

TOM AND TOAKAFO: THE BETSIMISARAKA
KINGDOM AND STATE FORMATION IN
MADAGASCAR, 1715–1750*

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ABSTRACT: The monarchies and other polities of precolonial Madagascar exerted a strong influence on each other. For this reason, in recent years it has become more interesting to trace their inter-relationship than to emphasize their autonomy. The Betsimisaraka kingdom, which flourished on Madagascar's east coast in the early eighteenth century, has generally been regarded as a polity standing rather outside the mainstream of state formation in Madagascar, not least because of the identity of its founder, the son of an English pirate. Research in European and South African archives demonstrates the close connection between the Betsimisaraka kingdom and the Sakalava kingdom of Boina.

KEY WORDS: Madagascar, kingdoms, state, slave trade.

HISTORY-BOOKS record the existence of a number of historical polities of substantial size and power in Madagascar, an island twice the size of Great Britain.¹ Historians in recent years have tended to emphasize the inter-connectedness of the island's historically known monarchies,² rather than to consider each of them as having a separate provenance more or less closely connected to an origin on one or other shore of the Indian Ocean.³ To be sure, there are striking similarities between the structure of monarchies in Madagascar and in Java,⁴ or between royal rituals in Madagascar and in

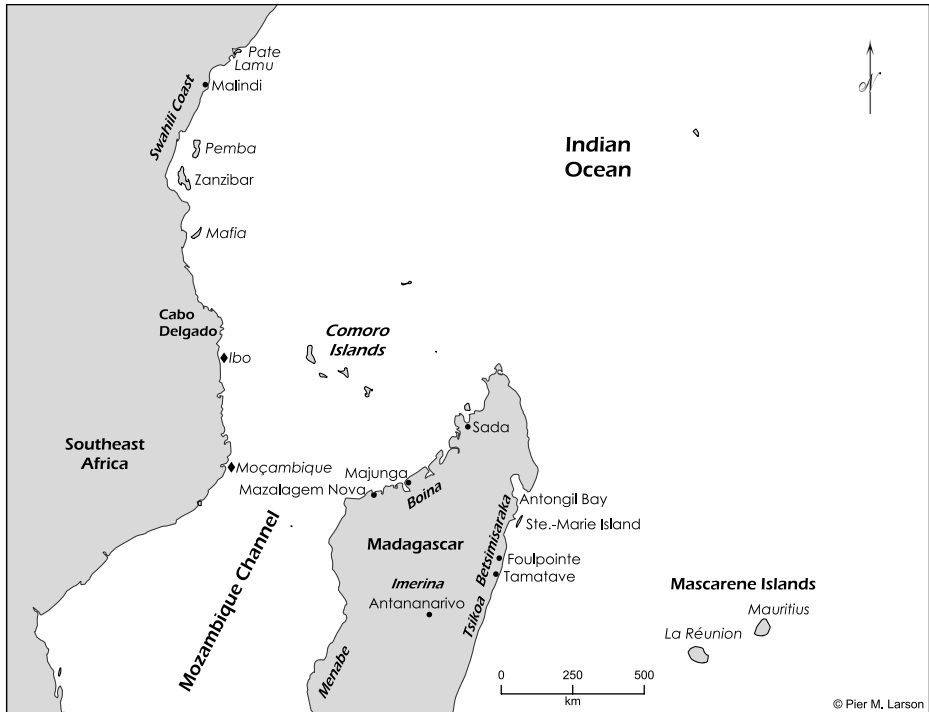
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¹ A short history of the island is Pierre Verin, *Madagascar* (new ed., Paris, 2000 [1990]), and in English Sir Mervyn Brown, *A History of Madagascar* (London, 1995). Solofo Randrianja and Stephen Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History*, will be published by C. Hurst & Co., London, in 2008.

² The standard text on the history of royalty in Madagascar is Françoise Raison-Jourde (ed.), *Les souverains de Madagascar* (Paris, 1983), especially the editor's introduction. Some stimulating re-readings by Gilbert Ratsivalaka in his unpublished *doctorat d'état*, 'Madagascar dans le sud-ouest de l'océan Indien (c. 1500–1824)' (University of Nice, 1995), tend in the same direction of demonstrating the inter-connectedness of monarchies in different parts of the island.

³ As represented by Hubert Deschamps, *Histoire de Madagascar* (4th ed., Paris, 1972 [1960]), and by Raymond K. Kent, *Early Kingdoms in Madagascar 1500–1700* (New York, 1970). The latter was preceded by a series of articles in the *Journal of African History* in 1968–9.

⁴ Gabriel Rantoandro, 'Des royaumes concentriques de Java au royaume de Madagascar: les fondements d'un héritage présumé', in Françoise Raison-Jourde and Solofo Randrianja (eds.), *La nation malgache au défi de l'ethnicité* (Paris, 2002), 107–23.



Map 1.

southern Africa,⁵ but it is clear that these elements were reworked and recombined in the great island rather than being simple transplants.

A changed vision of the origins of monarchy is difficult to separate from views of ethnicity. Madagascar's various population groups, nowadays all speaking dialects of a common language, are today more convincingly seen as political constructions than as primordial entities.⁶ Françoise Raison-Jourde goes as far as to suggest that historical communities in many coastal regions of Madagascar were creole societies 'before the letter', and that this was reflected in the formation of monarchy from indigenous and external elements.⁷

An appreciation of the complexity of monarchical formations in Madagascar also suggests their historical depth. Moments that once appeared as ruptures or radical innovations in the history of monarchy in the island have been shown to have antecedents that require historians to

⁵ Marie-Pierre Ballarin, 'Empreintes africaines dans les royautes de l'Ouest malgache, ancrages sakalava aux Comores (XVIIe–XXe)', in Didier Nativel and Faranirina V. Rajaonah (eds.), *Madagascar et l'Afrique: entre identité insulaire et appartenances historiques* (Paris, 2007), 401–24.

⁶ In the case of the Merina, see notably Pier Larson, 'Desperately seeking the "Merina" (central Madagascar): reading ethnonyms and their semantic fields in African identity histories', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22 (1996), 541–60; and *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770–1822* (Oxford, 2000).

⁷ 'Introduction', *Les souverains de Madagascar*, 21.

rethink the elements of continuity and change. Andrianampoinimerina (c. 1750–1809), the most famous king in Madagascar's history, once viewed as a proto-nationalist⁸ on account of his conquest of a sizeable territory in the centre of the island and his alleged suspicion of foreigners, has been convincingly shown to have had far more extensive dealings with potentates elsewhere in the island than was once thought to be the case, and also with Europeans.⁹ It has also become clear that the overseas slave trade, one of the sources of Andrianampoinimerina's power, is older than was once thought. Ruling in the densely populated highland region of Imerina, this king was able to expand his domains by turning to his advantage the rise in demand for slaves in the French plantation-islands of the Île de France and the Île Bourbon – today known as Mauritius and Réunion – but the numbers of slaves exported from Madagascar in his time do not appear to have been very much greater than a century earlier. It is estimated that, between 1767 and 1810, Réunion and Mauritius imported some 110,000 slaves, of which perhaps 45 per cent were from Madagascar.¹⁰ Gwyn Campbell and Pier Larson, while differing notably on the slaves' precise origin, both suggest that exports from central Madagascar to the two islands in 1770–1820 ran at somewhere up to 3,000 slaves per year,¹¹ a figure that excludes the smaller number exported from the west coast to other destinations. However, a number of authors have arrived at a rough consensus concerning the size of Madagascar's slave trade at a rather earlier period, before 1700, raising new questions about the chronology of state formation on the island and the role of the slave trade therein. James Armstrong has suggested that between 40,000 and 150,000 slaves or more were exported during the seventeenth century solely from the northwestern town of Mazalagem Nova,¹² at that date the island's most active slave port, and in more recent work he and a co-author suggest a figure of 3,000 slaves exported annually from Mazalagem Nova 'over a long period'.¹³ From an East African perspective, Thomas Vernet estimates that 2,000–3,000 slaves were exported from Madagascar annually before 1700 by Swahili merchants working out of Lamu and Pate particularly, excluding those who were shipped via the Comoros.¹⁴ He puts

⁸ *Ibid.* 10.

⁹ See, e.g., Ranaivo G. Ratsivalaka, *Les Malgaches et l'abolition de la traite européenne des esclaves (1810–1817). Histoire de la formation du Royaume de Madagascar* (Antananarivo, 1999). Ratsivalaka, 'Madagascar dans le sud-ouest', 153–4, even suggests that Andrianampoinimerina might have visited Mauritius.

¹⁰ J.-M. Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1974), 51. Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750–1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge, 2005), 55, suggests that the islands imported about 160,000 slaves between 1610 and 1810, of which 45 per cent were from Madagascar.

¹¹ Larson, *History and Memory*, 134; Campbell, *Economic History*, 55–6. Campbell's most detailed calculations, on 236ff., relate to a later period.

¹² James C. Armstrong, 'Madagascar and the slave trade in the seventeenth century', *Omalysy Anio*, 17–20 (1983–4), 216.

¹³ Piet Westra and James C. Armstrong (eds.), *Slave Trade with Madagascar: The Journals of the Cape Slaver Leijdsman, 1715* (Cape Town, 2006), 11.

¹⁴ Thomas Vernet, 'Slave trade and slavery on the Swahili coast, 1500–1750', in Paul Lovejoy, Behnaz A. Mirzai and Ismael M. Montana (eds.), *Slavery, Islam and Diaspora* (Trenton NJ, 2006), p. 4 of the chapter offprint.

total slave exports from Madagascar during the seventeenth century at 3–5,000 per year, excluding those shipped by Europeans.¹⁵ A number of other recent authors have produced broadly similar figures.¹⁶ Many of these slaves, exported mostly from northwestern ports by Swahili and Arab shippers, originated in the highland regions that were to be incorporated into a united kingdom by Andrianampoinimerina in the 1780s and 1790s. In short, slave-trading was an important activity in Madagascar from at least the early seventeenth century, including in the central highlands, and it is therefore unsafe to suppose that the slave trade had a major effect on the history of royalty in Madagascar only towards the end of the eighteenth century, as once appeared to be the case.¹⁷

These brief observations suggest several new angles for research in regard to monarchies or other polities that are known to have existed in Madagascar, particularly in the context of the slave trade. The present article takes as its subject Ratsimilaho (with variant spellings), the founder of an eighteenth-century polity generally known to historians as the Betsimisaraka confederation despite the fact that, as we shall see, his power was clearly of a monarchical type. His posthumous name is Ramaromanompo ('He Who Governs Many'), a name still pronounced in oral histories and in possession cults dedicated to royal ancestors. The son of an English pirate and a Malagasy princess, Ratsimilaho was generally known to the English and French seafarers who frequented Madagascar in his youth simply as Tom. Both Ratsimilaho and his political creation, the Betsimisaraka kingdom, are generally regarded as a colourful subject in the history of monarchy in Madagascar¹⁸ but nonetheless a rather minor one, since the Betsimisaraka confederation fell apart after the death of its founder.

The present article aims to show that Ratsimilaho was far more closely integrated into the history of the Sakalava monarchy of Boina than has generally been appreciated,¹⁹ and that he and his Sakalava allies made such a systematic use of Europeans as advisors and auxiliaries, and were so closely integrated into overseas systems of credit and trade, and constructed such a widespread system of commerce and rule, that they foreshadowed some developments often regarded as innovations of a later period.²⁰ Discussion of this matter thus has implications for the wider history of monarchy in Madagascar. This article makes particular use of accounts by Dutch traders

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 34.

¹⁶ René Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (Armonk NY, 2002), 259, estimates 3,000–4,000 slaves per year exported from Madagascar to the Swahili coast in the late seventeenth century, with a further 1,000–3,500 being exported annually to Mogadishu or points further north. For other estimates in the same range, see Markus Vink, "'The world's oldest trade": Dutch slavery and slave trade in the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century', *Journal of World History*, 14 (2003), 145; Arne Bialuschewski, 'Pirates, slavers, and the indigenous population in Madagascar, c. 1690–1715', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 38 (2005), 415.

¹⁷ Cf. Raison-Jourde, 'Introduction', 14.

¹⁸ Cf. Sir Mervyn Brown, *Madagascar Rediscovered: A History from Early Times to Independence* (London, 1978), 92–109.

¹⁹ This is also suggested by Ratsivalaka, 'Madagascar dans le sud-ouest', 113–18, 135.

²⁰ I am alluding here to the recruitment by King Radama I (1809–28) of Europeans as technical advisors.

that have previously been little used by historians of Madagascar. The most important Dutch documents quoted in the present article, originally consulted by the author in manuscript, have very recently been published by others in a bilingual edition.²¹

PIRATES AND SLAVE-TRADERS IN MADAGASCAR

The Indian Ocean is possibly the world's oldest integrated trading system, already well established long before Vasco da Gama's famous rounding of the Cape of Good Hope in 1498.²² Madagascar, located on the fringes of the main shipping-lanes, was from late in the first millennium of the Common Era the home of Swahili-Arab communities, known in Madagascar as Antalaotra ('Sea People'),²³ who built a number of port-settlements and small towns on its northern coasts.²⁴ The Antalaotra acted as commercial intermediaries between Madagascar, the Comoros, East Africa and southern Arabia, including in regard to a slave trade that was rather complex, as Madagascar was not only a source of slaves but may also have been an importer from quite an early period, even well before the sixteenth century. Possibly, the north-western coast of the island was used as a holding-ground for African slaves awaiting re-export, as were the Comoros.²⁵

Perhaps the most important newcomers to the island in the European age of discovery were not the Portuguese, the first Europeans to reach Madagascar, but Dutch traders, whose first landing was in 1595. The Dutch introduced into the trade of the Indian Ocean formidable amounts of silver coin from Spanish mines in the Americas,²⁶ with far-reaching consequences for politics and commerce throughout the region. Barendse²⁷ has argued that the impact of the Dutch and other European traders led to a new phase of state formation in various parts of the Indian Ocean rim in the seventeenth century, producing similar political effects from Africa to India. Access to foreign trade enabled kings in control of key seaports to import firearms on a larger scale than before, giving them an advantage over other rulers, while the possibility of acquiring and hoarding silver coin integrated them more closely into global markets.

Mazalagem Nova, Madagascar's leading slave-port, situated on an island in the Bay of Boina, was founded by Antalaotra merchants in the late

²¹ The main journal referred to, by Hendrik Frappé, consulted by the present author at the National Library of South Africa in Cape Town, has recently been translated, edited and published by Westra and Armstrong (eds.), *Slave Trade with Madagascar*. For a general survey of Dutch archives on Madagascar, see Yvette Ranjeva-Rabetafika, René Baesjou and Natalie Everts, 'Of paper and men: a note on the archives of the VOC as a source for the history of Madagascar', *Itinerario*, 14 (2000), 45-67.

²² Philippe Beaujard, 'The Indian Ocean in Eurasian and African world-systems before the sixteenth century', *Journal of World History*, 16 (2005), 411-65.

²³ Cf. Gabriel Rantoandro, 'Une communauté mercantile du nord ouest: les Antalaotra', *Omalý sy Anio*, 20 (1983-4), 195-210.

²⁴ Pierre Vérin, *The History of Civilization in North Madagascar* (Rotterdam, 1986).

²⁵ Cf. Claude Allibert, 'Une description turque de l'Océan Indien occidental dans le *kitáb-i Bahrije* de Piri Re'is (1521)', *Etudes Océan Indien*, 10 (1988), 33-4.

²⁶ Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, 'Born with a "silver spoon": the origin of world trade in 1571', *Journal of World History*, 6 (1995), 201-21.

²⁷ *The Arabian Seas*, 274-5.

sixteenth century after the abandonment of a similar port further north, known as Mazalagem Velho.²⁸ The Antalaoatra sultans who ruled there were, like their cousins along the Swahili coast, little concerned with extending formal control over the hinterland. However, even at this date Madagascar was also home to substantial kingdoms that were not controlled by Swahili traders, of which the most important seems to have been Guingemaro, incorporating the port-town of Sada, ruled by a king described by the Jesuit missionary Luis Mariano in 1613–14 as a ‘*rei cafre*’.²⁹ Mariano made a distinction between different groups of populations living in Madagascar, identifying Swahili-speakers (‘*mauros*’) and Malagasy-speakers (‘*buques*’) as well as the speakers of other African languages, the people whom he referred to as ‘*cafres*’. Guingemaro’s ruler, who appears also to have used the same title as the name of his kingdom, thus appeared to Mariano to have similar physical traits to Africans he had seen in Mozambique. It has been suggested that Guingemaro may have been ruled by the descendants of African slaves shipped to Madagascar in earlier times.³⁰ Its rulers were generally opposed to the Antalaoatra sultans who had such a firm grip on the slave trade.

During the seventeenth century, the political situation on Madagascar’s west coast was transformed by the rise of the Sakalava monarchies that arose in the southwest of the island, spreading rapidly northwards. The first powerful Sakalava ruler was King Lahifotsy (c. 1614–83),³¹ who acquired vast wealth in cattle and made war on rival rulers along the west coast, building a substantial kingdom and entering into direct contact with Dutch traders.³² After Lahifotsy’s death, his sons quarrelled. One remained as king of Menabe, while another headed north to found a new kingdom, known as Boina. In the course of time, further descendants of the dynasty were to found yet more kingdoms further north, producing a string of Sakalava kingdoms whose rulers competed in claims of seniority. Combining religious prestige with success as warriors and slave-traders, the Sakalava kings gained influence over wide areas of Madagascar, even as far as the central highlands and the northeast coast: by about 1720, the king of Boina had established his domination over the whole of northern Madagascar, perhaps a third of the island.³³ Only around 1800 were the various Sakalava kingdoms overtaken in political importance by the inland kingdom of Imerina, which was to claim

²⁸ On Mazalagem Nova (also known as Masselage and by many other spellings), see Vérin, *Madagascar*, 68–73. Its name in Malagasy is Antsoheribory.

²⁹ Humberto Leitão (ed.), *Os dois descobrimentos da ilha da São Lourenço mandado fazer pelo vice-rei D. Jerônimo de Azevedo* (Lisbon, 1970), 62, and 69, where Mariano describes the king as ‘*negro*’.

³⁰ Laurent Berger, ‘Les raisons de la colère des ancêtres Zafinifotsy (Ankaraña, Madagascar): l’anthropologie au défi de la mondialisation’ (thèse de doctorat, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2006), 247–66.

³¹ Jacques Lombard, *Le royaume sakalava du Menabe: essai d’analyse d’un système politique à Madagascar* (Paris, 1988), 24ff. Other genealogies give different versions of Lahifotsy’s relationship to his predecessors.

³² Armstrong, ‘Madagascar and the slave trade’, 220.

³³ See the map in Ratsivalaka, ‘Madagascar dans le sud-ouest’, between 110 and 111.

sovereignty over the whole island until Madagascar's eventual subjugation by French troops after 1895.

The younger son who headed north to found the kingdom of Boina was known in his lifetime (c. 1660–c. 1710) as Tsimenata. (Sakalava kings acquired new names after death, by which they are known in later genealogies.) Having lost the struggle to succeed his father in 1683, Tsimenata acquired guns, apparently from an allied king who in turn had acquired them from English traders.³⁴ By the end of 1685 Tsimenata had conquered a large swathe of territory including, crucially, the slave-port of Mazalagem Nova. Henceforth, he was able to dominate the slave trade from Madagascar's west coast, the one most visited by traders from overseas, including both Europeans and Antalaotra. From the early eighteenth century, however, there was an increasing demand for exports from Madagascar's east coast, driven by demand from the French colonies in the Mascarene islands, today's Mauritius and Réunion. Previously uninhabited, the two islands had become minor colonies of the Netherlands and France respectively after their discovery by Europeans at the end of the sixteenth century. After the French occupation of Mauritius in 1721, they were developed as plantation colonies, requiring constant imports of slaves, cattle and rice, all of which were most conveniently provided from the east coast of Madagascar. A trade in slaves from the interior to the east of the island was created, requiring protection from local rulers. In time, the Antalaotra traders, who had established major commercial influence in the west of Madagascar over many generations, were to respond to this new demand by importing slaves from Africa and transporting them across Madagascar overland from west to east to supply the markets of the Mascarenes.³⁵

The rise of European interest in the western Indian Ocean as a zone of commerce and colonization was accompanied by the arrival in the region of European pirates, especially after action by the English government to suppress piracy in the Caribbean had led to a major removal of pirate skippers from there to Madagascar, and as the pirates began to appreciate some of the rich prizes offered by shipping between India and the Red Sea.³⁶ Some of the pirates who established themselves in Madagascar retained the links established during the heyday of Caribbean piracy with investors in New York, who had spotted in Madagascar's location a means of circumventing the monopoly on the supply of slaves to North America held until 1698 by England's Royal African Company. The leading financier of the Madagascar pirates was Frederick Philipse (1626–1702),³⁷ a Dutchman who had settled in

³⁴ National Archives of South Africa, Cape Town, Council of Policy, C.357: Jeremias Brons to Gov.-gen. van Outhoorn, 19 Jan. 1695. A published translation of the letter (with mistaken date?) is H. C. V. Leibbrandt (ed.), *Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope. Letters Received, 1695–1708* (Cape Town, 1896), 28–31.

³⁵ See letters from Nicolas Mayeur to Barthélémy Huet de Froberville: British Library, London, Add. mss. 18128, fols. 57v–62v; and Add. mss. 18129, fol. 25r, Mayeur to Froberville, 4 April 1806.

³⁶ Anne Molet-Sauvageot, 'Madagascar et les colonies d'Amérique pendant la grande période de la piraterie européenne (1680–1700): contexte et documents de base', *Etudes Océan Indien*, 13 (1991), 8.

³⁷ Jacob Judd, 'Frederick Philipse and the Madagascar trade', *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 55 (1971), 354–74.

New York and had worked his way up to become one of its leading investors and entrepreneurs. In 1691, Philipse despatched an agent, Adam Baldrige, to set up a trading-station in Madagascar on the island of Sainte-Marie. Baldrige became a broker for many of the pirate networks.³⁸

According to the governing council of the Dutch United East India Company (VOC) colony at the Cape, in 1705 there were as many as 830 European pirates in Madagascar,³⁹ most of them probably English. In time, the Madagascar pirates became sufficiently well organized to send a petition to the king of Sweden proposing their services in return for his royal protection over no less than 1,200 of them.⁴⁰ The European pirates in Madagascar were not always the daring sea-rovers of legend. As one observer put it, they customarily took 'Negro women for their wives or whores & live constantly ashore'.⁴¹ Some developed close relationships with local rulers, particularly King Tsimenata of Boina and his successor, Toakafo. Tsimenata is said to have engaged the services of twenty sailors from two ships owned by Frederick Philipse to help him in his campaigns⁴² and, according to oral tradition, he used Europeans to help him build the defences around his capital.⁴³ Toakafo, generally reckoned to be the most powerful king in Madagascar after his accession to the kingdom of Boina in 1709 or 1710, developed his father's relationship with the European pirates. An official of the VOC who visited Toakafo's court in 1715 met there a well-known pirate, Samuel Burgess, who, the Dutch official wrote, 'in the year 1699 was captured as a pirate by another Englishman on the Cape roadstead and had for some years resided on the island [i.e. Madagascar], on this side as well as on the eastern side'.⁴⁴ Burgess had thus lived in Madagascar for many years. He was married to Frederick Philipse's sister,⁴⁵ a detail that suggests the extent to which the kings of Boina, thanks to their relationships with European pirates, became integrated into commercial networks stretching half-way around the world.

Some pirates even became rulers themselves. A French visitor to north-eastern Madagascar in 1714 noted that some 'have the Command of the Natives for 60 or 70 Leagues along the Shore'.⁴⁶ Within a few decades, there were so many petty rulers in Madagascar's northeast who were descended from European pirates, especially on Sainte-Marie and around the shores of Antongil Bay, that their offspring formed a dynasty known in Malagasy as

³⁸ *Ibid.* 357.

³⁹ Van der Stel to Heren XVII, 28 March 1705, quoted in Bialuschewski, 'Pirates, slavers, and the indigenous population', 419.

⁴⁰ Charles Dawson, 'The Madagascar affair: a little-known Swedish project of colonisation', *Mariner's Mirror*, 81 (1995), 210–12.

⁴¹ Quoted by Bialuschewski in an earlier draft of his article 'Pirates, slavers, and the indigenous population', kindly provided to the present author.

⁴² See the account by the pirate Cornelius, in Alfred Grandidier *et al.* (eds.), *Collection des ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar* (9 vols.) (Paris, 1903–20), III, 615–22.

⁴³ Rody Chamuleau (ed.), *Hoeveel Koperdraad voor een Slavin? De VOC en de slavenhandel op Madagaskar 1696–1697 volgens het journal van het zeiljacht Soldaat*, trans. into French by Gabrielle Cardin and Anne Molet-Sauvaget (Oosterbeek, 2004), 88 n. 31.

⁴⁴ Westra and Armstrong (eds.), *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 99. See also 151 n. 149.

⁴⁵ Brown, *Madagascar Rediscovered*, 81.

⁴⁶ 'Remarks on Madagascar', 1716, quoted in Bialuschewski, 'Pirates, slavers, and the indigenous population', 423.

the Zanamalata (Children of the Mulattos). In 1694 or 1695, a child was born from one such union between an English pirate named Tom⁴⁷ and a woman from the prestigious Zafindramisoa lineage located on Madagascar's north-east coast. Her son was known by the other pirates as Tom, the same name as his father. His Malagasy name was Similaho. Sometimes the honorific prefix 'Ra-' was added, making his name Ratsimilaho. Often, he was known by both names, as Tom Similaho.

The fact that pirates have a reputation as the outcasts of European society should not blind us to the fact that, in the age of mercantilism, skippers were often encouraged by their home governments or by colonial governors during time of war to raid the shipping of enemy powers indiscriminately, with official letters of marque permitting them to raid and pillage. It was the extravagant use of letters of marque during successive maritime wars between rival European powers that led to mayhem in the Caribbean and was at the origin of relationships between pirate-captains and New York financiers like Frederick Philipse. It sometimes took months for news to reach the colonies of peace-treaties signed in Europe. In any event, some captains chose to continue their way of life after war's end, turning themselves from law-abiding skippers into pirates. In short, some pirate captains had retained quite close ties to established financiers and grandees. The Madagascar pirate Samuel Burgess, counsellor of Kings Tsimenata and Toakafo, was said by Daniel Defoe to have enjoyed the patronage of the bishop of London and the archbishop of Canterbury.⁴⁸ Whatever disapprobation was attached to pirates in Europe was not necessarily replicated in Madagascar.⁴⁹ Those European pirates who married women from high-status local families were behaving no differently from other immigrants who had arrived in Madagascar over the centuries, bringing with them prestigious knowledge or technical skills – including in regard to commerce – and being received into local society. In the pirates' case, their assets included military expertise and integration into long-distance commercial networks. Through alliance with the pirates, confirmed by marriage, local rulers in Madagascar could acquire flintlock guns, which warriors learned to use with skill. Nevertheless, the power of the musket was at least as much due to the mystique and the prestige of this weapon as to its purely military effectiveness.⁵⁰

RATSIMILAHO AND HIS BIOGRAPHERS

The main source of information concerning the pirate's son Ratsimilaho that has been used by previous historians is an unpublished biography, now in the British Library, that was written in 1805–6 by the retired slave trader

⁴⁷ Exhaustive attempts to identify this man from among various candidates suggested in the literature have been unsuccessful, leading to the conclusion that he could have been 'any pirate named Tom who lived in the Sainte-Marie region in the period 1680–1707'. Molet-Sauvaget, 'Madagascar et les colonies d'Amérique', 24 n. 1.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Brown, *Madagascar Rediscovered*, 81.

⁴⁹ Yvette Sylla, 'Les Malata: cohésion et disparité d'un "groupe"', *Omalay sy Anio*, 21–2 (1985), 19–32.

⁵⁰ Gerald Berg, 'The sacred musket: tactics, technology and power in eighteenth-century Madagascar', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 27 (1985), 261–79.

Nicolas Mayeur (1747–1809).⁵¹ Born in the Breton port of Saint-Malo, Mayeur left France with his parents as a baby and arrived in Mauritius in 1750.⁵² In 1762 he went to work as a trader in Madagascar, and he spent most of the next 25 years there, travelling widely. Mayeur has a reputation among historians, largely on the basis of other of his writings that were published after his death,⁵³ as a generally reliable and observant witness with a deep knowledge of Madagascar – although, as we shall see shortly, he was capable of inaccuracy in regard to the dates of events that had occurred only shortly before his arrival there. His manuscripts were preserved largely thanks to the Franco-Mauritian scholar Barthélémy Huet de Froberville (1761–1835), and it was the latter who persuaded Mayeur, after the older man's retirement, to write his account of Ratsimilaho. Mayeur's sources were excellent, as, although he did not arrive in Madagascar until shortly after Ratsimilaho's death, he lived for some five years close to the late king's son and heir.⁵⁴ Drawing on information he had gleaned in his youth, Mayeur wrote in his biography that Ratsimilaho was still living in 1754 and that he had died in 1754 or 1755 aged about sixty. He reckoned that Ratsimilaho had reigned for about forty years. As Mayeur himself deduced, 'therefore, he must have been born in 1694 or 1695 and been aged between 18 and 20 years when he began to reign'.⁵⁵ In other words, Ratsimilaho rose to power probably between 1712 and 1715. The French astronomer Le Gentil de la Galaisière, who visited Ratsimilaho's former capital at Foulpointe in 1762–3 and who subsequently received information in Mauritius from a French veteran of the Madagascar coast, wrote that Ratsimilaho was in power by 1722.⁵⁶ However, it is clear that Mayeur's recall is faulty, as elsewhere he wrote⁵⁷ that Ratsimilaho died in 1755 or 1756, while a study by a later historian establishes incontrovertibly, on the basis of documents from French archives, that Ratsimilaho in fact died in early 1750.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Nicolas Mayeur, 'Histoire de Ratsimila-hoe, Roi de Foule-pointe et des Bé-tsi-micaracs', British Library, Add. mss. 18129, fols. 82r–143v. The first pages of this account (fols. 83r–85v) consist of letters from Mayeur to Froberville which provide valuable information on Mayeur's sources. Other letters from Mayeur to Froberville are contained elsewhere in the same volume. Hubert Deschamps published a useful summary of Mayeur's text, with modernized spellings of Malagasy names, in *Les pirates à Madagascar* (Paris, 1949), 215–29.

⁵² British Library Add. mss. 18129, 84r: Mayeur to Froberville, 27 April 1806. For a résumé of Mayeur's career, see Alfred Grandidier, in *Congrès des Sociétés savantes, Discours prononcés à la séance générale du Congrès le samedi 11 avril 1896* (new ed., Villiers-sur-Marne, 2003 [1896]).

⁵³ Nicolas Mayeur, 'Voyage à la côte de l'ouest de Madagascar (pays des Séclaves) – 1774', *Bulletin de l'Académie malgache*, 10 o.s. (1912), 49–91; 'Voyage dans le nord de Madagascar, au Cap d'Ambre et à quelques Îles du Nord-Ouest', *Bulletin de l'Académie malgache*, 10 o.s. (1912), 93–156; 'Voyage dans le sud et dans l'intérieur des terres et particulièrement au pays d'Hancove (janvier à décembre 1777)', *Bulletin de l'Académie malgache*, 12 o.s. (1913), 139–76; and 'Voyage au pays d'Ancove (1785)', *Bulletin de l'Académie malgache*, 12 o.s. (1913), 14–48.

⁵⁴ British Library Add. mss. 18129, fol. 83v: Mayeur to Froberville, 27 April 1806.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* fol. 84r.

⁵⁶ Guillaume-Joseph Le Gentil de la Galaisière, *Voyage dans les mers de l'Inde* (2 vols.) (Paris, 1779), II, 526.

⁵⁷ Mayeur, 'Histoire de Ratsimila-hoe', fol. 93r.

⁵⁸ Raymond Decary, *L'établissement de Sainte-Marie de Madagascar sous la restauration et le rôle de Sylvain Roux* (Paris, 1937), 49.

Mayeur is the source of the information that Ratsimilaho's father, the English pirate captain Tom, had married a princess of the Zafindramisoa lineage in northeastern Madagascar.⁵⁹ Also according to Mayeur, after many years in Madagascar Tom the elder returned to England, taking his teenage son with him. Mayeur states⁶⁰ that among the sources for his biography of Ratsimilaho were two old men who had accompanied Ratsimilaho and his father on this journey to England, which was presumably in about 1710. After just three months in England, however, Ratsimilaho, now a young man, wanted to go back to his native country. His father duly travelled with him back to Madagascar before leaving the island for the last time, leaving his son with a supply of money and guns that would enable him to make a career on his own account. Again according to Mayeur, the young Ratsimilaho returned from England to find that the people of his home region near Foulpointe were being oppressed by a group from further south, the Tsikoa, as a result of a struggle for control of the slave trade that was beginning to flourish with the rise in demand from the island of Bourbon (Réunion) and that was shortly to emanate also from the Île de France (Mauritius). Declaring himself the leader of a federation of local communities, Ratsimilaho succeeded in defeating the Tsikoa and became recognized as a king.⁶¹ Ratsimilaho's subjects took the name 'Betsimisaraka' (The Many Undivided), the origin of what is today recognized as one of Madagascar's ethnic groups. Mayeur, writing his biography at the height of the Napoleonic period, represented Ratsimilaho as an enlightened prince whose advanced ideas could lift his people to a higher level of civilization. A substantial part of his admiration for his subject was due to Ratsimilaho's achievement in introducing a European style of warfare to Madagascar's northeast.⁶²

It is possible that Ratsimilaho made not one, but several, trips overseas. The account written by the scientist Le Gentil de la Galaisière, who claimed to have spoken with French officials who had known the Betsimisaraka king personally, maintains that Ratsimilaho visited Bombay and other places on the Malabar coast.⁶³

There are also still more accounts of Ratsimilaho's origins, one of the more authoritative being that by a French officer, Louis Carayon, who lived on Madagascar's east coast between 1818 and 1829. According to him, Ratsimilaho was indeed the son of a princess from Madagascar and an English pirate, but Tom senior died even before the birth of his child. In Carayon's version, it was his widow who inherited the pirate's arsenal and made her late husband's firearms available to a group fighting against their local enemies. The recipients of these weapons, in gratitude, promised to take her son as their chief when he came of age.⁶⁴ Carayon's account has to be considered both less authoritative and less likely than that by Mayeur. It does, however, confirm the point that Ratsimilaho's connection to a valuable arsenal left to him by his father became fixed in local memory as a salient fact concerning his origin. However, it has been argued⁶⁵ that Ratsimilaho

⁵⁹ Mayeur, 'Histoire de Ratsimilaho', fol. 86v. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.* ⁶¹ *Ibid.* fol. 85r.

⁶² *Ibid.* fols. 84v–85r. ⁶³ Le Gentil, *Voyage dans les mers de l'Inde*, II, 526.

⁶⁴ Louis Carayon, *Histoire de l'établissement français de Madagascar* (Paris, 1845), 13–14. ⁶⁵ Berg, 'Sacred musket', 265–7.

actually possessed fewer firearms than his enemies, and that his military success stemmed from his superior strategic skills.

There are also eye-witness accounts of Ratsimilaho. The French engineer Charpentier de Cossigny, who visited Antongil Bay in Madagascar in 1733, found that the shores of this large bay were controlled by three separate potentates. One, whose name he wrote as Baldrichs, was surely the son or grandson of Adam Baldrige, the New York trader and friend of the pirates who had lived in the area forty years previously.⁶⁶ Another ruler he called Thame Tsimalau, clearly Tom Similaho, alias Ratsimilaho. 'He is a nasty fellow', the French engineer wrote; 'He is neither as easy to deal with nor as reasonable as Baldrichs'.⁶⁷ Thus Ratsimilaho was indeed a ruler on the shores of Antongil at this time, but not yet the powerful figure later described by Mayeur. The historian Gilbert Ratsivalaka has shown how Ratsimilaho was able to increase his power in the later 1730s by turning to his advantage an alliance with the kings of Boina, whose influence extended to Madagascar's northeast coast, and by astute management of the slave trade that was growing so fast in the same area. He was in effect the key local collaborator of the powerful Sakalava kings.⁶⁸ Crucial to Ratsimilaho's influence were his overseas connections and the sophisticated knowledge of commercial techniques that enabled him to establish a system of credit notes with European merchants and skippers.⁶⁹

A second eye-witness account of Ratsimilaho is that by Clement Downing, an English sailor who participated in the Royal Navy's campaigns against the Madagascar pirates in 1715–23. Downing wrote a book⁷⁰ in the familiar genre of pirate stories in which history and fiction are, as one postmodern author quaintly puts it, 'interpenetrating discourses'.⁷¹ A central character in Downing's work is John Plantain, a pirate born in Jamaica who later settled in Madagascar and was one of those who tried to set himself up as a local ruler. Plantain had a small private army of European pirates that he seems to have put at the disposal of local rulers from time to time. Downing wrote that Plantain's 'chief General was a Fellow they called Molatto Tom, who pretended to be the son of Captain Avery; which might probably be true'.⁷² Downing suggests that he met Molatto Tom in 1722. Unlike the French engineer who was to meet Tom 11 years later, Downing found him to be of pleasing aspect: 'He was a Man of tall stature, very clean-limb'd, and of a pleasant Countenance. He had Hair on his Head, and no Wool ... He had long black Hair'.⁷³ The eminent historian of Madagascar Hubert Deschamps has warned against assuming that Downing's Molatto Tom was the same person as Ratsimilaho,⁷⁴ but, notwithstanding this opinion, it seems reasonable to suppose that the figure of Molatto Tom may indeed be a sketch,

⁶⁶ Letter of 26 Mar. 1733, quoted in Ratsivalaka, 'Madagascar dans le sud-ouest', 115.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* ⁶⁸ Ratsivalaka, 'Madagascar dans le sud-ouest', 116–18.

⁶⁹ Mayeur, 'Histoire de Ratsimilaho', fol. 137v.

⁷⁰ Clement Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars* (London, 1924 [1737]).

⁷¹ Hans Turley, *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality and Masculine Identity* (New York, 1999), 73.

⁷² Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*, 106. Captain Avery was one of the most famous of the Madagascar pirates. ⁷³ *Ibid.* 114. ⁷⁴ Deschamps, *Les pirates*, 217–18.

whether based on personal knowledge or on hearsay, of the actual person of Ratsimilaho.

THE SAKALAVA CONNECTION

Further light is thrown on the history of Ratsimilaho by the journals and other writings of two officials of the VOC that are deposited in the National Library of South Africa in Cape Town. Hendrik Frappé and Willem van der Lint⁷⁵ were traders on board a VOC ship sent to Madagascar in 1715 to buy slaves and to inquire into the whereabouts of the crews of two of the company's other ships that had been hijacked by French rivals some years earlier. They were eventually to find thirty of the missing Dutch sailors stranded in Mazalagem Nova, where they had been left by their French captors. This, we have noted, was the main slave port in the whole of Madagascar, and the domain of King Toakafo, the island's most powerful king.

It was while the two Dutchmen were staying near Mazalagem Nova in 1715, negotiating to buy slaves from Toakafo, that they heard of a man called Simialoe. 'The king [Toakafo]', Van der Lint wrote, 'gave us to understand that his friend Simialoe, the second man of his kingdom, had gone inland, but that he was expected the next day, and that he would not conduct any trade until the latter was present'.⁷⁶ Frappé and Van der Lint stated several times in their respective journals that this Simialoe was the king's right-hand man. Frappé also referred to the same man as 'Andian Simonalij' (*andian* being a title of nobility). The Dutchmen resident at Toakafo's court, the thirty survivors of the castaway crews, told him that Simonalij 'had a great influence on the king, and that which he agreed to would be acceptable to the king', and that he was 'also loved by his people and natives'.⁷⁷ When the two Dutch traders eventually met Simialoe, Van der Lint found him 'very pleasant'. When Frappé and Van der Lint were finally able to open formal negotiations for the purchase of slaves, they were received by King Toakafo and Simialoe sitting together, Toakafo wearing a massive gold crown studded with agates, gold and silver chains hung around his neck, and carrying a loaded musket.⁷⁸ He was, noted one of the Dutchmen, 'honoured and feared like a god by his subjects'.⁷⁹

Although Westra and Armstrong are unable to identify the Simialoe or Simonalij met by Frappé and Van der Lint in 1715, it is interesting to inquire whether he might be the same person as the Ratsimilaho who came to power at more or less the same period, bearing in mind that 'Ra-' is an honorific prefix attached to the name Similaho. Malagasy names were subject to wide variations in spelling by Europeans. (The king of the Sakalava kingdom of Menabe, for example, was variously referred to by European writers of the time as Tsimanongarivo, Trimoninarivo, Temanuellerebo,

⁷⁵ Westra and Armstrong (eds.), *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 135, for short biographies of Frappé and Van der Lint. The latter uses variant spellings of his own name, such as Van der Linden.

⁷⁶ National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, MSD 10: 'Journael gehouden door den Commies Willem van der Linden in den Jaere 1716 van Cabo de goede hoop na Madagascar Anzuam', entry for 15 Oct. 1715. As Westra and Armstrong note (*Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 41–3), Van der Lint fell ill at this time and the dates of his journal entries became confused. ⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 97. ⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 129. ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Tomanueallarebo, Timalin Arivo, Andia Timalo Arivo, Andian Tingaling Arivo, Tomalarivo and Trimmonongarevo.)⁸⁰ The Dutch descriptions of Simialoe/Simonialij as the Sakalava king Toakafo's right-hand man are consistent with other information that Ratsimilaho enjoyed a very close connection to the kingdom of Boina. Mayeur informs us that, once Ratsimilaho had become the king of the Betsimisaraka, he married Matavy, daughter of the king of Boina.⁸¹ Ratsimilaho is said to have married one of her sisters also.⁸² Kings of the Zafimbolamena, the leading branch of the Sakalava royal dynasty, Toakafo's own line, habitually married within their own family in order to preserve their exclusive royal status, as well as taking concubines of lesser status, and gave their daughters in marriage to exogamous groups to seal local alliances.⁸³ After becoming a king, Ratsimilaho in turn gave his daughter in marriage to a king of the Sakalava Zafimbolamena dynasty.⁸⁴ Froberville, the Mauritian scholar who commissioned Mayeur's biography, noted that Ratsimilaho was allied by solemn oath to the Sakalava,⁸⁵ and Mayeur recalled that Ratsimilaho's memory was revered among the Sakalava after his death.⁸⁶ A leading Malagasy historian has remarked on the degree to which Ratsimilaho imitated the style of the kingdom of Boina.⁸⁷ In fact, popular memory was soon to confuse Ratsimilaho still more with the Sakalava royal dynasty, as a tradition collected in Ratsimilaho's capital of Foulpointe in 1805 claimed that his mother was from the Sakalava royal dynasty of the Zafimbolamena.⁸⁸

It is thus clear that Ratsimilaho had a close connection with the Sakalava kings of Boina. Ratsivalaka, in his important re-examination of histories of trade and state formation in Madagascar, has explained in some detail how Ratsimilaho, endowed with indigenous social status by his mother and with commercial connections by his father, became a vassal of the kings of Boina, and how he was able to use the growth of the trade with Réunion and Mauritius to enhance his stature within this alliance.⁸⁹ In brief, then, it seems likely that the Simialoe who was described as King Toakafo's right-hand man by Dutch visitors in 1715 is the same as the Ratsimilaho known to history chiefly through Mayeur's biography, and that he used his service with King Toakafo as a prelude to the launch of his own career as a ruler. He was to remain an ally of the Boina kings thereafter. Oral tradition on the east coast remembered him primarily as the son of an English pirate rather than as the vassal of a Sakalava king, no doubt in conformity with local political aspirations.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 147. ⁸¹ Mayeur, 'Histoire de Ratsimilaho', fols. 138v–139v.

⁸² Le Gentil, *Voyage dans les mers de l'Inde*, 11, 529.

⁸³ Charles Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie et le commerce de la partie occidentale de Madagascar* (Paris, 1845), 22–3.

⁸⁴ Vérin, *The History of Civilization in North Madagascar*, 112.

⁸⁵ Note in Mayeur, 'Histoire de Ratsimilaho', fol. 107r. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.* fol. 84v.

⁸⁷ Manassé Esoavelomandroso, 'Antagonisme des *Fanjakana*', in *Madagascar et le christianisme* (Antananarivo and Paris, 1993), 49.

⁸⁸ Mauritius National Archives, HB3: correspondence of Louis-Armand Chapelier, 1805–6, fol. 252. Chapelier wrote that, according to oral traditions he gathered on the east coast in 1805, Matavy was not Ratsimilaho's wife but simultaneously his grandmother and aunt, due to an incestuous union. *Ibid.* fol. 254.

⁸⁹ Ratsivalaka, 'Madagascar dans le sud-ouest', 116–18, 135.

As we have seen, Ratsimilaho was not the only descendant of a European pirate or freebooter who was to enjoy influence in Madagascar's northeast. So too did the offspring of the New York merchant Adam Baldrige. Collectively, these pirates' progeny became a veritable dynasty, the Zanamalata, who associated themselves with an older dynasty of immigrant origin, considered to have important religious powers.⁹⁰ In keeping with Madagascar's tradition of dynastic politics, the Zanamalata habitually inter-married both with high-status indigenous families and with Europeans.⁹¹ Thus, after Ratsimilaho's death, his daughter Betti is said to have married the representative of the French Compagnie des Indes at Sainte-Marie following the latter island's occupation by France in 1750.⁹² Similar alliances between Zanamalata princes and princesses and Europeans were to recur for several generations, during much of which period the Zanamalata were reckoned to 'form a part of' the Sakalava⁹³ – chiefly, we may suppose, as a result of Ratsimilaho's historic relation to the ruling house of Boina. At the same time, the Zanamalata, being locally descended, were buried in the tombs of indigenous families,⁹⁴ an important marker of status in Madagascar.

During his own lifetime, religious status seems to have become attached to the person of Ratsimilaho, as to other kings, although, alas, the available sources give little information on this aspect of his rule. However, when his son was born, wrote the scientist Le Gentil de la Galaisière:

Tamsimilo's subjects, or at least his courtiers, desired with such ardour to see their master produce a male child, that when his son saw the light of day, they showed their joy in a way that was highly satisfying to the sovereign; there was a volley of gunshots, accompanied by acclamations, and a general cry *that their God had come at last*.⁹⁵

Ratsimilaho's son was thereafter known as Zanahary, a Malagasy word for 'the high god'.

CONCLUSION

For all his exotic origins, Ratsimilaho is by no means an anomaly in Madagascar's history. The complex systems of inequality associated with the formation of kingdoms in Madagascar were, in the words of a leading historian, 'typical of creole societies'.⁹⁶ His foreign paternity was actually quite characteristic of royal dynasties in the island, which habitually represented themselves as being descended from gods or from foreigners, literally of

⁹⁰ Sylla, 'Les Malata', 27–8.

⁹¹ Cf. G. A. Rantoandro, 'Hommes et réseaux *malata* de la Côte orientale de Madagascar à l'époque de Jean René (1773–1826)', in *Annuaire des pays de l'océan Indien*, vol. xvii (2001–2), (Aix-en-Provence, 2003), 114–15.

⁹² Decary, *L'Etablissement de Sainte-Marie de Madagascar*, p. 6; on Betti's later existence in Mauritius (where she became known as Betsy), see Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-century Mauritius* (Durham NC, 2005), 105–7.

⁹³ Mauritius National Archives, HB7: Barry to Lesage, 20 April 1816.

⁹⁴ Fulgence Fanony, 'Fasina: tradition religieuse et changement social dans une communauté villageoise malgache' (Doctorat de 3e cycle, Paris, 1974), 33.

⁹⁵ Le Gentil, *Voyage dans les mers de l'Inde*, II, 529. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁶ Raison-Jourde, 'Introduction', 21.

a different breed from sons of the soil.⁹⁷ Indeed, Ratsimilaho's Sakalava overlord, King Toakafo, himself told an English captain that his ancestors 'had a Tradition of their coming on the Island many Ages ago in large Canoes':⁹⁸ it is debatable whether this is to be understood as a memory of the immigration of Toakafo's ancestors from Africa within quite recent times,⁹⁹ or, probably more likely, as an ideological statement intended to distinguish royalty from the ordinary run of humankind.

Moreover, although the kingdom Ratsimilaho created hardly outlived him, neither did it stand outside the mainstream of political development, as it has generally been considered to have done. Many kingdoms have come and gone in Madagascar's history, some of them long forgotten, but all of them exerting an influence on others. In the age of mercantilism, rulers in Madagascar – particularly those on the coast – were able to acquire firearms and silver and, via alliances with traders from overseas, to become integrated into networks of trade and influence extending abroad. The Sakalava kings of Boina were able to assert their control over the Antalaoatra traders who had traditionally dominated seaborne trade from Madagascar's northwestern coast, the one most closely integrated into Indian Ocean trade systems until the eighteenth century. Thereafter, they strove also to exert the same sort of influence over the island's northeastern coast, as the slave trade with the French-ruled plantation islands to the east of Madagascar grew in importance. Ratsimilaho was a political–military entrepreneur able to turn this shift in the pattern of trade to advantage. There is no doubt that he became an important ally of the kings of Boina. This article has suggested that he even entered the direct service of one of them, King Toakafo.

The slave trade in Madagascar was originally connected to the small-scale warfare endemic in the island. Before Ratsimilaho, war in Madagascar's northeast had served as an instrument of competition between rival lineages, of limited scale and duration. In effect, it was a form of social reproduction.¹⁰⁰ The conduct of war was transformed by Ratsimilaho, as it was by other political–military entrepreneurs of the time, who may have learned from him in this respect. It is known that Ratsimilaho intervened in wars among his neighbours, and he may have helped a French military adventurer, previously in his own service, to secure a contract to fight for one of the rival highland princes then engaged in a ruinous civil war.¹⁰¹

Ratsimilaho's career confirms that Madagascar's historical kingdoms are best considered not as autonomous creations, but as political constructions that arose from systems of trade, war and diplomacy that even in the seventeenth century could stretch across the whole island, and beyond it. New political entities were created in this process. Betsimisaraka, the name applied to Ratsimilaho's followers in his own time, is today considered the

⁹⁷ Cf. Paul Ottino, *L'étrangère intime: essai d'anthropologie de la civilisation de l'ancien Madagascar* (2 vols.) (Paris, 1986).

⁹⁸ Robert Drury, *Madagascar; or Robert Drury's Journal, During Fifteen Years' Captivity on that Island*, ed. Pasfield Oliver (London, 1890 [1729]), 34.

⁹⁹ Cf. Kent, *Early Kingdoms in Madagascar*, ch. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Cabanes, 'Guerre lignagère et guerre de traite sur la côte nord-est de Madagascar aux XVIIe et XVIII siècles', in Jean Bazin and Emmanuel Terray (eds.), *Guerres de lignages et guerres d'états en Afrique* (Paris, 1982), 143–88.

¹⁰¹ Ratsivalaka, 'Madagascar dans le sud-ouest', 151.

name of a specific ethnic group, sometimes considered to be endowed with a range of characteristic cultural attributes. The label 'Betsimisaraka' has thus proved surprisingly durable, being originally a description of a political allegiance that in fact was rather short-lived. The name has survived the demise of the political power with which it was originally identified by almost three centuries. This illustrates a change in the nature of group identities in Madagascar, that have been transformed from 'a historical mode of rooting in territory and of subjection',¹⁰² through the usages of colonial administration, to become components of modern nationalism.

The fact that Ratsimilaho's kingdom did not endure is probably the reason that it has become known as the Betsimisaraka kingdom rather than being regarded as one of Madagascar's historic kingdoms. It has sometimes been suggested that its failure to survive as a unified kingdom was because Ratsimilaho was unable to create a durable cultural-religious system,¹⁰³ the equivalent of the institutions associated with monarchies elsewhere in the island, presumably on account of his foreign origin. However, although we know little about the ritual instruments and religious aspects of Ratsimilaho's rule, there are reasons to doubt such an explanation, as the Zanamalata, the descendants of the pirates, seem to have been regarded as fully part of local societies from their inception. A more likely reason for the short duration of the Betsimisaraka confederation was the political context of the time, and notably the growing influence of French slave-traders, who encouraged Ratsimilaho's successors to engage in endless petty wars, which became fundamentally altered in character and far more destructive. Toakafo, Ratsimilaho and Andrianampoinimerina, slave-traders and warriors, were three of a kind, kings honoured as quasi-divinities by their subjects.

¹⁰² Berger, 'Les raisons de la colère', 244.

¹⁰³ Vérin, *Madagascar*, 74.