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**Slavery and Post-Slavery in Madagascar: An Overview**  
*Denis Regnier and Dominique Somda*

As Igor Kopytoff has well shown, historians were the first to document the specificities of African and Asian systems of slavery in the mid of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists at that time were reluctant to tackle this subject since they were preoccupied with rehabilitating the much-maligned reputation of the people they studied. As their unease with the topic faded away, a number of pioneering studies appeared that dealt frontally with slavery.<sup>2</sup> Their authors were primarily concerned with the question of a universal definition of slavery, i.e. one that would be applicable to non-Western societies, as well as with the local definitions of slave status and the reconstruction of past indigenous systems of slavery; they also discussed issues such as the Marxian approach to slavery as a mode of production and the cultural variations in systems of slavery. In the mid nineties, however, the research agenda on slavery was significantly impacted and reshaped by a major UNESCO project, launched in 1994 and called ‘The Slave Route’, which supported the worldwide organization of academic conferences and exhibitions on slavery and the slave trade, and the publication of books on the subject.<sup>3</sup> The interests of anthropologists and historians shifted during this period from questions of slavery as an aspect of indigenous social organization and a mode of production to questions about the cultural implications of enslavement and the trade, especially in the construction of social memory and identity. Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> Igor Kopytoff, “Slavery,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 207-30.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); James Watson, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Anthony Reid, ed., *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982); Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> On the goals and achievements of the Slave Route project, see UNESCO, *The Slave Route: 1994-2014: The Road Travelled* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014).

during this period ethnographies and historical accounts dealing with slavery increasingly focused on its remembrance.<sup>4</sup>

These global trends have also been followed in Malagasy and Indian Ocean scholarship. In Madagascar, two major conferences were organized as a direct consequence of the UNESCO project: the first, held in Antananarivo in 1996, commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the colonial abolition and was mostly concerned with documenting past slavery and its legacy in the present; the second, held in Toamasina in 1999, addressed the topic of slavery and the slave trade on the East Coast.<sup>5</sup> During these meetings it became apparent that the scientific study of slavery and post-slavery raised specific concerns in Madagascar because of the concomitance of the colonial conquest (1895) and the abolition (1896), which means that both events are often closely associated, not least because Malagasy slavery provided a convenient moral justification for the French takeover.<sup>6</sup>

In 2004, Sudel Fuma, then holder of a UNESCO chair at the Université de La Réunion, launched a regional project called ‘La route de l’esclave et de l’engagé dans l’océan Indien’,

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005); Ana L. Araujo, *Public Memory of Slavery: Victims and Perpetrators in the South Atlantic* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2010); Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene and Martin A. Klein, eds., *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade: Volume 1: The Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> These conferences resulted in the publication of two books: Ignace Rakoto, ed., *L’esclavage à Madagascar. Aspects historiques et résurgences contemporaines* (Antananarivo: Institut de Civilisations – Musée d’Art et Archéologie, 1997); Ignace Rakoto and Eugène Mangalaza, eds. *La route des esclaves. Système servile et traite d’esclaves dans l’est malgache* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Pierre Domenichini and Bakoly Domenichini-Ramiaramanana, “L’ ‘esclavage’ dans la société malgache,” in *Formes extrêmes de dépendance. Contributions à l’étude de l’esclavage en Asie du sud-est*, ed. Georges Condominas (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1998), 399-410; Gabriel Rantoandro, “L’esclavage comme enjeu de la mémoire à Madagascar,” in *Le Monde créole. Peuplement, sociétés et condition Humaine XVII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles. Mélanges offerts à Hubert Gerbeau*, ed. Jacques Weber (Paris: Les Indes savantes), 369-83.

which focused on collecting oral memories.<sup>7</sup> Another important aim of the project was to foster the development of a ‘roots and heritage’ tourism around significant sites of memory in the islands of the southwestern Indian Ocean. Many African countries, on both western and eastern coasts, have tried to develop the potential for tourism of slave trade’s sites, the most famous case being probably that of the Island of Gorée in Senegal.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite the geographic proximity of Reunion and Mauritius, which are home to a large number of slaves descendants tracing their origins to Madagascar, the efforts deployed by the UNESCO project – especially in the South-east of Madagascar, near Tôlañaro (Fort-Dauphin) – have not yet materialized in noticeable slavery-related touristic developments. Although this question would require further investigation, we believe that the relative failure of these attempts at establishing memorial sites in Madagascar is linked to the widespread ‘silence’ on slavery, a topic to which we will come back.

Our main goal in this chapter is to place post-slavery issues in Madagascar into a historical and comparative framework. We do so by first highlighting the particular significance of slavery and the slave trade in the history of Madagascar, especially during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the importance of the distinction between the two abolitions of 1877 and 1896. We then draw from a number of ethnographic studies to frame comparative questions on Malagasy post-slavery, in particular questions about the condition of slave descendants and the persistence of their discrimination in present-day Madagascar. The overview we provide does not aim at being exhaustive; rather, we seek to identify a set of questions that are core issues in

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<sup>7</sup> Sudel Fuma, ed., *Mémoire orale et esclavage dans les îles du sud-ouest de l’océan Indien. Silences, oublis, reconnaissance* (Saint-Denis: Université de la Réunion, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Other renowned sites include Elmina Castle in Ghana, Ouidah in Benin and Stone Town (Zanzibar) in Tanzania.

the study of Malagasy post-slavery, and to indicate questions that remain controversial, unanswered or understudied.

### **Slavery, Slave Trading and the Two Abolitions**

Slaves have been traded in the maritime networks of the western Indian Ocean for at least 2000 years.<sup>9</sup> In Madagascar, the existence of slavery may date back to the first Southeast Asian settlements, which probably occurred between the 4th and 6th century.<sup>10</sup> Scholars seeking to reconstruct the early occupation of the island find it plausible that slaves were among the South-East Asian settlers, since ship crews from Indonesia were probably made of people with different social statuses and may have included slaves who were left behind in the semi-permanent settlements of this remote colony.<sup>11</sup> If not earlier, slaves probably made an important part of the population of Madagascar as early as in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. By that date, two main commercial systems existed in the western Indian Ocean. One was in the hands of Muslim merchants from the Persian Gulf, southern Arabia and the Swahili coast who traded along the shores of East

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<sup>9</sup> On these networks, see Philippe Beaujard, "L'Afrique de l'Est, les Comores et Madagascar dans le système-monde avant le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Madagascar et l'Afrique. Entre identité insulaire et appartenances historiques*, ed. Didier Nativel and Faranirina V. Rajaonah (Paris: Karthala, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> On early human settlements in Madagascar, see Robert E. Dewar and Alison F. Richard, "Madagascar: A history of arrivals, what happened, and will happen next," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012): 495-517. The questions surrounding the first arrival of populations from Southeast Asia in Madagascar are still debated. On recent archaeological discoveries suggesting that hunter-gatherers from East Africa already occupied the island by 2000 BC, see Robert E. Dewar, Chantal Radimilahy, Henry T. Wright, Zenobia Jacobs, Gwendolyn O. Kelly and Francesco Berna, "Stone tools and foraging in northern Madagascar challenge Holocene extinction models," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 31 (2013): 12583-8. The first Southeast Asian settlers probably reached Madagascar during the first millennium AD but the exact date is controversial. In any case, most scholars agree that Southeast Asians had established permanent settlements by the 9<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. See Solofo Randrianja and Stephen Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 17-43; Alexander Adelaar, "Towards an integrated theory about the Indonesian migrations to Madagascar," in *Ancient Human Migrations: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Peter N. Peregrine, Ilia Peiros and Marcus Feldman (Salt Lake City, UH: University of Utah Press, 2009), 149-72.

<sup>11</sup> See Alexander Adelaar, "Borneo as a cross-roads for comparative Austronesian linguistics," in *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Peter Bellwood, James Fox and Darrell Tryon (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1995), 83-88.

Africa and in the northern Indian Ocean, and the other was in the hands of the Southeast Asians who sailed to the Comoros and Madagascar. It is likely that slaves circulated in both systems, since during this period Muslim merchants sent East African slaves to southern Arabia and the Gulf, while the South-East Asians probably used slave labor in the iron industry of their settlements.<sup>12</sup>

The arrival of Portuguese vessels in the Indian Ocean in 1488 marked the beginning of a new era of slave trading, one that was going to supersede, in intensity and extension, the ancient Indian Ocean trade.<sup>13</sup> As far as Madagascar is concerned, one of the most important events in this era of European slave trading is the transformation that occurred in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a new regional network started to export slaves from Madagascar to the Mascarene Islands. According to Pier Larson, between 1770 and 1820 highland Madagascar supplied about 70,000 slaves to the French colonies of Ile de France (Mauritius) and Ile Bourbon (Reunion). Even though the average population loss to export slavery may seem rather low compared with that of other African countries in the Atlantic, this export slave trade provoked nonetheless “profound, economic, and cultural dislocations that flowed from practices of enslavement and highland Madagascar’s links to a global economy of mercantile capitalism.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Claude Allibert, “Migration austronésienne et mise en place de la civilisation malgache. Lectures croisées: linguistique, archéologie, génétique, anthropologie culturelle” *Diogène* 218, no. 2 (2007): 6-17.

<sup>13</sup> On European slave trading, see Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Pier Larson, “A census of slaves exported from central Madagascar to the Mascarenes between 1775 and 1820,” in *L’esclavage à Madagascar. Aspects historiques et résurgences contemporaines*, ed. Ignace Rakoto (Antananarivo: Institut de Civilisations – Musée d’Art et d’Archéologie, 1997), 121-45. On Madagascar and the slave trade see also Jean-Marie Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Office de la recherche scientifique et technique outre-mer, 1974); Gilbert Ratsivalaka, “La traite européenne des esclaves en Imerina au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Tantara* 7-8 (1979): 113-35; James C. Armstrong (1984), “Madagascar and the slave trade in the seventeenth century,” *Omalay Sy Anio* 17-20 (1983-84): 211-33; Gwyn Campbell, “Madagascar and the slave trade, 1810-1895,” *Journal of African History* 22 (1981): 203-27; R.J. Barendse, “Slaving on the Malagasy coast, 1640-1700,” in *Cultures of Madagascar: Ebb and Flow of Influences*, ed. Sandra Evers and Marc Spindler (Leiden: International Institute for Asian Studies, 1995), 137-55; Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History*

The demand from the Mascarene Islands also affected the coasts, not only the West Coast ruled by Sakalava kings (allied with Muslim merchants) that dominated the slave trade in the late 17th and early 18th century,<sup>15</sup> but also the East coast ports that had provided slaves for the Mascarenes long before the Merina expansion in the second half of the 18th century. In the South East, around Fort-Dauphin, Frenchmen established slave trading posts before being forced out by the Merina army in 1825.<sup>16</sup> The North and North East coast remained nonetheless the most active competitors of Merina slave suppliers. Between 1785 and 1820, Sakalava and Betsimisaraka launched slaving raids in northern Madagascar, the Comoros and the coast of Mozambique.<sup>17</sup>

In 1820, a treaty signed between the British and the Merina king Radama I made the export slave trade illegal.<sup>18</sup> This led to the development of an illegal trade network through which slaves continued to be shipped from East Africa.<sup>19</sup> A number of these slaves were disembarked on the western coast of Madagascar, from where they were further shipped to the Mascarenes.<sup>20</sup> Following the abolition of slavery in Mauritius (1835) and Reunion (1848), slaves were replaced in these islands' plantations by indentured laborers from the North-West of

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*of Imperial Madagascar, 1750-1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 213-42.

<sup>15</sup> Gwyn Campbell, "The structure of the trade in Madagascar 1750-1810," *The international journal of African historical studies* 26 (1993): 132.

<sup>16</sup> Dominique Somda, "Et le réel serait passé. Le secret de l'esclavage et l'imagination de la société (Anôsy, sud de Madagascar)" (PhD diss., Université de Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 2009), 28.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Vérin, "Histoire ancienne du nord-est de Madagascar," *Taloha*, 5 (1972): 155-58; Edward Alpers, "Madagascar and Mozambique in the nineteenth century: The era of Sakalava raids (1800-1820)," *Omalasy anio* 5-6 (1977): 37-40; Campbell, "The structure of the trade," 140. On the connections between the Sakalava and the Betsimisaraka in the context of the slave trade, see Stephen Ellis, "Tom and Toakafo: The Betsimisaraka kingdom and state formation in Madagascar, 1715-1750," *Journal of African History* 48 (2007): 439-55.

<sup>18</sup> Radama I's 1817 discourse proclaiming the abolition of the slave trade can be found in James Sibree, *Madagascar and its People* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1870), 558-9.

<sup>19</sup> Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 125.

<sup>20</sup> Gwyn Campbell, "The East African slave trade, 1861-1895: The southern complex," *The international journal of African historical studies*, 22 (1989): 25.

Madagascar.<sup>21</sup> In the island, internal slavery grew in significance, especially in the highlands, as Merina rulers launched wars to expand or defend their kingdom. During these wars, Merina soldiers brought captives back to Imerina, which they could not send to the Mascarenes any more. At the same time, the importation of African slaves continued and peaked in the second half of the 19th, due to an increased demand for labor in Imerina because free men were mobilized in the wars.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slavery kept playing an important role in Madagascar, especially for the economic development of the Merina kingdom, and a market for slaves continued to flourish until the abolition of 1896.<sup>23</sup>

In most Malagasy societies a number of servile statuses existed, which intersected with strikingly different living conditions. In most Malagasy kingdoms, royal servants and slaves existed alongside commoners' slaves, although in most cases the latter seem to have been the privilege of the wealthy only. Interestingly, a few kingdoms seem to have not allowed slavery.<sup>24</sup> The different servile statuses defined unequal rights to marriage, property, inheritance, etc. The condition of slaves seems to have varied greatly; while some slaves and servants have been known to achieve fame, glory and wealth, for most of them the terms of endearment and kinship used by their masters served only to mask the harsh conditions and abject poverty in which they found themselves. It must be noted on this matter that European observers often stressed the 'mild' character of slavery in Madagascar, as they compared it with the other forms of slavery

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<sup>21</sup> Campbell, "Madagascar and the slave trade," 212.

<sup>22</sup> Campbell, "The East African slave trade," 7.

<sup>23</sup> There is some disagreement among scholars on the importance of slavery in the expansion of the Merina kingdom. Some suggest that its economy relied essentially on slave labor, while others argue that slavery played a significant role only in its early economic development, and that at a later stage the Merina kingdom relied more on *fanompoana* labor than on slavery. See Campbell, *An Economic History*, 113-22.

<sup>24</sup> The Antankarana rulers, for example, did not own slaves or use servants. See Laurent Berger, "Les raisins de la colère des ancêtres Zafinifotsy (Ankaraña, Madagascar) : L'anthropologie au défi de la mondialisation," (PhD diss., École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006), 577.



they were familiar with, namely Ancient (i.e., Greek and Roman) and plantation slavery in the New World.<sup>25</sup> Their judgment, however, was never corroborated by former slaves' narratives. To the contrary, contemporary anthropological accounts often insist on the abjection, humiliation and terror inherent to slavery.<sup>26</sup>

The differences between categories of slaves were reflected in rich terminologies.<sup>27</sup> In Imerina, for example, commoners' slaves were called *andevo* and distinguished from the royal slaves called *Tandapa mainty* (Tsiarondahy) and from the royal servants (Manisotra, Manendy, Antehiroka).<sup>28</sup> In Anôsy, where only members of the royal family were allowed to own slaves (*ondevo*) and to have servants, the servile population, called *tandonaky*, was divided into three categories: royal slaves (*tôva*) and royal servants (*mpitako* and *tsariky*).<sup>29</sup> Everywhere in Madagascar such past distinctions are being forgotten and increasingly replaced by a single category that refers to all slave descendants, for example 'blacks' (*mainty*) in Imerina and 'unclean people' (*olo tsy madio*) among the Betsileo. These categories have their binary counterparts – i.e., 'whites' (*fotsy*) and 'clean people' (*olo madio*) – that are used to refer to all non-slave descendants.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For European accounts on Malagasy slavery in the late 19th century, see for example Sibree, *Madagascar and its People*; Ed.-C. André, *De l'esclavage à Madagascar* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1899); Jean-Baptiste Piolet, *Madagascar et les Hova: Description, organisation, histoire* (Paris: Delagrave, 1895), 99-102; William Cousins, "The abolition of slavery in Madagascar, with some remarks on Malagasy slavery generally," *Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine* 5, no. 21 (1896): 446-50; Joseph Sewell, *Remarks on Slavery in Madagascar* (London: Elliot Stock, 1876).

<sup>26</sup> David Graeber, "Painful memories," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 4 (1997): 374-400; Somda, "Et le reel serait passé."

<sup>27</sup> Louis Molet, "Le vocabulaire concernant l'esclavage dans l'ancien Madagascar," in *Perspectives nouvelles sur le passé de l'Afrique noire et de Madagascar* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1974), 45-65.

<sup>28</sup> Gustave Julien, *Institutions sociales et politiques de Madagascar* (Paris: Guilmoto, 1908), 177.

<sup>29</sup> Somda, "Et le réel serait passé," 272-75.

<sup>30</sup> Janine Ramamonjisoa, "'Blancs et noirs', les dimensions de l'inégalité sociale. Documents socio-linguistiques," *Cahiers des Sciences Sociales* 1 (1984): 39-77; Denis Regnier, "Clean people, unclean people: The essentialisation of 'slaves' among the southern Betsileo of Madagascar," *Social Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2015): 152-68.

In continuity with Radama's decision, under external pressure, to forbid the export slave trade, two abolitions of slavery took place by the end of the 19th century. The Merina Queen Ranavalona II decided the first abolition in 1877. It was a partial emancipation insofar it concerned exclusively the Masombika, also called Makoa, a category that comprised all the slaves that had been imported from East Africa and their descendants. The Queen gave them land and the status of free subjects in the Merina kingdom.<sup>31</sup> The French colonial government decided the second abolition: a decree freed all the slaves without exception in 1896. These two abolitions were very different with respect to why and how they freed the slaves. They also had very different consequences. In our view, it is important to keep these differences in mind in order to understand the historical trajectories of former slaves and the current conditions of slave descendants in Madagascar.

Another important point to keep in mind is the specificity of the Malagasy islanders' attitudes towards slavery and slave descendants, in comparison with those present on the African continent. Although a number of similarities and regularities exist, such as the tendency to avoid marrying slave descendants or to silence personal histories of slavery, there are also specific features that, to our knowledge, are hardly found in continental Africa. This seems to be the case of the view, widespread in the island but seemingly absent on the continent, that slaves and their descendants are deeply polluted and polluting persons, a point to which we will come back. It has been suggested that such a way of conceptualizing slavery might be a legacy of the Southeast Asian settlers of Madagascar, who had come from Indianized regions of insular Southeast Asia and had presumably brought with them a strong sensitivity to the ritual pollution caused by

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<sup>31</sup> See Georges-Sully Chapus, trans. "Lettre du Rev. J. Richardson au sujet de la libération des Mozambiques," *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache*, 18 (1935): 79-83. Jean-Pierre Domenichini and Bakoly Ramiaramanana, "1877: une abolition de l'esclavage?," in *L'esclavage à Madagascar. Aspects historiques et résurgences contemporaines*, ed. Ignace Rakoto (Antananarivo: Institut de Civilisations – Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie, 1997), 233-45.

enslavement. True or not, this hypothesis points to the fact that Madagascar is an Afro-Asian island with a complex history of cultural influences. When dealing with slavery and post-slavery issues we therefore need to take into account the full range of possible influences, and compare the Malagasy views with those found in both continental Africa and insular Southeast Asia.

### **Comparing the Trajectories of Former Slaves and their Descendants**

In this article we are not primarily concerned with the history of Malagasy slavery but with post-slavery issues: our focus is on the legacies of slavery and abolition in contemporary Madagascar. These legacies must be understood in the light of the transformation, outlined above, that took place in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The commoditization of slaves, the increase of the number of slaves in the Malagasy population (especially in the highlands), the perpetual risk of enslavement and the role played by slavery in the political history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been accompanied, almost paradoxically, by an apparent effacement of explicit memories relating to these traumatic histories, as if it were a case of collective amnesia. Yet these “painful memories” are present, albeit “somewhat veiled and indirect,”<sup>32</sup> both among free and slave descendants, and are often implicit in ritual symbolism as well as in historical narratives.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to note on that matter that, compared to other countries with a comparable traumatic history of slavery and in spite of a steady scholarly interest, academic conferences on slavery took place only very late on the island, as a consequence of the UNESCO project

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<sup>32</sup> David Graeber, “Painful memories,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 4 (1997): 375.

<sup>33</sup> Pier Larson, “Reconsidering trauma, identity, and the African diaspora: Enslavement and historical memory in nineteenth-century highland Madagascar,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1999): 339.

mentioned above.<sup>34</sup> It is also noteworthy that, according to some who attended these first meetings, they were emotionally charged events: even though they were scholars, many Malagasy found it difficult to talk about these issues. If anything, these academic meetings showed clearly that slavery was still a very sensitive topic, more than a century after abolition.

It is no surprise that the legacies of slavery and abolition have been investigated first and foremost in Imerina, despite the fact that slavery was also extremely important in other regions, most notably in the development of the Sakalava kingdom on the western coast and the Betsimisaraka kingdom in the East.<sup>35</sup> An obvious reason for this concentration of academic attention is that Imerina, as explained above, once heavily relied on slaves for its economy and in consequence it had the largest number of slaves in its population on the eve of abolition.<sup>36</sup> In comparison to what has already been done for the Merina case, the study of post-slavery in the rest of Madagascar has remained largely overlooked until recently. Yet ethnographic accounts indicate that in all the other Malagasy societies the condition of slave descendants would also be worthy of close attention, irrespective of whether these societies are small-scale and never

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<sup>34</sup> For comments on these conferences, see Hubert Gerbeau, “L’esclavage dans les sociétés du sud-ouest de l’océan indien à partir des années 1960. Permanences, rémanences, resurgences,” *Revue des Mascareignes* 4 (2002): 179-96; Rantoandro, “L’esclavage comme enjeu.”

<sup>35</sup> On slavery and its legacy in Imerina see, among others, Ramamonjisoa, “Blancs et noirs”; Lolona Razafindralambo, “La notion d’esclave en Imerina (Madagascar): Ancienne servitude et aspects actuels de la dépendance,” (PhD diss., Université de Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 2003); Lolona Razafindralambo, “Inégalité, exclusion, représentation sur les hautes terres centrales de Madagascar,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 3, nos. 179-80 (2005): 879-904; David Graeber, *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); Lolona Razafindralambo, “Esclavage et inégalités. Entre constructions sociales et différences ‘naturelles’,” in *Esclavage et libération à Madagascar*, ed. Ignace Rakoto and Sylvain Urfer (Paris: Karthala, 2014), 95-106. On the importance of slavery for the Sakalava kingdoms see in particular Gillian Feeley-Harnik, “The king’s men in Madagascar: Slavery, citizenship, and Sakalava monarchy,” *Africa* 52 (1982): 31-50; Sophie Goedefroit, *A l’ouest de Madagascar. Les Sakalava du Menabe* (Paris: Karthala, 1998); Michael Lambek, “Revolted but not revolting: Reflections on the Sakalava division of labour and forms of subjectivation,” *Slavery and Abolition* 25, no. 2 (2004): 108-19.

<sup>36</sup> Estimates vary between 50 percent (Bloch) and about half of this figure (Campbell). See Maurice Bloch, *Placing the Dead: Tombs, Ancestral Villages, and Kinship Organization in Madagascar* (London: Seminar Press, 1971), 35; Campbell, *The Rise and Fall*, 159.

developed into large kingdoms like those of the Merina and the Sakalava.<sup>37</sup> Even among the Malagasy societies that are reputedly the most ‘egalitarian’, such as the foraging Vezo and Mikea in western Madagascar, issues of slave ancestry are far from being benign, since people usually avoid marrying those they identify as slave descendants.<sup>38</sup> Yet in these groups such issues have never been investigated.

It is striking that, until a recent date, the *andevo* (i.e., the ‘slaves’, a term that also refers to slave descendants) in Madagascar have often been studied only in passing. Few anthropologists have sought to put themselves in their shoes and see society from their perspective. Many of them have described the condition of the *andevo* from the point of view of free descendants, indicating what they lacked or how they differed from free descendants – as if they were a residual category – instead of focusing on their specific historical experience and its consequences. These implicit biases are still present in much of the anthropological scholarship on Madagascar. While a focus on what slaves lacked during the pre-abolition era is certainly justified, it seems to us that anthropologists’ tendency to approach present-day slave descendants with the same conceptual grid (as ‘people who lack X’, where X can be land, tombs, history, ancestors, ancestral blessings and so on) has somewhat hindered the detailed and intimate study of how slave descendants experience their condition in the various societies of the island. The fact that free descent informants often express prejudice inherited from the past, for example

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<sup>37</sup> The forest-dwelling Tanala and Zafimaniry are good examples. On slavery among the Tanala, see Philippe Beaujard, “Esclavage et groupes sociaux en pays Tanala,” in *Formes extrêmes de dépendance. Contributions à l’étude de l’esclavage en Asie du sud-est*, ed. Georges Condominas (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1998), 203-15. On slavery among the Zafimaniry see Maurice Bloch, “The social implications of freedom for Merina and Zafimaniry slaves,” in *Madagascar in History: Essays from the 1970’s*, ed. Raymond Kent (Albany, CA: The Foundation for Malagasy Studies, 1979), 269-97; Maurice Bloch, “Modes of production and slavery in Madagascar: Two case studies,” in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. James Watson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 100-34.

<sup>38</sup> Rita Astuti and Bram Tucker, personal communications.

when they say that “*andevo* have no tombs” or “*andevo* have no ancestors,” is no excuse for confusing these views with the actual condition of those who are called *andevo*.

In Maurice Bloch’s seminal study *Placing the Dead*, little is said about slave descendants even though, as Bloch commented, “if the difference between *andriana* [‘nobles’] and *hova* [‘commoners’] was never great [in traditional Merina society], the difference between these two groups and the *andevo* (slaves) was fundamental.”<sup>39</sup> This quasi-absence of slave descendants in the monograph that arguably set a standard for modern anthropological work on Madagascar is particularly striking because Bloch made clear at the same time that slave descendants formed a very large part of the Merina population.<sup>40</sup> We write with the privilege of hindsight, of course, but some of Bloch’s early reviewers noticed the paradox and exhorted the author to focus on slave descendants in the future.<sup>41</sup> A few years later, Bloch addressed the issue in two essays. In the first, he compared the social implications of freedom for the slaves who were held by the Merina and for those who were held by the Zafimaniry.<sup>42</sup> The second essay made use of the same comparative material but framed the question somewhat differently, in terms of modes of production and ideology.<sup>43</sup> Much later Bloch came back again to the topic of slavery in yet another essay on slave descendants in Antananarivo’s slums who are possessed by royal spirits. In this last essay he argued that the crucial problem of slaves (and former slaves) was “the interruption in blessing” that occurred during enslavement: “When people are taken as slaves,

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<sup>39</sup> Bloch, *Placing the Dead*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Bloch, *Placing the Dead*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Razafintsalama, “Maurice Bloch. The significance of tombs and ancestral villages for Merina social organization,” *Archipel* 1, no. 1 (1971): 225; Louis Molet, “Maurice Bloch. Placing the Dead,” *L’Homme* 12, no. 3 (1972): 149.

<sup>42</sup> Bloch, “The social implications.”

<sup>43</sup> Bloch, “Modes of production.”

their ties to their ancestors are broken, because they no longer receive blessing from their ancestors at the various familial rituals.”<sup>44</sup>

According to Bloch, the position of slaves in traditional Merina society was that of junior members of families who could never become full members of society because they had no ancestral territory and their children were condemned to the same fate: slaves “were outside the social system in its ideological representation.”<sup>45</sup> After abolition, ex-slaves had mainly three options: (1) to return back to the areas from which they had been taken (if this was possible); (2) to stay in the villages where they were slaves and to keep working on their former masters’ estates (often on a sharecropping contract); or (3) to find empty land where they could start a new life by building terraces and cultivating rice. While the consequences of the first option are difficult to evaluate, the most important consequence of the second option was the continuation of a type of obligation between former masters and former slaves in ancient Merina villages. The slave descendants played the role of caretakers for the free descendants’ land and tombs (known as *valala miandry fasana*, i.e. ‘the grasshoppers who guard the tombs’), and sometimes provided servants, often children, for their houses in Antananarivo or elsewhere. This was because, as documented by Bloch, many free descent Merina left peasantry to take up opportunities in education, in the administration or in business, and only kept their ancestral land for ideological reasons. Even though they accepted this situation of dependency, the descendants of slaves resented it bitterly.

Those among the freed slaves who chose the third option and went to new empty lands found themselves in the company of the free Merina who could not live on their ancestral land

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<sup>44</sup> Maurice Bloch, “The slaves, the king, and Mary in the slums of Antananarivo,” in *Shamanism, History, and the State*, edited by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 135.

<sup>45</sup> Bloch, “The social implications,” 276.

because of the increase of the population and a resulting land shortage. Although they started off on an equal footing, ex-slaves and free Merina usually lived in separate villages. What happened was that, because of their endogamous marriage rules, the free Merina were at first less able to form local kinship networks than the former slaves, who could marry whoever they wanted provided it was not close kin. So while the free Merina remained somewhat isolated in the new lands, former slaves were able to organize agricultural and political cooperation more easily. This advantage turned to a disadvantage because the free descent Merina, through their endogamous marriages, kept kinship links with administrators, teachers or businessmen who lived in town, and through these links they had access to new sources of power and wealth, whereas slave descent rural peasants did not. It is interesting to note here that Bloch's views on Merina slave descendants have been recently challenged by David Graeber, who argued that the slave descendants he observed in the region of Arivonimamo (west of Antananarivo) were actually more successful than the free descendants because they had managed to buy land to those free descendants who did not care much about keeping it, precisely because they lived in the capital.<sup>46</sup>

According to Bloch, the slaves held by the Zafimaniry had, unlike Merina slaves, access to land. But the Zafimaniry are shifting cultivators and free Zafimaniry tended to give their slaves the already semi-exhausted lands. Since they had land, however, most of them stayed in their villages after being freed. Later the ex-slave villages were the first to turn to rice-irrigation and they benefited most from education through Catholicism, from the trade of woodcarvings and from tourism. In consequence, present-day Zafimaniry slave descendants are generally better off than the free descendants. Since the ex-slaves have no positive marriage rules, they can marry outside Zafimaniry country and have therefore kinship links outside the rather cramped territory

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<sup>46</sup> See Graeber, *Lost People*.



where the free descendants must marry. Bloch concludes that, unlike in the Merina case, slave descendants among the Zafimaniry have been more successful than the free descendants. The comparative framework in terms of socio-economic success proposed by Bloch seems to us extremely useful for the study of post-slavery in Madagascar, and much remains to be done to have a better idea of whether former slaves and their descendants have managed to achieve equality in economic terms. Yet this perspective is clearly not sufficient because the economic success of slave descendants has not necessarily been accompanied by equality in terms of social status: prejudice against slave descendants remains deep in some regions of the island, where even wealthy slave descendants can still be viewed as subalterns.

A prime example of this situation is found among the southern Betsileo, where slave descendants are commonly called ‘unclean’ or ‘dirty’ people.<sup>47</sup> These derogatory labels still stick to groups of slave descendants that have otherwise achieved some kind of economic and political equality, for example because their ancestors were among the first settlers and thus among the ‘founding fathers’ of a local community.<sup>48</sup> Yet this achievement remains ambiguous and fragile since in spite of their efforts slave descendants have not managed to shed the inferior status that was once ascribed to them: commoner descendants continue to view them as unclean and strictly refuse to marry them.

In Anôsy, slaves descendants endure a fate that is in many ways similar and yet different.<sup>49</sup> Like in southern Betsileo, they are also described as dirty people and cannot marry commoner descendants. They live in separate neighborhoods. Their economic and political

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<sup>47</sup> See Sandra Evers, *Constructing History, Culture and Inequality: The Betsileo in the Extreme Southern Highlands of Madagascar* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Denis Regnier, “Clean people, unclean people.”

<sup>48</sup> Denis Regnier, “Pourquoi ne pas les épouser? L’évitement du mariage avec les descendants d’esclaves dans le Sud Betsileo (Madagascar).” *Études rurales* 194 (2014): 103-22.

<sup>49</sup> See Somda, “Et le réel serait passé.”

empowerment, while not completely inaccessible, remains difficult. Former slaves, after abolition, often stayed on their former masters' estates, which were in most cases royal residences. Their continuing presence in these places, more than any known genealogy or history, is an indication of their slave ancestry. Such an ascription of slave status on the basis of geographic cues feeds widespread suspicion. This suspicion extends to the descendants of commoners who choose to reside, for various reasons, in the incriminated areas. Yet a reputation of slave descent brings the most definitive shame, even though the economic and political aspects of slavery and slave origins are commonly deemphasized. Instead, the Tanôsy insist on the moral and ritual devaluation of slaves and their descendants. Thus they are generally oblivious of the complex circumstances of past enslavement. However, they often justify enslavement by saying that the slaves became slaves because in the past they behaved sinfully. Their wrongdoing included bestiality and gluttony, especially at funerals. The various roles and categories that slaves and servants had in the past are similarly overlooked by the Tanôsy, yet they are often able to recall a single servile duty that epitomize the abject condition of slaves and their degraded status: slaves were forced to clean royal corpses and some slaves used to be slaughtered to lie under their masters in their graves. Today, members of the royal family continue to summon slaves descendants when their highest-ranking relatives die. The ritual cleansing of corpses is viewed as a polluting act – among commoners, it falls to the less honorable kinsmen – and the slave descendants' impurity is explicitly connected to this function. Tanôsy slaves descendants are still considered as slaves, because slavery is believed to be an ingrained, transmissible moral defect rather than a legal status that can be abolished.

In an attempt at comparing the situation of slave descendants across different societies of the island, Margaret Brown stressed the relative ease with which slave ancestry is acknowledged

in an ethnically mixed (Makoa/Betsimisaraka) community of the Masoala peninsula, in the North East of Madagascar.<sup>50</sup> Such ease surprised Brown because much Malagasy scholarship had shown that slave ancestry is not easily acknowledged and that the topic is difficult to discuss openly. Eva Keller's recent observations also confirm Brown's: she stresses that in Masoala slave descent has become "invisible" and slave descendants engage "in the same daily activities and the same ritual practices as those of free descent."<sup>51</sup> But what factors, asked Brown, would explain the social acceptability of slave ancestry in some Malagasy societies and its concurrent stigmatization in others? She argued that the common ideology of ancestral power – according to which people's lives depend heavily from their ancestors' power – and the fact that slaves had been wrenched from their own ancestors, is not sufficient to explain why stigmatization occurs, because the slave descendants she observed shared the same reverence for the ancestors as other Malagasy and yet readily discussed slave ancestry and intermarried with people of free descent. Brown suggested that acceptability and stigmatization vary according to three factors: (1) social structure (absence or presence of rank; nature of the kinship system; marriage rules); (2) resource availability; (3) historical patterns of migration and ethnic mixing.

On the whole, we agree with Brown's suggestion that these three factors are crucial to account for the different levels of acceptability and stigmatization of slave descent found in the various societies of Madagascar. Yet we also think that she missed a highly important point. As her own example in Masoala shows, acceptability and stigmatization also depend on whether people perceive slave identity as being 'internal' or 'external' to their own group. In Masoala, the Betsimisaraka consider that the Makoa are another 'ethnic group' (*foko*) that had client

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<sup>50</sup> Margaret Brown, "Reclaiming lost ancestors and acknowledging slave descent: Insights from Madagascar," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46 (2004): 616-45.

<sup>51</sup> Eva Keller, "The banana plant and the moon: Conservation and the Malagasy ethos of life in Masoala, Madagascar," *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 4 (2008): 660.

relationships with them in the past. By comparison, in other Malagasy contexts where discrimination against slave descendants is strong, such as among the Betsileo or the Tanôsy, slave descendants are usually considered to be ‘internal’: they are perceived as people who have fallen down from a higher status within the Betsileo or the Tanôsy groups. We would therefore suggest that one of the main reasons for the acceptability of slave status in Masoala is the fact that the Betsimisaraka tend to view the Makoa as a different ethnic group rather than as subalterns among the Betsimisaraka. In our opinion, it is precisely this kind of ethnicization of Makoa identity, partly encouraged by their liberation by the Merina Queen in 1877 and by the memorial practices of the Makoa themselves, which renders intermarriage possible and makes public acknowledgement of slave ancestry unproblematic.<sup>52</sup> It is important to note, on that regard, that the Makoa remember their own history as a forced displacement from continental Africa rather than as a downfall that would have occurred within Madagascar. They also try to keep their own specific cultural identity. In consequence, despite facing problems of social integration,<sup>53</sup> they do not necessarily feel ashamed and obliged to keep silent about their history,

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<sup>52</sup> On the Makoa, see Maurice Scrive and Noël Gueunier, “‘Histoire du peuple’: Souvenirs sur l’esclavage des Makoa du Nord de Madagascar,” *Études Océan Indien* 15 (1992): 177-97; Gabriel Rantoandro, “Makoa et Masombika à Madagascar au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Introduction à leur histoire,” in *Madagascar et l’Afrique: Entre identités insulaires et appartenances historiques*, ed. Didier Nativel and Faranirina V. Rajaonah (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 137-61; Boyer-Rossol, Klara. “De Morima à Morondava. Contribution à l’étude des Makoa de l’Ouest de Madagascar au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.” In *Madagascar et l’Afrique. Entre identité insulaire et appartenances historiques*, edited by Didier Nativel and Faranirina V. Rajaonah, 183-217. Paris: Karthala, 2007; Klara Boyer-Rossol, “Les Makoa en pays sakalava: Une ancestralité entre deux rives, Ouest de Madagascar, XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles,” in *Les traites et les esclavages: Perspectives historiques et contemporaines*, ed. Myriam Cottias, Élisabeth Cunin, and António de Almeida Mendes (Paris: Karthala, 2010), 189-99; Klara Boyer-Rossol, “Makua life histories: Testimonies on slavery and the slave trade in the 19th century in Madagascar,” in *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade, Volume 1: The Sources*, ed. Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin A. Klein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 466-480. For an extensive account on the Makoa see Klara Boyer-Rossol, “Entre les deux rives du Canal du Mozambique: Histoire et mémoires des Makoa de l’Ouest de Madagascar (XIX<sup>e</sup> – XX<sup>e</sup> siècles),” (PhD diss., Université Paris Diderot, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> On the difficult social integration of the Makoa in the Antsihanaka region and near the capital Antananarivo, see Malanjaona Rakotomalala and Célestin Razafimbelo, “Le problème d’intégration sociale chez les Makoa de l’Antsihanaka,” *Omalay Sy Anio* 21-22 (1985): 93-113; Michel Razafiarivony,

unlike what happens in the case of slave descendants that are perceived (and perceive themselves) as ‘internal’, that is, as slave descendants who have Malagasy (and not African) origins.

### **Accounting for the Discrimination and its Regional Variation**

Indeed, it does seem that the strongest discriminatory practices against slave descendants mostly take place in situations where *andevo* (‘slaves’) are perceived as internal in the sense outlined above. The distinction between these two ways of conceptualizing ‘slaves’ (internally and externally) in Madagascar seems to us more relevant than, say, making a distinction between coastal and highland Malagasy with respect to the level of stigmatization of slave descent. At first sight there seems to be a correlation, insofar people in the highlands are perhaps more likely to view slave descendants as internal while on the coast they are more likely to view them as external, i.e. as people whose ancestors have been forcefully brought from continental Africa to Madagascar. However things are not that simple. In Antananarivo and Imerina, for example, where the issue of slave descent is increasingly racialized, the *mainity* (‘blacks’) are seen as both internal (as a group that has been integrated into the Merina ranking system after the royal abolition of 1877) and external (as people with African origins).<sup>54</sup>

In some contexts, former slaves and their descendants have sometimes continued to dwell, after abolition, in the southwestern parts of villages, as prescribed by the astrological system that is used in many Malagasy societies and attributes the South-West direction to slave

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“Les descendants des anciens esclaves importés d’Afrique à Madagascar: Tradition et réalité,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 70 (2005): 63-80.

<sup>54</sup> Razafiarivony, “Les descendants des anciens esclaves.” The distinction internal/external we propose here relies on people’s perception of slave descendants *today*: are they Malagasy or do they have foreign (i.e., African) origins? These perceptions may of course be far from accurate from an historical point of view. The distinction internal/external is not exactly equivalent to the distinction insider/outsider, which is mainly used to talk about migration and precedence in Madagascar.

status.<sup>55</sup> When they did so, they often accepted sharecropping arrangements with their former masters and until today those who chose this option have remained stuck in relations of dependency.<sup>56</sup> Yet after the 1896 abolition many freed slaves chose to leave their former masters and looked for new land to cultivate for their own benefit. In these endeavors, they sometimes joined groups of landless free descendants and together they founded new villages where the old spatial distinctions were not relevant anymore.<sup>57</sup> In consequence, distinctions between ‘slave’ and ‘free’ village parts are still visible today but this is only true of the ‘ancient’ villages that were founded before 1896. In towns, the old spatial distinctions have become increasingly difficult to read because of the changes brought about by rapid demographic expansion and urban migration. In Malagasy popular imagination, however, some neighborhoods of the capital Antananarivo are still strongly associated with slave descent because slaves lived massively in these areas in pre-abolition times.<sup>58</sup> The extent to which this popular perception still corresponds to a sociological reality remains an open question.

Another question that would require further investigation is whether access to land has ever posed a serious problem to the estimated 500,000 slaves who were freed in 1896. As James Sibree, a fine observer of 19th century Madagascar, noted in 1870 “the country is so sparsely populated that the land is, comparatively [compared to Europe], of little value, so that almost everyone possesses some piece of ground which he can cultivate; even the slaves have their rice-patch. There is very little of that abject grinding poverty so common in the crowded populations

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<sup>55</sup> Jean-Claude Hébert, “La cosmologie malgache, suivie de l’énumération des points cardinaux et l’importance du nord-est,” *Taloha* 1 (1965): 84-149.

<sup>56</sup> For examples among the Betsileo, see Conrad Kottak, *The Past in the Present: History, Ecology, and Cultural Variation in Highland Madagascar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980); Luke Freeman, “Speech, silence, and slave descent in highland Madagascar.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2012): 600-17.

<sup>57</sup> Regnier, “Pourquoi ne pas les épouser.”

<sup>58</sup> Catherine Guérin-Fournet, *Vivre à Tananarive: Géographie du changement dans la capitale malgache* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 37-8, 367-90.

of European cities. Except in the near vicinity of Malagasy towns, a good deal of the land appears open to anyone living in the neighborhood to cultivate and enclose at pleasure, so that no one need want at least the bare necessities of life.”<sup>59</sup> Sibree’s account thus suggests that access to land may not have been an issue for freed slaves after 1896. Provided they moved away from the towns and started cultivating free land in less populated areas they were probably able to do so with little obstacles.<sup>60</sup> A recent account, however, goes against this idea and characterizes slave descendants in the southern Betsileo highlands as people who are inherently landless, because their slave ancestors did not have the right to possess land and their descendants did not manage to have access to land after abolition.<sup>61</sup> In consequence of this ‘landlessness’, the argument goes on, slave descendants in the Betsileo southern highlands do not have ancestral tombs, and so “they are defined as people without history, without ancestors and without descent groups.”<sup>62</sup> This account attracted criticism for overgeneralizing a very local situation and for overinterpreting the data.<sup>63</sup> A particularly salient issue here is that of ancestral tombs, which are of utmost importance in Madagascar since they are central markers of group identity and are built on one’s *tanindrazana* (ancestral land).<sup>64</sup>

Slave descendants’ tombs are particularly important for the study of post-slavery issues in Madagascar because their existence shows that most slave descendants have managed to ‘re-ancestralize’ themselves, meaning that they have built tombs that now contain several

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<sup>59</sup> Sibree, *Madagascar and its People*, 223.

<sup>60</sup> For an historical example among the southern Betsileo see Regnier, “Pourquoi ne pas les épouser,” 119.

<sup>61</sup> Evers, *Constructing History*; See also Sandra Evers, “Expropriated from the hereafter: The fate of the landless in the southern highlands of Madagascar,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 33, no. 3, 413-44.

<sup>62</sup> Evers, “Expropriated from the hereafter,” 430.

<sup>63</sup> Regnier, “Why not marry them,” 211-7; Regnier, “Pourquoi ne pas les épouser,” 107-10.

<sup>64</sup> On the importance of tombs and burials in Madagascar, see in particular Bloch, *Placing the Dead*; Mike Parker Pearson and Denis Regnier, “Collective and single burial in Madagascar,” in *Gathered in Death: Archaeological and Ethnological Perspectives on Collective Burial and Social Organisation*, ed. Aurore Schmitt, Sylviane Déderix and Isabelle Crevecoeur (Louvain-La-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2018). 41-62.

generations of dead/ancestors (*razana*). Although their genealogies remain shallow, they can fully engage in ritual activity directed at these ancestors. Unlike land, the issue of tombs must have been a difficult one for freed slaves upon abolition because during enslavement their dead were not buried in kin-based collective tombs, so that after abolition freed slaves were hardly able to take out their dead and place them in the new tombs they built on the lands they started to cultivate.<sup>65</sup> Over the last century the dead/ancestors have nonetheless accumulated in the tombs of former slaves and their descendants, so that they have been increasingly able to ‘normalize’ tomb-centered ritual activity and to become proud of their tombs, which are sometimes more lavish and better maintained than those of noble descendants.<sup>66</sup>

To account for the persistence of the discrimination against slave descendants, the argument has been put forward that in some Malagasy contexts free descendants essentialize the *andevo*.<sup>67</sup> Essentialization here refers to ‘psychological essentialism,’ a way of thinking that has been well studied by cognitive and social psychologists. Among the southern Betsileo, commoner descendants seem indeed to think about slave descendants as people who have an unclean ‘essence’. They view the uncleanliness of slave descendants as impossible to cleanse and necessarily transmitted from parents to children. Such an essentialist construal, however, does not seem to be a relic of pre-colonial ways of thinking about slaves. It is more likely an unexpected but wide-ranging outcome of the 1896 colonial abolition of slavery. The circumstances of abolition made it impossible for freed slaves to be ritually cleansed, as it was the custom among the southern Betsileo, and therefore commoners systematically avoided

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<sup>65</sup> On the necessity to move ancestors to a new tomb when founding an ‘ancestral land’, see Denis Regnier, “La fondation d’une nouvelle terre ancestrale dans le Sud Betsileo (Madagascar): Dilemme, transformation, rupture,” in *(Re)Fonder. Modalités du commencement dans le temps et l’espace*, ed. Philippe Gervais-Lambony, Frédéric Hurllet and Isabelle Rivoal (Paris: de Boccard, 2017), 121-128.

<sup>66</sup> Graeber, *Lost People*.

<sup>67</sup> Regnier, “Clean people, unclean people.”



marrying former slaves. This avoidance in turn reinforced their prejudice against them. The circular process of marriage avoidance and prejudice reinforcement must have been going on since the aftermath of slavery and played a leading role in the essentialization of slave descendants.

In Madagascar the legacy of slavery has rarely brought the slave descendants together in defense of their rights. Notable exceptions originated from Antananarivo. Jean-Roland Randriamaro has described the emergence of social movements and political parties that made a significant impact on national politics from the late 40s to the mid-70s.<sup>68</sup> The PADESM, *Parti des Déshérités de Madagascar* (Party of the Disinherited of Madagascar),<sup>69</sup> which rallied slaves descendants against their former masters, was founded in June 1946. Ambitiously aiming at serving the disenfranchised population of the nation, it claimed to unite the *Mainty*, a heterogeneous category lumping together – mostly in Antananarivo and Imerina – slaves descendants, descendants of royal slaves and servants, and *Côtiers* (a category regrouping people who moved from various coastal areas). The PADESM's first national secretary was a slave descendant. A major anti-colonial uprising took place between March 1947 and December 1948, and their political opponents steadily accused the PADESM of collaborationism. It was suspected of being manipulated by the French colonial rule to counter the rise of the nationalist *Mouvement Démocratique de la Rénovation Malgache* (MDRM). Another movement, the

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<sup>68</sup> Jean-Roland Randriamaro, *PADESM et luttes politiques à Madagascar: De la Deuxième Guerre mondiale à la naissance du PSD* (Paris: Karthala, 1997); Jean-Roland Randriamaro, "L'émergence politique des *Mainty* et des *Andevo* au XXe siècle," in *L'esclavage à Madagascar. Aspects historiques et résurgences contemporaines*, ed. Ignace Rakoto (Antananarivo: Institut de Civilisations – Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie, 1997), 357-81.

<sup>69</sup> The Malagasy name of the PADESM, *Fikambanan'ny Mainty sy ny karazany*, signals explicitly that it is a party of "blacks" (*mainty*), i.e. of people considered to be of slave descent.

MFM,<sup>70</sup> was created in 1972. It recruited the ZOAM (or ZWAM),<sup>71</sup> the underprivileged, undereducated and ‘transgressive’ youth inhabiting Antananarivo’s impoverished neighborhoods – although the leadership and core of the party was comprised of students and teachers. The ZOAM played a critical role in the unfolding events. That year, the political unrest brought to power forces overtly hostile to the traditional hierarchy. The appointment of radical and social reformist colonel Ratsimandrava was a response to the *mainty* youth’s demands. Ratsimandrava however was assassinated only six days after his access to power. PADESM and MFM disappeared during the second republic. After Ratsiraka’s takeover and the formation of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar in 1976, the ZOAM became *de facto* a government institution. During the second republic, the *mainty* youth of Antananarivo were described as a manipulable and suggestible mass rather than a militant and empowered force.<sup>72</sup> Jennifer Jackson describes this as a case of “reification of class categories.”<sup>73</sup> She also observes that in developing the *zomaka* argot, which became a “covert instrument of political struggle” and an “object symbolic of an ideology of class struggle,” the ZOAM normalized the *Mainty* as a category of speakers. The political crisis of 2002, she explains, contributed to the reinvigoration of this argot and it has not only become a slang spoken by urban speakers across class lines but it was also

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<sup>70</sup> In Malagasy: *Mpitolona ho amin’ny Fanjakana’ny Madinika*. In French: *Militants pour le Pouvoir Proletarien*.

<sup>71</sup> This slang term is often presented as an acronym. Jean-Roland Randriamaro reports two definitions: ZWAM, for *Zatovo Western Amerikana Malagasy* (‘Western’ American-Malagasy youth’), a nod to the popularity of ‘Western’ movies amongst Malagasy youth. The second is ZOAM, for *Zatovo ory asa Malagasy* (‘Unemployed Malagasy youth’). See Randriamaro, “L’émérgence politique,” 364. For Jennifer Jackson, their name is even more explicit: they are the *Zatovo western andevo I’ Madagascar* (‘The western slaves of Madagascar’). She argues that ZOAM is actually *zoam*’s politicized reincarnation. See Jennifer Jackson, *Political Oratory and Cartooning: An Ethnography of Democratic Process in Madagascar* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 47-8. See also Marco Gardini, “L’activisme politique des descendants d’esclaves à Antananarivo: Les heritages de Zoam,” *Politique Africaine* 140 (2015): 23-40.

<sup>72</sup> See for instance Janine Ramamonjisoa « Blancs et noirs. Les dimensions de l’inégalité sociale. Documents socio-linguistiques ». *Cahiers des sciences sociales*, 1, 1986: 41.

<sup>73</sup> Jackson, *Political Oratory*, 52.

“reengaged in the genres of political cartoons and mass media arts as a mode of political allegiance in identity resistance to politics.”<sup>74</sup>

Yet the limited presence of parties and social movements protesting against stigmatization and marginalization, and committed to the empowerment of slave descendants in contemporary Malagasy politics, sharply contrasts with the increasing politicization of slaves and slave descendants in West African contexts.<sup>75</sup> In Madagascar, where the majority of slave descendants are still trying to achieve a more equal status through ‘re-ancestralization’ and intermarriages with free descendants, such mobilizations are not observed. It might not come as a surprise that one of the latest incarnations of a political and cultural affirmation by slave descendants is found amongst the Makoa youth participating in the budding Malagasy hip-hop movement modeled after the American gangsta rap.<sup>76</sup> The lyrics of the Makoa emcees celebrate their African origins through favorable stylistic and thematic associations with a globalized, thriving blackness.

On the contrary, where slaves descendants continue to reside amongst the descendants of those who once enslaved their ancestors, slavery has remained a difficult subject matter to discuss, both publicly and privately. The reserve regarding slavery is often justified by two opposite arguments: slavery is either no longer relevant or too serious an issue to be evoked at all. Claims of equality (achieved or yet to come) hide the persistence of the stigma, but secrecy

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<sup>74</sup> Jackson, *Political Oratory*, 53.

<sup>75</sup> See for instance Eric Hahonou, “Culture politique, esclavage et décentralisation: La demande politique des descendants d’esclaves au Bénin et au Niger,” *Politique Africaine*, 11, 2008: 169-86; Ould Ahmed Salem, “Bare-foot activists: Transformations in the Haratine movement in Mauritania,” in *Movers and Shakers: Social Movements in Africa*, ed. Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 156-77; Olivier Leservoisier, “Nous voulons notre part! Les ambivalences du mouvement d’émancipation des Saalfaalbe Hormankooobe de Djeol (Mauritanie),” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 179-180 (2005): 987-1014.

<sup>76</sup> Klara Boyer-Rossol, “From the Great Island to the African continent through the western world, itineraries of a “return to the origins” through hip-hop music in Madagascar (2000-2011),” in *Marronnage and Arts: Revolts in Bodies and Voices*, ed. S. Meylon-Reinette (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 161-77.

does not eliminate prejudice. Luke Freeman has recently analyzed the silence on slavery observed among Betsileo free and slave descendants. He notes that “the effect of this silence is cumulative: the more the stigma of slavery is avoided, the more ‘unspeakable’ it becomes”.<sup>77</sup> It is indeed difficult to fight what cannot be named. The use of euphemisms to allude to former servile status is widespread in Madagascar. These euphemisms generate ambiguities. Those used in rituals, for example, can become opaque to a number of people, both among free and slave descendants.<sup>78</sup> In Anôsy, royal slaves and slaves descendants are frequently described as *panopo* (‘servants’), a term also used for commoners, i.e. people who were subjected only to the authority of the kings.<sup>79</sup> Slaves descendants are also known as *olo ratsy* (‘bad people’) and *olo tambany* (‘people of the bottom’); but these terms carry little specificity and may also describe people that are marginalized because of their indigence. Finally, as in other regions of Madagascar, kinship terms are commonly used in Anôsy to address and refer to slaves descendants. Noble descendants address them contemptuously as *zanak’ampela* (‘children of the women’, i.e. uterine parents). These equivocal designations entwine the identities of commoners and slave descendants, and such entwinement often prevents any definitive, unanimous identification of the latter. Doubts are further augmented by the Tanôsy restriction of open communication about historical knowledge beyond one’s own descent group. This contrasts with other Malagasy contexts, for example the southern Betsileo, where genealogical speeches are publicly given at funerals and serve as means of keeping a social memory of ‘origins’.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Luke Freeman, “Speech, silence, and slave descent in highland Madagascar.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2012): 600-17.

<sup>78</sup> Denis Regnier, “Les esclaves morts et leur invocation dans les rituels du Sud Betsileo,” *Études Océan Indien* 51-52 (2014): 253-76.

<sup>79</sup> Somda, “Et le reel serait passé.”

<sup>80</sup> Regnier, “Pourquoi ne pas les épouser,” 114-5.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to give a broad overview of slavery and post-slavery issues in Madagascar. We hope to have shown that, despite an increasing amount of studies, many of these issues require further investigation and discussion. We believe that this scholarship is extremely important in the case of Madagascar because oversimplifications about slave descendants and the ensuing prejudice are widespread in the island and beyond. A particularly telling but highly regrettable example of such oversimplifications can be found in a recent report on contemporary forms of slavery in Madagascar written for the United Nations. In its short section on the island's history of slavery, one can read, for example, that "The nobles and commoners [among the Merina] are generally light-skinned, whereas those in the latter two castes [i.e., the *mainity* and the *andevo*] are dark-skinned," that "The Andevo live in slums located in the low villages, below the villages on the hill where the nobles and commoners settled" and that "most Andevo and Mosambika are illiterate."<sup>81</sup>

Oversimplifications of this kind are not just benign misrepresentations. They can provide 'official' justifications for stigmatizing people on the basis of racial traits, places of residence or illiteracy. Scholars should avoid relaying such simplistic statements and strive to make clear, instead, that popular perceptions of slave descendants' identity have been historically constructed and therefore do not reflect the present situation. As we have explained, ideas of slave descendants as 'ancestorless people', for example, no longer correspond to a lived reality because, as far as we know, slave descendants now have tombs and dead/ancestors (*razana*) in these tombs.

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<sup>81</sup> "Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences. Addendum. Mission to Madagascar (10 to 19 December 2012)," 4.

The study of post-slavery appears to be a particularly complex and sometimes slippery area of inquiry within Malagasy studies. Therefore, an extremely careful attention should be paid to local contexts in order to understand the full picture and avoid privileging one perspective – for example the Merina case – over others. The construal of slave descendants among the Merina, the Betsileo, the Zafimaniry, the Betsimisaraka and the Tanôsy – to go back to the few examples we have given here – is far from being identical because it is the outcome of different local (although interrelated) histories. In urban, multiethnic and more ‘politically conscious’ Antananarivo, as in the Malagasy diaspora and the media, the representation of slave descendants is also different. To make sense of these differences we have tried to provide some analytical tools. We have highlighted, in particular, three processes that account for the ways slave descendants are viewed in different Malagasy contexts. While the Makoa who were freed in 1877 by the Merina Queen seem always to be ethnicized as a slave descent group with ‘external’ origins, southern Betsileo and Tanôsy slave descendants tend to be essentialized as people whose origins are Malagasy and whose servile history is therefore ‘internal’. In Antananarivo, one of the most salient aspects of the problem is an increasing racialization – arguably a specific case of essentialization – of the differences between ‘slaves’ and ‘non-slaves’. We do not claim, however, that the processes of ethnicization, essentialization and racialization we have highlighted are sufficient to define how slave descendants are conceived across the Malagasy social spectrum. Sociocultural phenomena such as the discrimination against slave descendants in Madagascar need sophisticated and empirically grounded accounts rather than simplistic generalizations. We have only begun to scratch the surface.