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Teknonymy and the evocation of the "social" among the Zafimaniry of Madagascar.*

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Introduction

Names are words, and as words they are constituent elements in speech acts. Alone, or in combination with other linguistic phenomena, they are sounds which, as a result of the conventions learnt by speakers of a particular community, evoke in the minds of hearers or speakers, mental responses (see the chapter by Lambek for a very similar theoretical position).

It is important to begin a discussion of names in this rather pedantic way because, too often, names are considered in the literature in terms of the old and dangerous semiotic model of signifiers signifying signifieds. As has been argued by Vom Bruck (2001), words, including names, *pace* Levi-Strauss (1962 chap. 6), are not classifiers and to see them thus is misleading. Firstly, such an approach gives far too fixed an image of meaning, forgetting that the usage of names cannot be separated from pragmatics and that names are therefore used to "do" an almost unlimited number of things. Names, therefore, are tools used in social interaction, which can be put to ever new uses. Secondly, the use of names are a constituent part of the social interactions in which they are used, they are never isolated acts, but parts of acts. Thirdly, names, whether used in reference or in address, are one among many ways by which people can be referred to. They do not form a bounded system. They must be considered with other designating devices which include, *inter alia*, eye contacts, pronouns, titles, gestures, kinship terms. This means that the choice involved in using names must be understood in terms of these always available alternatives.

Because of all this, I will not be limiting myself to the analysis of names strictly speaking, I shall also have to consider words which would normally be called titles, kin terms and much else. I shall be concerned to place all these words in the world of interactions.

But there is an even more important reason why the semiotic model is misleading. It implies that words ultimately reflect the world and this is what they signify. If this world includes, as it does in much anthropological writing, the social world then this is given a referential quality of realism which is quite false. Words, such as names, do not signify the social, they are one of the ways in which phantasmogorical

images are given fleeting phenemonological existence. As we shall see in the example discussed here, names of different types may suggest a number of such images which may be quite contradictory. One such image may be of an ordered encompassing moral whole which I call here the "social". This is accorded particular authority by important people, but this fact is all the more reason for not allowing ourselves to be tricked in according it a false realism, rather it is a reason for concentratig on concentrating on the ways in which it is given this apparent concreteness.

The Zafimaniry.

This chapter concerns a relatively small group of people, approximately 30,000, who call themselves the Zafimaniry. They live in the eastern forest of Madagascar and are, by the standards of that country, and for a number of historical reasons, surprisingly culturally homogeneous (Coulaud 1973, Bloch 1992).

Much of Zafimaniry rhetoric concerning the process of life and death is similar to what has been described for many groups in the Highlands of Madagascar in that it is governed by the general principle that it involves a movement from the fluidity, wetness and lack of social role of infancy and childhood, to the strong individual vitality of early adulthood, which will, in turn, be replaced by the growing stableisation of the person, both geographically and socially. This "placing" is accompanied by the fading of individuality of all kinds; including sexual and gender identity. The end of this process is when the mortal body is replaced by, or merged into, a lasting artefact, usually a tomb. For people such as the Merina, the focus on tombs is part of the creation of an image of an ordered "social" system which in no way reflects practical life (Bloch 1971) In the Zafimaniry case, however, it is the house which takes on the role of the tomb. This shift is however theoretically treacherous since the non corespondance between the image of a "society" of houses and practical life is less obvious than the contrast of a society of dead people in tombs and the doings of the living. As a result we must exercise even more care in not being mislead in merging the two levels.

The Zafimaniry house is, above all, an inseparable part of the evocation of a successful marriage; that is a marriage which produces and sustains progeny who, in their turn, continue the process. These marriage/houses are what the ordered image which I call the "social" is made of. Such a house is established when a man brings to the structure he has begun to build, a wife and usually their children, who then settle in a permanent manner. It is then that they can be considered part of an encompassing moral order. This material form of the union is seen as particularly clearly manifested in the conjunction of the central post of the house, associated with the man, and the

furnished hearth, associated with the woman. At first, the house is an impermanent structure but with time it becomes more permanent as hardwood replaces perishable materials and as it becomes more beautiful, as the wood becomes decorated with carvings.

The centrality of the conceptual inseparability of the fruitful human union with the house as a building and its location can be seen particularly clearly when we consider the nature of, what might be called, the Zafimaniry concept of adultery. This occurs when a man, or a woman, but particularly a man, brings a person into the house and has sexual intercourse there. This is a very serious fault which, if discovered, usually leads to the breakdown of the marriage and social opprobrium. But, extramarital sexual liaisons which take place outside the house are considered, by those not directly involved, at least, as minor and amusing peccadilloes.

After the death of the original couple, the evoked growth of the house/marriage, does not end, since the children, grand children and great grand children should continue to strengthen the building (and therefore the original couple), decorate it with carvings, and gather there to ask for blessing from the original pair. At this stage, however, it is not living people who are beseeched, but the house itself which, in the continually constructed image of the "social", has become the enduring material existence of the original couple after death. Furthermore, a successful house/marriage may become the centre of a village, as the descendants build their own houses around the ancestral sacred house, the house of the founding marriage. Thus the transformation of the bodies of the married pair, into a localised thing, their house, and finally into an inhabited and settled place, is achieved and becomes the governing principle of the Zafimaniry "social" (Bloch 1995).

Names.

The word normally translated as "name", in standard Malagasy, *anarana*, corresponds fairly well to the English term. The Zafimaniry usage is very similar. *Anarana* can be used somewhat neutrally to refer to the words which designate places and towns. When applied to people, it has a similarly wide semantic field as the English term, since it can be used, not only to designate individuals or groups, but also to refer to their "reputation" or even their rank. Indeed, as we shall see, *anarana* applied to people is never hierarchically neutral. *Anarana* can however also be used in less familiar ways, most importantly, in prayers addressed to the ancestors, where *Anaran'dray*, lit: "the name of the father", evokes the ancestors on the father's side and similarly *Anaran'dreny* those on the mother's side.

Personal names.

Children are given names which I call "personal names" because they are linked to them, and them only, and do not link them to anybody else, as, for example, surnames do in Europe. Personal names, do not, therefore, in anyway, evoke a "social" system, but rather the "individual" in themselves: an equally immaterial entity whose phenomenological existence is created by acts such as using personal names.

These personal names are used in both address and reference. Personal names are given eight days after birth, in the case of a girl, and seven days after birth, in the case of a boy. The difference is explained by the fact that seven is a "strong" number which girls "could not bear". The ritual of name giving is simple, usually involving little more than a dozen people. The purpose of the ritual is said to make the child become *mazava* a word which is best translated as "clear", but which has many other associations (Bloch 1995) such as making truthful or ancestral. In the case of the naming ritual, the word *mazava* is used, according to my gloss and that of my Zafimaniry informants, rather more hesitant, gloss, to convey the idea of the "definite" character of the child's entry into a clear world out of the hazy darkness of the womb.

The main act of the ritual consists in winding the umbilical cord of the child round a dried bamboo, which is then lit and burned so that it, and the cord, is consumed. This act is said to "illuminate" the child. The idea that "clarity" comes from burning this type of dried bamboo is a recurrent and important Zafimaniry symbolical theme which occurs in a number of other contexts and, indeed, it is true that the white flame of this particular dried bamboo illuminates with striking brightness.

The burning of the bamboo and the cord is accompanied by a rather simple incantation asking for blessing, but which is addressed to nobody in particular. This invocation is repeated six times, an auspicious number used in all Zafimaniry blessings. The actual words of the phrase used simply mean "blessed be the name".

This first personal name given to a child involves a choice, followed by a consultation with a diviner astrologer who may approve it, guard against it, or, in some cases, where danger is to be expected for whatever reason, suggest a different name on his own initiative. In such a case, the diviner is understood to have chosen according to the obscure principles of his art. This type of name, given by a diviner, is intended, above all, to draw attention away from the child and thus mislead those vague forces of evil who might want to harm it. As a result, the name is often disparaging and hides the pleasure of the parents in the birth. Such names are called "bad names" because their negative character protects the child, by putting off evil forces (see Njara 1994). Indeed, the use of any name of a child

draws attention to the birth and thus always carries a certain danger, probably from the malice of those who might be jealous of the good fortune of the parents. Thus, as elsewhere in Madagascar, the names of young babies are commonly avoided in public by the parents and close kin and instead replaced by an unflattering generic term such as "little rat". This means that only very few people know the name of a child until it is quite old. The evoking of the unique person is thus delayed.

If the name is chosen by the family there is no absolute rule about who will decide. It may be the parents, but most commonly it is one of the parents of the mother, especially her mother, who does the choosing. This is because women usually go back to their parent's house for the birth of the child and it is therefore there that the naming ceremony takes place, usually under the mother's mother's supervision and authority. It is also possible for someone, almost anyone, to ask, as a favour, that the parents give a child his or her name and such a request is very difficult to refuse. It usually also involves the name giver in making a present to the parents, a chicken for example. Such a procedure does not, however, necessarily imply a continuing relationship between the name giver and the child which would be part of some "social" order.

If we except bad names, the actual names of young children seem to be chosen on a wide variety of not very serious *ad hoc* principles. Personal names may allude to the names of people of significance including, but not exclusively, kin. They may allude to places, events or things and often a combination of these different factors but not in an systematic way. Many names refer to the previous history of the mother or of other people. Thus, a girl in one of the villages I studied, is called *Soafamahamaizina*: meaning "sweet but which then renders dark". This "bad" part of the name is sometimes said to refer to the fact that she had a twin who died at the time of her birth and, it was explained to me, this will make the evil of her sister's death, which will still vaguely cling to her by association, avoid harming her because, through the use of the name, it is not denied. The allusions in the name may take the form of using the whole of an alluded name, incorporating it completely, or incorporating a segment of it. As a result these given names may form a phrase whose meaning can be deciphered, and which is often ironical. However, it is also often the case that such names form no recognisable word or phrase.

All these principles can be mixed in the most fanciful and playful of ways. In the same village, I knew a child called *Zafimiaraka*, which would apparently mean "the grandchild who is together". However, I was told that the real reason for his name was that his father had been given the baptismal name (see below) Jean-Paul, which, in his case, and quite unusually, was regularly used to refer to him, probably because of his enthusiasm for the church. Jean-Paul, to Malagasy ears, sounds like Za, or perhaps Zafy. The word would then mean "together with his father Jean Paul" and this was the improbable reason,

why he was called thus. I don't know if this story was a joke, it probably was as the obvious meaning of the name must be the original one, but it is an old joke which had become so often repeated that its playful character had faded and that it was, by the time I heard it, believed, by some people at least, to be the original motivation for the name.

Personal names do not even necessarily indicate the sex of the child. Many names are associated with girls and some with boys but many are not. Personal names really only reflect the impulse of the moment when they were given and this may, or may not, be concerned with the sex of the child. The optional character of the gender of the name yet again reflects its non systematic character.

This bewildering freedom of choice, governed by no hard and fast principle, sometimes apparently based on the result of a whim or a pun, shows well how a new born child is not yet a successor to previous generation, an entity with a fixed place in an organised world, but rather, he or she, is evoked as a kind of social monad and a subject of speculation for itself. The child is a phenomenon which has appeared in the clear light of the burning bamboo, but which remains fundamentally alone, outside any encompassing system. This non "social" character of the child's name accords well with the often repeated phrase that children, especially boys, are "animals". This qualification is not without an element of admiration, as it implies strength and liberty, but, above all, it stresses how the child has not yet been bound and domesticated by parenthood, morality and the social. All this does not mean that the child is of no value, the individual existence which the personal name evokes is indeed envied by those who are imagined as about to be sucked up into gradual impersonality by incorporation into the encompassing system which tekonyms evoke¹.

Teknonyms.

The end of the period of childhood, when the personal name is appropriate, is theoretically brought about by marriage. Marriage in the Zafimaniry sense however, is not a change brought about in a moment but it is a long process drawn out over many years. It requires the building of a house and its defining factor is parenthood. One cannot be truly married until one has had, at the very least one child. Both the establishment of a house and parenthood are necessary, but it is the parental element that is directly reflected in the uses of names².

The rule is apparently simple. Once a person has borne a child

¹ For a discussion of the value of individuality among the Merina which would apply equally for the Zafimaniry see Bloch 1989.

² For a somewhat similar system see Needham 1954.

they should never again be addressed, nor referred to politely, by their personal name. They must be addressed by a teknonym. The teknonym is based on the first child born to the parent, whether this child survives or not and irrespective whether this child be female or male. The principle underlying this rule is categorical: parenthood marks the entry into "society", not birth. To address someone who has borne a child by their personal name is to treat them like a child/animal and to refuse this first step in representing them as a part of a larger established order, consisting of fruitful marriages, houses and localities. An order created, and continually recreated, through the evocations of communication and intercourse, a process of which name use is a not insignificant part. In this sense, one can say that it is the birth of the child which makes the parent a member of "society"³.

However, if the teknonym marks the beginning of the creation of the social person, and the imagination of "society", this, inevitably, has a contradictory correlate, the beginning of the disappearance from the phenomenology of experience of that individual monad that is evident and clear in the way children are named. Thus, while the teknonym honours, it also depersonalises. It replaces the individual by his or her role. This is a process which is not necessarily positive and which is often resisted in minor but not insignificant ways (Bloch 1999). The depersonalisation caused by the use of teknonyms is somewhat similar to the effect noted by the Geertzes for commoner Balinese (Geertz and Geertz 1964). They argue that Balinese teknonyms lead to genealogical amnesia and the effacement of ancestral identities. This is less obvious among the Zafimaniry since, in any case, elaborate genealogies are rare in highland Madagascar. But what Zafimaniry teknonyms create is, perhaps a premature manifestation of a similar thing, an effacement of the living as they go through their lives.

Another implication of teknonyms is that they are the only terminological link between spouses since father and mother are both referred to by teknonyms that are similar since they always involve the name of the same child. By contrast, the earlier stages of the marriage process are not similarly reflected in naming practices. In fact this difference reflects the fact that the marriage has hardly gained social significance until it has reached the stage of child production, or to put the matter differently, it is not possible to be a socially recognised couple without being a socially recognised father or mother. In contrast to what is the case in other parts of Madagascar, single mothers are thus not normally addressed by a teknonym and

³ Childless people may be called by a pseudo teknonym such as "father of children" or "mother of children" or "father or mother of Koto" when Koto is being fostered by them. Such usages are however recognised to be mere polite euphemisms. The refusal of the Zafimaniry to accept adoption or other forms of non biological filiation contrasts with what occurs in many other parts of Madagascar.

are thus not "social" mothers⁴, and if a single mother is addressed or referred to by a teknonym this implies the shadowy evoked putative existence of a father of the child, who would be addressed by a balancing teknonym, if only he could be located. Much the same pattern applies to fathers though recognised single fathers only occur in quite exceptional circumstances.

Practice in the use of tekonyms is however much less clear cut than the simple principle outlined above. Although one should be called after one's first child, in fact dead children are often forgotten and are imperceptibly replaced by living ones, especially living ones who are present and successful in the village. This also has the unintentional and uninstitutionalised effect that, since women tend to marry out of the village, boy's personal names are more used than girl's personal names as the basis of tekonyms.

Other factors, linked to particular circumstances and which show the suppleness of the system, may also have an influence on which child is chosen for his parents' tekonyms. These include the personal affection of the parent for a particular child expressed in a given context, or the interest of the person addressing the parent in evoking that son or daughter. Aspects of the triangular relationship between the parents, the child and the person addressing the parent may also have an effect. Thus, for example, if I know a child well called Koto, and if I want to stress my relationship to Koto when I am speaking to his parents; I will then address them as "mother of Koto" or "father of Koto", even though Koto is not their first child and in spite of the fact that they are normally addressed by a teknonym based on that first child's name.

Such contextual practice shows how the use of tekonyms is not simply a matter of identifying a person by a conventional sign - a teknonym also contains a proposition. These propositions can be paraphrased, for example, as "you are the mother of Koto and I am showing you respect because you are the parent of such a powerful person" or "you are the father of Koto and because of my link to him I want to link myself to you". Like all propositions, such propositions are always expressed, and understood, as having a communicative purpose which explains their place within the context of a speech act. Again, this purpose, as always, depends on the relationship and attitude between speakers and intended hearers.

Teknonyms and the status of elder.

Teknonyms are, first of all, the recognition and assertion that the person addressed, or referred to, is a mother or father. Thus the mother of Solo is *renin'Solo*, since *reny* means mother,

⁴ The children of such a mother are usually referred to as the children of her parents.

and his father is *rain'Solo*, since *ray* means father. But to understand fully the frequency of use of the tekonyms another aspect needs to be taken into account.

Because of the existence of Solo, both his father and mother are also something else, something which we can gloss as "parents", where the term parent is a translation of the Malagasy *raiamandreny*. This is a word used in most of Madagascar and among the Zafimaniry. The word *raiamandreny* is a unit and not a phrase but it is composed of the word for father *ray*, the word for mother *reny*, and an emphatic word for "and": *aman*. Thus it can be said to literally mean: "father as well as mother". Now, for the Malagasy, as is the case for the English word parent, a person becomes, by definition, a *raiamandreny*, by the simple fact of having had a child and inevitably this is implied and proposed by the use of a tekonym.

However, the word and the notion *raiamandreny* has also other implications, which explain why it is usually translated as "elder" in the literature on Madagascar, probably by analogy with African elders. Indeed, in a phrase such as "the *raiamandreny* of the village", the term is used in a similar way to the way it would be used on the continent for an elder. Nonetheless, the fact that the term consists of the phrase "father and mother", and does not refer to age, is most significant for understanding the concept of Zafimaniry seniority. First of all and obviously, it shows well the crucial social significance of parenthood, but this is no different from the implications of tekonyms in general.

Equally significant, however, is that being called a *raiamandreny* also depersonalises, but in a more fundamental way than occurs simply from the use of a tekonym. This depersonalisation becomes particularly clear when people become important supports and leaders of the community, i.e. *raiamandreny* in all senses of the term. Respected *raiamandreny* are people who ideally do not speak or act for themselves since, they embody the community as a whole, present, past and future. They are thus the channels through which the ancestors make their presence felt as being together with the living. Thus, when acting out this role, *raiamandreny* speak very quietly, almost inaudibly, with their head bent down, dressed totally unobtrusively. It is as though they should disappear as people and appear as nothing other than a small constitutive part of the "social". Such *Raiamandreny* have then become almost nothing but parents or ancestors, which of course are by definition parents, and, soon, they will be dead and completely nothing in themselves individually. Or rather, they will survive in a transformed sexless, bodiless, unindividuated state, in the form of their house and their progeny combined. For the "social" exists, not only in the give and take of human intercourse, but also in the interpretations that are shared concerning those human artefacts that are houses and villages which leave no place for individual human people. And, significantly, it is rare to use any name to address people who have reached the

stage of full *raiemandreny*-hood and procreative success in life. It is as if this would imply an intrusion, as if it involved an attempt at evoking their particular identity and, therefore, ignoring the depersonalised corporate role and thing which they appear to become and are claiming to be.

This respectful depersonalisation, which is often manifested in a total avoidance of any name for address, and even in an avoidance of any indicative address through such means as kinship terms, pointing, or even second person pronouns explains a particularly surprising Zafimaniry practice. That is referring to people simply by the name of their village. Such a usage is particularly respectful as it seems to treat people, either as if they were always representatives of their locality, or as if they were part of a place. And of course, in a sense that is precisely what Zafimaniry ideology would suggest. People become houses through fruitful marriages and fruitful houses, and these houses, in turn, become villages or, conversely, villages are fruitful marriages and the inhabitants are products of these fruitful marriages.

All this has implications for the uses of tekonyms. Young people, who have born a child, but whose house is not yet completed and whose own parents are still alive, could be referred to as a *Raiamandreny*, because they have become *ipso facto* a parent. But, to do so, in any normal context, would be bizarre and cause a good deal of mirth since they are not yet elders, that is the basis of an established and growing family. They therefore are still individualised, as the mother of father of so and so, and have not yet become a fruitful conjunction of male and female located in a house which will continue after them.

The avoidance of calling young parents *raiemandreny* has, however, further effects, since it even colours the use of the tekonym as such. Although it would be most offensive to call or refer to someone who has just borne a first child by their personal name since this would deny the recognition due to them, it would, nonetheless, be odd to refer to them by a tekonym since this would implicitly involve aspects of the status of parenthood: elder hood, which they have not yet achieved. As a result of this ambiguity, such young parents are often referred to by no name at all, or, if need be, indicated merely by a pronoun, usually by the more "familiar" forms of the pronouns, or by a kinship term.

The young parents are therefore in something of a name no man's land since, they are parents but not yet truly elders. However, all available terms imply the two status combined as if they were one. However, with more children and grandchildren the tekonym normally becomes established for reference and since, the only alternative, to use a personal name would amount to denying the person the legitimate place in the moral order of society which their hardening house and reproductive success demonstrates. In address, however, the name is little used in

casual speech, but when the teknonym is used in this way, this marks the speech act as being of importance and involving the rights and duties of the addressee, rights and duties which they are in the process of acquiring as a result of the "social" corporate being they are realising in themselves.

Raiamandreny status and gender.

It is within the framework of this general depersonalisation and becoming a house and a place that the issue of gender is best considered.

As noted above, personal names often indicate whether the person is female or male, but this is best seen as an aspect of the individuality which the name celebrates. As an individual a person has many attributes which the personal name comments on, often in a very indirect manner. The sex of a person is quite naturally an important side to this and so it is not surprising that it is often picked up in this way, though always together with other traits. However, as is characteristic of personal names in general, this is not systematic since the personal name does not imply that the individual is part of a system, quite the opposite.

Such a lack of systematicity contrasts with the uses of teknonyms, which indicate the place of the individual in an evoked "social" system. This place is gendered by the nature of teknonymy which, *inter alia*, distinguishes mother from father. But noting a gendered element to teknonyms needs further qualification. First of all, I would argue that the gender proposition it contains is always less salient than the parental proposition. Secondly, and equally significant, the oppositional gender element implied by the father/mother dichotomy gradually becomes subordinated. This becomes clear when we bear in mind the development implied in the uses of Teknonyms noted above. With time the fact of being a *raiамандрены* by the mere fact of being a parent becomes more and more associated, and ultimately replaced, by the "elder" aspect of the meaning of the term. This "elder" aspect of the term is not gender neutral, but what it stresses is that the elder/parent encompasses fatherhood and motherhood together. This after all is the literal meaning of the term and this fact also explains that both men and women can be qualified as *raiамандрены*. Becoming an ever more "social" being, means that one gradually replaces the incomplete character of fatherhood and motherhood by a complementary and encompassing depersonalised parenthood of fatherhood and motherhood. An encompassing combined parenthood which becomes the house, a totally impersonal yet beautiful artefact, fixed in a particular place, which also combines the masculine and the feminine in its very construction.

Necronyms.

In the past important people, after their death were given a new name which was used whenever they were referred to. The main significance of this name was that it made it possible to avoid the names used in life. Nowadays, such names are rarely given because the ceremony when they were inaugurated does not normally take place, at least in Christian villages. This means that necronyms are only used for ancestors from long ago usually when referring to the founders of famous villages and even then very sparingly.

However, even today, one does not refer to the dead by name lightly. An often quoted phrase is "One does not use names for no reason". To do so shows a lack of respect but, above all, it seems to bring the unsettling presence of the dead, as individuals, too close. Among the Zafimaniry, as elsewhere in Madagascar, the ancestors are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, they are, as parents, the source of blessing, on the other, they are also suspected of being, individuals who have resisted the depersonalising process, jealous of the living. After all, as noted above the depersonalisation process leading to the status of *raiamandreny* is not only positive, it implies giving up the self and the pleasures it can enjoy. The dead as ancestors are, therefore perhaps jealous of the sensuous life of living people, especially young living people, as such they are possible sources of trouble (Astuti 1994, Graeber 1995, Cole 2001). Referring to the dead as a group, by the general term for ancestors: *razana*, or contacting them as houses, suggests more their beneficial protective side, but calling them by individual names evokes the particular individual who could be the source of trouble. Only at rituals asking for blessing will elders move away from the more depersonalised representations and call the ancestors by name, usually as part of a list. It is as if, only in this way, their full power can be brought into the arena of the living, but this is a dangerous business and it can only be done by respected elders who have taken much precaution. Even then, they address the dead very quietly, so that nobody, except those who stand near them, those immediately concerned, can hear the names spoken.

The same discomfort can be seen in the recent practice of writing the names of the dead on monuments near, or on, burial spots. It has become common to place a wooden cross against the stone covering the tomb on which is then inscribed the name of the deceased and the date of their death. This practice is probably due to the influence of the missionaries. However, the Zafimaniry are careful to select wood which rots quickly for the making of these crosses. The symbolism of the decay of the crosses actually re-echoes the non Christian symbolism of traditional funerals, where the wooden pole which was used to carry the corpse was also left to rot by the burial spot. Similarly as was the case for these poles, it is believed that the decay of the wood parallels, and is a sign of, the decay of the soft parts of the body. This is particularly important because, only when these parts have disappeared, will it be

possible to carry out rituals which involve entry into the tomb.

The wooden crosses, however, create a new aspect of signification since it is also the name of the deceased which disappears and disappears from the location of the tomb. This accords well with the Madagascar wide gradual depersonalisation of the person through life, which has been discussed above, but also particularly well with the characteristic Zafimaniry de-emphasis of the tomb as an ancestral site and the accompanying emphasis on the house.

There is one development of the last fifty years which goes against the disappearance of the names of the dead in daily consciousness. This is the fact that rich Zafimaniry have employed Betsileo stone masons to build, either the traditional stone commemorative monuments which stand outside villages or stone tombs of the highland type. On both of these artefacts Betsileo masons often inscribed the names of the deceased with the date of death. Such stone tombs represent such a radical departure from Zafimaniry conceptions of what is appropriate that people say of those who commission them that they are "becoming Betsileo" and they, therefore express, in this way that they are completely outside the evoked traditional "social" system. Such an action simply reflects a general rejection of what it means to be a Zafimaniry. The same is not true of the carved names on the stone monuments which the Betsileo stone masons often carve. There, however, the inscribed names merely cause discomfort. Indeed, I remember asking a companion about those names while standing right in front of such a monument. After an embarrassed pause, he assured me that the writing had become obscured by moss and lichen and consequently could not be made out, when, in fact, I had no difficulty in deciphering it nor, do I believe, did he.

Baptismal names.

Totally unconnected to the traditional naming practices are the names given in Christian baptism which are always French, though often pronounced in an unrecognisable Malagasy way. The reason for these names is that the majority of Zafimaniry villages declare themselves to be Christian, sometimes catholic, sometimes protestant. In these Christian villages many children are baptised and are given what the priest or the pastor believes are suitable Christian names. The villages I know best were officially catholic and a French missionary would come once a year, or so, to baptise children presented by their family. These Christian names so obtained were more used and more widely known when I first worked among the Zafimaniry in 1971. By the late 1990 the influence of the catholic church had waned considerably and fewer children were baptised. Of those that were, their Christian names were almost never used, except in the presence of the priest and most were simply forgotten. A few individuals were, however, regularly called by these names as an alternative to what the Zafimaniry call "Malagasy" names.

Thus, the lack of importance of the names given by the priest

was not total, even in recent years. Occasionally Christian names were used because other available names had become forbidden through the dictate of some taboo or other. Usually, however, the use of such a name involved the recognition of the strong commitment to the church of the individual concerned and, accompanying this, as it almost always did, their orientation towards the outside and towards the urban bureaucratic modern world.

The Jean-Paul, referred to above, is one of these persons for whom the baptismal name was normally used. He is an enthusiastic and sincere catholic and it was in his house that the priest stayed on his pastoral visits to the village. He had taken full advantage of the possibilities that the church offered, especially in terms of education, and had succeeded in schooling two of his children so well that they had gone on as boarders to a town catholic school and had ultimately become urban dwellers. In one case one was making a living in business, while the other was in the administration. It was no doubt his wish to be addressed as Jean-Paul and when he was called in this way, the use of the words evoked the world to which he was aspiring and in which he, by Zafimaniry standards, had been successful. When used by others the choice of his baptismal name normally marked the respect which his success caused in the village.

However, matters are not so simple and straightforward. It was evident that the name was also used with varying degrees of irony and a rather bitter irony at that. To understand the nature of this irony one needs to realise the ambiguity that the kind of success which Jean-Paul embodies within the context of a Zafimaniry village. According to the outline of traditional Zafimaniry ideology given above, the successful ideal fulfilment of life is the ability to transform oneself into a house which will become a village. The requirement for such a transformation is that one has a numerous progeny, but this in itself is not sufficient. This progeny must be successful but, also, be retained around the original house. It is in this way that one "becomes" a village. By contrast, the particular nature of Jean-Paul's success had led to the fact that his children had left the village for another world, the urban "modern" world. They returned extremely rarely. His two remaining children had stayed in the village, but they were not particularly successful and one had only had one child in turn. So, from the traditional point of view, he was a relative failure. The weakness of Jean-Paul's position as a progenitor explained the ambiguity of his political status in the village. He was respected and always represented the village to the outside and especially to the administration; but, inside the village, he was not powerful since this would have required descendants. His house was not beautifully carved but... it had a tin roof and had been consolidated with lots of cement: materials which he had obtained through his church contacts.

All this meant that, when his Christian name was used, the

attitude of speakers had to be placed somewhere along a continuum, one end of which was respect for Jean-Paul's achievements in the national world, the other end of which emphasised his relative failure inside the village. This ambiguity was also tinged with a feeling of betrayal and even hostility towards the subversion of values which the modern world implies. This is what explains the occasional irony. Every use of the name therefore evokes a position somewhere along this continuum and constitutes a minute act of political philosophy. Nothing shows this better than what happens in meetings of the elders of the village. In these Jean-Paul is obviously included, both because of his standing in the outside world and because of his standing inside the village which, though not as high as his age and genealogical status would normally lead to, is nevertheless considerable. What the elders most want to create in such meetings is a feeling of community and unity. Then, quite unlike daily village practice, they always address Jean-Paul by his teknonym. This not only marks him as an insider, but also places him within the genealogical framework which explains the unity of the village and ignores the external divisive aspects which his baptismal name brings to the fore.

Conclusion.

In a Zafimaniry village representations flicker on and off, evoked by communicative acts through which mental attempts to communicate representations and attempts to imagine the representations of others criss cross. The evocations are given life in a multitude of ways, some linguistic, others not. Among the linguistic evocations are speech acts involving names. This multitude of evocations is neither chaotic nor completely predictable and organised. What degree of order there is, is the product of shared socialisation and the unification which comes from continuous interaction. The degree of disorder comes from different educational and life experiences, different patterns of interaction and personality differences.

Among the partially shared orders which seem to emerge from the interactions where names occur, three seem important. First, there is the image of the growing "social" person who achieves immortality through becoming a thing and then a place. Secondly, we have the image of the sensuous individual monad seeking satisfactions to a multitude of desires. Thirdly, there is the imagination of a wider world of uncertain boundaries, which appears successively as Christendom, the modern world of nearby towns, the nation, or an even more global entity. All three are fairly unstable images, but the first two can appear usually, but far from always, in an ordered relation, where the first replaces the second in a process of depersonalisation and even ultimately dehumanisation.

It would, therefore, be quite misleading to look for such a thing as a "Zafimaniry naming system". If system there is, it

is the total system of village life which exists through a multitude of individual acts, of which linguistic acts are a significant element. It is a social system, but of quite a different nature to the "social" evoked in communication. And, furthermore, as the case of baptismal names illustrates, the social system, in both senses is not, nor ever has been, bounded by the village. Linguistic acts of naming have meaning in so far as they enable individual minds to guess how they will be understood by other minds. These acts, like all other acts, are carried out within a set of beliefs about how things are and are understood by others to be. But these institutional factors should not make us forget the individual character of each instance of use, of name words or of any other words or signs, an individual character which in turn explains the open endedness, subtlety and fluidity of such talk

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