From a PhD Dissertation entitled: THE BEHAVIORAL ECOLOGY AND ECONOMICS OF VARIATION, RISK, AND DIVERSIFICATION AMONG MIKEA FORAGER-FARMERS OF MADAGASCAR, By Bram T. Tucker. Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Copyright (c) 2001, Bram Tange Tucker. All Rights Reserved.

Chapter 2
Mikea History: Relicts or Refugees?[1]

A. Introduction

The Mikea, inhabitants of the dry forests, prairies, and coastline of southwestern Madagascar, remain one of the most misunderstood peoples of Madagascar. For many Malagasy, "Mikea" designates a semi-mythical forest dweller, a pygmy hunter-gatherer who hides from the outside world, disdains agriculture and technology, and lives without the trappings of civilization such as clothing, metal tools, and houses. Popular media in Madagascar and the exterior have presented today's Mikea as a primitive population of forest nomads and foragers, without knowledge of agriculture, clad in loin cloths, isolated, and threatened by the destruction of their forest habitat (Dutilleux 1997; Mouyon and Fancelle 1999; Rarojo 1999; Ushuaïa 1997). Yet during my own ethnographic fieldwork in the northern half of the Mikea Forest during 1997-1999, I found these characterizations to be rather exaggerated. People whom I met who identified themselves as Mikea appeared to be little different than any other Malagasy peasants—they spoke the same language, were of the same general physical appearance, participated in the same markets, and used the same technology as their neighbors, the Masikoro and Vezo.

[1] The majority of the content of this chapter will be published in a forthcoming issue of Michigan Discussions in Anthropology (Tucker, in press). Reprinted here with permission from MDIA.

In this chapter I discuss the historical origins of the current residents of the Mikea Forest, who refer to themselves as "Mikea." First, I briefly discuss and critique an explanation for Mikea origins that I call the Vazimba hypothesis. According to popular belief in Madagascar and among some scholars, Mikea hunter-gatherers are the descendants of ancient Vazimba hunter-gatherers, the original occupants of the island before the arrival of the Proto-Malagasy from Indonesia. The Vazimba hypothesis implies that the Mikea of today are a relict population of ancient hunter-gatherers and part of an unbroken hunter-gatherer phylogeny that extends back into the past to a time when all people were foragers. I suggest that the Vazimba hypothesis for the origin of Mikea rests on scant evidence. Rather, it as an attempt to apply the theory of unilinear social evolution, in which foragers are the bottom rung on a one-way ladder to civilization, to the mysterious fact that hunter-gatherers, representatives of a Pleistocene way of life, are found on an island that was not settled until the late Holocene.

Instead, Mikea oral histories suggest that today's Mikea are "recent refugees"—farmers and herders who fled into the forest during the past four or more centuries. To substantiate this view, I first present the historical context of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries using secondary sources and one primary source, the journal of British castaway Robert Drury (1826[1729]). These sources establish that this was a period of chronic raiding, warfare, and food shortage, during which time farmers and herders often chose to live in the forest so as to forage and stay out of harm's way. Then I briefly discuss oral histories collected from Mikea informants by my research team. These oral histories describe village-dwelling agropastoral Masikoro or Vezo ancestors who fled into the forest during the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries to escape slavery and loss of property. A dominant theme in the oral narratives is resistance against the political hegemony of the Andrevola kings, although closer examination suggests that people may have also sought to escape economic failure and interpersonal conflicts.

B. Myth and the Mikea

Sometimes it is hard to tell myth from fact in Madagascar. Malagasy folk knowledge and folklore are full of accounts of strange beings—solitary creatures and unusual, reclusive peoples—the existence of which is somewhat unclear. While many of these stories are obviously legend, a few have turned out to have had at least some factual basis. For example, Marco Polo recorded tales heard during his passage through Arabia in 1294 of a giant bird called *rukh* that allegedly lived in Madagascar. The huge *rukh*, with its "thirty-pace wingspan" and "twelve pace long feathers," could fly efficiently enough to carry elephants to high altitudes. Some have suggested that this account may based on exaggerated descriptions of the elephantbird (*Aepyornis maximus*), a flightless ostrich-sized bird that lived in Madagascar until its extinction some time in the last millennia (Brown 1995:5). A more recent example is the coelacanth (*Latimaria chalumnae*). The lobe-finned, evolutionarily conservative fish had long been known to fishermen in the Madagascar, the Comoros, and South Africa. Scientists, however, believed that this strange fish existed only in fossil form in museum collections and in the superstitions of local fisherpeople until Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer collected a live example from a trawler's waste pile in South Africa in 1938 (Thomson 1991). Perhaps other strange animals, known to Malagasy legend but not western science, will surface in the future. Burney and Ramilisonina (1999) describe oral accounts by peasants in the Belo-sur-Mer area of western Madagascar of eyewitness encounters with strange animals known as *kilokilopitsofy* and *kidoky*. They very cautiously suggest the possibility that *kilolilopitsofy* are relict populations of pygmy hippopotami (*Hippopotamus lemerlei* or *H. madagascariensis)* and *kidoky* are relict giant lemurs (*Archaeolemur*)—animals previously thought to have gone extinct before the twelfth century (MacPhee and Burney 1991). Possibilities for unique life exist, given Madagascar's remarkably high level of biodiversity and species endemism.

During my 22 months in Madagascar I heard many different stories of bizarre lifeforms. Some were easy to dismiss as fantasy— others demand critical evaluation. Many

of the legendary beings I heard about were human, or almost human. A friend from Diego Suarez (northern Madagascar) told me about his encounter with *kalinoro*—small furry people with great wisdom and supernatural powers that can be invoked in special ceremonies for healing or divination. Many Masikoro talk of *tsiboko*, wraith-like undead with deep set, glowing red eyes and incredible strength that hide in the shadows of tamarind trees at dusk and beg the living to carry them on their backs. Masikoro also talk of *kotoke,* reclusive human-like creatures that subsist largely by stealing milk and honey from sleeping herders. *Lampihazo*, literally, "tree-huggers," and *hako*, "hiders," are forest-dwelling humans that live like animals—without society, language, clothing, houses, or agriculture. I was told that they are small people who travel alone or in small groups and are nearly impossible to see, even when one is looking straight at them, for their ability to blend into the surrounding forest.

When most Malagasy hear the word "Mikea," they immediately classify these people along with the rest of Madagascar's cryptozoological pantheon—with the *kalinoro*, *tsiboko*, *kotoke*, *lampihazo*, and *hako*. The Mikea, like the *lampihazo* and *hako*, are thought to be forest dwellers and foragers with a minimum of culture, material wealth, and knowledge of the outside world. Like the *kalinoro* they are supposedly endowed with supernatural abilities.

In the cities of Toliara and Antananarivo I heard many strange stories about Mikea. Most of the urban Malagasy with whom I spoke told me that the Mikea have no clothing, houses, or possessions. Once on a taxi-brousse ride along National Route 9, which follows the eastern border of the Mikea forest, a woman from Ambahikily (a village only a dozen kilometers from the Mikea Forest) asked me if the Mikea cook their food or if they eat it raw. When I told her that they cook their food, she was baffled, and she suggested that the food must be roasted on the fire and eaten with wooden spoons, because metal pots and utensils would be too incomprehensibly modern to be in the possession of the primitive Mikea.

The first question that urban Malagasy usually asked me when they learned that I was working in the Mikea forest was how tall Mikea are. I was consistently told that the Mikea

were a race of dwarfs or pygmies. A seamstress in Toliara told Yount in 1995 and Yount and myself in 1996 that she once saw a truckload of frightened Mikea brought into Toliara through some sort of government program to civilize them. She claimed on both occasions that the Mikea were about a meter tall and a meter wide. Many others claimed to have seen captured, wild Mikea displayed in cages at provincial fairs.[2] These captured Mikea were reportedly people of very small stature, wild, unclothed, unbathed, and with a minimal vocabulary.

Another Mikea trait that I consistently heard about was their fear of strangers and their tendency to flee into the forest on a moment's notice. I was told that like *lampihazo* and *hako*, Mikea are impossible to spot in a forest because they know how to blend in with the trees and how to move without making a sound. Urban Malagasy often flat-out refused to believe me when I told them that I was living and working with Mikea. They insisted that Mikea were too frightened of outsiders, especially *vazaha* (white foreigners or their representatives),[3] for such a close relationship to be possible. When I insisted, and described my informants—who were Malagasy of normal stature, and peasants much like any other in Madagascar—I was usually told that I had not found "the real Mikea" and that I had been duped.

Several journalists and filmmakers have sought to document the Mikea and their way of life, but in general, their portrayals have been more consistent with local rumor about the

[2] Many people *have* seen pygmy Mikea displayed in cages at fairs. There is an old man from the village of Vorehe, an achondroplasitic dwarf, who made a living for many years by being displayed in a cage and performing the part of a primitive Mikea. A man with a megaphone would announce loudly, "come and see the Mikea!!" In his cage, the dwarf performed a routine that involved speaking an unintelligible language. He would entertain audiences by claiming to live in the forest without a house and to subsist on honey and wild tubers; then he would suddenly become frightened and rattle the bars. Today he lives in the villages of Vorehe and Ankililale, where he does some small agriculture and is an *ambiasa* (traditional diviner-healer) specializing in aphrodisiacs.

[3] There are several types of *vazaha* in the local lexicon. Light skinned Europeans and Americans are called *vazaha mena sofy* (red ears). On a few occasions I heard the term *vazaha mavo sofy* (yellow ears) to refer to members of the Merina ethnic group from the High Plateau, who tried in vain to conquer the Masikoro during the nineteenth century. *Vazaha gasy* are Malagasy people who enforce government policy, such as policemen, soldiers, and gendarmes. Foreign researchers regrettably find ourselves called by the same word as policemen and soldiers!

Mikea than any kind of ethnographic reality. In a romanticized account by Mouyon and Francelle for Repor'Mad (1996), Mikea foragers, who are described as descendants of an ancient race of Vazimba hunter-gatherers, live today by hunting wild swine and digging wild tubers. These Mikea are threatened by neighboring farmers who are burning the Mikea Forest to make cornfields. They write, "Is it necessary to continue this enumeration to explain that to burn the forest is to kill the Mikea? But who concerns themselves with a sort of mysterious descendant of aborigines? (47)."

Similarly, a World Wildlife Foundation publication aimed at educating the general public in Madagascar about environmental issues (Rarojo 1999) presents the Mikea as forager-farmers living in perfect harmony with nature. "If we want to have an example of the reconciliation of man with nature, it would not perhaps be superfluous to visit our friends the Mikea… But don't forget the chewing tobacco and cigarettes" (7). She describes Mikea as having a minimum of clothing, "rudimentary huts," and a nomadic lifestyle (7). She claims that Mikea start fires using flints or by rubbing two sticks together (7), and that their main form of exchange is a sort of passive trade in which forest products are left unguarded at the side of the road where they are collected by passing villagers who leave in exchange manioc, rice, or lima beans (6).

A French adventure documentary, *Okavango* (Ushuaïa 1998), presented a somewhat fictionalized storyline in which a French ex-patriot and a French archaeologist load up an ox-cart in the village of Vorehe and set off to find Mikea living in the forest. They find just that: after waiting at an abandoned campsite till dusk, the explorers are greeted by a family of loin-cloth clad foragers on their way back from the hunt. Their leader, a man I know well, is visibly uncomfortable in the loin cloth—which is not surprising, considering he has probably not worn one for years. He greets the French explorers with a firm handshake and says, anachronistic to the story line, "Hello again!" As the story goes, the next day the foragers take the explorers on a foraging trip. They demonstrate how to excavate tubers, extract hibernating tenrecs from dead trees, and procure honey. A fire is made by rubbing two sticks

together, and the tenrecs are cooked on spits and eaten on the spot. In the end of the segment, the archaeologist concludes that they have not seen Mikea do anything but search for food, and that the only time Mikea abandon nomadic foraging is when they assemble for spirit possession ceremonies.

These popular portrayals of modern Mikea life ignore much of the reality of Mikea life today. Both the Repor'Mad article (Mouyon and Francelle 1996) and the *Okavango* documentary (Ushuaïa 1998) lead one to believe that the Mikea are peaceful, environmentally-harmless forest dwellers who are threatened by deforestation caused by their farming neighbors. Only Rarojo (1999:7) admits that the Mikea are also among those who are chopping and burning the forest to create agricultural land. Yet, despite the obvious degradation of the landscape of the Mikea Forest, which is today heavily scarred with massive clearings made by Mikea and their neighbors in search of agricultural land, she still manages to conclude that these people live in harmony with nature. Other primitive motifs permeate these accounts. All three of these accounts make the claim that Mikea are nomads, whereas all the Mikea households that I came to know maintained residences in permanent agropastoral villages outside the forest in addition to their forest camps. While some Mikea I met know how to make fire by rubbing sticks together, most often today they use a flint and tinder kit, matches, or a cigarette lighter. Although a few old men still wear loin clothes while reposing in camp, shorts and dresses have largely replaced previous attire. All these accounts have chosen to ignore such items as aluminum pots, enamelware plates, aluminum spoons, plastic buckets, soap, western clothing, houses, ox-carts, cornfields, manioc fields, rice paddies, maize storage ramadas, village markets, Lutheran and Catholic mission churches and clinics, government schools, rum stills, mosquito nets, sewing machines, gas lanterns, Coca-Cola bottles, radio-cassette players, and flashlights—all significant items in Mikea life today.

The case of the Mikea is like that of Marco Polo's *rukh*. Just as tales of the fanciful *rukh* were perhaps based on some real, living being, so too, if one travels to the Mikea Forest

south of Morombe and north of Toliara, one can find actual living people who call themselves Mikea. However, just as the details of the *rukh* were greatly exaggerated, so are those of the Mikea. The real-life elephantbird, while large, probably had a wingspan somewhere under the 30 paces described by Marco Polo, and was certainly flightless. Likewise, my Mikea informants were Malagasy peasants like any other, of the same average stature as other Malagasy; who spoke the same language and dialects as other Malagasy, built the same types of houses as other Malagasy, wore same clothes as other Malagasy, and cooked the same types of food in the same aluminum pots as do other Malagasy.

C. The Vazimba Hypothesis

In casual conversations in the urban settings of Toliara and Antananarivo I was consistently told that Mikea are descendants of the Vazimba. According to the story, the original inhabitants of Madagascar were the Vazimba, a race of primitive, pygmy hunter-gatherers of African origin. I was told that Vazimba once lived everywhere on the island until the arrival of Indonesian mariners who are the ancestors of today's Malagasy. These proto-Malagasy migrants were farmers and herders, and because of their technological superiority they soon gained control of the island from the Vazimba. Some Vazimba assimilated into the Malagasy population, while others fled to the most remote recesses of the island so as to continue their hunting and gathering way of life in isolation. According to this explanation, those that remained in the Mikea Forest became the Mikea.

The Vazimba hypothesis has been presented by scholars as well. Birkeli (1936) traveled throughout western Madagascar during the first half of the twentieth century in search of elusive forest people, Beosi (Behosy), Vazimba, and Mikea. In 1914 he visited the Tsiribihina region (see Figure 2.1), where he found people who referred to themselves as Vazimba, who were culturally different from other Malagasy, and who spoke their own unique language. Although Birkeli apparently never visited the Mikea Forest, he concluded that the Tsiribihina Vazimba and the Mikea are both relict populations of the same ancient

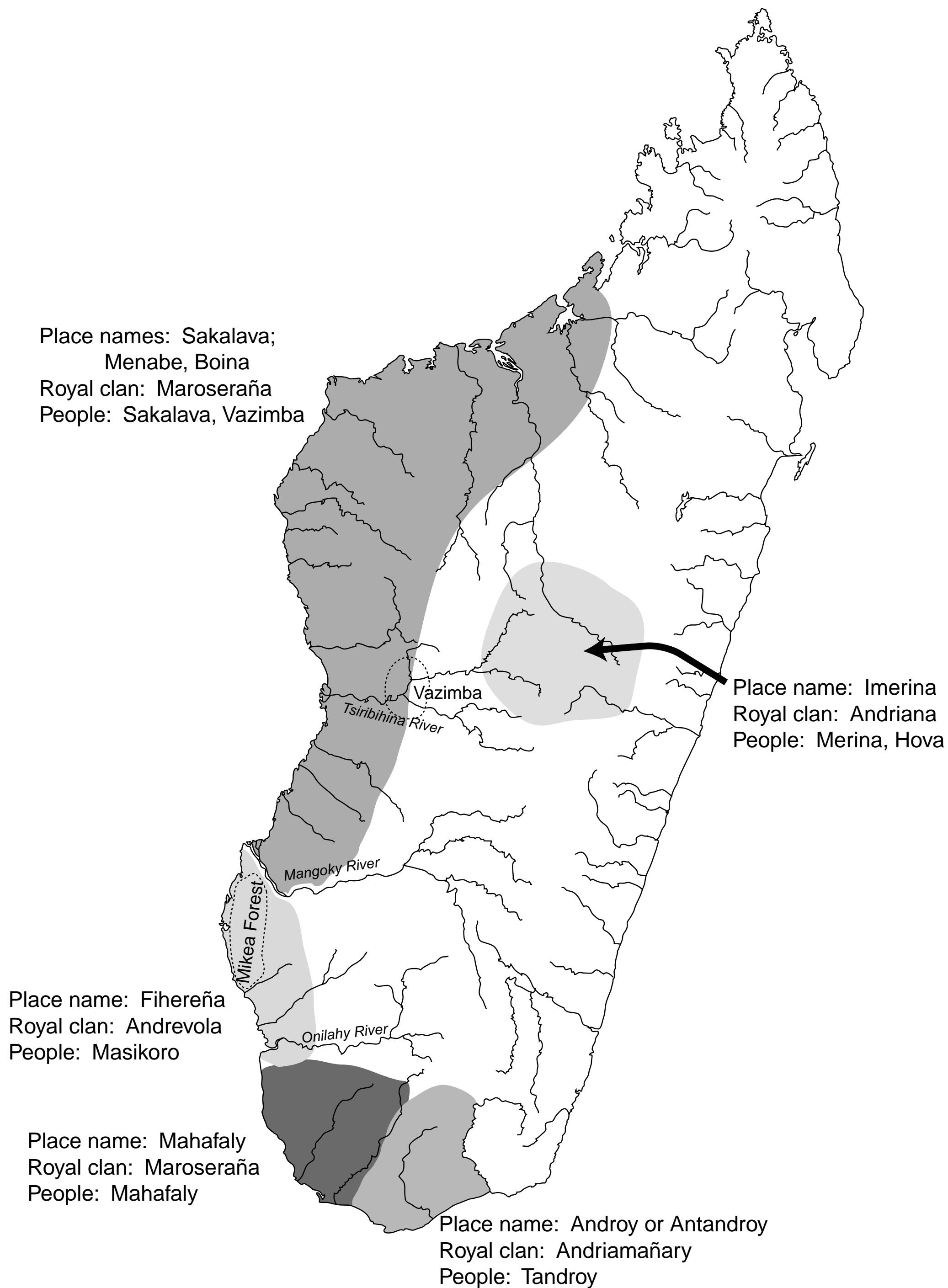

Figure 2.1: Seventeenth to Nineteenth century chiefdoms mentioned in text. This map is intended as a simplified reference. The actual territorial extent, and the name of the ruling clan of these polities changed over time largely as a result of warfare. The cultural identities of people living within these territories were neither homogeneous nor static. The royal clans did not command absolute power overthese regions, and other clans may have ruled at certain times.

race. Birkeli asserted that Mikea, Beosi, and Vazimba are "the same level of primitive" (12), and furthermore, that these three groups speak a language different from Malagasy (13). In an earlier study, Birkeli (1926) had attempted to map cultural migrations by studying the distribution and diffusion of clan-specific patterns for cutting the ears of cattle, called *sofinaombe* or *sofindraza*. This evidence lead him to conclude that the Mikea "are stationary: there is no trace of migration of their part, not to the north, nor to the south. They are wild, fleeing society, without any social organization whatsoever" (1936:13). In other words, Mikea are a leftover from the past, unmoved and unchanged for centuries.

Stiles (1998:129-32), who visited the Mikea Forest in the early 1990's, agrees with Birkeli's hypothesis that Mikea are a remnants of an ancient Vazimba foraging society. Stiles rejects the hypothesis that Mikea are Masikoro or Vezo refugees who fled to the forest during recent centuries, and he supports his conviction by arguing that Mikea are culturally different from Masikoro and Vezo. He lists several clans that he claims are unique to Mikea and Vazimba and are not found among the neighboring Masikoro and Vezo—Marofoty, "Ndrabala" (Ndrambalà), and "Mangedrano" (Mañindrano). He claims that Mikea do not practice Masikoro and Vezo customs such as spirit possession (*tromba*), healing festivals (*bilo*), and circumcision ceremonies (*savatse*), and that they do not erect the clan-owned posts called *hazomanga* that are used in the *savatse* ceremony. Stiles acknowledges that Mikea today speak the same language as other Malagasy, but he lists certain vocabulary which he claims is not found in neighboring dialects, except among Behosy (Vazimba).

Stiles's argument for the Vazimba origins of the Mikea is supported with weak evidence. My research team and I found the Mikea to be culturally and linguistically very similar to their neighbors. During 19 months in the forest we failed to find any Mikea who did not also claim openly to be either Masikoro or Vezo (or more rarely, Tandroy, Tanosy, or Mahafaly). We found no clans unique to the Mikea (see Yount, Tsiazonera, and Tucker in press). The supposed Mikea clans supplied by Stiles are all common among the Vezo and Masikoro. The Marofoty and Mañindrano are documented in Lavondes' (1967) study of the

Masikoro village of Bekoropoke. Indeed, the village of Marofoty, where many members of that clan may be found, is located only five kilometers from the village of Manombo, the historic capital of the Andrevola-Masikoro polity. Ndrambalà is primarily a Vezo clan, found in large Vezo villages such as Andavadoake and Ampasilava (Taku Iida, personal communication). I have attended *tromba*, *bilo*, and *savatse* ceremonies conducted by Mikea. Mikea villages such as Vorehe, Namonte, Ihotry, and Ankindranoke have *hazomanga* posts.[4] The "Vazimba" vocabulary that Stiles reports having heard among the Mikea contains words such as *bokahoho*, *boenga*, and *angavo*. These words are common in the speech of old Masikoro men and women, although they have fallen out of usage among younger generations (Tsiazonera, personal communication). In sum, Mikea share clan membership, customs, ceremonies, and dialect with their neighbors, which indicates regional cultural continuity.

The Vazimba hypothesis does not address the question of how this population of African foragers arrived on the island in the first place. If Mikea and Vazimba are holdovers from the Pleistocene, how did they appear on an island separated by 400 km of ocean and 180 million years of continental drift, that all evidence to date suggests was not inhabited until about 2000 years ago? So far, archaeological research has yet to identify Neolithic forager sites or components in Madagascar (Dewar and Wright 1993). However, much of Madagascar has yet to be surveyed, and remains of nomadic hunter-gatherers may be difficult to find (Henry Wright, personal communication).

The earliest archaeological evidence for human settlement in Madagascar come from two sites, Lamboharana and Ambolisatra, where paleontologists found bones of pygmy hippopotami that clearly bear cut marks left by iron tools (MacPhee and Burney 1991).

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[4] Forest camps do not have *hazomanga* posts because Mikea consider these habitations to be temporary—even if some people spend the majority of their time in these settlements. Mikea practice *savatse* in the home village of the clan head or *mpitokazomanga*. Stiles may not have realized that the Mikea he saw living in forest camps without *hazomanga* were attending ceremonies with kin at larger villages with *hazomanga*. Today, Mikea often forego the *savatse* ceremony because they cannot afford to slaughter the necessary cow.

Radiocarbon dates suggest that these animals were butchered 1900 to 2000 years ago. Coincidentally, these sites are just south of the current boundaries of the Mikea Forest, although palynological evidence indicates that this area was formerly marshy; perhaps a favorite spot for hippo herds (Burney 1993). Stiles (1998) cautiously speculates that the people who butchered the hippos at Lamboharana and Ambolisatra may have been the earliest Mikea, or ancestors of them. Dewar and Wright (1993:428) suggest that these animals may have been hunted by nonresident visitors to the island, because no habitation sites contemporary with these butchered bones have yet been found. It should be noted that the age of these finds corresponds to the long extreme of glottochronological estimates of how long ago the Malagasy language split from the Barito language of Borneo (Dahl 1951, 1977; Vérin, Kottak, and Gorlin 1970). It is impossible to say with any certainty whether these early hippo hunters were African or Indonesian in origin.

Part of the confusion over Vazimba and Mikea stems from differences in how these terms are used. "Vazimba" not only refers to the supposed race of primitive foragers from Africa who were the first to inhabit Madagascar. It also refers to a modern population living in the Tsiribihina region of western Madagascar (Birkeli 1936). Furthermore, the term "Vazimba" is used to describe certain ancestor spirits. The ancestor spirits of any Malagasy person can become "Vazimba" if their tomb is forgotten and neglected (Berg 1977; Henry Wright, personal communication).

The Vazimba hypothesis appears to be the result of a long coevolution of European and Malagasy historical interpretation. According to Berg (1977), the concept of Vazimba as a race of African pygmy precursors was created in the High Plateau during the nineteenth century, when a generation of Malagasy historians attempted to reconcile myths of sinister ancestor spirits with the Victorian concept of the primitive savage. The London Missionary Society began teaching Merina students 1818. Not only did the students learn to read and to write, they were also exposed to Christian teachings and western social theory in which differences of race and class were explained as reflecting differences in stage of evolutionary

progress. Berg explains that in early oral traditions, Vazimba were ancestor spirits who were dangerous because their tombs were neglected by the living. Some Vazimba were described as fair skinned, giant, and physically beautiful with long, supple hair. Other Vazimba epitomized evil: they were short, with messy, unkempt hair, and "dark" expressions. When the Malagasy students began writing down their own histories, they transferred unilinear social evolution onto their folklore and created the concept of an inferior, primitive Vazimba race. The qualities of the evil Vazimba were translated into racial traits—the unkempt hair became kinky hair and their dark expressions became darkly colored skin. These early historians were prolific writers and prolific borrowers of each other's material, who rarely cited their sources explicitly, and who also did little to delineate their interpretations from oral traditions. Important European histories of Madagascar by Sibree (1969[1838]) and Ellis (1880) then cited the works of these Malagasy historians as if they were primary sources of indigenous origin. The histories by Sibree and Ellis have influenced many subsequent generations of Malagasy scholars and schoolchildren, and this perhaps accounts for the widespread popular belief in the Vazimba hypothesis today.

The question of Vazimba mirrors a larger debate in anthropology about the history of modern hunter-gatherer societies. Schrire (1984a, 1984b) and Wilmsen (1989) among others have challenged traditional interpretations of modern hunter-gatherers as isolated remnants of past societies, as "living fossils" unchanged since the Pleistocene. Schrire asserts that such interpretations are based on incorrect and outdated theories of unilinear social evolution in which hunting and gathering is the most primitive stage and the only possible change from that stage is advancement. Birkeli (1936) was clearly thinking along these lines; because Vazimba and Mikea are "the same *level* of primitive" (12; emphasis mine), and thus would be plotted proximate to each other on an imagined scale of social evolution, he has connected the dots and posited that Vazimba and Mikea have common historical origins. However, evidence for this connection is scant. Stiles's ethnographic and linguistic evidence is faulty, the archaeological record is silent, and, thanks to Berg's (1977) analysis, the historical

sources are suspect. Meanwhile, the cultural similarity of the Mikea to their neighbors, and the fact that Mikea openly claim to be Masikoro or Vezo and belong to Masikoro and Vezo clans, suggests more recent and more local origins. In the remainder of this chapter I develop this “recent refugee” argument with discussion of historical and oral history evidence.

D. Forest life as refuge during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries

1. The recent refugee hypothesis

In the early 1950’s Louis Molet (1958) made a brief visit to a community in the Mikea Forest, and concluded that “The Mikea are undoubtedly the same anthropological group as the Masikoro fixed in the villages on the eastern border of the forest and their dialect is in all ways the same” (242). Oral histories collected by my research team within the Mikea Forest in 1998-1999 have lead us to the same conclusion: the Mikea, at least those people who live within the Mikea Forest today and call themselves Mikea, share a common heritage with their Malagasy neighbors, the Masikoro and Vezo (and in fewer cases, Mahafaly, Tanosy, or Tandroy). Their oral histories include migration narratives in which Masikoro or Vezo ancestors voluntarily moved into the Mikea Forest, and thereby became “Mikea,” in order to escape the tyrannical political domination of the Masikoro kings from the royal clan Andrevola. In the next section, I present the context of Malagasy history during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, in order to demonstrate the plausibility of the recent refugee hypothesis. This was a time of political instability and warfare, when farmers frequently fled into the forest for subsistence and protection, and in some cases, remained in the forest, and, I believe, became the ancestors of today’s Mikea.

2. Mikea at the genesis of Masikoro

Archaeological evidence suggests that small chiefdoms arose simultaneously throughout Madagascar during the fourteenth century (Dewar and Wright 1993:450). Portuguese sailor Luis Mariano described early chiefdoms of the southwest in 1614 as having

controlled small territories, often no more than a river valley, and as having used their political control to conduct raids aimed at pillaging their neighbors (Kent 1970:10).

A second island-wide trend in political consolidation occurred during the early seventeenth century, when these smaller chiefdoms were fused into larger polities that controlled vast stretches of land in southern and western Madagascar (Dewar and Wright 1993:450; see Figure 2.1). This appears to have been a time of chronic internecine raiding interrupted periodically by inter-polity warfare in which booty of cattle and slaves was hoarded by petty elites and sold to passing European ships in exchange for glass beads, coins, and firearms (Brown 1995; Kent 1970; Parker Pearson 1997).

Accompanying regional political consolidation was widespread ethnogenesis, the creation of new cultural identities. On the western coast, the diverse peoples living between the Mangoky and Sofia rivers became aligned with kings of the Maroseraña dysnastic clan; they became known as "Sakalava." Those people living south of the Mangoky River, to the Onilahy River, came under the control of the Andrevola royal dynastic clan, and became known as "Masikoro." Interestingly, the Masikoro and Sakalava share many of the same clan names (Yount, Tsiazonera, and Tucker in press), suggesting that these peoples were not dissimilar before the Sakalava and Masikoro identities were forged.[5] The Andrevola/ Masikoro territory, known as the Fihereña, contains the Mikea Forest.[6] Meanwhile, peoples of the south were assimilated into the Mahafaly and Tandroy polities, among others (see Figure 2.1).

[5] Masikoro does not appear on most of the maps of Madagascar's supposed "18 tribes." Instead, the Masikoro are often lumped together with the Sakalava, despite the fact that Masikoro and Sakalava were historically often bitter enemies (Fagereng 1950).

[6] "Masikoro" refers to the people, "Fihereña" refers to their territory, and "Andrevola" is the name of their royal clan; however, these three names were not always mutually associated. Flacourt in 1661 reported the presence of a tribe of "Machicores" south of the Onilahy River, while a separate tribe of "Zafe AnRenavoule," which Fagereng (1950:136) identifies as Andrevola, lived north of the Fihereña River. When Drury visited the region 50 years later, he reported more or less the same situation: a petty noble named Deean Mussekorrow (Ndrianmasikoro, Lord of the Masikoro) was living in the same region as Flacourt's Machicores. North of the Onilahy River, in a place Drury calls "Feraingher" (Fihereña), Drury reports that the ruling clan is the "Andry Voler."

Fagereng (1950) explains that the following groups were assimilated into the Andrevola polity and the Masikoro identity regime:

> *Mikea*, living in the thorny forests around lake Ihotry and living, in large part, off products from the forest and the lake; some *Vazimba*, less numerous here than around the fish-filled lakes of Tsiribihina; some *Antanandro*, cultivators; the *Antevaratse*, immigrants, as their name indicates, from the north, and claiming to be of Arabic origin; some *Vezo*, living from marine products, who, from Androka, are stretched along the coast to just north of Morondava; some *Voroneoke*, living in the mouths of the Fiherena and Onilahy (Fagereng 1950:137).

Similarly, Kent (1970:187) lists the original inhabitants of the Fihereña as: Tentembola, Antanandro, Mikeha, Antambaha, Andrifengo, Voroneoke, Sakoambe, Tsiveta, and Veso.

Were the Mikea (Mikeha) amongst the early cultural groups that the Andrevola assimilated into their polity? It is difficult to know. Neither Fagereng (1950) nor Kent (1970) list any sources supporting their having included Mikea on their lists. As far as I am aware, the Mikea escape mention in European documents before the late nineteenth century when they were encountered by explorer E. J. Bastard (1899). Perhaps the Mikea Forest, which is rich in wild tubers and game, has long been home to part time or full time foragers; and perhaps the term "Mikea," which today is closely associated with foraging and forest life (Poyer and Kelly 2000; Yount 1996; Yount, Tsiazonera, and Tucker in press), was similarly applied to the foragers during the seventeenth century. It is possible that there was some economic specialization among these groups—the Vezo are described as fishers, the Antanandro as farmers, and the Antevaratse and Voroneoke as pastoralists. If this were the case, then there may have been an identity group specialized in foraging as well. However, it is also quite possible that Fagereng, Kent, and other historians (and possibly their native informants) have merely assumed that the Mikea must have been present in the seventeenth century, based on the current presence of Mikea in the region and influenced by the Vazimba hypothesis and the stereotype that hunter-gatherers are timeless and unchanging.

3. Political and economic life during the early eighteenth century[7]

The journal of Robert Drury (1826[1729]), a British sailor who was shipwrecked in southern Madagascar in 1701 and who spent 15 years living among the Tandroy, Masikoro, Sakalava, and Vazimba, provides an interesting description of the politics and economy of the early eighteenth century, which is the backdrop of the Mikea migration narratives that I present in the next section.

Drury provides a description of the political environment of Madagascar's south and east. The land was divided into different territories, each of which was ruled by a king and his sons and nephews. The king lived in a capital village while his sons and nephews were petty nobles each of whom ruled his own, separate village. There were apparently other villages with no resident nobility, but who still recognized the sovereignty of the main king and the petty nobles, and paid them tribute in cattle, slaves, and agricultural foodstuffs (Drury 1826[1729]:140-141). Internecine warfare was ubiquitous (much as described by Mariano a century earlier); the petty nobles were constantly making and breaking alliances amongst each other and raiding each other's villages to steal cattle and slaves. The only time internecine warfare cooled down was when a whole polity went to war against another, as happened with the war of Tandroy and Masikoro against Mahafaly and Sakalava. Nobles eagerly hosted/enslaved European castaways like Drury as status trophies.

Drury's account supports the notion that the Malagasy kings were not absolute monarchs in the European sense. I argue that the power structure in the south and west was more one of heterarchy, powersharing by more or less equal but different political units

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[7] Although some scholars of Madagascar have speculated as to the historical accuracy of Drury's book, including allegations that it was written or edited by Daniel Defoe (Molet-Sauvaget 1992), I agree with Parker Pearson (1996) that much of the ethnographic and naturalistic description is too accurate to have been authored by anyone but an eye-witness, most likely Drury himself. It is possible that others edited or embellished Drury's account, and so researchers should exercise some caution in their interpretations. But these supposed editors would have been more likely to have edited the story line or Drury's philosophical muses to make the story more interesting to his European readership. There would be less reason to change Drury's observations of the subsistence strategies and settlement patterns of the people he encountered, which are the topics I discuss here.

(Ehrenreich, Crumley, and Levy 1995), rather than hierarchy. All able males in a royal clan shared political power and asserted it most noticeably in their home village. These petty nobles acted in concert when threatened by another polity. However, when warfare was not occurring they spent their time raiding each other's villages and stealing cattle, women, and children. This situation may have appeared to be hierarchical to Europeans because these nobles also practiced gerontocracy, respect for elders. The petty nobles were obliged to show social respect to their family head, although this "king" did not necessarily have much control over their decisions, and was not exempt from raiding by his sons and nephews. This would explain why king lists like that of the Andrevola discussed by Fagereng (1950) are so difficult to reconstruct and fit into historical records. The acknowledged "king" in any given area or year would have been the product of family politics at that time and place.

The economy that Drury describes was clearly based on cattle pastoralism, with foraging and cultivation of Old World crops being important components. Drury (1826[1729]:71; 79; 107; 274) described cattle herds of 200 to 600 head in Androy and the Fihereña, and herds in the thousands among the Sakalava. His first task as a slave was to herd cattle. Slaves were permitted to own their own cattle, and when Drury eventually earned four cows of his own he claimed that he was "as rich, and had as much as other people in my mean station, and much more than many of them (93)." The majority of meals that Drury described include beef, milk, or curds and whey (57-8; 218). Drury also reported the presence of sheep and goats (66). The Masikoro and Sakalava also raised swine, although Tandroy nobility maintained a pork taboo (66; 238; 295).

Foraging, for a variety of tubers (Drury 1826[1729]:55; 105; 106; 122-123; 215; 234) as well as honey (88; 92), tenrecs (59-60), fruits (201), wild cattle (120-1; 202-3; 214), and wild swine (127) was a full time activity for some and a part time productive activity for others. Drury reported that herd boys were expected to find their own subsistence through foraging or bee keeping while guarding their master's cattle (71), a practice that is still common in Madagascar today. Slaves, although permitted to own cattle and cultivate their

own gardens, likewise procured much of their subsistence from wild tubers (85-6). For most of the communities Drury encountered, foraged goods were most important during times of war and famine (106; 146; see also Flacourt 1908[1661]:161). At least twice Drury describes whole regions subsisting on foraged goods following war: once in Androy after a period of internecine warfare (108), and then again upon his first arrival in the Fihereña (220-1). Drury describes the hunting of wild boar and cattle as popular pastimes for the nobility (127). Drury also describes isolated communities in the forests of Androy that subsisted entirely on foraging, for economic and political reasons:

> [This forest] abounds with wild honey, wild boars, and such a variety of pleasant fruits, that men may not only find enough to satisfy their hunger and thirst, but to indulge their luxurious appetites, without the fatigue of any cultivation; and there are many that live in a state of indolence and ease (122).

One could imagine that Drury was describing Mikea here, or a similar people. However, Drury never uses the word Mikea, nor does he describe any such population in the Mikea region. He does mention populations of forest-dwelling foragers, as I discuss below.

Agriculture also played an important role in the economy, although its extent and profitability were limited by security issues. Many of the communities that Drury visited were fortified against attack, and at times of war Drury reports that villagers did not dare to venture out from the palisades to the fields to clear away the weeds (1826[1729]: 102; 108; 216). Also, fields and granaries were prime targets for invaders' plundering or devastation—they were more difficult to defend than cattle, which were hidden in the forest at first sign of threat (102; 108; 117).

In Androy, Drury saw fields of "potatoes," "guinea corn," and "carravances" (1826[1729]:56-57). In the glossary Drury translates "potato" into Malagasy as "ove marme," *ovy mamy*, which means literally, sweet potato. If these were indeed sweet potatoes (*Impomoea batata*), this is the only New World crop that appears in Drury's narrative—maize and manioc, the main staples in later times and today, are conspicuously absent. However,

Flacourt (1908[1661]) describes a tuber called "oumimes," which Grandidier translates as *ovy mamy* and attaches the scientific name *Coleus rotundifolious,* which is an old-world root crop. One may question whether Drury's potatoes were not manioc; but twice he mentions raising a crop within a few months (1826[1729]:88) which is inconsistent with manioc which takes 5 to 12 months or more to produce healthy tubers. Given the limits placed on agriculture by security issues, manioc may not have been a preferred crop, even if it had already been introduced. Drury translates "guinea corn" as "ampember," *ampemba*, a word that signifies sorghum to Masikoro today. "Carravances" is a legume that he compares to English gray peas (56). People of the Fihereña today call any dish in which beans are mixed with a starchy staple *karavansy.* In the Fihereña and Sakalava regions Drury also reported rice, bananas, plantains, sugarcane, and the bean *antseroko* in the riverbeds (220), and more potatoes, guinea corn, and carravances, as well as the lentil *antike,* further inland (256; 288). It should be noted, however, that upon his arrival to the Fihereña they had no crops at all north of the Onilahy river, because they had been badly beaten in skirmishes with the Sakalava. The crops they chose to plant at that time were likely those that would produce the fastest, and not necessarily the retinue of crops they would prefer to plant in more peaceful circumstances.

4. The forest as refuge

Throughout Drury's narrative there are descriptions of households or individuals leaving their agropastoral home villages to live in the forest, either temporarily or permanently. Drury (1826[1729]) described at least four reasons that villagers moved into the forest. First, at the first threat of violence, cattle, women, and children were hidden in the forest to protect them from the raiders. Cattle, women, and children were considered booty in internecine raids or inter-polity warfare (67-68; 115). Second, as discussed above, the forest became a source of food during famines caused by war or drought (106; 108; 146; 216). Third, some populations preferred forest residence so as to stay clear of internecine

raids and inter-polity warfare (139-140; 216). Fourth, Drury tells us that those sick with syphilis often lived in their own communities in the forest, away from the healthy (186).

Drury visited the Fihereña during the Andrevola's darkest hour (1710's). They were suffering combined attacks by the Mahafaly to the south and the well-organized Sakalava polity to the north. The region was largely depopulated, and those who remained were forced to live in small, fortified villages, from which they dared not venture long enough to work in agricultural fields (216; 235). There was such famine that the people were forced to subsist almost entirely on unripe tamarind fruit, whose extreme sourness is counteracted through mixing with ashes (220-221). Tamarind is still consumed in this way in the Fihereña, and people speak of this dish as war food or famine food. For those who emigrated out of the Fihereña, some left to enjoy the prosperity of the Sakalava. Drury reports that the Sakalava allowed their war captives from the Fihereña to settle down in Sakalava territory as freemen, if their kin in the Fihereña agreed to join them. Others fled to the forest. A man living near the Onilahy gave Drury the following report:

> …[The Mahafaly king]… slew a great many [captive] women and children. Rer Trimmenongarevo [the Sakalava king] took a contrary method, for he sent messengers with friendly invitations to the people to come and live in his country and be his subjects, with repeated assurances, that he would restore to them their wives and children; which promise he punctually performed, and still continues so to do; so that some hundreds have gone away: and he still so embarrasses us, who are unwilling to leave our native country, that many of us are obliged to fly into these forests and secret recesses in order to be safe, contenting ourselves, as you see, with what the country naturally affords us; for we dare neither plant nor keep cattle, lest we be surprised (216).

There would appear to be a history of population flux and migration into and out of the Mikea Forest throughout the history of the Fihereña, associated with warfare and food shortage. During Flacourt's tenure in Madagascar in the mid seventeenth century, 50 years before Drury, the Masikoro had just suffered a successional war that had forced them to abandon the Fihereña. On Flacourt's map he labels the Fihereña as "a very fertile land

abandoned and ruined by the wars" (Flacourt 1908[1661]: 74-5; see also Joan Blaeu's map, reproduced in Klemp 1970). This phrase is echoed by Drury's friends half a century later who lamented to him that they were forced to "…abandon the finest and most plentiful part of the country" (235). Drury's informants claimed that the past generation, under the rule of king Rer Vovvern, (perhaps just after the events described by Flacourt?) was a time of peace and prosperity (Drury 1826[1729]:235; 277). Likewise, the period following Drury's visit was relatively pacific, for the Masikoro and Sakalava had struck a truce (Fagereng 1950:149). It appears that the population of the Mikea Forest fluctuated over the course of the Andrevola rule. At times when they were militarily successful against their enemies, villages may have been well-populated and few people occupied the forest. Contrarily, in times of military defeat by their neighbors, chronic internal disputes, or food shortage due to droughts or other natural factors, villages may have been small, fortified, and poorly provisioned while a considerable portion of the population resided in the forest.

In Androy, Drury encountered forest-dwelling communities of forager-farmers who resided in the forest so as to avoid political and military conflict:

> There are some people in the remote parts of this country, whose habitations are in secret recesses in the woods; they live easy, indolent lives, never come near a town, nor concern themselves with any affairs of peace or war, either foreign or domestic. They keep no cattle, lest the vociferations of their herds or flocks might possibly betray them, and induce some evil-minded men to disturb their peace and by plundering them of so valuable a treasure; but content themselves with small plantations and the product of nature, which is, indeed, sufficient to support them. They never concern themselves of who is the lord of any particular place, or sovereign of the whole dominions. Deaan Murnanzack's cow-keeper, my governor, formerly lived after this manner…(139).

This passage describes people who were politically motivated to live in the forest rather than in agropastoral villages—people not unlike those who may have fled Masikoro villages during war—people not unlike the Mikea. Drury does not describe these small, remote populations as different peoples, tribes, or races, as he does the Vazimba of Tsiribihina,

whom he calls "…a different species, as it were, from the rest of mankind" (1729[1826]: 267). Rather, he describes a *lifestyle* which his governor had chosen to follow in previous days. *Mikea* also appears to be a lifestyle rather than a bounded ethnic group, as the oral histories in the next section demonstrate (see also Yount 1996; Poyer and Kelly 2000; Yount, Tsiazonera, and Tucker in press).

Herein probably lies the origin of the Mikea—warfare and famine forced semi-sedentary agropastoralists to abandon their land and seek refuge in the forest. There were likely multiple waves of immigration associated with periods of particular violence or food shortage. The first wave of immigrants into the forest may have fled political or economic crises that predated the rise of the Andrevola, and perhaps these were the Mikea or Mikeha that Fagereng and Kent claim were among the native cultures to be assimilated into the Masikoro nation. In the following section I present and discuss Mikea oral narratives of migration and resistance that date to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

E. Mikea oral history

1. Themes

What do modern day self-identified Mikea believe about their own origins? To find out, my research team and I collected oral histories from various informants throughout the northern half of the Mikea Forest during 1997-1999. Our primary informants (n=17) were old men that we interviewed in Mikea villages as well as forest camps. A woman in her nineties and her daughter, now in her sixties, who grew up in Namonte and still live in the area provided important perspectives, and kept our informant base from being entirely male. In Vorehe we were lucky to have shared countless conversations with three old men from a Merina family whose father had settled there in the early twentieth century to buy wild silk. Because they are relative newcomers to the area, their outside perspective often resulted in slightly different interpretations that enriched our understanding. Herein, I have attempted to present an accurate summary of what our sources have reported, although I lack space

enough to discuss discrepancies. The interpretations expressed are my own, and are not necessarily shared by my informants or research team. I will discuss two aspects of Mikea oral history that pertain to the subject of Mikea origins—clan specific migrations and narratives of flight.

When informants spoke of "their" history, most often they recalled the migrations of a descent group or lineage that claimed membership to a named clan through paternal or maternal lines. Among Masikoro and Mikea, children belong to their mother's clan until the father performs a rite of filiation ceremony called *soronanake*. Most often, these people claim to be primarily a member of their father's clan if this ceremony has been performed, and their mother's if it has not. The ceremony itself requires the slaughter of a cow. Because many Mikea can no longer afford to perform this ceremony, Mikea increasingly claim primary membership in their mother's clan. However, clan membership is also flexible, and people can potentially claim to be part of any of their great-grandparents clans, depending on the social circumstances (see Yount, Tsiazonera, and Tucker in press).

We have yet to find Mikea who claim that their ancestors have lived in the forest for more than a few centuries, although such cases may exist. In each case that we have examined, family history was traced to an ancestor who migrated into the forest during the past few centuries. Figure 2.2 maps out some of the clan-specific migrations, as discussed below. This figure does not offer an exhaustive treatment, for there are several clans about which we are aware whose migration histories we have not yet examined, and undoubtedly, many clans of which we are not yet aware.

2. Clan migration histories

The earliest migrations about which we were told are those of lineages belonging to the Ndrambalà, Tsimamorike, and Tohaombe (Tahoaombe) clans, who allegedly migrated from coastal villages into the Namonte Basin area of the Mikea Forest. Apparently these migrations occurred during the late eighteenth century or earlier, for these families were

already resident in the Namonte Basin when lineages from other clans arrived in what appears to have been the nineteenth century (see below). We were told that the Tsimamorike and Tohaombe had previously co-occupied the village of Andraboba, which was in the mangroves and coastal forests south of the Bay of Fañemotse, where they raised cattle and foraged for marine resources in the bay (see Figure 2.2). Our informants claimed that their ancestors migrated to the Namonte Basin region of the Mikea Forest in search of pasture for their cattle. The landscape of the Namonte Basin is characterized by a series of flat, grassy, open lakebeds that partially fill with water during the wet season, interrupted by sandy, forested dunes. Indeed, the grassy lakebeds, permanent water sources, and relatively isolated location of the Namonte Basin would have favored cattle pastoralism for these early Mikea, as it does for Mikea today. The sandy dunes in this part of the Mikea Forest are nearly devoid of wild tubers, and thus would have been a less than ideal habitat for foragers. These early Mikea would have been primarily pastoralists, and only part-time foragers. It is possible that they were using this part of the forest as Drury described, as a place to hide livestock and family during times of warfare or to escape external threats altogether.

The next migrations in chronological order were probably those of a family claiming membership in the Marofoty-Maromalike clan and members of the Tsimitiha clan. Old men told us that these migrations occurred during the lives of their father's grandfathers, which is perhaps the early nineteenth century. These migration stories claim that both the Marofoty and Tsimitiha had previously been Masikoro farmers who lived in villages. The Marofoty had lived in the village called Marofoty, in the Manombo river valley not far from the Andrevola port town (see Figure 2.2). The Tsimitiha had pastured their cattle and tended their gardens in the village of Marolinta, in the Iovy Floodplain on the eastern edge of the Forest. Both moved into the forest and settled in the Namonte Basin where they cohabited with the Ndrambalà, Tohaombe, and Tsimamorike pastoralists already living there. They are credited with having founded two of the major Mikea villages of the nineteenth century, Amboroke (Marofoty) and Namonte (Tsimitiha). Two other villages, Vondrobe and

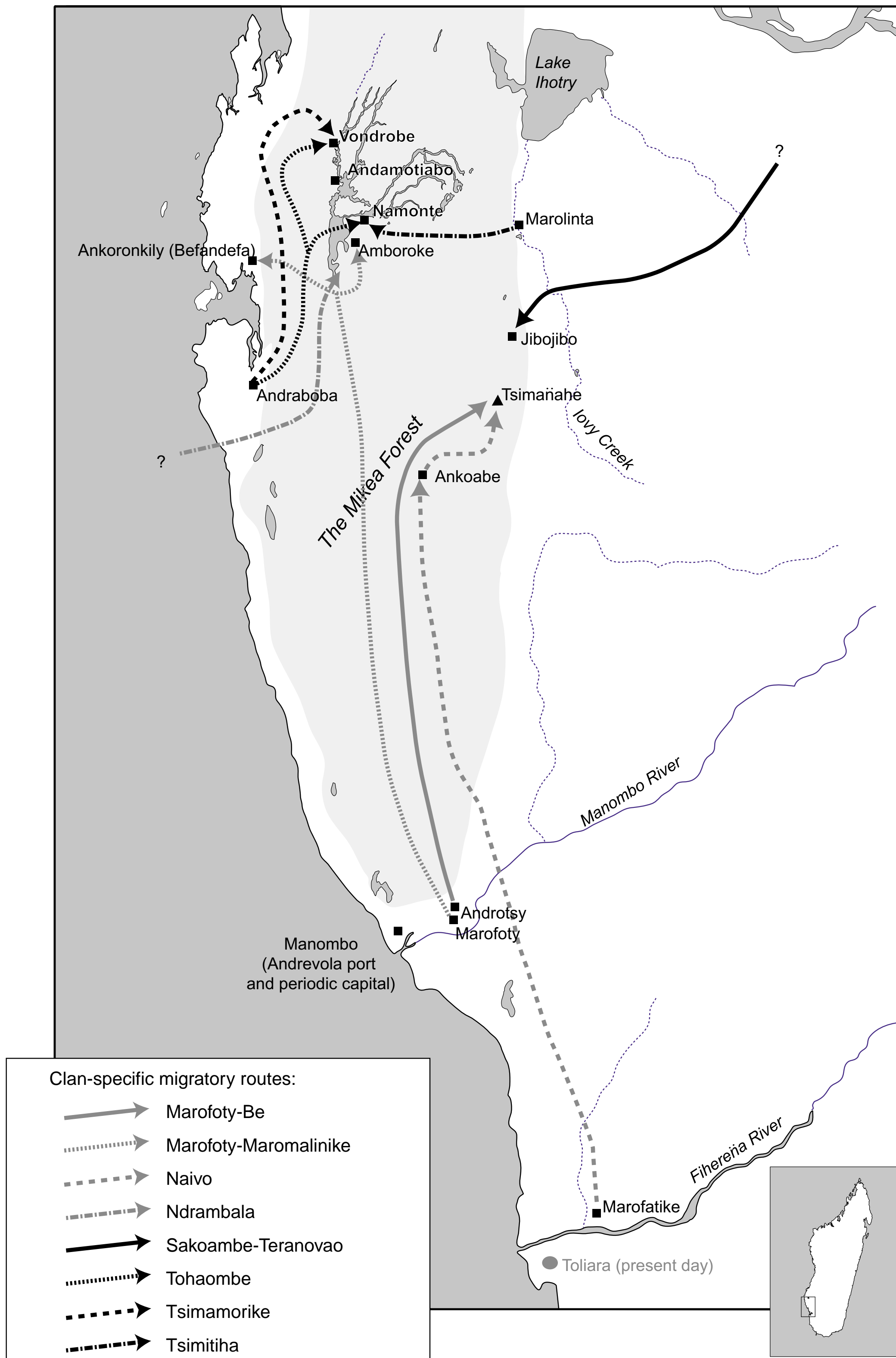

Figure 2.2: Eighteenth and Nineteenth century migrations into the northern half of the Mikea Forest, as discussed in the text.

Andamotiabo, were supposedly founded at about the same time, but so far we have not obtained many histories for the founding of these villages. Informants recalled that these Namonte villages were controlled by powerful diviner-healers or *ambiasa.*[8] The power of these *ambiasa* reportedly attracted many people to move into these villages, to take advantage of protection offered by the *ambiasa*'s magical force. Simultaneously, many Mikea found the authority of the *ambiasa* to be oppressive, which encouraged them to live away in small forest camps.

In the eastern part of the forest, by the nineteenth century there were at least two major Mikea villages. We were told that the village of Ankoabe was settled by members of the Naivo clan who had migrated there from the village of Marofatike on the Fihereña River. Meanwhile, the village of Jibojibo was allegedly founded by members of the Sakoambe-Teranovao clan. An elder from that clan who's grandfather was the first official *chef du village* of Jibojibo at the start of French colonialism in 1898[9] told us that his family believes their ancestors to have formerly lived north of the Mangoky River. It is unclear when these villages were founded. Informants from both clans told us that they were Masikoro as well as Mikea. We also heard the story of a man named Aorano, of the clan Marofoty-Be, who fled his home village of Androtsy in the Manombo river valley near the end of the nineteenth century to marry a Naivo woman at Ankoabe.

According to these oral history accounts, the forest dwelling Mikea of the nineteenth century lived in permanent, sedentary villages, rather than living nomadically through the forest. This stands in stark contrast to the folkloric and popular accounts of Mikea as nomadic primitives. At Namonte, Amboroke, and Ankoabe (and possibly at the other villages, although I was unable to verify) there are stone tombs which informants claim

[8] Diviner-healers in Madagascar are known as *ombiasy* or *ombiasa.* In the dialect of the Mikea of the northern half of the forest as well as older Masikoro, this is pronounced *ambiasa.*

[9] The French military under the command of General Gallieni captured Antananarivo in 1895 and declared the island to be a French colony at that time. However, the Fihereña did not come under direct French control until the last Andrevola kings surrendered in 1898 (Fagereng 1950:158).

predate French colonialism. I visited some stone tombs at Namonte that were old enough that no one today knew who had built them. Despite Stiles' (1998:131) claim to the contrary, these villages have *hazomanga*. The actual sites of the villages appears to have changed rather frequently. For example, the village called "Namonte" was relocated at least four times during the nineteenth century.

The existence of Mikea villages does not necessarily mean that Mikea were full-time sedentary villagers. Informants described a lifestyle in which families often traveled to different parts of the forest to hunt and gather intensively and semi-nomadically for a limited period of time, afterwhich they would return to their home villages. This practice is known today as *mihemotse* and is still practiced by some Mikea, especially during the cool dry season.[10] We were told that many families living within the Namonte Basin tended gardens in the lakebeds, while Ankoabe families farmed (swidden?) plots at a place called Ambato. Also, it should be noted that each clan had at least one remote cattle post/pasture territory (*toetsaombe)*. These Mikea do not appear to have ever been full-time foragers, but have always combined foraging with farming and herding, although reliance on foraging versus farming probably varied among households, seasons, and years, as it does today.

3. Narratives of flight

Now that we know to where these clans moved, the question remains as to why. To that end, I elaborate here on the stories associated with the founding of Amboroke, Namonte, and Vorehe.

The man credited with having founded Amboroke is a Marofoty-Maromalinike named Milahatse, whose father, Redihany, migrated with his wife into the Mikea Forest from his home village of Marofoty in the Manombo river valley. When we asked why, our

[10] Coincidentally, the cool dry season (*asotre*, May-July) is also the season during which researchers and journalists have most often visited the Mikea. Some may have observed families practicing *mihemotse* and assumed that this is how Mikea live throughout the year.

informants, in this case old men who claimed to be Redihany's great grandchildren, claimed that Redihany did not want his wife or children to be taken by the Andrevola's *mpangalaolo*, slavers. Redihany and his wife were said to have left all their possessions, including their livestock, behind them as they fled into the forest, where they wandered nomadically for two years before settling in the region of Andranotsiritse, in the southern part of the Namonte Basin (see Figure 2.2). There they met Ndrambalà pastoralists, with whom they cohabited until the death of Redihany. At that time, Redihany's younger son Rebasiny, who had taken a bride at the village of Ankoronkily (Befandefa), lost his daughter to a crocodile attack. Rebasiny claimed that Andranotsiritse was unsafe due to the crocodiles, and so he decided to move his part of the family to live with his father-in-law at Ankoronkily. Milahatse's family became joking cousins (*mpiziva*) with their Ndrambalà neighbors, and together they moved to Amboroke, where they built their village, Amboroke.[11]

Similar elements may be found in the Namonte origin story. Our informants credited the Tsimitiha as having founded Namonte after having been attacked in their home village of Marolinta by the army (*tafike*) of the Andrevola, who intended to enslave them. The Tsimitiha were allegedly lead by a powerful *ambiasa* diviner-healer. Our informants claimed him as their great-grandfather or great-great grandfather. This man lead his family into the Namonte Basin where they ambushed the pursuing *tafike*, and the *ambiasa* chopped off the head of the *tafike* leader. Having committed this act of violence against the Andrevola, the Tsimitiha could no longer live in Masikoro society. So they settled among the Tohaombe herders they met in the region, and founded Namonte.[12]

The third narrative was harder to come by, although it dated to a more recent era. Informants agreed that the founder of Vorehe was a man named Mandehameñatse of the clan Marofoty-Be, originally from the village of Androtsy (see Figure 2.2). Few informants

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11 "Amboroke" means "unstable place."

12 We were told that "Namonte" was named for the bush called famonte (*Pluchea bojeri*).

knew—or wished to recall—how Mandehameñatse's father got to the region. The current clan head of the Marofoty-Be in Vorehe told us that Mandehameñatse's father's name was Aorano and that he was an expert boar hunter. This was corroborated by an old man from another clan, who added that Aorano was also an *ambiasa*, and that he fled into the forest alone and without possessions. Aorano married a girl from the Naivo clan at Ankoabe, and they lived in her father's pasture territory at the natural wells of Tsimañahe.

In the years following the French invasion, the colonial government attempted to relocate the Malagasy peasantry into discrete, officially-recognized villages. The colonial government appointed a prominent village member to be the *chef du village,* the officially-recognized leader and the go-between between the peasants and the next level in the power structure, the *chef du canton* (and above this, the *chef du district*, who was usually a Frenchman). Our informants claimed that the colonial government sent *piripiza*—partisans, Malagasy who were friendly to the colonial government—and soldiers (*miaramila*) to remote villages such as Ankoabe and Tsimañahe to bully these people into moving into officially recognized villages. The Naivo people of Ankoabe plus Aorano's family of Marofoty were eventually relocated to Jibojibo. Once there, some time after Aorano's death, his son Mandehameñatse disputed with Jibojibo's *chef du village.* Mandehameñatse decided to relocate his family into their pasture territory, a place called Ambaho. Eventually, most of the rest of Jibojibo's residents followed, and Ambaho became Vorehe.

A common feature in these Mikea migration narratives is that informants remember their ancestors as having *voluntarily* left the Masikoro world and the agropastoral economy in order to resist the demands of the Andrevola. Redihany and his wife were said to have been escaping slavery threats in the Manombo valley, the headquarters of the Andrevola. The Tsimitiha practiced a very active form of resistance by chopping of the head of one of the Andrevola's military leaders. In these cases, Mikea today seem to idealize their ancestors as political freedom fighters, quite like the forest dwellers visited by Drury who wished to stay out of the way of local politics.

However, there may have been other, less noble or flattering reasons that people chose to move into the forest, which storytellers today have chosen not to remember. When we asked why Aorano left Androtsy, our Marofoty informants said that they did not know. An old man from another clan suggested that perhaps Aorano was escaping witchcraft accusations. Why else would an *ambiasa*, normally a valued member of a community, flee into the forest without possessions? This informant elaborated his point by saying that Mandehameñatse himself had been accused of witchcraft, which is the origin of the name Vorehe (from *Vorike*, black magic), and that it was rumored that his father was of the same ilk.

There are likely other reasons that Masikoro or Vezo may have fled into the forest which may have been selectively forgotten, such as food shortage or disinheritance. Both are sensitive issues in the region today, the discussion of which often embarrassed my informants. Foraging and farming are risky activities in the Mikea Forest, as the rest of this dissertation discusses.

F. Epilogue: Colonialism, postcolonialism, and the Mikea today

The distribution of self-identified Mikea today appears to be largely a result of French colonialism. As discussed above, our oral historians told us that with the start of French colonialism, rural populations were bullied by *piripiza* and *miaramila* into relocating in officially chartered villages. Residents of the major Mikea villages of the nineteenth century—Namonte, Amboroke, Vondrobe, Andamotiabo, Ankoabe, and Jibojibo—were encouraged (often by force) to abandon forest villages and become farmers. Only Namonte and Jibojibo were officially chartered by the colonial regime; the other villages were abandoned. Of those people who did not move to Namonte or Jibojibo, some chose to live semi-nomadically in the forest and to resist French colonialism in the same way they had defied the Andrevola in previous generations.

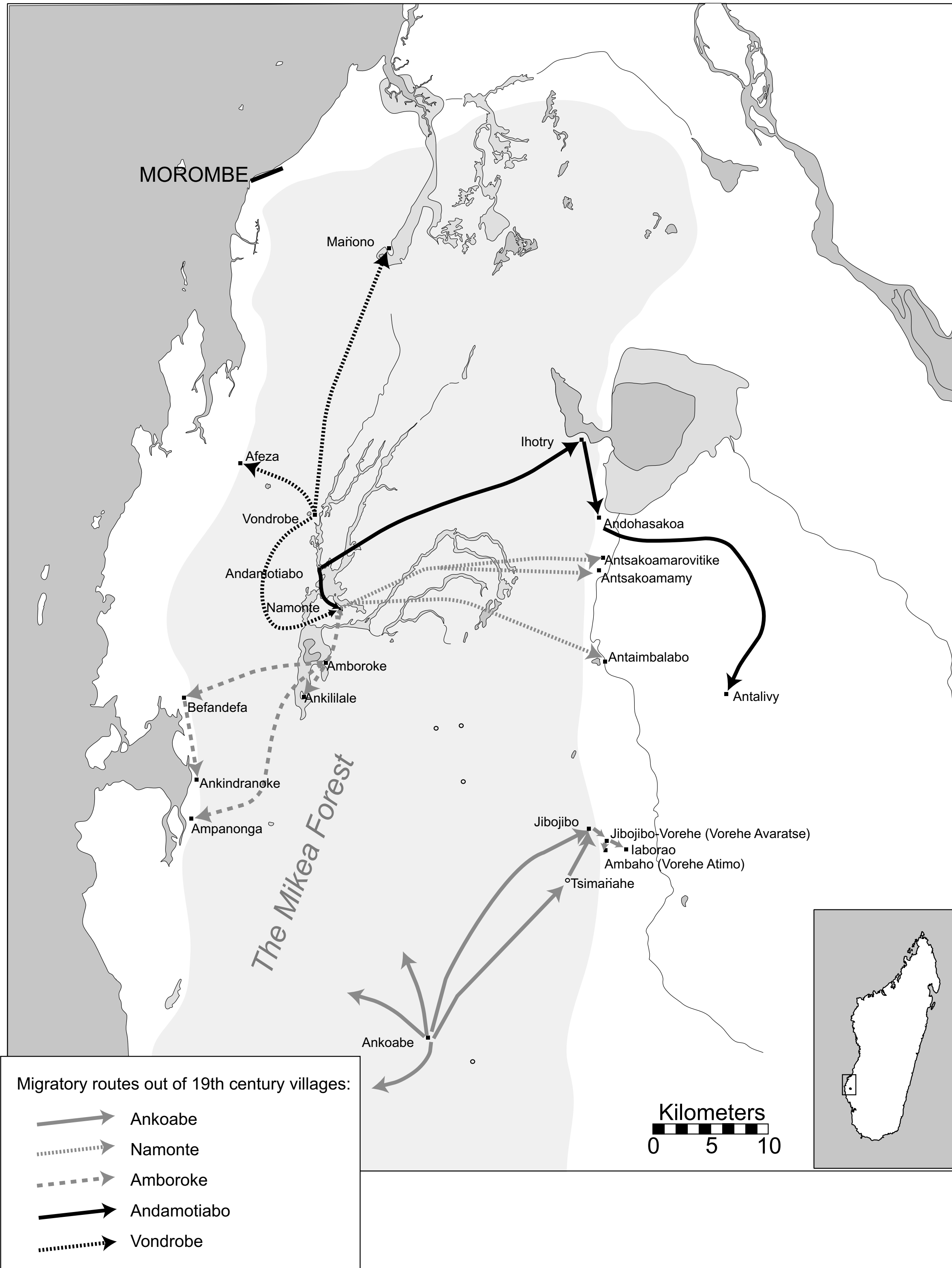

Figure 2.3: Migration routes during the early twentieth century.

Other Mikea went on to found the series of agropastoral villages that ring the northern half of the Mikea Forest today (see Figure 2.3). The people from Vondrobe established two new villages, Afeza and Mañono. Andamotiabo people founded the villages of Ihotry, Andohasakoa, and Antalivy. Namonte people founded the villages of Antaimbalabo, Antsakoamamy, and Antsakoamarovitike in the Iovy floodplain. Amboroke people founded the coastal villages of Ankindranoke and Ampanongà, as well as Ankililale. Ankoabe and Jibojibo people founded the village of Vorehe, as well as Iaborao. In most of these cases, they acquired an official charter from the French *chef du district* located in Amboibe.

Today, each of these villages is quite large—Vorehe has about 1200 people, while villages like Andohasakoa, Ihotry, Mañono, Ankindranoke, and Ampanongà have 400 to 800 residents. Many of them still self-identify as Mikea under some social circumstances, even though some forage only rarely, because their ancestors lived in one of the nineteenth century forest villages (Yount, Tsiazonera, and Tucker 2000).

Informants from several of these villages agreed that as the twentieth century elapsed, the people who had chosen to remain in Namonte maintained a close relationship with their friends and kin that had dispersed to the new villages. Namonte remained an important place largely because of the personality and magical power of Namonte's resident *ambiasa*, a man named Tsiasinda (he is the grandson of Namonte's founder, the man who beheaded the *tafike* leader). Tsiasinda played an interesting role in local politics. On the one hand, he was the official *chef du village* for Namonte and a representative of the French colonial government. He is remembered as having strictly enforced colonial rules; he personally collected the head tax and cattle tax from Namonte residents and delivered them to the *chef du canton* at Befandrea. He made sure that every Namonte resident participated in the canton's mandatory public labor projects. On the other hand, Tsiasinda actively resisted colonialism. His magic is said to have been particularly effective against Vazaha—Europeans and their colonial agents. If Vazaha failed to respect his authority and autonomy, he could call upon the forest itself to attack them. The offending Vazaha would get lost in the forest, attacked by

crocodiles, or bombarded by birds. In one particularly colorful story, Tsiasinda's magic caused a group of offensive soldiers to confuse rough-barked *sakoa* trees for attractive young women, with humiliating consequences. Tsiasinda's magic symbolized the power of tradition, the forest, and resistance—the power of Mikea-ness. Many Mikea viewed Namonte symbolically as their "capital." Tsiasinda died in 1984.

Meanwhile, those families who had resisted colonialism from the start grew increasingly socially distant from their kin in the new villages. While village Mikea gained clothing, oxcarts, and new agricultural techniques from the colonial government, their forest brethren still wore traditional loin clothes made from tree bark and gunny, and many relied almost entirely on foraging to make their living. The social division increased until after the end of colonialism in 1960. By this point, Mikea in villages like Vorehe were culturally and economically undifferentiated from other Masikoro; they wore cotton clothing, cultivated manioc and vegetables, owned herds of cattle, and built oxcarts. They practiced limited forms of market exchange—they sold agricultural produce to Pakistani merchants and wild silk to Merina collectors. Mikea at Vorehe derided the unwashed forest-dwellers that came to their village at night to trade *tambotrike* for tobacco, even though they were aware that they shared recent ancestors with them from Ankoabe. These forest-dwelling Mikea may be the same people that the missionary called Nenitoa told me she had encountered in the early 1980's. She reportedly found unclothed, unbathed foragers who did not cultivate and suffered frequent food shortage living in temporary forest settlements near Vorehe.

Vorehe has grown considerably since then, having perhaps doubled or tripled in size. I was told that many of the new Vorehe residents were the forest-dwellers of the 1980's. Today they appear to have assimilated with their village-based kin. Kelly and Poyer have described to me that in 1993 and 1994 Vorehe people made social distinctions between new and old residents. One new part of town was referred to derisively as the "Mikea quarter" while residents of the older parts of town denied that they were Mikea at all. My impression in 1998 and 1999 was that these social distinctions have been largely forgotten. Whenever I

mentioned the “Mikea quarter” people usually informed me that the whole village was Mikea. I found that all Vorehe residents were willing—or even proud—to label themselves as Mikea. I was told that people from what Poyer and Kelly had called the Mikea quarter were part of the same families as lifelong Vorehe residents, and so were no different from anyone else in town. My Vorehe friends were unable to point out to me which individuals were lifelong villagers and which were settled forest dwellers.

Since the 1980’s there has been a major shift from village life back to forest residence. This shift is related at least partially to rise of the maize market. Pakistani merchants began to purchase maize in the mid 1980’s. Mikea have returned to their old foraging or pasture territories in the forest to transform them into *hatsake*. While even my oldest informants insisted that *hatsake* was practiced by their parents, the *hatsake* of the 1980’s were much larger than before. The forest was already a patchwork of woods and anthropogenic clearings, but now the clearings became larger and more numerous.

Most Mikea households today maintain a formal residence in one of the large Mikea villages outside the forest (or at Namonte or Ankililale) and then have bark huts in one or more forest camps where they live while cultivating maize and foraging. Some households spend only a few months each year in their forest camps, while others spend almost the entire year living in the forest.

Ironically, it is those Mikea who remained at Namonte who are often the object of villagers’ derision today. These Mikea never left the forest at all and so they are often looked down upon by Mikea in villages as being uneducated and ignorant of the outside world. The power of tradition, the forest, and resistance that had once given Tsiasinda his political authority is now looked down upon by mission-influenced villagers who instead skeptically view Tsiasinda and Namonte folks as primitive, backwards, and superstitious. Mikea from Behisatse and Amondralambo, the subjects of this dissertation, often suffer this prejudice when they visit Vorehe.

G. Conclusions

The Mikea of southwestern Madagascar are reputed by many to be primitive, isolated foragers who have maintained the same way of life since the beginning of time. For this to be true within a "stage" based unilinear-evolutionary model, Mikea must have ancestors with a sturdy claim of antiquity, especially since Madagascar was not peopled until relatively recently, well after the worldwide spread of agriculture. Many have assumed that Mikea were descended from Vazimba. Vazimba is a complicated topic in the folklore of Madagascar, and it is very difficult to know who they were. The racial stereotypes associated with Vazimba—short, dark skinned, frizzy haired—appear to have been invented by nineteenth century Malagasy and European historians influenced by Victorian notions of progressive social evolution. The idea that the Vazimba were African pygmies with stone-age technology is not supported by the archaeological record, which has yet to locate Neolithic forager sites. Historical relationships between Vazimba and Mikea may possibly have occurred, but this has yet to be demonstrated.

The Mikea themselves, when asked, described their ancestors much as Drury described the forest-dwellers of Androy—as farmers from the surrounding countryside who chose forest residence so as to escape the politics, tribute obligations, and threats of violence and slavery that were the caused by petty nobles and polities who competed for power. Although Mikea oral narratives tend to highlight the theme of political resistance, it is also likely that people migrated into the forest to escape interpersonal conflicts, food shortage, and disinheritance.

While folklore and the popular media have presented the Mikea as pristine nomadic foragers with no knowledge of agriculture or village life, the ethnohistoric evidence suggests that most Mikea have always participated in a diversified economy with village residence. Every Mikea person whom I asked reported that their ancestors originated in one of six villages within the Mikea Forest during the nineteenth century. I heard stories about each of these villages that involved cattle herding and gardening. Ironically, the pure foragers

encountered by missionaries and others in the twentieth century may be a recent relict of colonialism rather than of the Pleistocene. These Mikea, and others in previous centuries, abandoned farming temporarily at times of political stress, but they were certainly familiar with agriculture and herding. There may have never been Mikea who were ignorant of the agropastoral world of their neighbors outside the forest.

Mikea ethnohistory holds intriguing mysteries for future research. First, did Mikea always buffer subsistence risk through diversification, or did they have other means? How did Mikea subsistence strategies change with the introduction of New World crops? If Mikea are defined as a cultural group by forest residence, where were the edges of the forest in the past, and how permanent a physical and social boundary did people consider this to be? How did life differ between Mikea forest villages versus Masikoro villages in the savanna? To what degree did sociopolitical stratification develop in the forest villages? To what degree were Mikea integrated, socially and economically, with those living outside the forest? How long have people occupied the Mikea Forest? Such questions deserve ethnohistorical and archaeological attention.