Reclaiming Lost Ancestors and Acknowledging Slave Descent: Insights from Madagascar

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INTRODUCTION

"My mother's mother was a 'lost person' [*olo very*]."

"My grandfather was taken as a slave as a child, back in the time when they were stealing children in the forest and from the banks of rivers."

"I'm Makoa."

These three statements regarding personal ancestry were made to me by villagers during life history interviews I conducted a few months into my research in northeastern Madagascar. Each statement is an admission of slave ancestry, and I highlight them to introduce this paper for three reasons. First, such statements are not uncommon in these villages. Many villagers told stories of lost or stolen ancestors, forced labor for "nobles," and slave ancestry.[1] Second, much of the recent scholarship addressing slavery elsewhere in Madagascar has suggested that slavery is not easily discussed among contemporary residents of this Indian Ocean island. Thus, the fact that the people among whom I studied readily acknowledged their own slave descent by referring to their "lost" or "stolen" grandparents or to their own Makoa[2] identity prompts further com-

[1] Information on ethnic identity was collected from approximately 225 adults in 140 households in two villages. Of these, between 40 and 45 percent cited Makoa as a primary identity, while 30–35 percent cited Betsimisaraka ancestry. While these categories are not always fixed and mutually exclusive, the important fact in the Malagasy context is the extent to which individuals claim their Makoa identity, especially when many of them have a choice to highlight another identity.

[2] Makoa is the term used in various regions of Madagascar, including the Northeast, to denote

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parative inquiry. What factors explain acceptance of slave ancestry among some Malagasy and its concurrent stigmatization among others? Third, examination of variations in Madagascar's responses to slavery can lead us to new insights into the forms of identity and opportunity in other post-slave societies.

In this paper, I analyze the experience of slavery and slave ancestry in northeastern Madagascar through a comparative lens in order to develop a deeper understanding of the social acceptability of slave ancestry in former slave-holding and slave-supplying societies. Particularly in a context, such as that found in northeastern Madagascar, where appearance and cultural traditions cannot easily be used to distinguish people of "free" descent from people of slave descent, what causes people of slave ancestry to readily acknowledge a past that might rather easily be submerged or reconstructed? Drawing on insights from studies of slavery in Africa and Asia, I will suggest that variations in slave experience within Madagascar can be traced to corresponding variations in: (1) social structure, including the presence or absence of hierarchically ranked social groups and the nature of the kinship system; (2) resource availability; and (3) historical patterns of migration and ethnic mixing.[3] The impact of any one of these three factors can be understood only by reference to the other two. The identification of these influences in Madagascar should expand our thinking about the variety of ways the slave trade and its abolition affected indigenous social structures and identities, not only in Madagascar but also in other slave-supplying and slave-holding regions of the world.

The approach taken in this paper is informed by the works of historians and anthropologists examining slavery and its legacy in various parts of Africa. For example, the detailed historical studies by Frederick Cooper (1980; 1997) and Jonathon Glassman (1995) in East Africa and by Martin Klein (1998) in French West Africa have contributed greatly to deepening our understanding of the variations in slavery within a single regional setting. Their work draws attention to how factors such as regional political economy, religious ideology, changes in international law, and involvement in international trade and warfare could have an impact on the experience of slaves, freed slaves, and their successors. This paper also draws inspiration from the vigorous debate that has ensued about the nature of African slavery since the publication of Miers and Kopytoff's *Slavery in Africa* (1977). Kopytoff and Miers' influential essay in that volume initially stimulated scholarly argument regarding whether or not

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people believed to be of African descent. The nature of this identity is discussed in more detail later in this paper.

  [3] I use the term "ethnic" and "ethnicity" for ease of discussion, with some reservations. In many cases in Madagascar, what has commonly been called an "ethnic group" would more appropriately be termed a "clan." I will use the term "clan" interchangeably with "ethnic group" when discussing the less centrally organized identities that are commonly known under an ethnic label. Much has been written about the historical, political, and social processes of group identity construction in Madagascar (e.g. Astuti 1995a; 1995b; Graeber 1999; Lambek and Walsh 1999; Larson 1996; 2000; Ottino 1998; and many of the contributions to J. Kaufman 2001).

African slavery was largely an extension of other types of dependency, particularly kinship. However, more recent scholarship on African slavery has become increasingly attentive to uncovering variations in African experiences of slavery and manumission instead of attempting to label all of African slavery as a single type. Klein's recent statement that the differences in interpretation between Kopytoff and Miers and their critics, particularly Meillassoux, "flow in part from the societies they studied" (Klein 1998:9) seems to capture much of the current thinking on this topic.[4] The task of the historian and ethnographer has evolved from one of capturing a single essence of slavery to one of developing historically and culturally informed analyses of slavery's many forms and meanings.[5] Some of this scholarship has extended its reach beyond Africa to the Caribbean and Asia as well (e.g. Berlin and Morgan 1993; Klein 1993a; Watson 1980).

Madagascar, which is recognized for its cultural diversity and which has been the subject of much richly detailed ethnographic and historical research, provides fertile ground for further exploration into the varieties of experience in post-slave societies. Furthermore, Madagascar's Indian Ocean location and its historical connection to European trade make it an intriguing site for the study of slavery's legacy. Various groups from within Madagascar took on multiple roles in the Indian Ocean slave trade. They were raiders both within Madagascar and on foreign lands seeking slaves for sale to Europeans. They enslaved people for their own use. And they were victims of enslavement for use by other Malagasy groups and by Europeans. These experiences make studies of Madagascar particularly relevant for deepening our understanding of the dynamics of continuity and change in local identities in response to slavery, important features in what Larson has referred to as the internal African diaspora (1999; 2000).

STUDIES OF SLAVERY IN MADAGASCAR

An initial review of the extant anthropological literature addressing slavery in Madagascar reveals that most of the research has been conducted in regions where the legacy of slavery is a silent but powerful social force. In many of these studies, descendants of slaves bear a deeply stigmatized identity that provides the foundation for social, economic, and political disenfranchisement. For example, among the Merina, Madagascar's most numerous and politically pow-

[4] Watson made a similar argument in his earlier discussion of the limits of Kopytoff and Miers' framework. There, he suggests that "open" and "closed" types of slavery correspond to open and closed systems of kinship, with open forms being more common in Africa, and more generally in areas low in population density but rich in land, while closed systems are more common in Asia, and more generally in areas higher in population density and less rich in natural resources (Watson 1980:6–7, 10–13). Klein's approach places additional emphasis on relative levels of market orientation.
[5] Many of the authors working on these topics are represented in volumes edited by Lovejoy (1981), Miers and Klein (1999), Miers and Roberts (1988), and Robertson and Klein (1997).

erful ethnic group, intermarriage between people of free descent with those of slave descent is forbidden (Bloch 1971; 1980; Graeber 1996). This is also true for the Zafimaniry (Bloch 1980). Among the Betsileo, descendants of slaves are considered to be dirty and inferior (Evers 1995; 1999; 2000; Kottak 1980). Likewise, in northwestern Madagascar, some categories of slave descendants fear being socially shunned if their status is uncovered, and others associate their contemporary low economic standing with their slave heritage (Feeley-Harnik 1991).

Underlying the attitudes regarding slavery are three beliefs that are common throughout Madagascar. The first is a belief in the power of ancestors to influence the lives of the living. The second belief, connected to the first, is that an individual's social identity stems from ancestral relations. The third belief is that ancestral power emanates from ancestral lands.[6] Thus, to be a fully functional social being, an individual needs to be able to identify his or her ancestors and to maintain physical connections to them through their agricultural lands and/or their tombs. Slaves are people whose ancestors are "lost" to them, and one way a person of slave descent can be identified is through his or her shallow genealogy.[7] For these reasons, many people of slave heritage try to hide their ancestry or to create familial ties to higher-status individuals through marriage, adoption, or fictive kinship rituals. Yet, while the people among whom I studied shared the reverence for ancestors exhibited by other Malagasy, slave ancestry was readily discussed by people of slave as well as free descent. Furthermore, descendants of slaves intermarried with people of non-slave descent, regularly invoked local ancestors and hosted and participated in ancestral rites and rituals. Thus, a common ideology of ancestral power and the importance of kinship does not sufficiently explain the contemporary stigma associated with slave ancestry in some parts of Madagascar. Instead, it is important to examine what factors came together to allow descendants of slaves in northeastern Madagascar to shed their marginal status, not just in terms of kinship, but also in terms of society as a whole.[8]

In developing the analysis for this paper, I am building on a strong tradition of comparison in Malagasy ethnography. While the question I am addressing is most closely aligned with that raised by Bloch in his 1980 comparison of the impact of manumission among the Zafimaniry and the Merina, my approach is also informed by other comparative efforts in the ethnography of Madagascar. Among these are studies examining the sources of social, cultural, and politi-

[6] For further discussion of general issues concerning ancestors among the Malagasy, see Cole and Middleton (2001), and Southall (1986).

[7] Kopytoff and Miers (1977) have engaged in a general discussion of slavery in Africa as an "institution of marginality" in which a slave is initially someone who "was wrenched from his own people" (p. 14). Similar discussions regarding the connection between slavery and kinlessness can be found in Patterson (1982), and in Meillassoux (1991), although the authors disagree with Kopytoff and Miers about the ease of turning slave status into kinship.

[8] On the distinction between the two types of marginality, see Kopytoff and Miers 1977.

cal variability within an identifiable cultural, or ethnic, group (e.g., Feeley-Harnik 1991; Kottak 1980). Additional studies cut across regional and ethnic boundaries to explore similarities and differences between or among distinct cultural groups (e.g., Bloch 1980; Cole and Middleton 2001; Ottino 1998). A further comparative focus involves examination of the changing meaning and form of particular cultural practices or events over time and the history, politics, and economics of interpretation (e.g., Bloch 1986; Cole 2001; Feeley-Harnik 1984; 1991; Graeber 1996; Lambek and Walsh 2001; Sharp 1999; 2001; Walsh 2001).

Seeking to examine underlying causes for variation in the social acceptability of slave ancestry in Madagascar, I take a hybrid approach to comparison in this paper. Drawing first on historical studies, I examine how processes of ethnic group formation, external trade, internal military conflict, and French colonization have affected slave identity. Focusing next on local, intra-group factors, I examine social structure and ideology as they are revealed through religious beliefs and practices, kinship reckoning, and marriage patterns. Third, taking a broader political economic perspective, I examine how spatial relationships and material conditions impact the social, political, and economic opportunities for descendants of slaves. Throughout, I compare the results of my own research in northeastern Madagascar with other anthropologists' published descriptions and analyses of slavery elsewhere in the country.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

The villages where the fieldwork for this paper was conducted are located on the northern edge of the Masoala Peninsula in northeastern Madagascar. The Masoala Peninsula is a 4,000 square-kilometer landmass bounded on one side by the Indian Ocean and on the other by the Bay of Antongil. Prone to frequent flooding and occasional cyclones, it is most reliably accessible only by foot or boat. The northern boundary of the Peninsula lies about 40 kilometers south of Antalaha, a large town on the east coast that is the center of Madagascar's vanilla trade. In 1995, the total population of the Peninsula was estimated to be 44,450. Villages range in size from small settlements of just a few households to large villages of over 1000 households. Rice, cultivated in irrigated lowland fields, in flooded upland swamps, and by the method of "slash-and-burn," is the primary subsistence crop throughout the region.

Because of its remote location and inhospitable environment, the Peninsula has historically not been very densely settled. Official histories state that most settlers arrived relatively late in the island's history, with some estimates suggesting that significant migration to the Peninsula did not begin until two hundred years ago. Immigrants of many ethnic backgrounds then came searching for land and work, seeking refuge from oppressive governmental policies, or forcibly, as slaves. Ambatobe and Tanambao are neighboring villages, located less than one kilometer apart, on the northeastern edge of the Peninsula. Tanam-

bao is the older of the two. They lie along a river about five kilometers inland from the Indian Ocean.

Although maps depicting Madagascar's ethnic diversity show this region to be populated predominantly by people of Betsimisaraka descent, the actual ethnic composition is more complex. In fact, ethnic identity is a complex matter throughout Madagascar, particularly in regions, such as this, where intermarriage between people of different groups is common. Because the Malagasy commonly maintain links to their "eight ancestors," maternal and paternal great-grandparents, they also maintain awareness of the ethnic identities of each of those ancestors. Thus, many Malagasy individuals can and do claim multiple ancestries. Taking account of this, it is nonetheless possible to ascertain that four ethnic groups have significant representation in the villages of my research, with Betsimisaraka (and its sub-group Betanimena) and Makoa comprising the largest proportion of the population.[9] Many people who claimed Makoa identity also had ancestors of other ethnic backgrounds, making even more notable their choices to claim their Makoa ancestries.

Betsimisaraka history will be discussed in detail in the next section, but here it will be useful to include a brief discussion of the nature of Makoa identity. Contemporary Makoa are widely thought to be descendants of people who were captured on the East African coast and brought to Madagascar for use or sale as slaves. Although villagers claim that one distinguishing feature of Makoa is their "kinky hair," today they are physically indistinguishable from most other inhabitants of the northeast coast and are distinguished primarily for their presumed non-Malagasy ancestry. Their precise origins are unknown. For example, one villager I interviewed calls their region of origin "Morimo," and says it is near "where the Anjouany come from," referring to the Comoros Islands. Yet, the name Makoa appears to be derived from the Makua of Mozambique. It is likely that many people who currently claim Makoa ancestry may not have African origins at all, but rather have been given or have assumed the label in more general recognition of their slave backgrounds. The absence of historical depth in their own genealogical knowledge contributes to their low social status in some regions of Madagascar, and has led many of them to seek higher-status identities where possible. In Sakalava-dominated regions, although Makoa have come to be considered a low-ranking sub-group within the broader Sakalava ethnic group, many Makoa choose to suppress their Makoa identity in favor of other sub-group affiliations when possible (Feeley-Harnik 1991; Sharp 2002:182).

In 1995, Ambatobe comprised approximately 65 households and 300 residents, while Tanambao numbered 80 households and 400 residents. The nuclear family is the core residential group. Having no running water or electricity, villagers use the river for bathing, cooking, and washing, and collect wood from

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[9] The other two ethnic groups with strong representation are Anjoatsy and Antaimoro.

the forest for cooking fuel. In addition to rice and other minor subsistence crops, approximately 80 percent of households cultivate at least one of the region's major cash crops.[10] Vanilla, coffee, and clove cultivation help provide villagers with the cash resources they need to purchase clothing, sugar, salt, oil, and kerosene. This income also helps purchase rice during the times, usually just before the two rice harvests, when many household granaries are low. Villagers have a few other ways to earn money. Many of them work for wages a couple of times each year in other villagers' rice fields. A few make furniture for sale, while some sell wooden planks to regional enterprises. Several villagers periodically go deeper into the Peninsula collecting ebony and rosewood for exporters in Antalaha.

Contemporary inhabitants of the two villages descend largely from four main families. There is no clear ranking within the villages based on that ancestry, either in status or in economic power. This is partially due to very open marriage rules, which have allowed much mixing among the families and has resulted in shared ownership of many agricultural lands. Property can be inherited by male and female children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, resulting in multiple ownership of larger fields and rights to some agricultural land for every family member. Family elders assume the primary leadership roles in familial and village affairs, and their close connection to deceased ancestors, who are believed to continue to exert control over the affairs of the living, make them an important resource for their young descendants.

This description of contemporary village life provides an overview of issues I will elaborate in what follows. To summarize, this is a generally unstratified community with a decentralized form of social organization. Most villagers are actively engaged in market activities, through cash crop production and/or through the collection and transformation of forest products for sale. To grasp the significance of each of these factors requires further exploration both of contemporary cultural beliefs and practices and of their grounding in history. I address these in the following sections. I begin with an examination of the various free populations that came to inhabit northeastern Madagascar and the social and political institutions they developed.

HISTORIES IN NORTHEASTERN MADAGASCAR

The Betsimisaraka Legacy

One of the intriguing features of Tanambao, Ambatobe, and other villages on the northern Masoala Peninsula is their well-established pattern of ethnic mixing. Makoa, Antaimoro, Anjoatsy, and Betsimisaraka all live side-by-side, and some mix of these often forms the heritage of a single individual. However, de-

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[10] Single women comprise 37 percent of the 20 percent who do not have cash crops. The remaining 63 percent are mostly a mixture of recent immigrants and very young couples.

spite their recognition of other ethnic identities, Betsimisaraka remains the sec-ond-most common label people provide when asked their ethnicity (*karazaña*), and many who cite multiple ethnicities or clans begin with or include Bet-simisaraka. Historically, the east coast of the Masoala Peninsula was settled ear-ly by members of the Betsimisaraka Confederation. The port at Andrombaza-ha[11] was once a stopping point for European slave ships going on slave raids to the Comoros, which are said to have been manned primarily by Betsimis-araka. Furthermore, fluidity of identity is one of the important features of Bet-simisaraka social life, in both the past and the present (Lahady 1979; Mangalaza 1994). Thus, there are features of Betsimisaraka history that might be useful in understanding contemporary inter-group relations on the northeast coast. Clear-ly, Betsimisaraka identity alone does not sufficiently explain the level of inte-gration between Betsimisaraka and Makoa, as shown by persistent divisions be-tween the two ethnic groups in the eastern village of Fasina studied by Fanony (1975). However, I would argue that the relatively non-centralized nature of Betsimisaraka organization became important in the context of other factors particular to this region: abundant resources and high levels of in-migration of other ethnic groups.

Until the early eighteenth century, there was no group known as the Bet-simisaraka. Due to the region's steep hillsides, dense forests, and the many rivers that impede north-south travel, there was limited casual interaction among the several small isolated groups that inhabited the various river valleys (Esoavelomandroso 1979:33–37). Social organization was primarily lineage-based. In times of celebration or warfare, the lineages would unite under the control of a chief (*filoha*) into clans, primarily for the purpose of cattle raiding (Cabanes 1982a). Each clan was connected by its common ancestry, territory, and taboos (*fady*). Occasionally, clans united as a larger confederation or tribe under the leadership of a single "big chief" (*filohabe*), staging raids and counter-raids, sometimes using human captives to bargain for the return of stolen cattle. Less frequently, all of the tribes would unite in raids or wars against inland peoples, usually with the aim of obtaining cattle or human cap-tives. In these cases, the capture of humans was intended to humiliate the op-posing group, not to bargain with them, and there was no expectation that the captives would be returned.

Until the early eighteenth century, all the lineages along the northeast coast had mostly unimpeded access to ports and could trade directly with Europeans, who were attracted by the abundance of natural gemstones, cattle, rice, locally produced rum, ebony, and other desirable hardwoods. Additionally, the state of almost perpetual warfare and raiding that existed on the east coast and the well-

[11] Andrombazaha, meaning "place of the foreigners," is the local name for the village at the east-ernmost point of this region, known as Cap Est in contemporary times, and as Angontsy or Angot-sy during the pre-colonial period. It is approximately 8 kilometers southeast of the research vil-lages.

established practice of enslaving the captives of war helped to provide a steady supply of slaves, which were sought by the Dutch in the seventeenth century, and later by the French and the British to provide labor for their Indian Ocean island colonies.[12]

Initially, a roughly equal balance of power was maintained among the northeastern lineages as they supplied the European trade (Cabanes 1982a:159). However, in the early 1700s, there emerged a single powerful chief, Ratsimilaho, who had the personal charisma, beneficial lineage connections, and political sensibilities to unite the disparate lineages into the Betsimisaraka Confederation. In 1712, he obtained an oath of loyalty from many of the northern lineage heads. It was at this time that they became known as the Betsimisaraka: "the many who will not be separated." Making strategic marriage alliances, first with the daughter of a powerful lineage chief of the southern Antatsimo tribe and later with a Sakalava princess, Ratsimilaho led the Betsimisaraka to become the most powerful force on the east coast. However, lacking his charisma and having no other basis of power, Ratsimilaho's successors failed to keep the Confederation together after his death in 1750. Divisions within the Confederation were exacerbated by French traders desirous of the slaves that resulted from internal conflict (Rochon 1971). By the end of the century, the Confederation collapsed into lineage and tribal warfare and had lost much of its power (Deschamps 1972:106–7).[13] Trade returned to a focus on lineage-based acquisition. In 1785, in order to meet the rising demand for slaves by European traders, Betsimisaraka[14] began to conduct external slave raids to the Comoros islands, bringing the slaves back primarily to Nosy Boraha (now Ile Ste. Marie) for sale or trade, with each participating lineage having an equal share in the returns.

While the Betsimisaraka were raiding one another and the Comoros, the Merina empire, based in the central highlands, continued to expand. They increased their control of the slave trade, capturing Malagasy in the highlands or in western Madagascar and also taking slaves from East Africa across the northern part of the island and selling them in markets on the northeast coast (Campbell 1993:140). However, by 1825, the Merina were actually attempting to prevent the export of slaves from Madagascar because of the labor needs of their

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[12]   In the eighteenth century, over 100,000 slaves were imported into the Mascarenes from Madagascar and Africa. It is estimated that 45 percent of these slaves came from Madagascar (Campbell 1993:139; Filliot 1974), with the majority leaving from the northeast coast Cabanes (1982a:158).

[13]   For the purpose of comparison, it is interesting to note that while the Europeans were successful in promoting divisions among the Betsimisaraka, they failed in their efforts to divide other groups to their advantage. For example, when Mayeur, a French traveler and trader, attempted to convince Sakalava chiefs to trade directly with foreign merchants in violation of orders given by the Sakalava royal court, they refused, fearful of angering their king (Mayeur 1777, cited in Campbell 1993:144).

[14]   The name continued to denote the inhabitants of the east coast from Manjary in the south to Sambava in the north.

own empire, and they shut down the trade out of east coast ports.[15] The hostile reaction by the French and by Creole planters on Mauritius and the Comoros led eventually to violent Merina retaliation against coastal populations that supported the French against the Merina. It is estimated that between 1828 and 1840, over 200,000 people were enslaved as a result of Merina aggression (Campbell 1981). Those who were not enslaved were subjected to abuse by Merina administrators and soldiers posted throughout Merina-controlled regions of Madagascar. During this time, thousands of Betsimisaraka refugees fled Merina domination, settling on the French-controlled island of Nosy Boraha (now Ile Ste. Marie), ultimately being recruited into contract labor on Mauritius (Campbell 1981).

From this history of the Betsimisaraka and their relations with one another, with European traders, and with the Merina, an overall impression emerges of a group that developed neither a strong sense of solidarity nor a well-formed, ideologically supported social hierarchy. Their "royalty" was not associated with rituals uniting its followers and legitimating their leadership. Trading and raiding were conducted by multiple groups with an entrepreneurial spirit rather than through the guidance and control of a single centrally organized political leader. Ultimately, their reaction to Merina domination was dispersal rather than unified resistance. In this past, we see precursors to many of the patterns we observe today among people, many claiming Betsimisaraka identity, residing in northeastern Madagascar. They practice open forms of kinship, allowing marriage with all other ethnic groups except the Merina. Their relations of authority are primarily lineage-based, with few matters requiring broader coalitions. And, just as members of early Betsimisaraka groups set a precedent in the northeast by conducting long-distance raids and collecting in local forests to collect captives and goods for trade with foreigners, there is no stigma in the region today in surviving by a mixture of subsistence farming and market transactions.

Population Flows in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

To talk about history with contemporary villagers in northeastern Madagascar is to talk about movement. People came to the Masoala Peninsula and the surrounding area for a variety of reasons. Most villagers say their grandparents and great-grandparents, if not enslaved, came in search of wealth (*mitady*). For some, trade with Europeans and Creoles was their primary incentive for migration. One villager's grandparents made money by entering the forest to gather nuts, from which they then extracted oils to sell to foreigners (*vazaha*), while another villager reports that early settlers used to earn a living doing "what 'true

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[15] Ramiandrasoa (1997) cites statistics suggesting that by the late nineteenth century there may have been as many as two times as many slaves as free people in the Merina territory, and that nearly all free men in that region owned slaves, regardless of their social status.

Malagasy' did": they collected rubber and ebony for sale to Europeans. Other people moved to the Peninsula to work for wages on foreign-owned concessions and agricultural plantations.

In the late nineteenth century, Merina prime minister Rainilaiarivony granted several forest concessions to European and Creole settlers on the Masoala Peninsula (Esoavelomandroso 1979; Petit and Jacob 1965; Valette 1966). Among these concessionaires was M. D. Maigrot, a Creole from Mauritius, who received 6000 hectares on the Masoala Peninsula, the largest concession in the region and encompassing the area around Andrombazaha. In 1898, with Madagascar under French rule, an observer noted that Maigrot employed "a certain number of Antaimoros"[16] to collect ebony and rosewood, and that the area around Andrombazaha had been denuded by Malagasy people working for Maigrot and clearing fields for themselves (Chapotte 1898:885–86). Thus, this appears to be one site to which migrants were attracted in their search for money and opportunity.

Under French rule, many foreigners received concessions to develop agricultural plantations. For those Malagasy seeking money to pay taxes, work on these plantations provided needed income. For example, in the nearby Andapa region in the northeast, vanilla plantations attracted migrants seeking work (Cabanes 1982b; Laney 1999). In the area immediately around Ambatobe and Tanambao, current villagers report that a foreigner named Pastelaire developed his concession into the first large coffee plantation in the vicinity and hired workers to farm both coffee and rice.[17] Some contemporary villagers descend from these workers. One such woman reports that when her uncle began his military service, he sent his children to work for Pastelaire, who, he said "protects his workers. Murderers and thieves can't get to them there." Later, when coffee, cloves, and vanilla became available for villagers to plant for themselves, they readily adopted them and created their own small cash crop plantations. Since Madagascar's independence in 1960, the pattern of migration in search of money and opportunity in the northeast has continued. In 1967, *Les Grands Moulins de Dakar* received seven parcels of land in the sub-prefecture of Antalaha for timber extraction.[18] This brought better roads and jobs to the region. It also brought people. In May of 1970, that concession was revoked,

[16]   Antimoroño, Antimahory, and Antaimoro are frequently interchanged locally. Antimoroño literally means "people of the coast." See Kent (1970:88–115) for a discussion of Antaimoro history. Those called Antaimoro (and the other variations on the name) may actually descend from another southern group. In general, people from the southeast coast who have moved to other regions are designated as Antaimoro regardless of their actual identity. Deschamps (1959:29) and Dez and Poirier (1963:14) suggest that many people who now live in the north and are called Antaimoro (or Antemoro) are actually of Antesaka descent. "True" Antaimoro are believed to descend from Arab settlers. It is also possible that people labeled Antimahory have their origins in Mayotte. I thank an anonymous reviewer for making me aware of this possibility.

[17]   Pastelaire's concession lay southwest of these villages. Rights to his land came into dispute after independence, and I have seen some records of those disputes. However, I have thus far been unable to find any records regarding his origins and the original terms of his concession.

[18]   Arrête No. 66-MAER/PRO/FOR. *Journal Officiel de Madagascar*, 14 Jan. 1967.

but since the 1990s, other exporters operating out of Antalaha have attracted workers willing to collect ebony and rosewood from peninsular forests.

In sum, the inhabitants of this region have been people who were willing and in many cases forced by circumstances to work for wages, to exploit forest products for sale, and to grow their own cash crops. Perhaps because there were so many migrants and so few long-term settlers, settlement patterns in this region have not followed the pattern set in other agricultural regions of Madagascar where being a "first-comer" continues to carry special status. In those regions, working for wages and working with cash crops is often seen as a sign of submission to an external, polluting force (Feeley-Harnik 1991; Sharp 1993). This is not the case in the northeast. Nor is there much rationale for a general hierarchy of first-comer over later arrivals. Here, the history of movement means that one of the primary connections contemporary villagers have to their past is the necessity to be flexible and the ability to move. Many people did not migrate here with the intention of returning to their homeland. As one of the current residents of the villages says, "Once people settled here, they were just from here. We're all just from here."[19] And once they were here, they continued to be on the move, due in part to the physical environment and in part to the social and political environment.

When asked about the relationship between Tanambao and other nearby villages, villagers today recount a history of back-and-forth movement due to epidemics and floods. Four villages were founded by families fleeing a flu epidemic in Tanambao in the early years of the twentieth century. One of those villages was later deserted when people escaping floodwaters migrated towards Tanambao and established Ambatobe. Politically, from the times of Merina rule to the present, the region has drawn the attention of government officials interested in controlling both forest resources and the human population. For example, the French colonial government targeted "slash-and-burn" agriculture as one of the destructive practices that needed to be eliminated, and they produced numerous laws forbidding the burning of forests by farmers (Althabe 1969; Jarosz 1993). Additional attempts to conserve the forest led to the creation of *Réserve Naturelle No. 2* on the Masoala Peninsula in 1927. These policies served to channel migrants to denser settlements on the coastal plains, which also allowed the government to more efficiently monitor their activities. There, local people could farm irrigated rice fields, but these were neither numerous nor large enough to sustain the population that had been pushed onto them. The shortfall in rice production further fueled the drive to make money through cash crops and wage labor. Local people today refer to this time as one when they or their ancestors temporarily moved away in search of land and

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[19] This is reminiscent of Merina villagers, described by Bloch, who had emigrated from their ancestral lands. Explaining why they could not banish a suspected thief and village trouble-maker, villagers stated that "the fact that everybody was a *vahiny* [visitor, newcomer] and not a *tompo-tany* [native land-holder, living on ancestral lands] meant that they had no right to exclude anybody" (1971:106).

work.[20] In 1964, the reserve was declassified and the forest reopened to public use, drawing a new wave of settlement.

Thus, we see that since their beginnings these villages have been continually in flux—laws change, and boundaries shift. People are pushed and pulled to test new crops and farming practices. Entire villages relocate. These processes continue today. Violent cyclones in March and April of 2000 caused Tanambao to rebuild on higher ground, distancing itself geographically and politically from Ambatobe residents who chose not to move. Vanilla and clove prices have soared, inspiring farmers to expand existing plantations and convert rice fields to cash crops. A new national park was created on the peninsula in 1996, bringing with it new regulations governing the use of forest resources. Under these conditions, the logic of a social hierarchy based in longevity on the land, so common in other regions of Madagascar, makes little sense. Here, strength comes from the ability to take advantage of new opportunities, to negotiate effectively with neighbors, and to be willing to move to new ground when necessary. These capabilities are not particular to any one ethnic group or to any one ancestry. Under these conditions, even someone of slave descent can participate fully in community affairs, and sometimes even become a leader.

POWER, MARRIAGE, AND IDENTITY IN A NON-HIERARCHICAL SOCIETY

Elder-junior relations are the primary loci for the exercise of power in these villages. Elders provide access to land and to deceased ancestors, who need to be consulted or appeased at various times in a child's life. Land is the most important economic resource, and land provides connections to ancestors. Thus, that all villagers can claim ancestral links to at least some land in the area, usually inherited from a parent, helps to ensure that no one is systematically shut out from political, social, or religious life. In many ways, these villages exhibit the type of "open" system referred to by Watson (1980; see note 7) and discussed in the essay by Kopytoff and Miers (1977). For example, there are few rules governing marriage. The most palpable fears regarding marriage involve incest, not intermarriage with a potentially polluting group. Furthermore, an individual most frequently experiences his or her own "type" (*karazaña*), whether defined as clan or ethnic group, through observance of that group's taboos. Significantly, none of these taboos invoke slave or free descent as a criterion for marriage, although the taboos of a few groups do prohibit marriage with people of Merina descent. For more evidence of this, both in the present and in the past, we can turn to an examination of one villager's story as it reflects broader social processes.

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[20] Fanony reports similar population movement out of Mananara towards Antalaha during this same period (1975:85–86).

Behoraka's Story[21]

Behoraka is one of the oldest members of the village of Tanambao. His version of village and regional history stresses the complex relationship between slave and free since abolition in 1896:

The first person to live in this village was my grandfather, the father of my father . . . Before the *hova* [local term for Merina] ruled (*nanjaka*), and before they enslaved people (*nañandevo olo*), my grandfather was already here. His brother and father lived at Andrombazaha. He moved here because his wet rice fields (*oraka*) were here. . . . His clan/tribe (*karazaña*) was Antimoroño. Our ancestral taboos (*fadin-drazaña*) are eel, spotted eel, pork, and lemur. We don't eat those. My grandfather was the first here . . . And then the French came, and the slaves were dispersed. The Makoa came here.

"Where are the Antimoroño?" they asked, because Makoa and Antimoroño are *lohateny*.[22] "We don't know where we will return to. Our land is far away . . . Are you Antimoroño?" they said to Sily, my grandfather.

He responded, "I'm Antimoroño, Anjoatsy. I don't eat pork. I don't eat lemur. I don't eat eel. They are all taboo for me. I'm Antimoroño."

"You are Antimoroño. We are lost (*very*). We are Makoa. The slaves are freed."

And because they were Makoa, grandfather provided them a place to stay. "I can't send you away since you are my *lohateny*."

Afterwards, the Makoa began to talk among themselves. They decided to call together members of their families so they would have the twenty people required by the French government to create a village.[23] Grandfather gave his permission, but forbade them from placing their houses too close to his. Later, however, he moved from his place to be with them. His Makoa. Then his uncle, having heard about all the Makoa living with his nephew, came here [from Andrombazaha], and he settled here too. They took care of (*nikara*) the Makoa.

Those Makoa have many descendants here. My wife is their descendant. Many of the villagers here are their descendants. They came here once they were freed, they asked my grandfather for land, and he gave it to them. And then they grew . . . When the eldest among them died, they didn't have a cemetery. My grandfather's uncle then gave them land his brother had cleared at Ampasibireny [a site upriver from the village]. That is the cemetery of the Makoa. But, then he decided he wanted to join them when he died. "I am not going to leave these Makoa. I won't go to Rantabe [another local cemetery]. I'm going to follow my Makoa." So we buried him here with his wife.

Later in our discussion, Behoraka discusses his grandfather's reasons for first moving away from Andrombazaha to the eventual site of Tanambao. At this point, he reveals that his great-grandfather was himself a slave owner who used slave labor to construct rice fields on land concessions he received from Meri-

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[21] This is not his real name. Life histories and other interview data were tape recorded in the local Betsimisaraka dialect and later transcribed. Extended interviews were conducted with seven elders regarding village history. Their stories were very similar to one another, with Behoraka's being the most detailed.

[22] *Lohateny* refers to a reciprocal aid relationship between two ethnic groups or clans. This will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of Behoraka's story.

[23] Cole (2001:54) provides a description of the impact of French settlement rules on Southern Betsimisaraka villagers.

na rulers.[24] These were the fields to which Behoraka's grandfather moved near Tanambao. While Behoraka's story my overstate the grandeur of his own background, its broad details are not disputed by other villagers and it serves as a guide to what is considered a socially acceptable historical account of the origins of these villages. Furthermore, his story raises issues, such as the nature of social identity in the past, that can be pursued further for what they might reveal about contemporary practices and perceptions.

Behoraka's story introduces two features that are central to understanding the open relationship enjoyed between people of slave descent and people of free descent in these villages today. First, ethnic identity is expressed at a very personal level, largely through adherence to taboos. Everyone, including Makoa, has taboos that are particular to their clan or ethnic group. There is no broad social pressure to follow the taboos of a single dominant ethnic group or to otherwise try to attain membership in a particular group. I will argue that this type of identity expression is a reflection of the non-hierarchical, highly decentralized nature of regional social structure. Second, the relationship between slave and free historically bears the mark of client-patron relations, similar to the type of relationships described by Kopytoff and Miers in their essay discussing slavery as an institution of "marginality." This, I will argue, is the significance of the *lohateny* relationship repeatedly mentioned by Behoraka as an important factor in his grandfather's sense of obligation to the Makoa. I address each of these issues—the absence of social hierarchy in the present and the presence of patron-client relations in the past—in the following sections.

The Personalization of Ethnic Identity

In Behoraka's discussion of history and in his description of contemporary village life, he reveals that he married a woman of Makoa origin, a granddaughter of one of the ex-slaves who settled here upon emancipation. Currently, he refers to her as being, along with him, one of the leaders of the village, and others in the village agree with that assessment. Her position as a village leader of Makoa origin is not uncommon. At the time of my research, such a man was considered the primary *mpijoro,* or ancestral prayer leader, for Tanambao. Furthermore, the unexceptional nature of marriage between people of free and slave descent provides evidence of the lack of stigmatization of slave heritage in these villages. Examination of my household data reveals that nearly three-fourths of all marriages in which Makoa is an identity of at least one spouse involve marriage between someone of Makoa descent and someone of other descent, usually identified as Betsimisaraka, Betanimena, or Antaimoro.[25] As an

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[24]   In his discussion of the history of the Northern Betsimisaraka village of Bas-Maningory, Ottino (1998:128) provides other evidence of Betsimisaraka villagers using slaves from Mozambique to clear fields for wet rice production.

[25]   There is no pattern regarding gender. Makoa men are as likely to marry a woman of other identity as are Makoa women.

additional measure of their local status, it is notable that members of these households possess land in comparable quantity and quality to members of non-Makoa households.

Behoraka's story provides a glimpse of another widespread feature of identity in these villages. When he and his grandfather are identified as Antimoroño, the claim is supported by providing a list of the taboos they follow. It is common in many parts of Madagascar for ethnic identity to be understood as something an individual achieves through performance.[26] Taboos play a particularly powerful role in this process, as adopting them can be a way of signaling one's membership in a community of fellow adherents to ancestral or village proscriptions (Brown 1999:248–62; n.d.; Lambek 1992; Lambek and Walsh 1999; Sharp 1993:57–58; Walsh 2002). Behoraka's way of describing his grandfather's identity is mirrored in many other discussions I had with villagers about their own identities. Frequently, a villager would immediately follow an ethnic label with a list of the taboos she follows. Likewise, when asked the differences between various ethnic groups, villagers always began with taboos, followed by place of origin (usually north or south), and then appearance. Taboos, however, are not seen as an indicator of marital compatibility or social status.

If two people with different taboos marry, their children should follow both sets of rules. All taboos are not followed equally strictly, but decisions about which to follow are made on a practical basis. For example, when abandoning a taboo work day, a common justification was, "once my spouse and I combined our work taboos, we didn't have enough time to get our work done." And when one man started eating sea turtle, breaching an ancestral taboo, he explained, "They are abundant here and easy to catch," unlike in the region of his clan's origins. In more stratified communities, taboos can be used to indicate social rank. For example, in the northwest, a single ethnic identity is often understood to correlate with the category of *tompon-tany,* or first settlers, of a village or town, and *tompon-tany* exercise considerable control over land and labor access. Therefore, newcomers may attempt to assume the identity of the dominant group through marriage (and subsequent childbirth), adoption, or even spirit-mediumship (cf. Sharp 1993) which can justify adherence to the dominant group's taboos.

While taboos are important throughout Madagascar, in some regions there are additional means of performing identity and establishing one's social status. For example, among the Merina, the Sakalava, and the Antankarana, performing royal rituals is one way group members mark their identity as separate from, and in many cases superior to, non-members (Bloch 1986; 1987; Feeley-

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[26] See, for example, Rita Astuti's (1995a; 1995b) studies of the Vezo, among whom ethnic identity is thought to be something that can be gained and lost through one's location and relationship to the sea.

Harnik 1984; 1991; Lambek and Walsh 1999). Alternatively, *not* performing certain tasks can also be seen as a marker of status. Both Lesley Sharp (1993) and Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1991) document that among the Sakalava in north-western Madagascar, avoidance of wage labor is perceived to be an important indicator of the higher status that Sakalava indigenes enjoy over more recent non-Sakalava immigrants, some of whom moved to the region primarily in search of wages.

Ranked societies in Madagascar exhibit particularly clear discrimination against people of slave descent. Among the Betsileo, with their clearly demarcated hierarchy of nobles, senior commoners, junior commoners, and slaves, meaningful social distinctions continue to be made on the basis of free and slave ancestry. Descendants of slaves depend on people of free descent for land access, and they also suffer social stigma. They are not allowed to intermarry with nobles or commoners. "The commoner who marries a slave loses the right to be buried in his family tomb" (Kottak 1980:103). In everyday life and on ritual occasions, *andevo* are given tasks that emphasize their lower status. If possible, people of slave descent attempt to hide their heritage from outsiders (Kottak 1980:20; Evers 2000). The neighboring Merina possess an even stronger hierarchical ideology than the Betsileo, one that is reinforced through norms of deme-endogamous marriage (Bloch 1971). The Merina are also noted as a group among whom knowledge of slave descent is a nearly insurmountable burden, one that is marked by the use of the terms *fotsy,* or white, to refer to people of free descent, and *mainty,* or black, to refer to people of slave descent (Bloch 1971; Graeber 1996; 1999). Thus, it seems that one commonality among at least some of the Malagasy groups who continue to place a strong stigma on slave ancestry is a well-established social hierarchy, with no accompanying ideology that allows for a slave to move up the ranks.[27]

In contrast to more hierarchically-organized communities, the villages of Ambatobe and Tanambao are noteworthy for the wide variety of identities they are free to express, primarily through taboos. There is no identity that emerges as more desirable than the others, no identity that, for status reasons, needs to be suppressed. People of Makoa, Betanimena, Antaimoro, and Anjoatsy origins can freely acknowledge any one or all of their identities, without having their choices determined by community politics. In Ambatobe and Tanambao, peo-

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[27] Some studies suggest that the positions of slaves in a hierarchical structure affect the opportunities for slaves and their descendants (e.g., Kopytoff and Miers 1977:41; Stillwell 2000). Support for this assertion can be found in Gillian Feeley-Harnik's study of the Sakalava in Analalava, where distinctions among slaves depend upon whether they were royal guardians (*Sambarivo*) or "ordinary" slaves (labeled "Makoa" or *andevo*) (Feeley-Harnik 1991:340–44). The ritual roles of royal guardians were partly responsible for their higher status. Meanwhile, descendants of ordinary slaves try to deny their ancestry. Based on Kottak's and Evers' descriptions of the duties of Betsileo slaves, it might be inferred that one reason there is no mention of stratification among the Betsileo slaves themselves is because they were all primarily agricultural and domestic laborers, providing them with the same points of articulation with their owners' lives.

ple who freely admit slave descent and openly practice their ethnic identities enjoy landownership, marriage with non-slaves, and the assumption of village leadership roles. They have been able to overcome their marginality in both kinship and societal terms (cf., Kopytoff and Miers 1977:16). In the context of a stratified social structure with an entrenched social hierarchy based in group origins and ethnicity, an individual can only overcome the stigmatization of slave descent by denying the past and hiding their identity. Where such hierarchy is absent, people of slave ancestry have opportunities that more closely match those of people of free descent.[28] Behoraka's marriage to his Makoa wife and the eventual inheritance of his land by his children of mixed Antimoroño and Makoa descent are extensions of the type of open system discussed in Kopytoff and Miers (1977), Reid (1983), and Watson (1980). In the context of an open kinship system, exemplified here by the absence of strict marriage rules and little felt need to preserve group boundaries, slaves have greater opportunities for incorporation into the lives of the free.

While open kinship and lack of hierarchy provide opportunities for freed slaves, we need further information to understand why and how such opportunities developed in this region and not in others. One of the factors we should explore is the type of relationship established between slave and master. As mentioned earlier, there is evidence in northeastern Madagascar of a type of patron-client relationship between ex-slaves and their former owners. This must be understood in the context of the broader political and economic relationships between slaves and their owners, and among the different categories of freemen that co-existed during the period of slavery.[29] To examine these issues further, I return now to the concept of *lohateny*.

Slavery as an Institution of Dependency

Much has been written about slavery and paternalism in Africa.[30] To suggest that a slave owner behaves paternally towards his slave is not to deny the basic facts that to be enslaved is to be removed from one's home and to be exploited for the benefit of others. However, beyond those facts, there is much variability in the type of relationship slaves have historically had with their masters. At one extreme, slaves could be thought of as useful primarily for their economic productivity and treated as merely replaceable laborers. At the other extreme, slaves could be considered useful in the ways they helped to expand a family unit and, thus, they could be treated almost like kin. There is considerable evi-

[28] Elsewhere in Madagascar, it has been suggested that the presence of a strong royal dynasty necessitates a deep historical account to legitimize its rule, thus emphasizing differences between those who can claim a share in that history and those who cannot (cf., Feeley-Harnik 1978).

[29] On the importance of political economy, see particularly Cooper (1980; 1997), Glassman (1995), Isaacman and Rosenthal (1988), and Kopytoff (1988).

[30] In addition to the papers in Miers and Kopytoff (1977), the writings of Frederick Cooper (1997) and Jonathon Glassman (1995) offer two well-developed analyses of the issues surrounding paternalism, patronage-clientelism, and slavery in East Africa.

dence to suggest that slavery in northeastern Madagascar more nearly approached the "kinsman" end of that range than the pure laborer end of the range. Yet, to be kin here, as in much of the world, does not imply equality. Rather, relationships among kin are characterized by a strong sense of age-based hierarchy, and family members have a strong sense of their "belonging to" as well as "belonging in" their paternal and maternal kin groups (cf., Kopytoff and Miers 1977). Thus, it is entirely plausible that Malagasy slave owners could develop a hierarchical relationship with their slaves while also displaying towards them a paternalistic sense of responsibility for their well-being. *Lohateny* may be one survival of those early slave-owner relations.

Contemporary villagers describe *lohateny* as a set of ritual relationships that are a remnant of slavery.[31] In recent times, when one meets a *lohateny* partner, one is supposed to provide for him or her whatever is asked, whether it be cattle, money, assistance in curing an ill, or food. Furthermore, it is a reciprocal relationship in which the request may be made by either partner. *Lohateny,* as practiced in this area after the end of slavery, may have been a means to maintain peaceful and practical relationships while masking power inequalities.[32] Although on the surface, the relationship appears equal, when Behoraka talks about the *lohateny* relationship between Antimoroño and Makoa, he uses a language of ownership and of dependency. His Antimoroño grandfather, Sily, had to take care of "his" Makoa; the freed slaves came to Behoraka's grandfather seeking land and assistance.

Why would the Makoa have pursued such an arrangement after having been granted their freedom, particularly since Sily and his father had themselves owned slaves and used slave labor to create their rice fields? Here, I examine three possible reasons: (1) the autonomy granted to slaves by their owners; (2) the relationship between coastal Malagasy and Merina administrators; and (3) the set of opportunities available to freed slaves. To discuss the first two reasons, I begin by sharing the observations of Francisque Coignet, a French mining engineer who visited northeastern Madagascar in 1863.

Coignet's mission was to explore the region between Cap d'Ambre and the Bay of Antongil on Madagascar's northeast coast. When he was greeted at Andrombazaha by the Merina customs officer and his soldiers, Coignet misrepresented his mission to them, fearing that acknowledging his ties to the French

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[31] *Lohateny* could be compared to blood brotherhood, or *fati-dra*, another Malagasy practice that helps to solidify a relationship of obligation between two people who are not kin. However, *fati-dra* usually takes place at the initiative of two individuals, while *lohateny* appears to be a more structured relationship between people who identify with particular ethnic groups or clans (cf., Feeley-Harnik 1991:271–77). In its connection to slavery, *lohateny* more closely resembles the relationship between royalty and *Jingô* described by Michael Lambek (2002:115–20) among the Antankarana, although that relationship was much more hierarchical.

[32] *Lohateny* relationships today are only rarely practiced, with very few younger villagers aware of the term's meaning. This is to be expected as actual material inequalities have diminished over succeeding generations since the end of slavery.

government would prevent him from gaining access to the interior of the Peninsula. Claiming he was the son of a Mauritian merchant, he was given access to some "Ova" (Merina) guides and allowed to explore some of the region. He noted a considerable Merina presence in the area. On a journey to the north of the river along which Ambatobe and Tanambao are now located, he observed several settlements. One fortress was described as comprising 700 to 800 people, "*ova* officers, some natives, slaves, women and children." The army there consisted of 158 men, 80 soldiers and 78 officers. The soldiers were armed with spears and guns (Coignet 1867a:266–67). As Coignet continued northward, he described a "pasture where there are magnificent herds of cattle, and nearby are several houses inhabited by slaves" (1867a:268). He observed more villages of slaves elsewhere in the region, and reported that both non-Merina Malagasy and Merina possessed slaves. Some were assigned to domestic work and lived in the village of their owner, while others were spread across the countryside guarding their owners' cattle and working their land. Local people estimated the number of slaves at two per every one free person (1867b:364).

Coignet enumerated four ways local slaves were obtained. The largest number were inherited. He describes these slaves as being treated much like family, and constituting the greatest wealth most native families possessed.[33] A second way of falling into slavery was to be convicted of committing a crime. A family could purchase such a man's freedom back, but if they failed to do so, he and his children were forever slaves. Coignet reported that most slaves of this type were owned by "*ova*," who purchased them from commanders in the provinces and speculated in their resale. A third category of slave was brought from the African coast and was valued much more highly than slaves of Malagasy origin. The fourth way of obtaining slaves was through warfare waged by the Merina, as defeated populations were placed into slavery (1867b:364–65).[34]

In addition to his discussion of slavery, Coignet provides ample evidence of the harsh treatment to which local free Malagasy were subjected at the hands of the Merina. While it is clear that one of Coignet's goals was to discredit the Merina administration and offer justification for an increased French presence in Madagascar, his account of local relations is consistent with other historical accounts of the period (cf., Esoavelomandroso 1979). As required under Queen Ranavalona I, native people had been forced by the Merina to pay tribute and taxes and to perform corvée labor extracting gum copal and rubber. The com-

[33] This observation was reiterated later, at the time of emancipation. In a note to the Governor General dated 3 November 1896, Rabesantsatana (the Governor of Maroansetra) writes that, for the people of the coast, slaves are their principal form of wealth (Center d'Archives d'Outre Mer/ GGM/2Z/416).

[34] These four ways of obtaining slaves seem to be common in other parts of the world as well. Reid, for example, provides a similar list of means of enslavement in pre-colonial Southeast Asia (1983:157–58).

manders of the provinces were all Merina, and they abused their administrative powers, acting as judge and jury in cases of crimes committed by members of the local population. Many local Merina administrators got rich by fabricating criminal charges against members of wealthy native families. If a man could not pay the fine levied against him, he, along with his wife and children, could be sold into slavery (Coignet 1867b:340–41). Because of the harsh treatment by the "*hova*," many coastal Malagasy fled the area, moving to the northwest to align themselves with the Sakalava, or heading south to the Fenerive region, where they worked at the ports or cultivated rice for sale to European traders (1867a:281–82).

Coignet's observations of slavery and of the relationships between Merina and local Malagasy people provide critical evidence regarding the relations between slave and free coastal peoples as well as between different free populations. He observed that slaves of indigenous peoples seemed to live independently in villages near the sites where they pastured their masters' cattle. The evidence of dispersed slave settlements, and of slaves being assigned tasks such as cattle herding that allowed for some independence, suggest that slave masters were more reliant on voluntary compliance on the part of their slaves than on regulating them through force. Such compliance could result from characteristics of slaves themselves that would make cooperation among them difficult, such as those summarized by Klein as posing barriers to coordination in French West Africa: "ethnic diversity, the lack of kinship ties, and divisions between old and new slaves" (Klein 1993b:183). However, slave compliance could also result from the achievement of a kind of patron-client relationship between masters and slaves, in which masters were expected to provide for their slaves' needs in return for slaves' provision of labor and loyalty. Thus, it is possible that Coignet was not glossing the truth when he asserted that the native (non-Merina) slaveholders treated their slaves "much like family." To understand how this could be the case, we have to examine the incentives and pressures as experienced both by both slave masters and slaves.

In the context of the Masoala Peninsula, two factors emerge as potential incentives for masters to develop a more kin-like relationship with their slaves. One concerns the nature of the local physical environment, the other the nature of the local political and social environment. The physical environment of the Masoala Peninsula in the nineteenth century was densely forested and fragmented by many hills and rivers. An escaped slave would be difficult to track if he or she disappeared into the heart of the forest. Regarding the local social and political environment, there is no reason to believe that there was a great deal of social solidarity among slave owners on the Masoala Peninsula in the nineteenth century. The most obvious cleavage was between the indigenous coastal peoples and the Merina, who would most likely keep any escaped slaves they recovered. Furthermore, the migration history of this region, as discussed earlier in this paper, involves the convergence of many different clans and eth-

nic groups into this geographic space. This means that someone's nearest non-kin neighbor might have been performing unfamiliar religious rituals, speaking an unfamiliar dialect, and committed to unfamiliar ancestors. Under such socially fragmented circumstances, assistance from one's neighbors in recovering an escaped slave was less likely than under circumstances when slave owners had a stronger sense of collective identity. For these two reasons, slave masters would have been more likely to prefer incentives to sanctions as a way of maintaining their slaves' compliance and to avoid losing them through escape.

The next question to ask is why the slaves themselves would not have taken advantage of their opportunities to flee. First, we have to consider the fundamental fact of slavery: slaves were outsiders, with no local allies. As Kopytoff and Miers usefully point out regarding many African societies, to be free is not to be independent; rather it is to belong, and belonging entails both rights and obligations (1977:17). Not only social identity, but also physical survival, are built upon one's ability to draw on the commitments inherent in long-term relationships of interdependence. This is also true in Madagascar. The "lost people" of Madagascar had no means to return to their homelands and their webs of dependency. Therefore, to leave their masters was to risk being alone in the world. As long as their masters were providing for their needs, such a risk may have been too great to bear.

One of the needs slaves had was to be protected from the Merina. A slave who considered escaping also had to consider that he might be recaptured by a Merina administrator and forced to do more arduous labor, with fewer rights, than under his current owner. Or he might be sold and taken off the island. As Coignet's report shows, the Merina did not view their non-Merina counterparts as fully human. In a very real sense, the slaves and the coastal Malagasy may have seen themselves as united in their hatred and fear of the Merina. Thus, when slaves considered the range of possible outcomes of escape, staying with a master may have seemed the best option.

Behoraka's story regarding how slaves responded to emancipation by coming to his grandfather suggests that, even in freedom, slaves found some value in staying near those upon whom they had previously depended and to whom they had been subservient. Observations by foreigners at the time of emancipation support this assertion that some freed slaves sought to maintain relationships with their previous masters.[35] André, a Frenchman, writes that some slaves viewed freedom with apprehension, since gaining free status carried its own burdens with no accompanying provision of social support (André 1899:

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[35] Certainly not all slaves responded this way to abolition in 1896. The experience of freedom differed depending on the origins of the slaves and the opportunities presented to them upon emancipation. Fanony, writing about a predominantly Betsimisaraka village near Mananara, suggests that freed slaves who moved away were Sakalava, who could return home, while those who stayed near their former owners and created new fields and tombs there were Makoa (1977:81).

80). André suggests that many slaves preferred to hang onto a less-than-free relationship that might protect them from the full force of taxes, forced labor, and military service.[36] Makoa, in particular, exhibited a consistent pattern of obtaining land and forming their own settlements where they had been slaves (Rantoandro 1997).[37] And if they settled in Betsimisaraka villages, former slaves and their descendents did not remain separate from their "host" populations, but were allowed to inter-marry with the various clans among whom they lived (André 1899).

The fact that some slaves stayed near and depended upon assistance from former slave owners does not, however, address the question of why those former slaves were not stigmatized. Why did their continuing state of dependency not lead to their designation as lower-status and exploited residents? Indeed, in other regions of Madagascar this appears to be precisely what happened. I would argue that one key reason this did not occur in the northeast was the relative abundance of resources in this region. In the following section, I develop this argument through a comparison of two regions that followed distinct trajectories in slave-free relations.

RESOURCES, OPPORTUNITY, AND CONSTRAINT

In this section, I draw a contrast between the highlands area associated with the Betsileo and the northern Masoala Peninsula associated with the Betsimisaraka. The issues examined here build on Frederick Cooper's argument regarding the opportunities for ex-slaves in East Africa: "The focus must be on the actual relations of production on the land, and the overall structure of opportunities—subsistence production, labor migration, cash crop production, casual labor—in which agrarian relations were nested" (1980:174). So in addition to asking whether or not ex-slaves could actually exercise independent control of land, we must also ask what other opportunities were open or closed to them to remove themselves from dependence on "free" persons.

Sandra Evers studied slave descent in a village in what is a "no-man's-land" where refugees from Betsileo conflicts, Bara and Antandroy raids, and Merina domination fled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Evers 1995:171).[38] Evers writes that many of the people who settled in the region took on the Betsileo ethnic title, regardless of their actual origins. These newcomers found in the Southern Highlands region plenty of land to start their own settlements and

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[36] As mentioned earlier in discussion of Coignet's observations, the practice of corvée labor was well established in the Merina kingdom, and Gallieni incorporated it into his administration of the country under French rule (Heseltine 1971:159; Thompson and Adloff 1965:18).

[37] Rantoandro (1997) claims that the Makoa attempted to maintain a separate identity. This does not seem to be the case in Ambatobe and Tanambao.

[38] Betsileo not only owned slaves, but they were also enslaved by neighboring raiding groups (Evers 1995:158, citing Knight [1986] and Grandidier [1916]).

farms, and also the opportunity to build their own tombs. "For the ex-slaves wanting to leave their past behind them, building a family tomb upon their own land would make them autochthonous. It is not unthinkable that some autochthons from Tanambao, so very proud of their free origins, are, in fact, the descendants of slaves" (Evers 1995:171). Her final statement highlights a very important distinction between those first settlers and later arrivals, all of whom might very well have been of slave descent. Later arrivals did not have the opportunity to adopt a Betsileo identity or otherwise identify themselves as people of free ancestry.

By 1970, Evers writes, all of the available land in the region of her study had been taken. Thus, the first settlers, the *tompon-tany,* began to exercise greater control over access to their land. Non-Betsileo migrants, who are recognizable by their physical appearance, were welcomed prior to 1970, but are no longer admitted to the village. The *tompon-tany* make a further distinction between free Betsileo and *andevo* Betsileo, or Betsileo of slave descent. If a newcomer can reliably claim a family tomb on ancestral land, then he is allowed to move into the eastern, free part of the village. If a migrant Betsileo cannot name his ancestral home in a way that satisfies the *tompon-tany,* he is considered to be of slave descent, sent to live in the western part of the village, and labeled "dirty" (Evers 1995:172–73). Even in town, where one might expect a person's homeland would be less important, the village categories are maintained in the competition for jobs and other resources (Evers 1999:275–79).

In this case as presented by Evers, slave status became a more important basis of discrimination once all the available land in the region had been claimed. In fact, it appears that only those people who had no other opportunities of self-support, as displayed through the existence of a local family tomb, were vulnerable to acquiring the *andevo* label. The importance of scarce resources as an incentive to develop sharper group boundaries becomes even more apparent when one considers the use of *andevo* status in more urban settings. There, it is used to restrict the number of competitors in the intense competition for wage labor in Madagascar's towns and cities.

Access to and the ability to exploit resources seem to be critical factors in the de-stigmatization of slave ancestry on the northeastern Masoala Peninsula. When the slaves were freed, the opportunities were many and diverse. They could seek aid from former owners without threatening the livelihood of those owners, and the need for agricultural labor continued to be important enough that settlers of free descent would welcome potential laborers, albeit now under more reciprocal circumstances. Unclaimed hillside land was available for new farmers to practice swidden rice agriculture. French and Creole plantations offered possibilities for wage labor. And people of free descent were increasingly involved in such a diverse array of activities, including working for wages on colonial plantations, that it would have been no simple matter to attach a stigmatized label to any one occupation.

Thus, contrasting the two cases, the highlands *andevo* had fewer opportunities to live independently of their "free" counterparts, while members of the free population had many incentives to restrict access to local resources. Meanwhile, the opposite conditions hold true in the northeast. There, the Makoa had access to land and to jobs that did not place them in direct competition with a distinctive local free population. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, identification as a "firstcomer" never seemed to hold the kind of political and social weight in this region as it did in some other parts of Madagascar.

CONCLUSION

When villagers in northeastern Madagascar first began to tell me they descended from slaves, I took note because I had not expected such ready acknowledgement of their ancestry. After that initial interest, I ignored it. Slavery did not seem to be having much impact on village life. There were no derogatory remarks about Makoa being dirty. People of slave descent did not complain about their status, and they worked, played, worshipped, participated in rituals, and even had children with people of free descent. Slave descent was not something that had to be overcome or negotiated. It just was. So I turned my attention to matters that required more of the villagers' own energy. However, as I talked to colleagues working in other regions of Madagascar, and as I placed my research in a larger context within post-slavery studies, I realized that the freedom to be, openly, a person of slave descent, was worthy of further analysis, not only in Madagascar, but in many former slave-holding and slave-supplying societies.

In this paper, I have raised three factors to consider when trying to explain the varieties of post-slavery experience. I have emphasized social structure and its supporting ideology, resource availability, and historical patterns of migration and ethnic mixing. I have needed to examine all three because it is unlikely that any single causal factor can explain the variety of experiences we observe in post-slave communities in Madagascar. However, when taken together, the issues I have examined all exert a strong pressure on contemporary relationships. The significance of this study, both for the broader literature on post-slave societies and for the understanding of slave status in Madagascar, is its attention to the ways in which distinct features of regional social organization and history combine to form the type of social relationships we observe today. The availability of natural resources and the need for labor provided the opportunity for freed slaves to be integrated into the relatively decentralized, non-hierarchical social structure that had existed among free coastal peoples prior to abolition. The local population's ability and willingness to migrate for survival allowed them to maintain their basic social structure even when the resource base was altered through government policies. People of both free and slave descent, all equally affected by the law, moved, resettled, and then later returned to villages that remained largely unstratified. These factors are

in many ways reminiscent of Kopytoff's (1987) model of the internal African frontier.

Among the features identified by Kopytoff as elements of a frontier dynamic are: (1) the absence of pre-existing institutions to which immigrants had to adjust, (2) the relative abundance of land when compared to the supply of human labor, and (3) the ability of groups to fission when social tensions or other pressures created internal turmoil. Each of these factors can be seen at work in the Masoala Peninsula region of northeastern Madagascar. While the Merina government and French colonial rulers imposed certain restrictions on the nature of settlements and the use of labor, rules regarding social hierarchy and some aspects of local resource control could be determined by settlers themselves. The absence of entrenched social institutions allowed migrating laborers, freed slaves, and local farmers to negotiate their relationships with one another on their own terms, and those terms never led to sharp divisions in social status. For example, although "firstcomers" such as Behoraka's grandfather originally controlled access to regional irrigated lands, their early willingness to intermarry with newcomers of Makoa ancestry enabled Makoa, as well as people of other backgrounds, to share in that control through inheritance. Additionally, the availability of agricultural land in the region and the need for agricultural laborers prevented any one group from trying to establish oppressive control over others, who had the opportunity to move and re-establish themselves in more hospitable surroundings. Furthermore, the sometimes hostile physical and political environment served to keep settlers mobile, prepared to move to new territory in response to the latest cyclone or the most recent government edict.

We have much left to learn about the impacts of slavery on societies that were both suppliers of and users of slave labor. Making connections between certain frontier dynamics and the social and political treatment of people of slave descent, as I have done in the preceding paragraph, opens the door to one possible avenue for further comparative post-slavery studies, while also suggesting ways that post-slavery studies can help refine existing models of social reproduction. For example, analysis of the northeastern Malagasy coast suggests that, in order to understand the nature of "firstcomer/newcomer" relations, scholars will need to develop more nuanced analyses of "firstcomer" motivations that go beyond the need to expand an individual's or a group's control over people. Again, Behoraka's grandfather's willingness to marry a Makoa and the ability of descendants of that union to inherit and share control in his land suggests an openness to newcomers that would not have been predicted by the frontier model. Only by examining the mélange of historical political, social, and economic dynamics of the region does the decision make sense. Such moving back and forth across theoretical, geographical, and disciplinary domains holds much promise for deepening our understanding of the complexities of identity in post-slavery societies.

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