Bonds, “Banks,” and Blood: Zebu as a Total Social Phenomenon in Southwestern Madagascar?

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Misaotra dahole ô!
Introduction

In the village of Marofijery in southwestern Madagascar, I had a conversation with my friend Gerard about the Malagasy currency, the ariary. Worth about 1/2,000 USD and coming in many sizes and colors, the ariary has for a watermark a zebu head – its elongated bovine face and curved horns appear when lifted up to the sunlight. Gerard and I joked about counterfeit money, saying that the currency wasn’t legitimate without the zebu’s presence. I asked him if he thought that was similar to the zebu market in the village. He said that it was the same – the currency wasn’t legitimate, meaning that an exchange couldn’t happen, without zebu.

The zebu (Malagasy cattle, from Austronesian and African breeds) is culturally significant across Madagascar. It is a staple of cuisine, exchanges, marketplaces, tools for farm work, and markers of status. Zebu-raising is particularly important in Madagascar’s “Great South.” The bull’s horned figure can be found on storefronts and logos, painted on the backs of charrettes and official government insignias (Image 1). However, people distant from the South tend to distill the various regional cultures into one homogenous zebu culture. Urbanites who live in the South, mainly in the regional capital of Toliara, implicitly understand these differences, while holding up zebu-raising as the region’s primary activity¹. Nevertheless, the zebu-raising in southwestern Madagascar is in the midst of changes. Increasing cattle theft and drought, and the government’s resultant policies, affect the livelihoods of people who rely on raising zebu.

My research focuses on the social importance of zebu in the littoral zone of southwestern Madagascar in the context of today’s changing social, economic, political and physical

¹ The Interregional Director of the Ministry of Livestock for the Toliara region emphasized zebu-raising to me as one of the region’s primary sources of wealth among precious minerals and petroleum. This surprised me: while the quantity of zebu produced in the south might be put on the same level as these extractive industries, it is nowhere near as lucrative.
landscapes. Like many groups in southern Madagascar, the Tanalana, my hosts during my research, value zebu very highly. Zebus are a central part of people’s daily lives and of important rituals; a marker of socio-economic status; and essential for maintaining social relationships, both with the living, the dead, and the ancestors. The zebu holds together these multiple relationships as the central component in gift exchanges. I claim that zebus constitute a total social phenomenon (système de prestations totals), as defined by Mauss, where

all kinds of institutions are given expression at one and the same time – religious, juridical, and moral, which relate to both politics and the family; likewise economic ones, which suppose special forms of production and consumption, or rather, of performing total services and of distribution. (1990[1950]: 3)

This thesis will explore the zebu’s role in various social institutions, including gift-giving, the economy and meat production. It will also discuss its role in religious institutions as a sacrificial element in funerals which facilitates the deceased’s transition from living to ancestor. Ultimately, I will argue that the social structures oriented around zebus both reflect and reproduce social norms, as well as the zebu’s theoretical and discursive – if not actual – social importance.

Image 1: Zebus painted on the back of a charrette (pulled by zebus) at the Saturday market in Efoetse. All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.
Background to the study

In the fall of 2013, I studied abroad for a semester in Madagascar, based in Antananarivo (the capital city, also referred to as Tana). During a month-long independent research project I studied conservation and the “slash-and-burn” polemic from an anthropological perspective. I interviewed people about fire use around a national park and the way the park’s borders were policed by park authorities, talking to farmers, local village leaders, park authorities, and government officials.

The project yielded a lot of information about fire dynamics from different viewpoints, but was hampered by the four-week limitation and my inexperience doing fieldwork. In spite of this, I found that one of the many reasons people set fires in western Madagascar was to feed their cattle. At the end of the dry season, when pasture was sparse and the new rains still awaited, herders felt that cattle were at risk of malnourishment unless something was done to increase their food supply. Burning the grass causes new green shoots to pop up, tiding the cattle over until the rains come. This practice is controversial, as it is known as environmentally hazardous by some scholars and government officials because it degrades the soil and decreases tree cover, which in turn causes erosion. Critiques of this practice, in line with international conservationist discourse, have sweepingly characterized it as a cultural phenomenon that needs to be eradicated (see Kull 2004 and Kauffman 2008 for a cogent rebuttal of this argument). Herders and farmers know that erosion is bad for their water supply, which they use to drink and water their crops. Drought has always been an issue to some degree (Kaufmann 2001, 2006), but it has been exacerbated in recent years, especially in the south. Some Malagasy, particularly in the west and

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south, continue to engage in “extensive” livestock-raising, frequently as their only source of income.

While conducting my study in 2013, the then-Secretary General of Livestock told me in an interview that plans for the “commercialization” and “industrialization” of Madagascar’s livestock economy were in the works. This recalled arguments I had read problematizing such “development” initiatives, like James Ferguson’s *Anti-Politics Machine* (1990). Ferguson argues that “development” projects do not necessarily succeed in improving the quality of life of the people they purport to help, but rather have unintended political consequences which affect people’s lives in profound ways. With this in mind, I wondered just how this “commercialization” would unfurl given the strong attachment I had seen (and that most zebu herders seemed to recognize) to livestock-raising in its current form. I later heard from professors in Tana that former president Marc Ravalomanana had attempted such a project on a small-scale “intensified” American-style ranch, though it was unclear whether the government would attempt another such project.

It was unclear to me what such a project would look like if it came to fruition. As it currently stands, Antananarivo maintains a monopoly on the country’s meat supply: over half of the cattle raised in the larger Toliara region are sent to the capital for slaughter. How did the metropole maintain such a chokehold on the meat market in Madagascar? How did the market chain for consumption fit in with zebus’ ritual use? And most importantly, how did the Ministry of Livestock’s plans account for zebus’ role as symbolic and social capital, as well as the alleged environmental degradation, in their development plans? These were just some of the questions I hoped to find answers to during my research last summer.
I went back to Madagascar in the summer of 2014 with the goal of studying the cattle-raising practices in the south and the impact of state development projects. Upon arriving in Antananarivo in mid-June I learned that these development projects did not exist. In spite of this, I found that a neoliberal development discourse was used by the government officials and Tana urban elites I spoke to. Further, with the rise to power of the new president Hery Rajaonarimampianina had come an influx of budgetary aid. Following what the U.S. and others termed a coup d’état in 2009, financial aid was suspended by international donors including the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the governments of France and Germany (JeuneAfrique 2009). Andry Rajoelina, who took power over former president Marc Ravalomanana, served as the High Authority of the Transition until 2014. Rajaonarimampianina, the Rajoelina camp candidate and former finance minister under the transition government, was elected in 2014. The international community reinstated budgetary aid, deciding that the elections had been free and fair (Centre d’actualités de l’ONU 2013), though the election remains contentious today.

The current political atmosphere and the discourse I noticed amongst government officials in Tana led me to believe that researching the social, economic and cultural importance of cattle-raising was a highly relevant and timely question. I designed a research question to this end, focusing on zebus’ significance in the southwest.

**Cattle in southwestern Madagascar**

Zebu-raising is a central livelihood in the southwest and has undergone serious changes in recent years. In their sweeping environmental and social history of Madagascar, Dewar and Richard write: “The southern economy was founded on cattle and goat pastoralism, evidently an
uncertain enterprise then as it is now” (2012: 506). They describe pastoralists’ practice of shifting to new pasture when rainfall is short, which is becoming more difficult as today’s population density increases (505). This is important because the effects of climate change – including drought, increasing temperatures, desertification, increasing cyclone intensity, and variation in rainfall (Dewar and Richard 2012: 507; SuLaMa 2011: 101) – are expected to manifest in Madagascar with increasing severity, with the most extreme outcomes slated for the southwest: “the prospect of agricultural breakdown looms in the south” (507). The authors conclude (correctly) that “nature” in Madagascar must include both humans and the environment, and that “‘natural’ Madagascar today is a landscape with people, not without” (508). However, they also claim that humans have outstripped global climate change as the primary cause of environmental degradation on the island. While it is true that zebu-raising is now and has been a precarious enterprise (see Kaufmann), this does not mean that humans and their livestock techniques have become the principal cause of worsening environmental conditions – in fact, that is highly unlikely. As we will see, humans have been adapting to their adverse climate for generations, and continue to do so at present.

What does this mean in the southwest? Droughts, locust swarms, and cattle theft are some of the issues that currently plague the Great South. One of the most salient features of zebu-raising in southern Madagascar is the prevalence of *malaso* (cattle-thieves; *dahalo* in official dialect). With debatable roots in “traditional” customs, *dahaloism* has, in the past few years, come to mean groups of young men stealing cattle and looting property on a large scale. The problem of *dahalo* (cattle thieves) has also worsened over the past few years, with a peak in 2011 during a government-sponsored military campaign to “eradicate” it in the south-east of the
island. It is impossible to speak about cattle-raising in Madagascar, particularly the south, without at least mentioning *malaso*.

These changes are especially prevalent in the Toliara region (Atsimo-Andrefana), the country’s largest region by surface area and most productive in terms of zebu. The quantity of zebus has steadily plummeted, particularly in the littoral. The practice of transhumance (pasturing elsewhere for a part of the year) has declined. “Agriculture played a smaller role to livestock-raising before the 1980s” (SuLaMa 2011: 69). Now, the reverse is true: a minority of families in the littoral own livestock and zebu-raising has been waning since the 1960s (SuLaMa 2011: 79). Yet, in spite of this apparent environmental turmoil, zebus are still an economic and ritual staple of the southwest. As the Interregional Director of the Ministry of Livestock in Toliara told me, zebu-raising “is in the blood of the people of the South.” Zebus are quintessential to peoples’ livelihoods and rituals. How do people reconcile what seems to be a paradox of zebus’ cultural, economic, and gastronomical centrality, with their apparent disappearance?
Research site I: Antananarivo, Toliara and the littoral

In the summer of 2014, I spent one week in Antananarivo (Tana), speaking with government officials and academics at the university. The capital is the country’s metropole and centralized hub of virtually all political and economic activity. Located in the upper highlands, Tana is Madagascar’s largest city by far at an estimated 1,391,433 (Mongabay). In the Malagasy context, Tana is quite urbanized: it has a semi-functional mini-bus system (along with some of the worst traffic), virtually all of Madagascar’s government offices, and what is considered the
country’s best university system. Tana is comprised of a diversity of neighborhoods, ranging from very poor (some of which have been identified as “slums” as part of the United Nation’s Participatory Slum Upgrading Program) to the very wealthy. Geographically, neighborhoods tend to increase in wealth, resources, and infrastructure as one moves vertically from the low points in the city to the high points. Atop the highest hill sits the Rova, or Royal Palace.

Antananarivo’s hills are one of the city’s defining features. Now a rolling urban space that spills into its peri-urban surroundings, the hilltops were once populated by twelve villages, with rice terraces in the valleys between them. The Merina, one of the island’s dominant “ethnic groups,” unified the villages into the Merina Kingdom and made Antananarivo the capital. The Merina took control of most of the island by the time the French made Madagascar a protectorate in 1895 (for a more detailed discussion of the history of Antananarivo and Madagascar, see Randrianja and Ellis 2009).

Tana and the central highlands are still mostly Merina, but the cosmopolitan capital also attracts people from a variety of backgrounds across the island. Because of the capital’s concentration of wealth and resources as well as the Merina’s historical coercion of other parts of the island, tensions remain between the capital and the provinces, especially the South. As a result of attempts at colonization, both by the Merina Kingdom and the French, the South has traditionally been positioned in opposition to the central highlands. The relationship continues today in the South’s distance from the central Malagasy government both in resisting their domination and because of the sentiment that the capital has never distributed wealth equally among the regions. Exemplary of Madagascar’s centralization is the statistic that Antananarivo controls 95 percent of the country’s budget, with the remaining five percent divvied up amongst the five other provinces (Interregional Director of the Ministry of Livestock, pers. comm.).
I left Tana and spent one week in Toliara, the capital of the Atsimo-Andrefana (southwest) region (see Image 2). A regional cosmopolitan city of 115,319 (Mongabay), Toliara is the smallest regional capital and is comprised of many ethnic groups, including Tanalana, Vezo, Bara, Mahafale, Tandroy, Masikoro, and others. It does not have a working bus system; people traverse the city on cyclo-pousses, or bicycle rickshaws. Resources like salaried employment and formal education are more plentiful in Toliara than its surrounding hinterlands (Image 3). At the recommendation of professors at the University of Antananarivo, I stayed at the Institut Père Nicolas Barré of Catholic Sisters, who rented rooms to guests. The Sisters kindly gave me an introduction to the city and helped me with my novice Malagasy, and since school was still in session, I helped translate the seniors’ graduation speech into English.

While in Toliara I met organizers and researchers in SuLaMa (Sustainable Land Management Madagascar), a participatory research organization and partnership between various German universities and the University of Antananarivo. The organization has been conducting interdisciplinary research using various methodologies in the area since 2011, and helped introduce me to the village of Marofijery and supported my research while I was there. With the help of my local advisor and SuLaMa, my translator Colette and I made our way to Marofijery, a village 80 kilometers south of Toliara in the littoral zone in the Betioky district where I conducted interviews and participant observations. Majority Tanalana, the littoral is a thin strip between the ocean to the west (and Vezo people) and the Mahafale plateau to the east (majority Mahafale). This area is uniquely positioned regarding the rest of Madagascar’s cattle economy. People in the littoral have been agro-pastoralists since their arrival in the area (SuLaMa 2011), but their zebu herding is not as strongly linked to the large zebu markets in the region (Toliara, Ihosy, and the country’s second-largest in Ambalavao). Rather, according to the Interregional
Director of the Ministry of Livestock, most of the zebus raised in the littoral don’t make it further than Toliara.

**Research site II: Marofijery**

I learned the origin story of Marofijery from Daniel, a resident in Marofijery. According to his telling, Ranioma, a noble from Ft. Dauphin, moved to St. Agustin where he met and married his wife Bemilala. They had three sons: Iarery, Ombilahy, and Tsivantsy. Tsivantsy erred by marrying one of his uncle’s wives and the uncles banished him. Bemilala’s parents had given them land in the south, so Ranioma told Tsivantsy to go there, but he refused. Iarery and Ombilahy set out for the land in the south. At a certain point, Ombilahy wanted to turn back because the water was salty and he was unhappy. Iarery told Ombilahy that he was only saying that because he was upset with him, and that therefore Ombilahy would stay there and name the spot Beheloke (the etymology of which references anger or discontent).

Iarery left Ombilahy behind and continued to Vondrony, following the Onilahy River. There, he encountered his uncle who had followed the Linta River, and the two stayed there. Iarery had four children, including Andriamihevitrarivo. Since Iarery had land at what is now Marofijery, he told Andriamihevitrarivo to go cultivate it. Andriamihevitrarivo called the place Maromaso (“many eyes”), because there were a lot of water points. But the ruler of the nearby kingdom of Betioke had a daughter of the same name who had died. The king made the village change its name. They assembled all the sages and changed it to Marofijery.

Marofijery is located in the rural commune of Beheloke. In Madagascar a “commune” refers to a city of at least 20,000 people, with further designations to differentiate an urban commune from a rural commune. The CR (Commune-Rurale) Beheloke was comprised of 19
*fokontany* when I was there in July and August of 2014. The *fokontany* is the smallest administrative unit in Madagascar. In most rural settings this means a village; in urban settings this can refer to a neighborhood. A village or hamlet needs 200 people to qualify to apply for state recognition as a separate *fokontany*. Marofijery had 875 residents when I was there.

One of the larger *fokontany* in the CR-Beheleoke, Efoetse, has been applying for several years to become its own CR. According to my interlocutors, this would have important impacts on Beheleoke as a CR and the region as a whole, as it might shift demographics and economic infrastructure away from the center of the Beheleoke Rural Commune (the *fokontany* Beheleoke) to Efoetse. When the Ministry of Decentralization in Antananarivo evaluates whether or not a new CR can be created, they have to determine if it could generate enough wealth to be self-sustaining. Efoeste could probably do this, according to my closest informants. Important recent developments such as the establishment of the main office of a national park as well as a recent upswing in the creation of hotels mean that Efoetse could see an increase in revenue in the near future. This would, however, leave the Beheleoke *fokontany* in a less fortunate situation, as it would no longer be the seat of the CR receiving the benefits from the park and the hotels.

Four kilometers north of Efoetse and four kilometers west of the Parc National Tsimanampetsosie is Marofijery. This proximity has meant that villagers, including some of my closest informants, had been hired by Madagascar National Parks (MNP) or SuLaMa as guides in the park, or as local guides in the village. During my research I watched MNP prepare to move the park’s office from Efoetse to Marofijery. This is an important development because it will provide more salaried employment for Marofijery’s residents, and perhaps change the way in which people interact with the park. Changes in employment patterns could potentially impact zebu-raising in Marofijery, as I will discuss in the conclusion.
When most people talk about the “cattle-raising people” of the South, they tend to refer to the Bara (who mainly live in the center-south and on the Bara Plateau), the Tandroy (in the far south, in the Ampanihy district), the Vezo fishers along the coast, and the Mahafale, slightly inland. These and many other different “ethnic groups”\(^3\) live in the Toliara region; however, people’s patterns of migration and living have changed drastically over time\(^4\). Marofijery is mostly Tanalana, which is usually described as being made up of three clans: the Tevondrone, Temitongoa, and the Temilahahe.

Any conversation about ethnicity in Madagascar must be contextualized. As Bloch (2001) argues, we cannot use given ethnic groups as measuring sticks; like any category of social classification, they also need to be scrutinized. “Scholars working on Madagascar have often been ahead of others in questioning the very character of the ‘tribal’ labels, which in fact had often been little more than tools in the hands of Malagasy and French administrations” (Bloch 2001: 296-7). It may be argued that the French created rigid ethnic divisions in order to fragment the island and conquer it through the Merina. The Malagasy state has upheld this practice of ethnic differentiation, which has led to a highlands/coastal fissure and ensuing political strife (such as the 2002 political crisis, which pitted coastal people against highlanders). The boundaries around ethnic groups may be more fluid than certain discourses that surround them would let on.

There are many ways in which the Tanalana self-identify and distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups. One of these is that all Tanalana are situated under one *hazomanga*, or

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\(^3\) For an interesting discussion of “ethnic consciousness” among the Vezo and how they relate to their Tanalana neighbors, see Marikandia 2001.

\(^4\) My understanding of these changes rely heavily on oral accounts I heard during my research, Robert Razaka’s master’s thesis on the history of the Tanalana (2007); and Mansaré Marikandia 2001.
spiritual leader and link with the ancestors and with god. Each clan has their own hazomanga fohi (little hazomanga) under the main hazomanga. The Tanalana language is distinct but very similar to Mahafale and Vezo. Tanalana also differentiate themselves based on their livelihood: as agro-pastoralists they are closer to their Mahafale neighbors to the east, but distinct from the Vezo fishermen to the west. As Robert Razaka writes:

Les Tanalana, ... pour marquer leur identité et leur unité dans les activités quotidiennes, à savoir l’élevage en tant que source de richesse toujours rehaussé au premier plan, et l’agriculture placée au deuxième plan, ... ils se réfèrent souvent au hazomanga. [The Tanalana, ... to mark their identity and unity in daily activities, specifically livestock-raising as a source of wealth brought to the foreground, and agriculture placed in the background, ... often refer to the hazomanga.]

The Tanalana’s shared identity based on their primary livelihood (agro-pastoralism) and their shared hazomanga unite the different Tanalana clans, groups which are reified at rituals such as funerals, circumcisions, and other ceremonies. Similarly, the Tanalana clans share a unique story of how they came to occupy the littoral zone south of Toliara. They are called the “Mahafale andriake” (Mahafale of the sea) by some to designate this separation between themselves and the Mahafale on the plateau. The Tevondrone clan of Tanalana occupies the littoral zone (but not the Vezo-inhabited coast). People I met in Marofijery virtually all identified as Tevondrone, further divided according to bloodline into three lineages.

There are five hamlets in Marofijery (Tanambao I, Tanambao II, Ambavarano, Mitsinjo and Ampasimahanoror), where the Tevondrone clan is divided spatially: the Tantsiha live in Ambavarano, the Tatohatse in Tanambao II and Mitsinjo, and the Tantsimamehy in Tanambao I. These four hamlets are grouped relatively tightly together around the “highway,” a path carved out in the sand by the wheels of passing trucks through the surrounding shrubbery.

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5 Razaka (2007) gives a thorough discussion of the institution of the hazomanga and its significance for the Tanalana.
Ampasimahanoro is located about one kilometer to the west, on the coast. That hamlet, where mostly Vezo reside as opposed to the Tanalana majority of the fokontany, has recently applied for designation as its own fokontany. They had reached the minimum number to qualify as a fokontany, and had begun building a hotel which would boost the cash economy. There is little to no animosity between Ampasimahanoro and the rest of Marofijery, however. One of my Tanalana interlocutors was married to a Vezo from Ampasimahanoro, and planned to learn the Vezo trade of fishing.

**Research practice and questions**

The chef de fokontany’s family hosted me and my translator for the duration of the fieldwork. We stayed in a tent next to their houses, which was common practice for researchers, since houses in the village are generally quite small. We shared meals and conversations with them, and their oldest son Gerard, who often worked with SuLaMa researchers, served as our local guide.
My research consisted mainly of interviews with consenting individuals regarding the importance of cattle, cattle-raising practices, and development projects. All interviews were preceded by a briefing of the purpose of the research, the nature of participants’ involvement, how the interview would be used for the study, and a request for verbal consent. Interviews were conducted with a list of questions but were semi-structured to allow space for interviewees to introduce new topics, which I often explored with impromptu follow-up questions. Audio recordings were collected for formal interviews. Interviews were recorded only with the interviewee’s consent. Informal interviews or conversations and observations of cattle-rearing techniques were not recorded for reasons of cultural and practical feasibility. Interviews were generally conducted with and translated by Colette and Gerard.

A major part of my research was observing and participating in daily activities, either related to zebu-raising or other domestic tasks. I would ask if I could watch what someone was doing, and ask to help if deemed appropriate. I would ask to see people’s method of preparing food and feeding cattle. I also asked people to show me around the cattle market or, in a few cases, to observe the slaughtering of a zebu. I kept a field journal to record observations and details, paying particular attention to the labor that went into caring for cattle on a daily basis, including guarding, feeding and watering, as well as the weekly market.

Finally, I occasionally took photographs to complement visually the information provided through interviews, and documentary research. Such photos document the cattle market, consenting individual interlocutors, and scenes of daily life in the villages where I conducted research. They also demonstrate the different steps in the meat market chain, including pasturing, preparing food, butchering and slaughterhouses, and the meat market.
Study limitations

Perhaps the most important limitation on my fieldwork proved to be my meager language skills. I had learned a small amount of Malagasy from studying there for a semester, but the Merina and standard dialects are quite different from Tanalana and Toliara dialects. I was conscientious not to use what I knew were Merina phrases, and tried to learn as quickly as possible. I am conversationally fluent in French and needed someone who could translate from Malagasy to French for me. My local advisor in Toliara recommended Colette, who spoke excellent French and was studying French literature at the university. I thought that the fact that she was a young female student in her late twenties meant that she could relate both to my position and to that of our interlocutors. She came from a different part of the country but had spent a substantial amount of time in Toliara; however, she was not fluent in the Tanalana dialect. While she was learning the dialect as we were conducting research, I had to include our guide throughout the process. She did not accompany me on all field-walks, or to a nearby village during the last week in the area.

Unfortunately, the amount of information I was able to glean without a translator was limited. Communication was sometimes unclear during interviews – Colette sometimes paraphrased the interviewee’s response, and asked them clarifying questions before translating for me, which prevented me from asking questions. Further, I generally favor an interview style that fosters discussion, rather than just question-and-answer. I believe the latter inclines toward an extractive research practice that involves minimal informant participation in how the interview questions are shaped and proceed. This was difficult to do, as my translator did not always translate my sentences. Even with these limitations, I think the interviews were useful in providing information and building relationships. They were also coupled with being able to
engage in dialogue with friends and interlocutors inside and outside of the formal interview setting, and supported by my observations and participation in daily activities.

My position as a foreigner in Madagascar and Marojejy was perhaps the most salient aspect of my identity. This has as much to do with historical attitudes towards foreigners as it does with the fact that not very many foreigners visit Madagascar, especially the south. As Karl Eggert (2001) points out, there is a dearth of sources on the early history (mostly pre-1900s) of most peoples in Madagascar's southwest, and there is a very good reason for that: most people tried to avoid telling the government about themselves or how many zebu they owned.

Based on these ideas and my own previous experiences in Madagascar, I was aware that outsiders are generally mistrusted by people in the south. The greater south has had a history of polarization and opposition towards the central ruling group, whether it be Merina kings in the nineteenth century, French colonizers, or the current Malagasy state. While my hosts in both the city of Toliara and more rural areas celebrate Independence Day on June 26th with enthusiasm, they are generally wary of paperwork, the official Malagasy dialect, and anything that smacks of government bureaucracy. People can direct the same sort of skepticism towards Merina from the highlands as they do towards vazaha (foreigner, usually Euro-American).

My identity as a vazaha shaped much of my interactions with other people. Though I studied and practiced the dialect while I was there, I understood very little spoken Malagasy, especially at first. Sometimes this worked to my detriment – useful information relevant to my study (or to life in the village in general) was often exchanged without my comprehension. On the other hand, this also meant that I remained unaware of some of the disagreements, since no one expected me to understand what was going on or to take sides. Being a student researcher in the village following other SuLaMa researchers before me also created various opportunities and
limitations. I did not fit into all expectations of how researchers should perform. For example, I
was shamefully not already well-versed in the *faly* (taboos) of the village, though I made sure to
ask and abide by them once I knew. On the other hand, the fact that most people were used to
researchers’ presence meant that some of my naivété was attributed to my status as a foreigner.
In my attempts to integrate into daily life in Marofijery, I helped with various tasks, including
preparing food and farming. I also taught a few French language classes at the request of my
friend Suzette after asking her what I could do in the village. While my role was a student
researcher, I attempted to deepen my interaction with my hosts.

As a *vazaha*, I was not held to the same gender norms as people in Marofijery. I helped
with “women’s tasks,” like domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning, that as a guest I
wasn’t necessarily expected to partake in. I also helped with and observed “men’s tasks,” like
milking and preparing zebus’ food. I was cast as unequivocally female (and foreign) in other
ways, however. When I helped cut *samata* (food for zebus), it was with the understanding that I
was a foreigner, and I was only allowed to “test it out.” When I couldn’t carry the five-gallon
buckets of water on my head, it became a running joke. My friend Suzette was crucial in helping
me navigate this gendered landscape – she kindly showed me how to wear a *lamba* (cloth)
around my waist at all times, how to wash my clothes, and did my hair like the other women’s.
My female-genderedness proved to be limiting in some circumstances: for example, at the
funeral I attended, women were required to leave before the end and before part of the sacrificial
ritual was completed. I still chose to follow these rules in order to avoid committing a *faly*
(taboo), which are very serious. Being a female *vazaha* also limited where I could and could not
go alone, so I was almost always accompanied by Gerard; on the other hand, because my
translator and I were both women, we had perhaps an easier point of access to women’s spaces.
Contextualization and the quandary of representation

In his introductory essay to a series of articles on anthropology in Madagascar, Maurice Bloch claims that “We have historicized and therefore ‘de-exoticized’ our anthropology long ago” (2001: 294). This has come about, he says, because anthropologists and historians of Madagascar have borrowed from each other’s methodologies, and anthropologists have been able to historically contextualize their work. Because scholars have placed the earliest inhabitants of Madagascar at about 2,000 years ago, they have tended to frame the history in terms of constantly arriving groups up until the present. This, in Bloch’s view, prevents anthropologists and historians from falling into the trap of the past/present, traditional/modern dichotomies. This has facilitated scholars’ proper contextualization of colonialism, rather than using it as a focal point for telling Madagascar’s history (2001: 294). Bloch warns against the myths of “globalization,” “authenticity,” and strict ethnic labels to apply to others and oneself, but he maintains that social sciences in Madagascar “have been ahead of their time” (293).

Whether or not it is further “ahead” than other fields of study, Bloch’s assertion belies the difficult task at hand of representing the Tanalana and of representation in anthropology in general. The words we use easily distort reality and do not represent any “objective truth.” As Edward Said put it, “To represent someone or even something has now become an endeavor as complex and as problematic as an asymptote, with consequences for certainty and decidability as fraught with difficulties as can be imagined” (1989: 206). No one exists in the world without position: both anthropologist and subject are inherently products of their own epistemologies and era (Said 1989), and it is impossible to climb out of that subjectivity to perch on a universal objectivity, looking down at an anthropological subject.
The insurmountable difficulty in representation is that “anthropological representations bear as much on the representer’s world as on who or what is represented” (Said 1989: 224). What lies in these pages is my effort to contextualize, expose the logic behind, and render comprehensible the immense complexity of Tanalana and Malagasy social relationships. For “to see Others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted would be to erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least” (Said 1989: 225). As much as possible, I hope to contextualize and historically constitute both myself and my interlocutors, though I have no pretentions of knowing any more than they do. What remains is a reflection of my experience more than anything else.

My study of the importance of zebu in southwestern Madagascar attempts to address certain aspects of this incredibly complicated topic. My argument is three-fold: first, that zebus are effectively a total social phenomenon in their social, economic and religious importance. Second, I argue that this lens illuminates how the social relationships articulated around zebus reflect and reproduce social norms and hierarchies. Third, while the importance of zebu as a total social phenomenon is certainly true in people’s discourse, external circumstances sometimes require people to replace zebus with other livestock or cash in exchanges and rituals.

In the first chapter, I examine existing literature on gift theory, distinction, consumption and production, animal sacrifice, and rituals. I draw together these fields of scholarship that are the most pertinent to my observations and analyses with a particular eye towards the notion that zebu constitute a total social phenomenon. Though this concept is central to my analysis, the way social interactions play out do not always fit neatly therein and will be complicated later on.
I look at the ways in which the zebu is central to daily life in Marofijery in the second chapter. This section, following a provisioning approach, details the process of meat production: herding, the cattle market, butchering and slaughtering, and consumption and the meat market. It analyzes how the activities that surround zebu-raising structure social relationships and looks at the zebu as a nexus of the economy.

The third chapter investigates the role of zebus in rituals, specifically animal sacrifice in funerals. I look at the zebu as a dominant ritual symbol and how it facilitates the deceased’s transition from the world of the living to that of the dead, through a liminal period before the final burial. Though some interviewees suggested that zebus are crucial components in sacrifice, exterior circumstances may point to why zebus are sometimes replaced in rituals by other animals.

I consider the replicability of zebus in my conclusion, examining questions that my research has raised such as the social ramifications of the diminishing number of zebus. The importance of raising zebu and other livestock vis-à-vis economic and environmental realities will be important aspects to consider for future livestock development projects.

A note on names

All names in this thesis have been changed to protect and respect the individuals involved. In an attempt to reflect the true diversity of names, I have included some that are French-derived and others that are Malagasy-derived.

Although some consider Malagasy to be one language, differences vary widely across geographic regions and “ethnic groups.” Where there are multiple word, accent, or spelling variations, I always choose the word in the speaker’s dialect. When that is not applicable, I
choose the Tanalana dialect. Where there are both Malagasy and French (and sometimes English) spelling differences, I choose the Malagasy spelling. I take my cues from Malagasy scholars who have written before me and try to privilege the Tanalana spelling.

All translations from French quotations or citations in the text are by the author.
Chapter One: Literature Review

My research question, which rests upon the central role of zebus in southwestern Madagascar, is informed by scholarship on gifts, reciprocity and obligation that begins with Bronislaw Malinowski and later Marcel Mauss, who introduced to anthropology the gift as a “total social phenomenon.” Their work has been enormously influential in shaping social, economic and religious anthropology in the 20th century. Within the broad field of economic anthropology I employ a provisioning approach to discuss the production of zebu meat for consumption. Though many other scholars in the broad field of economic anthropology have explored questions of gift and market economies, I draw primarily from authors who are most relevant to my research question. I then bring together this literature on gift and exchange with work on funerals and other rituals in order to explore the zebu’s dual role as a total social phenomenon and dominant ritual symbol. I invoke Victor Turner’s notion of liminality in rituals, which is furthered by Robert Hertz’s observations of the liminal period in funerals between death and the final burial. This is accomplished through sacrifice of a zebu which, as E. E. Evans-Pritchard notes, plays a pivotal role in funerals. Through a synthesis of this scholarship, I hope to frame my research on zebus as social, economic and symbolic capital and their relation to social relationships.

Zebus as a total social phenomenon

In his 1922 Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea, Malinowski famously studied the *kula*, the practices of exchange and reciprocity of goods among the Trobriand Islands. In this “ring” of exchange, one type of shell is passed in one direction in a circle of islands, reciprocated
by another type passed in the other direction. The shells exchanged in the kula are not simply objects, according to Malinowski (1922) and Mauss (1950): they carry with them a series of obligations and significations. “What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive” (Mauss 1990[1950]: 11-12); the obligation is not inert, but rather acts in a social context. Mauss’s foundational theory stipulates that there are three forms of obligation: the obligation to give, to receive, and to reciprocate (1950). In the Trobriand Islands, this obligation revolves around the exchange of shells.

Time plays an important role in the way shells are exchanged. The objects are continually moving, yet when one receives the object one is obligated to hold it, then to pass it on. “It is in the nature of a gift to impose an obligatory time limit,” Mauss states. “Time is needed in order to perform any counter-service” (1990[1950]: 35). This is supported by Pierre Bourdieu’s later arguments that the time between exchanges is absolutely essential: a gift reciprocated too soon or too similar in nature can easily be interpreted as an offense (1990).

The shells, Malinowski found, are “ceremonial objects of wealth” (1984[1922]: 89). The kula is society’s primary activity, and all else revolves around it (Malinowski 1984[1922]: 101). “The kula merely gives concrete expression to many other institutions, bringing them together” (Mauss 2000[1950]: 27). Mauss later expanded upon this idea of the gift as a total social phenomenon, as defined in the previous chapter, wherein “clans, families, and individuals create bonds through perpetual services and counter-services of all kinds, usually in the form of free gifts and services of a religious nature or otherwise” (Mauss 1997[1924]: 28). It is these bonds which structure society and which make the gift a total social phenomenon.
In his *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that to grasp the *totality* of the total social phenomenon, one must grapple with the ethnographical quandary of the observer/observed dichotomy. He writes:

To call the social fact *total* is not merely to signify that *everything observed is part of the observation*, but also, and above all, that in a science in which the observer is of the same nature as the object of his study, *the observer himself is a part of his observation*” (1997[1950]: 47; emphasis in original).

Further, once the observed social fact is grasped from the inside (or as close an approximation as possible for an outside observer), it must be translated into the outsider’s grasp (Lévi-Strauss 1997[1950]: 48). Lévi-Strauss claims that this is accomplished through the social sciences’ rejection of the distinction between objective and subjective, yet he recognizes that the observer “is always threatened by the tragic risk of falling victim to a *misunderstanding*” (49). Lévi-Strauss addresses this danger through the notion of the unconscious (50). With Lévi-Strauss’s original premise in mind but departing from his solution, I would like to postulate a different approach to comprehending the *totality* of Mauss’s total social phenomenon.

The power of the total social phenomenon lies in the relation between its component parts. “…Mauss had in mind a *constant relation* between phenomena, which would be the site of their explanation…” (Lévi-Strauss 1997[1950]: 54). This relation, not the existence of the component parts, is what justifies the term “total social phenomenon.” This means that the phenomenon is manifested in different social institutions, for “all kinds of institutions are given expression at one and the same time” (1990[1950]: 3; see Introduction).

The total social phenomenon is also manifested in relations between social actors. As previously mentioned, these social bonds are created by the three obligations associated with gift-giving. These bonds, however, are not equal, as power dynamics manifest themselves and are created in every exchange. Entailed in the obligation to reciprocate a gift is an indebtedness
that keeps the recent recipient in a lower social position until they counter the gift, for example.

“[T]he object received as a gift, the received object in general, engages, links magically, religiously, morally, juridically, the giver and the receiver. Coming from one person, made or appropriated by him, being from him, it gives him power over the other who accepts it.” (Mauss 1997[1924]: 29). This is to say that the bonds created in the exchanges that constitute total social phenomena reflect and reinscribe structures of power between the social actors. Thus, systems of exchange are also social institutions.

**Economics as social institutions**

Malinowski realized that the kula system was much more than simple bartering, and that while the shells didn’t seem to be traded for any purely “economic” purpose; they seemed to be wasteful (Malinowski 1984[1922]: 88). This system, Malinowski argued, is not utilitarian. For him, “trade” carries connotations of unsophistication and disorder, but this is untrue of the kula, which has rules and is ceremonial in nature (Malinowski 1984[1922]: 84-5).

In *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1950), Mauss also argued that economies were a social institution, not an institution apart from culture. Mauss found in Malinowski’s work that “the phenomena of exchange and contract in those societies that are not, as has been claimed, devoid of economic markets – since the market is a human phenomenon that, in our view, is not foreign to any known society – but whose system of exchange is different from ours” (1990[1950]: 4). Mauss expands upon the work of Malinowski and others to explore what makes market and premarket economies different. “Mauss’s fertile idea was to present the gift cycle as a theoretical counterpart to the invisible hand” (Douglas 1990: xiv).
The difference that Mauss found between gift and market economies was that the gift is more public, whereas markets are more hidden. The gift is a spectacle, a socially visible ritual, a ceremony. According to Mary Douglas, “gifts are given in a context of public drama, with nothing secret about them. In being more directly cued to public esteem, the distribution of honour, and the sanctions of religion, the gift economy is more visible than the market” (1990: xiv); the gift is thus more open to public scrutiny, and to study by anthropologists, while economists focused on the market. The market is a visible form of exchange for economists and the gift is the visible spectacle studied by anthropologists, yet exchange is constantly occurring to fulfill social obligations.

Karl Polanyi took a different approach to the difference between market and gift, or “premarket,” economies. Whereas Malinowski’s functionalist approach maintained that the same processes existed in gift and market economies but were hidden in market economies, Polanyi argued that the two are in fact substantively different, and thus “different forms of economy were not susceptible to analysis by a uniform method” (Roth 2006: 775). Polanyi’s definition of the economy has traces of Mauss’s ideas of reciprocity and the social rules that govern “economics.” Polanyi’s economy manifests itself under three “forms of integration”: “reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. Under systems characterized and provided stability by means of reciprocal exchange or redistribution, the rates of exchange are set by the imperatives of the larger social institutions” (Roth 2006: 775). This is to say that these larger social institutions (the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate; the institutionalized giving at funerals, circumcision ceremonies, and other rituals) govern the “economic” laws by which goods exchange hands.
The idea that the market constituted another social institution had important ramifications for economics, as it inherently questioned the ability of Western scholars to understand or control other types of substantively different economies – in other words, if culture governed economies, then cultural relativism applies to understanding economies as well. This threatened the functionalist theoretical framework because “at issue, in the claims of neoclassical analysis to be able to model economic behavior the world over, in part, was the authority to direct ‘development’” (Roth 2006). James Ferguson provides a concrete example of this and furthers this theory in his ethnographic work in Lesotho, *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994). Western modes of conceptualizing the market and separating it from culture did not apply to cattle in Lesotho. The resulting paradox was that Western leaders of development projects believed they could dictate “development” in Lesotho, while they did not understand the cultural context.

As previously stated, the total social phenomenon manifests in the relation amongst its components and social actors. Ferguson also argues that the market and property are social institutions, which deal with relationships between different parts:

property, it has long been observed, is not a relation between people and things. It is a relation between people, concerning things. And if property is always a social relation, one can state as a corollary that property is always structured (1994: 142).

Non-Western (here Basotho) economies and social institutions should not be expected to follow the same norms as the Western societies analyzing them. Ferguson pushes back against two main streams of Western thought which have conceptualized cattle in Lesotho. He critiques what had been termed a “dual economy” in Lesotho – that cattle are “overvalued” because of their “religious, social and symbolic reasons” over their “true” economic value (135); he then critiques the utilitarian view of people’s economic decisions as “irrational” choices in a non-dual economy – a “rural bank,” as it were. This “Bovine Mystique” is best explained by the existence of a “one-
way barrier,” which allows cash to be converted to cattle, but cattle cannot be sold for cash except under extreme circumstances (Ferguson 1994: 146-7). Thus, as Mauss argued, the gift and the market are not discrete systems; they are both forms of exchange governed by the same social institutions.

The “Bovine Mystique” and the one-way barrier are based on a set of dualities that revolve around cattle as the center: senior/junior, husband/wife, bridewealth giver/receiver. Thus cattle are at the heart of exchanges that constitute social and economic relationships. Ferguson explores the gendered component of these relationships and the division of labor in an economy supported by men who have wage-earning jobs outside Lesotho, leaving their dependents at home (1994: 149). Women are thus in a constrained economic position, but still have some input into the family’s income. In Lesotho, “claims by dependent women on the earning power of absent men, then, are an extremely important aspect of the rural economic structure, and the gender division thus takes on a fundamental economic importance such as we are more used to associating with class” (1994: 149). It is clear from Ferguson’s discussion of gender that as social institutions, economic systems both reproduce and reflect social roles and hierarchy. The next section will evaluate how these structures of power are facilitated through markers of distinction in consumption, as well as the division of labor in zebu production.

**Consumption and Production**

Regarding the zebu as a total social phenomenon illustrates how economic, social and political relationships revolve around the zebu in many ways (through gift exchange, ritual sacrifice, and daily labor), and as previously suggested, the social actors involved in these relationships are positioned differently in social hierarchies. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of
distinction provides a framework for understanding how groups of social actors differentiate themselves from other groups. Bourdieu allows us to expand on the role of gift exchange in creating social bonds, which apply to individuals (as we have already seen with Mauss’ three obligations) as well as to groups.

In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), Bourdieu argued that one’s consumption patterns, one’s “tastes,” are determined by one’s class. The lifestyle of a given group or class, or its habitus, both structures and is structured by people’s understanding of differentiations between social groups.

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes (Bourdieu 1979: 170).

Individuals’ actions and lifestyles reflect the fact that they have already internalized a division of social classes, and people act in accordance with the social norms of that class. Therefore these social classes, like many social categories, are constructed. I argue that the social bonds which are engendered by people’s relationships to zebu are a part of that construction of groups.

Bourdieu’s discussion of distinction illuminates how this is so. Some practices, he argued, are “designated by their rarity as distinguished,” while others are “socially identified as vulgar because they are both easy and common” (1979: 176). One’s status, exemplified by their “taste” and lifestyle, is informed by the kinds of capital they possess. Capital can manifest as economic, cultural, or social. In addition to economic capital, “people's social worth [i]s determined by possession of various forms of symbolic capital (linguistic, social, cultural), the ability to enact or display, through one's habitus, valued cultural forms” (Peterson 2006: 396). As a form of symbolic and economic capital, the possession of zebus is a part of how people’s social
status is determined, and distinguishes groups of people based on their possession of this particular form of capital.

This argument furthers the idea that the economy is a social institution: one kind of capital can be converted to another kind, and the boundary between the economy and other social forms of exchange (namely, the gift) is blurry. Bourdieu argues that exchanges of capital are “aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (1986: 52). As Mauss argued, the obligations associated with gift-giving serve to cement social relationships. Bourdieu adds to this discussion of the relationship between individuals by allowing us to understand how exchange affects groups of people: “[e]xchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies, reproduces the group” (Bourdieu 1986: 52). This then reifies the groups to which the giver and receiver belong and the larger relationship between those two groups. Understanding the zebu as capital that distinguishes certain groups from other groups further illuminates its role in economic and social exchanges. This underscores the value of viewing the zebu as a total social phenomenon, which combines economic and social institutions.

The social institutions that govern consumption, markers of status, and exchange also impact how goods are produced. “To look at exchange without considering production is to participate in ideological mystification” (Roth 2006). It is crucial to examine the chain of production for any good that brings it to the market for consumption. “The provisioning approach,” as defined by Susana Narotzky, “follows the path of provisioning in order to understand how the content and the meaning of goods and services are produced and how, in turn, they produce social differentiation” (2012: 80). While many approaches have focused on
patterns of consumption and consumerism as markers of distinction, this approach also addresses the ways in which a good’s production can reproduce social hierarchy and norms. This approach “is also a useful way to understand social differentiation, the construction of particular meanings and identities and the reproduction of the social and economic system as a whole” (2012: 77).

Production, or provisioning, plays just as much a part in the social institution of the economy as do the rules that govern exchanges.

At the nexus of the entire production-exchange system is the gift, according to Mauss. The gifted object requires reciprocity and exchange, and in that exchange is entailed all facets of society: economic, religious, spiritual, social, etc. “The cycling gift system is the society” (Douglas 1990: ix). This stems from Malinowski’s description of the kula as the society’s primary activity, around which all else revolves (Malinowski 1984[1922]: 101), leading to Mauss’ theory that the gift is a total social phenomenon. This insight necessarily influenced not only anthropologists’ later interpretive frameworks, but also their fieldwork and the questions they began asking. After Mauss, it became necessary to examine the society as a whole and every aspect that may play a part in this total social phenomenon. The next section will examine religion and the ritual sacrifice of zebu, and how that sacrifice constitutes another form of exchange and creates social bonds.

Sacrifice and zebus as ritual symbols

In addition to production, consumption, and the market, it is necessary to examine the role of gifts (particularly cattle) in the ritual setting. According to Mauss’ definition, a total social phenomenon gives expression to multiple institutions simultaneously, including economic, social, and also religious. I maintain that zebus are a total social phenomenon in that their
importance stretches into the realm of religion. In order to further complexify the role of zebus in religion and rituals, I turn now to a discussion of zebus as dominant symbols in rituals.

Victor Turner (1973: 1100) defines symbols in rituals as semantic in structure (dealing with signs, symbols, and their referents), and having qualities including: “multiple meanings,... the unification of apparently disparate significata... [and] condensation” of ideas and relationships. A dominant symbol is defined as “extreme multivocality... and a central position in each ritual performance” (1101). In this way, we can consider the zebu as a dominant ritual symbol. The zebu condenses multiple meanings in the different rituals in which it is present, including marriage, child recognition, circumcision, and funerary rituals, as I will discuss in Chapter Three. Some of these meanings include communicating with ancestors and demarcating a space as sacred in many rituals; continuing a family lineage, as in marriage and child recognition; facilitating the re-inclusion of a previously excluded group back into society, as in circumcision and funerary rituals; and purifying and cleansing after the transgression of a taboo. As a ritual symbol, the zebu expresses different cultural themes (Turner 1973: 1101). The ritual is also a social apparatus that reproduces a given culture’s norms:

members of the culture who have been exposed to the entire ritual cycle gradually learn, through repetition, variation, and contrast of symbols and themes, what the values, rules, behavioral styles, and cognitive postulates of their culture are (Turner 1973: 1101).

Zebus thus have an important role in communicating and reproducing culture.

Seminal work done by previous anthropologists, namely E. E. Evans-Pritchard, has illustrated the centrality of cattle as symbols which are situated at the center of political alliances, economic relationships, and religious and spiritual beliefs, particularly ancestral relationships embodied and performed in ritual. Evans-Pritchard adds to this discussion by illuminating cattle’s role as a dominant ritual symbol in sacrifice.
The Nuer sacrifice cattle in ritual, Evans-Pritchard argues (1953), as a replacement for human sacrifice. There is a strong identification between men and their oxen, and between the community and the herd. The lineage is produced and reproduced through the gift of a young ox from a father to his son: as the herd is continued, so is the lineage, so is the boy’s (and later man’s) identification with his ox. “The lineage-herd equation can thus be considered as a structural expression of the man-ox equation. ... which finds its most logical expression in the rite of sacrifice” (1953: 190), when a man’s ox name might be invoked when throwing a spear. This is important not only in creating and defining the group as a political entity, but also in tying together the group and the herd. The interconnection between the continuity of the lineage and the herd is exemplified in ritual through cattle. Using cattle as the dominant symbol express[es] in a single representation the idea of the unity of a lineage and its cattle, the cattle which sustain the lineage by their milk (the cow suckles the ancestor) and by constant calving provide them with bridewealth for marriages, whereby sons are born and the lineage continued, and with a means of maintaining communication with God ... and with the ancestral ghosts (Evans-Pritchard 1953: 190).

Cattle are able to serve as this nexus of economic, political, and religious realms because, Evans-Pritchard argues, of men’s identification with their oxen.

The tie between lineage and herd also governs the economic forces at play and the domestic economy of how goods are produced. The connections between the community and the herd are strictly gendered. They involve not only the gendered nature of labor involving the animals (1953: 181) but also men’s and women’s role within the community. According to Evans-Pritchard, a clan’s identification with its herd split along gendered lines: men’s relationships were specifically with oxen, while women’s were specifically with cows. Their daily labor echoed this division. However, women do no “identify” with cows in the same way that men identify with oxen. The significance of a shared name between man and ox, their
“identification,” is greater for men because men sacrifice the oxen: “men, and not boys or women, are the sacrificial agents. The two sides of the standard equation are the human male and the bovine male, man and ox” (Evans-Pritchard 1953: 183). Men thus occupy a privileged position vis-à-vis the ancestors as well as who occupies which roles in rituals.

Cattle exchanges are also central to daily life. “Evans-Prichard... had Mauss’s teaching very much at heart when he described the marriage dues of the Nuer as a strand in the total circulation of cattle, and wives, and children, and men: every single relationship had its substantiation in the gift” (Douglas 1990: xiv-xv). The sacrificial role of cattle as a dominant ritual symbol sheds light on their centrality in day-to-day exchanges. “Cattle are necessary to Nuer not only for food and marriage but also for salvation, for the sanctification of their social undertakings, and for overcoming evil in its twofold character of sickness and sin” (Evans-Pritchard 1953: 96). Cattle play a part in two types of social interactions: those with the “social undertakings” of the living; and with the ancestors, the pathway for salvation. The sacrifice is an exchange between the living and the ancestors, and can be a marker of distinction.

Mauss also saw sacrificial rituals as a part of the gift-exchange system, simply between living and dead rather than among living members of a society, writing that “sacrifice is a gift that compels the deity to make a return: Do ut des; I give so that you may give” (Douglas 1990: ix). The obligation to reciprocate holds true for ancestor-human relationships, since “it is they [the ancestors] who are the true owners of the things and possessions of this world” (Mauss 1990[1950]: 16). Sacrifice is not solely a power display or a demonstration of honor; it is constitutive of a human exchange with the gods and ancestors. Just as it is true that the gift holds human social relationships together, so it is true that the sacrificial gift connects ancestral spirits to the living realm.
Robert Hertz explores the connection between ancestors and the living, and the creation of a group through ritual, in his 1960 essay on death. “[D]eath has a specific meaning for the social consciousness; it is the object of a collective representation” (28), Hertz argued. Although Evans-Pritchard critiqued the notion of the social consciousness as “vague and ill-defined” (1960: 12, 21), I maintain that funerals, through ritual exclusion and re-inclusion into the social group, are moments when the collective constitutes itself as such. Hertz describes the funeral as a liminal period, one of transition, marked by a temporary burial and the family’s period of mourning. The corpse and spirit, between this world and the next, pose a danger to the community until they pass the threshold of the funeral celebration. Both body and soul must undergo a transformation before they are reunited with society in the land of the dead (for ancestors are also social actors). The final ceremony, Hertz says, has three objectives: to bury the remains, ensure the soul access to the land of the ancestors, and liberate the living from the obligations of mourning. This is achieved through destruction: the worldly aspects of the deceased, such as their house, are destroyed, and an animal is sacrificed to mark the severance between the deceased and the world of the living.

This ritual of exclusion and reintegration defines the funeral for Hertz. This liminal period of exclusion followed by reintegration is echoed in other rituals. Hertz takes circumcision rituals as an example:

if death, for the collective consciousness, is indeed the passage from the visible society to the invisible, it is also a step exactly analogous to that by which a youth is withdrawn from the company of women and introduced into that of adult men (1960: 80).

I will elaborate on this in Chapter Three, where I will discuss animal sacrifice in funerals and the meanings of sacrifice in other rituals. I now turn from these foundational theorists to scholars of Malagasy rituals and animal sacrifice specifically.
Rituals in the Malagasy context

Scholarship outside the natural sciences in Madagascar has been somewhat limited. Here, I highlight some scholars of the meaning of death, ancestrality and homeland in the highlands of Madagascar; liminality in funerary rituals in the northwest; and conceptions of death among the Vezo in the southwest. Maurice Bloch was one of the forerunners of Western anthropology in Madagascar for his work on the famadihana, the exhumation ritual practiced in the highlands. In elucidating this funerary tradition and kinship relations among the Merina, Bloch touched upon the importance of the funeral and tanindrazana (land of the ancestors). He writes that “a Merina finds his place in a complex segmentary system by the place where he is going to be buried…” (1968: 99). In other words, Merina are so invested in the afterlife because it gives a sense of place while living. Bloch explains this by detailing the two definitions of razana, which is usually translated as ancestor: “It is used in this sense in the phrase fombandrazana, the custom of the ancestors, where ancestor means some past, long dead, unspecified forebear. … The word also means ‘dead person’ or ‘corpse’ when the corpse is related to the speaker [including children]” (1968: 100). Thus tanindrazana refers not only to a vague homeland, but where one’s loved ones are currently buried, and where one will eventually be buried. It is thus important to maintain a connection with one’s tanindrazana because of the resulting “demonstration of rank, attachment to a fixed social order, and attachment to kinsmen” (Bloch 1968: 102). In this way, the tomb for the Merina is a social institution that structures the lives of the living.

Lesley Sharp explores how funerary rituals structure social bonds and hierarchies in her work on Sakalava funerals in northwestern Madagascar (1997). She describes how the death of a prince initiates a liminal period during which the community can re-define itself and determine who is included. Sharp adds to the scholarly conversation on the liminal period between
temporary and final burials (including Hertz), and on the creation of a collective as the question of royal succession is resolved. She illuminates how the death of a ruler can create national sentiment and group consciousness (1997: 284). She thus explains how the dead can be important social actors.

Rita Astuti has added to Bloch’s notion of the importance of *tanindrazana* as the locus of the society of ancestors in her studies of conceptions of death among the Vezo. She has built upon Bloch’s analysis of how “humans transcend the discontinuity of their finite existence” (Astuti 2007: 227). Astuti highlights how the deceased’s spirit is transformed into the spirit of a dead, and the fact that some people simultaneously recognize the “reality of biological death” (234). She thus challenges Hertz’s conception of a complete and parallel transformation of body and soul upon death. Astuti also brings to light anthropologists’ tendencies to overlook the fact that their informants’ may not completely understand the supernatural entities their rituals address (Brunton 1980, in Astuti 2007). This raises the question of “whether anthropologists can legitimately go beyond the limited… exegesis provided by their informants to produce their own analytical models of indigenous cosmologies” (Astuti 2007: 235).

There has also been much research done with the Tanalana and Mahafale by Malagasy students and scholars, particularly based at the University of Toliara. This research is especially rich as students and professors there are excellently poised to conduct continuous long-term research in the area, and have the added perspective of being Malagasy and speaking the language even if they are not always from the south. However, the sweeping majority of this research is inaccessible outside Madagascar and even outside the library of the University of Toliara’s anthropology department. While I had some access to these sources, there remains a wealth of information that is tragically inaccessible overseas.
My research is informed by this literature on the gift, consumption and distinction, provisioning, rituals and sacrifice, and funerals, focusing on the zebu as a total social phenomenon in Tanalana society. Zebus are the glue that holds society together: they serve as a medium of exchange to cement social relationships, and as a symbol of status and social capital. Zebus can be considered the dominant symbol in a cycle of rituals as described by Turner (1973: 1101). The zebu is central in many rituals and in day-to-day life, and its multifaceted importance is showcased in all these different venues. Zebus embody the idea of a total social phenomenon both inside and outside the context of rituals. They are important economically, socially, and religiously.

I now explore what can be gleaned about social relationships and structures of power from an analysis of the zebu as a total social phenomenon. I do this first by tracing the chain of meat production from herder to consumer and analyzing the social institutions that structure this process. I examine how this system also structures social relationships, particularly gender roles. Then, I explore the sacrificial role of the zebu in rituals, specifically funerals. I focus on how it facilitates the deceased’s transition through a liminal period to reintegration into the society as an ancestor. Finally, I ask questions about the future implications of zebus’ role as their numbers continue to wane.
Chapter Two: Markets

About three weeks after I arrived in Marofijery, a group of people decided to restart the weekly market that used to be held in the village (see Image 1). The market’s recommencement was contentious, as the mayor of the rural commune of Betioke had shut it down in January 2014 (it was on a day between two other market days and provided too much competition). I went to the first new market day to see if anyone was buying or selling zebus. Now, almost the whole village had transplanted itself to the northern section at the marketplace, which had become the biggest social gathering I had seen in my time in Marofijery. Vendors had restarted their previously-abandoned market stalls, selling coffee, clothing, drinks and food. Men clustered around a domino game. After going around and chatting with people I knew, I saw one of my interviewees selling a zebu calf to someone I didn’t know. The zebu buyer was from Maromitilike. He just heard about the market at Marofijery, and was buying the small zebu to raise and augment his existing herd of ten. Luc Vifasoa, a middle-aged man in Marofijery, was selling the zebu to get money to bring as an enga (a gift or condolence) for a death in his brother-in-law’s family in another village. The occasion was the fisa (a celebration one year or more after the burial of a ndatibe – an elder or respected person, usually a man) coming up in the month. Luc Vifasoa told me he was bringing money to the family instead of a zebu because the former, unlike the latter, is easier to share amongst family members.

This chapter will examine the zebu’s role in the component parts of Luc Vifasoa’s exchange. The zebu was the nexus of this particular social interaction which has ties to the market (the actual transaction), social exchange (the enga), and ritual (sacrificial) role of zebus. Zebus can be gifts themselves or the medium to acquire a gift; they are the sacred, sacrificial element of the funeral; and they represent a shift in economic and symbolic capital, and
exchange between giver and receiver. Implied in Luc Vifasoa's transaction and corroborated in interviews is that the recipient of his gift will later be obligated to reciprocate; the exchange of a zebu is “implicated for everyone in the whole community” in that they affect the social status of the giver, receiver, and structure the obligation to reciprocate. With this in mind, this chapter will use the framework of the zebu as a total social phenomenon in its roles in economic and social institutions, before turning to religious institutions and the gift-giving and exchange that surrounds funerals in Chapter Three. In the present chapter, I will frame the zebu as a total social phenomenon in order to discuss the social and economic relationships it engenders.

Social norms both produce and are reproduced by interactions concerning zebu. This is to say that the structures within which people (and their zebu) operate also structure people’s lives. This chapter will explore how this structuring around zebus produces social hierarchies and reinforces social norms, particularly along gender and age lines, in zebu meat production and circulation. Women and young men have far less access to economic and symbolic capital in the form of zebus than older men, yet navigate the social landscape and find other ways to accrue capital. I will discuss how social hierarchy is reproduced through interactions concerning zebu, while also bearing in mind that this very discourse around zebus as various forms of capital also reproduces these structures of power. The way people talk about the importance of zebu does not always match up with reality, as seen in Luc Vifasoa’s example, which parted from the “norm” of giving a zebu as an enga. The rhetoric that zebus are uniquely important serves to benefit those who already possess more capital. This discourse must therefore also be examined.

In order to understand the different facets of the zebu as a total social phenomenon, it is important to examine its production, circulation, and its finality (meaning the zebu’s ultimate role, or the conditions under which it is consumed). Whether the zebu’s finality is to be
sacrificed in a funeral, placed on a family’s table in Toliara, or sold for cash, there are myriad exchanges that take place leading up to that event. Illuminating how the process of raising a zebu (for consumption as meat or to be sacrificed in a ritual) is linked to social norms requires an approach that focuses on its production and circulation rather than exclusively on its consumption. This echoes the “provisioning approach” as defined by Susana Narotzky (2012; see Chapter One). My analysis encompasses the multiple finalities of zebu production, including meat consumption as well as the zebu’s sacrificial role in rituals, such as funerals. In this chapter, I use this framework to discuss the role of zebu in daily life on various levels: household labor, the market and exchange, the slaughterhouse, and consumption.

Image 1: The first day of the Sunday market in Marofijery, men gather around a game of dominos near a vendor selling clothes and other goods.
Daily life: the profession of zebu-raising

“Agriculture and livestock are like brother and sister – they go together, but they can’t be married.”

Claude, a middle-aged man in Marofijery who raises goats, told me this when I asked where he kept his baibo⁶ and his goats. Marofijery, like most villages on the littoral, is surrounded by the baibo of its residents. Inside the village are a few kialo⁷ interspersed between clusters of houses. These clusters often surround a space in the middle where a samata tree grows. Elsewhere in the village, samata groves are interspersed between kialo and houses. Zebu-herders prepare samata and raketa for their herd’s food⁸. Zebus are sometimes left to pasture in the baibo, where the raketa fence is similarly prepared for them. Zebus’ two types of food, samata and raketa, are found in the village itself and in the baibo. The centrality of zebu in daily life is highlighted in this spatial configuration: their space (the kialo) and their food are located amongst peoples’ houses, sometimes with the houses centering on them⁹ (see Image 2).

Image 2: Houses and a samata forest in Marofijery.

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⁶ Small field for cultivating, usually surrounded by a fence of raketa (cactus).
⁷ Corral for zebras. Smaller kialo are used to keep goats and sheep.
⁸ Samata are a particular type of succulent tree grown on the littoral. Raketa, from the French raquette, is a non-native species of spiny cactus. For a more detailed discussion of the role of samata and raketa in the southwest, see Kaufmann.
⁹ Many thanks to Eric for the conversation that led to this insight.
Agriculture and livestock-raising are co-essential to peoples’ livelihoods\(^{10}\). Not only do they “go together” spatially (without their “marriage” in the same space), but also economically. Other scholars (see for example von Heland and Folke 2013) show that people buy zebus with money from agricultural surpluses, and sell zebus in times of hardship for money to buy agricultural foodstuffs. Most people in Marofijery helped work their family’s *baibo* – young and old, men and women. Women are also in charge of domestic tasks (child-raising, cooking, laundry), while men and boys tend the family’s livestock if they have any. When it comes to zebu, there are specific gendered and aged norms that govern who tends the herd.

Daniel is an older man in Marofijery who works in his *baibo* most days. He told me about zebu-raising in his childhood and now:

“I didn’t study, I just looked after my grandparents’ zebus… from the age of 15. There were 80 when I was young… At [age] 10 you can start to look after goats and sheep, but you’re not mature enough to handle zebu. Now I only have goats and sheep; my son looks after them.”

Daniel’s account illustrates the division of labor concerning livestock. Most livestock is within men’s domain and is ranked by age.

My host family also had a sizable herd. It once belonged to Lamy and his brother – now both old *ndatibe* in the village – but now it is shared among his three adult sons, Gerard told me. However, the story that Lamy told did not appear to reflect what seemed to be the case. Lamy told me in an interview that he did not have any zebu; he said that he just has goats, which his grandchildren takes care of. Further, when a man’s herd increases (or decreases) in size, or when many zebus are slaughtered at his funeral, this is said to affect his social status; however, Lamy still occupied an important social position as a *ndatibe*. This is an interesting statement on the

\(^{10}\) For a more detailed discussion, see SuLaMa 2011.
nature of Tanalana collective herd ownership: though the zebus at one point belonged to the patriarch, they now simultaneously belong to everyone in the family and no one. I will further address zebu as symbolic capital in the next section.

Lamy’s grandsons (the older son in my host family, Keb, and his cousin Erea) tended the herd every day. They take the zebu out of their kialo in the village to pasture to the west of the village. There are 42 zebus in the herd, shared between the three brothers (one of which was the father of my host family, the chef de fokontany) and their sons. When I accompanied Keb and Erea to pasture the zebus, they explained that they were charged with the strong ones and their calves. Their cousins watched the weaker ones in a different forest, because otherwise the weak ones wouldn’t eat. There were eleven calves and six cows, and the rest of their half of the herd were males. At noontime, Keb and Erea took the zebus back into the village to the watering hole – a well for zebus adjacent to the well that people drew their water from on the east side of the village – before returning to the pasture in the afternoon.

While in the samata forest, they prepare piles of samata for zebu to eat – the spiny branches are difficult for zebu to digest if they are not chopped into smaller pieces. Samata is prepared by chopping the thick green branches off the tree and slicing the thick, soft thorns off of them with a machete, then chopping the branch into pieces. To prepare raketa, you burn the spines off the cactus pads and leave them to dry in a pile. The next day, you can slice the pads into strips (see Image 3).

Once, when helping our neighbor Manasoa prepare raketa for his zebu, he referred to it as the laoka (main dish) and to samata as vary (rice) – the two traditional components of any Malagasy dish, which always go together. Manasoa prepared raketa and samata for his zebu every day, once a day. He had one zebu-charrette (a work zebu) that he kept tied up in an open
baibo that a neighbor let him use. He took raketa from the enclosure, burned it, then left it to dry for one day. No one watches over the zebu during the day – there are no thieves there, he said. Both Sofizany and Manasoa said their grandparents were the ones who taught them how to take care of zebus.

Image 3: David preparing raketa for his zebus.

Zebu-raising practices have been in flux in recent years. Herders in the southwest usually practice transhumance: during the wet season, herders on the littoral will take their zebus to the plateau to pasture on the thick grass, and return in the dry season. According to a SuLaMa report, “the animals themselves decide when to leave” (2011: 81). Herders from the plateau then come down to the littoral in the summer. Social connections between the littoral and the plateau are strengthened by marital ties (SuLaMa 2011: 52). However, scarce rains and the increase in malaso (cattle thieves) activity have been changing these practices. Although they are far more prevalent on the Mahafale plateau than on the littoral, the presence of malaso greatly affects zebu-herding in Marofijery nonetheless.
Gerard explained why zebu-herders did not migrate this year:

“They didn’t leave for the plateau this year because of the malaso. Here the water is salty, and if they don’t prepare enough samata the zebu risk becoming thin and falling ill. Before, people would go to the plateau between the 20th of December and January and stay until April, because it’s cold and they’ll get sick [if they stay on the plateau later than April]. If they go this December, it will depend on the news about malaso. They went before but the malaso attacked and stole more than 100 zebus so they had to come back. They left only the little/weak ones.”

While other villages in the littoral did leave for the plateau that year, it was unclear whether this would be a continuing trend.

While I was there, two zebu herders had brought part of their herd down from the littoral. Benjamin and Manoa spent the day preparing raketa for them in their family member’s baibo. They also milked their zebus and sold it for extra income. Most people in Marofijery weren’t milking at that time since it was the dry season, when animals don’t produce much milk, which the herders save for the nursing animals. Since the two from the plateau fed their zebus exclusively raketa, they produced more milk. One morning, I went with them to milk their zebus. At about 5:30 a.m., I went with Gerard to the kialo where they kept the three females in their herd. Benjamin and Manoa asked me to take off my shoes, since it is taboo to enter a kialo with shoes on. The taboo does not necessarily mean that the space is sacred; some taboos are created by ancestors who decided that something was unfit for one reason or another (taboos on eating certain meats are an example of this).

To let in the calves, Benjamin removed the bottom sticks that gated the cows’ kialo. He then called in one calf from the goats’ kialo, and allowed the calf to nurse for few minutes. He then whipped it away and tied the cow’s back feet together. Manoa then milked the cow, alternating udders and pulling with force. He got about two big cupfuls from each cow – more than an Eau Vive bottle (the main brand of bottled water in Madagascar) and a liter in total. He
invited me to try my hand at milking. I did not succeed. When done with one cow, Manoa untied her feet and allowed calf to nurse again. Then he called in next calf. At the end of the process, they would sell the milk for 1,000 ariary (50 cents) per Eau Vive bottle.

Taboos structure the gendered division of labor regarding animals. After I had tried milking, I found out that it was taboo for women to milk zebus. I was incredibly embarrassed and confused as to why Benjamin and Manoa had invited me to try it. Probably as a vazaha, I was held to different (though certainly not completely fluid) gender norms than Tanalana men and women. Normally men deal with zebus exclusively – raising, buying, selling, and slaughtering, though women can sometimes take part in butchering. In some Malagasy cultures, it is taboo for women to even witness an animal being slaughtered. According to Gerard, it’s not taboo for Tanalana women to watch a slaughtering, but they can never kill. People have always done it that way, he said. Sheep- and goat-herding is the domain of younger boys, while the chickens are fed by women (or whoever happens to be home).

Outside the home, women frequently tend their family’s baibo and sometimes collect firewood. Women’s domestic work includes taking care of children, cleaning, laundry, and cooking. Once the meat enters the domestic sphere, women are charged with preparing it. When I was there in July and August, our most common meals were sweet potatoes (bele) for breakfast, corn (tsako) and mung beans (lojy) for lunch, and a stew of manioc (belahazo) for dinner. We also sometimes had squash (trehake) or millet (badjiry), my personal favorites. To prepare the meal, women (sisters and mothers) would take turns pounding the grains – the corn or the millet. If we had sorghum, they peeled the pods that had been drying for several days and popped the legume into a basket, to be simmered over a fire. Manioc (sometimes dried, sometimes “wet”)

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11 For the purpose of clarity, I am defining “butchering” (the process of cutting up and preparing meat for sale, which women can participate in) as distinct from “slaughtering” (the act of killing an animal, which is taboo for women to do).
would be peeled, chopped, and put in the stew, which sometimes included squash and tomato sauce. Women cooked inside the kitchen-house, a thatched house identical to where people slept, but black-ceilinged from the fire smoke and empty on the inside except for a wood fire and a small table for cutlery.

Women’s work expands far beyond the domestic and animal realm, however. Besides working in the field, women sell crops at the market in Efoetse, they run coffee stands and make different snacks, they buy other goods and re-sell them, and some buy fish from Ampasimahanoro and sell them to fish collectors from Toliara. According to scholar Mansaré Marikandia, livestock has been so menaced by the *dahalo* and climate change that a decrease in “contemplative stock-raising” will soon present itself (pers. comm., July 27). He believes that people will retain a few “little herds of prestige,” along with other means of subsistence. In this changing dynamic, he says, women are positioned to take on a larger economic role. Girls are more literate than boys: girls are in school more often because they aren’t obligated to tend the family’s livestock herds. Ironically, boys’ economic prowess could be faulting them in the future, if education rises as an important part of cultural capital. In the meantime, women participate economically as small-scale merchants, since the zebu economy moves more slowly. Women’s activities serve the family’s daily needs, even if theirs is largely limited to the domestic sphere.

**Zebus on the market: economic exchanges and social obligations**

When I was helping Manasoa prepare *raketa* for his zebu, the conversation between him and his friend Sofizany turned to their latest zebu purchases. Sofizany had bought two zebus the day before at the daily market in Beheloke (the seat of the rural commune of which Marofijery is
one fokontany) for 250,000 ariary (125 USD). He planned to sell them that Saturday at the weekly market in Efoestse for 300,000 ariary (150 USD). He hoped to use that money to buy other zebus in Efoestse and sell them in Beheloke. Manasoa planned to sell his zebu-charrette in Toliara for about 500,000 ariary (250 USD). Zebus are typically more expensive in Toliara because of the cost of transporting them into the city. Manasoa could then use the money to buy food and a small zebu at the market in Toliara, and have money left over. He would then raise the zebu and sell it for more money when it became older. This is a common practice in Marofijery. People strategically buy and sell depending on the season. Some people think of the zebu as a holding place for their money – if they gain excess money from agricultural surplus they will “store” it in a zebu. Zebus have been referred to as a “rural bank” for this reason.

In his introduction to the Bovine Mystique, Ferguson (1994: 135) outlines two predominant theories that have been used by Western scholars to explain “traditional” livestock-raising. The first is the “dual economy,” by which the economy is separated into “traditional” (livestock-focused) and “modern” (industrial). The second is utilitarian, wherein the livestock-raiser is a “rational actor” who, without access to investments or banks, uses the livestock as a “rural bank” (136). Ferguson refutes both of these claims: herders are not “rational actors” in the sense of Western economics; nor is the separateness between livestock and cash emblematic of a split between “traditional” and “modern.” As illustrated by Manasoa as well as other observations, people have distinct strategies that govern zebu selling and buying that have little to do with utilitarian rationality. Ferguson cites the livestock-cash barrier, the Bovine Mystique, in Lesotho. He says that when people acquire livestock, they strategically do not sell it or convert it back into cash, since livestock is more valuable.
This one-way barrier between cash and livestock that Ferguson observed is not the case among the Tanalana – many people told me about the need to sell zebu to take care of “problems,” so although not necessarily the ideal, it is certainly possible to “convert” zebu back into cash. This happens when people need to pay school fees, a medical expense, or a debt. Sometimes, people are forced to sell their zebu for adverse reasons. Their herd might be suffering from a sickness or drought, and they can’t afford to maintain it. Further, zebu-herding can actually be considered a more sustainable livelihood option, since it requires less rainfall than agriculture (SuLaMa 2011: 98). In addition to economic motivations for buying and selling zebu, exchanges are also governed by the obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate. The fact that zebus can be social and symbolic capital in addition to a simple holding-tank for economic capital is yet another reason why the “rural bank” metaphor does not hold up to snuff.

In addition to Ferguson’s critique of the ethnocentric imposition of this Western notion on Malagasy livestock-raising, the “rural bank” metaphor evokes notions of bureaucracy, corporations and the state in a completely different way from the types of capital associated with zebu. Yet this bank metaphor is deployed frequently. SuLaMa’s report states: “Because of the absence of a banking system, livestock represent the most important financial reserve for households (2011: 79). The metaphor was often used by people I spoke with about zebus – ranging from government officials in Toliara to zebu-herders and others in Marofijery. It could be that my position as an educated vazaha made people inclined to think that I could relate to a bank as a metaphor. People might have been exposed to the idea through other Western-influenced institutions, such as SuLaMa or MNP, and were simply using that vocabulary to describe their reality. It is impossible to know the origins of the “zebu-as-bank” discourse and
why people use it. Here, I wish to highlight the other ways people consider zebu, evidenced through their words and actions, and why the bank metaphor may not be the most apt.

People buy zebus and other livestock for a variety of reasons not limited to their “banking” practices. Zebus are a way of managing one’s income (through buying and selling), displaying one’s status (particularly for men), and creating and maintaining social relationships.

If zebus were a bank, one could say that economic capital is “put into” them, later to be “withdrawn” from them. The cash would not have been transformed, just stored. Zebus, however, can signify different kinds of capital. According to Bourdieu, “The different types of capital can be derived from economic capital, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question.” (1986: 53-54). Zebus are not only “storage” for economic capital (cash), but can be that economic capital themselves. Manasoa was selling his zebu for cash (economic capital), using that money to buy another zebu that augments his social status (and symbolic capital).

I also noted a prioritization of live meat in Marofijery. For example, Michel and Gerard didn’t have a disposable income for other things, but were in the market to buy goats. Gerard had stopped attending school and was saving up to buy a goat (on one market day he had 20,000 but could only find goats for 30,000 ariary). For 20,000 ariary, you could buy four to five kilos of meat at the market, which could last a couple of weeks. A goat is a long-term investment. It is important to note here that zebus are not the only livestock seen as worth investing in. The fact that Gerard, Michel, and many others saw goats and sheep as important forms of capital contradicts the discourse that the zebu is the all-important bank.

People buy live animals when they have money to later use to buy non-meat food (i.e., cassava, corn, etc.) in times of famine. In this way, I would like to challenge the idea that
livestock is a poor investment or anti-economical. People saw them as a safe place to keep their money from agricultural surplus, with the ability to sell them in times of crop failure to purchase food. However, in times of hardship, no one had the money to buy livestock, so the price plummeted – the zebu-seller didn’t get as much for the zebu as they paid for it. Similarly, when they did have the money to buy a zebu in times of plenty, the prices of livestock were much higher. This means that people are selling their zebu for a much lower price than what they bought them for. This purely economic account seems “irrational” without taking other forms of capital into consideration.

As Bourdieu (1979) states, “the propensity to subordinate present desires to future desires depends on the extent to which this sacrifice is ‘reasonable,’ that is, on the likelihood, in any case, of obtaining future satisfactions superior to those sacrificed” (180). In this case, the “future satisfactions” are not only nutritional, in that one sells livestock to buy agricultural foodstuffs later. They are also social, for with a herd comes greater social capital. A view of a “rational actor” that does not view their social desires as meaningful or “rational” will miss this very “reasonable” aspect of zebu transactions.

Owning a herd is a marker of status and of symbolic capital. For Zanamahy, there was a strong connection between symbolic and economic capital: “They’ve always been a sign of prestige,” Zanamahy told me; “it’s a whole economy.” Eugène told me that “If you didn’t have zebu, you would be poor.” However, that statement was anomalous to all my other interviews, and is marked by the fact that he is a ndatibe in the village and owns many zebus. It is difficult to parse out being “poor” in the material sense and the social sense, and would require further inquiry. As the number of zebu has dropped in recent years, the fact of not owning zebus does not mean that one is poor in Tanalana society. However, those who own them (and even those
who don’t) still consider them a signifier of wealth. Clemence explained to me what she saw as the importance of zebu:

“When there are problems, they can help the family. If you don’t have any, you have to indebt yourself. [Owning zebus] is a sign of prestige. It means you don’t have to borrow. […] It’s always the man who sells and buys zebu. Before there were a lot, now there aren’t many. It’s a natural phenomenon. If there aren’t any zebus, it’s a problem.”

Zebus are a method of distinction and a form of symbolic capital, as owning them constitutes a “practice designated by [its] rarity as distinguished” (Bourdieu 1979: 176). This is confirmed in a report conducted by SuLaMa (2011: 56-57) which found that people conceptualized distinct social groupings based on livestock ownership. The report delineated four social categories described in a study with residents of Marofijery: manankanana (who have large zebu herds), mahitahita (who have sheep and goats, and a few zebu), mahavelom’po (the majority, who only have some poultry in terms of livestock), and latsa (the very poor, who can’t work). “Animals, in particular zebu herds, determine the economic and social status of their owners,” the report states (79). While in the past larger herds may have been an even greater sign of distinction, now owning any at all is rare and a marker of distinction in the littoral.

It must be noted, however, that zebus’ role as a marker of distinction does not mean that Tanalana society is heavily stratified. On the contrary; the report also found that Marofijery is largely communitarian as a fokontany, and class distinctions are not always visible in daily life. In their study, “the residents affirmed with conviction that their social cohesion is strong,” and that “the respect owed to someone is not dependent on their wealth” (2011: 57). Further, social mobility is high within certain limits: a mpitakazomanga and fokontany president can come from lower classes; and “the wealthiest can become poorer because of medical debts… ritual sacrifices… droughts…” and other social obligations, while those in lower classes can rise by
buying animals (57). The report also stated that “celebrations are organized in order to maintain this social cohesion.”

Zebus are often given and bought in order to fulfill social obligations. As the Interregional Director of the Ministry of Livestock in Toliara put it, “beef regulates the social hierarchy.” According to Mauss, giving a gift is just as important as receiving one, and distinguishes the giver as one who can afford to give zebus. People (namely men) can reassert and reaffirm their status by giving a gift on occasions that entail such a social obligation, such as a funeral or circumcision. Mauss describes the link between the giver and receiver as one of power: “Coming from one person, made or appropriated by him, being from him, it gives him power over the other who accepts it” (Mauss 1950: 29-30). Herein lays the impetus for owning and exchanging zebu: social capital is built by giving them as well as for owning them. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Luc Vifasoa was selling his zebu to bring money as an *enga* to his family’s funeral. This would fulfill his social obligation, as well as provide a zebu for sacrifice in the ritual (as will be discussed in the next chapter).

Zebus are used both as *enga* and sacrificially in rituals. Von Heland and Folke “observed the competing roles of cattle as both economic and sacred capital … in general, the role of cattle as sacred capital is considered more important” (2013: 257). Rather than conceive of zebus’ roles as belonging to the distinct categories of either economic or sacred, it is perhaps more useful to think of them as interwoven and connected – one cannot have one without the other. The ritualistic and social value of zebus is why they must be considered as more than a “rural bank” or a holding-space for economical capital. The exchange in and of itself produces social relationships: “Exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies, reproduces the
group” (Bourdieu 1986: 52). Investment in this type of exchange, viewed by some as “anti-economical,” is actually an investment in social relationships: “the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships” (Bourdieu 1986: 52). The SuLaMa report suggests that social obligations were an economic hindrance in Marofijery: “they could impact the family’s standard of living and prevent investments for rising out of poverty. But they might also reinforce the [social] cohesion between villagers” (2011: 105). These investments are only “anti-economical” if one considers only the economy in its narrowest sense; in reality, the economy is only one of the sectors of society where zebus are exchanged. Zebus have multiple economic, social, and ritual valences and simultaneously constitute different types of capital. In fact, zebus’ place at the nexus of the economic, sacred, and social indicates their role as a total social phenomenon that ties together all these social threads.

The market stand: butchering in Efoetse

Since the market was cancelled in Marofijery in January 2014, people didn’t usually slaughter zebus in the village. Many people explained to me that they would never slaughter a zebu just to eat, citing their importance in serving other functions as mentioned in the previous section. Whatever symbolic capital accrued by eating meat was not as valuable as (and more ephemeral than) owning a large herd, fulfilling social obligations, or getting cash to pay for monetary expenses (such as healthcare or school fees). The only exception might be a celebration like the New Year, the national holiday, or an auspicious day as determined by an omBiasy. The nearest butcher to Marofijery was in Efoetse. Mme Hasina ran the enterprise though she never participated in the slaughtering itself. Her family would slaughter one zebu
every Saturday for the Efoetse market, and smaller animals throughout the week to provide meat every day in Efoetse (see Image 4).

One Saturday, I spoke with Mme Hasina’s sons Nosy and Lery at their market stall. They told me that their clients come from Efoetse and other surrounding villages (such as Manasa, Ambola, etc.). They kill the animals themselves, they said. Their family’s house was next to the chef de fokontany’s house where they sold meat on weekdays. They said that they would finish the zebu that day because it was a market day, but sometimes one zebu lasted two days. Sometimes they would slaughter a goat or a sheep because they’re smaller and sell faster. They sell all parts of the zebu: the meat, the organs, the blood, horns, hide, and hooves. The younger children take care of selling the blood, which is sometimes used as a broth for other food. (This differs notably from the sacred value accorded to blood in ritual contexts, which will be discussed in the next chapter, as the fact that the blood was relegated to children shows that it is not as important as and simpler to handle than the meat and organs). People use the hide to make sandals, belts, and containers that women use to grind corn. Lery showed me the belt he had made, a skill which he had learned by imitating pre-fabricated belts that he saw. Their family eats the meat when they bring in enough money. If there’s money, they’ll eat meat every day – buying it for themselves, they said. They learned how to slaughter from people (i.e. men) before them, Lery and Nosy said, not from their mother. She only verifies, and keeps the money. Normally the boys prepare the meat, but when she wants she can help prepare the tripe, they said. The way they described slaughtering was consistent with society’s gender norms. It was also consistent with the conception that butchering is a good job, a consistent source of income; however, in times of hardship when people don’t have the money to purchase meat, the butcher suffers as well.
After visiting her stall for several weeks, I watched the slaughtering process one Saturday morning. Gerard and I arrived around 5:30 a.m. in Efoetse and stopped at a coffee stand where men socialized and warmed up on the chilled morning. Some households were preparing for the day, lit up from the inside by cooking fires, including Mme Hasina’s house. We went to see their zebu, tied up to a tree near their goat kialo. Gerard immediately recognized the zebu as belonging to a friend in Marofijery. The butcher’s family had purchased it from him the previous Saturday. When I asked how he could tell so quickly just by its hide, he said, “you know what your friend’s clothes look like, right?” Many other young men I spoke to in Marofijery were equally well-versed in their family’s and community’s herds. Mme Hasina’s son Mamy set up the market stand, bringing dishes and utensils form the house. At around 6:30, the slaughtering began. The atmosphere was convivial – the men were chatting and laughing throughout, though it was hard work. As a woman I could not help them slaughter or butcher, but Gerard did. I engaged people in conversation and asked a few questions while trying not to get in the way.

A group of men led the zebu to the back of the stand. It put up a fight and wandered off, and the men threw stones at it to corral it back. They corralled it back to behind the stand, threw
it on the ground, and tied its legs together. They rolled it from where it had landed to the right
spot, a bit closer to the stand. They tilted its head back and dug the horns into the ground. Others
brought a metal plank and branches to roll the zebu onto. With people holding the zebu’s body
on its side, one adolescent boy slit its throat. Another boy collected the blood in a large metal
bowl to put in a bucket, to be sold at the market stand. About one bucket-full came out of the
neck. Then the hide down the spine was cut off and taken away, then the tail, then the head. The
zebu’s ribs were cut open, revealing its organs. The organs were cut apart from each other and
taken away, mostly in a bucket (though by hand at first). About one bucket of blood was
collected from the inside of the zebu. Once the gut was empty, the back legs were cut off and
hung up with metal hooks through the ankles – it took three people to carry each one to the stand.
Then the torso was cut open. Meanwhile, people dealt with the organs, and Mme Hasina came
and cleaned them. One man put the intestines on a tree and cut it open, letting all the waste spill
out. When taking out other organs, children opened them to reveal grass which was emptied onto
the ground. Once the meat was hung up, the head was prepared later on the metal plank next to
the stand. Mamy skinned it and prepared the meat. He took out the tongue. The eyes are eaten,
the teeth are thrown out, he explained. That day the horns were chopped off individually, though
the previous Saturday they had been left attached to the nosebridge. Mme Hasina weighed the
organs and meat after cleaning them, preparing for the arrival of the first early customers (see
Image 5).
Though very similar physical processes, the acts of butchering and sacrifice mean very different things. At the funeral I attended (described in detail in the next chapter), the sheep was sacrificed out of sight. Though Mme Hasina’s zebu was slaughtered in the early morning in the field behind the market where no one was around, it was in public. Many male family members and community members stepped in to help. Women passed by and saw, but did not stop or watch. The people who butchered the zebu did not have to step far outside their daily routine or where they lived, nor did they have to look far to find the zebu – in Efoetse, the zebu market is adjacent to the rest of the market, where the meat is sold. In the butchering, the various organs were given no special treatment and were sold like the rest of the meat (and at a lower price), whereas in a sacrificial context, the hump and liver would have been used to demarcate the space as sacred and give to the hazomanga. Similarly, the blood of a sacrificed animal is a tool of communication with the ancestors (a symbol that renders coherent a family’s lineage), whereas blood at a butcher’s stand is sold by children at a lower price than the meat and organs. The lesser economic value of blood at the stand does not mean that its symbolic value is any less.
Women cannot slaughter animals because they are the lifeline of the lineage – slaughtering a mammal would disrupt this line, and she would not be able to bear children afterward. In this way, although they serve different functions, the role of blood in butchering and sacrifice shows the coherent view of women as life-givers.

The Abattoir: slaughtering and the meat market in Toliara

Though it expresses similar ideas about gender, slaughtering in Toliara looks materially different from butchering in Efoetse. The zebu market, the slaughterhouse, and the meat market are spread out quite far from each other in the city. The slaughterhouse (abattoir) is owned and managed by the commune of Toliara I, which also pays three employees – the chief, the president, and the guardian. The veterinarian/meat inspector, Paul Rakotosolo, took me to the abattoir twice to show me his work in the abattoir, where about 30 zebus are killed per day. He also explained how the abattoir functions. A proprietor will go to the zebu market and choose the zebu he wants to slaughter the next day. “Zebus are brought in the evening and tied up outside. The slaughtering starts at about 2 a.m. but there are people who arrive late, like the people who came at 5:30 today,” he told me. The proprietor will come at that point with his team, usually between five and ten men. “The proprietors live in the neighborhood. They pay their employees, often in meat – but they often sell the meat for money,” Paul said. This also illustrates meat’s role as a commodity exchangeable with cash. In addition, the proprietor is responsible for paying the dues to the commune for the use of the abattoir.

Inside the slaughterhouse, there is one person – a Comorian, Paul specified, who is usually Muslim – responsible for killing all of the zebus. All the zebus killed in this
slaughterhouse are theoretically halal\textsuperscript{12}, since Toliara has a relatively large Muslim population. This is not true in Efoetse or in the slaughterhouse I observed in Tana. After he kills the zebu, the proprietor and his team take over the butchering process. “Women can help, but they mostly wash,” Paul said. The zebus’ feet are cut and sold apart. Their skin is collected by two men who send them to Tana. After one visit, Paul and I visited the house where the skins were processed. They placed them in layers of salt water to preserve them, then sent them to the tannery in Tana by truck. After the zebus are butchered, men took the meat outside the slaughterhouse to zebu-pulled carts waiting to take it into the city to be sold at the market. Women collected the animals’ organs during the slaughtering process; some sold them at market themselves, while others sold to vendors. They were paid by the zebu’s proprietor, though they were not part of his “slaughtering team.”

Sometimes the proprietor sells his meat that day at the market, but he often pays someone else to run the stall. There are multiple meat markets in Toliara, the largest ones at Sakama and Bazarbe (literally, the Big Market). Slaughtering takes place in the morning since the abattoir does not have refrigeration. If the meat vendors don’t sell all their meat on any one day, they pay someone who has a refrigerator and lives nearby to keep their meat there until the next day. Meat is divided by boned and boneless meats. Near the meat stands, women often sell organs at a cheaper price.

Nina worked in the Bazarbe meat market. She ran a stand that sells a variety of organs, including tripe, fat, throat, intestine, heart, liver, kidney, foot, mouth, tongue, ear, nose, eyes, pancreas, and brain. She referred to her job as “hiasa femme” – women’s work. She said that she

\textsuperscript{12} Halal means lawful or permitted in Arabic, which applies to many facets of life but is here used to describe permitted foods according to Islam. One of these rules is that animals must be properly slaughtered: it cannot be dead before slaughtering, it must be slaughtered in the name of Allah, its pain should be limited, and the blood drained immediately before the slaughtering process continues.
hasn’t been able to find work even though she has a high school diploma; her husband used to be a butcher, which is how she got this job. I asked her why selling organs was women’s work. “It’s women’s work because women can’t cut the hard/difficult parts... the work of separating the meat is for men only. Women usually just wash. Women are too weak – it’s not taboo. It’s just taboo to kill an animal.” Her boss sells her the organs wholesale, and she keeps the profit of whatever she sells.

While women are involved with selling and (to a limited extent) the butchering process in the city, Mme Hasina was able to run the butchering business in Efoetse even though she was not a part of the slaughtering process. I do not know if Mme Hasina was an exception as a woman running such a business, but nevertheless, it was socially acceptable in Efoetse for her to do so. In sum, both the abattoir in Toliara and the market in Efoetse subscribe to and reproduce the gendered division of labor.

The spatial division between zebu market, abattoir, and meat market does not exist in Efoetse. The more urbanized Toliara’s neighborhoods are more specialized and divided. The neighborhood around the abattoir in Toliara is mostly Masikoro (an ethnicity from the area just north of Toliara). The division is so stark that when I told others that I would be visiting the abattoir, they (jokingly) encouraged me to practice my Masikoro dialect.

The abattoir, an old colonial building, is also overshadowed by the specter of modernity – on the hill above the abattoir stands a “modern” slaughterhouse. Paul showed me this slaughterhouse that was built in 2011, donated by the former President of the High Authority of the Transition, Andry Rajoelina. The empty, sterile, modern building stands alone, watched over by a guardian and his family. The butchers who live near the commune’s abattoir don’t want the modern one to open, Paul said, because they would lose their jobs – around a hundred people
pass through the abattoir every day, and the new slaughterhouse would require a maximum of around fifteen employees. This suggests that the butchers’ interests as workers run contrary to the proposed modernization and commercialization of the cattle economy.

Consumption: the meat market

In Marofijery, most people do not buy meat on a weekly basis. Fish and chicken is not always considered “meat,” and people eat that more often – it is much cheaper than goat, sheep, or zebu. Of the two occasions I ate meat in Marofijery, one was when a goat unexpectedly died, and the other was when Manasoa had to sacrifice a sheep because an omboassy had deemed the day auspicious. If people did buy meat, it was only once a week. Parallel to the distribution of meat at the funeral, the people with the highest social status (older men) usually consumed more meat. The only exception I know of was Mme Hasina’s family, due to their profession.

The infrequency with which I saw people eat meat can be understood using Bourdieu’s notion of distinction. First, food, specifically one’s taste in food, is one of the markers of distinction identified by Bourdieu (1979). The fact that zebu meat is such a rare commodity makes it a marker of distinction, of material and symbolic capital. Second, taste is not the only determining factor. Bourdieu puts forth a theory of individual choice within societal constraints: “Taste is amor fati, the choice of destiny, but a forced choice, produced by conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams and leave no choice but the taste for the necessary” (1979: 178). Whether or not people ate meat was as much defined by availability and access as it was by economic or social capital.

In Marofijery, Zanamahy told me he ate meat on a semi-regular basis (more than my other interviewees). While he did not have a lot of economic or symbolic capital as someone
without zebu, the fact that he ran a small merchant operation and could afford to eat meat occasionally was a sign of his material capital. In Toliara, buying meat is a much more common practice. While the scope of my research did not include meat consumption in Toliara, the markets there more closely resembled other cities in Madagascar, where a premium is placed on being able to put meat on the table. In Toliara as in many other places on the island, a complete meal is considered rice and meat (preferably beef but not necessarily), with a side dish if the harvest is good.

Another important aspect of meat consumption was that of hospitality. Under the generalized rule of Malagasy fihavanana, generosity and hospitality are keys to a functional community. As one proverb goes, “kilo olo valo raza” – each person is connected to eight other people. Each is expected to share their roof and their meal with passers-by, in the expectation that they will return the favor. In this way, people also have an obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate visits, following Mauss’ three obligations related to the gift. It is common to feed a guest something special, which is oftentimes meat. Whether we ate meat or not, the father was always served first, often followed by us guests.

When I returned to Toliara from Marofijery, I visited Suzette’s family with her in Belalanda, a small fokontany on the northern edge of Toliara and a stone’s throw from the Fiherenana river. Their family did not normally eat meat – they only had a few milking cows and some chickens – but on that day her family had killed a chicken to serve us. We had delicious vary sy akoho, chicken in sauce served with rice. Suzette, knowing I wouldn’t want her mother to go out of her way, had told her mother that I would happily eat what everyone else was having; but her mother insisted. The chicken was all they had to kill that day, but I do not know if they would have purchased a different meat had it been a different guest (a Malagasy person,
an older person, or a man). This is perhaps attributable to my position as a vazaha, and I am aware of the power dynamic at play here. Her actions, however, also speak to the larger nature of hospitality. Fihavanana has been criticized for contributing to parasitism and placing too heavy a burden on families, but it remains a social fact functioning in full swing.

The bitter irony here is that the people raising the livestock in rural locations don’t always eat meat. Rather, the meat is transported to markets like the one in Toliara, Ihosy, and Ambalavao. It is impossible to conjecture too far, since much of the meat in Ambalavao and Antananarivo come from places in the deep south like Anosy and Antandroy, where I was not able to do research. However, in the case of zebu, all roads do lead to Antananarivo. Considering how the meat in Antananarivo is provisioned, where it comes from and who produces it highlights inequalities in access to food and to diversified income options.

The provisioning approach thus paints a fuller picture of the forms of capital and status entailed in zebu-owning, which are invisible if one only looks at meat consumption. It reveals the numerous relationships which revolve around zebus and how they structure myriad fabrics of society, from gendered labor norms to meat-market purchases. The zebu as a total social phenomenon structures and is structured by various social roles that surround the zebu. As we have seen thus far, zebus inform labor and reproduce social norms and gendered divisions around labor; they are the center and focus of exchanges (both monetary on the market; and social exchanges outside the market); and they are a marker of distinction and social, economic, and symbolic capital. In the next chapter, I will continue to examine the zebu as a dominant symbol in rituals, specifically funerals.
Chapter Three: The Role of Zebus in Rituals

The funeral procession (famandevy) began in Ankilibory on the morning of Friday, August 1. It began early, since the procession had to make its way seven kilometers from the village of Ankilibory to the village’s cemetery at Andranovao, located inside the National Park Tsimanampetsotse. When I joined the procession with members of SuLaMa (Sustainable Land management in south-western Madagascar, a participatory research organization based in Toliara), they were entering the park from the north. People followed a charrette pulled by two zebus with the deceased, solemnly but keeping a surprisingly lively pace over the uneven terrain. The atmosphere was sober but convivial – people brought together from different villages chatted while women kept up an upbeat song. Some women and children carried snack foods, lambas, and other items that added to the social atmosphere.

Before making a left turn into the cemetery area from the road we were walking on, the charrette turned six times around a tree growing at the crossroads. This, according to the deceased’s brother as well as a SuLaMa organizer, is to confuse the dead so that they can’t find their way back to the village from the grave. The charrette proceeded uphill towards the cemetery which had been prepared over the preceding days by the men in Ankilibory. The park, Tsimanampetsotse, increases in elevation from west to east. The funeral party proceeded up the hill at a brisk pace, avoiding small rocks and low-lying bramble. The park is full of baobab trees, some of which are sacred, and other trees native to the spiny arid ecosystem.

We came upon the tomb as the charrette pulled off to the side and waited. In a clearing surrounded by bush, a pile of rocks formed the shape of a square at least two or three arm-spans in each dimension. There was a large indent in the middle where the coffin (a large wooden box)

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13 In order to respect the dead, I avoid using her name in accordance with tradition.
was about to be placed. Some of the men proceeded to break more rocks, in order to have enough to completely cover the coffin once placed inside. We waited as people gathered around the tomb, with the men and family members sitting closest and women and others sitting further back and to the side. I sat with three Malagasy SuLaMa researchers – Eric (a “socio-organisateur”), Mahery and Marc (sociologists who have worked in Ankilibory and Marofijery since 2011) – and a German woman, who had all come to lead workshops in villages including Ankilibory. The women sang, continuing the acappella tune from the procession, which sounded like other religious music I had heard in Marofijery.

Then the charrette approached the tomb and the men lowered the coffin inside. Everyone present – men, women, elders and children – was invited to close the tomb by piling up rocks on top of the coffin to fill in the space, which was about chest-high. Once the coffin was covered, men from the deceased’s family stood behind the tomb facing us and everyone else on the other side of the tomb. Among the men who stood to speak I recognized the deceased’s brothers and father, who I had met in Ankilibory previously that week. They addressed the audience and prayed to the ancestors to receive the newly deceased. While they spoke, men slaughtered a sheep behind the scenes in the bush behind the tomb and the proceeding. Others smoked the sheep’s liver and tail over a small fire. After the prayer, men placed small branches on the four corners of the tomb, on which the liver and tail meat were eventually placed. From interviews I had conducted in Marofijery, I knew that these important parts of the animal would be offered in sacrifice to the ancestors, and that their being brushed off the tomb to be left on the side would be the last act performed before the mourners left the cemetery.

I did not witness this, however, since all the women left as the Ndatibe (elders or important people; usually men) prepared to give the prayer to the ancestors and confer a new
name on the deceased for her transition into the next world. The funeral party descended down the hill from the cemetery to a flatter space with trees next to a clearing. People sat in small clusters while men from Ankilibory prepared to kill three sheep in the bushes. These three sheep, in addition to the one that had been sacrificed during the burial, would stand in for the zebu usually sacrificed at burials. Extended family members and friends from the surrounding villages had brought the sheep, one of which was a juvenile and another of which was pregnant. These three sheep were not “sacrificial” in nature, I was told, but rather killed in order to provide enough meat for all the mourners attending the burial. The number of sheep killed was a reflection of what the family and their friends and guests had been able to furnish for the event.

Men from Ankilibory began to prepare the meat from the (now four) dead sheep. Every part of the sheep was saved and divvied up amongst the families; one sheep’s blood had been drained into a small pit in the sand for use later. The meat was distributed to the groups who were there from Marofijery, Efoetse, Besamanta, and the five raza in Ankilibory. The ndatibe from the deceased’s immediate family in Ankilibory were responsible for dividing up the meat. The three oldest Ndatabe (all men) received the head, the chest and the liver – the most important and delicious parts of the animal. The men doing the butchering also offered some meat to us – a good two handfuls of meat, as big as if not bigger than the rest of the meat intended for each of the other clans. Marc accepted the gift on our behalf, but not deeming it proper to take something intended for the affected families, he expressed our appreciation and returned it back as our gift for being invited to the funeral. We did not stay after the meat was partitioned, but we later heard that the funeral party walked back to Ankilibory.

This chapter explores a key facet of the zebu as a total social phenomenon in the context of rituals. It focuses specifically on funerals, but also applies to other rituals. Building on chapter
one’s discussion of zebus’ role in exchanges, I will examine the zebu as a medium for exchange and fulfillment of social obligation amongst the living at a funeral (the guests and hosts), between the living and the ancestors. I will discuss how these exchanges reproduce social hierarchies, and last, how the zebu functions as a symbol in other rituals.

Context: the funeral in Ankilibory

The funeral I attended at the cemetery in Andranovao was both emblematic and atypical of other funerals my interlocutors in Marofijery had described. Ankilibory is a fokontany seven kilometers north of Marofijery. The two fokontany are both Tanalana and are strongly connected by relatives and trade. I had largely relied on my interviews to inform my understanding of funerals up until this point, since the one I attended was on the last day of my stay in Marofijery. During my last week in Marofijery, I found out that my friend’s cousin had passed away in Toliara. My friend’s mother, also one of my interviewees, would be attending the burial with her family from Ankilibory.

The deceased was my friend’s 25-year-old cousin who lived in Toliara, who had been ill for six months. Kembanihy, an older woman who had accompanied the body from Toliara, explained to me what had happened since her death. The illness had caused blood to collect on her side; her mother was the only one who took care of her. Her husband had left her and three young children. It took two days for the body to be brought from Toliara to Ankilibory, including a three-hour boat trip and many hours in a charrette.

During the days preceding the funeral, I spoke with members of the family in Ankilibory, including Kembanihy. The corpse had been placed under a large tamarind tree at the southern
end of the village, around which family and friends had clustered. According to chef de
*fokontany* Jean Harison,

“Four branches were placed around the coffin and cloths draped around the sticks. When
the corpse arrived, the people in Ankilibory asked why she died, and the people from
Toliara explained. The people here fed the guests. Two goats were slaughtered – one for
the guests, one for the *fokonolona* [the people of the village]. The men at the camp are
looking for rocks [to build the tomb].”

While the men constructed the tomb at the gravesite, the women stayed in the village
preparing cassava for everyone to eat when the men came back for lunch.

Mesisoa, the deceased’s uncle, explained what had happened up until that point.

“Now the men are getting rocks, the goats have been slaughtered. An animal is killed
every day until they’re done [building the tomb]. Tomorrow they will slaughter another
goat. They’re finished because they worked fast. On the day after, they’ll rank the rocks,
then bury on Friday. Every day they work, they should slaughter *haria* [an animal].”

During this time, the villagers also engage in *haritory* – staying up all night next to the coffin
under the tamarind tree. “People take turns staying up every night until [the deceased is] buried,”
Mesisoa told me. “Perhaps the older people go to sleep. The women prepare coffee during the
*haritory.*” Once the tomb is prepared, the deceased is buried in the cemetery. Mesisoa explained
that the celebration of *fandrava* happens at the burial:

“We slaughter a sheep at the cemetery and a zebu in the village (after the burial). [People
may slaughter] goats because of means, the rich may slaughter zebu.”

At the time of our interview, Mesisoa didn’t know which animal they would sacrifice as the
family was still deciding\(^{14}\). After the burial, there would be the “informing,” when a sheep or
zebu is slaughtered at the gravesite; then “the tail and liver are smoked and put around the
corners and the meat is shared.” The animal’s blood is then sprinkled around the gravesite. The
tail and liver come from the animal slaughtered for the informing or, as I witnessed at

\(^{14}\) It is unclear whether the kind of animal slaughtered impacts the deceased’s reception in the land of the ancestors.
This question would require further investigation.
Andranovao, from other animals killed to provide enough food for the guests. This can range from a few sheep or one zebu, to several zebras if the deceased or his family and friends owned a lot. Clemence, the deceased’s relative who lived in Marofijery, told me that in most funerals three to four zebras are killed, depending on the family’s means: one where the tomb is built, one at the burial for the “separation,” and another one at the house.

Jean Harison told me that because the deceased lived in Toliara and had no house in Ankilibory, there would be no destruction of the house after the burial, as is customary. “If the person doesn’t live in the village but their house still exists, but people live in it, nothing is done,” he said. “If no one else lives there, it’s still destroyed. The deceased in this case did not leave a house.” Since the deceased was young, there would be no fisa, which is a celebration one or more years after the initial burial, commonly for deceased Ndatibe.

**What happens in the funeral? How hierarchies are reproduced**

My position in this funeral was unique, both as a woman and as a foreigner with a research team. I might have gotten to see a little bit more than some of the women because I am a foreigner and was with the SuLaMa research team, but we certainly didn’t see as much as the men did. As guests, we were also offered meat. The SuLaMa researchers I was with respectfully accepted and returned the gift. I was aware of my presence as a newcomer in the village throughout the funeral preparations. I tried to minimize my presence in their time of grieving. Some of the members of her family, however, like her brothers, were excited to talk to me. They showed me around the village and took me to one of the cemeteries in Ankilibory.

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15 I use “funeral” to refer to the whole process from death to burial (including the destruction of the deceased’s house and the fisa if applicable). “Burial” refers to the procession from the village to the gravesite, the interment, and the sacrifice of an animal – essentially everything from when the party leaves the village to when they return.
I noticed that people had very different perspectives on what happens in a funeral. While most men I interviewed told me about the ritual aspects of the funeral including the sacrifice, parts of the zebu, and renaming, the experience women had in funerals was much different. Finy, a young woman in Marofijery, told me about her experience with funerals:

"Guests *manenga* [bring a zebu to the immediate family]. It depends on the family’s means. You can bring a zebu, a goat, little things to help. If you don’t find a zebu you can bring money and a goat. You have to look for/buy/make a coffin. You have to buy *lambas* [cloths] to cover the body. If you have the means, kill a zebu or a goat to eat. There’s cassava, etc. During the burial, you need a zebu or goat to eat; there are 60-100 people. Before bringing the body in the cemetery, people play mandolins and sing. Once arrived, you bury it. If it’s a *ndatibe*, before burying the body you have a party and people speak. [...] For young people you just bury them. [I asked how old she thought one had to be to be considered a *ndatibe.*] Eighty years old is a *ndatibe*. The role of the women is to take care of the guests. Find wood, cook, fetch water. They don’t participate but bring water. If it’s a *ndatibe*, they sing. Then they go home and clean up. Destroying the house – they throw away their things, and the men destroy it, and the women rejoin them. When it’s destroyed there’s someone who kills a zebu, women can watch from afar. During the burial you also kill a zebu and share it with people. [I asked her if she knew how they kill the zebu during the burial; she said she didn’t know]. The women prepare the meat of the killed zebus, the men say which part goes to who."

Like many other rituals, the roles in funerals are quite gendered. Men are generally in charge of the ceremony. They collect rocks at the gravesite while women stay with the coffin and prepare food. While both of these tasks are essential for preparing for the burial, the men’s work is directly related to the creation of a new resting place for the body. During the service, the men lead the prayer while women watch – men are thus in the position of asking the ancestors to receive the newly deceased. Men also sacrifice the zebu or sheep and place the meat on the tomb, driving the ritual itself. During the close of the ritual, women have to leave while men *close out the transitory space* and give the ancestor a new name. Women are not a part of this closure of the liminal period. This is also true with several (but not all) other rituals, and illustrates why many women told me they did not know what happened in certain rituals (like funerals or circumcisions), even though they attended. In the words of Nirina, a woman from Marofijery: “I
can go to the tomb with the men but stand behind, I can’t watch. It’s men’s work, not a woman’s affair."

After the burial ritual, more animals are slaughtered. I was told that these animals are killed to share the meat with all the funeral attendees, not “sacrificed” for ritual purposes, such as drawing the ancestors’ attention to the ritual, to ask for their blessing, or to make an offering. When the animal is butchered to feed the guests, its various parts are divided according to a hierarchy, with the oldest ndatibe receiving the head, chest and liver. In other rituals, older ndatibe or the mpitankazomanga receive the liver and hump (or tail). Several interviewees told me that these are considered the most important, even sacred, parts of the animal. The men who did the butchering get small pieces, like the hooves, which they roasted and ate while completing the butchering. The rest of the meat was divided into fairly equal piles to share among the groups convened at the burial. Almost all of my interviewees mentioned feeding the guests with this meat. Rajean, a man in Marofijery who owned about twenty goats, described to me the partitioning of meat to roandria (ndatibe) in the circumcision ritual. After the hump, liver and filet are cooked, everyone eats them, but you “give it to the roandria first…. You give the tail, hooves, head, and tripe to the roandria, and the rest is shared with the rest of the clan… It’s faly [taboo] not to give the roandria their parts.” Though he was describing a different ritual, the importance of giving the best parts to the most respected members of the community (the older men with high social standing) still stands.

Thus, even though they are not “ritualistically sacrificed,” as my interviewees told me, the slaughtering and apportioning of meat after the interment reflect deeply embedded cultural norms. These norms also reveal themselves in other ritual and non-ritual contexts. In interviews, people spoke of the centrality of the zebu, the gendered division of labor related to zebras, and the
age-based social hierarchy. Here, these social norms of gender and age were recreated and reinscribed through the ritual itself. I would also like to underscore that while people talked about the zebu’s omnipresence, their discourse did not reflect the variation from that norm in practice. Thus, while the zebu holds great weight in discourse, situations unfurl in reality with far more flexibility.

The importance of zebus as gifts: social exchange, social capital

As I have just described, certain rituals and their use of the zebu reinforce certain social hierarchies. First, I will discuss how the use of the zebu as a gift (amongst the living and between the living and the dead) constructs and reinforces social roles. Then, I will explore how the zebu as a dominant ritual symbol helps facilitate the deceased’s transition through the liminal period from death to the land of the ancestors.

Exchanges amongst the living

I asked the father of my friend Michel one day why he thought zebus were important. Their family didn’t have any zebus, and at the time, Michel was trying to raise enough money to buy a zebu in order to officially marry his wife Suzette. Fanarisoa, Michel’s father, explained to me: “Zebus are important because they’re the bank. If you don’t have a bank you don’t have friends. Zebus are a social exchange. You don’t kill them for food.” I have discussed the complexity of the “zebu-as-bank” metaphor in chapter one. Nevertheless, this notion highlights the important social value of zebus as a medium of exchange. Fanarisoa explicitly recognized the value of zebu as a gift. He also recognized that giving a zebu affects not only one’s social

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16 As I will explain in a later section, marriages are only considered complete when the groom has given the bride’s family at least one zebu. The couple can live together, but the groom is still expected to furnish the zebu after a certain period of time, usually one to two years.
relationships, but one’s own social status. The “bank” is thus only the zebu’s proximate importance, that which enables its value in exchange.

Mauss’s concept of the gift operates on the basis that one has the obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate. Guests are expected to bring enga, or some sort of gift for the immediate family of the deceased. This is traditionally a zebu. However, it can be a sheep if the family can’t afford a zebu. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one interviewee was selling a zebu to get money to bring as enga for a fisa, since unlike a zebu, money could be more easily shared. At the funeral I attended, guests brought sheep for the family to slaughter; but as Finy pointed out, you can bring “little things to help” – gifts to help the family with the cost of the funeral. In return, the family shared the meat amongst all the guests. Some people cynically view this as a zebu (or sheep)-for-food exchange, but it is more complicated.

The exchange at funerals embeds the gift with meaning. As Malinowski remarks, the exchange is neither utilitarian nor wasteful (1984: 86-88). The gift creates an obligation for the receiver to bring an enga to the next funeral, and cements the social relationship between the two families. The enga also allows the family to make an offering to the ancestor, a type of exchange which I describe below. In short, the exchange sets into motion a series of complex social actions. One such effect is that of the giver and receiver’s social statuses.

The gift impacts both parties’ honor. The funeral is also a commemoration of the deceased’s status, especially if they are a wealthy ndatibe. Daniel, an older man in Marofijery, told me that funerals are to “respect the wealth of the deceased.” This is showcased by the zebu horns placed atop the tombs of particularly important or wealthy people: “The horns show power,” François told me, a middle-aged man in Marofijery, a sentiment echoed by several of my interviewees. This is especially true if the deceased owned many zebras, in which case several
(or all) of them are slaughtered and their horns are placed on top of their grave as an illustration of their wealth during life, which they take with them into death (see Image 1). If the deceased was wealthy, attendees expect that he had a lot to give. “People who attend the funeral expect to eat well, especially if the person was rich,” Daniel said. “The living institute their dead through the ritual of mourning,” writes Bourdieu (1986: 51), and their social capital cemented. The giving of a zebu can be seen as the bestowing of honor: the giver demonstrates their status, that they have enough means to give a zebu at a funeral; and the receiver is seen as worthy of receiving such a gift. As Malinowski argues, while you could give a lesser gift, your honor would be snubbed. Thus to possess is great, but to give is even greater (1984: 97). Providing guests with a huge feast at one’s funeral commemorates their status during life.

According to Mauss, this kind of honor creates a hierarchy, as it has the power to “transform into persons having an obligation those that have placed you yourself under a similar obligation” (2000: 37). He also envisions a potlatch as “a competition to see who is the richest and also the most madly extravagant. Everything is based upon the principles of antagonism and rivalry...everything is conceived of as if it were a ‘struggle of wealth’” (2000: 37). While I am
not sure that the funeral itself constitutes a “struggle of wealth” amongst the funeral attendees, there is certainly a competitive power display in the placing of horns on the tomb.

It is important to remember that the gift be in the context of a spectacle: “gifts are given in a context of public drama” (Douglas 1950: xiv; see Chapter One). A funeral is one such highly visible gift-giving setting, though it is not the only one. The funeral only comprises a part of the system:

The potlatch is an example of a total system of giving... Spelt out it means that each gift is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged. It is a total system in that every item of status or of spiritual or material possession is implicated for everyone in the whole community (Douglas 1950: viii).

This is to say that the relationships affected during a funeral extend outside. For example, if someone receives a zebu as enga, they might return the gift at the next funeral; in the meantime the first giver’s status might be secured, as they would have demonstrated their social capital in a highly visible way. There is significant social pressure to bring enga to the mourning family, whether a zebu or “little things to help.” While a zebu is the traditional gift, some advocate for bringing money or smaller gifts, since they are easier to share. In return, the family puts on a huge feast, to celebrate the life of the individual and also to satisfy the guests who have likely helped a great deal to have the funeral come together. In this way, the funeral is not only a site of exchange that fulfill social obligations, but the exchange is intrinsic to the ritual itself.

Exchanges between the living and the dead

At funerals and other ceremonies, gifts are not only made in a public spectacle but in plain view of the ancestors. The ritual of sprinkling blood around the tomb in funerals serves to call the ancestors’ attention and ask for their blessing. According to Mauss, the ancestors and gods were the original beings with whom humans exchanged and made contracts with.
With them it was most necessary to exchange, and with them it was most dangerous not to exchange. The purpose of destruction by sacrifice is precisely that it is an act of giving that is necessarily reciprocated (1990[1950]: 16).

Thus sacrifice is more than a power display or competition amongst the living. It is also an exchange with the ancestors. Robert Hertz calls this an exchange of services: “there are regular relations and an exchange of services between the community of the living and that of the dead” (1960: 61). In return for this sacrifice, the ancestors are expected to bestow their blessing or benediction upon the giver, as Mauss states: “sacrifice is a gift that compels the deity to make a return: Do ut des; I give so that you may give” (Douglas 2000: ix).

The zebu is the central link between the living and the dead in most rituals. The relationship between the living and ancestors is also forged through faly, or taboo (Astuti 2007; von Heland and Folke 2013). According to von Heland and Folke, the zebu exchange is not limited to either the market or the transfer between the worlds of the living and the dead; rather, the zebu connects the living, ancestors and environment together in a “social-ancestral contract,” wherein “agricultural surplus is converted to zebu cattle at the market place. The cattle in turn is the ritual capital necessary in ritual management of the ancestral sacred groves” (2013: 257). Zebus are bought with money gained from the sale of foodstuffs; they are then exchanged and given for ritual purposes – that is, for the purpose of communicating with and giving offering to the dead. Their exchange thus links the lands of the living and the dead.

I have thus far explored how social obligations arise and are maintained by exchanges amongst the living and dead, with funerals as the site of exchange. I will now turn to how these exchanges themselves serve to facilitate the deceased’s passage through the liminal period between life and ancestor-hood, for it is the very fact of the zebu exchanged between living and dead that constitutes the closure of the liminal period between death and burial.
The importance of zebus in defining a liminal period in rituals

Robert Hertz has defined the time between death and the final burial ceremony as a transitory period. At that moment, the deceased’s soul is neither a living member of society nor an ancestor (who are also social participants). Their body is neither amongst the living community nor the land of the ancestors. The deceased thus lies outside the bounds of society. Hertz points out that the deceased is temporarily buried in an isolated location (1960: 30), and thereby excluded from society (1960: 81) until they are reintegrated as a different social being.

First, the body is excluded physically from the normal bounds of society. When I was in Ankilibory before the funeral, the corpse was in its coffin under a tamarind tree, surrounded by *lambas*. That day was market day, and while some people crowded around the stalls on the other side of the village, the tamarind tree was surrounded by members of the close family, with children sometimes running back and forth between the parts of the village. This could lend credence to Hertz’s assertion that the time before burial, for the living as well as for the dead, is a time of social exclusion.

The period which follows death… also imposes on the survivors the duty of keeping the deceased company during this dreaded period, to keep watch by his side and to beat gongs frequently in order to keep malignant spirits at bay. Thus the corpse, afflicted by a special infirmity, is an object of solicitude for the survivors at the same time as an object of fear (Hertz 1960: 33-34).

Hertz claims that the close family members are considered “impure,” too close to the corpse, until the final burial – at which point they are “liberated.” This is not something that I noticed either in my observations or my interviews. The only taboo I noticed was the prohibition against women remaining at the burial site for the final prayer – which is coherent with the taboo against women slaughtering animals and being near death in general, as I will discuss at the end of this
chapter. It is true that during this period, a series of exchanges are made to fulfill obligations between the living and the deceased; Hertz argues people have a “moral obligation” to care for the deceased (29-30). While this period does impose certain obligations on the family members of the deceased, this can be analyzed within the framework of exchange rather than confinement and liberation. The deceased will soon become an ancestor, at which point they will bestow benedictions or maledictions upon their living relatives. People make offerings and sacrifices to ancestors in the hopes that they will bless them in return. It is in this light that we can consider the care given the corpse before its burial.

While in the funeral that I observed the temporary burial lasted for only three days, culminating with the burial at the cemetery in Andranovao, it can last as long as three years in some cases. Hertz argues that this is because the corpse is treated as a new body to accompany the new soul and new role of being an ancestor (43). The corpse must disintegrate into something other than the body of a living human to transition into the world of the dead. No one who I interviewed mentioned to me the necessity of waiting for these corporeal changes; on the contrary, people wanted to give the corpse its final burial as soon as possible. This could be because of what Hertz calls the “pity and fear” and the danger of impurity brought by the existence of a corpse not yet laid to rest. According to most of my interviewees, the timing of the final ceremony depends largely on the family’s means – and the large final ceremony after the burial is usually reserved for ndatibe. Luc Vifasoa, the man selling his zebu at the beginning of the previous chapter, told me that it can take up to three years before the fisa, the final celebration.

“You do the fisa when the tomb is finished. They’re buried temporarily when they die. The rohombola day is two to three days in advance. You come to the party and on that day, you present the gifts. It takes two to three years because you need to raise the money. Then you start to work on the grave. It’s not stop-and-start, you raise the money
first, and when you have enough, then you start to enhance the tomb. When you bury the corpse, you take one day to make the temporary tomb. For the rich people you take eight months to enhance it, to get other rocks. For people with not enough means, you need more time: one to two years to get enough rocks... For the rich, during the eight months, the animal is killed when people work on the grave. You kill a goat every day as food, some kill zebu.”

While the soul may be in a “dangerous” state during this period, the ability to appropriately honor the deceased is the rationale behind the *fisa*. The deceased in Ankilibory would not be given a *fisa* after a year, as the celebration is usually reserved for *ndatibe* or older men.

As the living are in a state of mourning, the soul of the deceased “lives, as it were, marginally in the two worlds: if it ventures into the afterworld, it is treated there like an intruder; here on earth it is an importunate guest whose proximity is dreaded” (Hertz 1960: 36). Rita Astuti describes the distinction between two ideas of the soul: “…when a person dies, his ‘spirit’ – known as *fanahy* up to the moment of death – permanently departs from the body. In such a disembodied, ghostly form, the spirit of the dead person – now known as *angatse* – can travel where his body could not…” (2007: 229). This was apparent in my research as well. As Luc Vifaso told me:

“If the ancestors ask for something in a dream, you have to give it. If they came but didn’t ask for anything, you have to kill something somewhere – east, in the forest – a sheep or a goat. If they came, it’s because they want something, so you kill something so that they won’t come back. If you don’t do it you’ll fall ill and have to consult an *ombiasy*.”

This had already happened to him, he said. He killed an animal and nothing bad happened. “You have to borrow, especially if you don’t have a zebu,” he said, emphasizing the importance of fulfilling this obligation to the ancestors. As evidenced by dreams as well as funerary rituals, the soul in addition to the body is betwixt and between the states of living and ancestor-hood.

After the period of mourning and state of exclusion, the ritual of the funeral closes out the liminal period, after which the members of the community are re-included, either as living or
ancestors. According to Hertz, the final ceremony has three objectives: 1) bury the remains (which have been excluded spatially); 2) ensure the soul has access to land of the ancestors (which has been betwixt and between the two realms); and 3) liberate the living from the obligations of mourning (who have been “excluded” from the rest of the village). The progression of the burial allows for all three things via the use of the zebu.

The burial begins by moving the deceased’s body in space from the temporary burial site (under the tamarind tree at the south of the village) to its permanent resting place in the cemetery. En route, the corpse must turn six times around a tree, in order to confuse the spirit and ensure that it does not return to trouble the village. The body’s tomb is individual, but everyone in attendance must help to cover the coffin with rocks. Most importantly, the body has been returned to its tanindrazana (ancestral homeland) to be buried in her village’s cemetery, a topic I will discuss further shortly.

The animal sacrifice signifies to everyone (living and ancestors) that the space has become sacred. When the animal is killed, its liver and hump (or tail, in the case of a sheep) are lightly grilled and placed on the four corners of the tomb. The animal’s blood is then sprinkled around the gravesite. Hertz speaks of the significance of animal blood in funerals in a different way:

But the most common belief among the Malagasy is that the liquids resulting from the decomposition of the flesh give birth to some more or less mythical animal which is none other than the new incarnation of the soul; that is why these liquids are carefully collected in earthenware jugs; sometimes they are sprinkled with ox-blood to make more certain the rebirth of the deceased (1960: 47-48).

While the “liquids in earthenware jugs” may not at all be applicable to the Tanalana, the idea that the zebu’s blood is connected to the rebirth of the deceased is still relevant.
In every ritual that my interviewees mentioned that included animal sacrifice, the blood plays an important role. This is notably in direct contrast to the banal role of blood at the market stand. In day-to-day life blood has no important qualities, but in rituals it is essential. It calls for the ancestors to bear witness to the events and sometimes to give their blessing. In marriages, the creation of a new hazomanga, and other rituals, the participants put a bit of zebu blood on their forehead; according to Lamy, “you spread blood on the tree and the forehead of everyone present – that way the ancestors will bless them – for protection and benediction.” As another interviewee said in such a context, “the blood is sacred, for asking to god.” In the context of the circumcision ceremony, Zanamahy said, “the blood is for zanahary [god] and the ancestors. Since you can’t give your own blood, it’s an exchange with that of the zebu. Blood is sacred.” This echoes Evans-Pritchard’s argument that men’s “identification” with their oxen finds expression in sacrifice, when sacrificing an ox essentially took the place of sacrificing a human (see Chapter One). For Daniel, the blood wasn’t as significant in the ritual as the hump and liver of the zebu; rather, “the blood is to address the ancestors.” Thus, the zebu’s blood sets the stage for the transition from living to ancestor. The zebu and its blood separate the deceased from the living, and connect it to the land of the dead.

*Separation: “no longer with us”*

In funerals, the hump, liver and blood constitute the separation between living and dead. Hertz (1960) suggests the need for a barrier between these two groups, a sentiment echoed in my interviews. Lamy explained the role of the zebu in achieving the separation between the living and the dead:

“Separation is cutting off communication – “you’re no longer with us, you’re going with the razana/zanahary, here are the zebus you’re bringing with you.” [...] You do the
separation with the hump and liver. Put them in the four corners of the tomb. “Here is what he will bring, you who come from there. You have a new person among you, here is what he’s bringing.” The ancestors will ask what you’ve brought. Pick up the meat after and either throw it or eat it. You have to grill the liver a bit before [putting it on the tomb]. The ancestors decided that those were the important parts.”

Lamy, like many people I talked to, placed a large emphasis on asking the ancestors to welcome the deceased into their realm. This lies in parallel with the connection that I will address in the next section. Here, I would like to highlight a point that several interviewees brought up – the “separation” between the living and the deceased. In “cutting off communication,” Lamy recognizes that he will no longer be able to communicate with the deceased as such (though as I’ve previously mentioned, the souls of the deceased can visit those of the dead; see Astuti 2007).

The zebu is critically essential to achieving this separation, which would be impossible without the hump and liver placed on the tomb.

The separation achieved through the zebu’s parts is furthered by the name change at the graveside. Once the animal has been sacrificed, its hump and liver placed on the tomb and the blood sprinkled, a prayer to the ancestors is said. In this prayer, the deceased’s new name is established. “[The deceased is] given a different name because now he’s a venerated ancestor,” said Zanamahy, one interviewee in Marofijery.

Another commonality amongst my interviewees was the unknown reason why the hump and liver specifically are used for the separation. Some people explained that those are the most delicious parts, which is why the ndatibe (and potentially the ancestors) get to eat them.

Referring to the same body parts used in a different ritual, Zanamahy said, “The hump and liver is for the ancestors, the body is to eat. The hump because it’s the highest part, and the liver because it’s good.” However, this does not explain why those parts are capable of severing ties between the living and the deceased. The use of these parts has become an engrained practice in
many rituals; no one may truly remember the reasons why this tradition was started. Clemence said that “The hump and liver are for them,” meaning for the dead. When I asked why, she said that the tradition had been like that “since always.” This view might also reflect the exclusion of women from the reasoning behind rituals, and the hierarchy of who gets to eat what meat – these hierarchies are reproduced through this ritual.

The views of Clemence and others on the details and rational behind certain aspects of the ritual also shines a light on the kind of information that I was exposed to. Much of what people told me in interviews about funerals was related to people, usually men, with families who have enough means to buy a zebu to sacrifice, build a permanent tomb, destroy the house, and have a fisa. This was the normative narrative provided to me; it was only when I learned I needed to ask further questions that people talked about “exceptions” – for example, if the person wasn’t “important,” there was no fisa. This is another way in which the discourse around funerals reproduces social norms and the existing structure.

The zebu and its constituent parts serve to separate the deceased from the living, but also to connect them with the land of the ancestors. As Lamy’s quote suggests, the separation of deceased from living is not the entire story – it necessarily entails the acceptance of the deceased’s soul by the ancestors. The animal’s sacrifice thus serves a dual purpose. In creating a link to facilitate the transition between this world and the next, the zebu separated the deceased from the living. Rather than juxtaposed to or in a dichotomous contrast with this separation, the zebu also serves to connect the deceased to the realm of the ancestors, specifically with the use of its blood.
Connection: leave with voandalana

The role of the zebu as the dominant ritual symbol in funerals is representative of the deceased’s parting – they have no more zebras amongst the living to return for. By the same token, the deceased takes their zebu with them, and the sacrificed zebu has called the ancestor’s attention to the matter. People talked about this aspect of the zebu’s role as connecting the deceased to the ancestors. The animal parts in particular cemented this connection – Daniel explained why the hump and liver accomplished this, while the blood served as an optional signifier to the ancestors:

“There’s not a lot of significance in the blood; it’s the hump and liver that count. These are to alert those who are already dead, tell them that the dead person is bringing a zebu and he doesn’t have family here anymore – you [the ancestors] will be his family now. He’s no longer in the world of the living; he’s in the world of the dead, and he needs to have zebras there too. If not a zebu then a sheep... The blood is to address the ancestors, but it depends on people’s beliefs. Some aren’t obligated to do it.”

Daniel’s observation that “it’s the hump and liver that count” – that is, the separation – further demonstrates that separation from living and connection to ancestors are two sides of the same coin.

Luc Vifasoa echoed this idea, saying that zebras are sacrificed at funerals “before leaving, for voandalana.” Voandalana literally means “fruit of the road” and refers to the gift one is supposed to bring to whomever one is visiting or returning to whenever one makes a trip. While Luc Vifasoa may have used this metaphor in a slightly joking way, it is an interesting insight – it encapsulates the idea that the deceased takes the zebu with them when they transition to the land of the ancestors. Both human and animal make it to the next world.

The voandalana is also tied to the social obligation of gift-giving. In life, travelers are obligated to bring a gift from where they are to their destination. To not bring something to your host’s house (or back home) would be frowned upon. This small example echoes the larger two-
fold exchange that occurs at funerals: first, the living give a zebu to the ancestors in the hopes that they will accept the deceased and grant the prayers of the living later on; and second, that the guests give their hosts the live *enga* in fulfilling their social obligations to give. The hosts in turn receive the *enga*, give their guests a feast, and are obligated to bring an *enga* the next time. The zebu-as-voandalana can also be seen as what Hertz calls one of the many “obligations” that the living must fulfill for the deceased.

The *voandalana* analogy is also interesting in light of Hertz’s argument that one of the objectives of the final ceremony is to join the deceased with the community of ancestors. He says that there is a connection between the joining of the *body* with the bodies of the already-dead, and of the *soul* with the land of the ancestors. Hertz even cites a Malagasy example: “‘In life one house, in death one grave,’ says a Malagasy proverb, expressing a widespread and deep feeling” (1960: 70). Hertz takes this example from the east part of the island to refer to the entire country. In places with familial tombs, this might be true; but in the southwest this does not hold water. Among the Tanalana (the Mahafale, the Tandroy, and many other clans), the soul does join the ancestors but the body is buried alone. However, the deceased is buried with the horns of their zebu atop their grave – so the bodies of the zebu and the body of the deceased are together in the grave, and both make it to the land of the ancestors. Further, although graves are individual, it is still crucial to be buried in one’s *tanindrazana* (ancestral homeland), which is why the young woman from the beginning of the chapter was moved at great cost from Toliara to Ankilibory. Burial in one’s *tanindrazana* is crucial perhaps for the same reason that Hertz describes collective burials in other cultures: it is a figurative “collective grave” that unties the bodies of all clan members, even though they do not share the same tomb.

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17 It remains unclear to me how people conceive of this. On the one hand, it is clear that the zebu makes it to the land of the ancestors with the deceased; on the other, people do not necessarily believe that animals have “souls” or “spirits.”
The liminal period of the funeral is resolved through both separation and connection. At the end of the liminal period, the deceased becomes an ancestor, integrated into that community; the living come out of that period as a community anew. “In establishing a society of the dead, the society of the living regularly recreates itself” (Hertz 1960: 71-72). As Hertz argues, while the deceased are in this transitional period, they are excluded from society. “Exclusion is always followed by a new integration” (Hertz 1960: 79). The funeral ritual is the transition from deceased to ancestor. As ancestors are social actors (albeit of a different sort), this represents the person’s reintegration into society.

**Zebus and livestock as dominant symbols in other rituals**

We have seen how the zebu as a symbol forges a connection amongst certain community members (both living and dead) during the funeral. The zebu acts as the connecting link in other rituals as well, rituals which mark the major milestones in a person’s coming into the community. As Turner (1973) argues, in order to fully understand the role of a symbol in a culture, one must look at all of the symbol’s expressions in the whole ritual cycle: “The wheel is the symbol’s total meaning, and the complete range is only exposed when the whole cycle of rituals has been performed” (1973: 1101). Zebus play a pivotal role in ceremonies including marriages, the recognition of a child, and circumcision rituals.

First, a zebu is a necessary component in consummating a marriage. Like in Michel’s case, a marriage is void until the husband gives his parents-in-law at least one zebu, which cements the couple and the family. The zebu is necessary for this gift and receipt which engender the continuation of the lineage. However, the zebu is not sacrificed at marriages. As Lamy put it, after bringing gifts to the father-in-law, “You have to kill something – a sheep, goat, rooster, and
eat it together to forge the link between families. Everyone puts blood on their forehead to create the link; it’s really the spouses who have to put it.” In marriage, the zebu and an animal sacrifice permit the continuation of the family lineage. This illustrates that while the zebu is central to this ritual, other livestock (sheep and goats) are also crucial. Unfortunately, more research is necessary to fully understand why zebus are not sacrificed in marriage ceremonies as they are in other rituals.

Second, a marriage is only considered complete when a father officially recognizes his first child. In this ritual, called soron’anake, as in marriage a zebu is crucial but not for sacrifice; a sheep might be killed instead. The sacrificed animal’s blood is placed on the foreheads of everyone involved, but particularly the parents and their child. The blood calls the ancestors’ attention to the newly-created family unit, which has been approved in the eyes of the ancestors, and the father has officially recognized his child. Luc Vifasoa explained the ritual:

“The wife gives birth at her parents’ house. You kill a sheep for the ritual, and a zebu to eat. [He said that it was necessary that it be a zebu.] The woman and child can then come back to the man’s house. You have to kill the sheep in front of the hazomanga while the husband listens. The hazomanga says, you have brought a sheep, given thanks, the child will be lucky and avoid curses…. It’s a sheep because it’s tradition…. And then sprinkle the blood. The hazomanga’s little brother will then burn the sheep’s tail in front of a tree to give the ancestors their part. You do this for the first child only. Then you eat the rest of the sheep.”

The soron’anake is doubly important because technically, a boy can’t be circumcised until this is done, which means that he can’t fully participate in other rituals late in life. Men who have not been circumcised must technically stand at the back of ceremonies with women and children.

Circumcision rituals themselves center zebus. Every few years in August, all Tevondrone clans attend the ceremony at the hazomanga-be (the large hazomanga) to celebrate and initiate all the boys who have reached the age of maturity in the past year. Each clan brings a zebu, which they line up with the boys from each clan. The second-mpitazomanga slits each zebu’s
throat, followed by the third- mpitakazomanga, who finishes the process. The zebu’s liver and hump are removed and boiled in a pot of water. It is said that the last person’s pot to boil has committed a fault, and must purify by sacrificing another zebu. As Zanamahy explained:

“The circumcised boys bring zebus and ask for benediction. The hump and the liver is for the ancestors, the body is to eat. The hump because it’s the highest part, and the liver because it’s good. The blood… is for zanahary/razana (god and the ancestors). Since you can’t give your own blood, it’s an exchange with that of the zebu. Blood is sacred.”

The role of the zebu and its blood in these other rituals parallels the importance of the bloodline. Outside the context of rituals, the taboos involving women and slaughtering animals are indicative of the zebu’s symbolism in reproduction. In marriage and soron’ananke ceremonies, zebus are needed to continue the family line. According to Mansaré Marikandia and one Malagasy proverb, “ampela manday raza – women permit the continuation of the lineage.” This is also reflected in Bloch’s argument (1968) that one’s homeland, tanindrazana, is vital because that connection with the ancestors of the past permits the family line’s continuation in that same place. Women specifically are considered to be life-bearers, and their spilling an animal’s blood puts that role in jeopardy. It is thus inappropriate, even dangerous, for a woman to take the life of another being. This is especially salient considering that zebus, according to Zanamahy, replace the blood of humans in rituals. A woman spilling the blood of an animal could be interpreted as spilling the blood of a future human. Women and zebus are thus both intrinsic to the family and the bloodline. The lineage’s predication on women’s traditional role and on zebu has interesting implications for the changing domestic and bovine landscape on the littoral.

Though it has been a useful framework thus far, we have also seen the limits of analyzing the zebu as a total social phenomenon. Namely, discrepancies appear between discourse and reality. While some people speak of the importance and irreplaceability of zebu, sheep and goats can also be sacrificed in ritual, exchanged as gifts, and “invested” in. The fact that sheep and goats
are sacrificed in marriage and soron'anake rituals destabilizes the zebu as an omnipresent total social phenomenon in practice, though it does not negate the zebu’s importance. Additionally, the way in which the sheep was sacrificed in the funeral in Anikilibory was not haphazard or arbitrary; rather, as many interviewees explained, there is in fact a specific way to use the parts of the sheep to replace the zebu in sacrifice, using the sheep’s tail instead of the zebu’s hump. In reality, sacrificing other livestock is perhaps not as “abnormal” as it would seem in the dominant discourse. This begs the question that I will address in the conclusion: are zebus replaceable?
Conclusion: Are zebus replaceable?

This thesis has attempted to argue that the zebu is a total social phenomenon; that the social relationships surrounding zebus reflect and reproduce social hierarchies; and that the discourse around zebus’ centrality must be complicated using interviews and participant observations. The notion of the total social phenomenon has been useful in that studying something allows us to study the relationships between people that revolve around that thing. This concept has powerful symbolic value in describing the zebu as a key institution that is economically, socially, and religiously important, but it does not account for variation in practice. Said variation is visible in people’s valuation of other forms of livestock and of cash, the sacrificial role of sheep and goats in certain rituals, and the replacement of zebu in some rituals with other livestock. Questioning the zebu’s role in this way can help us rethink the notion of the total social phenomenon.

I now provide accounts of interviewees concerning whether or not zebus are replaceable in certain circumstances in order to complicate the dominant narrative of the zebu’s significance. I will then turn to what analyses we can draw from these observations, and finally to the potential implications of these analyses.

Perspectives on substituting for zebus

People in Ankilibory had varying opinions on whether zebus could be replaced by other animals in funerary rituals. According to Mesisoa, the animal to be sacrificed depended simply on the family’s means. In Ankilibory I did not ask which animal one “should” sacrifice or what it
would be “acceptable” to sacrifice, since I didn’t want to put the family into an awkward position if a zebu wasn’t available. Jean Harison had a different perspective from Mesisoa’s:

“The goat and zebu are killed at the grave, never sheep (tsy mety). Then at the village they kill two to three zebus.”

He added that this would ordinarily take place at the point when the deceased’s house was destroyed, if they still had a house in the village. Jean Harison, as the chef de fokontany and an older man, fit the general trend that I saw: people with a higher social status were more likely to tell me that sacrificing a zebu at a funeral was absolutely necessary. Mesisoa was in a different position: as part of the deceased’s family, he knew they might not have the means to sacrifice a zebu, especially if no one brought one as a funeral gift (enga). His niece was also a 25-year-old woman. I suspect that sacrificing a zebu would have been more requisite had the deceased been an older man.

These conflicting views on whether it was acceptable to allow other animals to stand in for a zebu’s sacrifice were echoed in my interviews in Marofijery. Kismany was an older man in Marofijery who didn’t own any animals. He told me that he once had 30 zebus and 60 goats and sheep, but lost them to sicknesses, school fees and famine. He was present at the Andranovao funeral, and also said that having a zebu in the ritual was necessary:

You have to buy a zebu if you don’t have one. You can’t exchange [i.e. a sheep for a zebu]. It presents a problem, but you have to do it. You borrow money.

Even though he doesn’t have zebu at present, he previously owned a large amount and his extended family still owns quite a few zebus. Contextualizing his statements suggests that as an older man who once owned zebus, he values them and finds that they cannot be substituted.
However, according to Jacques Soana, zebus in funerals are replaceable. Jacques is a middle-aged man in Marofijery who now has seven sheep but used to raise different kinds of livestock; he had to sell them to buy food for his family during a famine (a fairly common practice).

If there’s no zebu, you can use sheep. No goats… [You] need to sacrifice something to create a separation. The sheep’s tail replaces the zebu’s hump. [The tail and liver are placed on the tomb’s] four corners; you take it off before leaving. For the hazomanga you really need a zebu, but for the funeral only you can replace it with a sheep.

Finy also said that zebus could be replaced by money or other animals, according to the family’s means. Daniel specified, “If not a zebu then a sheep – use the liver and the rump.”

As previously mentioned, people of a higher social status are more likely to say that they are essential in funerals. This usually entails people who own zebus, men, and older people who would have the means to procure a zebu if the occasion arose. Interestingly, Rajean alluded to the social (as opposed to sacred) nature of zebu exchanges that take place at funerals:

It [gift-giving at the funeral] is something we’ve invented, there’s not a ritual, i.e. at the butcher’s, it’s not a custom of the ancestors. You need a zebu when someone’s died, when you’re looking for the coffin, one for everyone, one for the enga. Depends on peoples’ means – you don’t need a zebu. For the other rituals you need a zebu, or else you have to buy it. If you don’t have a zebu you have to wait for the money. You bury the person, and then you give the dead person another name and then leave for home, then you kill a zebu to eat.

Rajean suggests here that the dual nature of the zebu’s role in funerals – gift-giving and sacrifice – is socially constructed, thus highlighting the ambiguity in the necessity of sacrificing a zebu.

Can zebus be replaced?

The spectrum of attitudes towards the replacement of zebus in rituals could be an indicator that the apparent necessity of sacrificing a zebu is perhaps not as rigid as it seems. People seem to recognize that a diminishing number of zebus could mean that they will not always be able to be used in funerals and other rituals. “Since societies are processes responsive to change, not
fixed structures, new rituals are devised or borrowed, and old ones decline and disappear. Nevertheless, forms survive through flux, and new ritual items, even new ritual configurations, tend more often to be variants of old themes than radical novelties,” which relies on the creation of a ritual system (Turner 1973: 1100). In this context, we can read the “form” as the funeral ritual, and the “ritual item” as the zebu. This reading of Turner would lead us to believe that despite diminishing numbers of zebu in the littoral, the rituals could continue to exist more or less as they are now. This is corroborated by the interviewees who said that zebus could be replaced in rituals by other animals. On the other hand, a “ritual system” according to Turner’s definition would imply that the zebu is at the heart of every ritual, and every social and economic interaction. It remains to be seen whether a “ritual item” can change without becoming a “radical novelty,” when the socio-economic structure rests so heavily on zebu ownership, gifting, selling and sacrificing.

My original research question concerned the social importance of zebus. I was interested in how and why zebus seemed so central to understanding people’s ways of life in southwestern Madagascar. Asking the question “how are zebus important?” can beget an answer that confirms their significance. I found that zebus are certainly important socially, economically and religiously, as are a lot of other things: other livestock, salaried employment, and agriculture are some examples. Socially, zebus can be substituted in important social institutions such as gift-giving, as seen in Luc Vifaso’s bringing cash as an enga to a funeral. In rituals, zebus are arguably sometimes replaceable by sheep or goats. Their economic importance is shifting, as people trade and invest in smaller livestock, and find other livelihoods and salaried employment. People, especially women, already diversify their income options by buying and selling foodstuffs and other prepared goods, as was mentioned in Chapter Two. These economic shifts
may be accompanied by further employment opportunities in the area, as I will discuss shortly, or increased migration to Toliara for work. The potential increase of valuation of cash proportional to that of zebu-raising could in turn engender changes in social relationships as social and economic capital are distributed differently. I still maintain that the zebu can be considered a total social phenomenon, but the dominant narrative of its role in society must be complicated with observations and interviewee’s attestations that zebus are not always necessary.

It remains unclear if this incongruity in whether zebus are replaceable has existed for a substantial period of time, or if people are utilizing other livestock more now than before because of changing external factors. This question merits further research, as it could help answer some of the following questions about the implications of the waning number of zebus.

**Implications: what is happening now and possible effects in the southwest**

Though I have not explicitly discussed the causes for the diminishing number of zebus in this thesis, other scholarship has demonstrated this phenomenon, which can in part be contributed to *dahalo* and climate change. “Climate change experts think that the driest areas of Madagascar are at risk for becoming even drier, but also for receiving more cyclones. In effect, the environmental risks might become even more difficult to manage” (SuLaMa 2011: 101). The effects of climate change include drought, which impact the availability of water and food for agriculture as well as livestock-raising. These changes are certainly not apolitical. This information contextualizes the government’s future policies concerning livestock development, other forms of economic development, and fighting *dahaloism*. The policies of Madagascar National Parks concerning Parc Tsimanampetsotsa also affect the livelihoods of zebu-herders in the littoral. The park has significantly contributed to the reduction of pasture area for zebus (SuLaMa 2011: 86), and it is more difficult for herders to practice transhumance by passing
through the park. The shift in the park’s headquarters from Efoetse to Marofijery will also provide further opportunities for salaried employment. This will be a key feature of a social and economic landscape in which zebus are less prevalent, and could potentially shape how people value them. These changes suggest that whether or not zebus have been replaceable long before now, their drop in numbers poses pressing questions about the effects.

The potential effects of shrinking numbers of zebu range from socio-economic and livelihood concerns to changes in social structures. First, continued droughts raise questions about the future of herding practices. Less forage and water could lead to further intensification and more labor-intensive preparation of zebus’ food. The SuLaMa report offers a pessimistic assessment of zebus’ increasing scarcity: “By increasing scarcity, we mean resource extraction at a level such that the stock cannot renew itself, leading inexorably to the disappearance of the resource. In this sense, we can say that the agricultural system of Marofijery is not sustainable” (SuLaMa 2011: 104). This suggests that changes in peoples’ livelihoods are imminent if zebu-herding and agriculture are truly “brother and sister,” as Claude suggested (Chapter Two).

Second, zebus’ increasing scarcity might influence their value. As discussed in Chapter Two, part of what makes the zebu a marker of distinction is its rarity. As zebus decline in the littoral, will their rarity, and therefore their value, increase? Will they become an even more significant marker of status or, as Mansaré Marikandia put it, “little herds of prestige”? Or will they wane in importance as people seek salaried employment? This might in turn affect social structures, specifically gendered social norms, and access to economic capital.

Even if they may be replaceable in practice, zebus are nevertheless critical to Tanalana society on a theoretical level. Zebus’ significance has been discussed throughout this thesis, but here I would like to highlight the importance of a clan’s collective identification with its zebu in
the context of Evans-Pritchard’s argument of a community’s identification with a herd (1953). In southwestern Madagascar, one manifestation of the clan-herd identification is the different earmarkings given to zebu of different clans. This gives all zebus in that herd the same marking and makes one clan’s herds distinguishable from those of another. The Tanalana earmarking is called *miheloke*, meaning anger or conflict, because the clan left angrily from St. Agustin. This physical manifestation of the community’s tie to its herds is therefore also directly connected to the story of the origin of Marofijery (see Introduction). Another manifestation of the clan-herd identification is the sacrifice of a zebu at the creation of a new *hazomanga*. As the clan’s spiritual leader, the *hazomanga* is a continuous figure under which the community comes together as a collective. Just as zebu sacrifice has a role in continuing a family’s lineage, so the *hazomanga*’s importance and connection to zebu illustrates the zebu’s role in the continuity of the group.

This research can also shed new light on the concept of the total social phenomenon. The zebu is certainly used as a gift, but this thesis shows that it extends far beyond the gift in its multiple manifestations in social institutions. Concerning the total social phenomenon, Mauss asserted: “All these institutions express one fact alone, one social system one precise state of mind: everything – food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labour services, priestly functions, and ranks – is there for passing on, and for balancing accounts” (1990[1950]: 14). I hope that this thesis complexifies and adds further dimensions to the notion of the total social phenomenon. While this concept has been broadened laterally, this study also leads to questions which expand our conception of change over time in the total social phenomenon. Although the idea of a fixed total social fact would seem to deny cultural change, as some have argued, Mary Douglas points out that Mauss’s theory of change was that “changes in the organization of production radically transform the system of categories and beliefs” (1990: xiii). In these very
changes in zebu production, there is the potentiality for radical transformation. Further research could examine the reverberations of these effects over time. I hope to have demonstrated not just the importance of zebu but the critical economic, socio-cultural and religious importance of continuing to ask these questions. As Eugène said, the world has changed.
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