand, they put the queen of hearts and the king of hearts. Behind the king, they hid their joker, a six of hearts. They finished as the next card dropped for them. Mavina's mom passed it off the top of the deck, a jack of diamonds. They drew from the deck as well, the jack of hearts, and passed the jack of spades. They moved the jack behind the eight with the nine. Hitô's mom left the jack on the table and pulled a card from the table, which they passed

after a glance. Four of hearts. Mavina's mom did the same. Four of diamonds. So it went a few times around the table. Pass. Pass. Queen of clubs. Five of diamonds. Queen of diamonds. Ten of clubs. Ten of spades. Six of clubs. Ace of hearts. Four of clubs. Five of clubs. Ace of clubs. Two of diamonds. At last, Mavina's mom picked a card they wanted off the deck. They pulled the king of clubs out of their hand and passed it. Cilivia's mom drew the seven of diamonds and passed it. Hitô's mom picked it up, and passed the king of diamonds. Mavina's mom drew from deck, put the card in their hand, and passed the king of spades. Cilivia's mom picked up a three of hearts off the top of pile. Almost there? Hitô's mom nodded. They passed them the two of spades. The next woman drew a card and put it in their hand, sticking up above the others. They flicked it a couple of times. They leaned over and looked at Cilivia's mom's cards. They looked through the cards they had discarded already and through the cards Mavina's mom had discarded. They placed the seven of hearts in front of them. The woman picked it up and passed the three of diamonds. Cilivia's mom drew the jack of diamonds and passed it. Queen of hearts. King of spades. Cilivia's mom drew a six of diamonds. Dead! They killed, placing their cards face up on the table with the exception of the nine of hearts that they slapped face down in their discard pile. Hitô's mom turned it over, shaking their head. Mavina's mom turned over the next card in the pile, a six of hearts would have gone to Hitô's mom. The next card, an ace of diamonds, would not have helped them.

As the cards turned, a couple of rhum drinkers marched through the gate, their backs straight like hardwood chairs. They complained of all the closed bars. Jack's ran dry. Up north, they all went to see the ballet. Marina's mom went into town two days ago. What about Raka? Their little father died. When? Last night. Where? In Mahajanga.[113] A *tuftuf* left early in the morning with the body and the family. More came by *botsy*. They might arrive in two days if the wind stayed good. When would they bury the dead? Friday. Why so late? They will wait for cement

and tiles from town. Cilivia's mom had not yet served them rhum, but a debate already boiled over. Soon the card players would join in as well, releasing their attention from the turning cards just long enough for those who cared more about cards than debates over burials, who cared more about cards than ballets, those that stayed home to play, sitting like their houses in the sand of the courtyard,[114] those players that did not avert their eyes could win a few rounds in a row. Cilivia's dad passed a six of hearts to Hitô's mom after they had already picked up a six of spades two turns before. The woman got seven. Mavina's mom reminded the rhum drinkers that funerals cost a lot of money and *lakroa* even more. They dropped a joker while they did, and nobody called it. Cilivia's mom snatched it up before it could get caught on the table. Wet bones cannot have hard tombs,[115] expensive or not. Cilivia's mom through up their hands. Two jokers, but they did not win after their spouse passed a five of hearts to Hitô's mom. October had almost ended and nobody had done *lakroa* yet. Why? Because too many people put in cement crosses and tiled tombs right away when they buried the dead. Those before had not done things this way. Go on! Deal the cards. What should people do? If they cannot afford to do two *fomba*? Should they leave their dead uncovered? With only wood crosses? Fourteen cards! Pay attention. Do you remember last year? Fifteen crosses at once for Pierrô's family? It took them so long to get the money. Don't play if you will only lose our money. We won't have enough players if they don't play. What about Binô's mom? Wet bones cannot have hard tombs. The woman did not want to play for five thousand. What about 500 Ar? Hitô's mom won again, without even a single joker. After death, bones still need to dry and harden.

The debate, now wet with rhum, still slipped from mouth to mouth as the first waves of people rushed home from the ballet to fill their bellies in the growing night before returning to dance until dawn around the painted, empty hull of the new *botsy*. The cards still turned, but

Cilivia's dad no longer played, the only remaining sober participant in the debate that had slowed to lists of every recent death in the village and whether they had had a single burial or a burial and *lakroa*, interrupted with the recurring choruses of wet bones cannot have hard tombs and *lakroa* cost money. Still, the debaters remained animately engaged as if they did not had the same debate every time the *goiky* rang three times to sound another death. Nobody listened much anymore. Soon they would leave with the first wave of people rushing back to the *zotso botsy*, where they would not have to pay for their rhum anymore. Cilivia's dad would follow close behind, with their brothers. Then the youth. The women had not decided. They might go, but did not want to go so far.[116] They expected an invitation to their brother's event very soon, anyway. They would go to that.[117] They had to.

When the sun came up the next morning, Binô lay sprawled out in front of their house, half of their face caked in dew drenched sand. They slept there until well past noon, having dropped their key while trying to open the door in the dark the night before. They had fumbled around for it, plunging their hand into the sand and letting it fall back through their fingers. To no avail. When they regained strength, they might rake the yard looking for it or break the lock with a hammer. They did not have the money to buy a new lock, though. For now, they slept. Across the yard, their mother drank tea. They watched the last wave leave to help put the *botsy* down. They watched the last wave return a few hours later, tired and laughing. *Fa vita?* The boat had only fallen once on its way down the shore, but as the men dug out holes underneath it to slide in new logs, Lana had fallen asleep in the shade of the slumped ship.[118] Everybody laughed. Only it took so long to dig the holes and position the levers that they also forgot. When the men went to hoist the *botsy*, they nearly crushed that man, sleeping in the sand. One of the women saw from up the shore and let out a cry. It startled everybody except the man, who kept sleeping. *Aaahaaa. Iiiiiheee.*

Hanicia's mom joined them in the yard. As did Jôsin and Delicia's mom's, bringing their youngests with them. They had finished their morning work, so they sat together in the shade, watching Binô's unmoving sleep and the slow conclusion of the preceding night. Cilivia's mom, Hitô's mom, and Mavina's mom came last, still wrapped in matching sarongs and heavy coats from the night's festivities. Did you hear? The *botsy* almost fell on Lana, this morning. They fell asleep beneath it while working. They sang and lifted and danced around, still so drunk. Then out. They could not see well from where they sat, but they knew they must have fallen asleep when the singing stopped. Only then one of the *vahiny* women screamed. The men almost lifted the boat onto Lana. They could not see, so all the women ran around to the other side to where the woman who screamed stood. They thought someone got trapped or a child? Lana did not move. They did not know what they did to wake them. It took so long. They could not see. But when they did, Lana went right back to singing and pulling the *botsy* down the shore almost on their own.

The men came home last. They went directly to sleep. Most had not come home the night before. They stayed out all night. At the party. In the bars. With a lover. Or if they had come home, they returned only a few hours later at day break to help set the *botsy* down. The women laughed as they watched their spouses shuffle home. The problem with a *zotso botsy*, they get too drunk and then have to do hard work. They need the rhum to have the strength to work, but then they don't have the strength for anything else. At least after a *bal*, the 26th, or *bonne année*, they come home and do the work that counts. After a *zotso botsy*, they all look like Binô, even the ones still on their feet. Even if they want to do work at home, they cannot. They get home, fall down in the bed, and fall asleep. All the work gets left to the women. Delicia's mom went over to Binô sandy body. Giggling softly, they lifted the young man's arm. Just like this, they said, dropping the arm so that it flopped back to ground. *Malemy. Aaahaaa Iiiiiheee.* The worst. Impossible. The worst,

for sure. Worse than when they finish their work too soon? At least they worked at all. Worse than when they do not come at all? At least if they do not come home then somebody else can deal with them. Worse than the way people did things before? Delicia did not know how people did things before. Hanicia's mom drew two lines in the sand. Like that. Facing. Yea right!? The truth.[119] Impossible. As the others laughed, Delicia's mom insisted Hanicia's mom demonstrate. Do you not understand? They did not think it possible. Everybody knows that people before did it like that. Show them how. No. Go on. No. The would play the man. No. Like this? Stop. They went on to the rolling laughter of the others until, with a jolt, Binô rolled over and stood up.

All of their attention turned to the man. Still covered in sand, they stuffed their hands in their pockets, pulling them out empty. They looked around where they had slept before crouching down to dig in the sand. They ran their hand back and forth over it. They pulled up handfuls, letting it slip back through their fingers, until empty again. The women watched. Coming to one knee, and pushing off the house wall, the man came to standing again. They retrieved a rake and piece of old mosquito net from their mother's house, their head down, without looking at the women, whose eyes followed each action. Starting from their own front door, they raked the sand into small piles. They did not go all the way down to the hard layer before the bright yellow, clean sand. They did not even rake very far past the surface. Just enough to catch a day or two's worth of charcoal bits and cigarette butts.[120] After raking from where they had slept to the front door, they began sifting the piles through the mosquito net. The sand spilled out into small mounds covered in the finest layers of charcoal dust. After three, Binô's mom called out. What do you look for? Sapphires? My key. Did you lose it? Yes. Did you leave it with your lover last night? *Aaahaa. Iiiiheee*. The man did not respond. When all of the piles came up empty of keys, they moved on to a larger radius. They raked to the gate. They raked further and further out into the yard. They raked

until they had sectioned nearly the whole yard into neat piles with a thin layer of charcoal dust. The women watched. Their mother boasted at the cleanliness of the yard. Do not forget by the pigs. They might have dropped it by the shower. Everyone had left by the time the man finished. They found no keys. When they came to their mother to ask for a hammer to break the lock, the woman gave them a spare key they had on a shelf in their house.

A day later, the cement arrived before the dead. From their store, Delicia's mom could see them building the cross and laying the tiles on it. They watched them dig a deep pit to extract the cleanest sand from under the layers of daily life. They watched them mix it together with water[121] and cement. They watched them pour it into a wooden mold, smooth the surfaces, and gently lay the tile. The men who built it worked well. Only one knew how to build a cross. The woman could not see the whole thing, but they occasionally stepped off the porch to catch a better glimpse. It looked like all white tiles with five blue tiles at the intersection of the cross. After the dead arrived, they left the cross to the side under the shade of a tarp but did not bring it in the house with the dead. At night, a yellow light hung above it. From the store, Delicia's mom watched it come on each evening. They nodded towards it with their head as it came on, turning to Delicia's dad, or Hitô's mom, or whoever sat with them on the porch that night, to comment on the cross. Baka's family had money. The woman had heard that the grandfather had two *botsy* in Mahajanga. Baka made good money with their store and the rhum they sold. Remember the sister married a *vazaha* before. A few years ago, did they not have a *vazaha* at the last *lakroa*? They used to do *lakroa* like people from before. Only recently did they start doing *lakroa* right away. Maybe because more and more people did it that way. It did cost less. People just did not have money anymore. Everything cost more. Even people who did have money did not have money like before.

The woman wanted to go to *lakroa*. Nobody seemed to plan one though, and the season

would end soon. They wanted to watch the bull chase from their porch. They wanted to sing all night and play *ramy* until dawn. They wanted to buy matching *lambahoany* with their sisters and have a headscarf made from the same fabric. They used to happen every year. Sometimes as many as one a week for two months. The more people built cement crosses and cement tombs right away, though, the fewer soft tombs remained in need of hardening when bones dried. Those that did still wait for a hard tomb and a new cross might wait for years while their living families saved up money. Fewer and fewer people followed the *fomba*. People could only afford to sit with the dead once. If they had more money, they might do it the way people had before. Or they might still do it the new way and use that money for something else. Delicia's mom turned back to Hitô's mom and laughed. Did they remember how much money people used to spend to ask the *raza*[122] for help? Now, they had *Jesôsy,* who helps for much cheaper. Now, everybody went to church instead.

Two bags of cement arrived for Peterô's mom, as well. Peterô had sent them from town in the same *botsy* with the cement for the cross. Maybe Peterô's mom had also heard that Baka planned to do *lakroa* right away. Petera's spouse's older sibling had married the child of Baka's little mother. Maybe they ordered the cement together. It did not matter. Two *jokera* brought the cement to the house that evening, but Peterô's mom had not yet come home from helping with the baby. They left the bags by one of the three piles of sandy rocks that Peterô's mom had collected over the past few months. Almost enough for a foundation and half the floor. When the woman came home, they had Binô help them slide the bags under their bed with the two others and five wood boards they had bought a few months back from a Masikoro. Peterô also sent three bags of rice, but nobody had brought them from the beach. The woman sent Binô to ask after them. With the profit from the rice, they would have enough for two more bags of cement and two more bags of rice. Soon, they could start negotiating a price for the labor to build their floor and maybe a

veranda. If they ever had a lot of money, they would build a full concrete house, and a WC with a tiled shower. They would replace all the sand in the courtyard with cement and throw *bonne année* parties where everybody could dance without kicking up dust. If, for example, just for example, they married a *vazaha* so that they really had money, they would replace all the sand in the village with cement so everywhere they walked their feet would only feel that wonderful, hard smoothness. They would tell the *vazaha* to come only when their spouse left to work on the *botsy*. They would tell them to leave when their spouse came home. Their spouse would not mind because they would have a big, concrete house with a maid and a cook, with a leather living room set, and a warm, palisander bed, with silk sheets and a matching mosquito net. They would build a second floor with a balcony, a kitchen, and a special house for playing *ramy*, but they would tell their spouse they used it for storage. One day. When they had money.

Still no invitation came for their brother's[123] event. A long time had passed since the women started practicing for the ballet. How many weeks? They could not throw a party with all of the recent deaths, though. Maybe. It would have to wait until the end of the last funeral. Nobody had announced *lakroa* yet, either. That too would have to wait. Maybe, the fear of *dahalo* also delayed the announcements. The *goiky* interrupted talk as Delicia's mom passed the three of clubs. It rang a second time. An official announcement. Word had already made its way through the sand some time earlier in the morning. Only onlookers and a few waiting their turn to play gathered their sarongs about them and rushed out the gate to hear the news. The rest kept playing. After eight rounds, most returned, some dismayed to find that, though they had left during the third turn, they returned during the first and would have to wait two more before they could to play. Two long turns as play slowed to accommodate news. Only one gendarme died the previous night. Not four? Only one. The one shot in the stomach survived. They took them to the hospital in town. Another

one, shot in the hand, also went to the hospital in town. And the forth? Only three gendarmes. They shot a *dahalo*, who died this morning. Outside Ambanidrano. They said it happened on the road to Hamba. The call came from a child who heard the *dahalo* stealing a cart and three bulls. They shot the child. Then the shoot out began with the gendarmes. They did not catch any of them, but they said they would. *Andao*. Whose draw? Cilivia's mom picked up the ace of hearts and passed a queen of clubs. More gendarmes would come down from town to help search for the *dahalo*. They had not yet found the family of the one who died. And the gendarme who died. Their spouse lived in the village with their children. Did they see which one? The tall, white[124] one? The man came from the South, though. They took them down this morning in a 4x4 from town. Hitô's mom drew a card from the deck and passed it. A four of spades. Did they see? The old gendarme. The one who drinks. Who does not have a wife. They got shot in the hand. And Tania's mom's *velahy*. They got shot in the stomach. They needed an operation. The man who got shot in the hand only needed stitches. Binô's dad drew a card from the deck and passed the eight of spades. It went on like this. Only an hour or so more. Everyone went home to cook early. They locked their doors early that night and shut out the lights. Delicia's mom would not even open the door when a youth knocked in the dark, looking to buy cigarets on their way back from the bar, had such a youth gone out on a night like that.

Some days later, three young women came through the gate to Binô's mom's house. *Hôdy*. Nobody answered. One of them called out to a group of children. *Aiza mamanao? Tsy haiko*. They sent a child to retrieve the owner of the house and knelt in the sand to wait. The child did not take long. The woman soon came through the gate and sat in front of their house. *Akory jiaby. Tsy magnay.* The visitors spoke softly, and their speech did not take long. When they finished, the woman thanked them, and they moved to the next house in the yard. So they went, from house to

house, through each courtyard. Each time, they knelt gently in the sand as if already standing so as not to inconvenience anybody. Each time, they spoke only loud enough for those concerned to hear, looking without looking at the owner of the house. Hitô's mom washed clothes when the visitors arrived. Cilivia's mom still sold *dite.* Delicia's mom sat outside their store. Peterô's mom had already left for their daughter's house. Mavina's mom cooked *tsaramaso* and braided their daughter's hair.

Soon the streets filled with *vahiny.* Young men and women crowded the square outside the market. If older adults came with them, they did not leave their family's compounds. They did not eat soup in the streets in the evening or visit the bars. They did not walk back and forth along the main road from sunset until dinner. They did not look for lovers, or dress up, or watch passersby. Hitô's mom watched busy night streets from in front of the store. They made jokes about the young men with their city clothes and hair. Delicia watched attentively as well. Their excitement about the men mingled uncomfortably with the threats of the women. Everyone needed to lock up their spouses on a night like that. Each day brought more *vahiny*, coming by sea and by sand. Some arrived alone. Others came all together in big trucks rented just for the occasion. Their bodies filled the streets. Their singing filled the night.

Sitting on the veranda with Delicia's mom, before lunch, Hitô's mom spotted Makisa up the road. They called out to them. The man came down from town with one of the 4x4s. They did not come for *lakroa*, but they knew a woman who did. The sister of the owner of the house where they stayed. They just came to visit their mother. Delicia's mom asked if they had seen the *lambahoany.* They had not. The woman wanted to buy a complete, but maybe not enough came from town. They asked a couple of people who lived up north near the house, but nobody knew when they would sell them. Delicia said they brought three different colors, but they had not seen

them with their eyes. Hitô's mom heard the same thing but also that the best color had already sold out, gone to the *vahiny*. Peterô's mom had already bought theirs. They left it to get hemmed though. They said they had picked between three colors. Two for 4,000 Ar a meter. One for twenty-five thousand. If any of the same one remained, they encouraged the other women to get it, so they could all go as a complete. Hitô's mom went to tell the other's, taking money from Delicia's mom who could not leave the store unattended.

Mavina's mom went to Cilivia's mom when the *tepla* had run out. The woman sat listening to the radio playing gospel music. They sang along. Gusts of southern wind caused them to close the window from which they sold breakfast. Now, they sat in the dim light of the deep awning. Mavina's mom came through the gate laughing at whatever they had left on the other side. They sat down on the bench across from their sister. Did the woman have a pen? Could they write in *vazaha*? Mavina's mom needed a note in their medical book ordering shots for their foot. Three shots for 15k each. What happened to their foot? Nothing. They needed the writing to show their spouse. Just in case. Cilivia's mom had a pen, but they would have to wait until Cilivia came home to do the writing. The child had very good handwriting. They always got top scores when the teacher reviewed their notebooks. When would they buy their complete? As soon as they had money. Cilivia's mom had already given money to Hitô's mom who they saw heading north with Peterô's mom. They had not seen the colors yet, but depending on the color they might also have a headscarf made. Apologizing, Mavina's mom got up to leave. They had to complete their mission quickly if they wanted to get the same complete as the other women. They would return later when Cilivia could write the note for them.

When they did, a small crowd had formed on the porch. Everybody crowded around the *ramy* table. Rhum drinkers. *Ramy* players. Spouses. Children. Everybody. They tisked and shook

their heads, but nobody fought. Instead, they spoke softly. Even the rhum drinkers. Mavina's mom leaned into the circle but from the back of the crowd, maybe they could not see. Cards did not turn. Most players had laid their cards down on the table in a stack so they could get up and come around to where Cilivia sat between their mother and Nenibe. Children wriggled their way into cracks between their mothers, into laps, over shoulders. Some of the younger, hard headed ones came straight across the table, stepping on discarded cards, leaning down to try to grab one while their mothers looked away. Behind the seated and kneeling woman stood the men, looking over as far as possible. Mavina's mom squeezed their way between the house and the standing men, but they could not find a place to sit from which they could also see. Everybody looked at a phone that Cilivia held out. They turned it from side to side as children reached for it and adults asked for it. They needed to pass it around. Nobody could see. It looked like a picture of fish prepped for salting, gutted and split open in the sand. Not a clear picture, but through the grain and glare, maybe a picture of fish. They needed to pass the phone so people could see. Nobody could tell what they looked at. Cilivia tried to make sense of it, pointing to parts, zooming in and out. There, see, they lie in the sand. There, the man's hands. See the rope. There, see, the man's head. Right there, their hair. That, there. They zoomed in too close, then back out a little. See there, the man's brain, in the sand.

Nobody attended the dead that night, even when they heard that the family planned to carry it the next morning. Not with the news moving through town that the gendarmes had caught and killed a *dahalo*. One person said they killed the leader of the *dahalo*. Another said they only killed a small time thief from a neighboring village. Some people heard the gendarmes had not killed anybody. The photo came from Facebook. Some people said they had seen the killing with their own eyes, though. The dead man had killed someone in an argument, though. They did not lead

dahalo or anything like that. Still another person said they heard from the gendarmes that they had caught four other *dahalo*, too. All from the shootout. They only killed the one to scare the others into talking. Most stories, true or not, meant *dahalo* would want revenge against the gendarmes or to break their friends out of jail. They would definitely come when they heard what had happened. Nobody wanted to stay out on a night when *dahalo* might come. When *dahalo* would come. They locked their courtyards. They locked their doors. They shut out the lights. In the dark, they listened to the soft song of the dead attended only by *vahiny* and hosts.

After a few days, the *dahalo* still hadn't come. The *vahiny* mostly left. A few young ones stayed behind. Some had met new spouses. Others stayed a little longer for work or vacation, to visit family, for something new. Still, the *dahalo* did not come. People stayed out after dark, again. They walked up and down the main street. They met their lovers in the shadows of alleys. They ate *lasopy, kompoze*, and fried fish. Still, the *dahalo* did not come. A person told Delicia's mom that they had seen the other ones at the gendarmes' office to the North. When they took them out to pee. The people who lived near by could hear the gendarmes beating them. They heard that they all slept in one room with only a concrete bench. They heard that the gendarmes would take them up to town soon to stand trial. Still, the *dahalo* did not come. The date for putting the *botsy* down came and went. Nobody went. They heard the owner had rescheduled. Still, the *dahalo* did not come. Most people had come back from the sea. They had fled after that first night. Gone out to the sea.[125] Whole families. With all their belongings. Protected by the sea, where *dahalo* could not get them. Only the *dahalo* did not come. People came back to land, to sand. They used their *laka* for fishing instead, and the winds stayed calm.

People caught a lot of fish at that time.[126] Fresh fish filled the market. Fried fish filled the streets. Everybody ate fish until they grew tired of it. And still more came. People salted and sent

kilos and kilos into town for the highlands, for andafy. The winds stayed calm. The water stayed clean. The fish kept coming. Everybody noticed. Soon they no longer talked about *dahalo*. All talk turned to the fish. To the wind. To the sea. Rhum drinkers talked about it. *Ramy* players talked about it. Women talked about it. Men talked about it. They told stories of times past when they had seen fish like that. They remembered times when the sea had whipped at their *laka*, when the winds blew them back to shore with no fish. When they would go out and dive into the sea but it had grown so dirty they could not see. Times they thought they might never see fish again. Times the tides turned, and the fish came again. Sometimes more than they could count. Sometimes just enough to get them through another year. Thus, like that, the water turned. The winds turned. They turned with them. They went out to sea. They came back to shore. If talk got this far, they turned to *ampelamananisa*[127], to all *vavindrano*.

The man had not seen the *vavindrano* with their eyes. They knew the other man who had, though. The two grew up together. They used to work together when still young. Net fishing, diving. They used to fish near the islands off of Morombe. They always caught fish out there. Made lots of money. Long ago. Before the man had met the mother of their children. They drank every night. Fished every day. Wore the best clothes. They had lots of money back then. From the fish. On one of those days, the man stayed in the boat while their friend dove down. They stayed down for a long time. The man remembered how worried they grew as the minutes went by. They called out. Looked down into the clean water. They acted as if their friend had fallen prey to a shark, but they saw no blood in the water.[128] They called out. As fifteen minutes passed, the man emerged from the water. They brought with them a large fish. Without saying anything, they continued the days work. Only months later did they tell their friend what had happened. They saw a *vavindrano*. The man knew they should not tell, but they had to because the two friends worked

together. For months they brought small gifts for the *vavindrano*, coins, gold. On that day, when the man went to put a coin in the coral, the *vavindrano* came out from behind a rock. At first, they looked like a woman, but the man saw their fish tail. The *vavindrano* gave them the large fish. *Aia koa! Tena marina.* The man did not believe their friend either. They acted as if the man had lied. Maybe they drank too much *toaka gasy*.

You see, the man should not have told the story. A person cannot tell when they see a *vavindrano*. They could get very angry. The next time the man went out to sea, they did not come back. The wind did not blow strong that day. The water remained clean. The man's *laka* came back to shore empty, though. Everybody looked for them. They all went out that day and for a week. Looking. The body never came to shore. Somebody said that a *vazaha* had stolen them. A *vazaha* with a speedboat who used to live on one of the islands. They stole people for their eyes and hearts, which they sent *andafy* for money. The *vazaha* did not steal that man, though. *Vavindrano* did.[129] Two years later, they came back. Thin. Their hair long. They came out of the water.[130] Just like that. People say they still live there. They lived on the islands for a long time. Now that ANGAP kicked everyone off the islands, they say the man lives in Morombe. They never said where they had gone for all that time.

They all knew somebody who had seen a *vavindrano.* Maybe even some of them had. They did not say if they had. They all knew somebody with a big mouth. One saw what they mistook for an octopus, only to realize that they grabbed for the long, black hair of a *vavindrano*. One only saw the woman swimming away. Some said it made them scared. Some said it made them money. A debate broke out. Not all the stories sounded true. None of them had seen a *vavindrano* with their own eyes. Everybody knew these stories had no value. Just stories. Everybody knew *vavindrano* lived in the ocean. Only nobody who had seen them would ever tell stories like that.

Just stories. What of the man who disappeared for so long? Lost in the sea[131]. How did they come back? Where did they go? They kept it up as they made their way out of the yard and down the path, their debate growing softer with each distancing step. As they left, Hitô's mom remarked to Binô's mom that they should consider taking up fishing. Men must also live under the water if all those women did. And men with money at that. All those coins their own men had left underwater. All that gold they had given to rocks instead of their spouses.

Mavina came through the gate with their dad's sisters. The women knelt by the *ramy* players, who listened without turning their heads from the game. Their father would put the *botsy* down on Saturday. A ballet would take place on Friday at 3:00. Would their brother come back before then? Had the woman not talked to their spouse? Their phone had run out of batteries. Yes, Mavina's dad[132] would return on Thursday. The women got up to continue on their rounds through town. From the *ramy* table, the players could see them go into the next courtyard and kneel down by Nenikely. Mavina stayed behind, hovering near their mother. The woman pushed them away. They need to go with Nenikely[133] back to their grandmother's house where they could play with their siblings and dolls. The child refused. Go. Quickly, before they left without them. The child began to pout. They pulled on their mother's arm. Go. Quickly. Look they will leave soon. Go. If they went now, Nenikely would buy them candy and balloons. Go. Still they refused. Finally, the woman reached under their sarong and pulled out 200 Ar. They handed it to the child who quickly ran off to catch up with the women who had moved on to the next house. They need to practice their ballet anyway. Mavina's mom had not seen it yet. The children hid every day to practice. Sometimes they came looking for Mavina if their mom had not already dropped the child off at the market with their in-laws. They did not know who else would perform at the ballet. It did not matter. They had to go. Their father-in-law owned the *botsy*. They all had to go. Their brother

owned the *botsy*.

They had gone to the other three too. They remembered the first one, when they still studied. Mavina's mom met Mavina's dad that night. They danced in the ballet for that first *botsy* because their grandmother's sister who had married the man's father, told them that the woman could dance. At the time, Mavina's dad still studied in town, but they came home to put the *botsy* in the water. Their sister studied with Mavina's mom back then. They danced together at the ballet, and at the party they met the brother. At the time, maybe people did not want them together, family like that. Maybe their parents yelled at them or whipped them with a ray tail. Nobody could remember. Nobody talked about it anymore.[134] Now, they had a child. The woman lived in their mother's house. The man worked on their father's *botsy.* The third one. The first one they sold after a few years. They could not trust the captain, who they thought lied about the count. They sold it and built the second one. The second one sunk going into town. It carried *vahiny* back from *lakroa*. Too many. Too heavy. The boat hit a sand bar and capsized. Most people did not know how to swim. Some of them got stuck under the mast or in the sails. Not far from shore. Not far at all, but most of the passengers died. Too many people. Too heavy. After that, the man did not build another *botsy* for years. Who knows why? Only they know that. Much later, they built the third. Mavina's dad worked on it. Now, they built a fourth. The man had money. Everybody would go to the ballet. Everybody would go to the party. Everybody would put the *botsy* down in the morning.

Fish made money for everybody. They played it at the *ramy* table and made more. A few days before their spouse came home, Mavina's mom brought down a large bag full of *lambahoany* when they came to play. Those that had not sold after the first invitation and cancelation.They took out samples of each style for the women to look at. How much for each? Did they have more? They held them up to see the writing along the bottom. *Ngoma tsy mahafaty*. *Fomba ny lelahy*

manana bola mampirafy. Another one did not have writing but everybody liked the color. Did they have enough for everybody? Which one had people already bought? How much for the one without writing? They wanted to buy all of it, so nobody else would match them. They wanted to do a complete just between them. They went back and forth debating the merits of the different options, turning their cards as they talked. Too slowly for some of the players. They shouted for the women to concentrate. They complained when people took too long to play. They teased when a person made an obvious error. If they did not waste time looking at all these *lambahoany* they would have noticed that all the fours had already dropped. The talk did not work their heads. They could afford to look away for a turn or two. The men could win a couple. Their money would come back to them later. They still had time. At last, they bought all of the purple ones, folded the rest back up, and put them back into the bag for Mavina's mom. The woman gave the bag and money to Cilivia to take back to their in-laws' compound. They took Mavina as well with 200 Ar for candy and a balloon.

That Friday, the woman swept the yard in the morning. They had not done so in some time. It had filled with wood shavings from when the man sanded the new planks for the house. The wind blew them into piles against every edge and corner in the yard. They did not float like *pistache* or rice husks. They did not sink like bits of charcoal either. They piled and spilled like the sand they covered and that covered them. The woman swept it all up. The wood shavings. The charcoal bits. The *pistache* husks. The rice husks. They swept it all up. Collected it in their hands. Let the sand slip through their fingers. They did not get it all. Much of it stayed behind in the cleaned sand, that gray sand that absorbed the sun instead of reflecting it, that sand grayed by the shade of the house. When they finished, they took out the dirty dishes from the night before. They took them out of the basin and stacked them on the table, leaving behind scraps of food and rice

settled at the bottom of water. They dumped it out in a bucket by the pig pen and went about cleaning the dishes. When they had finished, they sat down on a *tihy* and leaned against the house waiting for somebody to come by on their way to the market. They bought fish that day. Fish 1000 Ar, three tomatoes for one thousand, garlic 300 Ar, onion five hundred. When they got the fish, they immediately set up about preparing it. Its gills would not stay red, its eyes clear, not in that heat. They filled another basin with water and put the fish into it. One by one, they removed their scales. Their knife popped the scales off and flicked them back into the water. Some fell in the sand instead. They gutted it, next. Cut traces on either side. Marinated it in salt, garlic, and pepper. As it sat, they started cooking the sauce, sifted the rice, and put it on the coals as well. By noon, they had finished. They set down on the *tihy* again to eat.

After lunch, the woman headed next door to play *ramy*. Almost all the players had also arrived early and the game had already started. The woman waited only one turn for the round to end. Some people did not want to let them in because they had missed the first turn of the last round. They ignored them and took a place at the table. Why did the owner of the cards not run two tables if too many people wanted to play? They passed over 5000 Ar and picked up their cards. Another player watched over their shoulder. Their child climbed into their lap. They passed cards. Picked up cards. They did not win the last turn, but they stayed in the game because they sat across from the winner. They won the first turn of the next round, but they did not get seven. Only 2000 Ar. They could keep playing but their money had not returned yet. They did keep playing. They lost two more turns and had to leave for the next round. Three turns later they came back in. They lost one turn, won seven on the next, lost the next. They stayed through the next round because some of the players had already left to get ready. They did not win any of the next rounds, so they had to leave the game. The woman went back home. They pulled their freshly braided hair up into

a high bun, criss-crossing the braids in the back. They pulled out their new *lambahoany*, their white dress, and a pair of flats. They showered, dressed, did their make up, and put on perfume. After a quick look in the mirror, they locked up the house and went back to their sister's. Everybody gathered there. They all wore their complete. All together, the women left the compound. Their laughs echoed down the alleys as they wound their way north until only the sound of wind against the *voanio* leaves remained in the courtyard.

Cilivy sat in front of the locked house. Alone. Everyone else had left for the ballet. The child kept the house. For the first hour, they sat on a chair, hunched over the table. Later they moved to the edge of the veranda, leaned[135] up against one of its pillars.[136] They picked through the sand for hard bits of wood to clean under their nails or pieces of charcoal to draw on the cement with. Everyone else had left for the ballet. From the veranda, they could not see much of the yard, a small courtyard, running out of space for houses. Already five houses, two showers, a kitchen, and a duck coup filled the space. Only two of the houses had cement floors. The duck coup used to house pigs, and before that, Cilivia grew flowers there. One of the houses belonged to Cilivia's big father, who had not lived there for years since they moved south with their wife. Their children came to stay occasionally. Other times *vahiny* stayed there when they came for a *fomba*. Mostly, the house stayed empty. The roof needed fixing, and the thatch walls needed replacing. Maybe the owner would one day. Or their children. Or their grandchildren. Or their's. Only they knew that.

The courtyard gave onto pathways on all sides but the South, where a gate led to the next courtyard over. Binô's mom lived there in their grandmother's house. As did Hitô's mom in their father's house. Before, two brothers owned the two courtyards. Their sister lived in the courtyard to the east of theirs, and to the north of that one lived all of their parents. At first, the grandfather had not given land to their daughter, but when the woman's only child died, they raised one of

their brother's kids and lived on some of their brother's land that later became their own. That child's house belonged to Mavina's mom's spouse now.

The only house from before that still stood[137] had belonged to the grandfather. Their family came with the first families, who used to live across the water on the island. They lived their when the *vazaha* came that married two gasy women. One of the women came from the same family as the grandfather's grandmother. That's why their tombs lay across the water, and all the tombs of their descendants. All the tombs on that part of island belonged to one family like all the courtyards from the water to the forest south of the church. Before, only one courtyard sat where now four stood. One yard with one house, that remained through the years. A large, tall house, with cement floors and a tin roof. Nobody lived in it all year, but family always came through. Delicia's mom's house butted up against the North side of the big house so that they could have access to the main street. Peterô's mom lived in their father's old house. Their father's father, the oldest child of the grandfather, only had one child before dying. The grandfather raised them as their own. Now their father lived with their new wife on the other side of town. Only their daughters continued to live next to the big house, in the courtyard, now divided into four. The man did not have sons yet. Not even from their new wife, who had one child with them, a girl.

Before the grandfather's brothers and sisters lived in thatched houses near the big house. Then all their children lived in thatched houses near the big house. As did their children. Most of those houses no longer stood, but some had hardened over time, from thatch to wood, from wood to stone and tin. People still lived in them and kept them strong or strengthened them even more. Now, each courtyard around the big house had a least two or three wood houses. They stood longer than the thatch houses. Long enough for children to move into them, to harden them more, for their children. The children that did not move into their parents' houses, sometimes built their own.

Some built thatch houses. Some built harder houses. Some built thatch houses and bit by bit turned them into harder houses. They replaced the thatch walls with wood walls. They covered the sand floors with tarp. Then with linoleum. Then replaced them with concrete. They replaced thatch roofs with tin roofs. They built verandas. They grew flowers. They planted trees. Or they did not plant trees if their root systems would compromise their houses in a cyclone.

The big house watched all the other houses grow up around it, stretched out across the sand, watched them turn into big houses of their own with still more houses growing up around them. That sand on which they stood. It shifted, waxed, and waned under them and through them. A south wind rose, as Cilivy sat drawing on the veranda with charcoal. It picked up a mist of sand and laid it out gently across the cement. The sand slid across the yard, crashing against the houses before the winds pulled it back again. And again it came. It whipped and swirled around the houses, eddying at their corners. It dripped through cracks in their walls. It washed over recently swept floors. It pooled in holes in verandas. It piled up at their edges, some grains cascading back down those others that compacted into a long ridge sloping down from the verandas into the expanse of the yard. There, the top most layers of sand got easily caught up in the whims of the winds. The deepest sands moved little. Below the sand that danced with the winds. Below the sand that sat still, cradling wood chips, charcoal bits, cigaret butts, and the refuse of life. Below the last thin layer of grayed sand, hard like the peel of *lakoko*. Below the yellow, clean sand that only occasionally got unearthed when needed to concretize a house. There, lay the motionless sand that made the base for all the others built up on its back. There, lay the strength of the big house and all the big houses it bred. There, lay the sand that supported Cilivy, now, as they stood from their drawing.[138] They picked up the broom from the corner and swept away the sand that had accumulated. Finished, they regained their seat on the chair, leaning against the wall, and waited[139]

with the house for the return of everybody else.

V

SILENCE

Subtract from the village huma pestle pounding grains of rice
the swoosh of a winnowing tray
rice bubbling on the fire
chickens clucking in the yard
soft voices of women at work.

Bird songs stop.
Conchita Cumaldi arrives.
Don't panic, she says.

(Rosaldo 2014: 6)

They spread out their sarong and sat in the shade. Alone. They waited, but nobody joined them. The courtyard sat empty, still. They tucked the cards out of sight and laid down. In the sand, pieces of charcoal heated in the sun. In the houses, women cooled, sleeping on the floor, in the doorways, where a slight breeze blew open lace curtains and covered them in a moment's comfort. Everybody slept in that heat. Even the children fell silent. Even the music stood still. They all slept. Even the rhum drinkers rested. Even the ocean stayed home. They all avoided the heat. The woman on the sarong closed their eyes. No players came out in this heat. They all stayed home. They all slept. The sun arced across the courtyard as it began descending westward, elongating some swatches of shade, shortening others, peeking under verandas, through windows, and doors. Soon,

the sun would come to rouse them, converting their shady refuges into the very incandescence that had put them to sleep. The sun always comes.

The children woke first. Time for school. In packs of siblings, friends, and classmates, their squeals filled the passageways and alleys as they weaved their way between houses and fences, exhausting those last minutes of play that they had wasted on sleep. Always, the voice of a mother followed, sounding the silent steps of a straggler who tried to stay behind. Go! Get out of here! Hurry! Time for school! A woman rolled over in their doorway. The sun came sneaking in, spreading out across the ground, heating them against their will. The sounds of stubborn children and relentless mothers called to them, as well. Time for *ramy*! Another woman stands. They make their way to the game. The courtyard sits empty, still. Only one person there already, who sleeps on the ground. They spread out their sarong and lie down beside them in the shade. They wait. Nobody joins them.

The rhum drinkers wake next. Did they ever sleep? Or did their persistent chattering merely fade into a background noise like the wind? The music plays already. As if it had never stopped. The same songs. Repeating. They lift their slumped heads from table tops or arms and call out for some *kilalaky*. The radio's owner obliges. *Kilalaky* plays. Again. Repeated. The drunks do not even listen. They pick up the same debate from before they slept, or at least from before the women slept, or maybe just from before the women stopped listening. Always the same debate, anyway. Every day the same debate. My father said… Well my grandfather's brother… My uncle and your father… The rise and fall of their voices drift through the air. Everyone can hear them, though they try not to listen. A woman nods back to sleep. The rhum drinkers never sleep. All through the day they debate, drink, dance, debate, drink, dance, debate, drink, dance, repeat. Always time for rhum!

The woman on the sarong rolls over. They open their eyes. Sit up. Time for *ramy*? Let's

play. Only not enough players have arrived. The two women wait. Nobody joins them. They wait. When Delicia walks by, they call out. Where your mother? Sleeping. Where do you go? To the market. As they walk off, the women snicker. They don't know how to keep the count at the store. Their mother doesn't want them doing it anymore. The woman can't come play because they have to stay at the store in the afternoon. Otherwise, the count gets off. One of them bought 20 cups of rice, three cigarettes, and a cookie, before. They only charged them 40,000. They both laugh. Who else would play with them? Peterô's mom stays with their daughter, helping with the baby. They usually come every afternoon for *ramy*, but the baby fell sick. Mavina's mom? Their spouse came home. Hitô's mom? They went east to play bingo. Should they play just the two of them? For how much? 500 Ar? No. They wait. Nobody joins them. As the shade pulls further out across the sand, their waiting turns to gossip. Their gossip turns to sex talk. Their sex talk turns to laughter. The time for *ramy* has come and gone. That evening turns to other things.

A shout comes from over there. Fish! Bring it over here! What kind? *Lanora*. How much? Fifteen thousand. How about 1,500? Ten thousand. Fifteen thousand for these two? Not possible. 4,500 for these two. *Eka. Andao*. Expensive. Nobody went out today. Why not? Did they not know? Fifty *dahalo* arrived to the North, that morning. Ah! They might head this way. Mmhmm. People did not go out that day. Some have already left for the islands or to spend the night on their boats. Yea right?! Truth! The women hung their fish in the kitchen and went quickly to the store. Truth. The streets sat, empty, still. Nobody hung around outside watching passersby. No passersby passed by. Nobody sold fried fish or pistachio candies. Even the groups of young men suspended their usual strut up and down the street. Their lovers would not come out to watch them anyway.

The store remained open, but Delicia's mom had closed the fence in front of the veranda. They sat outside with their spouse. Any news? No. Any word? No. They all sat together. Did they

play? No. No players came. The woman had stayed home to weigh fish. Their voice dropped to a barely audible breath. The man gets angry if they play too late. They miss passersby carrying fish. They lost too much, yesterday. The other woman too. They lost 10K. The other lost 15K. Did the other woman win? No. They lost too. Just 3k. Oh! They acted as if the woman had won. They did win some to begin with, but they ended up losing. Who won, then? Not the owner of the cards, they only broke even. Did they see that woman from the South? They left right after winning a couple of rounds. Oh, yes. They stunk of castor oil! Did they smell it, too? Mmhmm. They must have taken all 28K. Mmhmm. Not many people out that night. The conversation trailed off. The three women sat in silence looking through the closed fence onto the empty street.

Did the woman get a lot of fish that day? No. They did not weigh much. Their spouse did not get much either. People did not go out that day. The *dahalo* scare them. *Dahalo?* Did they not know? No. *Dahalo* might come that night. How many? A lot. Maybe 40. They want revenge. Revenge for the way the police caught their leader and killed them. People called the mayor that night to tell them that 40 *dahalo* arrived from the North that day. Hmm? The mayor received the call while in the city for business. Then, they called the chief of gendarmes. Everyone fled out of fear. They went out on the sea. Whole families. Hmm! What can a few police do against 40 *dahalo*? Serious. Serious. Hmm. They shook their heads. The *dahalo* will bring guns. They want revenge. Mmhmm. They shook their heads. They did not know. They should go home. Yes, The woman needed to cook early if the *dahalo* came. Had they cooked their rice? Not yet. Yes, they should go. They went home and put the rice on hot coals, descaled, cleaned, and marinated the fish in garlic. They sat together on the veranda, speaking in low voices about the *dahalo* as the sun set.

After eating quickly, they locked all the doors and gates, closed all the windows, and turned out all the lights. Sitting under the most covered veranda, they quietly reconvened, too scared to

go to sleep, too scared to make noise. Their murmuring could not reach the ears of anyone who might pass in the night. Nobody would pass, though. Even the rhum drinkers stayed home. No music played, in homes or dancehalls or bars. Even the movie theater closed, and the silence of its generator made the night all the more frightful. Only the moon came out that night, shining so bright that it lit the entire town as if the sun had never set. A perfect night for siting out without fear, maybe playing *ramy*, or going next door to watch a movie. Nobody dared. The moonlight could not protect them from *dahalo*. Only the sea could. Only the sea could keep them alive for sure. Those that stayed behind would have to rely on what little darkness they could conjure that night. Rely on the feigned stillness of an empty house. They all went to bed early that night, but who knows what time they fell asleep, peeling their ears for the distant sounds of gunshots.

The woman woke to the sound of someone calling out in the dark. *Dahalo*. They did not move. Before, *dahalo* had gone to a woman's house in the night. The woman had nothing to give them. They did not have money. The *dahalo* hit them on the thigh with a large stick. Over and over again, they hit the woman on the thigh. They cut another woman before too. It does not matter if a person has money or not, *dahalo* will just get angry and hit them. The woman could hear the *dahalo* pulling on the gate, trying to get in. They called out again in a whisper. Then louder. *Fa maty zazamena.* Petera's baby died. Now, they recognized the voice. Scrambling from the bed, they tried to respond, but only a long cry broke the darkness. By the time they opened the door, the messenger had left. They fumbled in the dark for the light and clothes. In their hurry to get dressed, they forgot to shake their jacket before putting it on, and a large centipede dropped to the ground as they pushed their arm through the sleeve. It flopped and writhed on the ground in the dim yellow of the dying charge of their battery powered lamp. Grabbing a knife from a nearby shelf, they hacked at the animal, cutting it into seven still writhing pieces, its forcipules franticly

chomping at an invisible menace.

They stepped out. The sand lay hot under their feet against the chill of the moon. They set about waking the others. First within their own courtyard, they knocked on doors, whispered names in the night. *Fa maty zazamena.* Then to the neighboring yards, they shook on locked gates, called softly out on the wind to still sleeping sisters. *Fa maty zazamena*. All together, formless layers of warm jackets and colorful sarongs, they set out. In the dark. They had a ways to go. Far. Across town. *Fa maty zazamena*. The sand shown white under the bright moon. The wind had already blown away the day's footprints, leaving the town motionless. Nobody moved that night. Those that had stayed home, those that had not sought the protection of the sea, they stayed still in their beds. They did not turn on the lights. They did not burn candles. If *dahalo* had come, they would not have recognized an empty house from a full one. Only no *dahalo* came that night. No *dahalo* knocked on doors or called out names. No *dahalo* fired gun shots through the night. No siren would wake those who restlessly feigned sleep out of fear. Sirens do not ring when babies die. Only those who had heard the whispers would walk that night with the dead.

Approaching the house, they saw men sitting off to the side in silence. The father. How many children had they lost? The woman's first pregnancy did not go well. And before? Did they have other children? Do they not have a sister in town who also lost a baby? The one who married Hanicia's son? The sister lives here now, no? Maybe a different sister? How many sisters do they have? The women fell silent as they arrived. Without looking at the men, they went straight into the house, slipping off their flip-flops as they crossed over the threshold. Two candles burned in the dark. The woman lay in the bed, wrapped so thick in a fleece blanket that the entering women could not see them. Only the sound of their soft whimpering filled the room. Their mother sat on the floor by the bed. Motionless. Their eyes fixed on the swaddled corpse across the house.

Nobody moved as the new arrivals filed in and found places to sit on the floor. Nobody spoke. A few of them that could from where they sat glanced over at the baby. Somebody had already packed up all of the baby's things and removed them from the house. The house sat, emptied.

They sat.

Tears swelled in some of their eyes. Others stayed stoic, silent, and still. They sat.

One woman let out a shriek, wailing out the baby's name as if to call them back across immeasurable distance, across the thickness of wet heat and darkness of futures now fixed with emptiness. They sat.

Oh mother! They sat.

Nothing could happen in the night. They would wait until morning. How long would that take? Nobody knew. They did not check their phones. It did not matter. Morning would come. They need only wait. They need only sit. Stay through the night together. Sit together with that baby, with that daughter, with their daughter. The morning would come. Mornings always come. Death always comes. They knew how to sit well. They knew how to wait.

Nobody made a *kabary*. No men even entered the house. No women spoke either. Not for a baby. No words needed saying. No plans needed making. Nobody else would attend to this death. No more nights would go sleepless. No rhum would bought. No animals butchered. No food cooked. No food shared. They would only sit. They sat.

They waited.

Waited.

Waited for what?

For the light of morning.

For nothing.

They sat.

Oh mother.

They cried out.

They sat.

Stoic.

Silent.

Still they sat.

Still they cried out.

Still.

Oh mother.

A tear rolled down the face of the short woman with the long hair. They sat.

The woman next to the door adjusted their sarong.

The mother whimpered.

Their mother remained motionless, their eyes still fixed across the room. They sat.

They cried out. Oh mother! Oh mother!

Nobody sang. They sat. Nobody spoke. They sat. Nobody moved. They sat. They sat between a mother wrapped in grief lying to the North and a child wrapped in white lying to the

South. Thus, they sat. Filling that distance. Filling that space. With what? Not with words. Words cannot. Words know how to fill, but they do not know how to wait. Waiting, sitting, they filled time with nothing. They hollowed time out. Silent. Still. They sat. Hard against encroaching time. Hard against insistent time. They sat. Mothers. Daughters. They sat. Through the night. They did not sleep. They sat. Listening to the muted sorrow coming from the bed. The only sound. It covered the night. They could not hear the chatter of the wind in the palms. They could not hear the sea. They sat in the sound of sorrow. Silence. Oh mother!

A red streak from the East broke through the thatch in the roof or maybe the wood wall panelling. Night waned. They could hear the men stirring outside and the sleeping children began to stretch out their limbs under blankets on the floor. The steady whimpering of the woman rose in strength and tempo. Time grew ever closer. Right behind them. It pressed against their back, weighing on them, that future without their child.

They sat.

As day break turned to daylight inside the house, they could hear the sounds of sawing wood. Oh mother. Oh mother. Nails piercing boards, drawing in, together, tight. Oh mother. They sat.

It arrived. The door opened. The future came clearly into view. The men entered the house from the Southwest door. They carried the small coffin with them to the table where the body lay. No! The mother leaped from the bed, bursting from their cocoon of covers that could not keep out the heat of death, flinging themselves forward across the room with a scream that tore apart the air straight to their baby as it lifted into loving arms for the last time. They collapsed. Unconscious. Letting out syncopated shrieks on the down beat of every breath. Their mothers threw themselves into the bed with the limp body of their inconsolable child, slapping their face and calling out their

name. The grandmother stood as if to go to the baby but stopped short. Oh mother. Oh mother. The men had already put it in the coffin. They left as quietly as they had come in. Nobody looked back. They did not stop walking, carrying the baby away. Some of the women stood and joined the procession. Some stayed to tend to the mother who still lay motionless in the bed, gasping, hollering. A mother never knows where their dead baby gets buried. Babies' bodies like water do not leave hard bones in the ground or hard tombs above it.

No baby lives in this house anymore.

The mother has left as well. Only their cries remain. Yelping jolts coming ever faster. Quick high pitched shots of breath. Beating through them. Like a twitch. Staccato. They cannot breathe between each burst as if someone has their hands around their neck, pulling them down, choking their scream. Gone. Gone in their screams. Gone from that body now hardened beyond its years. Hardened by death. Stiff like the bones deep beneath the ground. A stiffness that surpasses life. That expels it from their body in sharp screeching halts. Out life, out. Only heat can sit atop this body. This body overtaken. This childless mother.

Three or four women cradle the woman in the bed, trying to bring them back. One sits behind their child, their legs spread on either side of the woman's stiffened, lifeless body. They prop up the woman's torso with their own and rub down their chest between their breasts. Two others squat on either side of their child, slapping their inner thighs. Another comes and goes, fetching cups of water and throwing them on their child. We need silver! Clean silver! Someone begins rummaging through the suitcases stacked in the corner. Finding the silver, they pass it to the woman with the cup, who promptly submerges it in the water and pours it on the mother still stiff and spurting screeches. It does not work. We need copper! They yank a copper bracelet off the woman's wrist and put it in the water, dousing them anew. It does not work. Still, the women

continue in their efforts to revive their daughter. More rubbing, slapping, dousing. Still, the woman cannot stand. Their knees locked tight. Their screams will not let up. Grief has taken them. It will not let go. An animal. They saw an animal. An animal. There. In that empty house.

Here. Here, it has arrived. Time. On them. Now, they close their eyes for time has arrived. Brace against it. Push it back. Back. Back to where it came from, but the future floods in. Engulfs them. Weighing down on them. Bearing down on them. They had a child, before. They can still see them. There. Right in front of them. They strain to look at that spot across the house, to make their eyes see that place before where their baby lay, to fix their stare, to fix that place, that time, but time has rushed up on them from behind in the night. Now, they cannot move, they cannot close their eyes, but they cannot see. Time has arrived. Here. The future bearing down on them. Only the past can hold them against this future. This future now pushing itself forward into that past. They have to let the force of the past take them over. Hold them. Harden them to the bone so they can resist, persist against this future. Stand. Like the house. Like the sand. Stay. Against time. Here. Only they cannot stand. Their knees lock, their body stiff. Overtaken by the past or overtaken by the future.

They pour water down the woman's chest. They pour water over their legs. They try to pour water in their mouth, but the woman clinches their jaw and shakes their head. They rub the woman's chest. They slap their legs. They try to pour water down their mouth, but the woman wails out with each mouthful causing the water to run down their chin mingling with the water on their chest as it flows to their thighs. Collapsed against their mother, their limbs outstretched and stiff, the water coves them. It comes in splashing waves across them, collecting in pools and meandering rivers as it makes its way over their body. Their soaked clothes have turned the rich, dark shade of their regular hue, the blue of night close on the tails of sunset, faded brown blooming

into the vibrant black of its youth so far off in the past that most only barely remembered it, a dot on the horizon, now suddenly magnified, magnificently there. The fleece blanket, saturated as well, sops over the edge of the bed, dripping into the sandy floor. The sand, too, changes colors under the weight of water running between its grains, coating each one. The sand, hard and dry, but it cannot forget the water that bore it. Water and their mothers' hands run over their rigid body, calling to them, but the woman cannot move. Locked. Drowning. Screaming. Screaming as they bob up for air. Screaming. Screaming. Screaming. Screaming.

Then silence.

They slumped. Sinking into the wet. Their mothers bearing their weight. Slowly two women began to bend their legs from the knee. Pumping them in and out, slapping them up and down if they remained stiff. Their eyes looked up, now calm. They moved to stand though still rickety, relying on the strength of the other women around them. They fell back onto the bed. They had returned. There. In that empty house. In the distance, the sounds of people returning, trickling back across the sand of the risen sun from wherever the baby now lay. Somewhere far away. They would never go to that place. That far away place. They didn't even know where. They stood again. They could on their own, now. They pulled back their hair, which had come loose over the course of the morning, their braids falling about their face. The time had come to take the braids out, anyway. Their edges frayed. Wisps stuck out. Someone had remade the bed and prepared a bucket of water for a shower. People started to go outside to greet the others. Nobody went back in the house. Nobody stayed long. Time had come. Caught up to all of them. They left with it.

They took off their jackets as they walked home, releasing themselves from the heat that had built up over the course of the morning. Passing a compound, they called out a greeting. Any news? None. Long time no see. Just here. Where you all coming from? Back there. Far. Passing

the school, one of them nodded towards one of the students, pointing at them with puckered lips. That one I told you about. Oh, them! The one who can dance. With that woman? They lifted their eyebrows in silent confirmation. A child! How many years old? Fifteen, sixteen, maybe fourteen. Young. They do not know women yet. Oh they know. They tisked and shook their head. Passing a *Masikoro* selling thatch, they asked how much it cost. Expensive. Passing by women selling rice, they asked how much it cost. The price had dropped. Passing the market, they all stopped to look at the fish. Not many people sold. Nobody had gone out the night before. At least not to fish. Those that had set out to sea went not for fish, not for sea cucumber, but for safety. Only the water could protect them from encroaching death. *Dahalo* do not know the sea.

The siren rang. Once. Twice. A meeting. News about the *dahalo*. A crowd formed right outside the market, where the mayor had already begun talking. Standing in the middle, they spoke in an unstrained voice about the events of the day and night before. More people continued arriving as the chief of police took over speaking. Given the possibility of a real attack, the town would start a night watch. They would post a weekly schedule of names at the market for an indefinite period of time. What happened? People still hurried over as the crowd began to disperse. Small groups gathered to relay information or discuss the news. Almost as quickly as it had come together, the meeting broke apart and people headed home. No *dahalo* came the night before. No *dahalo* even came close. A lie. A rumor. A real threat, however. The night watch would protect them.

They went the rest of the way home with the disbanding crowd. None of them had done their morning chores or began cooking. Those that had older daughters could hope that they had washed the dishes and prepared the rice, but even they would only now return from school. They all immediately set to work, with little time to tell their spouses or those that had not come of the

night's events or the morning's news. Those with spouses and brothers in town or male clients near by might have announced the start of a night watch, but for the most part they turned towards sweeping, cleaning, fetching water, cooking, weighing fish, weighing sea cucumbers, tending to clients, reviewing finances, a morning's work in a few hours. Mavina's mom set about sweeping their yard. Their daughter having already done the dishes, cooked the rice, and prepped the fish, the next priority: that yard. Every day it filled with the waste of the preceding day. Every day, they swept. Every day it filled. They began by raking up the larger detritus from all around the yard into many small piles. Then, they went over the area just around their own house with a broom, clearing the sand of the small scraps of accumulated life that colored it, burying themselves so deep into it that nobody could have known if a person had thrown them on top of the sand or if the sand itself had regurgitated them as it shifted under the weight of daily footsteps, children running, *jokera* carrying 100 kilo bags of fish, or women sitting up long after sunset, squinting to distinguish a club from a spade as they played just one more round of *ramy*. They swept it all up. No matter if it came from above or below. They swept it all into neat piles. Then set about sifting, plunging their hands in and floating them out, overflowing. The grains of sand slipped between their fingers as they lifted their hands, leaving only bits of charcoal, cigarette butts, and empty, aluminum snack bags in their wake. Pile after pile, they squatted down. Pile after pile, they separated the sand from the trash. Finished, they spread the piles of cleaned sand back out across the yard, covering and submerging any remaining specs of charcoal.

Before long they all ate and went to sleep, as living people do. They slept the long sleep following a sleepless night. Undisturbed by children, rhum drinkers, heat, or *ramy*. They slept. A long time. Late in the afternoon, the women gradually reunited in the shade. They dealt the cards and began playing. More joined. They watched over shoulders, waiting their turns, cringing at

wrong moves, smiling at lucky draws. Waves of talk rose and crashed into silent concentration. Children stopped by, to take a rest from playing or to beg their mother for money despite their insistence that they did not have any. A dispute broke out over the count. The owner of the cards told Hitô's mom to put money in. No, they had put in twenty-five thousand on the second round. They got seven on the third turn. No, Jôsin's mom did. Not the last third turn, but before. Seven, so twenty thousand left. They played three. They took the turn. They got seven again. They had one left. No? Nobody responded. Cilivia's mom just won. They got their money back. Who owned the 10K? How many rounds had they played? Three left on that. What about the ten thousand? For them two. Jery-Marcos's mom still had two rounds in the game, though. No, they had one. They just won and only got back 3,000. First round! Did they still not know how to count?

The game went on. As night fell, they instructed a child to hold up a phone with the flashlight shining down on the cards. They played on. They sent other children out to buy fried fish, fried chicken, steak kabobs, and soup in the street. They played on. The cards turned. They played on. Nobody cooked. They played. Nobody went to watch a movie. They played. Long after the rest of the compound had gone to sleep, they played.

They would play the next day, too. The day after that, as well. They played *ramy* every day.

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[1] "Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight" (Malinowski 1922: 4).

[2] Do not imagine yourself set down in this place. No ship has brought you to these shores. Nor will this text deliver these shores to you. Lose sight, yes. Lose sight of your gear. Lose sight of the tropical beach. Lose sight of the native village. If you lose sight of that ship that carried you, not

here where you have not set foot nor will, that ship that carried you to where you now sit, if you lose sight of that ship, may that loss allow you to better hear, to listen, to feel that which sight has only ever blinded you to. Though we reject Malinowski's opening gambit, that rejection does not serve as rejoinder to the many anthropological critiques of visuality. To a certain extent, to do so would betray the larger project of calling back to the Gasy women who agreed to work with me on all this anthropology and for whom to have seen with one's own eyes constituted one of the strongest claims to knowledge. Even if we did feel enticed by a questioning of strong visual epistemologies or did want to give credence to problematizing surveillance, the Gasy position suffices. It suffices because regardless of whether or not seeing engenders knowing, nobody reading this will have seen. They have not seen with their own eyes the tropical beach. They have not seen with their own eyes the native village. They have not seen with their own eyes that ship that sails out of sight. Malinowski's invitation does not ask its reader to see. Indeed the last vestige of the familiar rapidly moves out of sight. Malinowski asks that we imagine. It asks that we imagine all that we cannot, have not, and will not see. All that we cannot, have not, and will not know.

When we close our eyes, when we reach out in the dark for something to guide our way, Malinowski throws us two life preserves: our imaginations and the anthropological text. These will shed light, give sight, make knowable that tropical beach and its native village. Except when they don't. Most often, they won't—and we should reflect on why it might seem scary to end up in a waiting place instead of all the places you'll go. Why do imagining and anthropology fail to give life? To preserve life? Why does the knowledge they produce not hold up to seeing with one's own eyes? What happens when we do not accept Malinowski's offer, but instead reflect on what kind of knowing our closed eyes produce, what limitations it has, and what possibilities?

[3] "We know that, as far as images of Black people are concerned, in their circulation, they often don't, in fact, do the imaging work that we expect of them. There are too many examples of this to name: from the videotaped beating of Rodney King in 1991, to the murder of Oscar Grant, to the brutal murders of twenty-one trans women in the United States as of November 2015, to all the circulating images of and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, to the ongoing deaths in transatlantic, trans-Mediterranean, and trans-continental crossings extending across the Black global diaspora. This is true even though and when we find images of Black suffering in various publics framed in and as calls to action or calls to feel with and for. Most often these images function as a hail to the non Black person in the Althusserian sense. That is, these images work to confirm the status, location, and already held opinions within dominant ideology about those exhibitions of spectacular Black bodies whose meanings then remain unchanged. We have been reminded by Hartman and many others that the repetition of the visual, discursive, state, and other quotidian and extraordinary cruel and unusual violences enacted on Black people does not lead to a cessation of violence, nor does it, across or within communities, lead primarily to sympathy or something like empathy. Such repetitions often work to solidify and make continuous the colonial project of violence. With that knowledge in mind, what kinds of ethical viewing and reading practices must we employ, *now*, in the face of these onslaughts? What might practices of Black annotation and Black redaction offer?

[…] Redaction and annotation toward seeing and reading otherwise; toward reading and seeing something in excess of what is caught in the frame; tower reading and seeing something beyond a visuality that is, as Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) argues, subtended by the logics of the administered plantation. In 'Home,' Toni Morrison (1998, 7) writes that she has consistently tried 'to carve away the accretions of deceit, blindness, ignorance, paralysis, and sheer malevolence embedded in raced

language so that other kinds of perception were not only available but inevitable'" (Sharpe 2016: 116-117).

[4] "The word *tantara* means both 'history' and 'story.' It can be used for any narrative presented as true. But if applied to recent events, the usual implication is that the speaker is not an eyewitness but is merely reporting something she has heard. Even when speaking of events that happened long ago, in Malagasy times, narrators would very often remark that they could not ultimately vouch for the truth of the story as they had not seen these things themselves" (Graeber 2007: 419n61).

[5] Reading Malinowski against Sharpe offers another angle from which to consider the work of imagining called for by Malinowski. The images evoked by Sharpe take us closer to seeing than the text in a literal sense, but their efficacy still depends on imagining. An imagining that ends up not directed towards the otherwise but towards the reification of violence against black bodies, and perhaps also against the inhabitants of Malinowski's imaginary (and yet all too real) tropical beaches and native villages. Reading these two together forces an uncomfortable move from the image, imagining, and knowing on the one hand to real bodies, real violence, and real suffering on the other. An uncomfortable move even theoretically as anthropologists go back and forth on epistemology versus ontology. Uncomfortable because tense. Tense like an overworked muscle or the strain of prolonged weight bearing. Tension that both threatens rupture and holds together, even strengthens. Tension between knowing that makes live and knowing that makes die, between visibility as access, power, repression, oppression and invisibility as precarity, death, resistance, and freedom. Tension between belonging to the known and belonging to the unknown. Tension between knowing and not-knowing.

If we return again to Malinowski, and the residue they left on how we do anthropology, the project

of moving away from imagining and the text as guides for hands groping in the dark asks also that we engage in different forms of writing and reading. That we redact, perhaps. That we annotate, too. Also, that we position ourselves differently to that redaction and annotation. When the government releases the report full of thick black lines, do we pine for what they cover up or read more carefully that writing that remains uncovered? Do we know how to read redacted texts? What writing does not always redact, even without the visible black lines? If all writing redacts, how do we do that redaction in ways that do not perpetuate forced invisibility or misguided imaginings?

[6] "Le concept se présente clos et ouvert, mystérieusement.

Les pensées de système abolissent dans le concept ce qui est ouverture.

La pensée de la trace confirme le concept comme élan, la relate: en fait le récitatif, le pose en relation, lui chante relativité" (Glissant 1997: 83).

The concept presents itself closed and open, mysteriously.

Modes of system thinking abolish, in the concept, what is opening.

Trace thinking confirms the concept as momentum, relates it: makes of it the recitative, puts it in relation, sings relativity to it. [my translation]

[7] When I first went to Madagascar, the study abroad program of which I was a member, took us every few weeks to a national park or wildlife preserve. On one such occasion, they organized a night hike. A Gasy guide took our restless cohort of student tourists more interested in exchanging scary stories in the dark than staying silent so as not to scare off the nocturnal animals we ostensibly set out to see. Every so often, the guide would stop and shine a flashlight on a chameleon or a lemur. That guide impressed me most, more than the animals. I wondered at how they had known to turn the light on. How did they find anything to show us at all, in that dark? Only now, do I think back and wonder not how but why? Why should they have shown us at all? We clearly did

not care to look at all, or to learn, or to listen. We wanted only to have someone show us, to show us only so that we might say we had seen.

In what ways do imagining and the text guide the reader through the darkness to knowledge? The text leads. Imagining replaces the unknown with the known. The text leads because its author sees. They have been to the beach. They lived in the village. They know the way because they have done the work of reading the signs, understanding the system, making sense of it all. We trust them because they relate their own findings to the findings of other guides to the same village, or one near by, or a comparable one at the very least, to *a* native village. We challenge them too, those among us who have also gone to a native village. They saw. We saw. If enough of us can see, we can guide all the rest of us to light, give or take some time spent debating the best way. For all of us though, regardless of approach, we aim to get out of the dark, to lead others behind us, towards visibility, and in that visibility, knowledge.

What if the author does not-know, though? If nobody paid somebody to shine a flashlight on all the things the author wanted to see, and even if they had, why do we expect, want, need the author to know? To know to the extent of creating a coherent system, an order out of our perceived chaos, a path for us to follow. To know by cutting off, by closing, by concluding. We need the author to lead us from the traces they came across in the sands of that beach, but those traces leave open many possible paths. Can a text only take us down one? For the moment, let us stand at the crossroad between all the paths, let us sit with the inability of knowing for sure which one to take. Just a moment to recognize the ever-presence of that unknowability as new traces continuously open up new paths for us to navigate.

[8] "Notice that, although Matti utters a shocking insult here, the quotative form protects her from being held responsible for it. It is the author of an insult, not the speaker *per se*, who is to blame.

In conversation, then, quotation can serve ends similar to those that are served in *xaxaar* performances by the use of intermediaries: disassociating speaker from author" (Irvine 1993: 125-126).

[9] "This is a very common style of exposition. First comes the account of distant wonders, things which might seem incredible and which can only be known by hearsay; then follows a much more recent piece of concrete evidence, almost always, something a living witness has seen with their own eyes. The movement is from mere words to visible images, *zavatra hita maso*, "things seen with the eyes," which is in rural Imerina the commonsense definition of incontestable truth.

Now, by my own definition, this style of exposition is not really narrative at all. These are really more forms of argument, direct efforts to persuade what is presumed to be a skeptical audience" (Graeber 2007: 179).

[10] "Most people found it hard to articulate what kind of existence the ancestors enjoy, how exactly the *angatse* acts on the living, whether dreams are a necessary vehicle for their interventions, and so on. Some were indifferent, even skeptical novices, while others struggled to produce a coherent account, and readily gave up by asserting: 'I don't know, I have never been dead '

[…]As people gather to get things done, they are likely to stop speculating or doubting or not caring about the ancestors' ways of being, their ways of communicating, of eating, and so on. Instead, they defer to whomever it was that, a very long time ago, originated this way of doing things and they just align themselves with it" (Astuti 2011: 17).

[11] "L'errance n'est pas l'exploration, coloniale ou non, ni l'abandon à des errements. Elle sait être immobile, et emporter.

Le monde, immédiatement inconnu.

Par la pensée de l'errance nous refusons les racines uniques et qui tuent autour d'elles: la pensée de l'errance est celle des enracinements solidaires et des racines en rhizome. […] L'errance est le lieu de la répétition, quand celle-ci aménage les infimes (infinies) variations qui chaque fois distinguent cette même répétition comme un moment de la connaissance. Les poètes et les conteurs se donnent instinctivement à cet art délicat du listage (par variations accumulées), qui nous fait voir que la répétition n'est pas un inutile doublement" (Glissant 2009: 61-62).

Wandering is not exploration, colonial or not, nor abandonment to misguided ways. It knows how to be still, and to carry away.

The world, instantly unknowable.

By wandering thought we refuse singular roots that kill around them: wandering thought is thinking from united rooting and from rhizomatic roots. […] Wandering is the site of repetition, when it arranges the minuscule (infinite) variations that each time distinguishes this same repetition as a moment of knowledge. Poets and storytellers instinctively give themselves to this delicate art of listing (by accumulated variations), which shows us that repetition is not useless doubling. [my translation]

[12] "Matters prove transparent when they shed all negativity, when they are smoothed out and leveled, when they do not resist being integrated into smooth streams of capital, communication, and information. Actions prove transparent when they are made operational—subordinate to a calculable, steerable, and controllable process. Time becomes transparent when it glides into a sequence of readily available present moments. This is also how the future undergoes

positivization, yielding an optimal presence. Transparent time knows neither fate nor event. Images are transparent when—freed from all dramaturgy, choreography, and scenography, from any hermeneutic depth, and indeed from any meaning at all—they become pornographic. Pornography is unmediated contact between the image and the eye. Things prove transparent when they abandon their singularity and find expression through their price alone. Money, which makes it possible to equate anything with anything else, abolishes all incommensurability, any and all singularity. The society of transparency is an *inferno of the same*" (Han 2015: 1-2).

[13] "I learned early—and repeatedly—that exposure shrivels and demeans its object, that the medium is the message and the journey its own reward, that intimating or acknowledging secrets is often more powerful than revealing them. This inhibits the sort if surgically precise ethnographic description conducted by the master structural-functionalists that I admire (though nothing provides as clear a picture as an autopsy), but it is not so far removed from the theory and practice of Western literature, of 'fiction,' as we say. This book is definitely a work of 'nonfiction,' but it tries to evoke and imply rather than state certain things—periodically to entice by means of glimpses, fragments, and allusions. This is the way that most Sakalava learn things as well" (Lambek 2002: 10).

[14] Definitely a work of fiction, this text does indeed take such a form for its ability to allude, to only offer fragments and traces, to intimate, to just talk. Some writers credit fiction with allowing them to dig deeper, to express more fully, to better represent. Through fiction, authors can more accurately and intimately portray the inner truths of their characters. This fiction explicitly does not do that. Instead, the ease with which fiction does not tell the truth motivates this writing. The opacity of its language, the uncertainty of its realness. As with French fantastic literature, this work never leaves the ambiguous. Though it does not place that ambiguity in the juxtaposition of 'the

real' and 'the supernatural,' it does, much like Gasy speech, always leave the reader with the feeling that this might have really happened and the author with some way to back out, to hedge, to deny. In this way, it also mirrors the larger question of the overall project: what does not-knowing do?

More than the stylistic and linguistic possibilities of fiction and their parallels with Gasy speech and learning, however, the form offers two key alternatives to nonfiction, or more precisely the most 'standard' forms of anthropological writing. These relate to the role of the reader and orientation towards time. Anthropological monographs tend to seek to transmit information and knowledge. The author does the heavy lifting in this regard, working on writing clearly, to the point, and with well organized arguments. Readers of anthropological nonfiction often expect to access the information and knowledge offered through the text with relative ease and some skills in reading these kinds of texts. To the extent that discussions about the form of such texts occur at all, they usually hinge on the ability with which the author clearly communicated their ideas. For all intents and purposes, this style of writing most resembles a conduit model of communication, in which language serves as a vessel for the transmission of ideas from one person's head to another's. Fiction, on the other hand, at least the kind emulated here, does not hold as fast to a conduit model of language, most notably in the role of the reader. Readers of fiction expect little from the author in the way of guidance and clarity. They more willingly forsake attachments to coherence and systematicness. They certainly do not expect the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth. To the contrary, fiction readers enjoy metaphor, indirect speech, cliffhangers, foreshadowing, and all those other techniques that put the quality of the text in the hands of the reader willing to read actively. This work takes up fiction, in this sense, because of the shifts in expectations of what readers do and the shift in expectations, on the part of the reader, of what

writing does.

Secondly, fiction and monographs—or articles for that matter—take differ stances towards time. Monographs face the future. The introduction establishes everything that comes after, outlining the argument. Each sentences sets up the next, leading the reader to an inevitable conclusion, already established in the introduction. Some go so far as to anticipate possible critiques of the argument and respond to them before anybody ever makes them. Even the conclusion, the one part of the text meant to look back over its own shoulder, even the conclusion, when done well, projects out into the future some yet unfulfilled possibility of the preceding text. Fiction does not know the future. It unrolls facing the past, where each detail comes out in its own time, accumulating a past from which the reader can understand each new bit until they eventually arrive at the end, which, had they skipped ahead to read, would not have made sense without all that preceded it. Fiction, then, embraces the unknowability of the future, lives in it, lives through it, rather than projecting into a future and bit by bit closing off all paths to an alternative future. This text, as fiction, but also thanks to fiction, turns it back on the future, relies on the traces of the past as they come bit by bit into the present and remain laid out in front of the reader.

Rather than resting on a stark opposition between fiction and the anthropological monograph, however, we should return to tension. Anthropologists, after all, regularly practice the kinds of orientation and learning that fiction calls for. Without falling into the trap of reducing people to texts, no anthropologist shows up on their tropical beach or sits down to write already knowing what they will learn or where they will go. In practice, they also face the past, stumble between traces, and only pick up on lies, metaphors, and foreshadowing some months later as the every expanding past of experience comes to the fore in a present moment. Even beyond the beach, we all learn without knowing, if not by intention at least by definition. If we cannot read people like

texts, we can read texts like people, intersubjectively, opaquely, without every really knowing them.

[15] "Angkaiyakmin assume that knowledge in circulation is necessarily incomplete, only 'halves' which require completion though an addition which they must provide themselves. Unlike Barth's notion of knowledge shaped in the image of a bounded individual subjectivity, Angkaiyakmin regard knowledge as relationally composed, constituted through combination and requiring other parts (e.g. examples, listeners) for completion" (Crook 1999: 237).

[16] "Acclamer le droit à l'opacité, en tourner un autre humanisme, c'est pourtant renoncer à ramener les vérités de l'étendue à la mesure d'une seule transparence, qui serait mienne, que j'imposerais. C'est ensuite fonder que l'inextricable, planté dans l'obscur, en dirige aussi les clartés non impératives" (Glissant 2009: 69).

To demand the right to opacity, to make it into another humanism, is, however, to renounce bringing the truths of the expanse down to the measure of a single transparency, which would be my own, that I would impose. It is also to establish that the inextricable, rooted in darkness, also leads to non-imperative clarities. [my translation]

[17] Though we have focused, thus far, primarily on questions of representation, this text does not take up the ontics of representation as its primary subject. In particular, it does not contribute to broader anthropological discussions stemming from the crisis of representation as to the accuracy or lack thereof of anthropological representation. That issues of style, reading, truth, and imagining have come up at all speaks to the significance of these themes within broader discussions of how language relates to knowledge production and how anthropological representations—more specifically written anthropological representations—participate in knowledge production. Of course, no one glove fits all of anthropology, so the generalized plural might mislead, here. [In

spoken Gasy, singular and plural nouns have no grammatical distinction. Without the presence of a quantifying adjective, only context would indicate if a person spoke of one or more of something. Sometimes, this made it hard for me to tell if people spoke generally or specifically. When I asked for clarification, I rarely got it from speaker or other listeners alike. For example, if somebody tried to warn about the dangers of some activity they would often point to illness or death caused by that activity. *Mampavozo ny gidro satria nisy namono olo tam taloha* could just as easily mean lemurs scare people because before they used to kill people as it could mean the lemur scares people because before lemurs used to kill people or before a lemur killed somebody or a lemur killed multiple people or any variation. Though I try when possible in this text to find English equivalents to some of the ambiguities afforded by Gasy grammar, like the absence of gendered third person pronouns, I could not find a comparable way of skirting the responsibility of overly specific and overly generalized speech.] To varying degrees, anthropological writings make use of or appeal to modes of representation more or less familiar to those they represent. They do so, most often, as part of projects of producing new or expanding existent knowledge, even when at times they acknowledge the limits of such projects. Thus, at least since the crisis of representation, if not before, discussions of representation serve to reinforce, challenge, reimagine, or critique epistemologies, but with the common goal of knowing better, if not more.

If admittedly a part of the discussion of representation up until this point has served to orient the reader—at least to the extent that the host orients the party goer when they tell them that they will blind fold them and spin them around three times before giving them a little push more or less in the right direction—the issue of representation, as it moves through epistemology, only provides a stepping stone towards a discussion of knowing, as that thing which choices concerning representation aim to augment. If I linger too long on representation, however, I do so not to

reinforce this knowledge facing direction. As such, I have brought to the fore examples of and calls for limited, obscure, and destabilized knowing. For forms that do not make us know, but do makes us not-know. In doing so, we move away from epistemology, but not towards agnotology, which still seems to hold negative connotation for all those things that do not lead to truth or accurate knowledge. Rather than ask how we come to not-know or how our representations lead us to not-knowing, we start with the seemingly obvious statement that people do not-know (at least as much as they do know) and that representations can leave open, can stay with ambiguity, can even obscure and misdirect in ways that productively undermine forms of truth making that operate through systematizing, ordering, surveillance, and colonialism.

[18] "In some ways, this is an ethnography that is not one, if such rubric demands full disclosure in the name of social science, if it requires producing the fiction of full and complete knowledge. There is so much that I do not share in this book, cannot or simply will not, a plethora of secrets kept, stories not shared, purposefully confounded, for better or for worse. A different kind of thinning.

Of course, anthropologists have always been pretty good secret keepers about certain things. It is hardly controversial to say that ethnography research has long been powered, to a certain extent, by what cannot or will not be written, from Malinowski's infamously offensive diary to the juicy stories of humor or intrigue or inappropriateness usually saved for academic cocktail parties and university lectures (that is, before the latter entered the domain of online permanency and global accessibility not all that different from formal publication). But many people know that the art science of ethnography has always pivoted on the inextricable ties between revelation and nondisclosure, between what's said and what's better left unsaid—and for any number of reasons, personal or political" (Jackson 2013: 91).

[19] "Sakalava history is constituted as a chronotopic maze of enclosures and disclosures. Bodies, voices, persons, objects, and lessons are diffused and congealed, and displayed and concealed behind fences, screens, and gates; around corners and over mountains; within and by means of narrative fragments, snatches of song, flashes of character, and irruptions of the past in the present. […] In order to crosshatch threshold one must remember something. Each time one turns the corner, one forgets something. […]

The image of the maze grasps—visualizes—the chronotope in spatial form. Temporality is partly constituted in the tension between the visible and the invisible, presence and absence, voice and silence" (Lambek 2002: 29).

[20] "[A]udiences often do not notice the ways in which stories add meaning to the events they describe. This makes telling stories an appealing rhetorical device because it allows speakers to comment on events in a veiled and indirect way. For instance, when speakers relate particular events to more general schemas, the audience can infer all sorts of related information" (Brison 1992: 20).

[21] "Ici, je voudrais examiner un aspect seulement de la décolonisation des savoirs, mais qui me semble décisif: la désorientation. Je crois en effet qu'il faut apprendre à se désorienter et, par là, à se décentrer—en soi-même et de soi-même—, pour parvenir à atteindre convenablement ou correctement les régions de l'humanité considérées longtemps—par les Européens—comme 'arriérées'. On sait combien l'orientation a été prisée, combien le nord est le symbole du repère par excellence (peut-on voyager sans boussole?). On sait également à quel point la philosophie a embrassé la métaphore. C'est pourquoi me revient en mémoire le texte publié en 1786 devenu si connu, dans lequel le philosophie allemand, Kant, pose la question de savoir 'comment s'orienter dans la pensée'. Il souligne d'abord le rapport étroit de l'espace et du corps propre car la

reconnaissance des points cardinaux suppose la distinction physique de la gauche et de la droite, de la main gauche et de la main droite. Si cette différence (subjective) n'est pas sentie, il n'est dès lors plus possible de s'orienter spatialement. Le philosophe remarque ensuite que l'orientation est liée à la mémoire. Il se représente, dans l'obscurité, dans sa chambre, espace qui lui est familier et estime que le souvenir de l'emplacement des objets est propre à lui permettre de se repérer facilement dans ce lieu pourtant devenu invisible. […]

Je passe ainsi du sens littéral au sens figuré car l'humanité tout entière, Européens compris, s'est organisée à partir de la grande différence entre ce qui est droit et bon et ce qui est gauche et mauvais, différence non véritablement physique, mais incarnée. Cela signifie que nous avons tous une géographie mentale, quelquefois cartographiée par des savants (histoire de la philosophie, études ethnographiques circonstanciées sur telle ou telle 'tribu', dictionnaire des dix personnalités les plus importantes de l'art, catalogues d'exposition qui indique des pays ou des nationalités, panoramas qui présentent l'art contemporain africain, etc.). Cette espèce de géographie physique, humaine, philosophique, et politique nous sert de sens commun ou de table d'orientation. Nous avons tous, pour le dire autrement, une *camera obscura* (une chambre noir) dans laquelle, malgré l'obscurité, nous pouvons situer les objets à la condition qu'ils n'aient pas été déplacés à notre insu par un plaisantin. N'y a-t-il pas, cependant, de plaisantin colonial qui a tout mis à l'envers? […]

L'orientation est reliée à une évaluation (droit/gauche) et à une colonisation de l'espace qui lui obéit symboliquement: est droit le moderne, est gauche le traditionnel; est droit l'universel, est gauche le particulier; est droit la langue, est gauche le dialecte ; est droit le peuple, est gauche la tribu; est droit la religion, est gauche la croyance ou la superstition. […] Le dualisme primitif que l'Occident a avalé métaphysiquement a polarisé le monde entier selon le droit et le gauche (et le haut et le bas) pour faire de l'Afrique un monde non pas différent mais *contraire* à l'Europe, un

monde d'autant plus obscur qu'il est un monde magique. Cette contrariété est à défaire. La désorientation implique de renoncer d'abord à la division droit-gauche qui pérennise un 'ordre du monde' à abolir par la décolonisation des savoirs et des pouvoirs" (Boulbina 2018: 18-20).

Here, I want to examine only one aspect of the decolonization of knowledge, but it seems decisive to me: disorientation. Indeed, I think that there is a need to disorient oneself and, from there, to decenter oneself—in oneself and on one's own—, in order to properly or correctly reach the regions of humanity long considered—by Europeans—to be 'backwards'. We know how much orientation has been prized, how much the

north is the ultimate symbol of a reference point (can we travel without a compass?). We also know the extent to which philosophy has embraced this metaphor. This is what brings to mind the now popular text published in 1786, in which the German philosopher, Kant, asks the question of how to know 'how to orient oneself in thought.' He first underlines the strict relation between space and the body itself because the acknowledgment of cardinal points presupposes the physical distinction between left and right, between the left hand and the right hand. If this (subjective) difference is not felt, it is not therefore possible to spatially orient. The philosopher next remarks that orientation in linked to memory. He depicts himself, in the dark, in his room, a space that is familiar to him and in which he considers the memory of the placement of objects is suitable for allowing him to easily find his bearings in this space despite it having become invisible. […]

I pass, thus, from a literal sense to a figurative sense because all of humanity, Europeans included, has organized itself around the big difference between what is right and good and what is left [read also gauche] *and bad, not as much a physical difference, but an embodied one. This signifies that we all have a mental geography, sometimes mapped by scholars (history of philosophy, ethnographic studies dependent on some 'tribe' or another, a dictionary of the ten*

most influential personalities in art, exhibition catalogs that indicate countries and nationalities, overviews that present contemporary African art, etc.). This kind of physical, human, philosophical, and political geography gives us a communal sense or a toposcope [topograph, orientation table]. *We all have, to put it differently, a camera obscura (a dark room) in which, despite the dark, we can find objects so long as they haven't been displaced without our knowledge by a practical joker. Have there not , however, been colonial practical jokers who have turned everything the wrong way around? […]*

Orientation is linked to an evaluation (right/left) and to a colonization of space that symbolically obeys it: is right the modern, is left the traditional; is right the universal, is left the particular; is right language, is left dialect; is right the population, is left the tribe; is right religion, is left belief or superstition. […] The primitive dualism that the Occident has metaphysically swallowed has polarized the entire world according to right and left (and up and down) making Africa a world not different but in opposition to Europe, a world all the more dark as it is a magical world. This opposition must be undone. Disorientation first requires a renouncing of the right-left division that perpetuates a 'world order' to be abolished by the decolonization of knowledge and power. [my translation]

[22] "This is a culture where many recite powerful verse such as *hain-teny*, a term that lends itself to multiple interpretations, including 'science of language,' 'burning words,' 'life of words,' and 'breath of life' (Fox 1990:40). Paulhan further helps us understand that *hain-teny* are not only recited, they are 'made to fight' in public discourse. A century after Raombana's remarks, Paulhan (1938; 1991; 2007), in his studies of *hain-teny*, came to appreciate the power of oral verse in Madagascar to persuade, to dissuade, and to incite the imagination. This is a culture that has many additional named genres of speech acts including *isamanga* (blue/beautiful speech),

volamandiadia (speech that tramples), and *fampariahitsa* (tossing of the seeds of the *ahitsa* plant; this last term carries the image of planting ideas for further reflective thought) (Michel-Andrianarahijaka, 1986). Further, there is the tradition of the *kabary* in the highlands, public discourse, which is in theory, and is made in practice, to resemble discursive exchange between a sovereign and his subjects. A contemporary Malagasy term for public, political discourse, *fampielezan-kevitra*, which westerners might gloss as 'propaganda,' carries as well the notion of using discourse to reveal and share ideas with the assumption that the audience is made up of sophisticated consumers of speech acts and capable of following [and assenting to] thoughtful analyses" (Kus and Rahijaona 2013: 47).

[23] "L'errance n'est pas l'exploration, coloniale ou non, ni l'abandon à des errements. Elle sait être immobile, et emporter.

Le monde, immédiatement inconnu.

Par la pensée de l'errance nous refusons les racines uniques et qui tuent autour d'elles: la pensée de l'errance est celle des enracinements solidaires et des racines en rhizome. […] L'errance est le lieu de la répétition, quand celle-ci aménage les infimes (infinies) variations qui chaque fois distinguent cette même répétition comme un moment de la connaissance. Les poètes et les conteurs se donnent instinctivement à cet art délicat du listage (par variations accumulées), qui nous fait voir que la répétition n'est pas un inutile doublement" (Glissant 2009: 61-62).

Wandering is not exploration, colonial or not, nor abandonment to misguided ways. It knows how to be still, and to carry away.

The world, instantly unknowable.

By wandering thought we refuse singular roots that kill around them: wandering thought is thinking from united rooting and from rhizomatic roots. […] Wandering is the site of repetition, when it arranges the minuscule (infinite) variations that each time distinguishes this same repetition as a moment of knowledge. Poets and storytellers instinctively give themselves to this delicate art of listing (by accumulated variations), which shows us that repetition is not useless doubling. [my translation]

[24] "Reading darkly means, among other things, a kind of knowing not predicated straightforwardly on sight, It is to feel, grope, invent, even pretend for the real—and most especially because the stakes are so high. Micheal Taussig cites Walter Benjamin to describe the quotidian as always already 'nervous,' in a perpetual 'state of emergency,' another ethnographic iteration of the volatile everydayness of trauma, an everydayness, an everyday darkness, that privileges tactility over visuality. Wimbush, Stewart, and Taussig are also interested in how we read and write these everyday emergencies, how we mobilize them toward analytical ends—and without simply flicking on some objectivist light-switch" (Jackson 2005: 67).

[25] Organized around arguments, theory, clarification, analysis, ethnographic writing cuts up its subject: a vignette here, a piece of recorded conversation there, only those bits that most clearly articulate the intended theoretical intervention. This cutting, segmenting, allows for ordering, in text, that which, long since left behind on some tropical beach, resists such smooth transparency. Even in the dark, we find our way through the well written text, so long as all the pieces remain organized the way we expect. Thus, if not in content, in form this style of writing follows in a long tradition of colonization. Annotated fiction reverses the form, cutting up the theory, as a form of

disorientation. Not that the fiction better represents some real people out there and their stories. No, this fiction lies, jokes, withholds. It refuses where the analysis disorients, Thus, this work does not just speak about not-knowing; it tries to produce it as a way of moving and relating. If it breaks open the containment metaphor of writing as the marriage of form and content, if it wanders about in the dark, hopefully it leaves just enough traces so that you do not get lost.

[26] Imagine yourself yet again moving around in a dark place, without a compass, disoriented, not-knowing where you will go or what will come next. You do not see a tropical beach, a native village, or the ship that brought you.

[27] "It is in robustly acknowledging these complicated histories of agency, imposition, pushback, acquiescence, aspiration, and sovereignty that anthropological limits are produced. […] Rather than stops, or impediments to knowing, those limits may be expansive in their ethnographic nonrenderings *and in what they do not tell us*" (Simpson 2014: 113).

[28] *To grasp shadows in order to extract from them the heavy words of silence and oblivion. To discover in them quiet and sleeping words.*

To speak. To name. To be… [My translation].

[29] "Vezoness is not a *state of being* which people are born into; rather, it is a *way of doing* which people perform, and which renders them Vezo (*mahavezo*)" (Astuti 1995: 16).

[30] "As Ramana showed when she warned me not to mention the topic of slave descent, it is speech which causes shame and blame, and speech which must be managed, because once words are uttered, you cannot control where they will go or what they will do. […] Social differentiation, status inequalities, and slave descent are incontrovertible facts of village life. Since these uncomfortable facts cannot be unmade, the priority is to avoid the trouble caused by referring to them. Such precautionary strategies, in recognizing the social force of words in politics and

interpersonal relations, try to rein in the danger inherent in the act of speaking" (Freeman 2013: 608).

[31] "Bosavi speakers participate in a shared framework for using forms of indirect speech such as *bale to* ('turned over words'), metaphors, allusion, connotations, lexical substitutes and forms of obfuscation and poetic devices. These speech forms have a surface as well as an underneath side (*ha:g*), or meaning, which according to context, may be concealed to some, but not to all. Used as verbal strategies, they are especially salient in situations of conflict, and require that listeners look for not one, but possibly two sides or meanings. These rhetorical strategies make the listener think about what is being said, and what is going on" (Schieffelen 2008: 435).

[32] "(1) language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another; (2) in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts or feelings in the words; (3) words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to the other; and (4) in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words" (Reddy 1979: 290).

[33] "But of course, no one expects young children to understand the deeper implications of the hand action—all they are expected to do is to perform it. Similarly, adults do not expect children to be able to understand the actions they witness, and themselves perform, during ancestral rituals—all that matters, as we shall see, is that they are present in larger numbers, as the multiplication of life that they instantiate" (Astuti 2011: 4).

[34] "Because of its inability to convey what is in the minds of others, Melanesians often say speech is 'mere talk' or 'just talk'—not something one should treat as of much importance" (Robbins 2008: 421).

[35] "Among other things, this sequel attempts to sketch some of the social and psychological effects

of believing that communication is a 'success without effort' system, when, in fact, it is an 'energy must be expended' system. […] [The conduit metaphor] objectifies meaning in a misleading and dehumanizing fashion. It influences us to talk and think about thoughts as if they had the same kind of external, intersubjective reality as lamp tables. Then, when this presumption proves dramatically false in operation, there seems to be nothing to blame except our own stupidity or malice. […]

Another point from the story worth emphasizing is that, to the extent that the conduit metaphor does see communication as requiring some slight expenditure of energy, it localizes this expenditure almost totally in the speaker or writer. The function of the reader or listener is trivialized. The radical subjectivist paradigm, on the other hand, makes it clear that readers and listeners face a difficult and highly creative task of reconstruction and hypothesis testing. Doing this work well probably requires considerable more energy than the conduit metaphor would lead us to expect" (Reddy 1979: 308-309).

[36] "I maintain that the opacity of identity discourses in Martinique is a condition of density that needs to be seriously considered instead of being further researched in order to arrive at a position of transparent analysis (the usual conclusion of many an ethnography). This latter position is reflective of positivist, empirical discourses' concerns about order, category and fixedness; interestingly (and, of course, not coincidentally) these have also been the concerns of colonial regimes, and the results of social research framed in this manner have been devastating for colonized populations who have been inevitably ordered, categorized and fixed in a subordinate, inferior position in relation to the colonizing 'civilization.'

[…] 'Black' bodies have long been scrutinized, conceptualized and organized by white bodies through legitimate 'scientific disciplines' such as anthropology which have their origins in colonial

metropoles. Yet these authoritative narratives (and the more direct, heavy-handed coercive actions of colonial governments) have never managed to be completely successful—the colonized subject has continuously avoided being pinned under the analytical microscope, creating much frustration for those who desired to make him or her transparent and therefore controllable" (Murray 2002: 15-16).

[37] All these forms of opaque speech, misdirection, joking, just talk, lying, double negatives, indirect speech, ambiguous speech, generalized speech, silence, they do more than simply indicate a shift in frame or a "map-territory relation" (Bateson 1972: 180). They create the possibility for speakers to back away from all speech. They can claim it originated with someone other than themselves, thereby displacing responsibility for it to that other person. They can say they only joked. They can simply refuse to say one way or the other. Despite the potential veracity of any speech or the actions taken based on a hearer's interpretations of that speech, the speech itself remains just talk, an always present out from the dangers of speech that fixes. Just talk does not bear the heavy weight of eliciting particular responses to particular truths nor does it seek authentication as the basis for relating. Instead, it stays with the ambiguity of unframed speech, or rather speech with multiple possible or floating frames.

Within conversations about the opacity of other minds language ideology, a small debate has arisen around the extent of the unknowability of others' minds and intentions. The argument goes that certainly some mind reading must occur even if frowned upon when done explicitly. For example, if a person comes into a shop and asks how much the rice costs, the shop owner would probably take this as an indication of a want on the person's part: a want to buy rice, a want to suss out the prices from competitors, a want to judge the status of the general price of goods in town, at the very least a want to know the price of rice in this particular shop. In turn, the shop-owner's response

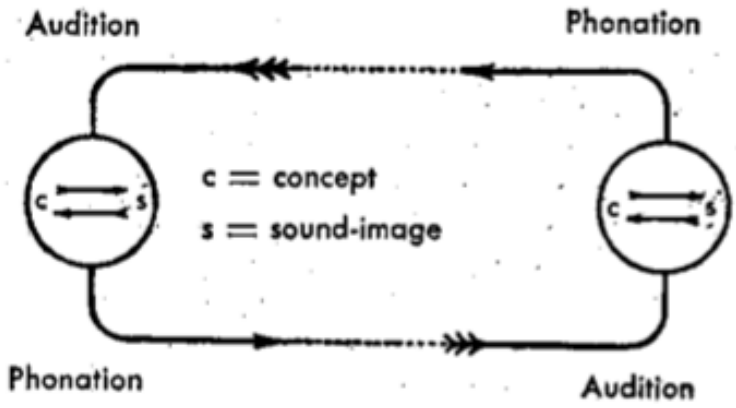
might indicate which of these interpretations they have in mind: if they respond with an invitation to buy rice, if they respond by lying about an inflated price, if they also comment on the scarcity of rice this time of year. Indeed, these kinds of mundane exchanges seem ripe with mind reading and, if not immediately transparent, accessible speech. This talk remains ambiguous too, however, insofar as somebody could always reframe their way out it if put on the spot about their mind reading. They lied about the price not because they thought the other person acted maliciously when inquiring after the price but because they had simply misspoken or confused the current price with the price from last month. The person asking did not really want to know the price of rice but just joked around while passing by the store that day. Thus, though the sale of rice might go off without a hitch and nobody will remember the every day occurrence, there remains the possibility of it having gone otherwise, of reframing, of another interpretation, an opening, an out. Rather than a king of determination of fixed inner states, mind reading, in this sense, amounts to taking a risk by putting into action one interpretation of speech. Still, even that action and any speech that might accompany it offers up so many new interpretations, that reframing always mitigates the risk. The unknowability of other minds rests not, therefore, in a fixed truth about the nature of minds but in the fluidity of said minds and the fluidity of speech as always reframeable and ambiguous. Speaking and listening with the constant awareness that this ambiguity pushes people out of talk geared towards facile truth trading through speech alone.

[38] "A response lies within the interviewee, and the problem simply consists of extracting it from her or him as directly as possible. The truth value of an informant statement is measured vis-à-vis its correspondence to the 'real' object 'out there,' as somehow grasped 'objectively,' independently of the manner in which it is communicated to the researcher. Note the way in which such advice encapsulates our own folk epistemology, conceiving of 'the truth' as being singular,

unequivocal, and semantically transparent, once it has been identified. It goes without saying (or does it really?) that this reassuringly places the researcher in the position of final arbiter of what is 'correct' and 'objective.' It also strongly biases the analyst in favor of responses that seem to bear a direct relationship to the 'reality' in question" (Briggs 1986: 22).

[39] "Suppose that two people, A and B, are convening with each other:

Suppose that the opening of the circuit is in A's brain, where mental facts (concepts) are associated with representations of the linguistic sounds (sound-images) that are used for their expression. A given concept unlocks a corresponding sound-image in the brain; this purely *psychological* phenomenon is followed in turn by a *physiological* process: the brain transmits an impulse corresponding to the image to the organs used in producing sounds. Then the sound waves travel from the mouth of A to the ear of B: a purely *physical* process. […] I shall diagram as follows:



" (de Saussure 1966: 11-12).

[40] "1 thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to become other) nor to "make" him in my image. These projects of transmutation—without metapsychosis—have resulted from the worst pretensions and the greatest of magnanimities on the part of West" (Glissant 1997a: 193)

[41] "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [Bestand]" (Heidegger 1977: 322).

[42] "Water for the Merina is associated with the power and strength of non-human living things, plants and animals. The Malagasy word for this power is *mahery* (from the root *hery*) which is normally translated as strength, vigor, energy (Abinal and Malzac, 1963: 238) and which has also associations with wildness and fast growth. Not only is water *mahery* but so are animals, particularly strong animals such as cattle which are nearly alway described as *mahery*. *Mahery* beings are also characterized by their type of filiation since they are only related to a parental generation through their mother

[…]The vital, strong, *mahery*, element has also a dark negative side which makes adding it to blessing problematic. The simplest expression of the negative side of the Vazimba *mahery* world is found in the historical myth which explains the establishment of civilization by the Merina as the result of the driving out of the wild matrilineal Vazimba and their queens. This was necessary before the order of the ancestors could reign. The symbolical and ritual construction go further. The Vazimba are associated with non-human force, vigour and creativity and this is thought to be characteristic of the feminine element of the person which is seen as 'wet' in accord with the

association of the Vazimba and water. Newborn children who have not yet received the blessing of the ancestors are entirely 'wet', they are called *zazarano*, children of water, and in the case of boys, at least, the have to be 'cleaned' of this element in order to become closer to the 'dry' ancestors in the tomb. […] The same notion is manifest in the various funerary rituals (Bloch, 1982) which are concerned with 'drying' the corpse so that it can enter the eternal tomb and join and merge with other dry ancestors" (Bloch 1989: 179-180).

[43] "Here I want to push 'turning away' into the ambit of refusal—of simply refusing the gaze, of disengagement—and to the possibilities that this structures: subject formation, but also politics and resurgent histories. In my ethnographic work I was deeply mindful of the range of possibilities available for political life, for identification and identity within and against recognition, all instantiated in refusals" (Simpson 2014: 106-107)

[44] "Because 'history' was carried in one's genealogy, 'surveying people's ancestors' was a means to transform previously autonomous people into subjects of the monarchy by subsuming them into the general history of the kingdom. By taking to the sea with their canoes, by refusing to pay tribute and to disclose to the *mpanjaka* who their ancestors were and where they came from, the Vezo were avoiding being so subsumed" (Astuti 1995: 75)

[45] "'When we steal, we take tangible shit,' Damon says to me as we walk over to McDonald's for a quick dinner on me. 'A TV, a stereo, and shit. Objects and shit. When white folks steal, they steal souls and shit, they steal cultures. We kill people, they kill peoples. That's the difference. Look at all that shit they done to us, and tell me they ain't evil.'

Soulthievery

The soultheft Damon was talking about manifests itself in many ways. Not just Tropical Fantasy sodas and Reebok sneakers. Not just KKK-owned Snapple products and water-bottled sterilization. But the rumors are a good entry-point into this world of stolen black bodies, souls, and people, a world bubbling over and above that familiar one of more discrete and tangible things" (Jackson 2005: 105-106).

[46] "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. […] 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. […]

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*). […] 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 cross they replace.

Concrete is considered a 'good thing' (*raha soa*) because it lasts a long time (*maharitsy*). The dead are thought to like it because it extends their material presence in the cemetery. Other people would often point to a small baby, a grandchild or a 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 letter's desire to be forgotten by the dead" (Astuti 1995: 126-127).

[47] "I followed up by asking if a woman would be able to prevail is she did not want to remarry and Kenuku answered, 'Yes, they will just talk and talk and finally they will leave it. If she listens to them she will remarry. If she doesn't, she will stay as she is'" (Brison 1992: 92).

[48] "There is a clear tendency to avoid making a specific commitment to some future event. […] This same fear of committing oneself to some future event taking place leads one to hold back certain information when warning, advising and giving directions. […] That is, speaker B tells speaker A that if he doesn't do X, then Y will not take place. He is not making the stronger commitment and stating that if A *does* do X, then Y will take place […]. Again the speaker is unwilling to commit himself to the stronger statement, as he cannot guarantee that the action will take place as instructed" (Keenan 1976: 71).

[49] "A child's separation is cried out by its mother who, from inside the house, sees the coffin go; she is not allowed to join the procession because people say that she would cry too much at the cemetery and would be unable to face the burial" (Astuti 1995a: 115).

"[B]abies of less than a year are given an unmarked burial, typically under a large tree in the forest, rather than being buried in tombs (*toy milky an-dolo*). Little babies are 'water children'

(*zazadrano*), they are 'soft' (*malemy*) and are therefore unable to stay upright. Only when they start sitting up (*fa mahay mipetsaky* [they know how to sit]) do they become 'people' (*fa olo*). 'Water children' are not buried in tombs, I was once told, because they lack bones (*taola tsy misy*): for burial is 'the gathering and the preservation of bones' (*fanajaria taola*)" (Astui 1995a: 96).

[50] "Perhaps the one expression I heard the most, when people talked about spirits, was simply "I don't know." Spirits were inherently unknowable. (The spirits that possessed mediums were ultimately unknowable as well.) I ended up concluding this lack of knowledge was not incidental; it was foundational. To put it bluntly, while OT would encourage me to privilege the fact that I will never fully understand Malagasy conceptions and to act *as if* those conceptions were simply determinant of reality, I decided to privilege the fact that my Malagasy interlocutors insisted they did not understand reality either; that nobody ever will be able to understand the world completely, and that this gives us something to talk about" (Graeber 2015: 28).

[51] "And why enlist a sincerity like this one, described variously as opaque, interiorized, nervous, dark, and impossible to verify? In other words, how do we gain anything from relinquishing our ability to test the real, to authenticate it—especially when the realness in question are about the very taxonomies we use to understand ourselves as human beings inextricably caught up in complicated, hierarchical, loving, violent, friendly, and fraught relationships? Trying to think through potential answers to those questions, I have attempted to play a bit of the *bricoleur*, the 'sauntering *flâneur,*' splicing the same ethnographic elements into differing configurations, combining the pieces into what I hope to be productive juxtapositions. I wanted to work recursively, centripetally, emphasizing our mutual inability to look inside one another, to ever fully reach the unknown recess of social interlocutors. And so, alongside illumination through 'thick description' and ethnographic detail, I have opted for another kind of 'deep play,' a groping around

in the darknesses of impermeability.

I have done so because this impermeability, this opacity, is productive—and not merely comprehensible through the otherwise important critiques of authenticity testing. Such critiques are predicated on powerful indictments of false naturalizations, the same false naturalizations that prove integral to affective investments in the destructiveness of race—the sexisms, racisms, xenophobias, and homophobias that anchor racial essentialism. However, readings of race that rely exclusively on such de-authenticating gestures may already have concede too much ground to the mandates of authenticity itself, an authenticity that imagines racial subjects as always already trapped within an intimate, unthinking, and thinglike objecthood. But even these *things* have insides, a sharp 'black interior' usually blunted by the dictates of begged questions ('What is inside?') that authenticity tests try, vaingloriously, to answer. Sincerity recognizes these racial subjects as impermeable but not simply objectified. Instead of creating some authenticating puppeteer who predetermines the movements of racialized marionettes, sincerity sees racial identity as a continual debate between culpable subjects (even if those subjects' own fears would wish *others* into some kind of petrified and mute materiality).

The problem is not opacity, a belief that might propel some into a metaphysics of mutuality—where all is knowable to all and subjectivity implies the profoundest understanding of the selfsame other, the interconnected and permeable other. Opacity here passes itself off as diaphanous, easily seen through, convincing us to think that we can peer beyond it and into the real, which is little more than the painted-over hillside that Wile E. Coyote assumes must be roadway—and not just because it looks like one, but also because he has already seen the Road Runner dash straight through and into it, into the rocky mountain's insides" (Jackson 2005: 225-227).

[52] "[Anthropologists] seek knowledge in local Muchonas, one might say, in order to *be* like him,

the adroit knowledge-broker, in a discipline which is fundamentally and teleologically knowledge-orientated" (Chua 2009: 332).

[53] "Pacific assumptions about the impossibility of knowing the minds of others fundamentally contradict social scientific models that assume such knowledge is possible, and that further assume that gaining such knowledge stands universally as a regulating ideal for human beings in engagement with their fellows" (Robbins and Rumsey 2008: 408).

[54] "Je réclame pour tout le droit à l'*opacité*, qui n'est pas le renfermement.

C'est pour réagir par là contre tant de réductions à la fausse clarté de modèles universels.

Il ne m'est pas nécessaire de 'comprendre' qui que ce soit, individu, communauté, peuple, de le 'prendre avec moi' au prix de l'étouffer, de le perdre ainsi dans une totalité assommante que je gérerais, pour accepter de vivre avec lui, de bâtir avec lui, de risquer avec lui." (Glissant 1997b: 29).

I demand for all the right to opacity, which is not withdrawal.

It is, thereby, to react against so many reductions to the false clarity of universal models.

It is not a necessity for me to 'understand' anybody, individual, community, population, to 'take them with me' at the cost of suffocating them, to thus lose them in a stifling totality that I would manage, to accept to live with them, to build with them, to risk with them. [my translation]

[55] "Communication theories based on the conduit metaphor turn from the pathetic to the evil when they are applied indiscriminately on a large scale, say, in government surveillance or computerized files. There, what is most crucial for real understanding is almost never included, and it is assumed that the words in the files have meaning in themselves—disembodied, objective, understandable meaning. When a society lives by the conduit metaphor on a large scale, misunderstanding, persecution, and much worse are the likely products" (Lakoff and Johnson 2008: 232).

[56] "[W]hat is enacted through secrecy is an interpellative politics of epistemophilia—the performative constitution not just of 'the secret', but, more importantly, of (real or imagined) Others who are desperate to know. When seen in this light, an important difference between 'privacy' and 'secrecy' thus lies in the fact that the latter entails the production of an absence, a zone of not-knowing, that is constructed as the target to be overcome for epistemophilics" (Kirsch 2015: 203-204).

[57] "In the tumult that attended the onset of the revival, people began to confess their sins publicly and some people who claimed gifts of discernment publicly reported the sins they claimed to be able to see in the minds of others. We can take this initial enthusiasm for public verbal confession as an early experiment in fulfilling the Protestant demand to become subjects who speak sincerely about what they know in their minds and who can also read the minds of others (for in Protestant language ideologies, the mind-reading hearer is an important complement to the sincere speaker). As a rather hurried solution to the problem of constructing the sincere speaker and hearer, public confession and discernment proved extremely disruptive practices: Urapmin tell several stories of people who nearly committed suicide out of shame after publicly confessing their own sins or having them confessed by others" (Robbins 2008: 425)

[58] "It is unlikely, therefore, that the informational needs of the requestor will be immediately satisfied. In fact, interlocutors are generally aware of the reluctance to depart with requested information. They *expect* the response of the addressee to be less than satisfactory" (Keenan 1976: 70).

[59] "We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing. The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out.

It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries.

The theory behind our tactics: 'The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away" (Hurston 1935: 2-3).

[60] "Like tracks in the sand, information found in a phone's call logs and other folders can be read as convincing evidence of deceit […]. The main problem with compromising messages is that, because of their materiality, they provide proof of unfaithfulness that cannot as easily be dismissed as rumors can. If deceit is common, and somewhat expected, it still causes a stir when revealed […]. Explaining how they deal with jealousy, young people commonly say that 'if you seek, you find' (*queen procura, encontra*). In other words, individuals know that their partner is likely to be deceitful and that if they set out to look for proof, they are bound to find some; but as long as they can turn a blind eye, they tend to do so. […] Even if many still do get caught red-handed by failing to take precautions, I argue that the phone nonetheless conceals enough to enable those who so choose to, to feign ignorance" (Archambault 2013:97).

[61] "A second and perhaps more significant motivation for revealing less information than would satisfy the addressee is *the fear of committing oneself explicitly to some particular claim.* Individuals regularly *avoid* making explicit statements about beliefs and activities" (Keenan 1976: 70).

[62] "We [the West] have since become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one

goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses—or is forced to confess. […] Western man has become a confessing animal.

Whence a metamorphosis in literature: we have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centering on the heroic or marvelous narration of 'trials' of bravery or sainthood, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage. When too this new way of philosophizing: seeking the fundamental relation to the true, not simply in oneself—in some forgotten knowledge, or in a certain primal trace—but in the self-examination that yields, through a multitude of fleeting impressions, the basic certainties of consciousness. The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a peer that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weight it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom: traditional themes in philosophy, which a 'political history of truth' would have to overturn by showing that truth is not by nature free—nor error servile—but that its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. The confession is an example of this.

One has to be completely taken in by this internal ruse of confession in order to attribute a fundamental role to censorship, to taboos regarding speaking and thinking; one has to have an

inverted image of power in order to believe that all these voices which have spoken so long in our civilization—repeating the formidable injunction to tell what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten, is thinking and what one thinks he is not thinking—are speaking to us of freedom. An immense labor to which the West has submitted generations in order to produce—while other forms of work ensured the accumulation of capital—men's subjection: their constitution as subjects in both senses of the word" (Foucault 1990: 59-60)

[63] "For Heidegger, the picture is the medium through which one takes over being and holds it fast. This theory of the picture does not explain today's media images, for they are simulacra that no longer represent 'beings.' They do not serve the purpose of 'positioning,' being 'before oneself,' and 'constantly having it in this way.' As simulacra without reference, they lead an independent existence, so to speak. […]

The society of transparency not only lacks truth; it also lacks symbolic appearance. Neither truth nor symbolic appearance are see-through. Only emptiness is entirely transparent. To avert this emptiness, a mass of information is brought into circulation. The mass of information and imagery offers fullness in which emptiness is still noticeable. More information and communication alone do not illuminate the world. Transparency also does not entail clairvoyance. The mass of information produces no truth" (Han 2015: 40-41)

[64] Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* takes on a perhaps unintended significance when considered in the context of bio/necropolitics. While they point to the dangers of a conduit model in its capacity to objectify, the real danger lies perhaps more ominously in its capacity to subjectify. Subjectification begins with confessional speech, but such speech relies on language ideologies beyond the content as such. For confessions to produce truths, listeners, in whatever form they take, must hear said speech as transmitting intentions, thoughts, feelings, all those supposedly

interior facts that biopower seeks to extract, to count, to classify, to regulate. Thus, bio/necropolitics rely on the transparency inherit in a conduit model, the transparency of words as easily accessible containers for ideas, and the ability of transparent words to render speakers transparent as well. Lakoff, Johnson, and Reddy's critique remains focused, however, on the thingification of people through their reduction to containers or the misrepresentation of the effort communication requires. They do not object to the notion that language should communicate interior states. Their critique problematizes the metaphor but not the ontology. The most pernicious aspect of the model thereby goes unquestioned: that language allows us to better know each other, to speak our minds and hearts so that others can understand them, to confess.

[65] "In Western knowledge economies in particular, ignorance often implies a highly pejorative sense of what *should* be known, rather than simply gaps or silences. To some extent, ethnographers of 'indigenous knowledge' replicate this status of knowledge in an implicit attempt to morally upgrade their informants and consequently the data gathered in fieldwork. I suggest that in order to avoid assuming a parallel of knowledge and its absence cross-culturally, practices that depart significantly from our own focus on knowledge, such as Waorani shamanism, should be understood as forms of 'unknowing.' That is, we should adopt a view that leaves open the possibility that gaps in knowledge can be valued, elaborated, and constituted in unfamiliar ways" (High 2012:130).

[66] "Though we might characterize the linguistic form as 'direct' or 'indirect,' we cannot presume that we have thereby characterized the statements communicative function. Some other aspects of the performance, such as its role structure, might provide a mitigation, obliqueness, or ambiguity lacking in the form of the insult statement itself. These other avenues for 'indirectness' can allow such tactics as complicating the message's route from source to utterer, and from utterer to target—

circumlocution in a social, rather than semantic, sense—as well as routing the message through complicating or 'non-serious' frames" (Irvine 1993: 129)

[67] "[S]peakers regularly avoid identifying an individual in their utterances. Many villagers feel that in identifying an individual, they may bring his identity to the attention of unfriendly forces. Someone in the world of the living or dead may overhear the utterance and take note of the individual referenced. Something unpleasant may befall the individual as a consequence of this specification. The tsiny would rest with the utterer. Consequently, terms of personal reference that specify individuals as distinct from other members of the community are avoided in favor of terms that do not make this distinction" (Keenan 1976: 72).

[68] If confession depends on a conduit model that transmits the inner intentions and thoughts of a person out to others through language in a transparent, effortless manner, then to turn towards an opacity of other minds language ideology short-circuits the foundation of biopolitical, colonial ordering. Such a language ideology provides, therefore an alternative linguistic basis for political demands to opacity as a right, as a form of relating, or as a refusal. Opacity of other minds ideologies, regardless of where they fall vis-à-vis the extent of the opacity, tend to reject language's role as communicating inner states. While the responsibility over language gets redirected from the speaker to the listener, in these ideologies, that responsibility does not center around a deciphering of truths or intentions. Speech remains unfinished, unstable, with trap doors, and escape routes, always ambiguous and open. This kind of language cannot produce transparency because it does arise from or produce simple containers, standing in reserve for organization and configuration into more truths and more standing reserve. What relation gets created through opaque speaking does not depend on knowing, on confessing, or transforming the opaque into the transparent.

[69] "Explicitly linked to the masked, communal figures of the black bloc, the Zapatistas, and Anonymous, Blas's project invites us to share in an air of 'deliberate mystery,' an opaque queer fog. Yet resisting biometric technologies of the face or introducing disruptions into this field of surveillance can also result in law enforcement agencies using yet more extreme approaches. As Blas observes in the video missive, Occupy activists and Afghan civilians alike became the object of biometric data collection, and the NYPD has criminalized the wearing of masks in public. […] Techniques of refusal, such as anonymous massification vis-à-vis masks, are unevenly available. There are some for whom flight may not be possible and/or for whom it may be forced. For example, becoming clandestine or deserting are not really options for populations already subject to spatialize forms of control. The Stop-and-Frisk program takes place almost entirely in black and brown neighborhoods, contexts in which people year to escape police harassment and violence but where efforts to evade surveillance or to contest it only result in heightened forms of scrutiny—hoodies and baggy pants or mascara and glitter are already sufficient to attract dangerous forms of attention" (McGlotten 2016: 273).

[70] "Moral rhetoric may dwell incessantly on the value of honesty, transparency, and *fahamarina*, "truth," there may be innumerable proverbs against lying, but in ordinary life, people seemed to proceed on the assumption that all human relations necessarily involve an element of deception; it is foolish to admit everything one is about; there will always be false fronts, hidden motives, stratagems. People were always laughingly accusing each other of lying, happily responding to any opinion with which they happen to disagree, or any account they wouldn't have told precisely the same way, with *lainga zany*, "that's a lie!" When even an embellishment of narration becomes a lie, lies in themselves can not be all that morally objectionable, and indeed the general opinion seemed to be that lies were only evil if done with evil ends in mind.

One might go even further: an ethos of avoiding confrontation necessarily meant that at least in certain circumstances, tact and diplomacy—in other words, benevolent lying—was a virtue" (Graeber 2007: 80).

[71] "In listening and shutting off the tape recorder, in situating each subject within her or his own shifting historical context of the present, these refusals speak volumes because they tell us when to stop. Whether or not we wish to share that is a matter of ethnography that can both *refuse* and also take up *refusal* in generative ways" (Simpson 2014: 113).

[72] "The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed. The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology—anatomical and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed toward the performances of the body, with attention to the process of life—characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through.

The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault 1990: 139-140)

[73] When presented with the critique that ontological approaches fail to take into account the all too real consequences of marginalization brought to bear on the lives of certain people and not others (Bessir and Bond 2014, Helmreich 2014), Descola responds that "if there is a at least one common purpose in the various approaches that have been subsumed under the label of the 'ontological turn,' it is precisely our attempt to do away with those Eurocentric categories and with the colonial project of sucking into our own cosmology peoples who, having lost their land, their dignity, and the control of their work-force, face the added ignominy of having to translate their way of life into our own way of life and of being grateful to us for providing them the tools to do so" (2014:

436). I struggle to find the best way to read this rebuttal. On the one hand, it gestures towards a recognition of the coloniality of anthropological truth making. On the other, it claims for itself the answer to that coloniality while simultaneously reproducing it (Todd 2016). The tension between these two readings arises, however, precisely because the approach promoted by Descola makes only one of them possible, unable to hold both simultaneously. Of course, it makes possible the first, and it does so by drawing a sharp line between epistemological and ontological approaches to anthropology (Salmond 2014, Viveiros de Castro 2014, Holbrad and Viveiros de Castro 2016). If an epistemological approach—and all anthropology falls under this category prior to the ontological turn—colonizes by reducing all worlds and those who inhabit them down to the categories through which Euro-Americans (the only anthropologists) make truth, than an ontological one decolonizes by returning that truth making capacity to all the 'non-anthropologists.'

While holding present Graeber's (2016) analysis of the ways that both the ontological approach and the epistemological approach as depicted by OTers actually depend on the more overarching (and, for Graeber, mistaken) ontology of worlds and their inhabitants as knowable, we might also turn to the question of how both these approaches actually *make* worlds in the same ways by making them knowable. In some ways, Graeber presents a kind of ontology insofar as he argues for unknowability as a feature of existing and not-knowing as a positioning with and towards that unknowability. Rather than asking whether we can or cannot know worlds or people or anything else, or even if that unknowability constitutes those worlds, people, etc, I turn instead to what knowing, and not-knowing, do in those worlds. What and how they make people by trying to know or not-know unknowable worlds. In these questions, epistemology and ontology collapse into each other, challenging the OTer position that by expanding the categories of true and real they do not,

also, participate in the same colonial projects they critique. However, rather than coming up with a neat social constructionist ontology, slipping ever so quickly back towards the epistemological paradigm under debate, I call forth those already present 'other' ontologies that also take aim at particular modes of knowing as ontic.

[74] "[*Scientia sexual*] claimed to ensure the physical vigor and the moral cleanliness of the social body; it promised to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized populations. In the name of a biological and historical urgency, it justified the racism of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in 'truth'" (Foucault 1990: 54).

[75] "This move, Barth argued in his 2000 Sidney Mintz lecture, 'An anthropology of knowledge', 'secure[s] the space for agency in our analysis' by 'focusing on the knowers and the acts of the knowers—the people who hold, learn, produce, and apply knowledge in their various activities and lives' (2002: 3). The advantage of this framework is thus that it avoids the danger of treating knowledge as 'a context-free, knower-less entity' (2002: 2). However, in concentrating its analytical energies on the knowers themselves, it leaves little room for an exploration of those knowers' understandings of *the way knowing works*" (Chua 2009: 340).

[76] "These arguments by means of negation (underdetermination, unfreedom) are ones I learned from Madagascar, where states of affairs are frequently described by what they are not and people by what they do not do, rather than what they are or do. Thus, the name Tsimihety, referring now to a large ethnic group in northern Madagascar, means "those who do not cut their hair," recalling an original refusal to follow a deferential mortuary observance on the death of a Sakalava overlord. It describes not what people do or must do, but a once politically salient refusal to do something (a historical event) and what, since then they do not do. This leaves a space that is underdetermined or under defined, albeit not a space that is free in any absolute sense." (Lambek 2015: 3).

[77] "'As yet'(on the crest) subject and object are undetermined. They are only virtually subject or object. Actually, they are what they will have been. The subject and object fall into definition on the same side of the actual-virtual distinction: the actual side. That is, they fall in retroactively (in the through). Their actual definition is a kind of experiential doppler effect immediately registering their already having passed, in the momentary calm before the next wave rolls up. Subjects are not preconstituted foundations for purposive movement yielding useful effects. They *are* effects: movement-effects, directly registered passings-on that are also phasing-out" (Massumi 2011:33)

[78] "In fact, very little endures in a Betsimisaraka village. The houses made of traveler's palm rarely last more than ten years and require constant renewal. Untended, they succumb quickly to the heavy rains and occasional cyclones, the traces of their brief existence sign erased and forgotten. The tombs are made primarily of wood and rot all too quickly in the damp earth. In likening themselves to standing stones, then, Betsimisaraka suggest that their very bodies are the most important memorials to ancestors. The memory of ancestors is not permanently fixed onto tombs or stones, the proverb implies, but remains internal. What this means is that the practices aimed at memorializing ancestors are far more pervasive than a simple invocation of them in ritual. Rather, they are embodied in people's continued willingness to keep the memories of ancestors alive, which they achieve by living, as closely as possible, the way they perceive ancestors lived" (Cole 2001: 108).

[79] "While the sand's referents are far from concrete, they provide a model for one way to understand the memory of same-sex desire and gender transgression on the island—as diffuse yet somehow omnipresent. […] Rather than invoke ideas about absence and invisibility as the condition of same-sex desiring and gender-transgressing people, turning to sand as a metaphor for the repository of memory may help our analyses engage with more fine-grained and ephemeral

presences than our usual archives would allow" (Agard-Jones 2012: 340).

[80] "Maybe this wide country just stretches your life to a thinness just trying to take it in, trying to calculate in it what you must do, the airy bay at its head scatters your thoughts like someone going mad from science and birds pulling your hair, ice invades your nostrils in chunks, land fills your throat, you are so busy with collecting the north, scrambling to the Arctic so wilfully, so busy getting a handle to steady you to this place you get blown into bays and lakes and fissures you have yet to see, except on a map in a schoolroom long ago but you have a sense that whole parts of you are floating in heavy lake water heading for what you suspect is some other life that lives there, and you, you only trust moving water and water that reveals itself in colour. It always takes long to come to what you have to say, you have to sweep this stretch of land up around your feet and point to the signs, pleat whole histories with pins in your mouth and guess at the fall of words" (Brand 2009: 7).

[81] Reading Wynter, Foucault, and Mbembe together presents, in many ways, the strongest argument for an ontology as epistemology. Biopower, as the power to make live or let die, necropolotics, as the power to make die in order to make live, and the overrepresentation of Man as white, capitalist, heterosexual, cis-gendered, male, so many practices of power through the categorizing, ordering, and management of biological life do not begin with an ontology of life as biological but with an epistemology that produces truths (including the truth of biology). These forms of humanness find their source in confession. Through truthful speech derived from and producing inner truths, confession renders transparent, makes known. The knowability of bodies and people produces the systems through which those same bodies can exist at all. Furthermore, external powers, states, colonists, and so on, do not impose these technologies of confession and transparency. Instead, we [and here I lament the lack of nuance of distinct words for an inclusive

versus an exclusive 'we' in English given an unknown listener. I cannot say 'they' because it would exclude me. I do mean an inclusive 'we' for some readers, but I mean an exclusive 'we' for other readers. I leave it to you, the reader, to know which] all enact these technologies such that the distinction between the production of the truth and the truth of that truth conflate in ourselves through our practices of knowing and confessing. Here, knowing does not reduce to a mere matter of thinking, of judgment, of feeling, but to a production of humanity at the level of existence, of life or death, where some human bodies do not count. Do not count, literally, in that counting amounts to letting live, to existing at all. We cannot disentangle epistemology from ontology in this model, for everything and everybody must present itself as knowable and knowing in order to count—even when that counting manifests as counting out.

[82] "This, he remarks, evokes the metaphorical understanding of the body's relation to time in Malagasy, in which a stream of time flows from behind to be revealed in the present. Common in nineteenth-century accounts of the greetings exchanged at the royal bath was the formal and polite response 'Trarantitra!' This is often translated in English as 'May you live long!'; however, its literal translation evince the same sense of being reached or caught (*tratra*)—this time not by the new year but rather by old age (*antitra*). The word *antitra* itself was variously translated as mature, completed, perfected, permanent, and durable, carrying resonances not simply of reaching old age but of being reached by the hard and stone like characteristics of the ancestors" (Crossland 2014: 52).

[83] "The centrifugal tendency—the nerve to find resources to 'make oneself living' that propels young people out into the world—has long been matched by centripetal forces that pull people back to their homelands" Cole 2010: 184).

[84] "Si nous renonçons aux pensées de système, c'est parce que nous avons connu qu'elles ont

imposé, ici et là, un absolu de l'Être, qui fut profondeur, magnificence, et limitation" (Glissant 1997b: 20).

If we renounce modes of system thinking, it is because we have known that they have imposed, here and there, an absolute of Being, that has been depth, magnificence, and limitation. [my translation]

[85] "And waiting in contexts like this is not necessarily any less active that moving. Just as movement throughout Africa can be understood as having become 'a locus of experimentation and recalibration as much as it is a sign of desperation' ([Simone 2003]: 34), so is staying put after a rush not just a matter of being left behind. In Ambondromifehy certainly, and perhaps elsewhere, abiding the familiar uncertainties of a place that may appear to be in decline can make more sense than exploring the possibilities, and unfamiliar uncertainties, of a next new thing" (Walsh 2010b. 248-249).

[86] "'Culture' described the difference that was found in these places and marked the ontological end-game of each exchange: a difference that had been contained into neat, ethnically-defined territorial spaces that now needed to be made sense of, to be ordered, ranked, to be governed, to be possessed. This is a form of politics that is more than representational, as this was a governmental and disciplinary possession of bodies and territories, and in this were included existent forms of philosophy, history and social life that Empire sought to speak of and speak for" (Simpson 2007: 67).

[87] The sticky part of bio/necropolitics and of the overrpresentation of Man, rests in the place of truth. These systems, or maybe better these modes of systematization, system thinking, do not flow linearly from (untrue) truths to forms of oppression, through the reification of those truths into operationalized ordering. If so, then the matter could be resolved with a simple replacement of the

untrue truths with true (or at least truer ones)—lets just include black bodies in the category human from now on, or more precisely in the category of humans deserving of life #alllivesmatter. Truth, however, does not provide a more or less accurately observed origin point based off of which system thinking develops—a kind of never ending epistemological battle over a fixed though not always apprehended state of things. System thinking produces the truths that produce it, or going even further, it produces the very notion of truth itself. The truth of biology. The truth of sexuality. The truth of gender. The truth of race. The truth of capital. The truth of exchange. The truth of kinship. Rather than the truthfulness of whatever comes after the 'of' in these examples, system thinking produces truth itself. Thus, it does not matter how many debates seek to problematize, reimagine, reconfigure, or reframe some possible after 'of,' the act of seeking out the truest truth of that thing only fuels the flames of system thinking like so many new twigs, logs, and ball of paper thrown into the fire pit.

[88] "Another time Josef told me that one of his more distant nephews, a *tangalamena* from another ancestry, came to him to ask about the original site of their prayer post (*jiro*). Josef knew that the original site of the post was now a trash heap where children defecated and adults urinated. He chose to keep quiet, however, because he knew his speech would provoke the ancestors to demand a bull to remove the filth and dishonor brought about by forgetting" (Cole 2001: 147).

[89] "Knowing and representing people within those places required more than military might; it required the methods and modalities of knowing—in particular, categorization, ethnological comparison, linguistic translation, and ethnography" (Simpson 2014: 95).

[90] "Authenticity conjures up images of people, as animate subjects, verifying inanimate objects. Authenticity presupposes this kind of relationship between an independent, thinking subject and a dependent, unthinking thing. The defining association is one of objectification, 'thingification': a

specialist applying his or her expertise to a seventeenth-century silver candlestick, or a newly discovered Picasso, or any item dusted off from a dead grandfather's attic and brought before the appraisers of PBS's *Antiques Roadshow*. Authenticity presupposes a relation between subjects (who authenticate) and objects (dumb, mute, and inorganic) that are interpreted and analyzed from the outside, because they cannot simply speak for themselves.

Sincerity, however, sets up a different relationship entirely. A mere object could never be sincere, even if it is authentic. Sincerity is a trait of the object's maker, or maybe even its authenticator, but never the object itself, at least not as we commonly use the term. Instead, sincerity presumes a liaison *between subjects*—not some external adjudicator and a lifeless scroll" (Jackson 2005: 14-15).

[91] "Viewed in this light, young Bidayuh adults' lack of interest in or refusal to learn about *adat gawai* is less a rejection of the *contents* of knowledge, than of the agentive effect of *knowing* and its 'built-in' relations. For knowing *adat gawai* does not entail merely the acquisition of a passive, abstract body of propositions, but also the obligation to perform and sustain those propositions. In this regard, ignorance—not-knowing—may be described as an equally productive mechanism for *denying* inappropriate relations and enabling non-(*adat gawai*)-knowers to engage fully in the relations associated with Christianity" (Chua 2009: 342).

[92] "Øyvind Dahl shows how highland terms for temporality serve to orient the speaker toward a past that lies 'in front of the eyes' (*two alohan'ny maso*). The Malagasy word for past (*taloha*) may be translated as 'there, in front of one's head.' In contrast, the future is located behind the body:

Future events are designated by *aoriana, any aoriana* (after, behind), or *any afara* (last). Another

expression referring to the future is *amin'ny manaraka* (in the following, behind).

[…] For highlanders, although the future is expected, it is also understood to be profoundly unknowable, lying outside one's normal field of experience. The actions of the present must always take place with an eye to the past and to maintaining relations with the ancestors, who inhabit the world alongside the living. To anticipate the future is to tempt fate and to risk drawing shame (*havatra*) and blame (*tsiny*) to oneself and one's family" (Crossland 2014: 39-40).

[93] "[T]he fundamental measure of our humanity lies in what we *cannot* know about each other. To recognize another person as human would then be to recognize the limits of one's possible knowledge of them. Their humanity is inseparable from their capacity to surprise us.

In a way, this fits quite well with what I was saying about why anthropologists are able to recognize they are not dealing with a fundamentally different sort of being. The constant process of assessing other peoples' characters, which I suggested is an inevitable feature of any relation between people, are so many innumerable imperfect ways of approximating something that ultimately cannot be known: how that person is likely to behave (Character, noted Aristotle, emerges from action.) But this is why for all they are necessarily partial, flawed—like bits of cloth pasted over something that's invisible—they nonetheless seem to convey such an immediate sense of common humanity" (Graeber 2007: 388-389).

[94] "Whites want to become whiter (all over), but so too do many people of color. Whatever their political orientation, few queers of color can escape the lure of whiteness. Who doesn't want to be beautiful, rich and white? Who doesn't want to possess technological, financial, and social power? Who doesn't want to control space? Who doesn't want to escape the darkness of violence, poverty, and exclusion? Why wouldn't one opt instead for translucency, transparency, and technological

control and power? Venus Xtravaganza was not alone in the wish she expressed in *Paris is Burning*: 'I would like to be a spoiled rich white girl'" (McGlotten 2016: 276-277).

[95] "Apparently spontaneous, these 'actants' are wholly generated, with neither past nor future, as tribal currents moving out of time. Moynihan's 'Families' are pure present and always tense. 'Ethnicity' in this case freezes in meaning, takes on constancy, assumes the look and the affects of the Eternal. We could say, then, that in its powerful stillness, 'ethnicity,' from the point of view of the 'Report,' embodies nothing more than a mode of memorial time [...]. As a signifier that has no movement in the field of signification, the use of 'ethnicity' for the living becomes purely appreciative, although one would be unwise not to concede its dangerous and fatal effects.

'Ethnicity' perceived as mythical time enables a writer to perform a variety of conceptual moves all at once. Under its hegemony, the human body becomes a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor" (Spillers 1987: 66)

[96] To exist as human, therefore, requires knowing, as surveillance (Foucault 1975), but also as constant production of the truth of humanity as such. For anthropology to document what people know, or how they know, or for anthropology to document the truths of those people as ontic, comes down to the same practice. Not just insofar as knowing about generates existence, but also insofar as both forms of anthropology rely on the same processes of documentation, knowledge production, classification, thingification, production of standing reserve, categorization, and so on and so forth, so many iterations of the bio/necropolitics of that very colonialism Descola claims to escape. What does it matter to those 'non-anthropologists' if we, anthropologists, get it right or wrong? If we document it correctly, truthfully? If we analyze it like them or like us? The very basis of these questions depend on the centrality of knowledge production as making human, and

most often making human in ways that do not include the 'non-anthropologists.' The question, then of the dangers of recognizing the all too real marginalization of people does not hinge on the all too realness of the categories Descola refuses to ascribe to them in favor of there own 'ontologies,' but in the all too real marginalization that both produce through the practice of truth making regardless of it coming from anthropologists or 'non-anthropologists'—without even addressing the problems with such a divide, its own kind of making and unmaking through categorizations taken as truths.

[97] "Thus when man, investigating, observing, pursues nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve. Modern technology, as a revealing that orders, is thus no mere human doing. Therefore we must take the challenging that sets upon man to order the actual as standing-reserve in accordance with the way it shows itself. That challenging gathers man into ordering" (Heidegger 1977: 324).

[98] "Following Foucault, I do not treat Native American DNA as the latest moment in a linear, progressive, or purposeful history of Native American identity. Instead, I pursue a genealogy of the concept, focusing on the accidents and deviations in the history, the way that 'truths' are produced out of disunity, and the way DNA reflects power as an object identity and knowledge. In other words, particular strings of molecules in particular bodies are not in any way simply a transparent reflection or indicator of a particular genetic population. The concept of Native American DNA […] loops back then to shore up genetic understandings of difference, giving credibility and authority to a particular way of knowing and seeing" (Tallbear 2013: 31-32).

[99] "Biopower, in Foucault's work, appears to function by dividing people into those who must live and those who must die. As it proceeds on the basis of a split between the living and the dead, such

power defines itself in relation to the biological field—of which it takes control and in which it invests itself. This control presupposes a distribution of human species into groups, a subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of biological caesura between these subgroups. Foucault refers to this using the seemingly familiar term 'racism.'

That *race* (or indeed *racism*) figures so prominently in the calculus of biopower is easy to understand. After all, racial thinking more than class thinking (where class is an operator defining history as an economic struggle between classes) has been the ever-present shadow hovering over Western political thought and practice, especially when the point was to contrive the inhumanity of foreign peoples and the sort of domination to be exercised over them. […] Indeed, in Foucault's terms, racism is above all a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of bio power, 'that old sovereign right to kill.' In the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the state's murderous functions. It is, he says, 'the condition for the acceptability of putting to death'" (Mbembe 2019: 71).

[100] "Western social and political thought contains two alternative approaches to ascertaining 'truth.' The first, reflected in positivist science, has long claimed that absolute truths exist and that the task of scholarship is to develop objective, unbiased tools of science to measure the truth. But Afrocentric, feminist, and other bodies of critical theory have unmasked the concepts and epistemology of this version of science as representing the vested interests of elite white men and therefore as being less valid when applied to experiences of other groups and, more recently, to which male recounting of their own exploits. […]

Relativism, the second approach, has been forwarded as the antithesis of and inevitable outcome of rejecting a positivist science. From a relativist perspective all groups produce specialized thought and each group's thought is equally valid. No group can claim to have a better

interpretation of the 'truth' than another. In a sense, relativism represents the opposite of scientific ideologies of objectivity. As epistemological stances, both positivist science and relativism minimize the importance of specific location in influencing a group's knowledge claims, the power inequities among groups that produce subjugated knowledges, and the strengths and limitations of partial perspectives (Haraway 1988).

The existence of Black feminist thought suggests another alternative to the ostensibly objective norms of science and to relativism's claims that groups with competing knowledge claims are equal. […]

Those ideas that are validated as true by African-American women, African-American men, Latina lesbians, Asian American women, Puerto Rican men, and other groups with distinctive standpoints, with each group using the epistemological approaches growing out of its unique standpoint, thus become the most 'objective' truths. Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is unfinished" (Collins 1990: 235-236).

[101] "There is also something profoundly vitalizing in the knowledge that it's not just that our perspectives on the world will always be lacking but rather that vitally, generatively, *the world itself is lacking*" (Mazzarella 2017: 24).

[102] "So that rather than 'sustainable knowledge' merely disregarding the 'other ways of knowing' of the Amerindian peoples, as Mignolo contends, Pandian proposes instead that it was to be the discourses of this knowledge, including centrally those of anthropology, that would function to construct all the non-Europeans that encountered (including those whose lands its settlers expropriated and those whom they enslaved or enserfed) as the physical referent of, in the first phase, its irrational or subrational Human Other to its new 'descriptive statement' of Man as a

political subject. While the 'Indians' were portrayed as the very acme of the savage, irrational Other, the 'Negroes' were assimilated to the former's category, represented as its most extreme form and as the ostensible missing link between rational humans and irrational animals. However, in the wake of the West's second wave of imperial expansion, pari passu with its reinvention of in Man now purely biologized terms, it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the "racially inferior" Human Other, with the range of other colonized dark-skinned peoples, all classified as "natives," now being assimilated to its category—all of these as the ostensible embodiment of the non-evolved backward Others—if to varying degrees and, as such, the negation of the generic "normal humanness," ostensibly expressed by and embodied in the peoples of the West" (Wynter 2003: 266).

[103] "The challenge, as I see it, is not to indulge an empirically-based skepticism grinding away in its infinitude on yet another disputable or disputing fact, trying to maintain one's balance in so much heady contrariety by clutching at yet another destabilizing observation, but instead to allow oneself to be brought face-to-face and remain within the ambiguity, grasping it whole, so to speak. I am at a loss to put a name to this stance but it must imply location no less than mobility, location within struggle, the struggle with ambiguity itself, with the fact of ambiguity as opposed to the facts that constitute it" (Taussig 1999: 107).

[104] Given that black and brown bodies get left out of what counts as human most often, that they get left to die and that that death and violence comes to define them, it might come as no surprise that people consigned to these categories most often resist the epistemologies that make possible these necropolitics. Refusal, opacity, disorientation, standpoint, sincerity, forgetting so many modes of not-knowing that demand a decolonizing of humanness. If we can say what knowing does in biopolitics, in necropolitics, in system thinking, in the production on Man and its antithesis,

to do the same with these various forms of not-knowing presents a challenge. More specifically, to say what kind, or even kinds, of humans not-knowing makes would do the same work of defining, categorizing, and ordering to which we object. What then do these do?

First, some talk about doing. Astuti (1995) turns to doing in the present over belonging, identity, or being in their ethnography of Vezo people. They do so in part to mirror what the Vezo they worked with also did, but also to bring to the fore a refusal of fixing processes—a kind of reversal of the dangers associated with the present tense of anthropological and other forms of analytical writing (Fabian 2014, Spillers 1987). To define people by what they do really means to not define them at all because what they do always changes from one moment to the next. Doing, thus, exceeds any move towards fixing people across time or in essence. Not just a bearing of the past in the present, but also a refusal of continuity into the future, doing requires forgetting and not-knowing. Lastly, to only ever describe a person by what they do implies limiting how much you can say about them, not drawing conclusions, not assuming intention, much in the same ways as opacity of other minds. Though, Lambek also points to how not doing can matter just as much as doing, both remain unstable. What a person does do now, they might not do later, and may not have done before. Doing, therefore, calls not for an ontology of humanness as process but for an ontology of inconsistency. In asking what not-knowing, in all its forms, does, therefore, I ask a question that cannot have an answer because it calls to all directions, all openings, all inconsistencies. It calls for wandering.

[105] "We cannot simply claim that the highest calling is 'the' truth, when there are multiple reasonably accurate narratives or ethical and knowledge systems to shape how we might apprehend the world and our obligations to other beings within it" (Tallbear 2015: 202).

[106] Personally, if I tell the truth, something always remains unsettling for me about not-knowing. I

want to take it up in theory and in practice to meet the call to refuse, to respect all the refusals I met in the field, the secrets, the lies, the obstruction of surveillance, the inabilities to reduce and order, the inconsistencies. Yet, in pushing myself in this direction, I lose sight of something else: of racism, of violence, of death, of the all too real produced by bio/necropolitics. Not-knowing, if it does not necessitate the production of these in the ways that bio/necropolitics does, it also does not erase them. I cannot go as far as Graeber to insist on its centrality to relations between all humans. I cannot meet the urgency of Wynter's project. I cannot even go so far as to claim an alter-ontology. In attempting then to do some work towards 'unsettling the coloniality of power,' I feel that I have drifted very far out to sea.

[107] "[W]hat Fanon's new answer to the question of who/what we are (its revalorizing 'descriptive statement' detached now from any form of extrahuman agency or authorship, theocentric or biocentric) enables us to come to grips with is precisely such a new mode of causation, thereby, with the still-to-be-explained puzzle of (human) consciousness(es), doing so outside the terms of our present 'Two Culture' order of knowledge and its adaptive 'regime of truth' based on the biocentric disciplinary paradigms in whose terms we at present know our social reality; this, as the indispensable condition of our continuing to assume that the mode of being in which we now are (have socialized/ inscripted ourselves to be) is isomorphic with the being of being human itself, in its multiple self-inscripting, auto-instituting modalities" (Wynter 2005:330).

[108] *This night, [I] will raise up a part of the horizon, will free from it the memory of our ancestors. It will be diffuse, veiled in the mist of the ocean. It will be opaque, engorged with the salt and effervescence of waves. Konanitra will read on my skin the history that she will want eternal but which in truth will disintegrate with my death. Our history is the history of the betrayal of our sovereigns. Our history is the history of the greed of our conquerors. Slavery. Unification of the*

island. Protectorate. Pacification. Our history is the history of our death. [My translation].

[109] "As my friends pointed out, the very 'easiness' of the Vezo with their customs and taboos—their willingness to find a way around a *faly* which proves too difficult, or to soften a custom that they find too hard—is also a source of uncertainty about what such customs and taboos are meant to be. […]

A participant in the discussion later remarked to me that one reason why people die so often (*maty isanandro isanandro*) is that they do not know how to act properly. Interestingly, it is the *hazomanga*, elderly people who mediate between the living and the ancestors, who are especially vulnerable and in constant danger of dying. They are in a particularly difficult and dangerous (*sarotsy*) position, because if the ancestors are unhappy or upset by wrongdoings (*hadisoa*) of the living, they will most probably vent their anger on the *hazomanga*. Thus, if a mistake is made in the timing of a ritual, or the wrong sequence of events is followed, the *hazomanga* may easily 'die on the spot'. In one instance, an offering of food to ancestors was postponed for more than a week, as people debated whether the ritual should be done at dawn or at sunset. What is significant about this episode is that everyone understood that a mistake would have been fatal for the *hazomanga*, but no-one expected him to know the correct answer to the problem. The *hazomanga* was thus caught in an impossible situation: he was recognized to be the repository of traditional knowledge which could not in effect be known. His authority and power, which should have been based on the 'difficulty' of his knowledge, were thus being perpetually undermined by his inevitable and life-threatening mistakes" (Astuti 1995: 65).

[110] "Andrianapoinimerina 'grounded' the ideology of the Merina polity in the local topography and in the fruits that the land bore. This was an ideology crafted around relatively abstract notions of singularity, completeness, perfection and the endurance of the sovereign and the polity. Upon

unification and pacification of Imerina, Andrianapoinimerina announced his expansionist intentions by claiming that the sea would be the limits of his rice fields. When he chose his successor he did so by handing him a basket of dirt, *ny tany"* (Kus and Raharijaona 2013: 55).

[111] "Dans nos représentations, la terre est à la mer ce que la certitude est à l'incertitude, la sécurité au danger, la théorie, enfin à l'expérience. Le flottement parle d'hésitation, de doute, d'indécision, de perte de repères. Être terre à terre signifie-il être prosaïque? Le dictionnaire nous apprend que l'expression provient du langage maritime et désigne, pour commencer, le cabotage, autrement dit la proximité avec la terre 'ferme'. Sinon, on prend le large. Au large, l'espace maritime, mer ou océan, figure les entre-mondes qui ne coïncident ni avec le lieu de départ, ni avec le lieu d'arrivée. En mer, on est quelque part. Pour savoir où on est, il faut calculer sa position (latitude et longitude) et, pour ne pas perdre le nord (...), faire usage de la boussole. La désorientation spatiale et temporelle du navigateur est bonheur et terreur à la fois. Associer la création et les espaces flottants, c'est faire de l'art une aventure dans laquelle, comme dans la navigation, on ne sait pas sur quoi le jour se lève" (Boulbina 2018: 113).

In our representations, land is to water what certainty is to uncertainty, safety to danger, and lastly, theory to experience. Floating implies hesitation, doubt, indecision, loss of points of reference. Does being down to earth signify being mundane? The dictionary teaches us that the expression comes from maritime language and refers, to start with, to coastal navigation, otherwise called proximity to 'terra firma' [while it seems most likely to me that Boulbina evokes 'terra firma,' the French 'terre ferme' often translates to '*dry* land']. *Otherwise, we sail away. Away, maritime space, sea or ocean, represents between-worlds that coincide neither with the place of departure nor with the place of arrival. At sea, you are somewhere. To know where you are, you have to calculate your position (latitude and longitude) and, to not lose your bearings*

[the direct french translation, 'to lose the north,' also appears in the title of Boulbina's chapter on disorientation*:* 'Perdre le nord: un éloge de la désorientation'] *(…), make use of a compass. The navigator's spatial and temporal disorientation is both a joy and a terror. To associate creation and floating spaces is to make of art an adventure in which, as with navigation, you do not know over what the sun will rise.* [my translation]

[112] First tension: water and land. Anthropological literature on Madagascar contains many references to land and its significance as an anchor for Gasy people (Bloch 1971, Feeley-Harnik 1991, Graeber 2007, Kus and Raharijaona 2013). As site of houses, tombs, history, land holds power. Land, like ancestors, cannot break. If people possess land, hold it literally and metaphorically, through it they hold the unbreakable power of ancestors and history. The land holds them back, for all living people will one day turn to bones buried in the land, in a land. Thus in a literature full of analysis of ties to ancestors and land, *People of the Sea* (Astuti 1995) stands out. Almost a checklist of all of the ways Vezo counterpoint people of the land, the ethnography recounts their living on the sea and off its fruits—in opposition to their close neighbors who live on land and farm it, their resistance to the overdetermination of ancestry, and even their resistance to the state as they flee the biopolitical reach of the Sakalava kingdom by taking to the sea—that limit of Andrianapoinmerina's rice fields. While land gives power by fixing, the sea offers freedom from ties and bonds. In Astuti's account, Vezo resist by not-knowing. They do not-know their ancestry to avoid cutting off living family or to avoid ties to the state. They do not-know how to grow rice or raise cattle to resist belonging. They also play off of the not-knowing that defines other people, not-knowing the sea, not-knowing edible versus poisonous fish. Of the sea: living beyond the limit, beyond the limits of the rice field, beyond the limit of the state, beyond the limit of knowing.

[113] "For its victims, brought as captives to be sold. In markets in Imerina, the very first thing slavery meant was a complete rupture of the ties of love, kinship, and shared experience that had bound them to a home, to parents, friends, lovers, everything and everyone they had most cared for in their lives. Even when it was not brought about by wholesale mass murder—which it usually was—enslavement meant being ripped away from all of the objects that made life meaningful. It was first and foremost a loss of human relationships, but people at the time tended to speak of it as a loss of place. Slaves were 'lost people' (*loon very*), wrenched from their ancestral lands, in an alien place among people who did not know them" (Graeber 2007: 201).

[114] "How might we stay in the wake with and as those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unlivable? These are questions of temporality, the *longue durée*, the residence and hold time of the wake. At stake, then is to stay in this wake time toward inhabiting a blackened consciousness that would rupture the structured silences produced and facilitated by, and that produce and facilitate, Black social and physical death.

For, if we are lucky, we live in the knowledge that the wake has positioned us as non-citizen. If we are lucky, the knowledge of this positioning avails us particular ways of re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and re/imagining the world. And we might use these ways of being in the wake in our responses to terror and the varied and various ways that our Black lives are lived under occupation. I want *In the Wake* to declare that we are Black peoples in the wake with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected, and to position us in the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, despite Black death: to think and be and act from there" (Sharpe 2016: 22).

[115] "Parallel to the jettisoning of female attributes is a gradual process of physical and social hardening as one is drawn toward the paternal order of lineage and tomb (fig.3). First, the child's

bones harden (most noticeably, the fontanel): then, with circumcision, his penis. Gradually through adulthood one's social position becomes firm through long residence in the hamlet and an ever closer relationship to the dead. Finally, after burial, exhumation, and reburial, one reaches the pure state of a fixed, dry, and hard skeleton in the paternal tomb

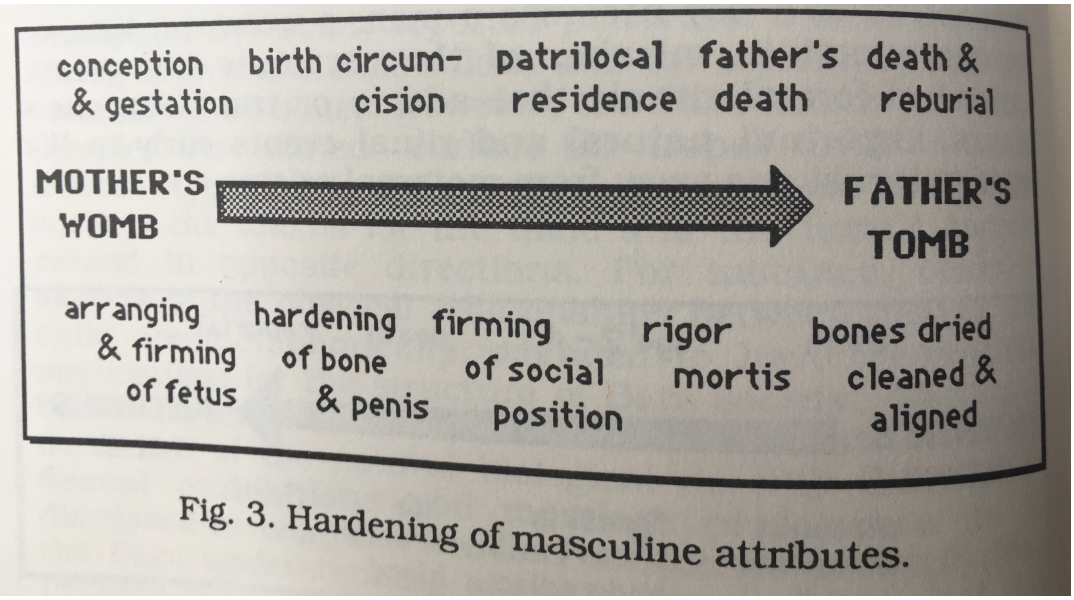


Fig. 3. Hardening of masculine attributes.

" (Huntington 1988: 30).

[116] "In referring to herself as 'lost', Vola was obviously not identifying as a descendant of slaves. […] For her, being lost had more to do with the circumstances of an uncertain present and future than the burden of an unknown past. A 'loss of place' was certainly part of her predicament—she was distant from her mother and the well-established kin and place-based networks that might have given her life more order—but the disorientation Vola was experiencing had as much to do with the uncertain implications of being in an unfamiliar place, and among unfamiliar people, as it did with being away from home. And she was certainly not alone in being lost in this way in Ambondromifehy" (Walsh 2015: 36-37).

[117] "L'errance, c'est cela même qui nous permet de nous fixer. De quitter ces leçons de choses que nous sommes si enclins à semonce, d'abdiquer ce ton de sentence où nous compassons nos

doutes—moi le tout premier—ou nos déclamations, et de dériver enfin.
Dériver à quoi? À la fixité du mouvement du Tout-monde. À ces marelles, tragiques, endiablées, sages ou bienheureuses, à quoi nous jouons et dont les horizons ne forment pas les lignes.

L'errance nous donne de nous amarrer à cette dérive qui n'égare pas" (Glissant 1997b: 63).
Wandering, that is what allows us to fasten ourselves. To leave behind those lessons from things we are so inclined to reprimand, to relinquish the tone of condemnation with which we weigh [literally measure with a compass] *our doubts—myself first and foremost—or our declamations, and to finally drift.*
Drift to what? To the fixity of the movement of the All-world. To its hopscotches, tragic, frenzied, wise and joyful, at which we play and whose horizons do not form straight lines.

Wandering allows us to moor ourselves to that drift that does not get lost. [my translation]
[118] Second tension: lost and staying. Though people no longer practice slavery on the island, its echos remain in the fear of getting lost. The euphemism, applied to descendants of slaves, those displaced by ebbs and flows of global capitalist systems, or just to those who find themselves removed from the ties of family and land that constitute them as people, the euphemism carries with it the enduring threat of violent legacies. Getting lost does not fit easily anywhere. The other side of wandering, the unmoored drift, or that trace, mark, stain, scar, vestige that orients us such that we cannot lose sight of the north. Getting lost does not fit easily anywhere, constantly bringing forth its irreducibility, its irreconcilability. It stays.
If taking to the sea undermined colonial and state projects by exceeding their landedness, getting lost knows no such limits. People get lost on land and at sea. In this case, the sea does not foil land,

but parallels it in the confounding of past and present dangers, of dying at sea, of not coming back, of an ever encroaching global capitalism, of the residence time of the transatlantic slave trade and its resonances in the current migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. To get lost on and from land, to go far unwittingly, under economic duress, or in chains, strips people of their humanity in the same way as the Middle Passage. What space can a person carve out, therefore, between getting lost and the wake?

Staying. Staying home, with family, with house, with tomb, not going far, making life, making live, so many anecdotes to a danger that also knows how to stay. Lost people does not just refer to slaves, but to their descendants, and to others living in ongoing forms of colonialism. Like those people in the sea, thrown overboard in the Middle Passage, drowned the Mediterranean, they stay. Their bodies do not make it to the floor of the ocean, but they stay in residence time. Getting lost does not mean going away. It means staying lost. It means staying in the wake. Waves, sea, bodies, fish, ships, ebbs, flows, crests, crashes, all different forms of the same affective substance always manifesting and returning.

Not-knowing turned on its head. Taking to the sea turned to loss. Not-knowing ancestors as resistance turned to repression. Silence that protects turned to silence that betrays. While Graeber concludes their monograph on lost people with an ontological appeal to the necessity of not-knowing to relating to each other as humans, to a kind of sincerity, what can such a call do for those people made unknowable, unrecognizable, whose counting (2 million deaths in the Middle Passage, 2 thousand in the Mediterranean) only serves to show how little they counted—as least to those who count in this way? We have to ask how not-knowing could ever assuage the violence of not knowing? And yet, even Sharpe turns to annotation and redaction as forms of wake work.

[119] "And here too, the paradoxes were not incidental, but constitutive of the object; even Malagasy

myths about the origins of life and death, which are surely seen as conveying important truths about the human condition, tend to end with the tag-line, "it is not I who lie; these lies come from ancient times" (Graeber 2015: 14).

[120] "Que la pensée de *la trace* s'appose, par opposition à la pensée de système, comme une errance qui oriente. Nous connaissons que la trace est ce qui nous met, nous tous, d'où que venus, en Relation" (Glissant 1997b: 18).

That trace [the French also implies track, imprint, mark, stain, scar, or vestige] *thinking affixes itself, in opposition to system thinking, as a wandering that orients. We know that the trace is what puts us, all of us, wherever we come from, in relation.* [my translation]

[121] "Slaves felt an affinity with *Vazimba* because *Vazimba* were figures of loss and dispersal. The common feature in all stories about *Vazimba* is that they involve people being uprooted, cast out of their proper place. *Vazimba* are people who have been driven from their homes, ancestors whose descendants have dispersed and forgotten them, who have themselves left their solid tombs to enter confused, watery places. Like slaves, then, their defining feature is that they are lost; they embody the complete negation of those ties of descent that bind the living to ancestors buried in ancestral soil" (Graeber 2007: 222).

[122] "Mention of living rulers, ancestral rulers, and pilgrims in each blessing might lead some to imagine that the Antankarana kingdom must be structured something like a pyramid, with royalty firmly positioned at the top and their followers arrayed beneath them, holding them up. In fact, it is much more complicated than that. As I cam to understand it, the Antakarana kingdom might be more appropriately described as being like an hourglass. It is a system in which the living ruler finds himself precariously positioned at the narrow neck that separates demanding ancestors above him and demanding followers beneath" (Walsh 2012a: 6).

[123] "*Dadilahy* is an old man who is reaching the end of his life; he has come to acquire during his lifetime an ever increasing number of descendants, gathered indistinctly from all sides including his descendants' spouses. When he looks down at them, *dadilahy* imagines that they are all 'his' grandchildren; he imagines himself at the head of a sort of bilateral, all-inclusive descent group. He does so by ignoring that other old men and women like himself are also looking down at their descendants and are enjoying the same visions of growth and expansion that occurred in the generations that followed them; he ignores the fact also that many of these men and women embrace within their own bilateral, all-inclusive descent group the *same* grandchildren that *dadilahy* includes in his. This overlapping is, of course, inevitable, because in the realm of *filongoa* people are not divided into discrete groups, but are plurally related on all sides. This overlap is not only inevitable, it is also unproblematic: because as long as people are alive (as *dadilahy* and his grandchildren are), they can 'belong' simultaneously to many bilateral, all-inclusive descent groups. They 'belong' to all of them because they are related to all of them; in *filongoa*, relatedness is not and need not be exclusive.

Death (*dadilahy*'s death and the death of his grandchildren) engenders radical transformation. As he is lowered in his tomb, *dadilahy*'s vision is suddenly curtailed. He now enters an exclusive group, a group made up of only '*one* kind of people' (*raza raiky*). As he enters the 'single' *raza*, *dadilahy* loses sight of the many descendants who will *not* be buried with him. Thus, whereas in life he could pretend that all the grandchildren he included in his vision were 'his', in death he has to surrender many of them to other tombs.

[…]

For the Vezo, the creation of the 'single *raza*' does not realize an ideal phantasy, a utopian condition in which the person can finally achieve its integrity. On the contrary, […] the Vezo

construe the realization of descent as a *loss*, the loss of *all but one* kind of relations that constituted the living person" (Astuti 1995: 90-91).

[124] "Prior to manumission in 1896, some families had owned slaves, primarily people captured in raids; but older people kept silent about this topic, only occasionally referring to it in oblique, guarded ways, and younger people tended not to know much about it. It was only after I began to understand the political organization of the town more clearly that I realized that three of the families that people claimed to be Zafindrenian were in fact the descendants of the Zafindrenian's former slaves. By the time of my second visit in 1997 I was able to identify who the Zafimalaone's slaves had been. But slavery was not the live, profoundly divisive issue that it remains in areas of the high plateau, a phenomenon that I attribute partially to a process of directed forgetting" (Cole 2001: 73).

[125] "The Vezo make a clear distinction between the high sea zone, *ambohone* (*voho*, beyond), the coral shoals, *andriba*, and the lagoon situated between the barrier reefs and the coast, *antrone* (at the belly). In practice, this specific differentiation is appreciated according to experience: as the Vezo fisher his usual reference points, he considers the unknown. Ambohone thus means unpredictable. Once beyond the pass (*vavarano*) with his frail boat, he is in constant danger. A slight change in the wind can be fatal. The antrone, however, contains the daily food:it is both close and familiar" (Marikandia 2001: 164).

[126] "22

Eo amoron' ny aloka miandrona

ambony valamparihy

mafy sy mihanjaka toy ny vatolampy,

nefa anirian' ny ahi-maroroka,

dia misy mpanjono tsy hita isa milahatra
sy manipy fintana.

Ary any an-tendrombohitra mihavory
toa voankazo mihamasaka,
ka hatreny an-dohasaha mihalava sy mihamando
mihoatra noho ny voantango,
dia misy losi-boro-mangina
ary fivilim-pahazavana jamba
izay samy manaitra ny tondro
ka tsy mampanaikitra azy.

Tompon’ ny vintana
ary tsy manahy na inona na inona,
mifampiantso amin’ ny feony aloka ny mpanjono
mba hamelatra ny harto
hamerenany any an-dranomasina
an’ ireto tondre volafotsy sy jaky
izay miporitsaka, tsy azo, eran’ ny lanitra.

22

Au bord des ombres qui stagnent,
sur des digues

dures et nues comme les roches,

mais où croissent des herbes précoces,

des pêcheurs sans nombre s'alignent

et jettent la ligne.

Des cimes qui s'arrondissent

comme des fruits qui mûrissent,

aux vallons qui s'allongent et devienne plus humides

que les melons,

se suscitent des fuites d'oiseaux furtifs

et des dérives de clarté aveugle

qui effraient pareillement

et empêche de mordre.

Maîtres du destin

et ne s'inquiétant de rien,

les pêcheurs s'interpellent de leur voix d'ombre

pour tendre les filets

dans lequel ils rendront à la mer

ces poissons d'argent et de pourpre

qui se faufilent, insaisissables, à travers l'azur"

(Rabearivelo 2007: 58-59).

On the edge of stagnating shadow,

on the dykes

hard and bare like rocks,

but where grow precocious weeds,

countless fishermen line up

and cast the line.

Rounding peaks,

like ripening fruits,

in vales that lie down and become more humid

than melons,

provoke the flight of furtive birds

and the drift of blind clarities

that terrify in the same way

and keep from biting.

Masters of destiny

and worrying about nothing,

the fishermen call to each other with their voices of shadow

to add tension to the nets

in which they will return to the sea

those fish of silver and imperial purple

that slip in and out, ungraspable, across the azure

[My translation]

[127] "1/ Rencontre en mer d'un pêcheur et d'une belle sirène, qu'il prend dans son filet

2/ L'homme demande la femme aquatique en mariage, acceptée à la condition d'un interdit (portant sur une partie du corps de la sirène, ses ouïes le plus souvent, mot dont il ne faut pas prononcer le nom et parfois sur une chose qu'il ne faut pas voir)

3/ Retour au village avec beaucoup de poissons

4/ Mariage et enfantement (enfants avec ouïes ou non)

5/ Transgression de l'interdit par la mère du pêcheur

6/ Départ de la sirène, recommandations sur les soins particuliers à apporter aux enfants, et sur leurs funérailles (inhumation sur la plage ou déposés en mer)

7/ Retour des enfants en mer avec leur mère, et dans certains contes : d'autres enfants restent à terre avec leur père" (Mousard, 2011: 30).

1/ Encounter at sea between a fisherman and a beautiful mermaid, that he traps in his fishing net.

2/ The man asks for the aquatic woman's hand in marriage, which she accepts on the basis of one taboo (related to a particular part of the mermaid's body, often her gills, a word which should not be pronounced or sometimes as a thing which should not be seen).

3/ Return to the village with many fish.

4/ Marriage and children (children with or without gills)

5/ Taboo transgressed by the mother of the fisherman

6/ Departure of the mermaid, recommendations for particular care to be given to the children, and for their funerals (burial on the beach or left in the sea).

7/ Return of the children to the sea with their mother, and in some accounts: some of the children

stay on land with their father. [my translation]

[128] "Anne Gardulski tells me that because nutrients cycle through the ocean (th process of organisms eating organisms is the cycling of nutrients through the ocean), the atoms of people who were thrown overboard are out in the ocean even today. They were eaten, organisms processed them, and those organisms were in turn eaten and processed, and the cycle continues. Around 90 to 95 percent of the tissues of things that are eaten in the water column are recycled. As Anne told me, 'Nobody dies of old age in the ocean.'

The amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean is called residence time. Human blood is salty, and sodium, Gardulski tells me, had a residence time of 260 million years. And what happens to the energy that is produced in the waters? It continues cycling like atoms in residence time. We, Black people, exist in the residence time of the wake, a time in which 'everything is now. It is all now' (Morrison 1987, 198)" (Sharpe 2016: 40-41).

[129] "She threw it overboard. I watched her face knot up like a thread, and then she let go. It fell in a splash, floated for a while, and then sank. And quickly after that she jumped in too. And just as the baby's head sank, so did hers. They went together like two bottles beneath the waterfall. The shock lasts only so long. There was no time to even try to save her. There was no question of it. The sea in that spot is like the sharks that live their. It has no mercy.

[…]

I must throw my book out now. It goes down to them, Célianne and her daughter and all those children of the sea who might soon be claiming me.

I go to them now as though it was always meant to be, as though the very day that my mother birthed me, she had chosen me to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea, those who had escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood drenched

earth where you live" (Danticat 2004)

[130] Third tension: wet and hard. Huntington lays this tension out as a process. A gendered process, at that. The path from mother's womb to father's tomb does not always veer straight. It wanders and does not always land. People do not always do the necessary in their life or the lives of their children to ensure burial in the father's tomb. They get divorced and move apart. They cannot afford it. They have children from multiple spouses. When they do do the necessary, people do not always remember, or children choose their mother's tomb anyway, or people get in fights. We do not need to go far beyond the practicalities of everyday life to understand why the model does not make the rule. Going further, though, the model itself gets muddle. Not with respect to the distinction between wet and hard or even to the desirability of the progression from one to the other. Wet babies to hard bones. Soft, weak minded children to hard, thoughtful, calm adults. Soft, wood houses to hard, concrete houses. Soft, wood tombs to hard, concrete ones. I do not know about the people Huntington worked with, or those who Bloch worked with, so I cannot speak on their assertions of the (dangerous) wetness of women. I can only speak about what I have seen with my own eyes.

The tension between wet and hard, women and men, does not follow a progression from womb, ostensibly female, and tomb, ostensibly male. Instead, the tension lies between the wet tomb and the dry tomb, between descent from Ampelamananina and male descent. Taking belonging to the sea further than Astuti does, the Ampelamananisa story directly challenges the masculinity of descent, the hard tomb, and the power of land. To the extent that the latter all constitute a particular ontology of hardening that culminates in buried bones and ancestor status, descent from a merwoman and burial in the sea seem to propose an alternative ontology of wetness. Nobody I knew, however, would want a sea burial or claim actual descent from Ampelamananisa.

Merwoman can bring great fortune, but to not return from them to land would mean getting lost to the sea.

Instead, they hardened. They hardened their homes. They hardened their tombs. Still, men and masculinity do not define this practice. Hardening does not simply happen. It takes time, work, and money. While all adults, men and women alike, participate in all of these aspects, women harden with the land in particular ways by virtue of staying home. Like Andrianapoinmerina leaning up against the central pillar of the Merina house, women spend their days leaned up against their homes. They harden with the homes, their backbones like pillars holding them up. They too, hold up the rest of their families, maintaining the home for children, youth, men, and all those who go far. They not only embody the hardening process, they make it possible for others around them. Integral to going far, coming back, even if only to die, requires a place to come back to. A place that keeps a person from getting lost.

[131] "The sea was its own country, its own sovereignty. There was always some uncontrollable news from it. Either it had taken a fisherman or about to take a house away. It was always taking a child or would take a child. To take a child away. That type of away was the most fearsome news. The sea was feared and loved, generous to a fault. Boats laden with kingfish, red snapper, lobster, and bonito came in with a fisherman who had his foot on fatal coral. Logs and stone which once were churches, sand which once was human" (Brand 2011: 7).

[132] "As it was often pointed out by *dadilahy* and his descendants, the number of a person's relations in the present depends upon the memory of older men and women who know how people were related to each other in the past. That is why *dadilahy*'s grandchildren will often come to him to ask if and in what way a certain person is their *longo*; it is also why, every time an old person dies, some knowledge of *filongoa* is lost, and some of the descendants who are related will become

forever unaware that they are so. In some ways, this periodic loss of knowledge is regarded as a good thing (*raha soa*). Marriage among the Vezo should only occur among people who are unrelated, called *olo hafa*: 'different people'. But as Sary once explained, having so many *longo* makes it impossible to find 'different people' to marry (*maro mare longonteña, tsy misy olo hafa*); inevitably, one has to marry a *longo* (as she did Lefo). The loss of genealogical knowledge makes it easier to avoid having to do so" (Astuti 1995: 84).

[133] "They strategically play on the ambiguities that are central to their ways of reckoning kin relations" (Cole 2014: 546).

[134] "The paradox of this is that the veil of silence intended to protect slave descendants from exposure to the 'shame' believed to be natural to their kind turns out to be instrumental in protecting and even propagating the very ideology that created it. Similarly, threatening to fine people a zebu for calling someone a slave only entrenches the ideology stigma of slavery. The effect is cumulative: the more the stigma of slavery is avoided, the more 'unspeakable' it becomes" (Freeman 2013: 614).

[135] Bearing as "supporting a heavy load, being under obligation," "as giving birth, creating, bringing forth, and carrying forward; as raising and caring for," "as enduring suffering," "as ethical activity," and "as exposing" (Lambeck 2002: 5-10).

[136] "Andrianampoinmerina, as a youth, had the habit of now only making metaphorically significant choices among gifts offered to rivals for the throne (Rahajarizafy 1961 [1]:9), but he also had the habit of leaning against central pillars of houses (Callet [1908] 1981: 380). This latter action was clearly an action appropriate for a sovereign. Yet, it is not only the gesture that is appropriate but also the recitation of the tale. The word for "noble" in Merina is *andriana*. This allows for a play on word since the first two syllable of that term, *andri*, can be confounded with

the word for central pillar (Ferrand 1891: 150)" (Kus and Raharijaona 2000: 105).

[137] "But far from V. S. Naipaul's condemnation of the Caribbean as a site of 'ruination,' the sand, even in its erosion, has its own integrity and retains its own history" (Agard-Jones 2012: 339).

[138] Fourth tension: sand. I cannot resolve these tensions—not just because I do not know how to but because tension holds up as much as it stresses. Instead, I propose another place to sit with all these tensions: in the sand. Sand, the land of water and the water of land. Sand has the fixing capacities of land, unbreakable, hard, the culmination of generations of history. Like water as well, sand moves, it shifts, spills, changes with the wind. Not just the space between these two distinct substances, sand runs through them and they through it without clear boundary line. In this sense, sand does not overcome the tension or release it. An ambiguous substance itself, it does not demand obviation or enable clarity.

A singular plural, sand as substance for thought, envelops without effacing system thinking based in differentiation and closing off. It should come as no surprise that in trying to create a metaphor for the conduit model, rather than draw the classic Saussurian heads in a circuit, Reddy turned to the image of a series of cells, connected in a circle with a central enclosure through which all communication occurred. The uncanny similarities with the panopticon need almost no commentary. Of note, though critical of the conduit model as language ideology, Reddy does not make an attempt to problematize the human ontology inherent in it. In fact, as we have seen, this ontology founded in the fundamental opacity of the various cell dwellers constitutes the prime mode through which to theorize communicating otherwise. That same ontology undergirds Foucaudian cellular individuality and the impossibility of axial visibility (Foucault 1975). That space in the middle of Reddy's cells, or that space in which de Saussure's communication lines droop like stolen electricity cables [and when you look up, in order to see with your own eyes,

what this metaphor looks like, note again the disciplining of black bodies through the imaging of their suffering], or in the wall between one cellmate and the next, always the gap. Epistemology and ontology entangle again as the necessity of the gap and the necessity of traversing it (Leach 1969), traversing it with sight, with language, with knowledge. Sand does not traverse a gap on this way. Instead, like the pregnant body or the folds of the vagina, alway singular and multiple, touching itself (Irigaray 1985), sand need not divide in order to make sense of, to sense at all. A knowing through not knowing where one ends and the next begins. Because they do not.

What can thinking of sitting in the sand as wake work do? Living in and of the sand as irreducible ambiguity calls forth the work of making life in the many forms of death present in water and land. Where the deaths for which Sharpe demands wake work result from the unambiguous violence historically and presently wrought on black bodies, the death sat with in Gasy sand does not lie so still. Certainly, some of that death comes from those same histories, those same presents, from slavery, from colonialism, from free market capitalism, from unimaginable and unimageable loss. Those deaths join, in the sand, all the deaths that make up ancestry, that give power, strength, place, humanity to the people who sit withe them. And yet all those deaths, brought together in common tombs, still mark the loss of all the relations possible above the sand, all the open traces, the wandering, cut off when the spouse and the sibling break the grass string over the casket and walk away from each other. All those relations that people live in the sand for, so that at any moment they can take to the sea to protect them at the risk of other deaths, their own and those that come after them seeking to subjugate, through descent, statecraft, unsanctioned violence, and the like. The sand holds all of these.

Ultimately sand brings together the tenuous ambiguities of not-knowing. Ambiguities between silent and silenced people, between refusing and refused people, between subjugating counting

and not getting counted as human. Ambiguities in the same tactics used to uphold necropolitics and to dismantle it. Ambiguities that clamor for life while staying present with death. Remaining with these ambiguities might seem to at least take a step in the right direct by refusing rationalities of reduction, demarcation, and transparency, but to take that step requires stepping out of ambiguity and into those very systems of cutting off, bounding, categorizing. To really not-know, to really sit in the ambiguity, opens up as much danger as it does freedom.

[139] "In Cradle2Grave's logo, the numeral 2 appears as an un/conscious doubling, a redoubling, a signifier of how for many in the wake the cradle and the grave continue to be produced as the same space. It is a reminder that to be Black is to be continually produced by the wait toward death; that the cradle and the grave double as far as Black flesh is concerned" (Sharpe 2016: 88).

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