

**Architectures of Belonging:  
Moral Economies of Urban Place-Making in Mahajanga, Madagascar**

**By**

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to

David

Micah, River and Zara, my three lucky stars

Mama and Papa Taoaby, lasa ray aman-dreninay amin'ny fo

And to the memories of Tafita and Youssef  
two lives  
one cut short and another long lived

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## ABSTRACT

In December 1976, following centuries of generally peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence in Mahajanga, Madagascar, violent riots against Comorians erupted resulting in 1,000 deaths and the mass expulsion of 16,000 people. This dissertation takes this moment as an entry point into a deeper history of contested belonging and urban space in this Indian Ocean port city marked by migration and ethnic heterogeneity. Grounded in a historicized account of place-making practices, I document how since the city's inception in the late eighteenth century, inhabitants have articulated ideas about belonging and difference (autochthonous, ethnic, class and religious) through building processes and materials. Some competing migrant groups have drawn on specific spaces and things of the city — homes, mosques, streets, parks, and sanitation infrastructure — to differentiate themselves from one another and to construct their claims as natives (autochthones).

Beginning in the early 1900s, French colonial authorities recruited laborers from Comoros for infrastructural projects, private enterprise, civil service and municipal maintenance. Owing to the promising possibilities for work, vibrant Islamic communal atmosphere, and the expansion of kin and religious networks, Comorian migrants were drawn to Mahajanga more than any other city in northwestern Madagascar. Migrants from the Comorian archipelago and their mixed Malagasy-Comorian descendants were particularly adept at transforming themselves from *vahiny* (strangers) to *zanatany* (literally 'child of the soil'). Drawing on kinship ties, labor practices, moral registers, and economic cooperative networks, these self-identified *zanatany* accumulated social, spatial and economic capital that enabled them to establish themselves as the city's *tompontany* (masters of the land) by the early 1970s. Yet *zanatany* claims to nativism were most forcefully disputed by newer migrants in the 1976-77 massacre.

This study contributes to findings on kinship, urban studies and histories of science and technology, by showing how labor relations, moral practices, and modes of differentiation have materialized over time in infrastructural and built forms. Urban building practices have historically been informed by competing visions of the past and future among diverse inhabitants, urban planners, and the state, I argue, that express different moral perspectives about proper engagements with land, labor and materials. It challenges existing scholarly accounts that frame productions of difference as discursive struggles, by documenting how urban dwellers positioned themselves—sometimes as 'natives'—through the accretion of building materials, infrastructure, and constructed forms. Reading questions of difference through urban space and infrastructure across time, I argue, reveals how experiences of belonging are at once ideological, embodied and material.

**Chapter 1**  
**Introduction: Geographies of Aspiration and the Politics of Difference**



Figure 1: Mahajanga Port, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

This dissertation was born from happenstance, an utterance, and a gesture to historicity.

In September 2012 on a late morning already saturated with heat, the local *fikambanana* (women’s association) in one of Mahajanga’s central neighborhoods, gathered to cook for a funerary ritual event for a deceased elderly neighbor. Over cast-iron cauldrons steaming with *vary* (rice) and *girigitzi* (beef with coconut and tomato sauce), women of various ages traded

stories and relayed jokes. Maman’i Nasra<sup>1</sup>, one of the key leaders of the *fikambanana*, began to emphatically tell a story. All eyes of the women, nestled on the cool, concrete veranda, turned to her. “Listen closely,” Mama Jaki whispered in my ear, “she’s saying something important.” When I finally caught the trailing narrative, I gathered that Mama Nasra was describing a recent encounter with a newcomer migrant in town. The migrant had questioned, was she “really” Malagasy? Marked by her head and shoulder covering (*kisaly*) and flowing cloth wrap (*salovana*), the man insinuated whether she was in fact from the nearby Comoros, an island archipelago with a predominantly Muslim population. “I told him,” she exclaimed, “my grandparents got this land, and they built their house of wood, and my parents rebuilt the house of corrugated steel! Ô! And now we’ve rebuilt the house of concrete! You see this house, this concrete house? This is proof that we’ve been here longer than you can imagine! We’re natives (*zanatany*)! Ah!”<sup>2</sup>

This narrative stayed with me. In the weeks and months to come and after repeated encounters with similar stories, it became clear that Mama Nasra’s account reflected something about how people’s senses of belonging to the city were intertwined with their spatial and material worlds. While assertions to belonging have historically hinged on naturalized claims to land,<sup>3</sup> it was the way Mama Nasra described the *texture* and *material substance* of her home that was striking. What was to be gained by signaling the increased durability of her house? Why did its composition in concrete matter? What, more broadly, is at stake in urban things and materials

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<sup>1</sup> While the official spelling of maternal names is Maman’i Nasra, Maman’i Khalil and so forth, I will use throughout “Mama Nasra,” “Mama Khalil,” etc., to reflect the local verbal usage of these names. All names throughout are fictitious to guarantee anonymity, except in circumstances where interlocutors provided consent. In many cases, individuals selected their own pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldnotes, September 17, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Carola Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

for city inhabitants? I came to gradually understand that building materials and spaces were key sites through which some urban dwellers—those that could manage to do so—tethered themselves to the city. What Mama Nasra recounted that day was at once a regaling moment of prideful defiance and a forceful affirmation of her belonging to the town. It was also an establishment of undeniable evidence of her family’s nativist status.

Contemporary families like Mama Nasra’s trace their ancestry to the unions between Malagasy women and migrant men from present-day Comoros, an archipelago island nation some 500 kilometers northwest of Madagascar (see Figure 2). For hundreds of years, families from Comoros and Madagascar have been connected to one another, through Indian Ocean trade routes and Islamic networks encompassing parts of East Africa, Arabia and South and Southeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> Migration from Comoros to northwest Madagascar intensified considerably beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Figure 3). While longstanding Indian Ocean migratory routes had entailed the movement of people, goods, and ideas between northwest Madagascar and the Archipelago, French colonial labor regimes shaped these flows in new ways. French colonial authorities in Madagascar actively recruited able-bodied, male migrants from Comoros to fulfill envisioned dreams for infrastructural projects in Mahajanga and beyond.<sup>5</sup> The legislative binding

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<sup>4</sup> For detailed studies of the early migration back and forth between Madagascar and Comoros, and the subsequent Islamization of northern and northwestern Madagascar, see: Gabriel Ferrand, *Les Musulmans à Madagascar at aux îles Comores*, (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1891-1902), 3 vols; Pierre Verin, *The History of Civilization in North Madagascar* (Rotterdam and Boston: Balkema, 1986); Noel Gueunier, *Les Chemins de l’Islam à Madagascar* (Paris: Harmattan, 1994); Andrew Walsh, *Made in Madagascar: Sapphires, ecotourism, and the global bazaar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Michael Lambek and Andrew Walsh, “The Imagined Community of the Antankarana: Identity, History and Ritual in Northern Madagascar,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27:3 (Aug. 1997): 308-333; I. Said, M.A. Chamanga, N.J. Gueunier, “Un Qasida Arabe en l’honneur de Sayyid Ahmad al-Kabir, missionnaire de l’Islam a Madagascar de 1896-1919, *Études Océan Indien*, 1(1982):137-148. Anne Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks in the Western Indian Ocean (c. 1880-1940)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014) especially Chapter Four.

<sup>5</sup> Archives Nationales of the République Démocratique de Madagascar (herein ANRDM)/Série D (D): Cabinet Civil Travaux Publics (CCTP) 29: Letter from Resident de France à Moheli to Gov. Gen Madagascar, 22 Aout 1904.



Figure 2: Map of Madagascar and Indian Ocean

of Madagascar and the Comorian archipelago into a single colonial territory in 1908 further facilitated the movement of migrants to and from the Archipelago. In 1905, 1000 “Comorians”<sup>6</sup> lived in all of Madagascar.<sup>7</sup> But by the late 1950s they comprised 50% of the Mahajanga’s overall population of about 68,000.<sup>8</sup> Those from Comoros grew to represent the island’s largest group of Muslim migrants from outside Madagascar and constituted a socio-economically important population in Mahajanga by the mid-twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

But in December 1976, the city was torn asunder. Following centuries of generally peaceable multi-ethnic coexistence in Mahajanga, violent riots took place in which those identified as Comorians were targeted in unprecedented acts of brutality. Triggered by a single incident, a child defecating on a neighbor’s veranda, three days of atrocious attacks unfolded in which some 16,000 people identified as “Comorians” were repatriated to Comoros. Most devastating, however, was the massacre of some 1,000 people with machetes, stones, and sticks.<sup>10</sup> Mosques were desecrated. Houses attributed to “Comorians” were torched. And the words “Malagasy” were scrawled across the exterior walls of houses in desperate attempts to

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<sup>6</sup> The ethnonym “Comorians” is problematic both because it effaces the wide range of ethnic and religious affiliations, and varying cultural practices, across the Archipelago. It also collapses the complicated history by which the category of “Comorians” was constructed through French census reports and administrative mechanisms. “Comorians” as an indexical category in these records, furthermore, was slippery, as it was used to denote variably newcomer migrants from the Archipelago, and/or those of mixed Malagasy-Comorian parentage (today self-identified *zanatany*), on which this study is focused. These issues will be discussed more in subsequent chapters. To avoid confusion, however, “Comorian” here, and unless otherwise specified, will refer to individuals from the Archipelago islands, and primarily from Ngazidja (Grande Comore) and Ndzواني (Anjouan).

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Malagasy Republic: Madagascar Today* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 270.

<sup>8</sup> Hubert Deschamps, *Les Migrations intérieures passées et présentes à Madagascar* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1959), 146-7. This figure represents the population of the district of Majunga. Others specified the city’s population in 1955 at 44,229, Jean Poirier, “Aspects de l’urbanisation à Madagascar: les villes malgaches et la population urbaine,” *Civilisations* 18:1 (1968): 81. There is some discrepancy between accounts of the proportionate Comorian population in Majunga. Poirier cites 26% of the city’s population in 1965 were “Comorians,” 82. Importantly, however, is that national censuses may have classified *zanatany* (first generation descendants of Comorian and Malagasy parentage), as “Malagasy”.

<sup>9</sup> Gueunier, *Chemins de l’Islam*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Gueunier, *Chemins de l’Islam*; Radifison, Nathalie, “Conflit ethniques et leur résolution à Majunga de 1740 à aujourd’hui,” in C. Allibert (ed) *Les Comorians à Majunga: Histoire, migrations, émeutes, Études Océan Indien*. 38-39 (2007):113-168.

protect the inhabitants. Newer migrants, specifically “Betsirebaka” and Tandroy, were widely seen as the perpetrators of the bloodshed; however oral and written sources affirm that other groups were also involved in the struggle.<sup>11</sup> No overtly violent event of this scale had ever transpired in Mahajanga before this moment. Across the island nation, people categorize this conflict as exceptional—that is, as beyond the bounds of everyday violence and an historical anomaly.<sup>12</sup>

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This dissertation offers an alternative approach to the study of difference and nativist claims over time. It begins with the question: What happens if we take urban materials and building processes—rather than written words, texts and printed matter—as our entry point into understanding how people have made claims to difference, belonging, and autochthony? Looking at how urban inhabitants produce difference through material culture and reworked space, I suggest, reveals the ways enduring claims to inclusion (and exclusion) become visible, compelling and legitimate in everyday life. Studying nativist claims through urban space exposes how people build belonging (senses of, affective experience of, and claims to) incrementally and over time. Taking a spatial approach, in other words, foregrounds the ways experiences of belonging are at once ideological *and* embodied and material. Urban dwellers, I suggest, have rendered claims to belonging durable through material laminations that bind people to one another and to the city. Labor and moral practices have been critical means through which

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<sup>11</sup> Radifison, “Conflit ethniques,” 2007; Celton, Marie, “Les affrontements entre Malgache et Comoriens en 1976 à Majunga: événement isolé ou échec de l’intégration d’une minorité ethnique immigrée?” in C. Allibert (ed) *Les Comoriens à Majunga: Histoire, migrations, émeutes, Études Océan Indien*, 38-39 (2007):169-319.

<sup>12</sup> Up to this point, most notable violent events in the island’s contemporary history were anti-colonial rebellions of Moramanga in 1947. Experiences of violence, often invisible and related to spiritual insecurity, are prevalent and everyday occurrences throughout Madagascar. See Sandra Evers, *Constructing History, Culture and Inequality: The Betsileo in Extreme Southern Highlands of Madagascar* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 182-186; Sharp, Lesley, *The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1994), 206-208. Faranirina Rajaonah, *Cultures Citadines dans l’océan Indien Occidental (XVIIIe – XXIe siècles* (Karthala: Paris, 2011) 364-367.

material sedimentation has taken place; they sit at the heart of historical actors' assertions of autochthony and hierarchies of difference. Labor relations, kinship, moral practices, and modes of differentiation have materialized over time—indeed concretized— in infrastructural and built forms. One of the key arguments here then is that land, materials and buildings are not simply devices with which people leverage claims to first-coming, they are *constitutive themselves* of how people understand and cohere their attachments to place and one another.

Grounded in a historicized account of place-making practices, I document how since the city's inception in the late eighteenth century, inhabitants have articulated ideas about belonging and difference (autochthonous, ethnic, class and religious) through building processes and materials. This study explains how some competing migrant groups have drawn on specific spaces and things of the city — homes, mosques, streets, parks, and sanitation infrastructure — to construct their claims as natives (autochthones) and to differentiate themselves from one another. I track how modes of differentiation and idioms of belonging—most notably that of “zanatany”— emerged in specific moments and shifted meaning over time. *Zanatany* by definition means “a native of the place” or “child of the soil,” [*tany*, the earth; *zanaka*, a child, offspring].<sup>13</sup> Beginning in the 1930s, migrants from the Comorian archipelago and their mixed Malagasy-Comorian descendants gradually crafted themselves as *zanatany*. Drawing on kinship ties, labor practices, moral registers, and economic cooperative networks, these self-identified *zanatany* accumulated social, spatial and economic capital that enabled them to establish themselves as the city's *tompontany* (masters of the land) by the early 1970s.

Assertions of autochthony and difference, at once cohering and exclusionary, have been historically entangled with the materials of the city. The possibilities for distinguishing oneself

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<sup>13</sup> See James Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, (Antananarivo: London Missionary Society, 1885), 796.

whether as an authoritative figure, a first-comer, or a person of high moral standing, have been afforded by the materials at hand—whether concrete, water, thatch—replete with properties of their own. In the case of early Majunga, the abundant availability of thatch (*satrana*) enabled Sakalava monarchal leaders to insist that inhabitants build their homes of vegetative materials, as a demonstration of their loyalty to the monarch and ancestral prohibitions.<sup>14</sup> In more contemporary times, concrete provides a durable mode through which claims to residential longevity in the city are rendered perceptible. At other times, other invisible matters—soil conditions, microbes, ancestral spirits among others—have exerted themselves on the city’s inhabitants, shaping possibilities for labor and life. Today, urban building practices are continually informed by competing visions for the future among inhabitants, urban planners, international aid groups, and the state, that express different moral perspectives about proper engagements with land, labor and materials. But these visions are ever encumbered by the ecological, material, and economic conditions of the city.

Mahajanga, today a secondary city of some 300,000, is an especially fruitful place to investigate the makings of urban space and the construction of differences, owing to its deep history of migration and heterogeneity. From its founding as an Indian Ocean trading post in the late-eighteenth century by Antalaotra<sup>15</sup> seafarers, Mahajanga was home to multiple ethno-linguistic and religious communities. Coming from parts of Arabia, East Africa and Comoros,

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire, la géographie et le commerce de la partie occidentale de Madagascar* (Paris: Royale, 1845), 34.

<sup>15</sup> Literally “people of the sea,” Refers to people of mixed Arab, East African and Comorian descent who were traders along northwest Madagascar, akin to “Swahili” inhabitants of East Africa. Gabriel Rantoandro, “Une Communauté Mercantile Du Nord-Ouest, Les Antalaotra.” *Omalý Sy Anio* 17–20 (1984 1983): 195–210; Samuel Sanchez, “Navigation et gens de mer dans le canal du Mozambique: les boutres dans l’activité maritime de Nosy Be et de l’Ouest de Madagascar au XIXe siècle,” in *Madagascar et l’Afrique: Entre Identité Insulaire et appartenances historiques* (ed. Didier Nativel and Faranirina Rajaonah), (Karthala: Paris, 2007), 119; also see John Middleton, *The World of the Swahili: an African Mercantile Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 20–22. There is some slippage between categories of “Comorian” and “Antalaotra,” as many Antalaotra came from Hadramawt arrived to Madagascar in the latter nineteenth century via the Comoros, see Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks*, 72.

Antalaoatra forged alliances with the reigning political-ethnic Sakalava leaders in northwest Madagascar. Because of its bustling cattle and rice trade, the town flourished into the nineteenth century. Like other towns along northwest Madagascar and the Indian Ocean basin rim, Mahajanga was what Pearson calls a “littoral society.”<sup>16</sup> It was a critical nexus for groups traversing routes between highland Madagascar, the Betsiboka riverine basin, and the Indian Ocean. Antalaoatra traders were gradually augmented by migrants from South Asia (commonly referred today as *karana*) in the mid-nineteenth century, many of whom shared Muslim faith and ritual practices.<sup>17</sup> Makoa, who came initially as enslaved persons through the trans-Mozambican channel slave trade, adopted many of the Islamic customs of their Antalaoatra and Indian masters.<sup>18</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, the city—like many towns across northwest Madagascar—was heterogeneously composed of different ethno-linguistic groups including: Sakalava, Makoa, South Asians, Europeans, migrants from across Madagascar, and from nearby Comores.

A number of key questions drive this study: How and why did Comorian-Malagasy families, in particular, manage to transform themselves from newcomers (*vahiny*) to natives (*zanatany*) over the twentieth century? How did they negotiate their status with monarchal and colonial authorities, who held ever shifting, often contradictory, conceptions of nativism, ethno-racial classifications and urban citizenship? By what means did the autochthonous category of “*zanatany*” come to have visibility, traction, and salience? How might we understand the

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Pearson defines “littoral societies” as those which “have more in common with other littoral societies than they do with their inland neighbors.” “Littoral Society: The Concept and the Problems,” *Journal of World History* 17:4 (2006):353-373.

<sup>17</sup> Sophie Blanchy, *Karana et Banians: les communautés commerciales d’origine indienne à Madagascar*. (Paris: Harmattan Press, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Klara Boyer-Rossol, Klara, “De Morima à Morondava: Contribution à l’étude des Makoa de l’ouest de Madagascar au XIXe siècle,” in D. Nativel et F. Rajaonah (eds), *Madagascar et l’Afrique: Entre identité insulaire et appartenances historiques*. (Paris: Harmattan, 2007).

complicated relationship between labor, moral practices, urban materials and space, and productions of difference? How have material elements shaped the possibilities for political and spatial claims? And finally, what might a spatial history of difference and nativism in urban

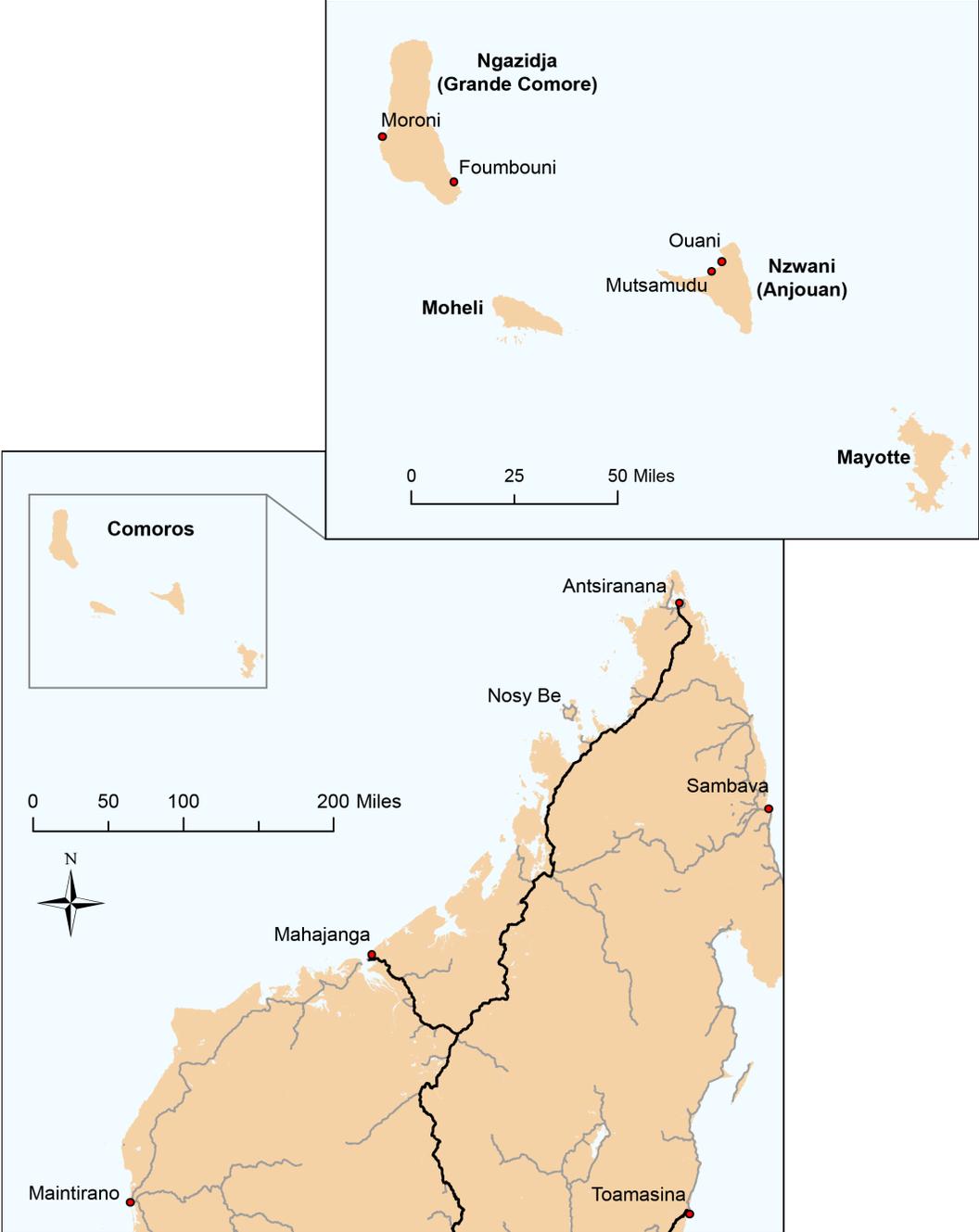


Figure 3: Map of Northern Madagascar and Comoros

Madagascar tell us more broadly about the nature of urban built and infrastructural forms? And about how and why some ethnic, racial and religious categories get politicized and harnessed for collective action and not others? Answering these questions requires untangling the nest of histories of labor and economizing practices, building materials, moral economies, and spatial politics. In the next section, I situate this crosscutting study across the fields of urban history, autochthony and difference, and science and technology studies.

### ***Histories of the City: Labor, Class, and Conflict***

This study builds on a rich and longstanding historiographical tradition within African history centered on urban life. Comparatively, historians of Africa lagged behind urban sociologists, geographers and political scientists in investigating cities.<sup>19</sup> Urban anthropologists and sociologists pioneered early urban studies throughout the continent in the 1940s and 1950s. They were primarily concerned with competing “tribalism(s)” and “detrribalization,” terms used to describe the changes accompanying intensified migration and urbanization in southern Africa. Early ethnographies framed urbanization as the local manifestation of regional, social disequilibrium in which migrant workers were drawn out of subsistence rural existence and thrust into dependency on a capitalistic economy. In this formation, colonialism and the penetration of an unbalanced world economy would bring about permanent urbanization, only to be followed by ‘detrribalization’ or the massive cultural loss of earlier customs among black Africans.<sup>20</sup> For historians, cities were perceived as harbingers of modernity, historical

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<sup>19</sup> David Anderson and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Africa's Urban Past* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 10.

<sup>20</sup> The key anthropologists working within this frame, Max Gluckman, Godfrey Wilson, Monica Wilson (among others,) were associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. They were working to break out of the functionalist and structural-functionalist frames propped by Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, respectively, which failed to account for societal transition and massive change. Godfrey Wilson, *Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia*, (Manchester: Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1941); Hellmann, Ellen, Rooiyard, *A Sociological*

“aberrations” that represented a sharp break with the past.”<sup>21</sup> But by the 1970s, urban history energetically emerged as a subfield partly propelled by broader disciplinary rise of social history.

These early studies comprised a foundational and now canonical body of work, and were collectively concerned with class formation, oppression, and capitalism. They documented how wage laborers proved unwieldy to control through the disciplining of time,<sup>22</sup> the challenges to colonial authorities of African mobilities and migration,<sup>23</sup> and fraught administrative measures to tame “unruly” urban spaces.<sup>24</sup> Historians of urban Africa exposed Eurocentric assumptions underpinning neat distinctions between “the city” and “the countryside,” and between “precapitalist” and “capitalist” societies, by showing how the fluid multi-directionality of migration between rural and urban regions challenged these analytical categories. Others demonstrated the wide range of economic strategies employed by migrants navigating the perils and possibilities of urban life.<sup>25</sup> Gendered perspectives offered important insights into urban

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*Survey of an Urban Slum Yard* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press for Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1948). For accounts of the Institute, see Richard Brown, “Anthropology and Colonial Rule: Godfrey Wilson and the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute” in Talal Asad, ed. *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973). Also, Eriksen, Thomas and Nielsen, Finn, *The History of Anthropology* (London, Pluto Press, 2001). On the crucial roles of African intellectuals in the Institute’s production of ethnographic knowledge, see Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Anderson and Rathbone, *Africa’s Urban Pasts*, 10-11. One early exceptional work that seriously engaged early modern African cities was Akin Mabogunje’s *Urbanization in Nigeria* (London: University of London Press, 1968)

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Charles Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of Witwatersrand, 1886-1914* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> These themes are thoroughly explored in Cooper’s foundational edited volume, *Struggle For the City: Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983.) More recent is Andrew Burton’s *African Underclass: Urbanisation, Crime and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Colin Murray, *Families Divided: The Impact of migrant labor in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility and Class Formation in an extended Yoruba Family* (Berkeley: UCA Press, 1985); Jane Guyer, LaRay Denzer and Adigun Agbaje (eds), *Money Struggles and City Life: Devaluation in Ibadan and Other Urban Centers in Southern Nigeria, 1986-1996* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002); Early work in South Africa in this vein includes Philip Meyer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African city* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, [1961] 1971). Belinda Bozzoli, “Introduction: Popular History and the Witwaterand,” in idem (ed), *Labor, Townships and Protest* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979), as quoted in Hyslop. Also see Bozzoli’s (ed), *Town and*

women's labor forms previously marginalized in scholarship—domestic labor and prostitution,<sup>26</sup> markets and trade,<sup>27</sup> and factory work,<sup>28</sup> as well as the significance of household and kinship dynamics as livelihood strategies.<sup>29</sup> Urban women took integral leadership roles in independence movements, furthermore, and scholars documented these histories drawing extensively on and privileging oral history methodologies.<sup>30</sup>

This study takes on these abiding concerns with class formation and labor practices, but situates them in the broader, historical context of struggles over space and contested notions of belonging. From the perspective of the city's cosmopolitan character, Mahajanga is typical and even representative of other East African and southern Indian Ocean coastal towns in the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> But the city's rapidly growing and significant population of migrants from Comoros, by mid-century, renders it peculiar in the region. In 1956, colonial census figures

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*Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983); Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (Johannesburg, 2001 [1982]), and *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Histoires des Villes d'Afrique Noire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993); A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, (Longmans: New York, 1973).

<sup>26</sup> Luise White, *The Comfort of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> Sheldon, Kathleen (ed) *Courtyards, Markets, City Streets: Urban Women in Africa* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996); Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890-1990* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), and *Sharing the Same Bowl: Women and Class in Accra* (Bloomington, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Penvenne, Jeanne, *Women, Migration and the Cashew Economy in Southern Mozambique, 1945-1975* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Abosede George, *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor and Social Development in Colonial Lagos* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); Rachel Jean-Baptiste, *Conjugal Rights: Marriage, Sexuality, and Urban Life in Colonial Libreville* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change Among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985);

<sup>30</sup> Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997); Teresa Barnes, *'We Women Worked So Hard': Gender, urbanisation and social reproduction in colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930-1956* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001); Justin Willis, *Mombasa, The Swahili and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

indicated 22,812 “Comorians” in Mahajanga, comprising some 50% of the city’s population. By contrast, other towns along northwest Madagascar boasted sizeable, but proportionately much smaller Comorian populations at the time: Diego Suarez, 8,750 (17% of overall population); Nosy Be, 1,970 (14%); Ambanja, 1,428 (7%); Mitsinjo, 930 (5.5%); Morondava, 309 (4.2%). Within the broader Indian Ocean region, Comorians also settled in Kenya, mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> But even in Zanzibar, which boasted a comparatively large Comorian population, they comprised only 1.1% of the island’s overall population in 1948.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, from the 1940s till the 1970s, Mahajanga was characterized as a “Comorian city,” having a higher population density of “Comorians” than any other city worldwide, including in the Comoros Islands.<sup>34</sup>

This group of Comorian migrants and their children, took on a wide variety of jobs in Mahajanga—dockworkers, domestic workers for Europeans, taxi drivers, municipal and sanitation workers, and market sellers—which allowed them to accumulate capital and construct homes.<sup>35</sup> Over the early-mid twentieth century, they came to make up the city’s rising working class.<sup>36</sup> Europeans and later South Asians, dominated the wholesale and large-scale commerce,

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<sup>32</sup> See Iain Walker “Identity and Citizenship among the Comorians of Zanzibar, 1886-1963” in Abdul Sheriff and Enseng Ho (eds) *Dhow Cultures: Oceanic Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London: Hurst, 2014); Gillian Marie Shepherd, “The Comorians in Kenya: The Establishment and Loss of an Economic Niche,” Unpublished PhD dissertation, London School of Economics, 1982. Also for earlier histories of Comorians in Zanzibar see Ibuni Saleh, *A Short History of the Comorians In Zanzibar* (Dar es Salaam, 1936); For work on the scholarly networks which brought Comorians to Zanzibar and beyond, see Bang, 2004, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, 53-56.

<sup>33</sup> Lofchie, Michael, *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965 [2005]), 71.

<sup>34</sup> Mariata Moussa Saïd, “Contribution a l’étude des minorités étrangères a Madagascar: Les Comorians de Majunga 1947 – 1960.” *Identity, Culture and Politics*. 1-2 (2007):111.

<sup>35</sup> The types of labor pursued by Comorians in Majunga are similar to those Faranirina Rajaonah describes of Comorians in Antananarivo, except that a larger proportion appear to have been students at the University in Tana, “La communauté Comorienne d’Antananarivo pendant colonisation: entre intégration et marginalisation”, in Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (ed) *Être étranger et migrant en Afrique au XXe siècle. Enjeux identitaires et modes d’insertion* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Gueunier, *Chemins de l’islam*; Didier Nativel, “Les Migrants Comorians à Majunga et Diego-Suarez durant l’époque coloniale (1895-1960)” in C. Coquery-Vidrovitch (ed) *Être étranger et migrant en Afrique au XXe siècle: enjeux identitaires et modes d’insertion* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003), 117-132; Natalie Radifison, “Conflits ethniques et

and thus comprised the city's economic elite.<sup>37</sup> Comorians and their *zanatany* progeny were resolutely the petty bourgeoisie. And though many managed to acquire property and generate income through renting portions of their houses, generally *zanatany* families strategically derived household income from diverse activities. *Zanatany* families did not apparently constitute a cohesive *rentier* class, nor did they dominate as shopkeepers, like James Brennan describes of Indians in twentieth century Dar es Salaam.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the histories of relationships between Asians and Africans, and the subsequent Asian expulsions from East African cities described by Brennan and Edgar Taylor, offer a productive contrast to the historical situation in Mahajanga.<sup>39</sup>

From the mid-nineteenth century, Mahajanga has been home to a lively and important South Asian population. Like Asian populations elsewhere in Africa, this group has been popularly cast by Malagasy as oppressive, snobby and heartless through social, racial caricatures.<sup>40</sup> In Madagascar, like Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, the juridical citizenship status afforded *karana* has historically been precarious and insecure; many have and continue to be categorized as “non-natives” by the colonial and postcolonial state.<sup>41</sup> But unlike those of Asian descent elsewhere in urban East Africa, *karana* in Madagascar have not often been the target of popular uprisings or state-sponsored expulsions (Chapter 9).<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the town's *karana* population, Comorians married into Malagasy families, and lived side by side with their

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leur résolution à Majunga de 1740 à aujourd'hui” in C. Allibert (ed) *Les Comorians à Majunga: Histoire, migrations, émeutes*. (Paris: Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales-INALCO, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 169-170.

<sup>38</sup> *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Brennan, *Taifa*; Edgar Taylor, *Asians and Africans in Ugandan Urban Life, 1959-1972*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Brennan, *Taifa* 10-11.

<sup>41</sup> Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 261, and *The Impact of Political, Economical and Juridical Context on Identifications in Indian Gujarati 'Diaspora.'* Chapter presented at International Conference on 'Global Gujarat and its Diaspora,' (Patan University, Patan, India, 2008), 5. Caroline McInerney, “Accessing Malagasy citizenship: The nationality code and its impact on the Karana,” *Tilburg Law Review*, 19:1-2 (2014), 182-193.

<sup>42</sup> Note that there have been attacks on *karana* shops in Madagascar, and challenges to citizenships but these have been episodic than systemic.

Malagasy neighbors. While some *karana* have also self-identified as *zanatany*, it was those from Comores and their Malagasy-Comorian progeny that most adeptly and prominently asserted their status as the city's true heirs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

And yet it was those *zanatany* of Comorian-descent who were the tragic victims of the 1976-77 massacre (commonly referred to as the “*rotaka*”, a tumult, upheaval), and against whom nationalist discourses were popularly mobilized by newer migrants in the town. It is this cataclysmic event—exceptional in the town and the island's history— which beckons a deeper consideration of how and why nativist claims were formed and upheld. Although a devastating conflict sits at the heart of this dissertation, this is not a study of violence. It is rather a study of the labor hierarchies and relations, building practices, and competing moralities that converged in the fomentation of the 1976-77 *rotaka*. My choice to examine the mundane ways people negotiated daily life leading up to the conflict—rather than the conflict itself—is deliberate and guided by several imperatives.

First, journalistic and scholarly accounts are replete with discussions of “ethnic conflict” and violent contestations over land, resources, and political authority, leaving historical moments of urban conviviality and the “micromechanics of coexistence” in the shadows.<sup>43</sup> The preservation of peace in Mahajanga over decades and centuries has required creative labor and everyday negotiations within households and neighborhoods, between neighbors (*jirany*) and kin (*famille, havana*), and strangers (*vazaha*) and natives (*zanatany*). Yet, less known about how tolerance has been maintained in this multi-confessional and ethno-linguistically diverse urban

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<sup>43</sup> Laura Ring, *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment Building* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3.

setting over long stretches of time.<sup>44</sup> This study documents the ways marriage, religious and moral practices, were integral to the aversion of conflict between Comorian migrants and some other ethno-linguistic and political groups over the twentieth century.

But more importantly, to understand the 1976-77 *rotaka* as a key event in the city's history necessitates excavation of the deeper, historical forces that fostered enmity towards "Comorians" and their *zanatany* progeny by newer Malagasy migrants. Beginning in the early 1900s, French colonial authorities turned to Comoros—among other places and possibilities—out of desperation to find workers for wide-ranging infrastructural projects, private enterprise, civil service and municipal maintenance (Chapter 4). Owing to the promising possibilities for work, vibrant Islamic communal atmosphere, and the entrenchment of informal kin and religious networks, Comorian migrants were drawn to Mahajanga more than any other city in northwestern Madagascar (Chapter 4, 5, 8).<sup>45</sup> As they married into Malagasy families, and toiled in (sometimes undesirable) jobs, Comorian migrants accumulated wealth and economized resources through collective savings groups (*shikoa*) (Chapter 4, 7). And in turn, they constructed dwellings— Sufi mosques, graveyard, Qu`ranic schools, and homes— infusing them with moral values about hard work, communality, and asceticism (Chapters 4 and 5).

As waves of migrants from elsewhere in Madagascar arrived in Majunga beginning in the 1930s, they encountered a town built and rebuilt as a "Comorian city," dominated spatially by

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<sup>44</sup> Loren Landau observes the "perennial academic preoccupations with ethnicity and violence" and calls for more attention to "patterns and rhetoric of inclusive tolerance" in "Becoming 'cosmo': Displacement, development and disguise in Ongata Rongai," *Africa* 85 vol 1 (2015): 60.

<sup>45</sup> Mariata Moussa Said attributes the draw to Majunga for Comorian migrants in the 40s and 50s to the distinctly Islamic character of Majunga where Comorians could practice without fear of persecution, and the port town's location which facilitated exchanges and offered work possibilities. Scarcity of land and the cyclone of 1950, which devastated much of Comoros, pushed many Comorians to migrate in search of wage labor and land, see "Contribution a l'Étude des Minorités Étrangères a Madagascar: Les Comorians de Majunga 1947-1960," *Identity, Culture and Politics* 1:2(2007): 109-110.

the solid homes and mosques of Comorian migrants and their *zanatany* progeny.<sup>46</sup> Since the central neighborhoods of town (Manga, Abattoir, Morafeno, Tsaramandroso) were occupied by Comorian and *zanatany* families, newcomer migrants were obliged to rent from them or to settle on the outskirts of town (in the present-day neighborhoods of Tsararano Ambony and Ambany, Mahavoky, Ambondrona, and Antanamisaja.) Streets were frequently the site of spectacular Islamic ritual dances through which Comorians and *zanatany* pronounced their ties to Sufi communities and declared their rightful belonging to the city through their appropriation of public, shared spaces. Majunga was, what one scholar called, the “first site of the Comorianisation” of Madagascar:<sup>47</sup> a place where Comorians and their *zanatany* children conserved, fertilized and productively reworked cultural practices, beyond the Archipelago.

By the 1950s and 60s, newer migrants Malagasy migrants (*mpiavy*) found themselves marginalized in the labor force. Some—especially those from south and southeast Madagascar—were obliged at times to take lower-rung manual labor jobs of rickshaw drivers, guards and domestic workers. Others found work alongside Comorians in factories or in marketplaces. Comorians were perceived by newer migrants as favored by French colonial authorities who gave them greater access to higher-paying jobs as police officers and municipal workers.<sup>48</sup> Independence in 1960 did little to change the exclusionary economies of labor in Majunga, but by the early 1970s, political and economic convulsions shook the island nation and reverberated in the city. Growing unemployment and mounting tensions in Majunga were intensified by global economic crises, the nationalisation of private industry that prioritized “nationals” as

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<sup>46</sup> Mzé Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena’ de la Grande Comore. Étude d’une migration” in C. Allibert (ed) *Les Comorians à Majunga: Histoire, migrations, émeutes, Études Océan Indien*. 38-39:11-112; Saïd, “Contribution a l’étude,” 111.

<sup>47</sup> Mzé Mohamed, “Les Sabena...,” 35.

<sup>48</sup> Nathalie Rafidison, “Conflits Ethniques et leur resolution à Majunga de 1740 à aujourd’hui,” C. Allibert (ed) *Les Comorians à Majunga: Histoire, migrations, émeutes, Études Océan Indien*. 38-39 (2007), 135; Saïd, “Contribution a l’Étude,” 107.

workers, and President Ratsiraka's (1975-1993) Marxist-Socialist inspired "Malagachisation" of education and commerce. The convergence of these events, with the long-standing spatial and economic-labor dominance of Comorians and *zanatany*, fueled anger and resentment from those on the margins. The post-independence socialist era (1970s—1980s), I suggest, offered new discursive and regulatory openings through which many Malagasy—newcomer migrants and long-standing residents alike—could dispute the dominance of Comorian migrants and foreground "Malagasy" national belonging.

Rather than the focal point, I approach the 1976-77 conflict as an invitation to unpack the long expanse, the historical thickness of people's morally informed relationships to each other, to their city, and the spaces within. This contrast to the historical situation of other East African towns, I suggest, reveals important insights about the nature of urban life, the fomentation of xenophobic sentiments, and the emergence of autochthonous claims. In Mahajanga, tensions over belonging emerged not necessarily in struggles over property and rent. Nor did they rise through contested relationships in "urban economic circuits,"<sup>49</sup> though these dynamics certainly played a part in the accumulation of tension between different city inhabitants. Everyday interactions in commerce and public display, as scholars have convincingly shown elsewhere in urban East Africa, were informed by different moral and ethical norms around the proper uses of wealth and kinship duties.<sup>50</sup> But also at the heart of historical struggles for belonging were the competing ways diverse groups—Comorians, *zanatany*, newer Malagasy migrants—materially constructed and physically inhabited urban spaces; these practices were reflective of divergent moral norms and ideas about proper urban life (Chapters 5, 7, 8, and 9).

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<sup>49</sup> Brennan, *Taifa*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Brennan, *Taifa*, Chapters 1 and 2. Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), especially Chapters 2 and 4; Jonathan Glassman, *Feasts and Riots: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995).

Ethnic and religious categories cannot, in other words, capture the complexity of the dynamics and groups involved in the 1976-77 pogrom. While the ascription and appropriation of ethnic labels were certainly laced through the event, I suggest, by contrast, that people actually reworked conceptions of ethnicity as an outcome of the conflict. Undergirding this violence, were in fact deeper, overlapping histories of nativist claims and competing moral visions for proper urbanism. The 1976-77 *rotaka* was a contestation of Comorian and *zanatany* reclamation of the city by newer migrants from across Madagascar. It was a fight about who had the right to determine the fundamental moral principles governing land, labor and bodily comportment in urban life. Reading questions about the 1976-77 *rotaka* through built forms reveals that land and houses were not simply territorial sites, over which competing groups fought, but were themselves constitutive of how people could imagine, forge or destroy ties of belonging.

To understand the unfolding of the *rotaka* in 1976-77, calls for engagement with several key themes: the politics of place, ethno-racial thought, land and autochthony, and infrastructure. In the remainder of this chapter, I chart scholarly literature, beginning with the ways that built forms have historically mattered in African cities. Urban planning and architecture have been key sites through which early modern and colonial authorities aspired to shape the temporality, texture and rhythm of daily life. Competing needs for labor within colonial regimes, required wrestling with the challenges of mobility and emplacement. Efforts to engineer space in African cities were almost always entangled, however, with the ways that people distinguished themselves from one another. Historians have struggled analytically with how to account for the complex ways in which people categorize and construct ethnic-racial hierarchies, and the political utility of ethno-racial distinctions. Claims to belonging have been linked and delinked from ethno-racial categories, even while enacting new autochthonous idioms. Yet, these

enunciations of difference are constituted and made visible in the materials and labor of everyday life. The last section of this chapter considers studies of infrastructure, and suggests how infrastructure—and infrastructural labor—are sites which constrain and enable practices of difference and political efficacy.

### ***The Politics of Place: Urban Planning and Colonial Architecture***

One key way colonial authorities sought to control the messiness of African cities, and the excess of unemployment and mobility, was through what Cooper once called the “mask of city planning and urban architecture.”<sup>51</sup> Workers and migrants, for their part, reworked or crafted multiple temporalities and spaces. Colonial efforts to create visible, grid-like spaces conducive to controlling, pacifying and exploiting local populations<sup>52</sup> manifested in cities in the form of segregationist schemes designed to create separate residential spaces for colonizer and colonized, among other goals.<sup>53</sup> Scholars have documented how political configurations and modernist aesthetic theories gave rise to the conception of architecture as an experimental device for domination and control,<sup>54</sup> even if efforts were stymied in bureaucratic fractures.<sup>55</sup> Spatial engineering and segregation were devices of hegemony.<sup>56</sup> Early studies in Africa and beyond

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<sup>51</sup> Cooper, *Struggle for the City*, 27.

<sup>52</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002); James Scott *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod, “Tale of Two Cities: the Origins of Modern Cairo,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7 (1965): 429-457; Garth Myers *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Abdul Sheriff, “The Spatial Dichotomy of Swahili Towns: The Case of Zanzibar in the nineteenth century,” *Azania* 36-37 (2002): 63-81.

<sup>54</sup> James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> William Cunningham Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Robert Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities* (London: Routledge, 1997 [2013]); Anthony King, *The Bungalow: The Production of Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 1984); Myers, *Verandahs of Power*; Wright, *The Politics of Design*; Rabinow, *French Modern*.

demonstrated the divisive dimensions of colonial urban planning, in the strategic separation of colonizers and the colonized, often through dual-city configuration.<sup>57</sup> Public health and sanitation were used as justifications for far-reaching spatial segregation programs undertaken in colonial situations globally.<sup>58</sup> Subsequent studies revised understandings of dual-city arrangements, arguing they were less a product of ideology, and more of bureaucratic calculations aimed at efficiency.<sup>59</sup> Urban boundaries were blurry and social differentiation did not always map onto spatial organization in clear ways.<sup>60</sup>

Like other colonial towns in Africa, Malagasy cities were also theaters for the performance of colonial grandeur through the feats of architecture and the reworking of space.<sup>61</sup> French and British colonial interventions into ancient African cities differed, but both approaches

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<sup>57</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod "Tale of Two Cities"; Robert Home, *Of Planting and Planning*; Moussa Dembele, "French Colonization and Urban Evolution in Djenné and Bamako" in Falola Toyin and Salm (eds) *Globalization and Urbanization in Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004); Odile Goerg "From Hill Station (Freetown) to Downtown Conakry (First Ward): Comparing French and British Approaches to Segregation in Colonial Cities at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32:1 (1998):1-31. For critiques of this literature, see William Cunningham Bissell "Between Fixity and Fantasy: Assessing the Spatial Impact of Colonial Urban Dualism," *Journal of Urban History* 37:2(2011): 208-229; Swati Chattopadhyay, S. (2000) "Blurring Boundaries: The Limits of "White Town" in Colonial Calcutta," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 59:2 (2000):154-179.

<sup>58</sup> Maynard Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909," *The Journal of African History* 18: 3 (1977): 387-410; Rabinow, *French Modern*, 240-1; Zeynep Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (UC Press, Berkeley, 1997), especially Chp 4; Liora Bigon, "Bubonic Plague, Colonial Ideologies, and Urban Planning Policies: Dakar, Lagos, and Kumasi," *Planning Perspectives* 31:2 (2016): 205-226; Johan Lagae, Sofie Boonen, Maarten Liefoghe, "Fissures dans le 'cordon sanitaire': Architecture hospitalière et ségrégation urbaine à Lubumbashi, 1920-1960" *Comptes Rendus* (2013): 247-261; For comparative Asian contexts, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations in the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1996 [2003]).

<sup>59</sup> Celik, Zeynep, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*.

<sup>60</sup> Celik, Zeynep, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*; Bissell, "Between Fixity and Fantasy."

<sup>61</sup> On Madagascar, see Faranirina Rajaonah, "Modèles européens pour une ville malgache: Antananarivo XIXe-XXe siècle" in *La ville européenne outre mers: un modèle conquérant: XVe-XXe siècle* (Paris: L'Hamattan, 1996); and Wright, *The Politics of Design*; For 19<sup>th</sup> C urban forms and power in Antananarivo, see Didier Nativel, *Maisons royales, Demeures des Grands. L'inscription de la réussite sociales dans l'espace urbain de Tanananarive au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Karthala, 2005); For other colonial African cities see Bigon, Liora, "Urban planning, colonial doctrines and street naming in French Dakar and British Lagos, c. 1850-1930," *Urban History* 36:3(2009): 426-448.

were constrained.<sup>62</sup> By incorporating local aesthetics into architectural forms, French colonial authorities sought to mitigate resistance and to project an image of colonial benevolence steeped in exotic romanticizing of the colonial other.<sup>63</sup> Spatial modifications were usually minor alterations to existing urban landscapes, rather than demolitionary, radical reworkings of the town's form—an approach encapsulated in the French term *aménagement*.<sup>64</sup> British efforts were at times hindered by multiple, inconsistent responses to reworking entrenched urban space.<sup>65</sup> William Bissell showed this to be the case in colonial Zanzibar where many envisioned urban plans either failed or never materialized.<sup>66</sup> British authorities efforts to implement a master plan for the city were frustrated by the disjointed bureaucratic apparatus and the incoherencies of the plans themselves.<sup>67</sup>

At times co-creative endeavors between colonizer and colonized gave rise to “colonial third culture” manifest in hybrid forms of architecture and urbanism.<sup>68</sup> This was especially true with housing, which interwove vernacular and colonial forms.<sup>69</sup> Much as architects aspired to emulate pure modernist forms, in colonial Libya for example, their efforts were mitigated by political imperatives to gain the sympathies of Muslim inhabitants through support for Islamic architectural projects.<sup>70</sup> In many colonial cities, architectural styles emerged through sustained

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<sup>62</sup> One review of the two approaches is Ambe Njoh, “Colonial philosophies, urban space, and racial segregation in British and French colonial Africa”, *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (2008): 579-599.

<sup>63</sup> Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*; Myers, *Verandahs of Power*.

<sup>64</sup> Rabinow, *French Modern*; Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*, 66, 69.

<sup>65</sup> Liora Bigon, *A History of Urban Planning in Two West African Colonial Capitals: Residential Segregation in British Lagos and French Dakar (1850-1930)* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar*; This was also true in Antananarivo, see Rajaonah, “Modèles européens...”

<sup>67</sup> Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar*.

<sup>68</sup> Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment*, (Routledge, Boston, 1976).

<sup>69</sup> William Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Richard Harris and Myers, Garth, “Hybrid Housing: Improvement and Control in Late Colonial Zanzibar,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 66:4 (2007): 466-493.

<sup>70</sup> Krystyna von Henneberg, “Imperial Uncertainties: Architectural Syncretism and Improvisation in Fascist Colonial Libya”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 31(1996): 363-95.

negotiation between colonial authorities and urban dwellers. Architectural historians have shown how urban spaces were processual, shaped by “spatial imagination,” in which ideological imperatives for ordering urban life were collapsed into physical forms.<sup>71</sup>

Surprisingly, for all the attention to African cities, *material* aspects of the city have largely been overlooked among historians, with few exceptions.<sup>72</sup> When architecture or building forms are present in urban histories, they are often situated as backdrops, separate from the realm of social practices.<sup>73</sup> This is also the case among urban studies scholarship in Africa and beyond. Critical geographers, historians and anthropologists have documented the ways exercises of political and economic power manifest through urban, socio-spatial stratification.<sup>74</sup> Scholars of African cities asserted that past and current spatial segregation in mega-cities like Johannesburg have further entrenched socio-economic marginalization and inequality.<sup>75</sup> Arguing against the effacement of African cities in urban theory, and the caricature that “African cities don’t work,” others emphasize the multiple logics governing urban spaces. In this frame, African cities are characterized by “informality,” “spectrality,” and “mobility;” out of the ashes and chaos have arisen improvisational social practices that testify to human creative capacities.<sup>76</sup> AbdulMaliq

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<sup>71</sup> Key works here are Dell Upton’s *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*; Swati Chattopadhyay, *Unlearning the City: Infrastructure in a New Optical Field* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Another way to frame this is to pose the question, following Jane Bennett, ‘How did Marx’s notion of materiality—as economic structures and exchanges—come to stand for the materialist perspective per se?’ in *Vibrant Matter*, xvi. Notable exceptions to this are Didier Nativel’s study of 19<sup>th</sup> century Antananarivo, *Maisons Royales*, and Sandy Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016).

<sup>73</sup> Didier Nativel makes this point, “À chacun selon ses moyens. Pratiques d’appropriation et construction de modes de vie citadins à Tanananarive au XIXe siècle,” *Afrique & Histoire* 5:1 (2005), 47.

<sup>74</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009 [1973]); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in Sao Paulo*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> Martin Murray, *City of Extremes: The Spatial Politics of Johannesburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Martin Murray, *Taming the Disorderly City: The Spatial Landscape of Johannesburg* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Garth Myers, *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice* (Chicago: University

Simone positioned African cities as “a frontier for a wide range of diffuse experimentation with the reconfiguration of bodies, territories, and social arrangements necessary to recalibrate technologies of control.” But the material significance of technologies, building materials and infrastructures are left in the shadows of his and others’ studies.<sup>77</sup> Space and urban built forms have featured in this scholarship as metaphorical terrains on which political contestations are waged, rather than as sites of meaningful processes in and of themselves. Historical sources, moreover, have rarely been tied to evidence about the myriad, lived experiences of city dwellers.

This study offers a fine-grained account of how urban matters—building materials, constructed forms and infrastructure—have shaped urban life and expressed morally-informed norms of urbanism. Cities, buildings and infrastructures can enable or constrain possibilities for change and for imagining new futures. Urban inhabitants are obliged to contend with the material properties and arrangements of their streets, homes, and infrastructures. Among Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars, Annique Hommels signaled “obduracy” to describe the ways urban built forms exhibit a kind of inertia, limiting the possibilities for new innovations. This obduracy comes from both the physical properties of materials—the solidity of concrete, for instance—but also from the gradual accrual of city policies, property laws, infrastructural investments, affective attachments and people’s everyday habits that entrench built environments.<sup>78</sup> I build on this important scholarship, and bridge it with an ethnographic eye to how people have contested and reworked the materials of urban infrastructure and housing to

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of Chicago Press, 2011); Filip de Boeck and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004); AbdulMaliq Simone *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Simone opens, *For the City Yet to Come*, with a bold challenge to this caricature of “African cities don’t work.”; For cities beyond Africa, see See also, De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Setha Low *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. (Austin: University of Texas, 2000).

<sup>77</sup> Simone, *For the City Yet to Come*, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Annique Hommels, *Unbuilding Cities: Obduracy in Urban Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 20.

make new claims and meanings. Guided by the recent approach of Clapperton Mavhunga and others, this study centers Africans as the “designers and innovators” in the making of their technological and material worlds, rather than as passive recipients of transferred technology.<sup>79</sup>

At times, Mahajangais have crafted their city by initiating, designing and building their homes and mosques, what James Holston calls “autoconstruction.” Such self-organized, spatial interventions are forceful assertions of one’s “right to the city,”<sup>80</sup> and result in ‘anticipatory’ artifacts of imagined futures that tie together perceptions of pasts, present and futures.<sup>81</sup>

Attending to these material interventions reveals how people have imagined their cities, their possibilities and place in the urban landscape, and what constitutes a meaningful, morally upright urbanism. In Madagascar, scholars have documented how people have drawn on cosmologically and astrologically auspicious orders to shape architectures of homes and villages.<sup>82</sup> Alterations to space, whether clearing land or constructing homes, necessitated negotiation with ancestors.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout the island people have drawn selectively on materials to imbue their houses with symbolism of fertility and longevity; over time houses serve as material manifestations of kin

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<sup>79</sup> Clapperton Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces: Technologies of Everyday Innovation in Zimbabwe* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2014), 8; Robyn D’Avignon, *Subterranean Histories: Making ‘Artisanal’ Miners on the West African Sahel*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1965[1972]). Scholars have tied this concept to vernacular spatial production, see Crawford, M. “Urban interventions and the right to the city,” *Architect*, August 84-5 (2012).

<sup>81</sup> Krisztina Fehérvári, “American Kitchens, Luxury Bathrooms and the Search for a ‘Normal’ Life in Post-socialist Hungary.” *Ethnos*. 67:3 (2002):369-400; Caroline Melly, “Inside-Out Houses: Urban Belonging and Imagined Futures in Dakar, Senegal” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:1 (2010): 37-65; Morton Nielson, “Futures Within: Reversible Time and House-Building in Maputo, Mozambique,” *Anthropological Theory* 11 no. 4 (2011): 397-423; Claudia Gastrow, “Aesthetic Dissent: Urban Redevelopment and Political Belonging in Luanda, Angola,” *Antipode*, forthcoming; Alison Kohn, *The Production of Urban Vernacular Space in a Postcolonial Context: City-building and social transformation from the margins of La Paz, Bolivia*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Domenichini, Jean-Pierre 1989. “La Conception Malgache du Découpage de l’Espace: Un Aspect de l’unité culturelle austronésienne” in Fremigacci, Jean, ed. *Histoire et organisation de l’espace à Madagascar*. (Paris: Karthala, 1989), 7-45; Fremigacci, Jean, *Histoire et organisation de l’espace à Madagascar*; Gillian Feeley-Harnik, “The Sakalava House” *Anthropos*. 75 (1980):559-85.

<sup>83</sup> In highland Madagascar, ritual specialists known as *mpanandro* guide the timing and spatial orientation of house building to ensure compliance with cosmological forces; Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona, “Where to Begin a House Foundation: Betsileo *mpanandro* and the (re)creation of tradition,” in Claude Allibert and Narivelo Rajaonarimanana (eds) *L’extraordinaire et le quotidien: Variations anthropologiques* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 135-141.

groups (which included the living, dead and future progeny).<sup>84</sup> Philip Thomas has shown how in contemporary Southeast Madagascar, house builders mediate tensions between urban migration and rural dwelling by incorporating non-locally produced construction materials into local systems of spatial symbolism.<sup>85</sup>

This work reveals the tremendous interpretive latitude rural Malagasy undertake through dwelling construction; but less is known about *city* dwellers and builders. How have they perceived and employed building materials, design, and decorative features? My project brings together historical, ethnographic and STS approaches to account for the ways African actors organized and transformed their material urban world. I contribute to the growing, vibrant body of literature seeking to decenter colonial and contemporary narratives of Africa lacking technology,<sup>86</sup> by rooting the study of urban planning and place-making in early modern times. I examine the ways precolonial Malagasy spatial practices were infused with ideological intentions. Chapters 2 and 3 explore how monarchal leaders, traders, and migrants demonstrated their degree of authority and belonging through selective building materials in early modern Majunga.

French military planners and colonial administrators in the early twentieth-century entered into a vibrant urban landscape filled with multiple ethno-linguistic groups holding competing norms about what constituted proper urban life (Chapter 3, 4 and 5). Urban space and approaches to managing density, were and would continue to be fundamentally plural and contested. French city administrators, for their part, sought to negotiate the complicated spatial

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<sup>84</sup> Maurice Bloch, “The Resurrection of the House amongst the Zafimaniry of Madagascar” in Janet Carsten and S. Hugh-Jones, eds. *About the House: Levi-Strauss and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>85</sup> Philip Thomas, “Conspicuous Construction: Houses, Consumption and ‘Relocalization’ in Manambondro, Southeast Madagascar.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 4:3 (1998): 425-44.

<sup>86</sup> Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Julie Livingston, *Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Clapperton Mavhunga, *Transient Workspaces*; Robyn D’Avignon, *Subterranean Histories*.

coexistence of different ethnic-political groups through the management of space and housing. Negotiations between colonial authorities and city inhabitants over aesthetics, building materials, and the uses of space were complicated in historically multi-ethnic Mahajanga. I trace the ways different groups, but especially Comorian-Malagasy *zanatany* families registered their political sensibilities and aspirations in urban architectural projects. In colonial and post-independence times, these families drew specifically on the inhabitation and refashioning of space to develop, project and perform morally-informed practices of the good life, what we might call “zanatany urbanism,” in Mahajanga (5 and 8).

### ***Tangles of Nativism: Ethno-Racial Thought and Idioms of Autochthony***<sup>87</sup>

This study is an excavation of histories of nativism and belonging. Ethno-racial thought has been an important dimension to nativist discourses and race and ethnicity have been remarkably fruitful scholarly analytics for making sense of competing nationalisms. Jonathon Glassman traced how Zanzibari politics were gradually saturated with ethno-racist discourses, by drawing on exchanges between elite intelligentsia (who considered themselves Arab) and “subaltern intellectuals” (linked to African and Shirazi groups) in newspapers and propaganda. He suggested that Zanzibari nationalism, like “all nationalisms are built on a nativist logic,” where the rights of citizenship were allocated based on claims to place and belonging.<sup>88</sup> James Brennan similarly tracked the emergence of discourses around ‘race’ and ‘nation’ in urban Tanzania, culminating in a persistent, exclusionary racial nationalism.<sup>89</sup> Colonial categories of

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<sup>87</sup> The term autochthony itself derives etymologically from Greek language, *autos* (self) and *chthonos* (soil). In contemporary scholarship autochthony is most commonly used in francophone regions, with the anglophone corollary being “native” and “nativism.”

<sup>88</sup> Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 299.

<sup>89</sup> Brennan, *Taifa*.

“native” and “non-native” informed urban planning policies, while racial categories were constructed intellectually by multiple historical actors with competing aims. Collectively, these studies and others<sup>90</sup> established a powerful correction to dominant nationalist histories that elide the experiences of racial minorities, by showing the sheer heterogeneity of experiences over time and how nationalisms were racialized and exclusionary.

Recent studies have departed from the enduring, if constraining, questions of whether and to what extent ethnicity was “invented,” shaped, and rigidified by colonial regimes. They insist on the longstanding presence of ranked ideas of racial and ethnic difference, and they probe how local intellectuals have propagated and negotiated ethno-racial consciousness for the realization of various political projects. In this recent wave, race has been (re)introduced—and joined with ethnicity—as a key analytical vector. Glassman usefully brings race and ethnicity together as “modes of thought that fall towards opposing ends of a single continuum...”<sup>91</sup> Glassman, David Schoenbrun, Bruce Hall and others have effectively unfastened racial thought from the colonial era, by documenting how ranked categorizations tied to descent have persisted across the continent from early modern times.<sup>92</sup> Ethnicity has also been productively refined in recent scholarship. Historian John Lonsdale differentiated the political usages of “tribalism” from “moral ethnicity,” which he defined as “the common human instinct to create...a system of moral meaning and ethical reputation within a more or less imagined community.”<sup>93</sup> Derek

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<sup>90</sup> See Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Christopher Lee, *Unreasonable Histories: Nativism, Multiracial lives, and the Genealogical Imagination in British Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Edgar Taylor, *Asians and Africans in Ugandan Urban Life, 1959-1972*, Unpublished Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Glassman, *War of Words*, 11.

<sup>92</sup> David Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998); Glassman, *War of Words*, especially chapter 2; Hall, *A History of Race*.

<sup>93</sup> John Lonsdale contrasts this with “political tribalism” which concerns the ways collective ethnic identities get harnessed in political contestations. See “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,” in Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa; Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity* (London: James Currey, 1992).

Peterson has shown furthermore how localized nationalists and itinerant, cosmopolitan revivalists in East Africa challenged and reworked notions of ethnicity through moral debates, about gender relations, etiquette, and social decorum. Taking inspiration from these recent approaches, I investigate how moral economies were at the core of contestations over belonging in Mahajanga over time (Chapters 3, 5-7, 8-9).

At the same time, some have questioned the epistemic costs of drawing on ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ as analytical categories. In the context of Madagascar, Pier Larson critiqued scholarly and popular reflexes to read ethnonyms into deeper pasts, when they may not have existed or may have had very different meanings. He argued for scholarly examinations of the “semantic fields of ‘names of belonging’” as the most effective tool for identifying how ethnonyms have been historically constructed and how their meanings have shifted over time.<sup>94</sup> In the case of Madagascar, the present-day ethnonym “Merina” emerged contingently as a reference to political consciousness in the nineteenth century, and gradually shifted to denote ethnic affiliation. Brennan cited the prickly challenges of writing about race by using ethnonyms such as “African,” and “Indian” as descriptors *and* as historicized, analytical categories. Drawing on the terms used by historical actors, especially *taifa* (meaning both race and nation) is one way he resolved this tension. Christopher Lee offers that while race allows for productive historical comparisons, “it can obscure the specific discursive practices that have inhibited recognition of and critical thinking about these communities in past and present.”<sup>95</sup> Perhaps most forcefully, Glassman provokes that “the only solution [to transposing categories from one history onto

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<sup>94</sup> Pier Larson, “Desperately seeking the ‘Merina’ (central Madagascar): reading ethnonyms and their semantic fields in African identity histories,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22:4(1996):541-60.

<sup>95</sup> Lee, *Unreasonable Histories*, 8.

another] would be to strive to abandon race altogether as a category of analysis and limit it instead to a topic of study.”<sup>96</sup>

This study heeds these cautionary calls. Rather than invoke race or ethnicity as central points of inquiry, I probe the city’s history by asking broadly, “What kinds of grammars have people used to differentiate themselves? What concepts have denoted belonging?”<sup>97</sup> Then, I trace the shifting meanings attributed to key idioms of belonging, as they are invoked by competing historical actors over time. This is a deliberate move, informed by the particular intellectual and political genealogy charted here.<sup>98</sup> Central to this study is the Malagasy concept “zanatany” which is sometimes used interchangeably or in contrast to *tompon-tany*, meaning “master of the land.” In contemporary Mahajanga, like nativist terms elsewhere, identifying as *zanatany* has historically been a forceful claim to native status— a loaded assertion in this city long marked by waves of successive migration. But its meaning has shifted over time. Who can claim, or identify as, *zanatany* in Mahajanga and northwest Madagascar has long been contentious. *Zanatany* appears to have emerged as an indexical ethno-racial, autochthonous category as early as the late 1800s.<sup>99</sup> Historically, Sakalava groups were regarded as the *zanatany*, the autochthones of the region as evidenced by longstanding Sakalava monarchal regimes which ruled the region up to the mid-nineteenth century; many still assert this in contemporary times, owing to the presence of royal ancestral spirits (Chapters 5 and 10).

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<sup>96</sup> Glassman, *War of Words*, 302.

<sup>97</sup> While the reader might be initially frustrated by my persistent use of the expansive terms “belonging” and “difference,” I hope that the stakes for doing so will soon be evident.

<sup>98</sup> I’m inspired not only by the intellectual genealogy cited here (Larson, Glassman, Brennan, Hall, Lee) but also by anthropologists who have argued for privileging of emic idioms, vernacular categories, in short “indigenous analysis.” Stuart Kirsch’s *Reverse Anthropology: Indigenous Analysis of Social and Environmental in New Guinea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) for a particularly strong formation of this argument. At the same time, I recognize there is no clear path outside of the analytical quagmire of dealing with categorizations. At times, I will wrestle with ‘zanatany’ and other ethno-racial signifiers as both categories of analyses and descriptors.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Also, see Victorin Malzac, *Dictionnaire français-malgache* (Tananarive: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1893), in which *zanatany* is defined variably as “indigene” and “national” 436, 546, respectively.

Under colonial rule (1896-1960), however, French authorities appropriated the term *zanatany* to describe Malagasy as the children of the French motherland, infantilizing Malagasy as the children of the metropole.<sup>100</sup> Conversely, French nationals who remained in the country after independence, and their descendants, described themselves as *zanatany* or *vazahas zanatany*, in an affirmation of their belonging to the Malagasy soil.<sup>101</sup> The concept began to take salience as a nativist term by the early to mid twentieth century, used by citizens and colonial authorities alike to denote the first generation offspring of Comorian migrants (usually men) and their Malagasy partners (usually Sakalava women). This generation of *zanatany* differentiated themselves from their Comorian fathers (*vieux Comorians*) and drew on the connections with matrilineal ancestry to make claims to the spaces, jobs and opportunities of the city.<sup>102</sup> In contemporary times, newer Malagasy migrant groups and youth self-identify as *zanatany* in bold declarations of their urban citizenship.<sup>103</sup> The sheer malleability and persistence of this concept provokes questions that this study probes in more detail in forthcoming chapters: What has constituted ‘*zanatany*’ over time? How have material culture and space—appropriations and reworkings of—been tied to articulations of *zanatany*-ness? What are the “techniques of the

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<sup>100</sup> In this formation, Madagascar was the “child country” and France was the “parent” (*ray aman-dreny*) Oyvind Dahl, *Meanings in Madagascar: Cases of Intercultural Communication* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), 103.

<sup>101</sup> This continues today. Interview with MD, October 8, 2013; Faranirina Rajaonha (ed), *Cultures citadines dans l’Océan Indien (XVIIIe – XXIe siècles)*, 265; *Bulletin du Réseau des observatoires du français contemporain en Afrique noire*, vol 7-9, defines *zanatany* as “a European born and established in Madagascar” (Didier-érudition, 1987), 91; Eric Jennings and Jacques Cantier (eds), *Empire colonial sous Vichy* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), 396; For a documentary film profiling *vazaha zanatany* see Régis Michel, *Zanatany les “petits blancs” de la Grande Île* (2005; Antananarivo, Madagascar: Pacifico Island Productions); Jean Poirier suggests that *zanatany* could even, by extension, denote “a foreigner living in Europe who...considers himself in profound solidarity with Malagasy society,” see “La Memoire des “Zanatany” et la collecte des recits de vie a Madagascar” in Claude Allibert and Narivelo Rajaonarimanana (eds) *L’Extraordinaire et le Quotidien: Variations Anthropologiques* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 283.

<sup>102</sup> Gueunier, *Chemins d’Islam*, 50.

<sup>103</sup> This can also be found in journalistic accounts, “Mahajanga – Les autorites sur le qui-vive!” AllAfrica.com, March 25, 2014.

body,”<sup>104</sup> the bodily engagements with the material world of the city, by which *zanatany* has rendered visible and made to appear natural?

At first glance, *zanatany* conforms neatly to terms used elsewhere to denote autochthony, by connecting blood and soil to invoke a naturalized idea of nativism.<sup>105</sup> Autochthonous discourses have been key vectors through which various kinds of difference —ethnic, racial, and class-based— have been articulated and contested throughout contemporary Africa and beyond. A rich, emergent body of literature spurred partly by the work of Peter Geschiere and others,<sup>106</sup> has illuminated how autochthonous concepts are foremost concerned with authenticity, and draw selectively on historical narratives, usually masking earlier journeys of migration and mobility.<sup>107</sup> But, paradoxically, autochthony is strikingly empty, since it “only expresses the claim to have come first,” and it is “precisely this emptiness that makes the notion so pliable: autochthony’s other can be constantly redefined, entailing new boundary making for the group concerned...”<sup>108</sup> Autochthonous idioms of belonging have been particularly persuasive because they naturalize purported differences between insiders and outsiders by invoking imagery of the soil (as in ‘sons of the soil’) in ways that seem axiomatic.<sup>109</sup> Autochthony becomes saturated

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<sup>104</sup> Marcel Mauss, “Les techniques du corps,” *Journal de Psychologie* 32: 3-4 (1934 [1936]) 4-23; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, [1962] 1979), especially chapters 3-4; See also Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997), especially chapters 6-10.

<sup>105</sup> Geschiere, Peter, *The Perils of Belonging*; Michaela Pelican, “Complexities of indigeneity and autochthony: An African example,” *American Ethnologist* 36 n. 1 (2009), 52-65; Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*.

<sup>106</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*; See special issue of *Africa*, on “The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Africa” 85:1 (2015); Pelican, “Complexities of indigeneity and autochthony”; Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*; Bambi Ceuppens and Peter Geschiere, ‘Autochthony: Local or Global? New Modes in the Struggle over Citizenship and Belonging in Africa and Europe,’ *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 385-409; Jean and John Comaroff, “Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse, and the Postcolonial State,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27:3 (2001): 627-651.

<sup>107</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*.

<sup>108</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, 28.

<sup>109</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, 27.

with ethno-racial concepts, and Geschiere suggests may even be “a new, emptier form of ethnicity.”<sup>110</sup>

But upon closer examination, *zanatany* diverges from this classical definition of autochthonous discourses. Being *zanatany* in Mahajanga, has historically been a mode of distancing from ethnic markers, rather than a neutral category into which ethnicity is grafted by its claimants. For newer migrants from the Archipelago and their children in the mid-twentieth century, being *zanatany* meant one was not (foremost) Comorian, but something else. For the children of mixed Malagasy-Comorian marriages, *zanatany* was a generational differentiation. While their fathers were considered “Comorians” or “old Comorians,” their sons were resolutely *zanatany*.<sup>111</sup> It is notable that in Greek origin myths, autochthony meant he who “sprang from the land itself,” even possibly denoting someone not born from parents, but “earth born.”<sup>112</sup> In some sense, the use of *zanatany* in Mahajanga resonates with this, as it effaces kinship links and suppresses one’s paternal connection to Comoros. Even in more contemporary times, many young people leave aside ethnic terms (*karazana*), say as Betsileo, Tsimihety, or Antesaka, to instead articulate themselves as *zanatany*.<sup>113</sup> Autochthony in Mahajanga seems to trump ethnicity, not necessary as a new iteration of ethnicity as Geschiere and Nyamnjoh<sup>114</sup> suggest, but as tactic of distancing from and even expunging ethnic affiliations.

Unlike autochthonous concepts elsewhere, *zanatany* is much more capacious, encompassing far more than simply a reference to first-coming. Older *zanatany* recalled that

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<sup>110</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, 230 fn41; also see Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, “Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging,” *Public Culture* 12:2 (2000): 423-452.

<sup>111</sup> Gueunier, *Les Chemins d’Islam*, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Walter, Uwe. 2012. “Autochthony.” *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with J, Jan 15, 2014; Interview with F, Feb 3, 2014; Interview with L, Jan. 14, 2014; Interview with W, Feb. 22, 2014. This was a bold claim for newer migrants to make, though those that made it didn’t always see it that way; this will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 8.

<sup>114</sup> Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, “Capitalism and Autochthony,” 424.

their forebears distinguished themselves from their Malagasy neighbors, by their upholding idealized notions of fastidious bodily cleanliness, asceticism, and scrupulous economizing practices.<sup>115</sup> In these narratives, *zanatany* acquisition of property was legitimated by toil and faithful perseverance. Collectivity and conviviality were also core attributes to the concept of *zanatany*. Mahajanga's urban life was animated by playful, public celebrations, displays of (usually same-sex) affection, and celebratory ritual dances.<sup>116</sup> Some Malagasy, for their part, argued that Comorians were showy with their wealth, loud and boastful, violating norms of restrained bodily comportment and discretion deemed suitable for urban life.<sup>117</sup> *Zanatany* was not simply an autochthonous category; it was rather, as some informants suggested, a morally-informed way of life replete with particular assumptions about consumption, habitus, and public decorum. This is not to suggest that *zanatany* has historically been a stable category of belonging. What constituted a *zanatany* lifestyle or genealogy has, of course, been debated over time. But key here is that being *zanatany* implied a whole host of material, spatial and bodily practices, not just a claim to first-coming, by which one differentiated themselves from their neighbors.

### ***Nativist Claims: The Place of Land***

The surge of literature on autochthony in the last two decades is undeniable. Some have suggested that debates around belonging have intensified with the introduction of neoliberal policies, the influx of international aid, and the mounting pressure to democratize from

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with K, Oct. 29, 2012; Interview with M, October 18, 2013; Interview June 28, 2013; Interview with A, October 31, 2013; Interview with AM, February 18, 2013.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with AT, April 18, 2013; Interview with B, March 15, 2012; Interview with C, October 25, 2013; Interview with H, Feb. 2, 2014; Interview with HE, Dec. 11, 2013; Interview with R, Nov. 12, 2013.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with BP, Feb. 7, 2013; Interview with DE, Feb. 7, 2013; Interview with DL, April 4, 2014; Interview with DK, October 11, 2013; Interview with DS, October 19, 2013; Interview with D, March 21, 2014. See also Mohamed Toihiri, *La République des Imberbes*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), 90-91.

outside.<sup>118</sup> African countries are witnessing the convergence of violent new forms of exclusionary practices in “an epoch when nationhood seems at once critical and yet in crisis.”<sup>119</sup> For Geschiere and others, autochthony is a relatively recent phenomenon in African contexts. It emerges from colonial hierarchies and distinctions between newcomers and first comers. In this formulation, colonial regimes set in motion a competitive political terrain that would endure well into the contemporary times.<sup>120</sup> And while it might be true that conflicts over first-coming have intensified, or certainly become more overt in recent times, differentiations between autochthones and allogenes have deeper histories.

Nativism is not new. This study builds on a rich historiography documenting how East African societies have long been organized by paradigmatic principles of autochthony and allochthony.<sup>121</sup> Scholars have shown how ecological conditions and land distribution were critical conditions shaping how newcomers were incorporated into existing polities.<sup>122</sup> In situations of abundant land, the main hindrance to social reproduction was “securing access to people...not in controlling access to land.”<sup>123</sup> African leaders sought to attract followers, dependents and adherents that expanded their authority and allowed them to build capital through ‘wealth in people’.<sup>124</sup> Historical linguistic data demonstrate that discourses of

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<sup>118</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*.

<sup>119</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, “Naturing the Nation,” 651.

<sup>120</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>121</sup> David Schoenbrun *A Green Place, A Good Place*, especially pp. 96-100, 178-200; Holly Hanson *Landed Obligation: The Practice of Power in Buganda* (2003); For a different viewpoint on the chronological origin of banana farming and population dynamics see Christopher Wrigley, *Kingship and State: The Buganda Dynasty*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1996, 235 (quoted on Hansen, 2003:27. See also, Catherine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>122</sup> On how frontier conditions of “open resources and sparse populations” engendered inclusive societies revolving around kinship idioms, which thrived on “reproducing kinsmen, adopting adherents, purchasing ‘slaves’ and attracting strangers”, see Igor Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The reproduction of traditional African societies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 47.

<sup>123</sup> Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 100.

<sup>124</sup> See Guyer, Jane I. and Samuel M. Eno Belinga. 1995. “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 36 (1995): 111; Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne

‘firstcomer’ were found from 1000-1300 CE in the Great Lakes basin”<sup>125</sup> By the sixteenth century, Great Lakes communities shifted away from “wholesale incorporation of newcomers around a longer-established firstcomer group, to a policy of crafting hierarchical access to land and protection of community through the creation of hereditary concepts of nobility and royalty.”<sup>126</sup> Competing lineages made similar gestures towards property inheritance based on patrilineality and enunciations of indigeneity, which allowed them to retain control over land allocation. Historically, existing inhabitants in African frontier regions often derived prestige and legitimacy from their firstcomer status which included “special ritual power over local gods, controlled land use arrangements in their area”; they could, moreover, use these advantages to develop patron-client relationships with newcomers.<sup>127</sup> Outsiders drew on a range of elaborate maneuvers to appropriate the knowledge and legitimacy of original inhabitants and to claim autochthony.<sup>128</sup> Autochthony featured in these early East African contexts as a kind of capital, which if properly co-opted allowed later inhabitants to garner and expand their authority.

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Meiers, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and anthropological perspectives* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); this was amplified in frontier conditions, see Kopytoff, *The African Frontier*, 1987: 40.

<sup>125</sup> For instance in the ancient West Nyanza term “basangwa” meaning “to be found, be already there when one arrives Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 181.

<sup>126</sup> Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place* 124. Of course these could also take violent forms. It is interesting to note that the marked relationships between firstcomer and newcomers in Buganda apparent in the historical linguistic record from around 1000 AD, appear to have become subsumed into a lexicon of patronage over the next several hundred years.

<sup>127</sup> Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place* 181. In another, later example of the considerable power of firstcomers in nineteenth century southern Gabon, Gray described “the basic cognitive concept operating in the relationship between clan and access to land was that of ‘firstcomer’. At its most fundamental level, this was expressed through the respect afforded hunter-gatherers, the inhabitants of southern Gabon prior to the arrival of Western Bantu...it was always the proclaimed firstcomer to a district who enjoyed the special privileges of distributing land parcels and collecting tribute”, in *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, CA 1850-1940* (2002:80).

<sup>128</sup> Some strong incoming groups worked to enfold firstcomers into their socio-political structures and co-opt their “mystical powers” over the land by ascribing them ritual roles or by transferring territorial spirits, associated with firstcomers, to new localities Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place* 156; Kopytoff *An African Frontier*, 1987:55 also cites Vansina’s description of Tutsi conquerors who aligned themselves with “priest-like chiefs abiru of the conquered” Jan Vansina, *L’évolution du royaume Rwanda des origines à 1900* (Brussels: Académie royales des sciences d’outre-mer, 1962); Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 182, 203-4. Blood brotherhood was another important way in which male newcomers and firstcomers could bind themselves to one another and retain hereditary control over land. See Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 182. See also White, Luise. 1994. “Blood Brotherhood Revisited: Kinship, Relationship, and the Body in East and Central Africa.” *Africa* 64:3.

Kopytoff signals a profound paradox, however, which is that “no one could ever claim to be really first” and that affirming firstness required a process of “infinite regression” in which fabricated, legitimizing origin stories, linking residents to the land, became critical devices.<sup>129</sup>

Studies of natives and newcomers throughout the continent make clear that land is absolutely central in the production of autochthony. Across Madagascar, tombs and burial practices have been absolutely critical to the politics of belonging among commoners and royalty alike. Strict prescriptions and prohibitions on tomb construction, were key ways that the living showed their loyalty—and legitimate claims to belonging—to royal ancestors in northwest Madagascar.<sup>130</sup> In highland and southern Madagascar, people enact their ties to ancestors and ancestral land through ritual burial and reburial practices.<sup>131</sup> In West Africa, claims to autochthony have been tightly linked to burial and funeral rites in rural, ancestral villages.<sup>132</sup> Carola Lentz, in her magisteral book *Land, Mobility and Belonging* documented how origin stories and genealogical narratives have been pivotal means through which migrants have claimed land based on first-coming status. First-comer claims for some are validated when ritual negotiations with spirits are resolved at earth shrines; it is at this point that some inhabitants gain full rights to the land.<sup>133</sup> Others posit themselves as the original inhabitants by invoking descriptions of bush-clearing to legitimate land holding.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, in mid-nineteenth century Rwanda, firstcomer status was defined by labor of land clearing; those *ubokonde* lineages who

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<sup>129</sup> Kopytoff, *An African Frontier*, 54, 57.

<sup>130</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 42-43, 446-452.

<sup>131</sup> Maurice Bloch, *Placing the Dead. Tombs, Ancestral Villages, and Kinship Organization in Madagascar* (London: Seminar Press, 1971); David Graeber, *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); Sandra Evers, “The Construction of History and Culture in the Southern Highlands: Tombs, Slaves and Ancestors,” in K. Middleton (ed) *Ancestors, Power and History in Madagascar*, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999: 257-282; Jennifer Cole and Karen Middleton, “Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power in Madagascar,” *Africa* 71:1(2001), 27.

<sup>132</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, 190-211.

<sup>133</sup> Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*, 18.

<sup>134</sup> Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*.

occupied the land for several generations and could claim that they or their ancestors had cleared the land for cropping could legitimately claim autochthonous privileges of owning the land.<sup>135</sup> Gikuyu people in early twentieth century deployed origin stories that situated themselves as the early inhabitants who were the first to clear the land and cultivate crops.<sup>136</sup>

These accounts also reveal a dimension of staking autochthonous claims that is critical, but relatively unexplored in existing scholarship. They suggest that it is not only the presence of land, but the *transformation* of that land, that is pivotal in asserting first-comer status. Land and space has served in many historical moments as a kind of “autochthonous capital.”<sup>137</sup> Yet autochthony is not reducible to “an ontological sense of ownership over territory,” but is rather constituted through a constellation of generative bodily, material and spatial practices.<sup>138</sup>

Elsewhere in northwest Madagascar, Lesley Sharp has explained newcomers to the town of Ambanja transformed themselves from *vahiny* (outsiders) to *tera-tany* (literally, those born on the land, insiders) through ritual practices of spirit possession (*tromba*).<sup>139</sup> This study both builds on and diverges from Sharp’s study, by considering how people have employed embodied and material urban practices beyond spirit possession—home construction, inhabitation of spaces, infrastructural labor—to differentiate themselves, incorporate or exclude newcomers.

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<sup>135</sup> Catherine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression*, 79.

<sup>136</sup> Kopytoff, *An African Frontier*, 58, see also John Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau May,” in Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa; Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity* (London 1992) and Derek Peterson, 2004, “Be Firm Like Soldiers: Political Imagination and the Geography of Gikuyuland” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37:1, 71-101 for the ways kikuyu claims to land were founded on the historical labor of land-clearing; see Randall Packard “Debating in a Common Idiom: Variant Traditions of Genesis among the BaShu of Eastern Zaire” in Kopytoff, *An African Frontier*.

<sup>137</sup> Bozon, M. and Chamboredon, Jean-Claude, “L’organisation sociale de la chasse en France et la signification de la pratique,” *Ethnologie française*, 1(1980). See also, Gollac, Sibylle, “Propriété immobilière et autochtonie: Les trajectoires immobilières, sociales et politiques d’une maçon breton et de ses descendant,” *Politix*, 101(2013): 133. There is a prolific sociological, francophone literature on ‘the capital of autochthony.’ Some translate “capital d’autochtonie” as “indigenous capitalism.” See issue 40 (2010) of *Regard sociologiques* for a sampling of the debates.

<sup>138</sup> Laurent Fourchard and Aurelia Segutti, “Introduction of xenophobia and citizenship: the everyday politics of exclusion and inclusion in Africa,” *Africa* 85:1 (2015): 3.

<sup>139</sup> Lesley Sharp, *The Possessed and Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1993).

In cities, moreover, where increasing population density necessarily shifts the economic and cultural value of land and property, the nature and form of alteration to land has particularly high stakes. This dissertation probes the questions, what kinds of spatial transformations have afforded autochthony (and which ones not)? What kinds of moral norms are expressed in creative endeavors through which inhabitants rework the urban, material landscape? And what dimensions of the built environment have been pliable, reworked by people to differentiate themselves and others in hierarchical terms? Full reckoning with these questions demands moving beyond the bounds of discursive concepts and intellectual categories. Debates waged in newspapers and colonial textual legal records only give us a partial story of how people fashion themselves as distinct. Interrogating the stakes, possibilities for, and normative values within alterations to the urban, material landscape is critical to understanding how have people made claims to nativism and difference meaningful and cogent in everyday life.

To transform and inhabit space, Merleau-Ponty reminds us, is always an embodied affair. Our perceptions of the world emerge from a complex interplay between consciousness and our ‘spatial existence.’<sup>140</sup> That spatial existence is ever entangled with heterogeneous human and nonhuman things, which exert forces of their own at times. Latour calls these *actants*, and Jane Bennett calls for attention to the “material powers” of inanimate matter to more fully grasp the engagements of “people-materialities and thing-materialities.”<sup>141</sup> Put more bluntly, people make

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<sup>140</sup> “The Spatiality of One’s Own Body and Motility,” in *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945 [1962, 1979], 109.

<sup>141</sup> Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, Duke University Press), ix. Though I am sympathetic to the ontological turn to the political agency of nonhuman actors, I am uncomfortable with flattening human agency and equating it with nonhuman agency. My point here is that human actions need to be grappled with in a more expansive frame, that accounts for the material properties of nonhuman things and forces. I’m inspired by Jason De Leon’s formation of agency, drawing on Callon and Law’s *hybrid collectif*, as “relational and produced as part of a human-induced chain reaction... humans and nonhumans as political actors cannot be separated, even if the former has more obvious intentions.” *Land of Open Graves*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 2015), 61.

things, but things also make people.<sup>142</sup> In the case of Mahajanga, this means contending with the possibilities for life, differentiation, and belonging afforded (and constrained) by poured concrete, standing pools of water, septic tanks, printed housing deeds, and stone obelisks (among other things). Narratives like Mama Nasra's reveal is that it's not simply the ontological state of owning land that validates her native status, but rather the *textures* and *qualities* of the dwellings her family has constructed on that land. As Mama Nasra herself pointed out, it was the incrementally durable composition of her home, culminating in a concrete dwelling, that established her family's assertion of longevity in the city. In this case, the properties of cement—its durability and tenacity in the face of scorching sun, tropical rains, salty sea air, and fierce winds—enabled her to claim her family's longstanding presence in the city to the exclusion of newcomers.

### ***Framing Infrastructure: Infrastructural Engagements and Repair Makers***

Houses—and the stone, thatch, and cement that binds them—are but one of many urban materials through which inhabitants of Mahajanga have historically constituted themselves. The matters of infrastructure—including septic tanks, water pipes, streets—have also been at the heart of practices of difference-making. Concerns about materials—what they allow for and occlude—have been at the core of a burgeoning scholarship cutting across anthropology, history, and science and technology studies (STS). This study draws conceptually on this literature to make sense of technology, infrastructure and the politics of place-making Mahajanga over time. In this section, I synthesize current scholarship on infrastructure and propose an

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<sup>142</sup> This argument is at the heart of the new field of material culture studies, sustained by key works including Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Clarendon Press, New York, 1998); Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Routledge, London, 2000); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Daniel Miller (ed), *Materiality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

analytical framework for investigating infrastructure—one that holds materials, moral practices, and labor together in the same frame.

Over the last decade, scholars have documented the permutations of infrastructure and built forms in the Global South, wrestling with issues of agency, the mutability of infrastructural networks, and the legacies of colonial intervention. Building on early studies of large-scale technical systems (LTS), STS scholars subsequently pushed for grounded investigations into the more "mundane" aspects of infrastructure.<sup>143</sup> Historians of technology illustrated the intertwined relationships between nation building and infrastructure, in which technological interventions are both driven by political imperatives, and strategically designed and inserted to "constitute, embody or enact political goals."<sup>144</sup> Bound up with high-modernist schemes, large infrastructural projects have been markers of technological prowess as much as evidential failures of developmentalist initiatives.<sup>145</sup>

Political actors have constituted territories through infrastructures, making visible the convulsions of state power.<sup>146</sup> Operating at times through enchantment, infrastructure as statecraft stirs awe and optimism by the surprising stabilization of unwieldy material, social,

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<sup>143</sup> Paul Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996); Hughes, Thomas, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 1983); Pinch, Trevor and Wiebe Bijker, *The Social Constructions of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1987); Bowker, Geoffrey and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999); Star, Susan, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 43:3 (1999): 377-391.

<sup>144</sup> Hecht, Gabrielle, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>145</sup> Christophe Bonneuil, 2000, "Science and State Building in Late Colonial and Postcolonial Africa, 1930-1970," *Osiris*, 15: 258-281; Ferguson, James, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Isaacman, Allen and Barbara Isaacman, *Dams, Displacement and the Delusion of Development: Cahora Bassa and Its Legacies in Mozambique, 1965-2007* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013); Pfaffenberger, Bryan "The Harsh Facts of Hydraulics: Technology and Society in Sri Lanka's Colonization Schemes," *Technology and Culture* 31 (1990):361-397; Scott, James, *Seeing Like a State: how Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>146</sup> Harvey, David, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

political, and economic fields.<sup>147</sup> Part of this infrastructural enchantment emanates from infrastructure's embeddedness in aesthetic regimes. Studies of colonial and postcolonial contexts have traced the ways infrastructures are bound up with state projects to enact sensorial experiences of a promised modernity, whether in the hardness of the asphalt road or the echoing, ethereal, and newly socialized soundscapes accompanying radio and film.<sup>148</sup>

The 'infrastructural turn' has been characterized by studies of the dynamic and continually unfolding nature of networked technologies. Scholarly attention to the processual elements of infrastructure has exposed the many ways political agency and material technologies are intertwined and co-constitutive. Scholars have exploded standing conceptions of the state as sole proprietor of infrastructural power by showing how a host of publics have drawn on material technologies for political projects. While earlier STS work established that users exert technological agency when they adapt technologies in surprising, unanticipated ways, others have refined this to show how infrastructures unfold "incrementally" through accretive interventions.<sup>149</sup>

Infrastructures serve as key sites for opening political possibilities especially for those living on the margins in postcolonial urbanities.<sup>150</sup> Urban residents navigate resource inequality through spectacular acts of infrastructural destruction, gestures of appropriation and inhabitation, as well as smaller adjustments of tinkering and refashioning existing electrical, water and road

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<sup>147</sup> Harvey, Penny and Hannah Knox "The Enchantments of Infrastructure," *Mobilities* 7:4 (2012), 521-536; Mains, Daniel, "Blackouts and Progress: Privatization, Infrastructure and a Developmentalist State in Jimma, Ethiopia," *Cultural Anthropology*, 27:1 (2012): 3-27.

<sup>148</sup> Mrázek, Rudolph, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Larkin, Brian, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>149</sup> Silver, Jonathan, "Incremental infrastructures: material improvisation and social collaboration across post-colonial Accra," *Urban Geography*, 35:6 (2014): 788-804.

<sup>150</sup> Amin, Ash and Nigel Thrift, *Arts of the Political: New Openings for the Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

systems.<sup>151</sup> Collectively, these actions can be understood at times as strategic tactics in low-intensity conflicts with service providers or the state. Within these micro-interventions, some scholars have argued, lie the seeds of political emancipation as residents stake their "rights to the city" and reclaim their political agency.<sup>152</sup> Infrastructures ranging from sewage sanitation to electricity and water provision have served as "political terrain for the negotiation of moral-political questions."<sup>153</sup> Through reworking material technologies, people (re)imagine and enact new arrangements of infrastructural inclusion, of belonging and citizenship. In forging new assemblages of infrastructure, urban dwellers deploy remarkable expansive creative propensities and improvisational capacities.<sup>154</sup> Threaded throughout these studies is a shared concern with the state, whether its absence, neglect, orchestration and performance, deployment, or imposition through infrastructural means.

Within this emergent literature, however, conceptions of what counts as "infrastructure" have become increasingly expansive. Scholars have moved beyond a rigid material-culture distinction and a narrow focus on the technical dimensions of infrastructure, in order to

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<sup>151</sup> McFarlane, Colin, *Learning the City: Knowledge and Translocal Assemblage* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Simone, AbdouMaliq, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture*, 16:3 (2004): 407-429; Chattopadhyay, Swati, *Unlearning the City: Infrastructure in a New Optical Field* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 245.

<sup>152</sup> Lefebvre, Henri, "The Right to the City" in *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 147-159; Swyngedouw, Erik, *Social Power and the Urbanization of Water: Flows of Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 116.

<sup>153</sup> von Schnitzler, Antina, "Traveling Technologies: Infrastructure, Ethical Regimes and the Materiality of Politics in South Africa," *Cultural Anthropology*, 28:4 (2013): 671; Chalfin, Brenda, "Public things, excremental politics, and the infrastructure of bare life in Ghana's city of Tema," *American Ethnologist* 41:1 (2014):93, reveals how public sanitation infrastructure in Ghana has served as a "durable basis for collective consciousness and entitlement...of the urban underclass." Sanitation infrastructure in Tema is a site of "political praxis," by which subaltern dwellers can expand their political possibilities and make new demands on the state (ibid). On water provision, see Anand, Nikhil, Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai," *Cultural Anthropology*, 26:4 (2011): 542-564.

<sup>154</sup> De Boeck, Filip "Inhabiting Ocular Ground: Kinshasa's Future in the Light of Congo's Spectral Urban Politics," *Cultural Anthropology* 26:2 (2011): 263-286; Amin, Ash, "Lively Infrastructure," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 31:7/8 (2014): 137-161.

reconceptualize infrastructure as a "socio-technical assemblage"<sup>155</sup> as "the movements and circulations of people" and the "mobilization of community members."<sup>156</sup> Matthew Gandy has suggested we expand our conception of infrastructure to encompass "the experience of space."<sup>157</sup> Some have sought to capture the layered labors that transform nature into infrastructure, while others have taken this even further to define infrastructure as "the urban-regional landscape."<sup>158</sup> But, one might ask, what purchase is there in this ever-elastic concept of infrastructure? How are we to distinguish between the material stuff of infrastructure and its ecological, transactional, political and aesthetic constituents? Should we even make these distinctions? Are they meaningful for understanding the ways infrastructure matter in everyday life?

Lying at the heart of theoretical conundrums of defining "infrastructure" are troublesome questions of perceptibility, visibility, invisibility, and agency. Do we know infrastructure because it is that which remains invisible until it falls into disrepair, as foundational STS and urban studies scholars have argued?<sup>159</sup> Recently some scholars have taken issue with characterizing infrastructure by its invisibility, signaling instead the multiple moments when infrastructures are rendered visible over time. They have proposed new approaches to theorizing infrastructure, some of which I draw on below to sketch an analytical framework for understanding infrastructure.

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<sup>155</sup> Amin, "Lively Infrastructure," 138.

<sup>156</sup> Silver, "Incremental infrastructures," 791.

<sup>157</sup> Gandy, Matthew, "Landscape and Infrastructure in the Late-Modern Metropolis," in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds), *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 57.

<sup>158</sup> Bélanger, Pierre, "Landscape as infrastructure," *Landscape Journal* 28 (1) (2009):79-95; See also Carse, Ashley, "Nature as Infrastructure: Making and managing the Panama Canal Watershed" *Social Studies of Science* 42:4 (2012): 539-540.

<sup>159</sup> Star, "Ethnography of Infrastructure," 380; Graham, Steve and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition* (London: Routledge, 2001); Graham, Steve and Nigel Thrift, "Out of Order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24:3 (2007): 1-25.

Filip De Boeck and AbdouMaliq Simone have separately argued that in urban landscapes of infrastructural lack and ineptitude, urban inhabitants have developed alternative means for managing everyday life. They suggest that the material constraints of the city afford vigorous, less visible configurations of political and social organization. De Boeck describes the sprawling landscape of Kinshasa, and contends that "many activities in the city become possible...because that infrastructure is not there, or only exists through its paucity."<sup>160</sup> People navigate around the bits of pieces, residues and "echoes of built environments from the colonial period" drawing on techniques of creative improvisation to secure their livelihoods (Ibid). In De Boeck's rendering, the city exists "beyond its architecture" (and implied here is infrastructure), yet the specter of a fabulated new Cité de Fleuve development enchants those who will soon be displaced by its construction.

In a similar vein, Simone approaches the city with an eye to the actions that facilitate everyday existence in the context of "bare life."<sup>161</sup> He proposes an expansion of the concept of infrastructure to account for "people as infrastructure." He suggests "conjunctures of urban dwellers become an infrastructure, a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city."<sup>162</sup> Both Simone and De Boeck are writing against dystopic discourses on African cities. They seek to shift the terrain away from declensionist arguments about the dysfunction of urban Africa, to reveal the creative performative "enskillment" of urban dwellers.<sup>163</sup> Yet they do so, paradoxically, by similarly asserting the lack of material infrastructure that characterize alarmist commentaries on urban decline in Africa and beyond. Material infrastructure and physical space

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<sup>160</sup> De Boeck, "Inhabiting Ocular Ground," 271.

<sup>161</sup> Simone, AbdouMaliq, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture*, 16:3 (2004): 428.

<sup>162</sup> Simone, "People as Infrastructure," 407-8.

<sup>163</sup> Ingold, Tim. *Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Enskillment* (London: Routledge, 2000).

fall away in De Boeck and Simone's analyses, moreover, risking a portrait of people-centered cities which exist only in the actions, thoughts and dreams of their inhabitants.

Architectural historian Swati Chattopadhyay ventures to radically upend the concept of infrastructure to account for the way it "resides beyond the visible spectrum of the state and the market."<sup>164</sup> To do so, she engages with long-standing debates in subaltern and postcolonial studies that have explored the possibilities of resistance in invisible acts. She pushes for attention to the ways marginalized groups refashion infrastructures through creative and aesthetic acts, revealing how 'hidden' political agendas morph into visible popular imaginations of infrastructure. She credits Simone and Brian Larkin (discussed below) with "relocating agency in the subaltern body" but she goes further to make linkages between urban infrastructure and subaltern aesthetic practices.<sup>165</sup>

She locates these aesthetic acts in wall art, paintings on buses, and the reworking of streets into impromptu cricket fields. Small acts of alteration — the weighting of a ball with tape, the demarcation of bases, the control over one's stroke lest the ball land on a hostile neighbor's property — transform the infrastructure of the street into a highly sociable cricket field. These interventions can be understood as "agential moments" when the subaltern (framed here as a position of marginality) shifts into the popular realm (a stance expressive of agency). Cumulatively these aesthetic acts reflect desires to transform dominant institutions. If the subaltern is by definition invisible, the popular is the moment when the subaltern becomes recognizable as an agent of social and political change.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Chattopadhyay, Swati, *Unlearning the City*, xvii.

<sup>165</sup> Chattopadhyay, *Unlearning the City*, 247.

<sup>166</sup> Chattopadhyay, 250-2. Chattopadhyay's approach illuminates the ways these advances to claim political agency through aesthetic means in turn reshape and reconceptualize infrastructures (see also Abaza 2014). If Chattopadhyay's selective choice of highly visible infrastructures -buses, walls, streets- allow her to make this argument, then questions remain about how aesthetic practices might tack onto less visible infrastructure, such as underground

We might also remember here, as Brian Larkin notes, that people's relationships with infrastructures are deeply affective.<sup>167</sup> Through their encounters with infrastructure, people generate complicated emotional responses such as pride, wonder and desire. Infrastructures stimulate "senses of awe and fascination...an important part of their political effect" (ibid). Larkin critiques the invisibility argument set forth by Star (1999) as "wholly untenable", citing multiple studies that testify to the persistent visibility of technologies. Instead, he calls for attention to "how (in)visibility is mobilized and why" and to the "range of possible visibilities" that allow infrastructures to serve and instantiate political agendas.<sup>168</sup>

But is it only in acts of alteration or political mobilization that these "agential moments" are visible? Do we not, in this move, risk missing those less visible, everyday, unspectacular engagements with infrastructures? While scholars of technology have contested narratives of the West as the seat of technological knowledge and production, others have more recently pushed for a radical shift of the analytical lens: away from invention and towards maintenance. Invoking the provocative phrase "broken world thinking," Steven Jackson calls for attention to repair sites and maintenance actors, as places where we can grasp the ways technologies are reworked, fitted, and accommodated.<sup>169</sup> He, along with others, push scholars to consider the "forms of labor, power and interest...that underpin the *ongoing survival of things* as objects in the

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pipes, cell towers, electrical wires. Chattopahyay's approach opens up new ways of seeing infrastructure as shaped by subaltern-popular aesthetic and inhabitation practices, but it also risks eliding the ways infrastructures are produced through other kinds of practices, especially *affective*, *technical* and *moral* practices.

<sup>167</sup> Larkin, Brian, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42(2013): 334.

<sup>168</sup> Larkin, "Politics and Poetics," 336. The studies he cites that demonstrate the rhythmic visibility of infrastructures include Sneath, D. "'Reading the Signs by Lenin's Light: Development, divination and metonymic fields in Mongolia,'" *Ethnos* 74:1 (2009): 72-90; Barker, J. "Engineers and Political Dreams: Indonesia in the satellite age," *Current Anthropology* 46:5 (2005): 703-27; von Schnitzler, Antina "Citizenship prepaid: Water, calculability, and technopolitics in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34:4 (2008): 899-917.

<sup>169</sup> Jackson, Steven J. "Rethinking Repair" in Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kristen Foot (eds) *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*. (MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass, 2014), 221-239.

world.”<sup>170</sup> In so doing, we might begin to grasp maintenance actors as engaged in ethically informed acts of care, which accumulate over time and ensure the persistent endurance of material, infrastructural things.

Focusing on maintenance may also provide us with a path beyond the privileging of symbolic and political dimensions of infrastructure at the expense of its specific materialities (aside from their symbolic significance) and their ensuing consequences.<sup>171</sup> If we focus on the symbolic and imaginative capacities of infrastructures, we risk missing how they “are themselves *shaped relationally* by encounters with non-human others.”<sup>172</sup> While Larkin points out that infrastructures are unique in their ontological nature of being things and “also the relation between things,”<sup>173</sup> Jensen and Morita take this even further. They push for an analytical framework that take infrastructures as experimental systems, in which both humans and non-human agencies are entangled, and which give rise to reworked “practical ontologies”.<sup>174</sup> Infrastructural arrangements are composed of material things (pipes, circuits, electrical wires) that shape how people see their possibilities, which people selectively refashion enabling new ways of seeing and being. Both humans and non-human things, in short, are made and remade in these encounters.

Taking the collective insights from these interventions opens possibilities for a fruitful analytical approach for understanding infrastructure in Mahajanga. As we will see in the case of sewage in Mahajanga, people have had varying levels of embodied involvement in waste

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<sup>170</sup> Jackson, “Rethinking Repair,” 230 (italics mine). See also include Graham and Thrift, “Out of Order,” 2007.

<sup>171</sup> Jensen, Casper Bruun and Atsuro Morita, “Infrastructures as Ontological Experiments” *Ethnos* (2016): 5.

<sup>172</sup> Jensen and Morita, “Infrastructures as Ontological Experiments,” 7 (italics original).

<sup>173</sup> Larkin, “Politics and Poetics,” 329.

<sup>174</sup> Jensen and Morita describe, “Because infrastructures at once integrate a multiplicity of disjunctive elements and spin out new relations between them...we engage them as *open-ended experimental systems*. The outcomes of infrastructural experiments are differently configured practical ontologies which *give form* to culture, society, and politics.” They diverge from Larkin by their focus on the new configurations that get produced through infrastructure’s ‘practical ontologies’, rather than the ontology *of* infrastructure. (2016:3). See also Chalfin, Brenda, “‘Wastelandia’: Infrastructure and the Commonwealth of Waste in Urban Ghana,” *Ethnos* (2016):1-24.

management over time. Increased engagement with waste management whether through latrine construction, maintenance, or usage has emerged from the particular convergence of multiple historical contingencies: French colonial technical designs for sewage, increased population density, a malfunctioning mechanical extractor. This has triggered critical, contemporary consequences (pervasive rumors, judgments made about others' moral standing, spread of illness, mobilization of public health campaigns). Rather than asking whether people *are infrastructure*, as do De Boeck and Simone, we might ask 'when do people *become infrastructural*'? That is, under what political and economic circumstances are some people (and not others) involved — either through labor, usage, adaptation, maintenance or destruction — with infrastructure?

To be clear, we need histories of infrastructural design, innovation and implementation. But we also need to look to the acts of maintenance and repair actors, whom we might even call “repair makers,” to trace the textures, rhythms and stakes of infrastructural engagement. Chapters 6 and 7 grapple with these guiding questions more directly to investigate the political, economic and social conditions under which some residents are brought into increasingly embodied engagement with infrastructures.

Drawing on the above approaches, I argue for a conception of infrastructure that retains a distinction between material and social (to illuminate the work that both do), reprioritizes the material and non-human stuff of infrastructure, and sheds light on the ways infrastructures mediate and transform lives through everyday acts of maintenance labor. In Mahajanga, non-human others in the form of ancestors, microbes, and soils, have profoundly shaped the ways people imagine, experience and produce sewage infrastructure. The material configuration of the sewage system, as we will see, matters for the ways waste management labor regimes have developed, for everyday practices, and for possibilities of political mobilization. Yet

infrastructural encounters with sanitation in Mahajanga have less clearly been about staking political projects or exerting political agency. Instead, I consider when people in Mahajanga have become *infrastructural*, when their affective responses are elicited, and when these responses have become tethered to moral discourses. How has the distinct materiality of sanitation in Mahajanga reordered people's relationships to their material world? Such moments may tell us something about how urban dwellers have understood their capacities and constraints, their place in the world, and their imagined futures.

### ***Methods and Sources***

This dissertation is based on historical and ethnographic research in Madagascar and France over a period of five years. I conducted a preliminary field research trip to Madagascar for one month in 2009, and then returned to the country in December 2011 – April 2014 for twenty-nine months, living for most of that time in Mahajanga. Prior to long-term fieldwork, I carried out preliminary archival research in the Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mers (CAOM) in France for four months in 2009 and 2010. Once in Madagascar, I conducted research at the National Archives of the République Démocratique de Madagascar (ANRDM); Bibliothèque National; Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie; Université d'Antananarivo's library; and Société d'Équipement Immobilier de Madagascar (SEIMAD), a parastatal corporation founded in late colonial period and charged with public housing. In Mahajanga, I consulted a wide range of private, family archives; church records from the Spiritan Catholic Congregation; land deed records at the Service de la Topographie et des Domaines; and photographic collections at the Commune of Mahajanga; as well as neighborhood district records (*fokontany*) detailing neighborhood disputes in the Abattoir quarter.

This project was accidental and unplanned. Before arriving in Madagascar, I'd charted an entirely different project, an historical ethnography of cartography and road-building in Northwest Madagascar. When we arrived in Madagascar, my family and I spent some months in Antananarivo where I conducted archival research for this original project. We settled in Mahajanga, where we rented a home just outside of town in the small fishing village of Amborovy-Petite Plage, and we quickly formed relationships with our neighbors, who were mostly newer migrants to the city from southern Madagascar. They welcomed us warmly, patiently endured my floundering attempts at Malagasy language learning, and incrementally invited us more deeply into their homes and celebrations. In 2012-2013, I spent three months in practicum at the Mozea Akiba, a small museum based at Université de Mahajanga, with a rich collection of paleontological, archaeological and cultural artifacts pertaining to the region. There, I collaborated with colleagues in the design and implementation of a new exhibit on the city's multi-confessional history, through which I met a wide range of religious leaders, local scholars and ritual specialists.

Yet I found the questions driving the project difficult to translate in my conversations with neighbors, friends, museum colleagues, and religious leaders. People would nod, scratch their heads, and suggest I speak with others who might know about cartography. When I changed tack and expressed desire to learn generally about the city's history, others insisted that I must really want to know about "Sakalava history" (*tantara Sakalava*) or "Sakalava customs" (*fomba Sakalava*). They steered me to well-regarded public figures deemed knowledgeable in local history, or ritual practitioners and sacred shrines. Indeed, Malagasy interlocutors made those suggestions because they were keenly aware that most researchers coming to northwest Madagascar have been primarily interested in Sakalava ritual practices and political formations;

a rich ethnographic and historical literature abounds from these (now) well-worn paths.<sup>175</sup> This study is an effort to move beyond sacred spaces marked Sakalava (though they are important), and beyond a narrowly circumscribed history of Mahajanga as solely “Sakalava history,” to attend to the significances wide-ranging groups have attributed to vernacular, everyday places and things of the city over time.

It was my engagement with one particular family (discussed in Chapter 5), of mixed Comorian-Malagasy descent and who self-identified as *zanatany*, that immersed me in the pressing concerns of this group of city inhabitants. Throughout my research I relied heavily on the assistance of this family. Early on, I worked with one of their sons, Ben Taoaby, as a language tutor to gain linguistic and dialectic proficiency. Taoaby initially accompanied me as a research assistant to formal interviews, introduced me to many interlocutors, helped translate difficult conversations, and instructed me in the linguistic norms governing conversation and inquiries. Much of what I discovered in my research was possible only through the guidance and

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<sup>175</sup> Marie-Pierre Ballarin, *Les reliques royales à Madagascar: source de légitimation et enjeu de pouvoir (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)*. (Paris: Karthala, 2000); Jean François Baré, *Conflits et résolution des conflits dans les monarchies Sakalava du Nord actuelles*. Travaux et documents, no. 12. (Tananarive: Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie de l'Université de Madagascar, 1973); Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate: Restoring Independence in Madagascar*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Sophie Goedefroit and Jacques Lombard. *Royauté et arts funéraires chez les Sakalava Menabe* (Paris: Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, 1993); Sophie Goedefroit, *A l'ouest de Madagascar: les Sakalava du Menabe* (Paris: Karthala, 1998); Robert Jaovelo-Dzao, "Anthropologie religieuse sakalava, essai sur l'inculturation du christianisme à Madagascar." Unpublished Thèse de 3<sup>e</sup> Cycle, Université de Strasbourg, Théologie Catholique, 1983; Robert Jaovelo-Dzao, *Mythes, rites et transes à Madagascar, Angano, Joro et Tromba, Sakalava* (Paris et Fianarantsoa: Karthala et Ambozontany, 1996); Michael Lambek, *The weight of the past: living with history in Mahajanga, Madagascar* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Jacques Lombard *Le royaume Sakalava du Menabe: essai d'analyse d'un système politique à Madagascar, 17<sup>e</sup>-20<sup>e</sup>* (Paris: Editions de l'ORSTOM, 1988); Suzy Ramamonjisoa, "Pouvoirs religieux et pouvoirs politiques à Madagascar: points de repère pour une histoire du Doany central de Majunga, Andriamisara Efa-Dahy" in Noël J. Gueunier and Solo-Raharinjanahary (eds) *Raki-Pandinihana: Études de linguistique, d'anthropologie et de littérature malgaches offertes au Professeur Siméon Rajaona*, 217-229 (Ambatomena-Antananarivo and Fianarantsoa: Imprimerie St. Paul, 1998); Samuel Sanchez, "Territorialité coloniale et enjeux de centralités sakalava dans la région de Nosy Be, Nord-Ouest de Madagascar (1839-1895)" in Alain Forest (ed) *La production socio-politique du territoire dans les situations subalternes: Etudes de cas dans les sociétés du Sud, Approches historiques et anthropologiques* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010), 176-213. Lesley Sharp, *The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Bernard Schlemmer, "La domination royale au Menabe: détournement colonial, survivance et décomposition" in Françoise Raison-Jourde (ed) *Les souverains de Madagascar*, (Paris: Karthala, 1983), 391-408.]; Bernard Schlemmer, *Le Menabe: histoire d'une colonisation* (Paris: ORSTOM, 1983).

protection of Taoaby and his parents, who took our family in as kin. As a family of highly respected educators, with close ties to overlapping communities, he and his parents immediately understood the nature of historical research, and provided key intellectual acumen and social connections. After I became competent I often worked independently and communicated with interlocutors almost exclusively in Malagasy, but I continued to consult with Taoaby and his family.

A critical shift came when Mama Taoaby facilitated my involvement with two neighborhood womens' associations (*fikambanana*), and introduced me to other *zanatany* families who shared their stories and experiences of living in the city.<sup>176</sup> Through my affiliation with the *fikambanana* in Manga, a central neighborhood near Mahabibo market, I regularly joined women members in large, collective cooking efforts for a variety of life-cycle events including weddings, funerals, and Islamic religious celebrations. Comprised of women from varying generations and class levels, the *fikambanana* was historically an important social institution, through which collective events were organized and which overlapped at times with saving groups (*shikoa*, discussed in Chapter 5). Most, but not all, of the *fikambanana* members self-identified as *zanatany* of mixed Comorian-Malagasy descent; most observed Sunni Islam to varying degrees, and a small, but critical group engaged in Sakalava spirit possession. Many of these women from the *fikambanana* became key interlocutors and guides for this project.

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<sup>176</sup> As I became more entrenched in the fieldwork, I felt obliged to make a choice about with which families I would more deeply immerse: that of Comorian-Malagasy (*zanatany*) families in town, or that of the Betsirebaka and newer migrant families who were my residential neighbors. Much like Lila Abu-Lughod describes, this choice came with deepened perspective of the families with whom I participated, but also limited the depth and trust among newer migrant families. This unexpected predicament meant that as I grew closer to several families of Comorian *zanatany*, I perceived my ties with Betsirebaka neighbors became more fragile, questionable. Even though I worked primarily with *zanatany* families, I maintained relationships with, and garnered perspectives, from these multiple communities. Lila Abu-Lughod, "Fieldwork of a Dutiful Daughter," in Soraya Altorki and Camillia Fawzi El-Solh (eds) *Arab Women in the Field* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 139-161.

Though Comorian-Malagasy *zanatany* families are the primary historical actors in this story, I weave in perspectives from newer migrants of varied geographical, ethnic, and generational positions to provide a wider purview of the contested ways people have negotiated belonging and the politics of space in the city. These perspectives came from lengthy, frequent conversations with neighbors at their homes and ours in Amborovy-Petite-Plage and elsewhere in the city. Our immediate neighbors, Papa and Mama'Dina and their daughter Rasoa, were important collaborators throughout the research. They worked as guardians for a crumbling, decaying beachfront home, owned by a *karana* family in town, and lived in a makeshift home on the property. It was largely through their deep hospitality and warm openness that I was able to accompany many newer migrant families to consultations with ritual practitioners, funerals, burials and exhumations (*famidihana*), marriages, and circumcision celebrations. At several points we travelled with other migrants to their ancestral lands (*tanindrazana*) and family tombs in the northwest region and as far as the highlands. Additionally, I conducted over one hundred semi-structured interviews with city inhabitants, urban planners, shopkeepers, ritual specialists, and religious leaders in Mahajanga.

Noticeably absent in my early conversations with city dwellers of all backgrounds, however, were any references to the 1976-77 *rotaka*. It soon became clear that this event was a source of sorrow and revealed sensitive, even volatile tensions that still pervaded the town. It was only after a much time had passed, and my relationships with these families deepened, that I was able to broach the topic of the '76-'77 conflict, alongside other sensitive subjects (detailed family genealogies, stories of migration, and the politics and labor of filth removal). Recollections of the city were often speckled with melancholy references to the brutal 1976-77 *rotaka*, in which the violence was commonly attributed to newer migrants from southern

Madagascar who many cast as the foot soldiers of more powerful groups—inhabitants ethnically categorized as Merina and Tsimihety, and even the state itself. By virtue of my outsider status, I was permitted to probe and expose pieces of the Comorian programs of 76-77 in ways that would have been far too inflammatory for many Malagasy. It was the concerns of those families—about belonging, space, and the norms of proper urban life—that usurped the original project, and which animate this current project.

This study is a “history of the present” driven by a desire to understand the “conditions of possibility” for a contemporary conflict and for persistent tensions around difference and autochthony.<sup>177</sup> Following Foucault’s formulation, it traces the genealogies of the contemporary practices and structures of thought enveloping everyday life today in Mahajanga.<sup>178</sup> There are multiple genealogies of relevance here—most prominently that of the 1976-77 rotaka, and the emergence of *zanatany* as a meaningful idiom and practice of belonging. But these genealogies can only be grasped through the excavations of family histories, competing moral codes, colonial logics, and space (meaning the biographies of houses and built structures). Looking at politics of belonging through these multiple genealogies reveals how the past impinges on contemporary inhabitants by shaping their trajectories, and their possibilities for building and creation, but also how the spatial environment is produced through socio-political contestations and aesthetic, spatial interventions.

Throughout this project, I take the city as archive. We might think of the city as the accumulation of sediment, ever morphing and shifting, in which some deposits adhere and solidify, while others erode with passages of time, or active processes of neglect (Chapter 9).

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<sup>177</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, (New York: Routledge, 2003, [1963] 1973), 35.

<sup>178</sup> Michel Foucault *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1972 [1969]) As David Garland clarifies, this is not a search for “origins” but rather “a search for processes of descent and emergence,” See Foucault –the Foucault Reader, Paul Rabinow, 1984:80-86, and David Garland, ‘What is a ‘history of the present’? Foucault’s genealogies and their critical preconditions’ *Punishment & Society* 16:4 (2014): 371.

There are very real geological processes of sedimentation of the city (Chapter 2), but there are also human interventions in this sedimentation, where people layer their building materials, waste, water, memories, and “social detail that is in endless transformation”<sup>179</sup> If the city is an archive,<sup>180</sup> then its inhabitants are the archivists, curating their homes and mosques (and public spaces), streets and parks, as well as their personal photographs, documents and artifacts, which bear out their laminations of the past. Interrogating this archive requires privileging Malagasy as the primary knowledge-makers and brokers, the curators of their pasts, and the fashioners of their city.

The role of the researcher in this urban archive fluctuated and the genres of this dissertation reflect those changing roles. At some moments, I was a medium transmitting relatively raw first-hand oral narratives to the page. At other times, my role was that of observant interpreter, noting the ways *zanatany* friends inhabited their houses, breathed life into them, and drew on them to craft subjectivities and navigate competing demands of nurturing life, hospitality, and protection. But houses are not only singular, living places, they also have textual counterparts in government files and offices.<sup>181</sup> In that vein, at times I was also sometimes a sleuth, scouring through dusty municipal land deeds and municipal records to trace the documentary life of these selected homes. Thus this study weaves together a variety of genres including first-person narrative, textual sources, theoretical analysis, maps, and visual images, to tell a broader story of competing urbanisms, formed and informed by affective ties, materials, and moral expectations.

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<sup>179</sup> Cecilia Olsen “Performing Urban Archives” in *Cultural Geographies* 23:3 (2016): 23.

<sup>180</sup> See Michael Sheringham and Richard Wentworth, “City as Archive: a dialogue between theory and practice” in *Cultural Geographies*, 23:3 (2016):517-23.

<sup>181</sup> Matt Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2012).

## *Dissertation Structure*

This dissertation has a tripartite structure, which moves across temporal and spatial scales. Part I begins in the northwest littoral region during ancient times and moves through the city's initial founding in late eighteenth century. Chapter 2 traces the early environmental history of the town, charting the geological forces that shaped the northwest region and the ecological possibilities that gave rise to early settlements of Antalaotra traders in the 1780s. It considers how eighteenth century spatial practices in the northwest region were important to the formation of the city's political-economic heterarchy, in which Antalaotra, Indians, and Sakalava groups both differentiated themselves and held overlapping claims to different kinds of political, economic and customary authority. I argue that "architectural governance" was an important dimension of early monarchical Sakalava urban governance, and the regulation of Malagasy, Comorian and Indian homes were at the center of state driven efforts to manage the city's built environment.

Chapter 3 delves into the economic and political history of the port town in the nineteenth century, from its apex in the 1810s and 1820s to its economic decline in the late 1800s. It documents how the flows of certain commodities—especially cattle products and rice—gave different groups in the city new means to construct the material urban landscape. I contend that through the construction and decoration of homes, mosques, and sacred shrines, some inhabitants kindled their connections to faraway peoples, places and times. But these spaces also became sites of devastating contestation between competing political leaders and traders, especially following the 1824-5 invasion by King Radama's troops.

Part II narrows the aperture onto specific sites throughout the city, especially neighborhoods, mosques and homes. Chapter 4 follows the ways Malagasy, Comorian, Indian

and French groups registered their political and aesthetic sensibilities in urban architectural projects, especially homes, in the face of new colonial administrative regulations. It argues that colonial city administrators tried to organize and differentiate ethnic-political groups in Mahabibo through vague, and at times contradictory, housing and property regulation. Some town inhabitants seized on the ambiguity of housing regulations and their uneven enforcement, finding openings for establishing their households in lasting ways and accumulating surplus land. When housing regulation failed to deliver the promise of population control, colonial authorities shifted to regulating religious edifices through which they tried to constrain the burgeoning Comorian migrant population. Migrants from Comoros nonetheless managed to harness immense material resources and labor to construct durable mosques—thus enacting their collective ties to one another, their newfound city, and transoceanic Sufi communities.

Chapter 5 draws on family narratives, house biographies and municipal records to tell the stories of how some migrants, especially Comorians, were able to gain lasting access to land and construct homes through kinship networks, labor practices, and economic cooperative associations. It delves into family accounts of their Comorian ancestors' migration and establishment, and shows how they accommodate both legitimate Sakalava connections to land and their rightful ownership over urban space. It traces how through marriage, economizing practices, and home constructions, Comorians and their Comorian-Malagasy progeny transformed themselves from *vahiny* (guests/outside) to *zanatany* between the 1930s – 1960s. It argues that autochthony needs to be understood as a spatial process, incrementally constructed, and animated by embodied modes of place-making that link generations across time and space.

Part III shifts to the city's infrastructure, especially sanitation and streets. Chapter 6 chronicles the city's contemporary 'sanitation crisis' by tracing the genealogies of sanitation

technologies in colonial Majunga. It explores the technologies of waste management prevalent in precolonial Majunga, and tracks Malagasy engagements with latrines introduced by French public health officials to Mahajanga in the early 1900s. I argue that sewage sanitation has emerged unevenly across space and time in Mahajanga, and that residents have refashioned the meaning of waste infrastructure through moral debates about personhood, the value of places, and political subjectivity. Chapter 7 contends that as latrines became more prevalent in Majunga, and increasing material and human investments were made in the city's sewage infrastructure, sanitation practices became critical filters through which some groups differentiated themselves and others. I explore the contemporary outcomes of the decentralized sewage system by situating a range of historical actors – sanitation workers, inhabitants, royal leaders - in moments of breakdown, repair and maintenance of Mahajanga's sewage system between the 1940s and 2010s. To do this, I draw on the concept of 'infrastructural engagement' to probe the relationship between the materiality of infrastructure, definitions of moral personhood, and the production of difference in Mahajanga.

Chapter 8 situates the concept of "zanatany" in a broader historical and geographical frame, charting its movement through textual accounts in dictionaries, newspapers, legal codes and municipal reports between the 1890s and 1940s. I argue here that *zanatany* as an autochthonous idiom has historically been capacious, signaling far more than a position of first-coming. Like any linguistic marker tied to social standing, the invocation of *zanatany* has been dynamic and deeply contextual. Its meaning has shifted variably to index judicial and legal categories, an ethno-racial category for various groups born in Madagascar, or the very relationship between the colonized and colonizer. But in Majunga uniquely, *zanatany* came to have salience as a key marker of autochthony. The meanings of *zanatany* were tied to the street,

where a generation of young Comorian-Malagasy, people born in the 40s and 50s, could perform proper urbanism, and a set of distinctive expressive practices. These very public expressive forms—bodily comportment, spatial inhabitation, and consumption practices—however, clashed with those of other Malagasy groups in the city, giving way to mounting social tensions in the city. Ultimately, I assert that the *rotaka* might best be understood as a contestation over who could map the moral norms of the city, and which moral register might guide practices around land, labor and urban space.

Part IV turns to neglected, hidden and ruined places. Chapter 9 documents the lifespan of a public garden and investigates the myriad spatial practices of forgetting and remembering of the colonial and postcolonial pasts Mahajangais exert on their urban surrounds. Over its 100-year history, this site has been founded, forgotten, and reincarnated over again as a memorial to a succession of revered leaders, thus serving as a kind of spatial register of the historical socio-political changes that have given rise to the city. I argue that the deterioration of colonial-era architectural forms through long-standing neglect and abandonment may be understood as an active spatial practice of effacing some dimensions of the past, while the subsequent recuperation of deserted public spaces by certain groups is an effort to position themselves as legitimate residents and enunciate their attachments to the city.

The conclusion, Chapter 10, considers the deserted places throughout the city—vacant lots, empty houses, neglected cemeteries—which bear the traces of the painful past of the 1976-77 *rotaka*. Rather than latent, fallow places, these places are populated by troubled spirits and revelatory of unresolved, ancestral anger. Some houses, with particular historical ties to the '76-'77 *rotaka*, are described as “refusing” to let inhabitants live in peace. Still other sites, such as a large, unmarked, unnamed mass grave of Comorian victims from the '76-77, expose the ways

*zanatany* negotiate their precarious, scarred senses of belonging to the city, even while they draw on these spaces and this event to enact kinship and religious-fraternal ties with Comorian communities abroad. This chapter argues for the importance of attending to the desolate places and unseen dimensions of urban life to understand how city dwellers have negotiated their relationships with one another, with ancestors, and with the spirit, invisible world.

**Part I:**

**Territory: Forging Moudzangaie from Earthly and Envisioned Forms**



Figure 4: Majunga Port, ca. 1890s (Source: Archives, Hotel de Ville, Mahajanga)

## Chapter 2

### City of Stone and Thatch: Architectural Governance in Moudzangaie (1770-1824)

“You see this place? This was the gate to the old *rova* (royal palace), and just over there” he said pointing westwards just a little afield, “that was Sakalava *doany* (sacred shrine).”<sup>182</sup> It was March 2012 and we stood at the hilltop of Mahajanga in the blinding morning sun, with the bustling town below our feet. Bachir had brought me here. A dignified retired schoolteacher and politician, Bachir and I had met through a mutual friend. From our first meeting when he learned of my interest in the city’s past, he took it upon himself to instruct me on Mahajanga’s early history. Over the course of several months, we met weekly in the airy, stone home he shared with his elegant, dignified wife. They lived in La Corniche, an expansive elevated quartier historically inhabited by elite Malagasy and Europeans. In these sessions, we drank black tea and ate vanilla biscuits while Bachir narrated the city’s emergence from ancient Indian Ocean trade routes, to the early inhabitation by Antalaotra traders, and finally the contemporary social geography of the town. He drew on a remarkable range of sources—historical linguistics, maps, archaeological sites, and published scholarly sources—to compose compelling narratives in the fashion of a veritable “homespun” historian.<sup>183</sup>

Our visits culminated on this day. I had proposed the city tour, hoping that a journey through the city’s spaces might elicit more personal memories from Bachir, recollections of his

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<sup>182</sup> *Doany* refers to a royal compound, shrine or sacred place associated with royalty, see Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate* 592; Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*, 21.

<sup>183</sup> “Homespun” or “homegrown” historians refer to entrepreneurial African researchers “working outside the university...who carried out research, did interviews, collected data and subjected their work to critical review.” Derek Peterson and Giacomo Macola, *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 13-15.

younger years growing up and living in the town, memories largely absent in his scholarly renditions. Moving by car, it was clear that Bachir was enthusiastic about this adventure, and that he had taken deliberate care to craft our itinerary. Though he did point out his boyhood home,



Figure 5: Postcard, Entrance to the Rova (Source: Author's Collection)

our outing seemed rather a carefully staged pilgrimage of landmarks to reflect the diverse historical actors animating the town's past: Sakalava sacred spaces, shophouses owned by South

Asian families, French colonial-era civic buildings and houses, many now in ruins, the city's industrial past and the rich maritime history. We began at the Schneider Port, a massive, uncompleted project stalled in World War II and now mostly used by small vessels for refueling; then continued onto Jardin d'Amour, a seaside park named for the city's French Architect which served as the site of lively public and ceremonial gatherings under President Tsiranana (1960-1972) (Figure 6). We passed by an eerily abandoned building with peeling red and white paint, which was the old residence for the *vazaha* mayor. The building was rumored to be inhabited by ghosts (*lolo*) after the mayor installed by former President Marc Ravalomanana (2002-2009) fled amidst the unrest surrounding his ousting in 2009. After pointing out the great, massive baobab tree which now serves as the city's primary landmark, we headed to the Bazary Be marketplace. Here, Bachir described, South Asian artisans once sold clay pots (*sadja vas*), ubiquitously found in every home to contain and cool fresh drinking water. Finally, we landed at this elevated spot, now crowned with the city's public hospital and the military encampment, but also with the material traces of a key historical nexus.

It was at this hilltop, Bachir explained, that Sakalava monarchal leaders first established their royal compound (*doany*) in the city's earliest seventeenth century days. Together we stood at the foot of the towering tamarind tree, the *amontana*, swathed in brilliant, scarlet red cloth to honor royal ancestral connections (Figure 7).<sup>184</sup> Tamarind trees, what Richardson identified as *Calophyllum inophyllum L.*, were important gathering points, "calling places," in early northwest

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<sup>184</sup> Fieldnotes 12 March 2012; Feeley-Harnik described the significance of trees and processes of rooting of people in Analalava region in northwest Madagascar, in which the burial of humans, artifacts and blood, the planting of trees, bushes and enclosures, and the ceremonial acts of circumambulation served over time to establish foundations of sacred space in *Green Estate*, 160-162, 442-446; Also see Lisa Malkki on the arborescent idioms of national belonging, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees," *Cultural Anthropology*, 7:1(1992):24-44.

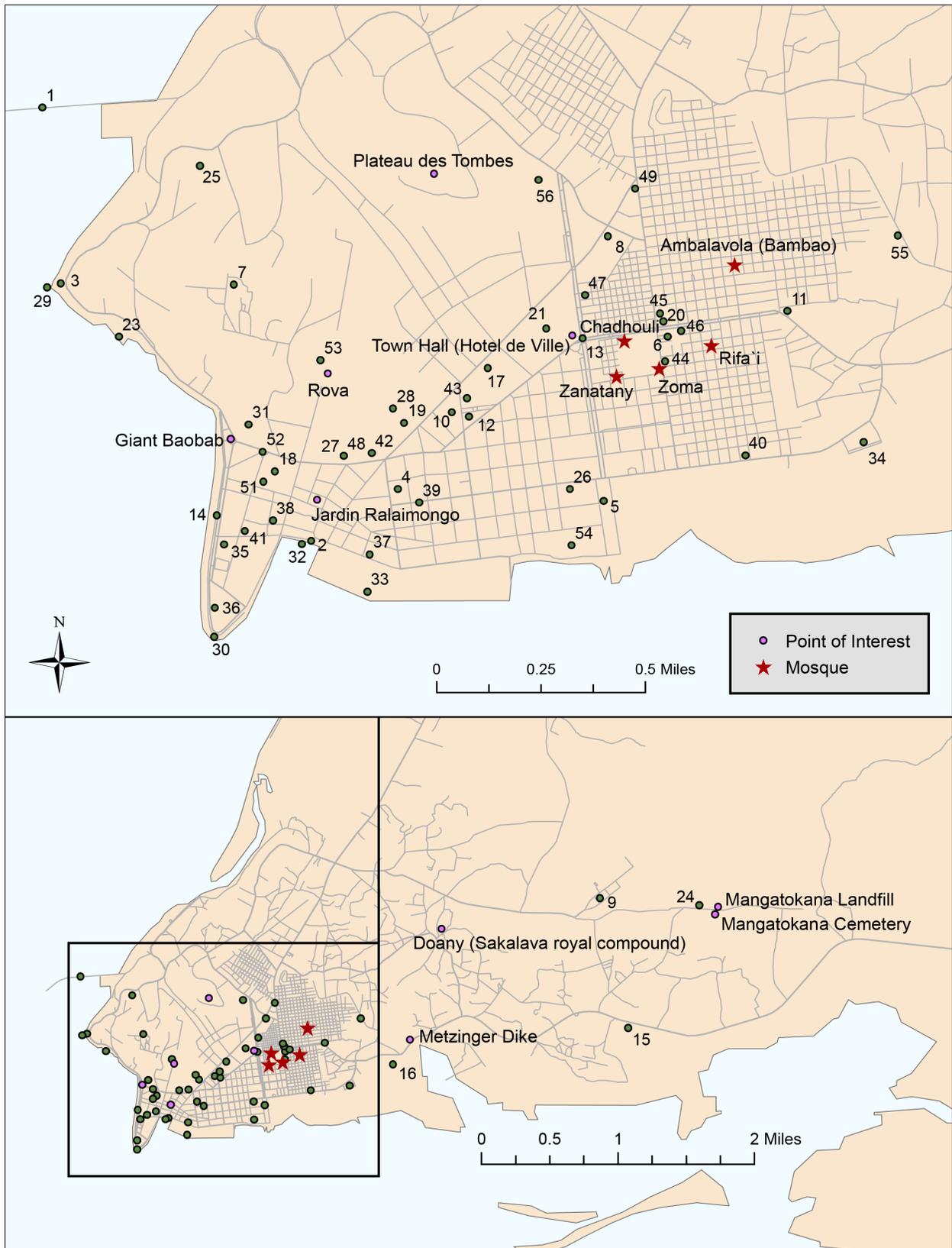


Figure 6: Map of Mahajanga, with sites mentioned throughout text and key

### Map Key

1	Schneider Port
2	Quay Orsini
3	Jardin D'Amour (former site of Radama's Fort ca 1820s)
4	Bazary Be
5	Bazary Marolaka
6	Bazary Mahabibo
7	Hospital Androva
8	Hospital Mahabibo
9	University of Mahajanga
10	Cathedral (Cathédrale du Coeur-Immaculé de Marie)
11	Jardin Cayla and 1947 Monument
12	Jardin Santatra
13	Bust of President Tsiranana
14	Bord de la Mer
15	SOTEMA Factory
16	FITIM Factory
17	Lycee Tsiranana
18	Lycee Renel
19	Artillerie
20	Police Station, Mahabibo
21	Rabemananjara Stadium
22	Airport
23	Pool (now Hotel Piscine)
24	Madacompost Operation
25	European Cemetery
26	Prison
27	Tribunal
28	Bostany Barracks
29	Pointe de Caiman
30	Pointe de Sable
31	Residence Administrative
32	Small Craft Port (Port aux Boutres)
33	Commercial Port (Container)
34	Taxi Brousse Station (Gare Routiere)
35	Central Bank
36	National Maritime School (Ecole Nationale d'Enseignement Maritime)
37	Mosque Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri-Jamat
38	Mosque Bohra
39	Boulangerie Zapandis
40	Former site of slaughterhouse
41	French Consulate
42	Police Headquarters
43	Post Office
44	Hotely Dallas (Restaurant)
45	Catholic Church, Mahabibo
46	Public Latrine
47	Public Latrine and Shower
48	Tribunal
49	Cinq Étage
50	Petite Plage (little beach)
51	Bohra cemetery (c.late 18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> C)
52	Achmed Tombs
53	Former site of Sakalava doany (approximate location)
54	JIRAMA (Jiro sy Rano Malagasy) Power Station
55	Metzinger Canal
56	Collège Montfort-Saint Gabriel

Madagascar during colonial times.<sup>185</sup> As elsewhere in northwest Madagascar, this tamarind tree literally rooted the *doany* of Mahajanga, and served as a centripetal point of convergence between the living and the dead.<sup>186</sup> This site was where cattle would be kept just before sacrificing them for ritual events, Bachir explained. Beyond the wrapped tree, no physical trace of a dwelling or structure remained. Standing just a few hundred feet away was a massive stone gate, which marked the entrance to the nineteenth-century fort erected by King Radama I's soldiers (Figure 5). It was no accident that Radama's highland-based forces, upon invading the

<sup>185</sup> James Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English*, 203, and Dandouau 1922:11, 37 as cited in Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, fn 28, 539.

<sup>186</sup> Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, fn 28, 530.

city in 1824, selected this same hilltop to construct their fort. By appropriating this paramount place, King Radama I's soldiers asserted their dominance over the city's inhabitants and the reigning Sakalava royalty who ruled there.

I was intrigued that Bachir found it important to show me this place. Others had implicitly warned me that Bachir might deliberately lead me astray, by indoctrinating me into a historical narrative skewed towards outsiders, especially Antalaotra traders and Muslim migrants. One high-ranking administrator at the Université de Mahajanga impressed upon me the importance of finding “other” learned people (*mahay*) who could educate me in “the Sakalava”—and thus “true”—history of the city.<sup>187</sup> At times, Bachir's narrations *did* seem to overemphasize the role of Antalaotra traders in the city's formation, which was partly reflective of his own ancestral background. But our arrival at this hilltop site affirmed Bachir's heartfelt investment in the city's myriad histories, and exposed the futilities of such neatly cast historical narratives. Although though I'd read about the location of Radama's fort, and knew that the current military compound was located there, I knew nothing of the old tree associated with the *doany* or the struggle that had ensued there.<sup>188</sup> But the story of this hill, of the contestations that took place there, and the competing constructions of built structures, turned out to be emblematic of a deep-rooted history of conflictive and mutually-constituting place-making in Mahajanga. This hill was a kind of metaphorical knot, revealing the entanglements of multiple historical protagonists—Sakalava monarchal leaders and ritual specialists, Radama's military forces, heterogeneous city dwellers and European explorers and travelers.

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<sup>187</sup> Fieldnotes, March 17, 2012. “Tandremo” (be careful) he warned, “mila mahay ny tantara tena, tena tantara Sakalava” (“you need to learn the veritable history, Sakalava history”).

<sup>188</sup> Aside from local, oral recollections, I have not yet found any archival trace describing this seventeenth century *doany* or the conflict. I was surprised when Bachir took me to this place because it diverged from the routes and sites people most often urged me to visit: the present-day *doany*, the *bord de la mer* (seaside boardwalk), and the town hall, for example.



Figure 7: *Togy*, Sacred tree at Lake Mangatsa, Mahajanga area, 2013 (Source: Author)

This chapter traces the early formation of Moudzangaie [Mouzangaye, Mojanga, Majunga, Mahajanga],<sup>189</sup> and introduces various groups of social actors, as the city became a key entrepot in long-distance and regional Indian Ocean trade throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the beginning of the chapter, I follow the terrestrial, fluvial, economic and socio-political processes through which the shoreline was gradually transformed into a city. Geological forces shaped the region, and early human inhabitants drew on the climatic, hydrological and geological resources of the region to further refashion the landscape. The chapter then lays out the foundational

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<sup>189</sup> Here and throughout the dissertation, I seek to retain the specificity of time and place, by using the historically specific names for places. Present day Mahajanga has variably been named Moudzangaie, Mouzangaye, Mojanga, Majunga, Mahajanga. When speaking of ancient times up till the eighteenth century, I use Moudzangaie. When speaking of present-day, I use the city's contemporary appellation of Mahajanga. The toponymy used depends on the time period in note.

historical context of Indian ocean trade, migration, dissension and political alliances, particularly between Antalaotra traders and Sakalava royal figures, from which subsequent chapters unfold. These events and historical actors provide context for understanding the complex and delicate political relationships that shaped the spatial forms of the burgeoning city.

Like other coastal East African and Indian Ocean towns of the period, Moudzangaie emerged as a vibrant, cosmopolitan node in which Malagasy, Southeast Asians, Arabs, Comorians and East Africans comingled and coexisted. (Vérin 1975). The town emerged from overlapping processes of demarcation, enclosure, alteration, and valuation of spaces by competing groups over time, what some might call “territorialization.”<sup>190</sup> Histories of ancient city-making elsewhere on the continent, for instance in Barry Kemps’ study of Akhenaten’s Amarna or Holly Hanson’s of ancient Buganda, show the extraordinary capacity for sovereign rulers to shape the course of a city’s built environment.<sup>191</sup> But Moudzangaie’s past tells us a different story. Moudzangaie’s spatial forms arose from ongoing negotiations between different political-ethnic groups with competing cosmological, temporal and political norms. This chapter probes the nature of these negotiations that gave rise to the city’s forms. How did spatial practices reflect different ideas about time, political power, and the relative value of building materials? What were the political and socio-economic stakes of particular materials over time?

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<sup>190</sup> Note that the two key geographers who have theorized territoriality - Robert Sacks and Claude Raffestin- have done so in very different ways. Sacks defines territoriality as a spatial strategy to achieve political ends, “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic areas (387-88), as quoted in Vandergeest and Peluso “Territorialization and State Power in Thailand,” *Theory and Society* 24 (1995): 385-426. Raffestin sees territoriality as relational: emergent from and constitutive of certain structural relationships. See Alexander Murphy, “Entente Territorial: Sack and Raffestin on Territoriality”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30 (2012):159-172, for an eloquent analysis of how both relational territoriality and strategic territoriality concepts can be combined in single, powerful analytical approach.

<sup>191</sup> Barry Kemp, *The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Amarna and its People* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012); Holly Hanson, *Landed Obligation: The Practice of Power in Buganda* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).

And what did degrees of durability afford and constrain for heterogeneous groups of Sakalava, Antalaotra, and South Asian residents?

Key in this narrative are sacred sites—mosques, tombs, and shrines—erected variously by Muslim adherents and Sakalava builders and reflective of ideas about divine order and hierarchy. Drawing on archaeological evidence and early explorers’ accounts of the northwest region, I discuss the range of possibilities for how different people in ancient Moudzangaie could instrumentally engage with buildings and their compositional materials to make claims to authority and allegiance. Most of the available sources for the seventeenth and eighteenth century describe sacred compounds and structures in the northwest areas surrounding Moudzangaie. In this chapter, therefore, I rely on these sources to make claims about the meaning of building materials in the broader Bombetoka-Boeny region, whereas in subsequent chapters I will draw on sources more specifically pertaining to the city.

Strategies of spatial alteration were initiated by everyday inhabitants, traders, and monarchal leaders, in ways that complicate easy categorizations of “the state”<sup>192</sup> and “civil” actors. The competing, multiple visions for the city, and the way they manifest in spatial forms, was reflective—and constitutive—of the city’s broader political configuration. In this chapter, I suggest that the city’s earliest times were characterized by a political-economic heterarchy, in which multiple groups—Antalaotra traders, Sakalava monarchs and commoners, South Asian migrants, Europeans—held overlapping claims to different kinds of authority. This heterarchy had deeper historical roots in the contentious and tentative relationships of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, especially between Antalaotra traders and Sakalava monarchal

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<sup>192</sup> By “state” I mean competing forms of political authority. I recognize, however, the problematics of making categorical separations between “state” and “civil” or “vernacular”, since these entities often inform and blend into each other. Here, I have tried to use “state” to signal Sakalava, Hova, French, or Malagasy monarchal or governmental institutions.

figures. By the city's earliest decades, I argue, building practices and materials came to be key sites through which city dwellers could express their loyalty, proximity, and access to authoritative figures.

Throughout this chapter and in forthcoming chapters, I seek to build on an emergent thread in African historiography that foregrounds how growing interests in control over land among diverse African groups came well before European colonial rule. Carola Lentz argues for a corrective of earlier historiographical formations that portrayed "precolonial" political rule in African places as "over people rather than land."<sup>193</sup> Early scholars asserted "notions of property were conspicuously absent from traditional tenure regimes"<sup>194</sup> or championed land as meaningful to Africans only for its religious or ancestral ties.<sup>195</sup> As Lentz points out, these images of uncontested communal ownership of land held by chiefs or of land valued only for its ritual, ancestral-laden significance are not only misleading, but have also limited our understanding of the complicated ways different newcomer groups in African places have invoked - and challenged - material control over new places to make claims to inalienable property.<sup>196</sup> To Lentz' critique, I would add that urban places have been largely marginalized in this literature on land and political formations, with some notable exceptions,<sup>197</sup> and that the making of property

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<sup>193</sup> Carola Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 9. Earlier work in this vein includes Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); see also Christopher Gray, *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, c. 1850-1940* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002):121-13, 86-88.

<sup>194</sup> Paul Bohannan, *Tribal and Peasant Economies* (New York: Natural History Press, 1967); Elizabeth Colson, *The Impact of the Colonial Period on the Definition of Land Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), as discussed in Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*, 9.

<sup>195</sup> Goody, *Technology...*; Bohannan, *Tribal and Peasant...*; Colson, *The Impact...*, as quoted in Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging*, 9. See also the work of Peterson (2004), Lonsdale (1992) which demonstrate the ways African groups transformed land into territory, thus enabling them to make autochthonous claims to contested terrains over time.

<sup>196</sup> Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging*, 9-11.

<sup>197</sup> Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility and Class Formation in an extended Yoruba Community* (Berkeley: UCA Press, 1985), and *Chiefs Know Their Boundaries: Essays on Property, Power, and the Past in Asante, 1896-1996* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001).

and territory have taken quite different forms in urban settings. By broadening the chronological lens to account for how these practices of place-making transpired in northwest Madagascar in the eighteenth nineteenth centuries, and specifically Mahajanga, I consider how frictions over place and land were deep-seated and persistent in enduring ways. But I also judiciously contextualize (in later chapters) the impact of French colonial rule on property struggles that came later.

### ***Transformative Entanglements and Natural Histories***

Long before Antalaotra found their ways to the shores of the Betsiboka, profound geomorphological processes were underway which would shape the future of Madagascar's northwest. Scientists have estimated that some 165 million years ago Madagascar, still connected to the Indian subcontinent, gradually shifted away from the Gondwana supercontinent.<sup>198</sup> The giant landmass moved southeasterly and settled in its current location some 400 kilometers from Mozambique 35-40 million years later, and finally separated from the Indian subcontinent some 88 million years ago.<sup>199</sup> From this time, Madagascar's geological form remained relatively and tectonically constant, and its island position gave rise to a distinctive terrestrial and freshwater fauna history.<sup>200</sup> Numerous remains from the Jurassic period reveal the presence of dinosaurs, as well as diverse amphibious and mammalian species. The ancestors of most Malagasy fauna likely arrived by formidable feats, namely "rafting, swimming and/or island hopping" across the

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<sup>198</sup> This section follows the narration provided by David Krause in "Late Cretaceous Vertebrates of Madagascar: A Window into the Gondwanan Biogeography at the end of the Age of Dinosaurs," in *A Natural History of Madagascar*, Steven Goodman and Jonathan Benstead (eds) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 40

<sup>199</sup> Rabinowitz, P.D., M.F. Coffin, D. Falvey, "The Separation of Madagascar and Africa", *Science* 20:4592 (1983):67-69; Storey, M, J.J. Mahoney, A.D. Saunders, R.A. Duncan, S.P. Kelley, M.F. Coffin, "Timing of Hot Spot – Related Volcanism and the Breakup of Madagascar and India", *Science*, 267:5199 (1995): 852-855.

<sup>200</sup> Kusky, T. M., Toraman, E., and Raharimahefa, T. "The Great Rift Valley of Madagascar: An Extension of the Africa-Somali Diffusive Plate Boundary?" *Gondwana Research*, 11:4 (2007):577-579; David Krause "Late Cretaceous Vertebrates of Madagascar: A Window into the Gondwanan Biogeography at the end of the Age of Dinosaurs." *A Natural History of Madagascar*. 40.

400 kilometers of the Mozambique Channel.<sup>201</sup> The tectonic cleavage between present-day East Africa and Madagascar created sedimentary basins along the northwest coast composed of limestone, siltstone, dolostone and sandstone.<sup>202</sup> Much terrain in and surrounding Mahajanga is alluvial sand, and silty sandstone; but the surrounding hinterlands are plains that offered optimal sites for rice farming and cattle pasture.

Centuries-long entanglements of humans, material objects, and natural processes began with visits from “Arab” traders to the northern part of the island in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>203</sup> Islamic port settlements were found along Madagascar’s northwestern coast dating from the late twelfth century.<sup>204</sup> Gradually from that period onwards, early traders, often calling themselves “Antalaoatra” began settling along the shores of Madagascar’s west coast.<sup>205</sup> Antalaoatra were driven to Madagascar in a search of commodities lacking in eastern Africa and Arabia, including rice, copal resin, soapstone, mangrove stakes, and later, slaves (Vérin 1986:4). But archaeological evidence also suggests that as they came to colonize the island’s northwest in small hamlets, they cultivated rice and subsisted on fishing and livestock farming.<sup>206</sup>

Climatic forces were critical to seafarers’ mobility and arrival on Madagascar’s shores. Seasonal monsoon winds, unique to the Indian Ocean, carried early traders across the Basin’s

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<sup>201</sup> Krause, “Late Cretaceous,” 47.

<sup>202</sup> Bésairie, H. 1973. Madagascar Carte Géologique, Echelle 1/1 000 000. Service Géologique, Antananarivo.

<sup>203</sup> There is much conflation around the term “Arab” in scholarly and popular accounts of Moudzangaie.

<sup>204</sup> Dewar, R.E. and Wright, H.T. “The Culture History of Madagascar”, *Journal of World Prehistory*, 7 (1993):417-66; On the twelfth century port settlement of Mahilaka, see Chantal Radimilahy, “Mahilaka: An Archaeological Investigation of an Early Town in northwestern Madagascar” (PhD Diss, Uppsala, 1998).

<sup>205</sup> Antalaoatra literally translates as a “people from the sea”, deriving from the Malagasy language “ant” = from, and “laut” = sea. There are various prononciations and iterations of the ethnonym, Antalaoatra = the official Malagasy; Antalaotsy in Sakalava dialect; Antalaotse in Tandroy dialect; Antalaotsa in Betsileo, see Rantoandro “Une Communauté Mercantile”; Gueunier, *Les Chemins*; Bachir, interview, 14 February 2012.

<sup>206</sup> Henry Wright and Jean-Aimé Rakotoarisoa, “The Rise of Malagasy Societies,” in S. Goodman (ed) *The Natural History of Madagascar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003):117.

expanses.<sup>207</sup> Guided by the earth's rotations, the Northeast Monsoon began in November and brought sailors from parts of Arabia and the northeastern coast of Africa southerly toward Madagascar, the Comoros, and southeastern Africa.<sup>208</sup> In the eighteenth century, one could expect to travel from India to Zanzibar in twenty to twenty-five days during the Monsoon season.<sup>209</sup> From April, the Southwest Monsoon pushed ships again to the north. What is critical about this climatic cycle is that the temporal cycle of the trade winds obliged monsoonal seafarers to remain in their destination for months, until the winds shifted and allowed for a return passage. This led to the forging of enduring ties of affiliation between seafarers, coastal inhabitants, and the lands they inhabited in northwest Madagascar and along the Swahili Coast of Eastern Africa.<sup>210</sup>

As Antalaotra returned to these trading points time and again, and eventually settled for longer periods, they sought protected shelter along the seashore that would allow for ease of docking and habitation.<sup>211</sup> They named places, carved paths, planted trees and bushes, and constructed dwellings - giving meaning to the land. Phylogeographical<sup>212</sup> studies suggest that early traders also brought much to Madagascar they would alter the landscape with – both intentionally and unintentionally.<sup>213</sup> From about the tenth century, rats apparently traveled

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<sup>207</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Abdul Sheriff and Engseng Ho, *The Indian Ocean: Ocean Connections and the Creation of New Societies* (London: Hurst, 2014); Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>208</sup> Gerald Donque. "Le contexte océanique des anciennes migrations," *Taloha I* (1965): 43.

<sup>209</sup> Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 20.

<sup>210</sup> Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: UCA Press, 2006).

<sup>211</sup> Vérin, *The History of Civilisation*, 10.

<sup>212</sup> This is a relatively new approach -and subdiscipline- that studies the historical processes of geographical distribution of species through mitochondrial DNA lineages. Avise, John C. "The history and purview of phylogeography: a personal reflection", *Molecular Ecology*, 7 (1998):371-379; Hewitt, G. "Speciation, hybrid zones and phylogeography –or seeing genes in space and time" *Molecular Ecology*, 10 (2001): 537-549.

<sup>213</sup> Nicole Boivin, Alison Crowther, Richard Helm and Dorian Fuller, "East Africa and Madagascar in the Indian Ocean World," *Journal of World Prehistory* 26(2013):213-281; Beaujard, Philippe, "The first migrants to Madagascar and their introduction of plants: Linguistic and ethnological evidence," *Azania*, 46 (2011):169-189; Fuller, D.Q., Boivin, N. Hoogervorst, T. and Allaby, R. "Across the Indian Ocean: The prehistoric movement of



**BAOBAB-TREE, MAJUNGA.**

Figure 8: Sketch of Baobab from Elton's journey to Majunga, 1857  
 (Source: James Frederic Elton, [ed H.B. Cotterill], *Travels and Researches among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa* (London: Cass, 1968)

on board Arab and Antalaotra vessels across Indian Ocean trade routes to lands new to them.<sup>214</sup>

Rats would become some of the most vexing species to arrive with early traders. Dendrologists have shown that humans successively introduced not only baobab species (Figure 8),<sup>215</sup> but also fig trees<sup>216</sup> to Madagascar over the last 2000 years.<sup>217</sup> Some oral sources suggest that the giant baobab tree, standing emblematically at Mahajanga's seaside was carried from abroad and

plants and animals," *Antiquity* 85:328 (2011): 544-558; Kull, Christian, J. Tassin, S. Moroeau, H. Rakoto Ramiarantsoa, C. Blanc-Pamard, and S.M. Carrière, "The introduced flora of Madagascar," *Biological Invasions*, 14:4 (2011): 875-888.

<sup>214</sup> C. Brouat et al, "Invasion genetics of a human commensal rodent: the black rat *Rattus rattus* in Madagascar," *Molecular Ecology* 23:16 (2014): 4153-4167.

<sup>215</sup> G.E. Wickens "The Baobab: Africa's Upside Down Tree," *Kew Bulletin* 37 (1983), and *The Baobabs: Pachycauls of Africa, Madagascar and Australia* (Springer, 2008): 267. "Arab" traders appear to have also introduced the baobab to Zanzibar, India, Sri Lanka, Penang, Java and Phillipines.

<sup>216</sup> A. Dalecky et al, "Moraceae, Ficus and Associated Fauna," in Steven Goodman and Jonathan Benstead, *The Natural History of Madagascar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 328.

<sup>217</sup> Binggeli says that Arabs and Africans from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards would have brought with them "useful plants, such as crops and weedy annuals transported as seed or soil contaminants", though it is difficult to know of these plants with precision. European ship records reveal that they carried seeds and seedlings of key food crops to the island, and missionaries brought fruit trees in the early 1800s. But he clarifies that "it was only after the colonization of Madagascar by the French in 1896 that the introduction of plant species from all over the world became widespread and systematic." See P. Binggeli, "Introduced and Invasive Plants," in Steven Goodman and Jonathan Benstead, *The Natural History of Madagascar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 258.

planted by Antalaotra traders.<sup>218</sup> This tree, a species of *Adansonia digitata* grew to mammoth proportions matched only by its fame as an iconic symbol of the city.<sup>219</sup>

### ***Early Seafaring and Stone Towns in the Indian Ocean Basin***

Nestled at the mouth of the Bay of Bombetoka, Moudzangaie arose quite gradually and accidentally to become a prominent eighteenth century Indian Ocean trading depot. The early founding of Moudzangaie built on a long-standing tradition of seafaring trade between southwest Asia, Persia, and East Africa that gained importance from the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>220</sup> Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, subsistence economies shifted into migratory economies based on maritime trading and fishing. Urban settlements constructed of coral and lime structures emerged in key sites throughout the Indian Ocean basin.<sup>221</sup> The thalassic economy, which expanded to reach from East Africa, Madagascar, to Aden, Hadhramaut in Yemen, and Oman revolved around the trade of ivory, slaves, skins and tortoiseshell in exchange for pottery, glass vessels, and stone bowls. Over time, coastal communities became dynamic nodes of exchange and production, of heterogeneous ethnic and kinship ties, often woven together by shared Islamic practices.

By the twelfth century, a strand of Swahili trading towns were firmly established along

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<sup>218</sup> Fieldnotes, Feb. 16. 2012.

<sup>219</sup> Wickens, *The Baobabs*, 267. Many long-time residents of the city affirmed to me that this baobab had been carried and planted by Antalaotra traders long ago. Throughout the twentieth century, images of this baobab circulated on postcards and in guidebooks; the tree is now thought to measure about 46 feet around the base.

<sup>220</sup> For historiographies of the ancient Indian Ocean trade routes see Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, 1985; George Hourani, *Arab Seafaring: In the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995); Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998); Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 2003; Himanshu Ray and Edward Alpers, *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The history of the Indian Ocean World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007). My account of the earliest founding of the city draws largely on Vérin's seminal archaeological and historical work published first as his thesis in French (1975), and later translated into English (1986).

<sup>221</sup> Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 50.

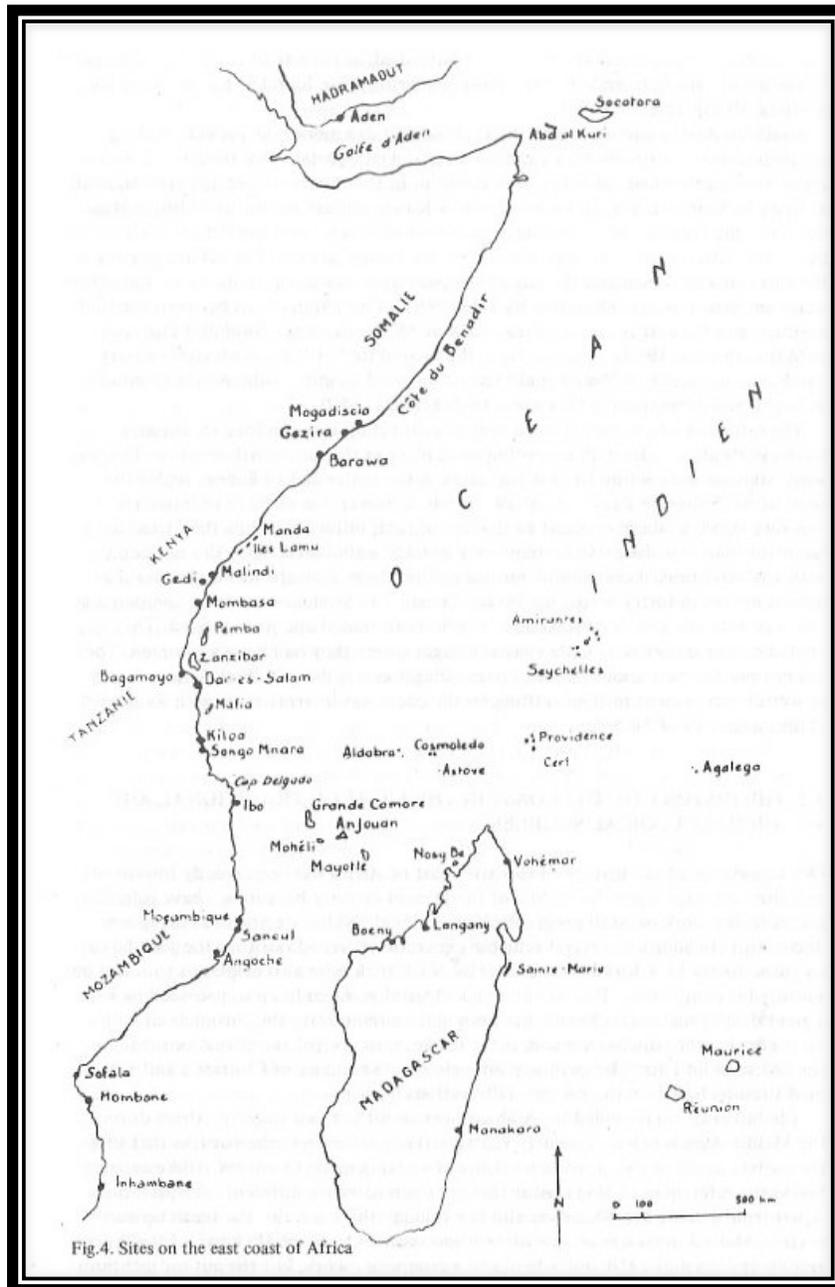


Figure 9: Swahili trading towns  
 (Source: Verin, *The History of Civilisation in North Madagascar*, 108)

the East African coast which gave rise to new architectural forms using coral rag. Coral rag, a rough, hardened coral limestone, was used as a marker of increasing prosperity as Swahili

trading towns reached their peak in the fifteenth Century (see Figure 9).<sup>222</sup> Several fourteenth and fifteenth century sites along the East African coast contain archeological ruins of stone construction, including the palace of Husuni Kubwa at Kilwa, paneled tombs in Songo Mnara (in present-day Tanzania) and Kingany, Madagascar (in Bay of Boina).<sup>223</sup> Many stone homes were increasingly built in towns, which were most often laid out with “two long, narrow rooms...the first overlooking a courtyard and two little bedrooms at the back.”<sup>224</sup> Archeological remains in Kilwa suggest that homes were constructed with mangrove poles as the supporting structures, with toilet facilities, and were narrow, flat-roofed, decorated with embossed niches.<sup>225</sup>

Along Madagascar’s northwest coast, coral rag constructions dating back to possibly the eleventh and twelfth centuries were found in the early settlement of Mahilaka, north of present-day Mahajanga.<sup>226</sup> Twelfth to fifteenth century towns were demarcated by markers such as ditches, perimeter boundaries, or in the case of Mahilaka, a surrounding wall, which delimited the urban territory where certain activities took place.<sup>227</sup> Early northwest Malagasy towns were generally defined by the existence of clustered economic activities or the presence of a ruling monarch. In the latter case, the presence of a *rova*, where royal relics were kept, signaled the sovereignty of the reigning Sakalava king or queen.<sup>228</sup> But above all, coastal towns in early Madagascar emerged in large part through the Antalaotra trading networks that came to dominate the region.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 60.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Radimilahy, “Mahilaka,” 199; Mahilaka was dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, partly because of the presence of yellow pottery of Hadhramaut, which was probably from Kawd am Saila, and also found in Kenya, see Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 69.

<sup>227</sup> Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 618 (quoted in Radimilahy, “Mahilaka,” 35) concluded that in the absence of coral or stone at Mahilaka, the coral must have been taken from underwater reefs, likely at Nosy Be or other nearby islands. Though the exact purpose of the walls is difficult to determine, Radimilahy suggests the possibility that they were sea walls, intended to protect from the encroaching tide, 37.

<sup>228</sup> Radimilahy, “Mahilaka,” 20.

From the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Antalaotra communities established themselves in northwestern Madagascar in three primary sites: initially in Langany, under their leader Amadi; Makamby, under the tutelage of Kambamba; and later in Antsoheribory, in the Bay of Bombetoka (see Figure 10).<sup>229</sup> Early Portuguese travel accounts identified Antalaotra as Muslims,<sup>230</sup> speaking a language in the Bantu family (Swahili and some Arabic), and sharing similar customs and practices to Swahili inhabitants across East Africa.<sup>231</sup> Antalaotra communities were distinctive to the northwest coast of Madagascar and were heterogeneously composed of immigrants from East Africa, Arabia, Persian Gulf, India, Comoro Islands, and Sakalava and Muslim Malagasy segments.<sup>232</sup> They could best be characterized as an “economic community cemented by their religion, Islam” and by their seafaring way of life, based on the preservation of trade.<sup>233</sup> Sources described the division of Antalaotra in two groups, one residing in Boina (the Hounzati), and another residing in Majunga (Mozanghi).<sup>234</sup>

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Portuguese ships approached Swahili coastal towns, and to a much lesser extent northwest Malagasy towns.<sup>235</sup> They attempted to gain control of the lucrative spice and slave trade, but were unsuccessful largely due to the acumen of Antalaotra traders and the growing influence of the Omani Empire. Within a century, Swahili

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<sup>229</sup> By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Antsoheribory had grown to a bustling muslim town of 6,000-7,000 inhabitants, according to the Franciscan Luis Mariano, see Alfred Grandidier et al, eds. *Collection des ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar*. (Paris: Comité de Madagascar, 1903-1920; henceforth *CAOCM*). Vol. 2; Gueunier, *Les Chemins*, 1994; Guillain, Documents sur l’histoire, la géographie et le commerce de la partie occidentale de Madagascar (Paris: Royale, 1845); Rantoandro, “Une Communauté Mercantile...” 205; Vérin, “Les échelles anciennes du commerce sur les côtes nord de Madagascar” (PhD diss, Université de Lille, 1975), 91.

<sup>230</sup> de Barros on Tristan de Cunha, in Grandidier, *CAOCM* I: 27-28. Historically, Antalaotra were Sunni Muslims.

<sup>231</sup> Mariano, Luis. “Relation du voyage de découverte fait à l’île Saint Laurent dans les années 1613-1614 in Grandidier (ed) *CAOCM*, 11(1904):1-64.

<sup>232</sup> Gueunier, *Les Chemins*; Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 78.

<sup>233</sup> Rantoandro, “Une Communauté Mercantile...”, 208-9; See Gwyn Campbell, “Madagascar and the Slave Trade 1810-1894,” *The Journal of African History* 22:2(1981): 215-219 for a detailed analysis of Antalaotra trading networks, and their relationships with Sakalava, Merina and Karany groups, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>234</sup> This was cited by Campbell “Madagascar and the Slave Trade,” 215.

<sup>235</sup> Jane Hooper, “Pirates and Kings: Power on the Shores of Early Modern Madagascar and the Indian Ocean,” *Journal of World History* 22:2 (2011): 215-242; Also, for a detailed account of the Portuguese intrusions into the northwest coast between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 96.

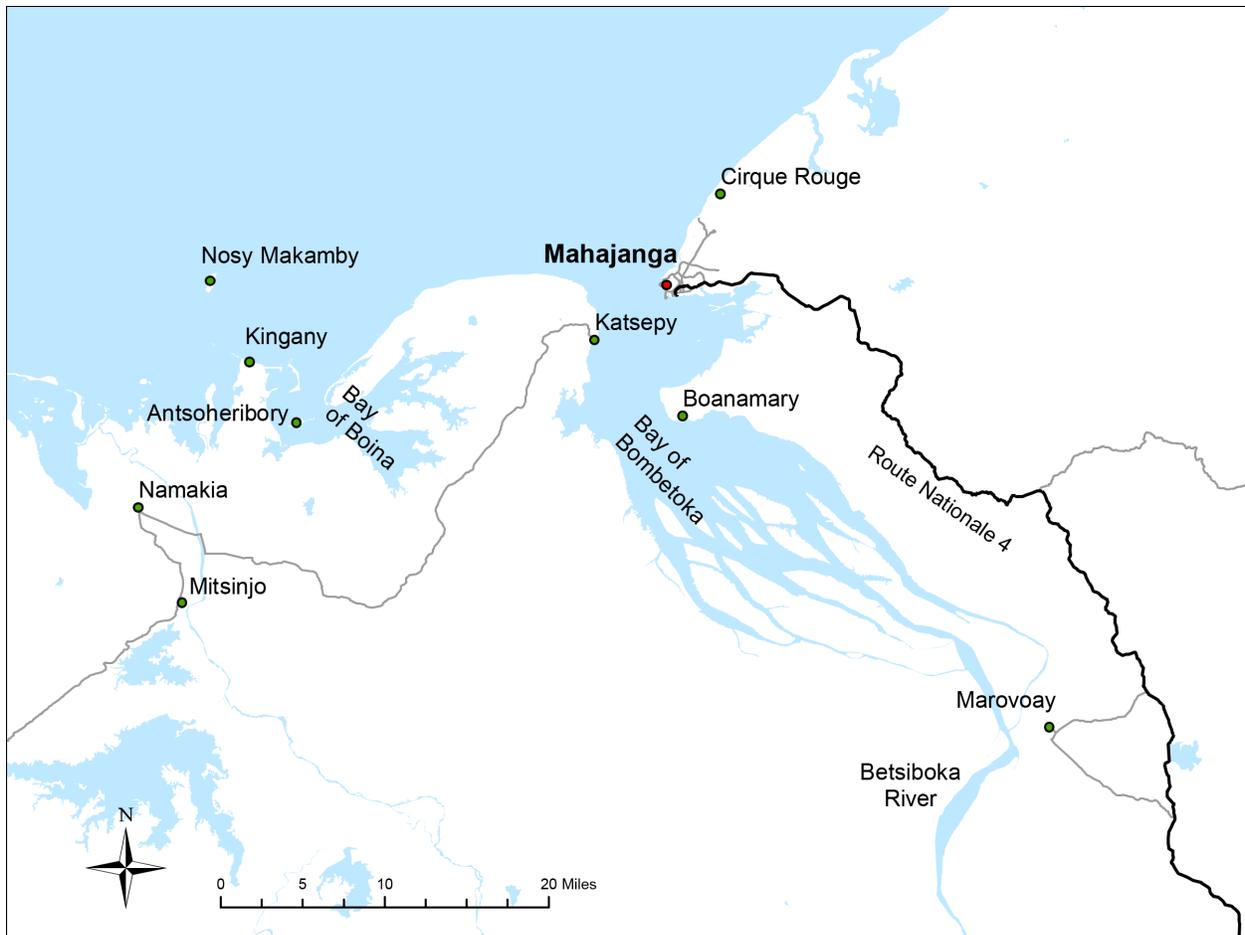


Figure 10: Map of Mahajanga and northwest region

coastal towns united with Omani Arabs to maintain tight control of the trade, which increasingly came to be centered on enslaved persons as well as ivory and spices.<sup>236</sup> Like their counterparts in East Africa, Antalaotra towns along the northwestern coast of Madagascar grew prosperous out of the slave-trading economy, especially in the Bay of Bombetoka.<sup>237</sup> By the seventeenth

<sup>236</sup> Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Pattern of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Later Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: UCA Press, 1975); Campbell, "Madagascar and the Slave Trade," 215; Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory: Integration of an East African commercial empire into the world economy, 1770-1873* (London: J. Currey, 1987); Campbell suggests that the Antalaotra regained their commercial strength and influence after the 1824, when Merina governors "cultivated a friendship with Mose Sama, a local dignitary... and kept the cooperation of Sakalava chiefs into whose families they; d married. It was further reinforced by the expansion of Omani trading empire in 1830s. 'After Zanzibar had become the base of Omani commercial operations, the Antalaotra became fully incorporated into the Swahili trade network, through their contact with Arab trading colonies on the Comoros and the East African littoral,'" "Madagascar and the Slave Trade," 216.

<sup>237</sup> James Armstrong, "Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *Omalý sy Anio* 17 (1983-84): 211-233; J.M. Filliot, *La Traite des Esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIII siècle*, (Paris: ORSTOM, 1974);

century, between 2,000 – 3,000 slaves were seized in raids on highland communities annually, and were then transported to the Bay of Boeny.<sup>238</sup> Enslaved persons were sold and transported to the Comoros Islands of Anjouan and Mohely, and eventually transported to the Lamu region and Red Sea.<sup>239</sup> Antalaotra apparently held a monopoly on the slave trading economy<sup>240</sup> in Madagascar, which they maintained in an alliance with the Sakalava royal monarchies<sup>241</sup> established in Boina from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>242</sup>

Owing in part to the accumulation of wealth, Antalaotra settlements witnessed the intensified building of stone homes, mosques, and tombs on the northwest coast of Madagascar in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in sites such as Kingany, and subsequently Antsoheribory.<sup>243</sup> By the time Dutch, English, French and Portuguese traders and explorers made their way to northwestern Madagascar, they encountered ethnically heterogeneous towns with varying degrees of built forms, which had long been linked to the

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Micheline Rasoamiamanana, "Pouvoir Merina et Esclavage Dans le Boina Dans La Seconde Moitie Du XIXe Siecle (1862-1883)" *Omalysy Anio* 17-20(1983-1984):323-335; Vérin, *History of Civilization*; Thomas Vernet, "Le Commerce des Esclaves sur le cote Swahili, 1500-1750," *Azania* 38:1 (2003):76.

<sup>238</sup> Solofo Randrianja and Stephen Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History* (London: Hurst, 2009):106; Vernet, "Les Commerce des Esclaves," 77; Other scholars have placed the estimate in the same range, see Arne Bialuschewski, "Pirates, Slavers and the Indigenous Population in Madagascar, c. 1690-1715," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 38:3(2005): 401-425 and Markus Vink, "'The World's Oldest Trade': Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of World History* 14:2(2003): 131-177.

<sup>239</sup> Vérin, "Les Échelles," 262, Vernet, "Les Commerce des Esclaves," 69-70,77; Comorian traders would purchase the Malagasy slaves, as well as rice, meat and cattle. Note that Vernet's findings offer an important corrective to earlier scholarly accounts, by demonstrating that the slave trade was an important Indian Ocean commerce well before the French and Omani markets demanded slaves in the mid-late 1700s.

<sup>240</sup> Gwyn Campbell notes that the secure grasp of Antalaotra on the trading economy was also served by the European suppression of piracy and the economic development of the Mascarene Islands, in "The Structure of Trade in Madagascar, 1750-1810," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26:1(1993):131.

<sup>241</sup> It is critical to note that multiple social and political units which comprised Sakalava royal monarchies; as others have noted, there was not a single, centralized, monolithic Sakalava royal monarchy. Rather small kingdoms with diverse political and cultural practices, formed by groups of Sakalava royal leaders and followers, were anchored around key monarchs. Sakalava polities were also often fluid, migratory socio-political formations, driven by the need to trade seasonally or her cattle, Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 109. Eventually, these Sakalava polities did cohere into two kingdoms: Boina and Menabe.

<sup>242</sup> Campbell, "The Structure of Trade," 131; Raymond Kent, *Early Kingdoms in Madagascar, 1500-1700* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1970); Lombard, *Le royaume Sakalava*; Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 2009; Vérin, *A History of Civilization*, 68, 74-5.

<sup>243</sup> Vérin, *A History of Civilization*, 65, 173.

Indian Ocean trade routes. Jesuit explorer Luis Mariano discovered a town at Antsoheribory (near present-day Mahajanga), inhabited by some 6,000 to 7,000 people in 1613.<sup>244</sup>

Antsoheribory was in some ways a forerunner to Majunga, containing particular architectural features that were later also found in Majunga. Most densely occupied between 1580-1750, Antsoheribory declined just around or after founding of Majunga.<sup>245</sup>

Reflecting the importance of stone in early town building, Mariano ascribed the name “Boeny” (Boene) to this settlement; Vérin notes this is a Swahili word meaning “‘where there are stones’ and undoubtedly also ‘stone buildings.’”<sup>246</sup> Indeed, archaeologists have discovered some 45 tombs, two stone houses, and a mosque containing openings for doors and some coral remnants at the qibla.<sup>247</sup> Like those at Mahilaka, discussed earlier, most houses were composed of thatch and vegetative matter and stone structures were largely reserved for the dead.<sup>248</sup> Yet some remains suggest that wealthier households built stone homes on the north-central side of the settlement, near the mosque.<sup>249</sup> Travel accounts from the seventeenth century describe the importance of Muslim sacred structures in Antsoheribory, especially the presence of a stone

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<sup>244</sup> Mariano, Luis. “Relation du voyage de découverte fait à l’île Saint Laurent dans les années 1613-1614 in Grandidier (ed) *CAOCM*, 11(1904):1-64.

<sup>245</sup> Vérin, *A History of Civilization*, 291.

<sup>246</sup> Vérin, *A History of Civilization*, 206 fn 3.

<sup>247</sup> Vérin, *A History of Civilization*, 291. Or Kiblah “the direction of the Kaava (the sacred building at Mecca) to which Muslims turn to at prayer (Oxford American Dictionary); Another feature of note on this mosque include a stone for the removal of mud and earthy matter on one’s feet, some 2 meters southeast of the mosque. A small well would have served for ablutions. The tombs excavated by Vérin suggest social stratification: lower walled rectangular tombs likely for commoners; and higher-walled tombs (some with a domed roof) for elites. All walls were plastered with a fine paste of (mollusk) shells or from coral, burnt on a wood fire, and mixed with sand. Verin, *A History of Civilization*, 299.

<sup>248</sup> Vérin, *A History of Civilization*, 298. He rightly contends that “stone houses must have been a very rare privilege” on account of their scarcity, 298-9. One of the stone houses was commonly referred to by nearby inhabitants as the “Sultan’s palace” and imported decorative objects including locally made and imported vessels, dishes, jars, lamps, were found there; the remains suggested the structure was abandoned because of a fire, 303.

<sup>249</sup> Henry Wright, Pierre Vérin, Ramilisonina, David Burney, Lida Pigott Burney, and Katsumi Matsumoto, “The Evolution of Settlement Systems in the Bay of Boeny and the Mahavavy River Valley, north-western Madagascar,” *Azania*, 31(1996): 63.

mosque running north-south in which adherents prayed daily<sup>250</sup> But the presence of a Sakalava *doany* on the small island also reveals the intermingling of heterogeneous groups, and accommodation of multiple, ritual sites associated with different practicing communities—Sakalava, Muslim, Antalaotra—that would similarly characterized Majunga.

### ***Forging the Town through the Crucible of Conflict, 16<sup>th</sup> century- ca. 1750***

Majunga's founding in the late 1700s was inextricably bound up with a series of political contestations that swept across Madagascar's northwest in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This section delves into the conflicts and migrations—both forced and voluntary— as well as the shifting trading practices that gave rise to the city. Accounting for these events is critical for understanding the broader historical and political context in which the heterogeneous inhabitants of the city found themselves in the late eighteenth century.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, the Sakalava monarchy began consolidating and expanding northwards from Menabe and into Boina (see Figure 11).<sup>251</sup> Oral accounts about the expansion of Sakalava political authority into the present-day Mahajanga area have been foundational in historiographical portraits of early monarchical movements. Following struggles in the fraternal order of the Sakalava family in Menabe, one of the sons of the reigning Andriandahifotsy, Andriamandisoarivo (ca. ?-1710), looked to establish his own kingdom northwards following a clash with his brother. To legitimate his authority, he carried a portion of the relics from Andriamisara, and travelled north through Morondava. He eventually

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<sup>250</sup> CAOCM II:263-267, 327; Vérin, *A History of Civilization*, 190-191, 293.

<sup>251</sup> This account largely follows from oral accounts which I collected in Mahajanga between 2012-2014, and which is consistent with existing historiographical accounts; see Ballarin, *Les Reliques Royales*, 40-43; Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 26; Kent, *Early Kingdoms*, 159-195; Lombard, *Le royaume Sakalava*, 40-41; Suzy Ramamonjisoa, "Questions dur Andriamisara: un exemple de critique historique à propos de traditions culturelles influencées par l'islam bantouisé à Madagascar," *Omalysy Anio* 3-4(1976):251-266; Vérin, "Les Échelles...", 138-9. These histories are still very present and 'beared' by spirit mediums, see Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*.

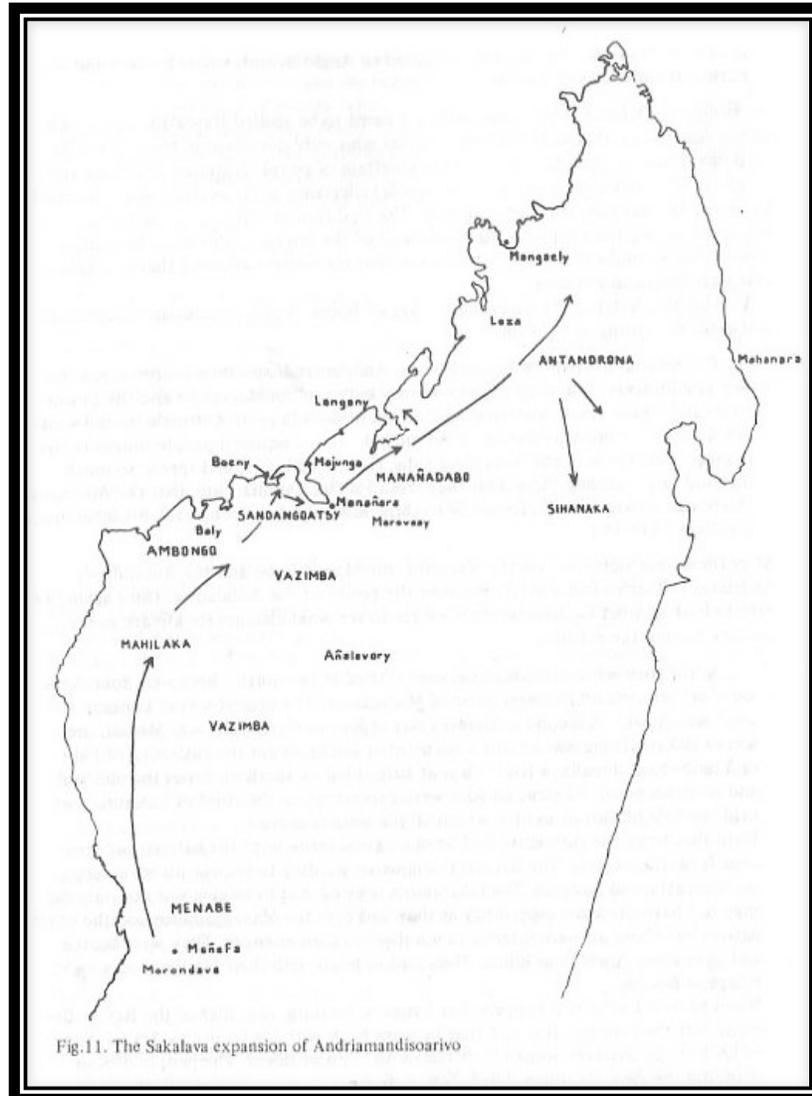


Figure 11: Movement of Sakalava expansion, seventeenth century  
 (Source: Verin, *The History of Civilisation in North Madagascar*, 108)

arrived in Mitsinjo area, near the Baly River at a place called Sandangatsy, where the inhabitants fought him and rejected his authority. Eventually he and his forces defeated them, as he did the Antambohilava that lived between the River Mahajamba and River Loza. Oral traditions describe that rather than be subjected to Ndriamandisoarivo's authority, the Sandangatsy inhabitants committed mass suicide in Lake Kinkony.<sup>252</sup>

<sup>252</sup> For a much more detailed oral account of this origin story, see Guillaín, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 18-19. The crossing of Lake Kinkony was, at the time of my research in 2014, considered *fady* (taboo) for those from Sakalava royal descent. One informant described that when he attempted to cross Lake Kinkony by pirogue, the weather

The Sakalava warring faction, led by Andriamandisoarivo (also known as Simanato), encountered Antalaotra in the settlements of Langany, Kandrary, Boeni (under King Faki<sup>253</sup>), and Bali and considered them enemies. Despite the longstanding peaceful coexistence between Antalaotra and Sakalava communities, Andriamandisoarivo perceived Antalaotra as a threat needing to be conquered for the full establishment of his kingdom.<sup>254</sup> After vanquishing the largest Antalaotra settlement at Langany, Andriamandisoarivo struggled to defeat the Antalaotra completely. Many<sup>255</sup> fled to Antsoheribory island,<sup>256</sup> where they maintained a stronghold for several more years, and hoped to secure it as a permanent independent colony. In this vein, Chief Faki began fortifying<sup>257</sup> the island and prepared to resist Andriamandisoarivo. Andriamandisoarivo learned of these plans for a Antalaotra resistance, and suppressed this potentially embarrassing and disruptive tide. He apparently invited King Faki to the Sakalava capital of Tongay under false pretenses and had him put to death upon his arrival.<sup>258</sup> This terrorizing act undoubtedly served to stifle some resistance, but Andriamandisoarivo implemented additional strategies to divide and conquer the Antalaotra colony.

Antalaotra groups were submitted to Andriamandisoarivo's authority not only by force, but also through manipulation and disturbance of customary power structures.

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changed dramatically and suddenly. The pirogue's Captain remarked on the *fady* and noted that there must be a passenger of royal descent onboard, among whom was the man. The boat was never able to cross the Lake and returned to shore (fieldnotes 21 February 2012).

<sup>253</sup> Faki was apparently the great-grandson of Amadi, mentioned earlier, who ruled the Antalaotra, derived from the Hassani migration, in Langany, Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, (as quoted in Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 91.)

<sup>254</sup> See Guillain *Documents sur l'histoire*: 349, note 6 (as quoted in Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 107) "Until that time, the Antaloats' had lived on good terms with the natives, independent from their chiefs. The Sakalava monarch, wanting to impose his sovereignty on them, attacked Langani."

<sup>255</sup> Guillain suggests "half" of the Antalaotra population fled to their "Grande-Terre", while the others sought refuge in Antsoheribory, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 20.

<sup>256</sup> The presence of archaeological ruins of stone dwellings here described by Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 108, testify to the extensive degree of sovereignty Antalaotra traders must have enjoyed at this place in the 1600 and 1700s, prior to the invasion of Andriamandisoarivo's forces. As discussed below, there existed in these years a prohibition against the construction of stone dwellings by Sakalava royal authorities in the region, but it is notable that Antalaotra living at Antsoheribory managed to build substantial stone structures.

<sup>257</sup> Guillain describes this fortification as constructing "petit bruit les murailles" *Documents sur l'histoire*, 20.

<sup>258</sup> Guillain outlines these events in *Documents sur l'histoire*, 20, 349.

Andriamandisoarivo perhaps astutely perceived that those Antalaotra most invested in independence were the prominent, influential families. Seeking to minimize their hold on the local population, he sought out ways to separate them and dismantle their authoritative position. He began by installing Hassan-ben-Youmah, an Antalaotra of lower standing, to replace King Faki. Ben-Youmah, however, realized he was endangering himself and his family by suddenly accepting this royal designation, which flew in the face of Antalaotra nobles. He thus proposed to Andriamandisoarivo that this honorific title be offered to his granddaughter, Andrianantan-Arivou, “under whose name he could really exert his authority without threatening his life.”<sup>259</sup> Surprisingly, the Antalaotra leaders “became attached to this child and obtained her grandfather’s permission to instruct her and make her a Muslim.”<sup>260</sup> In this way, Hassan-ben-Youmah governed the Antalaots by proxy through this granddaughter, and at his death the rights to reign were transmitted to his son, Youmah-ben-Hassan.

With strategic concessions such as this, Sakalava monarch Andriamandisoarivo sought to conserve relationships with Antalaotra who could provide commercial expertise and connections to the monarchy. Over time, they would become trusted counselors and aides to Sakalava monarchs. In exchange for their political role they were offered a monopoly over trade to the interior, to the exclusion of competing Merina groups.<sup>261</sup> Eventually Andriamandisoarivo settled his capital at Bekipay (Tongay), near the Bay of Boina, which still today holds the Bezavodoany royal tombs. Testifying to the collaborations between Antalaotra and Sakalava leaders, is the likely involvement of Antalaotra masons in the construction of the *doany* structure. Vérin noted

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<sup>259</sup> Guillain *Documents sur l'histoire*: 21-22; See also Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 310; André Dandouau and Georges Chapus, *Histoire des populations de Madagascar* (Paris: Larose, 1952), 23. Shortly after her installation, she married an Arab from Surat named Seid Abderrhaman; this one died and she married another arab with the name Sidy Ahmet, from Patta. See Vérin, “Les Échelles,” 137.

<sup>260</sup> Guillain *Documents sur l'histoire*: 21-22.

<sup>261</sup> Rasoamiamanana, “Pouvoir Merina,” 61.

on his visit there in 1968 that the interior section, containing tombs and sepulchral mounds, was enclosed by a mortared stone wall (inside a structure of three walls), built a similar fashion to Islamic buildings in Antsoheribory and along the coast.<sup>262</sup>

Although the Bay of Boina had initially been the primary trading thoroughfare on the northwest coast, Vérin suggests that it gradually ceased in importance as traders discovered that the Bay of Bombetoka was much more accessible to European ships.<sup>263</sup> The shift of the Sakalava royal capital from Tongay (Bezavodoany) to Marovoay, in the Bay of Bombetoka, appears to have taken place between the 1710s and 1730s.<sup>264</sup> The Sakalava state formation in Boina was accelerated by the intensifying alliance with Antalaotra and Europeans, the latter often pirates, around the slave- and arms-trade.<sup>265</sup> The demand for arms by Sakalava leaders was apparently so voracious that it overwhelmed Dutch traders who lacked the supply to fulfill these demands; American traders stepped in to furnish firearms to Sakalava polities.<sup>266</sup> But as Berg argues in the case of the highland monarchy, it is likely that the Sakalava royal leaders garnered symbolic and sacred strength with the possession of arms, rather than using weapons to rule through brute force.<sup>267</sup> Sakalava leaders astutely collaborated with pirates, at times using them as interpreters and mediators in trading negotiations; over time elites learned English, as well as some French

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<sup>262</sup> *History of Civilization*, 286.

<sup>263</sup> *History of Civilization*, 310.

<sup>264</sup> Vérin estimates that this shift took place under Tokaf's son in the 1730s (*History of Civilization*, 286-7), but based on slaving expedition journals, P. Westra and J. Armstrong suggest the move occurred earlier, *Slave Trade with Madagascar: The journals of the cape slaver Leijdsman, 1715* (Cape Town: Africana Uitgewers, 2006), fn52, 151.

<sup>265</sup> Campbell, "The Structure of Trade," 140; Wright and Rakotoarisoa "The Rise of Malagasy Societies," 118; Vérin cites slaver-trader Hemmy's account (COACM VI:110-111) as evidence of this (*History of Civilization*, 310).

<sup>266</sup> Bialuschewski, "Pirates, Slavers..." 417.

<sup>267</sup> Gerald Berg, "The Sacred Musket: Tactics, Technology and Power in Eighteenth-Century Madagascar," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27:2 (1985): 261-279; see also Bialuschewski, "Pirates, Slavers..." 418.

and Portuguese.<sup>268</sup> As the demand for slaves grew, Sakalava and other Malagasy warriors began raiding Comoro Islands and even coastal settlements in East Africa.<sup>269</sup>

The slave-trading network in northwest Madagascar was entrenched in competing global economies of chattel slavery in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The demand for laborers emanated from several places: Portuguese settlements in East Asia; Dutch plantations and commercial emporia such as eastern Indonesia, Ceylon and Cape of Good Hope; and British settlements in northwest Java and Malaysia.<sup>270</sup> Over the course of the eighteenth century, the European demand for slaves from Madagascar was largely driven by the need for laborers on sugar and coffee plantations in the Mascarene Islands.<sup>271</sup> Eventually the east coast commerce<sup>272</sup> superseded that of the west coast in fulfilling the ever-growing demand for chattel laborers.<sup>273</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, slave traders from northwest Madagascar began transporting slaves, primarily east Africans, across cattle paths from west to east where they were sent on

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<sup>268</sup> From 1672, the Dutch East Indies Company brought along high-ranking slaves of Malagasy origin, presumably from Cape of Good Hope, to slaving expeditions in Madagascar, to assist with interpretation, Armstrong, "Madagascar and the Slave Trade," 232 (as quoted in Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 23). In an example of the latter, Frappé reported that Sakalava king Tokaf spoke some English with him during his slave expedition to the northwest coast in 1715, Westra and Armstrong *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 23, 127, 129; Hooper "Pirates and Kings," 231; Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 2006: 23, 127

<sup>269</sup> Guillain dates the beginning of the raids into Comoros for slaves to during the reign of Ravahiny, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 33. Also see Campbell, "The Structure of Trade in Madagascar..."; Edward Alpers, "Madagascar and Mozambique in the Nineteenth Century: The Era of the Sakalava Raids," *Omalý sy Anio* 5-6(1977); Pier Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 331-2.

<sup>270</sup> Richard Allen, "Satisfying the "Want for Labouring People": European Slave trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850, *The Journal of World History* 21:1(2010):53-55.

<sup>271</sup> Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Campbell, "The Structure of Trade," 131; J.M. Filiot, *La Traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: ORSTOM, 1974); Auguste Toussaint, *History of the Indian Ocean* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1967); Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices...*

<sup>272</sup> Larson notes that a critical difference between the east coast and west coast trading networks was that the eastern commerce with the Mascarene islands was "conducted exclusively by European vessels, not Malagasy and African ones." *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000):52-3. French merchants had long been marginalized from Madagascar's northwest trading networks, but did not face the same commercial competition on the east coast (ibid).

<sup>273</sup> Larson, *History and Memory*, 54-55.

French vessels to the Mascarenes.<sup>274</sup> Trading in the Bay of Bombetoka initially took place in the settled of Ampombitokana (later known as Fombitokana, Fombetocke or Bombetoka), with Dutch and French slave-traders traveling upstream to Marovoay<sup>275</sup> to negotiate the terms with Sakalava king Andrian Maheyningerivo.<sup>276</sup>

Antalaoatra traders remained important interlocutors in these trading networks. As such, they apparently occupied a paradoxical position vis a vis Sakalava royal monarchal leaders, perceived as both an asset for their trading connections and perspicacity, and a potential threat to Sakalava sovereignty.<sup>277</sup> But sometime around 1750, the trading hub moved from Fombitokana to Moudzangaie largely because of the growing presence of Antalaoatra traders there perhaps mandated by the Sakalava king.<sup>278</sup> The incorporation of Antalaoatra constituents into the Sakalava royal domain thus served as the most effective means to mitigate any threat and maximize their commercial knowledge. Historians and archaeologists have estimated that the city of Moudzangaie was established sometime between 1742 - 1758<sup>279</sup>. In the existing literature on Madagascar, the earliest founding of the city has been described as an “Antalaoatra settlement.”<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Larson, *History and Memory*, 53. Larson notes further that some of the income gained from this west-east flow of slaves was “reexported through the west coast, where it was employed to purchase Indian-manufactured textiles and east African slaves, among other items of commerce” (54).

<sup>275</sup> *Marovoay*, in Malagasy, means “many crocodiles”. It was at the time a bustling monarchal capital with ‘thousands of houses and an enormous number of inhabitants’, as well as an important royal compound with concentric rows of fences constructed of stone (Grandidier, A., and G. Grandidier (ed). 1903-1920. *Collection des ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar* (Henceforth CAOCM) VI:114-5, Paris: Comité de Madagascar, as quoted in Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 312.

<sup>276</sup> Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 311.

<sup>277</sup> See Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 315 for accounts of how Antalaoatra were at times sought after and even captured by Sakalava leaders as assets in the ever-fluctuating power field.

<sup>278</sup> Dumaine, Julien-Pierre, “Idée de la côte occidentale de Madagascar depuis Ancouala au nord jusqu’à Moroundava en 1792”, *Annales des Voyages*, 11:(1810) 33. as quoted in Vérin, *History of Civilization*:313; Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 25-26.

<sup>279</sup> Vérin, “Les Échelles...”, 1980:312. He bases his date in part on archaeological data, and also from Dumaine’s account which states that in 1792, the Arabs had *occupied* this place “for at least thirty-four years” (25). Also Guillain notes that Drury’s journal of 1716 made no mention of Moudzangaie, or the presence of “Arabes” even though he visited the Bay of Bombetok *Documents sur l’histoire*, 363. Also see p.363-366 for discussion about the determining the date of the city’s founding.

<sup>280</sup> Vérin, “Les Échelles...”: 452, and Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 363.

however the ethnonyms employed by European explorers—and carried over at times in scholarly accounts—complicate this narrative. Explorers often conflated “Antalaotra” and “Arab,”<sup>281</sup> others differentiated between “Arabes” and “Maures,” though it is possible the latter referred to Muslim migrants of Surat.<sup>282</sup> Guillain described how the Antalaotra “did not form a separate tribe” but rather little by little “lost its purity [as a distinct community]” as the settlers married indigenous women.<sup>283</sup>

In later times, Antalaotra, “Indians”, and Malagasy converts to Islam have been variably identified as “Silamo.”<sup>284</sup> And as Blanchy points out, the presence of Southeast Asian merchants and migrants, historically called “Karana” or “Karany,”<sup>285</sup> was also first documented, and sometimes confounded with “Arabs” in the earliest written sources concerning Majunga’s founding.<sup>286</sup> Some explicitly noted the presence of South Asians in the Bay of Bombetoka and their location “among the Arabs” of Moudzangaie in the early nineteenth century.<sup>287</sup> Blanchy estimates, furthermore, that a small, but growing number of South Asian traders, most often from the Gujerat region (Surat and Kutch), occupied Majunga from its earliest foundation around 1745.<sup>288</sup> Historians have documented that the first Karany to settle in Madagascar from the twelfth century were from Bombay and Gujerat, and were “Khoja” or “Bohra” Shia Muslims,

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<sup>281</sup> For example, see Antony Jully, “Mémoire sur Madagascar; manuscrit de Jacques de Lasalle” (1797), in *Notes, Reconnaissances et Explorations* (1878), 578. Europeans offered referred to a wide range of Muslim groups as “Arabs.” See Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade*, 137, fn27,

<sup>282</sup> Dumaine as quoted in Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 55.

<sup>283</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 363.

<sup>284</sup> Campbell “The Structure of Trade,” 130.

<sup>285</sup> Following Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 16, I use the term “Karana” broadly to denote the five socio-religious groups of southeast Asian descent who have resided and traversed through Madagascar. Four of these groups as muslim, and one in hindu. “Banian” is reserved exclusively for this latter group, but here I sometimes group “Banians” with the Karana groups, when it is appropriate to do so. Missionary O. Dahle traced the etymology of the word “Karana” or sometimes “Karany” to a Kiswahili word meaning “clerk, secretary.” L. Dahle, “The Swaheli Element in the New Malagasy-English Dictionary,” Antananarivo Annual IX(1885):106.

<sup>286</sup> Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 51.

<sup>287</sup> Dumaine, Julien-Pierre, “Idée de la côte occidentale de Madagascar depuis Ancouala au nord jusqu’à Moroundava en 1792”, *Annales des Voyages*, 11:(1810):20-52.

<sup>288</sup> Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 53.

followed later by Hindus.<sup>289</sup> Majunga, therefore, was from its very earliest times, thoroughly cosmopolitan, inhabited and traversed by Antalaotra, Sakalava, other Malagasy, and various Indian groups. But the legacy of conflated perceptions of the town's ethnic composition, and the problematics of ethnic categorization, as recorded and recapitulated in travelers' accounts, early colonial reports, scholarly literature and popular representations would persist and continue to shape characterizations of the city.

Moudzangaie—as a late eighteenth century town—emerged through the conjecture of multiple political conflicts and new economic opportunities. The gradual coherence of the Sakalava monarchal political formation, shifting global, economic tides, growth among Antalaotra families, and rising acknowledgement of their importance among Sakalava monarchs all served to give rise to the city. Embittered contestations over sovereignty and Sakalava political authority were bound up conflicts over land, but also over sacred power; these conflicts would persist. By the 1760s, the town was firmly emplaced. Like other coastal settlements in the southern Indian Ocean basin, the city's peninsular situation reflected the inhabitants' orientation to the maritime domain and interests in maintaining connections to lands distant and near.<sup>290</sup> The ecological and hydrological conditions of the city and its hinterlands, not to mention political ties, ensured that the city was integrated into the terrestrial region.

### ***Terrestrial Transformations***

Moudzangaie was neither the first nor one of the earliest settlements of Antalaotra communities in northwest Madagascar. It was only after the eighteenth century conflicts between Sakalava monarchies and Antalaotra mercantile communities, especially those at Antsoheribory

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<sup>289</sup> Campbell, "The Structure of Trade," 130.

<sup>290</sup> Jeffrey Fleischer et al, "When did Swahili Become Maritime?," *American Anthropologist*, 117:1(2015):100-115.

Island in the Bay of Bombetoka, that Antalaoatra sought to settle there. And it was the convergence of these conflicts, and the move of the Sakalava monarchal capital to Marovoay, deep in the Bay of Bombetoka, that cemented Moudzangaie's establishment in the 1740s or 50s. Moudzangaie offered several important benefits to its early inhabitants. Located on a peninsula, the city serves as a junction between the Mozambique Channel and the Betsiboka River, which flows from the highland capital of Antananarivo and through Marovoay. The Betsiboka Estuary, now made world famous by aerial satellite images of its striking red, octopus-like shape, offered the primary vein of access into the hinterland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sandy banks provided a natural harbor for dhows, and the surrounding lush forests offered shade from relentless sunshine. According to one European traveler, the harbor was favorably placed and easy to recognize from sea by the "red rocky earth and wide bay" together with its generous depth, all of which allowed a facile approach for ships.<sup>291</sup>

Settlements were nestled along the riverbanks in the Bay of Bombetoka,<sup>292</sup> and Antalaoatra and later European traders would have stopped in Moudzangaie before venturing up river to Marovoay. Dutch ship records indicate that the upstream journey from Moudzangaie to Marovoay took two to three days in the eighteenth century.<sup>293</sup> European traders were compelled to make this journey to secure the Sakalava monarch's permission to conduct trade.<sup>294</sup> The landscape around Marovoay, more so than Moudzangaie, offered ideal low-lying plains and marshes along the Betsiboka River and inland which inhabitants cultivated for rice farming. The

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<sup>291</sup> Dumaine, "Idée de la côte occidentale," 27.

<sup>292</sup> Verin details the toponymic confusion in 18<sup>th</sup> C accounts in the region. The Bay of Bombetoka was often conflated with Bay of Boina, and both were at times called 'Masselage'. To confuse matters further, there appears to have been a trading post in the Bay of Bombetoka which preceded Majunga in importance and chronology, known as Ampombitokana. The remains of this town, however, have yet to be found in *History of Civilization*, 309-10.

<sup>293</sup> See account of Henrik Frappé (ca. 1715) in Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 95-99.

<sup>294</sup> COACM VI:129-130; but also Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 23.

plains and forests in the region also offered ideal pastures for cattle, which would in the nineteenth century, constitute critical commodities to the city's formation (Chapter 3).

The Betsiboka offered passage not only from the ocean to Marovoay, but from there into the hinterlands. Antalaotra traders navigated the estuary's riverways to gather and trade rice, wax, salt and rubber, which they would use in future exchanges.<sup>295</sup> Persons enslaved by Antalaotra, usually "Makoa" from Mozambique, labored over rice cultivation.<sup>296</sup> But one of the most important early commodities was aged wood gleaned from the hinterlands of the Bay of Bombetoka. It was gathered by Antalaotra and sold or used for building construction. As early as the seventeenth century, "Arabs" were reported to have come to the Bay to acquire the mangrove timber (Du Bois in Verin 1986:309).<sup>297</sup> Indeed, the entirety of the region on which Moudzangaie was built was abundant with deciduous, dry forests and mangrove riparian woodlands. In this way, Moudzangaie resembled East African towns, especially those in estuary areas, in which mangrove wood was one of the primary exports.<sup>298</sup>

It was from this forested landscape that the earliest inhabitants took inspiration to inscribe the place with its name, drafting a toponymic story that would prove remarkably robust over time. At least one long-standing rendition about the city's toponym suggests that it derives from the Swahili *angaia* (flower), penned by the Antalaotra traders as *mji - angaia* (town of flowers, *mji* = town, *angaia* = flowers) to describe the copious trees, vines, and luscious white blooms of the *Angaia* shrub visible from the Bay. W.C. Pickersgill, a LMS missionary in Majunga,

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<sup>295</sup> Guillaïn, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 203.

<sup>296</sup> Guillaïn notes that Makoa slaves were quite limited in numbers in the city of Moudzangaie, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 216. For more on Makoa in Madagascar, see Gabriel Rantoandro, "Makoa et Masombika à Madagascar au XIX siècle. Introduction à leur histoire," and Klara Boyer-Rossol, "De Morima à Morondava: Contribution à l'étude des Makoa de l'Ouest de Madagascar au XIX siècle," in *Madagascar et l'Afrique: Des Liens et des appartenances historiques*, eds. Didier Nativel and Faranirina Rajaonah (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 137-162, 183-220.

<sup>297</sup> "Arab" here was likely the European misnomer of Antalaotra traders.

<sup>298</sup> See Erik Gilbert, *Dhows and the Colonial Economy of Zanzibar, 1860-1970* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004); on Dhows; Thaddeus Sunseri, *Wielding the Ax: State Forestry and Social Conflict in Tanzania, 1820-2000* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009).

collected one historical explanation of the town's founding from an older Antalaotra man in the 1880s that mentioned the *angaia* flower and asserted that the town's founders were Antalaotra coming from Boina (south of Moudzangaie).<sup>299</sup>

Early Antalaotra inhabitants likely selected Moudzangaie not only for its plentiful forests, but also for its proximity to freshwater. Though early accounts do not mention freshwater sources, European observers in the mid-nineteenth century noted the presence of a natural spring and the construction of a fountain to channel the water. Between 1842 and 1843, Charles Guillain, an agent with the French Ministère de la Marine visited the region and observed the spring.<sup>300</sup> He noted that a natural spring was located some “200 steps” from the edge of the hilltop fort, on the northwestern side of the settlements.<sup>301</sup> Sometime in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, Moudzangaie's inhabitants sought to harness this earthly fluvial channel. They built a basin, reservoir and small edifice, perhaps from a combination of limestone, wood, and palm fronds. Much care was taken in the construction of this public fountain.

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<sup>299</sup> Pickersgill, W. Clayton. “Revision of North-West Place-Names: Some curiosities of topographical nomenclature.” *The Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine*. IX (1885): 493-4. “*Amboalambo [an early 19<sup>th</sup> century term for highlanders] he not first come here. Sakalava not first come either. We Islam first come....From Boina. Come Boina in dhow; make house; live quiet; Sakalava friend. The Sakalava king he die. All people shave heads. Sakalava devil want Islam shave beard too. That no go. Islam go abroad, sail away, come here. Nobody live, nobody at all. Plenty flower, beach full. Call him 'angaia.' Islam make town, call him 'Mij-angaia.'* Amboalambo not know how speak it, he say Mo-ja-nga.” Note that there are three competing origin stories of Mahajanga's toponym.. See Guillain 1845: 362 for an explanation of all three stories. Sibree, James, 1896. *Madagascar Before the Conquest*. (Macmillan), 134. And Taylor, Isaac. *Names and Their Histories: Alphabetically arranged as a handbook of historical geography and topographical nomenclature*. (Rivington: Percival, 1896),184. Sibree and Taylor recount a similar narrative which may well have been taken directly from Pickersgill (1885).

<sup>300</sup> The French ministere de la Marine aspired to promote French commercial interests abroad, Lee Cassanelli, “Tradition to text: writing local somali history in the travel narrative of Charles Guillain (1846–48),” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 18:1(2006); see also Michel Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens et la tentation coloniale: Les explorations africaines et le gouvernement neo-caledonien de Charles Guillain* (Paris: Harmattan, 1995).

<sup>301</sup> European travelers often recorded distances in “steps”, revealing the ways in which estimates of distance and perspective were always deeply embodied undertakings. Whether the figure of 200 hundred steps derived from Guillain's experience or was reported by an interlocutor of his, we cannot be sure. But it is worth noting that Guillain and others frequently found such quantifications of movement helpful for rendering legible to their audiences the topographic features of unfamiliar places.

The fountain seems to have been an important point of reference for the town's early inhabitants, serving as a water collection, bathing and ritual washing space. In 1837, Leigh struggled to avert his gaze when he stumbled upon a group of young, naked women bathing in the water.<sup>302</sup> Guillain not only observed this "large reservoir and fountain from which the water cascaded down...and to where the believers [i.e. muslim Antalaotra] came to cleanse themselves."<sup>303</sup> He was also cognizant of the accumulated wealth that made this enterprise possible and surprised by the engineering of the structure, noting that the inhabitants were "not completely foreign to the arts of civilization."<sup>304</sup> He poetically described the lush, verdant inside of the fountain covered with "Climbing plants or vines of which the branches, untangled and flexible, fall down with their leaves and flowers above the reservoir, and on the surface of which flowers are blooming like blue rings of nymph species."<sup>305</sup>

By the 1830s, the water source apparently nourished not only the soldiers housed at the garrison, but also the inhabitants of peripheral villages. It served as the primary source of water, as the city had no wells and only one cistern for storing water located at the military fort.<sup>306</sup> People of "different sexes, ages, and clothing" frequented the fountain, which in turn lubricated conversation, exchange of gossip, and suggestive intimations. Harnessing the earth's freshwaters enabled not only the provision of nourishment and thus the social reproduction of early Antalaotra and Sakalava dwellers, but also ensured an enduring emplacement for traders to become settlers. At the same time, water was at times scarce – or at least arduous to obtain – for

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<sup>302</sup> J.S. Leigh, *Deux voyages inédits sur Madagascar et les Comores autour de 1840: [Journaux de bord de Kite]*, John Marshall, Florence Vérine, Claude Allibert (eds) (Paris: INALCO, 1991), 27.

<sup>303</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 209.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. Guillain left meticulous documentation of the city's composition and commercial prospects in the 1830s, from which I draw extensively throughout this chapter.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 210.

ships seeking refreshment. Arriving vessels were obliged to drop anchor in the southwest of the city to find “excellent drinking water,” as the old city had brackish water.<sup>307</sup>

In sum, the landscape of northwest Madagascar was gradually shaped over time by geological forces, which whittled the coastline into a protected haven at which seafarers could take refuge. Anthropogenic transformations of the environment built on and transformed extant ecological processes, beginning with Antalaotra traders in the twelfth century. Antalaotra gradually settled on the shores of northwest Madagascar, carried across vast expanses of the Indian Ocean by monsoon winds and handcrafted dhows. They brought with them not only interests in trading and sensibilities for navigating the littoral regions, but also living, earthly things: enslaved persons from East Africa, trees, cattle, and rats. By channeling water, hewing trees, cultivating rice, and farming and livestock raising, they altered the terrain in ways that allowed for the emergence of Moudzangaie as an important trading post in the Indian Ocean basin in the eighteenth century.

### ***Shrines, Tombs and Trading Spaces***

At the time of Moudzangaie’s founding in ca. 1740s-50s, Marovoay remained the veritable political capital for the reigning Sakalava monarch and an active economic trading post.<sup>308</sup> After a series of less remarkable Sakalava royal successions in the early-mid 1700s, Queen Ravahiny (Andriamamelonarivo) ascended to the throne in the late 1770s or 1780s.<sup>309</sup> Her ascension was a critical turning point in the expansion of the Sakalava dynasty in several

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<sup>307</sup> Guillaïn, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 216.

<sup>308</sup> Vérin, *History of Civilization*: 313-315. Mauritius August Benyowski, *Memoirs and Travels* (London: Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, 1904), 566.

<sup>309</sup> Verin dates Ravahiny’s ascension to the throne at 1785 in *A History of Civilization*, 111). See Jean-Claude Hébert, “Les Français sur la cote ouest de Madagascar au temps de Ravahiny (1780-1812?),” *Omalysy Anio* 17-20(1983-84): 239-40 for discussion about other historical estimates of the dates of her reign.

ways. First, it marked a profound movement away from male rulers and towards female leaders in the Sakalava polity.<sup>310</sup> While the earliest rulers were almost all men, women came to gradually occupy these key political roles beginning in the late 1700s.<sup>311</sup> In some parts of the northwest, this shift towards women rulers was “inseparable from changes in ancestors from relics to tombs.”<sup>312</sup> In these areas, early Sakalava rulers seeking political expansion constructed *doany* (royal compound, shrine) as a way of establishing their own domains. But the increasing presence of soldiers from the highland monarchy in the nineteenth century, and later by French colonial authorities, made the governance of *doany* throughout the northwest and the possession of royal relics “increasingly untenable.”<sup>313</sup> Thus, ancestors were gradually transformed from relics, contained in royal compounds, to royal burial tombs (*mahabo*) which more easily be attended, protected and serviced by royal followers.<sup>314</sup>

In Moudzangaie and Marovoay, however, the historical trajectory of sacred spaces and reliquary objects took a different path. The significance of the relics as the central objects most embodying the ancestors persisted, supplanting burial tombs, in Moudzangaie.<sup>315</sup> Eighteenth century explorer accounts document the presence of the Sakalava *doany* (royal compound) and *mahabo* (tombs) in Marovoay, replete with ample stockage of arms and decorative objects from overseas.<sup>316</sup> It was only much later, following a forceful conflict between King Radama’s forces and diverse town inhabitants in 1824, that the Sakalava royal relics would be confiscated from Marovoay and brought to Moudzangaie. It was at this point that the hilltop *doany*, which Bachir

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<sup>310</sup> Feeley-Harnik notes how this was true not only in northwestern Madagascar, but also in highland Imerina in which Queen Ranaivalona ascended in 1828 in *A Green Estate*, 67, 79. Also, Ballarin, *Les Reliques Royales*, 43.

<sup>311</sup> Feeley-Harnik showed how this shift to female succession emerged from internal rivalries, and was accompanied by a shift from endogamous unions to exogamous unions among royal figures, in *A Green Estate*, 79-88.

<sup>312</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 69.

<sup>313</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 93.

<sup>314</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 95-100.

<sup>315</sup> Lambek draws out this contrast between the case of Analalava and Mahajanga, in *Weight of the Past*, 76.

<sup>316</sup> See account of Henrik Frappé (ca. 1715) in Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 135; Hemmy, 1907 [1741] “Voyage a la Baie de Masselage ou de Bombetoke”, CAOCM 5-6, 115-116.

had signaled to me, was consecrated in the port city. But this site would not be the last protective resting place of the relics. The physical structure of the *doany* was moved at least three times over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The relics, as signifiers of authentic royal authority, remained “the most powerful and best-known ancestral relics in the North” to present times.<sup>317</sup>

Even before the arrival of the *doany* in Moudzangaie, however, the city’s terrain was refashioned and imbued with value—sacred and otherwise— in the first decades of the town’s existence (1740s-1780s). Explorer accounts are scarce for this time period, but a few sources suggest the importance of land ownership, tombs and mosque construction, and trading pathways in everyday life.<sup>318</sup> Lt. Jacques de Lassalle visited Moudzangaie in 1789 and described it as “capital of the land of the Cyclaves [Sakalava]” inhabited by a large settlement of “Arabs who protect their trade with natives.” But strikingly, he noted that in the town “there were many people and they were *greatly attached to the ownership of their land.*”<sup>319</sup> The value of land was only matched by cattle which was their “most valuable possession.”<sup>320</sup> The strong presence of “Arabs,” did not detract from the sense that Moudzangaie was situated in “Sakalava” lands, at least from the perspectives of several explorers in the late eighteenth century. Still this early reference to the importance of property ownership is notable for its suggestion that specific ideas about land possession (possibly exclusionary, private, and linked to generational legacies) were present in the town’s earliest times.

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<sup>317</sup> Lambek, *Weight of the Past*, 81.

<sup>318</sup> Sadly, travel accounts and sketches offer very little about the organization of the town, the architectural form of the mosques and schools, and the ways people inhabited city spaces.

<sup>319</sup> Italics and translation is mine. “Ce peuple et belliqueux, fort nombreux, tient beaucoup à la propriété de son pays... Leur grande richesse est en boeufs.” Jacques de Lassalle, “Memoires sur Madagascar” (trans) Antoine Jully, *Notes, Reconnaissances et Explorations* (NRE) 3:17-18 (1898 [1797]), 578. Jully was Director of Civic Buildings in Madagascar in the 1890s, and he wrote many historical and scholarly accounts of the island.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

Trade was the lifeblood of the town. Julien-Pierre Dumaine, a French commercial agent based on the east coast, traveled to the town in 1792 and affirmed that the “Arab” presence was so strong that it would be impossible to establish a French trading post, “without provoking much jealousy among them.”<sup>321</sup> Under Ravahiny’s reign, the town would prosper and transform into a key economic site over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, rising to become what Guillain would describe as a “entrepot for African, Arabian and Indian products...a center for all the dealings between those countries and Madagascar.”<sup>322</sup> Traders based in Moudzangaie conducted an “astonishing” volume of trade with merchants from Surat (Gujerat region) and beyond, trading wood, shells, wax, and enslaved persons for cloth, silks (called *acoutis*) and merchandise from Arabia, East Africa and the Comoros.<sup>323</sup> Dumaine also noted the vibrant boat-building industry. Ship-builders constructed double-decked ships capable of carrying up to 150 barrels, as well as pirogues which were artistically hand hewn, likely of wood brought from the hinterlands. Moudzangaie was a critical depot in the Indian Ocean trading economy at this point, and the strategic value of the town did not go unnoticed by Sakalava monarchs. Some described that “Arab” traders conducted their commerce “under the submission to the laws of Queen Vahini” who “ruled very despotically.”<sup>324</sup> One form this took was that the entrance of trading ships to the port was tightly regulated, and foreign boats which stopped in Moudzangaie were required to pay

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<sup>321</sup> Dumaine, “Idée de la côte occidentale,” 25.

<sup>322</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 213, My translation. Original French “Son port et sa marine en faisaient l’entrepôt des produits de l’Afrique, de l’Arabie et de l’Inde; elle était le centre de toutes les transactions entre ces pays et Madagascar.”

<sup>323</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 33. As Ellis points out, the importance of Majunga in Arab-Antalaotra trade networks thrived from at least the late 17<sup>th</sup>, as evidenced by the reports of Sultan Hamet in 1676 and the officers of the Dutch ship Barneveld in 1719 (412).

<sup>324</sup> Antony Jully, “Mémoire sur Madagascar; manuscrit de Jacques de Lasalle” (1797), in *Notes, Reconnaissances et Explorations* (1878), 586 (italicized in original).

an anchorage tax of “10, 20 or 30 piastres” corresponding to whether the ship had one, two or three masts.<sup>325</sup>

The town was comprised of a range of groups. More than 6,000 “Arabs and Indians” inhabited the city with their families in the 1790s. Though Europeans were quick to demarcate “Arabs” as a distinctive group in the city, the composition of this group was rarely explicated in their accounts. Many accounts document the presence of “Arabs” from Yemen and Oman, but at other times it seems European observers identified Antalaotra as “Arab.” Evidence for this conflation can be found, for example, in later, early twentieth century descriptions that “Arabs, which the locals call Antalaotra...”<sup>326</sup> This persisted during the twentieth century, when ethnologists and geographers studying Madagascar generally used “Arab” to denote those traders and travelers coming from “Oman, Yemen, Persian Gulf, parts of Persia” and sometimes “Swahili and Comorian metis”, whereas “Antalaotra” was denoted for those Islamic descendants of mixed parentage: most often “Arab” fathers and mothers from parts of Madagascar.<sup>327</sup>

Persistent intermarriage between Antalaotra and various Malagasy groups, which characterized Majunga and other parts of Madagascar from its earliest times, betrayed easy categorizations. Some of the ostensibly “Arab” groups Europeans observed would have likely been Antalaotra, and contained many Sakalava women and mixed children who most often adhered to the Muslim customs associated with the “Arabs.” By the 1820s, the existence of Antalaotra as a distinctive ethno-linguistic group and their marriage practices were noted by European observers. Leguével de Lacombe, for example, described in the 1820s that “Muslim Arabs” known as “Antalotches” had long been established on various parts of the island,

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<sup>325</sup> Guillaïn, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 33.

<sup>326</sup> 1902 *Recueil Général de Jurisprudence, de Doctrine et de Législation Coloniale*, (Paris: Administration de la Tribune des Colonies et des Protectorats, 1902), 226, “Les Arabes (que les aborigènes appelèrent Antalaotra, ou hommes venus d’au delà des mers) étaient industriels et habiles dans les opérations commerciales...”

<sup>327</sup> See Grandidier, *Histoire Physique, Naturelle et Politique*, T. 1 1908:405-412; Guénier *Chemins d’Islam*: 43-4.

*“they take local women and live in the manner of Malagasy, they conserve many of the customs of their country [of origin] and especially their religious practices; they know the malagasy language, but between them they speak swahili...they don’t have mosques, but the senior among them keeps the Coran and they gather each Friday to hear a reading from the holy book...they also have schools where their children learn to read and write.”<sup>328</sup>*

In short, the historical ethnonym “Arab” is very problematic, partly because of its capacious and inconsistent use by eighteenth and nineteenth century European recorders, who used it to homogenously denote groups quite different in their cultural and geographical origins.

Within the “Indian” community were Gujarati Muslims, some of whom were Bohras. These diverse inhabitants retained some sense of their distinctiveness, which they expressed partly through spatial practices.<sup>329</sup> Different sects constructed mosques for their respective congregations.<sup>330</sup> “Houses of education,” likely *madrassa* schools, probably followed similar congregational lines.<sup>331</sup> Spatial separation was not only articulated in spaces for the living, but also for the dead. South Asians belonging to the Bohra community, constructed their own cemetery in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century or end of 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>332</sup> Burial plaques in Majunga confirm this. Vérin asserts the presence of a “great burial place” in which “Indians, Antaloatse and Arabs” were entered, but on which now stands the public high school, College Charles Renel.<sup>333</sup> Eighteenth century Islamic tombs belonging to Antalaotra and Hadramawt migrants were found in Marofoto, due east of the Bohra mosque and cemetery. As Engseng Ho eloquently illuminates,

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<sup>328</sup> Translation mine. Leguevel de Lacombe, B.F. 1840 *Voyage à Madagascar et aux îles Comores (1823 à 1830) par B.F. Leguével de Lacombe, précédé d’une notice historique et géographique sur Madagascar*, par M. Eugène de Froberville, Tome II. (Paris: L. Desessart), 57. Lacombe’s account suggests that Antalaotra either increasingly identified as a distinctive group by the early nineteenth century, or that European observers were better able to discern the different linguistic and religious practices of groups they encountered. Though spatial practices of different inhabitants in the city are not fully clear, late eighteenth Sakalava monarchical authorities were particularly astute about the political pragmatics of buildings and constructions materials.

<sup>329</sup> Dumaine, “Idée de la côte occidentale,” 27.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 316.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. Vérin does not, however, provide archaeological evidence for this statement; it’s not clear if remains have been discovered or if this is based on oral accounts.

Hadramawt inscribed gravestones served to cement the connection between person and place, “The relationship of place and named person that a grave and inscribed tombstone represent is a base or foundation on which to create potentials.”<sup>334</sup> Inscribed tombstones also allowed the living to greet dead by name, a practice the Prophet himself performed.<sup>335</sup> But they could also be dangerous places of heretic veneration of emergent saints, and as such some jurists discouraged the visitation of graves.<sup>336</sup>

“Sakalava” were present in the town, but Dumaine observed that “not a single Sakalava cohabited with the Arabs.” Rather he described Sakalava as transient, coming into town for the main purpose of purveying commodities from the hinterlands.<sup>337</sup> Vérin discovered the remains of village dwellings and a necropolis some 12 kilometers southeast of present day Mahajanga, which he surmised supports the evidence that Sakalava did not dwell permanently in the town in the late eighteenth century.<sup>338</sup> Verin takes this to mean that by the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Majunga was nearly an “exclusively Islamic town”, which was likely true.<sup>339</sup> But the diversity of Muslim communities, as indicated in the separate mosques built “by each sect” reveal the heterogeneity of communities of practice. We cannot be certain whether this expression of difference extended to domestic dwellings or public spaces in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nor can we fully discern how different groups thought about ethnic and racial differences, or differentiated themselves from one another in everyday life.<sup>340</sup> But it is

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<sup>334</sup> Engseng Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, 25.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Dumaine, “Idée de la côte occidentale,” 27-8. Grandidier emphasizes this point, that “not a single Sakalava lived in the city, which was entirely Arab” (Aucun Sakalava n’habitait cette ville, entièrement arabe...) in *Histoire physique, naturelle et politique*, 409.

<sup>338</sup> Vérin, “Les Échelles...”: 482-488.

<sup>339</sup> Vérin, “Les Échelles...”: 457.

<sup>340</sup> The limitations of nineteenth century European travel accounts, and the paucity of archaeological evidence, constrain what is knowable about the spatial practices of town inhabitants. European explorers struggled to fully grasp the complex ethnic heterogeneity of the city’s population.

apparent that town inhabitants retained some sense of their distinctive religious and cultural practices, which they expressed in the construction of mosques and tombs.

### ***Articulating Authority: Eighteenth Century Sakalava Royal Compounds***

The end of the eighteenth century was a pivotal moment in the architectural form and spatial governance of the northwest region of Madagascar. According to Guillain,<sup>341</sup> Sakalava royal leaders throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had traditionally prohibited the construction of homes in durable materials throughout the northwest region. These royal predecessors recalled the difficulty that Andriamandisoarivo encountered when he attempted - and finally succeeded- to seize the island of Boeny, under the Antalaotra King Faki. To protect their prized territory, seventeenth and eighteenth C Sakalava leaders drew upon architecture and the construction of dwellings as a key mechanism to constrain the power of Antalaotra traders, especially in the town of Moudzangaie. Guillain contended that in so doing, these royal monarchs believed they could prevent Antalaotra from “strengthening the city and escaping their [the Sakalava royalty] authority.”<sup>342</sup> These earlier Sakalava leaders acutely perceived lasting structures as potential symbols of consolidated wealth and power on the part of Antalaotra. But the suspicion of fixed, durable buildings also suggests something about the temporal frame

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<sup>341</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 34-5. Guillain’s account remains one of the most thorough historical renderings from 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century Madagascar. Charles Guillain worked as an agent with the French Ministère de la Marine, which aspired to promote French commercial interests abroad, see Cassanelli “Tradition to text” and Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens*, 1995. He undertook a mission to the west coast of Madagascar, between August 1842 and January 1843, with the expressed mission of identifying potentially lucrative resources and trading opportunities. It was during this visit that he spent time in Moudzangaie and collected the account which follows below. A close reading of his narrative shows that most of his information came from a small circle of Antalaotra elite, many of whom lived in smaller towns in the northwest region. His time in Kiakombi, on the Bay of Cagembi, was where he found himself among a “number of Antalaotra” whom he names specifically as Tsim’ba (confidante of Andriantsoly) and Faki-Abdallah. The latter took part personally in the events which followed the invasion of Hovas into Boeny, and came from one of the most important merchant families in Moudzangaie. Guillain discloses, “During my stay in the bay, I surrounded myself with these two men, and I owed to them the largest part of the documents which I received.” Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 240.

<sup>342</sup> Guillain, Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 34.

invoked by 18<sup>th</sup> C Sakalava leaders. Durable homes, mosques and shops were threatening because they signified *permanent* emplacement of outsiders, an emplacement that foreclosed the critical cycles of production, decline, ruin, and reproduction of homes which sustained and nourished Sakalava socio-political formations.

Like other African<sup>343</sup> monarchal leaders, Sakalava leaders drew on architecture to articulate and instantiate their legitimate authority. Built structures offered highly visible means through which monarchies could arrange their capital in strategic and illustrative forms. In precolonial Buganda, for example, roads leading into the kingdom were open and broad and led into the capital in a centrifugal fashion, which signified the centrality of the king's authority.<sup>344</sup> But once inside the palace, one's ability to glimpse across distances was precluded by an intricate layout of twists and turns allowing only partial views; the inner sanctum of the king's world then was protected and privileged by spatial privacy.<sup>345</sup> In the early seventeenth century Huedan capital of Savi, in southern Benin, monarchs used monumental architecture to naturalize social distinctions and to secure protection by "evoking cosmological elements."<sup>346</sup> Ditches, for example, were an important material and monumental representation of the king's authority.<sup>347</sup> Ditches and gates found nearest to palace complexes in the Kingdom of Benin between

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<sup>343</sup> In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Dahomey, see J. Cameron Monroe, "Continuity, Revolution or Evolution on the Slave Coast of West Africa? Royal Architecture and Political Order in Precolonial Dahomey" *The Journal of African History* 48:3(2007), and "Power by design Architecture and politics in precolonial Dahomey" *Journal of Social Archaeology* 10:3 (2010); On the Buganda Kingdom see Holly Hanson, "Mapping Conflict". There is another body of related research on the symbolic configuration of colonial-era and contemporary houses, which will be addressed in a later chapter, including Pierre Bourdieu, 1970, "The Berber House or the World Reversed," *Fondation maison des sciences de l'homme* 9(2): 151-170.

<sup>344</sup> Hanson, "Mapping Conflict," 191.

<sup>345</sup> Hanson also notes how queen mothers, queen sisters, and competing chiefs resided on their own hills, separated from their ruling king by rivers that "cooled" the intensity of competing authority. These forms asserted a Ganda political logic in which "multiple forms of authority should exist, they should be contiguous, but they must be distinct; and the opposition among them needed to be managed, and cooled, in "Mapping Conflict," 197.

<sup>346</sup> Neil Norman and Kenneth Kelly, "Landscape Politics: The Serpent Ditch and the Rainbow in West Africa" *American Anthropologist*, 106:1 (2004), 99.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

fourteenth and nineteenth centuries served to demarcate powerful thresholds between spiritual and natural worlds.<sup>348</sup> And in nineteenth century highland Madagascar, an enormous central pillar of wood signified King Andrianampoinimerina's sovereignty over the consolidated Merina territory.<sup>349</sup> It was not only the structures themselves that signified and proponed royal power, but also the spectacular ceremonies that took place in these built forms that enacted and enforced hierarchical political relationships.<sup>350</sup>

Critical to the maintenance of royal power across many precolonial African polities were cosmological conceptions of power as bestowed by ancestors, secured only through proper acts of reciprocity and devotion.<sup>351</sup> Acts of gift-giving and service have long been an important means through which royal followers can signal their allegiance to royal leaders and receive ancestral blessings. In eighteenth-century Buganda for example "exchanges of gifts appear to be at the heart of the formation of the ancient polity that became Buganda."<sup>352</sup> It was through tributes of banana beer and game and offerings of labor for road and fence construction that followers secured the protection and provision of land from chiefs, just as chiefs secured alliances and land from kings through their public offerings of extravagant gifts of canoes and hand-crafted luxuries.<sup>353</sup> In nineteenth century Dahomey, construction campaigns on local

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<sup>348</sup> Paula Girshik Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1995).

<sup>349</sup> Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona, "House to Palace, Village to State: Scaling up Architecture and Ideology," *American Anthropologist* 102:1(2000):106.

<sup>350</sup> Esoavelomandroso, Faranirina, "Les 14 Juillet à Antananarivo au temps de la colonisation," in G. Jacob (ed) *Ravao ny "La Bastille." Regards sur Madagascar et la Révolution Française*. Actes du colloque d'Antananarivo, 5-6 June 1989. Antananarivo, Madagascar: CNAPMAD and distributed through *Omalysy Anio*, 1990.

<sup>351</sup> In the case of Madagascar, see Bloch, *Placing the Dead*, 1971; François Raison-Jourde, *Les Souverains de Madagascar: l'histoire royale et ses résurgences contemporaines* (Paris: Karthala, 1983); Paul Ottino, "Ancient Malagasy Dynastic Succession: The Merina Example" *History in Africa* 10:247-92.

<sup>352</sup> Holly Hanson, "Mapping Conflict: Heterarchy and Accountability in the Ancient Capital of Buganda", *Journal of African History*, 50(2009), 196.

<sup>353</sup> Hanson, "Mapping Conflict," 195.

palaces required extraordinary labor investments and served to “symbolically materialize elite authority at the local level.”<sup>354</sup>

In early nineteenth century northwestern Madagascar, acts of service by royal slaves, including the construction of royal “pens” and “hedges” were important to the constitution of Sakalava political formations.<sup>355</sup> Royal compounds and burial sites were constructed, but also repaired and reworked, thus embodying a temporality which linked the living to the dead, and the past to the future. Royal tombs were, and continue to be, sites of ritual ceremonies to cleanse and honor ancestors. Since these royal structures were built of wood, they required restoration. Sakalava royal figures were obliged in colonial times, furthermore, to secure French authorization to carry out these rebuilding projects.<sup>356</sup> But by offering labor for the building of fences, royal slaves were ideologically transformed to “friends” or followers;<sup>357</sup> these practices would persist to contemporary times.

Like in these other precolonial African polities, the spatial layout of early Sakalava royal compounds were physical representations of the cosmologically-informed networks of authority made real through acts of performance and exchange. Hendrik Frappé,<sup>358</sup> a Dutch merchant aboard the *Leijdsman*, visited the Sakalava capital of Foelenak<sup>359</sup> (most likely Marovoay, if not nearby) to conduct slave-trading negotiations with King Tokaf in 1715. He described the mountain-top royal compound as constructed in a square, “fenced with poles and provided with

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<sup>354</sup> J. Cameron Monroe “Continuity, Revolution or Evolution on the Slave Coast of West Africa? Royal Architecture and Political Order in Precolonial Dahomey” *The Journal of African History* 48:3 (2007), 362.

<sup>355</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 96-7.

<sup>356</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate* 108-9.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> Frappé (ca. 1678-1747) came from Amsterdam, and he had a long career in the Dutch East Indies Company. He worked initially in Batavia, and then arrived at Cape of Good Hope in 1706, where he was assigned to the *Leijdsman* for slave-trading missions to northwest Madagascar and the Comoros Islands. After his mission to Madagascar, he returned to the Cape where he worked for the Company in various roles including a bookkeeper in the butchery and the supervisor of the Slave Lodge, Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 135.

<sup>359</sup> Foelenak was situated some eight (Dutch) miles from Fombetocke. Westra and Armstrong deduce that Foelenak was likely Marovoay, in *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 151.

four gateways, in which 18 to 19 dwellings have been built...<sup>360</sup> The square configuration likely aligned with the four cardinal points which spatially ordered socio-political hierarchies in everyday life. Poles and gates were, furthermore, important demarcations of royal spaces. Frappé noted that most of the structures were “equipped with a curious type of arms” which had been carefully maintained and denoted the long-standing trading relations Sakalava monarchs enjoyed with Europeans. Dwellings in the area were generally made of heavy, hardwood beams with bamboo walls, and thatched with “leaves of rushes.” Height of buildings was correlated to one’s social class, as Frappé noted that dwellings could reach 20-25 feet high for nobles and royalty, and 10-15 feet or less for commoners. In exchange for nine *reals*, Frappé and his crew were permitted to build small temporary structures at the seaside for conducting trade, including one building for housing the crew and merchandise, another for trading and imprisoning slaves, and the third for the crew.<sup>361</sup>

Otto Luder Hemmy, a senior merchant aboard the Dutch VOC’s slaving ship *De Brack*, visited Madagascar’s northwest almost thirty years later. He commented on the spatial layout of the Sakalava royal palace of Boina during his visit, guided by several interpreters to Marovoay in 1741. The city had grown from the time of Frappé’s visit, and now contained thousands of houses and an enormous population. In following with the utilization of built borders to delineate sacred and common spaces, a fence surrounded the town.<sup>362</sup> Upon the invitation of the King, he and his crew visited the royal palace that stood on a hilltop, described as follows, “His palace is

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<sup>360</sup> Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 130.

<sup>361</sup> Westra and Armstrong, *Slave Trade with Madagascar*, 109. After the completion of their trading mission, the Dutch crew burned all their structures. It is not clear what the purpose of this was, or whether this was of their own initiative or following a directive given by the Sakalava monarch.

<sup>362</sup> Hemmy reports that when they first arrived, they were directed to a fortified house [Casbah] where the local inhabitants came to view them. On the following day, they received many gifts from the King, including a large iron pot, a pig, 3 baskets of rice, 1 basket of salt, 1 basket of lemons, 1 honey-filled calabash, 2 chickens, one bottle of sugar can and a bit of milk; the next day he sent a cattle, and should they need something else, they were to ask without worry. Hemmy, 1907 [1741] “Voyage a la Baie de Masselage ou de Bombetoke”, CAOCM 5-6, 114-115.

larger than the governor's residence at the Cape [of Good Hope]; it is surrounded by four or five rows of concentric fences...the house of the king and those of his wives are at the center, in the interior courtyard which is surrounded by a strong fence...<sup>363</sup> Inside the palace, Hemmy glimpsed a porcelain vase filled with alcoholic spirits from Japan, over one hundred "beautiful and good quality muskets," a full chest of vases and objects of silver, and a large lacquered and gilded throne, all testimonies to the King's cosmopolitan trading and diplomatic connections.<sup>364</sup> The careful placement of the King and his wives at the center of the concentric formation served to symbolize the King's centrality in the cosmic ordering of 18<sup>th</sup> century Sakalava political and social life. And in a deliberate performance of power, Hemmy and his crew were only permitted access into the private chambers of the royal dwelling incrementally, over the span of several days.

These early portrayals of the Boina Sakalava royal compound in Marovoay reflect norms concerning the making and remaking of sacred places that have persisted in contemporary northwest Madagascar. Feeley-Harnik described the construction of "pens" and fences among Northern and Southern Bemihisatra (Sakalava) that emerged around the early nineteenth century.<sup>365</sup> Michael Lambek shows how, in the contemporary royal compound (*doany*) of Mahajanga, the (re)drawing of "successive, ever more inclusive enclosures, produces purer, more sacred, more powerful and more dangerous spaces as one moves inward."<sup>366</sup> In this case, the hardened attributes of the bones, teeth and relics stored deep inside the royal compound, were encased by increasingly hardening materials.<sup>367</sup> Taken collectively, these accounts suggest that the use of fences, enclosures and materials selected for their unyielding nature in Sakalava sacred

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<sup>363</sup> Hemmy, 1907 [1741] "Voyage a la Baie de Masselage ou de Bombetoke", CAOCM 5-6, 115-116.

<sup>364</sup> Hemmy, "Voyage a la Baie," 117.

<sup>365</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 97.

<sup>366</sup> Lambek, *Weight of the Past*, 29.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

place-making practices in northwest Madagascar have persisted across centuries. The making of sacred spaces was inherently bound up with the forging of secular spaces and the establishment of ever-oscillating spheres of political and economic authority in eighteenth century Moudzangaie.

### ***Architectural Governance and Heterarchy***

Queen Ravahiny, ascending at the height of the kingdom's power, was particularly attuned to the political possibilities and constraints of building materials. She overturned these earlier prohibitions and authorized stone constructions for Antalaotra and Karana traders.<sup>368</sup> While little trace remains about how and why Ravahiny radically departed from her predecessors, Guillain interpreted this as evidence of the significant degree of influence acquired by Antalaotra under her reign.<sup>369</sup> It was also owing to the dense kinship ties forged between Antalaotra leaders and Sakalava royal family. Namely, the Antalaotra leaders shared a formidable friendship with Ouza, the eldest son of Ravahiny, who Guillain suggested was "elevated among them in the Muslim community and to whom they were devoted". Ouza spoke and wrote Arabic, with the dialect employed by the Arab settlers established in Boeny.<sup>370</sup>

Building on a long-standing and mutually agreeable alliance between Antalaotra traders and Sakalava royalty, Ravahiny allowed the expansion of the Antalaotra and Indian material and architectural presence in the city. The longstanding prohibition on building durably, as well as Ravahiny's revocation of the prohibition might be considered a strategy of "architectural

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<sup>368</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 34.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 34-35.

governance.” Architectural, here, follows from Lefebvre’s<sup>371</sup> conception to include the material and ideological connections, aesthetic sensibilities, socio-political relationships, traditions and beliefs which constitute built creations. Since the political field of early Moudzangaie was dynamic and host to multiple ethnic groups with overlapping and allied spheres of authority, however, architectural governance was not necessarily a form of top-down state control. Nor was architectural governance intended here to suggest straightforward technologically deterministic practice, where architectural form was thought capable of embodying cosmological values, solving social problems and shaping human behavior in linear and predictable ways.<sup>372</sup>

Rather during the late eighteenth century, different political, economic and ethnic groups in Moudzangaie began to draw on building materials and built forms to enact their linkages to the past, strategize and claim their possibilities, and imagine their futures. Builders of royal Sakalava compounds (*doany*) throughout Madagascar’s northwest demarcated pure, sacred spaces from more dangerous spaces. Antalaotra town dwellers valued land, perhaps imagining how their property might pass to their progeny. Those that could manage, constructed stone homes and tombs to honor their dead elite. Muslim communities from South Asia constructed mosques, schools, and tombs to accommodate their living and dead. The mosque built by the Bohra community, for instance, was likely built in this era of newly sanctioned stone construction.<sup>373</sup> With the newfound ability to construct durable structures, the shape of the city changed quite dramatically over the course of the late 1700s and early 1800s. Notably absent from late eighteenth century explorer accounts are references to any conflicts between the city’s

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<sup>371</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Wiley, 1991); Pierre Bourdieu, “The Berber House...”; James Fernandez, “The Feeling of Architectonic Form: Residual and emergent qualities in Fang cult and culture,” *Visual Arts: Plastic and Graphic*, 1979: 103-137.

<sup>372</sup> As later imagined in the twentieth century by modernist architects like Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture; Vers Une Architecture* (Martino: New York, 2014 [1995, 1923]).

<sup>373</sup> Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 316.

different religious communities and migrant groups. Tolerant social norms, and perhaps the abundance of space and building materials, apparently allowed multiple groups to undertake construction projects, whether mosques or cemeteries. The accommodation of different groups was not only spatial, it was also reflected in forms of governance and judicial order.

Ravahiny's approach to governance departed from her predecessors by her granting of architectural liberty to inhabitants, with which they could build structures of their own visions, drawing on the widest possible array of materials at hand—stone, thatch, and wood. This expansive governance approach to building practice was mirrored in forms of judicial governance. Dumaine observed that the town was organized into three districts which were governed by three chiefs and an Antalaotra overseer, appointed by Ravahiny. These chiefs shared the management of interior affairs of the city.<sup>374</sup> Justice, moreover, was not administered uniformly but rather with a culturally inclusive approach to conflict resolution. Dumaine described how in the case that an Indian was accused of a crime, the “chiefs and principal Arabs will judge him in the presence of another Indian, constituting his defender and the ad hoc prosecutor of his compatriots...if justice is applied to a Sakalava, nothing is undertaken against him before the Queen has addressed her orders concerning the culpable subject.”<sup>375</sup> In return for the loyalty of the Indian population, at the same time, Ravahiny accommodated the involvement of Indian prosecutors. Queen Ravahiny seems to have commanded a great deal of authority, and she precariously balanced her authority with diplomatic concessions intended to secure the

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<sup>374</sup> It is not clear the extent to which the division of “three districts” was a spatial arrangement, or simply an administrative one. It is likely that ethnic groupings cohered throughout the city, but there is nothing in primary sources to suggest that ethnic ghettos were at this time deliberately organized, enforced, or administered. Ravahiny resided in Marovoay, the Sakalava capital at the time, and there is no mention of a royal dwelling in the growing city of Moudzangaie. The town of Marovoay has a fascinating history of its own, which warrants further research. The appointment of this governor seemed to follow a patriarchal lineage, in contrast to the succession of women to the Boina Sakalava throne. Hassan-ben-Youmah was the first; he was then succeeded by his son Youmah-ben-Hassan, who governed Moudzangaie when Ravahiny ascended to power. Following his death during her reign, he was replaced by his cousin Abdallah-ben-Massico Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 34.

<sup>375</sup> Dumaine, “Idée de la côte occidentale,” 28-9.

fidelity of her ethnically diverse constituency. Arabs “dreaded her authority and character, despite their sufficient force to resist her,”<sup>376</sup> because they enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in their trading activities. Dumaine reported that the “Arabs” followed a “federative treaty” which had been forged with Queen Ravahiny’s father to support the Sakalavas and their wars, after having received from a sizeable concession of land, where they were first established, and from where they came to Mouzangaye following the hostilities.”<sup>377</sup>

How might we understand the complex nature of the political configuration in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Moudzangaie? Under Ravahiny, I would suggest a political-economic heterarchy<sup>378</sup> emerged in which Antalaotra, Indians, and Sakalava groups held overlapping claims to different kinds of authority. As traders, merchants, appointed district chiefs, and Sakalava royal figures moved through the multicentric landscape, they accessed possibilities for authoritative license and latitude over political, economic and customary matters. This system was fundamentally based on rhythmic, reciprocal concessions. Just as Antalaotra and Indian traders were obliged to concede to Ravahiny’s legislative authority and customs, so too was she obliged to concede economic autonomy to the Indian and Antalaotra traders who labored under her auspices. Similarly, Ravahiny deliberately navigated the territorially-contentious relationship with King Andrianapoimerina in the highlands, and his successor King Radama, and ingratiated them to her

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<sup>376</sup> Dumaine, “Idée de la côte occidentale,” 30.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid. Dumaine adds, “if this brings some support for public security, from the despotism the queen inflicts on her people, on the other hand it contributes to diminishing the population of her country”. He also attributes the depopulation to the poor quality of drinking water in certain neighborhoods.

<sup>378</sup> See Susan McIntosh, “Pathways to Complexity: an African Perspective,” in *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ Press, 1999):11 as quoted in J. Cameron Monroe “Power and Agency in Precolonial African States,” *Ann Rev Anth*, 42 (2013):17-35) for more on precolonial heterarchy. Also see Jeffrey Fleisher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, 2010, “Authorisation and the process of power: The view from African archaeology,” *Journal of World Prehistory* 23(4):177-193; Ann Stahl, “Political economic mosaics: archaeology of the last two millennia in tropical sub-Saharan Africa,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004):145-172; Aidan Southall, “The Segmentary State in Africa and Asia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30:1(1988).

by proffering annual gifts of cattle.<sup>379</sup> They reciprocated these acts of bestowal.

Andrianapoinimerina concluded this reciprocal history with a final offering of 400 cattle for the funeral procession honoring Ravahiny.<sup>380</sup>

Gift-giving was one part of Ravahiny's strategy to maintain sovereignty over her expansive geographical territory. Ongoing negotiations over commercial rights with various European powers in the Bay of Bombetoka was yet another important way in which Ravahiny sought to lay claim to her kingdom and maximize the economic possibilities derived from Majunga's favorable maritime setting. Such negotiations were always delicate. During Dumaine's visit, he appealed to her several times to limit the British presence in the Bay. He invoked the possibility of a breakdown in the kingdom's carefully balanced political-economic heterarchy, and simultaneously asserted the importance of the French presence in this configuration (even if –or rather because- French traders fared relatively poorly during this time).<sup>381</sup>

*“I made her aware that the preference she grants our enemies does not correspond in any way with her jocular protests against the French and the government of the Ile de France. At least I was able to secure her agreement that an English trading post will no longer be permitted at the village of Mouzangaye, under the pretense that this gesture could become the trigger of a break between the Indians, Arabs, Sakalaves and French, and if that occurs, war would be declared between France and England”<sup>382</sup>.*

Du Maine went on to describe how the “maures” (from ‘moors’, muslim traders) had the habit of stopping at the English trading station, but that he negotiated with an “Arab” captain to navigate

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<sup>379</sup> Dumaine, “Idée de la côte occidentale,” 31. Benyowsky reported that upon a diplomatic visit to King Andrianampoinimerina, Ravahiny offered him three cannons, twenty guns and seven barrels of gunpowder, which he returned with 400 cattle, 500 portions of rice, and 1500 piastres in *Memoirs*, 594.

<sup>380</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 33.

<sup>381</sup> Hebert, “Les Français.”

<sup>382</sup> Dumaine, “Idée de la côte occidentale,” 34.

his ship under the French flag so that “the British flag is not the only one admired by the Queen of Mouzangaye, and they will see more of our colors.”<sup>383</sup>

This delicately balanced process of maintaining authority and order, albeit, was also conflictive. Struggles intestine to the Sakalava royal family persisted.<sup>384</sup> While in Majunga, Dumaine observed that Ravahiny was at odds with princess Volamena and her kin who resided a “little inland from the left riverbank” of the Bombetoka and were identified with the ethnonym “Antanbongoue.” Bounded together in their ancestral bestowal of authority, Ravahiny and Volamena engaged in an intense fight over a theft of cattle and slaves. Ravahiny made “hostile preparations” to take revenge for the theft, though the outcome is unclear.

Leading up to the eighteenth century, the Boina Sakalava polity gradually established a sphere of influence in the northwest region as both a geographical territory, albeit with fluctuating and blurry boundaries, and as a set of economic and political-cosmological practices. The city’s founding emerged through a series of factors: the seventeenth and eighteenth century expansion and consolidation of the Sakalava Boina kingdom, reaching a pinnacle under Ravahiny’s reign;<sup>385</sup> the displacement and subsequent coherence of Antalaotra communities in the face of mounting Sakalava repressive rule; and the topographical features of the area which offered proximity and convenience for regional and oceanic trading. The city thenceforth flourished thanks to the cultivated coexistence and heterarchy that characterized everyday life, the prime geographical location, and the abundant flow of goods through the city’s roadways and

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Dumaine “Idée de la côte occidentale, 31, as quoted in Verin 1972:144.

<sup>385</sup> Lambek describes how despite the significance of Ravahiny’s reign, her *tromba*, Ndramamelong, rarely appeared in Mahajanga the 1990s and this was also the case during my fieldwork in 2012-2014. Lambek attributes this to the “conflation of Sakalava history, the fact that female tromba are more discreet than male ones” and “that she is portrayed as so old as to be virtually immobile” as well as her internment at the distant Mahabo, in Bezavodoany, some several days journey from Mahajanga in *Weight of Past*.

waterways. Embryonic processes of ‘territorializing’ the city were apparent under Ravahiny’s rule, evidenced in the durable construction and the strategic emplacement of the doany.

But it would be following the 1824 invasion by highland King Radama’s army that different groups would battle for, appropriate and reshape specific sites in the city. Among the first initiatives undertaken by Radama’s regime in Moudzangaie was the construction of a hilltop fort on the *Saribengo*<sup>386</sup> hill, which rose about 120 meters, overlooking the city and bay. This was the same hilltop on which the aforementioned *doany* apparently stood, and it was no accident that Radama’s troops would choose the very same, symbolically loaded site on which to establish his key outpost for the northwestern region. Radama’s fort was intended not so much for militaristic, defensive purposes as a medium for communication lines between the highlands and the Boeny capital and a proclamation of Hova dominance.<sup>387</sup> The remaking of key places, like the hilltop, would be the means through which struggles for sovereignty would be enacted.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter charted the ancient geological changes and seventeenth and eighteenth century political contestations between Antalaoatra traders and Sakalava monarchical leaders, that engendered the establishment of Moudzangie in the mid-eighteenth century. Here, I probed the ways in which the diversity of built forms reflected different ideas about time, political power, and the relative value of building materials. I began to develop the theoretical concept of “architectural governance” to describe the ways degrees of durability afforded and constrained possibilities for Sakalava monarchical authorities and commoners, Antalaoatra traders, and South Asian migrants. Moving to the pivotal moment under Sakalava Queen Ravahiny when long-

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<sup>386</sup> This word “Saribengo” is perhaps an alteration of “saribongo” which would mean “an elevated picture or view”; from “sary” = picture, image, portrait; and “bongo” = a mound, elevation, Antoine Abinal and Victorin Malzac, *Dictionnaire malgache-français* (Tananarive: Impr. De la Miss. Cath, 1899) 82, 559.

<sup>387</sup> Jean-Aimé Rakotoarisoa, “Le Fort Merina de Majunga,” *Bulletin de Madagascar* 308(1971):95; see also Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 91.

standing prohibitions against building in hardened materials were revoked, this chapter considered how control of space was linked to the heterarchical governance of everyday life.

Gradually the built environment of the city came to be comprised of increasingly durable materials, moving at times from straw to mud to sheet metal and stone over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. Yet, my intention throughout is to complicate a straightforward narrative of the material transformation of the city's landscape from "soft" to "hard," or from "indigenous" to "Western" planning and building by showing the coexistence of building materials, knowledge(s) and practices. I seek to complicate scholarly formulations that straightforwardly link the hardening of cities to intensification of capitalist markets and commercial competition. Goudsblom, for example, has argued that the "stonification" of European cities in the seventeenth century came about in parallel with increased economic prosperity.<sup>388</sup> But in parts of Africa or East Asia, despite surges of capitalism or the escalation of global trading relations, cities have not necessarily followed a linear path.<sup>389</sup>

The structures built in the eighteenth century would serve as the literal and metaphorical foundation of the city's architectonic future. The city's material transformation can be likened to a process of accretion through which the material traces of the city gradually accumulate, are layered, and cohered in such a way as to constrain future material and political manipulations and recastings of the city. Like the historically emergent narrative of Shaka Zulu described by Carolyn Hamilton, the built environment of Majunga was "established over time, through processes which can be charted historically and which set limits on the extent and form of its

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<sup>388</sup> Johan Goudsblom, *Fire and Civilization* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>389</sup> There remains much work to be done to fully consider this relationship in the context of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century northwest Madagascar, and other Malagasy and African contexts. See Greg Bankoff, Uwe Lubken, and Jordan Sand, *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 2012).

manipulation in the service of politics.<sup>390</sup> The significance of planning and building practices from the earliest times into colonial moments, I contend, were shaped as much by the gradual material hardening of the town, as by the ongoing negotiations and competing interests of multiple ethno-linguistic groups, infrastructural investments, and the physical properties of building materials.<sup>391</sup> Collectively, these physical and political layers accrued over time and limited the possibilities for the (re)invention of the cityscape and the imagining of futures in profound and unanticipated ways.

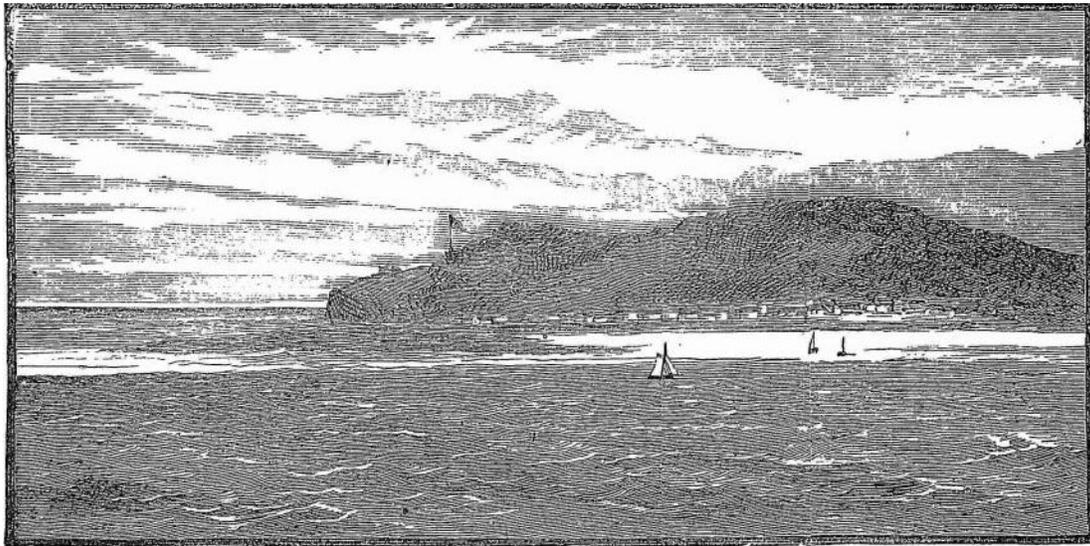
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<sup>390</sup> *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998), 26.

<sup>391</sup> Anniqwe Hommels, *Unbuilding cities: obduracy in urban socio-technical change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

### Chapter 3

#### At the Sea's Edge: Commerce and Connectivity in the Indian Ocean Basin



MOJANGA, FROM THE SEA.

Figure 12: Majunga, ca. early 1880s  
(Source: W. Pickersgill, “North-West Madagascar-Mojanga”,  
*The Evangelical Magazine and Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*. October 1882,324-5.)

After months of traversing across Madagascar, on October 24, 1889, French explorer Louis Catat and his porters arrived in Moudzangaie. There he encountered “a city completely different than all the other Malagasy cities” that he had previously seen. Most distinctive was the small “indo-arab” town, which he found a delightful variation from the “monotonous” Malagasy countryside. Nestled at the foot of the towering hill of mango trees, were of homes built in distinctive styles: *satrana* homes belonging to Sakalava and Makoa, mud dwellings, raphia and thatch huts like those from the highlands, and at the center sat Indian and Arab homes “in stone, spacious and relatively comfortable.” Yet Catat’s characterization of Moudzangaie as “different” and “unique” was only a matter of perspective. Had he traveled by sea, passing through the ports

of Mogadishu, Lamu, Mombasa, Zanzibar or Mutsamudu, he would have found Moudzangaie quite similar, even ordinary. In terms of architectural forms, Catat could have just have easily been describing any number of other Swahili port towns in the late nineteenth century.

That Moudzangaie bore striking resemblance to East African coastal cities testifies to the town's deep connections to Indian Ocean trade and migratory routes. As the monsoon winds carried people—their ideas, goods, and religious and cultural practices—from one place to the next, so too did they bring their ideas about building and inhabiting spaces. This chapter follows the channels of commerce that enabled city inhabitants the means to transform their material and spatial forms in the nineteenth century. Early trading networks served to buttress Moudzangaie ties to the global economy and here I consider the flows of certain commodities<sup>392</sup>—especially cattle—that catapulted the port town to the forefront of trading networks with American and British merchants. I argue that Moudzangaie's importance in regional and global commercial networks has largely been left in the scholarly shadows. Accounting for the critical role that Moudzangaie played, especially in the early-mid nineteenth century trade of cattle products (tallow, hides), cloth and later firearms, complicates standing scholarly narratives of Indian Ocean trading histories—dominated by slaves, spice, and ivory. Foregrounding Moudzangaie in these trading networks exposes the interdependent movements between Indian Ocean port towns and the contingent ways in which some towns, like Zanzibar or Mombasa, eventually surfaced as key outposts for American and British traders.

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<sup>392</sup> Scholars have long tracked the flows of commodities to different ends. On histories of Indian Ocean see Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987); Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Pattern of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Later Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). For studies of commodities and their flows, see Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985). On tracing the “paths of commodities” from production, distribution to consumption, and the need for analysis of the ways these paths are politically constructed, see Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Another recent contribution: John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin: UT Press, 2005).

A rich, extensive economic historiography abounds within Indian Ocean studies. Influenced by Braudel and the *longue durée*, K.N. Chaudhuri's foundational study took the Indian Ocean as an analytic site, coalesced through long-distance trade.<sup>393</sup> His work demonstrated how the increasing maritime economy interfaced with an elaborate system of caravan routes throughout the Arabian Peninsula and into Asia. A generation of Marxist-influenced scholars in the 1970s gave rise to important studies of East Africa as an important place along transoceanic trading networks. Abdul Sheriff and Edward Alpers laid much groundwork to establish the early global mercantile networks that spanned from Zanzibar, across East Africa, into South Arabia and South Asia. More recently, others have shown how Indian Ocean dhow economies were remarkably resilient to colonial pressures of modernization. And another fruitful outgrowth of this scholarship, driven by Jeremy Prestholdt and others, documents how East African *consumer* practices have markedly shaped international currents of commodity production in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Though these studies have been prolific and important, they have not attended to place-making practices in these Indian Ocean entrepôts. This study breaks out of established approach to Indian Ocean history, by rooting practices of mobility in forms of emplacement and establishment on land. It shifts away from large-scale world history studies of the Indian Ocean to focus on one particular site—Moudzangaie— within this network. It considers how dwellers in eighteenth century Moudzangaie experienced the Indian Ocean, and what their connections with vibrant economic networks enabled them to build and construct in situ. As forms of wealth and goods increasingly circulated through Moudzangaie, some traders amassed the capital to build double-story homes in the early nineteenth century. Although Antalaotra and other

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<sup>393</sup> Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, 2.

seafaring groups built stone structures—homes, tombs and mosques—in northwest Madagascar from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, they dissipated or were abandoned over time.<sup>394</sup> It was only in the 1820s that stone edifices were built with intensity in Moudzangaie, giving rise to a stone town that is still evident today.

Like their counterparts along the East African coast, they constructed homes from gleaming limestone, rock, and crushed shells. These architectural sites, and archaeological ruins, have been at the heart of debates among historians of East Africa about “origins.” Historians have debunked arguments that migrants from South Arabia and South Asia were responsible for the remarkable coastal architecture using coral rag, and for the formation of the language now known as Swahili.<sup>395</sup> They demonstrated that such arguments implicitly assumed that Africans were not capable of independently fashioning complex languages or engineering feats. Such arguments were part of a larger set of assertions that were historically taken as evidence of African inferiority and used as justifications for colonial conquest. Instead, scholars argued that Swahili towns cannot be understood exclusively as external transplants or purely local outgrowths, but rather as “dynamic cultural and commercial entrepôts in an Indian Ocean stretching from East Africa to Malaya.”<sup>396</sup> But, as Pier Larson has shown more recently for Malagasy speakers in the Indian Ocean, diasporic peoples often retain and enrich their cultural practices, even in the face of great political and social change.<sup>397</sup> Thus, this chapters probes, how did elites draw on built forms and objects to differentiate themselves and to articulate connections with places beyond the city? It builds on a small, but growing body of scholarship

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<sup>394</sup> Radimilahy, *Mahilaka*; Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 167-170.

<sup>395</sup> Spear, Thomas and Derek Nurse. *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500* (Philadelphia: Univ Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

<sup>396</sup> Thomas Spear, “Early Swahili History Reconsidered”, *The International Journal of African History* 33:2(2000), 281.

<sup>397</sup> Pier Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

that brings together insights from rich historiographies of trade, commerce and consumption in the Indian Ocean on the one hand, with those of material culture and architectural history approaches.<sup>398</sup>

### ***The Bullock: Skins, Tallow, and American-Moudzangaie Trading Ties***

In the span of 75 years or so, the burgeoning city of Moudzangaie congealed as an oceanic crossroads. It was emplaced on an Indian Ocean littoral deeply engaged in multiple networks of trade, migration and information across the Indian Ocean.<sup>399</sup> While a commerce in slaves dominated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cattle trade came to the forefront in the nineteenth century. Ample pasture lands on the western plains outside of Moudzangaie that engendered, beginning in the 1810s, the important commerce of things manufactured from cattle: tallow, hides, and jerky. Commodification was uneven. Those with access to livestock – usually men - benefitted most from the intensification of trade. Sakalava men owned and raised the cattle in the hinterlands, then brought them to town for sale, slaughter and processing.<sup>400</sup> Antalaotra and South Asian<sup>401</sup> traders were most frequently the middlemen, buying and later trading cattle with Americans and Europeans.

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<sup>398</sup> Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016).

<sup>399</sup> Kerry Ward, “Tavern of the seas? The cape of good hope as an oceanic crossroads in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c”, in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures and Transoceanic Exchanges*, (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2007), 146-7.

<sup>400</sup> Several accounts indicate that Sakalava rarely dwelled in town, but rather came only to sell and trade and then returned to peripheral or rural homesteads.

<sup>401</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> century European accounts of the city typically refer to all those of South Asian descent as “Indians” and “Banians”, or “karana.” South Asian migration from Kathiawar peninsula and the Gujerati district to Madagascar emanated from centuries long Indian Ocean trading activity. From the mid-1800s South Asian petty merchants and traders settled more permanently in Moudzangaie, and established strong commercial enterprises and networks in the city from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. See Sophie Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, for a detailed historical-anthropological study of “karana”, the very heterogeneous groups of Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims who settled in Mahajanga.

The significance of Moudzangaie in global trading networks matters on several levels. Within the environmental account of Moudzangaie's early days, the movement of cattle, rice, and guns demonstrates similarities with other nineteenth century trading posts across the world. The growing city, its resource-abundant hinterlands and the littoral zone were connected in a dense constellation of exchange and movement. Trading activity around cattle products intensified with the marginalization of other goods. And though less is known about the ways wealth traveled within families in Moudzangaie during the nineteenth century, we do know that Sakalava and Antalaotra men – either as cattle herders, sellers or traders - maintained a tight hold on access to these key commodities. It was the grasslands, furthermore, that allowed Sakalava herders to raise cattle and the pathways and riverways leading to the city that transported the beasts. Without the hinterlands, and their abundance of grassland, Moudzangaie would not have become a central trading depot. The flow of capital, in turn, led to the population and spatial growth of the town.

Moudzangaie's history adds an important layer to studies of the Indian Ocean that have documented how Zanzibar became the focal point of commercial networks in the western Indian Ocean.<sup>402</sup> Historians in the 1980s, working within a Marxist framework, argued that Zanzibar and the East African coast became gradually subordinated as a peripheral, 'comprador' site of production and exploitation to the dominant powers in Europe in the nineteenth century.<sup>403</sup> Some scholars subsequently sought to revise this narrative, emphasizing instead that Zanzibar's regional Indian Ocean trading relationships were not only longstanding, but intensified under Omani and British imperialism.<sup>404</sup> Others shifted the scholarly gaze entirely away from

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<sup>402</sup> Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spice and Ivory*.

<sup>403</sup> Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Sheriff *Slaves, Spice and Ivory*.

<sup>404</sup> Gilbert, *Dhows and Colonial Economy*.

resistance to Omani dominance, by documenting the nuances of urban life, shaped by political negotiations between plebian and patricians in nineteenth century Zanzibar and its hinterlands.<sup>405</sup>

Most recently Prestholdt has convincingly argued that consumerist patterns in Zanzibar, as well as Mombasa, help to counter teleological narratives of Euro-American economic encroachment and domination.<sup>406</sup> Collectively, these works have powerfully ‘provincialized Europe’ in the Indian Ocean, showing how regional and class relationships have unfolded through contestation and contingency. But the role of other key portals in the Indian Ocean economies, particularly those of Madagascar and Comores, have been left in the shadows, with some exceptions.<sup>407</sup>

In offering up a portrait of nineteenth century Moudzangaie, I seek to provide a textured, more nuanced account of the complex, multi-sited traversals that constituted trading networks in the Indian Ocean basin. It was the intersections between capital, climate and topography, and meaning-making (all very much contingent on happenstance, human intervention and the environmental conditions at hand) that enabled Moudzangaie to congeal into a key mercantile settlement that drew traders from far and near. Moudzangaie appears to have been among the most important depots in nineteenth century Indian Ocean trading networks. Its prominence, in fact, preceded Zanzibar chronologically and in trading activity with Americans.<sup>408</sup> One nineteenth century source goes so far to attest that the trade with Zanzibar “was an extension of

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<sup>405</sup> Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*.

<sup>406</sup> Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, 60-61.

<sup>407</sup> Sophie Blanchy, *Maisons des femmes, cités des hommes: Filiation, Âge et Pouvoir à Ngazidja (Comores)* (Nanterre: Société d’ethnologie, 2010); Domonique Bois, “Tamatave, la cité des femmes,” *CLIO: Histoire, femmes et société* 6, numero spéciale: Femmes d’Afrique, (1997):61-86; Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750 – 1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 2004; Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*; Pier Larson, *Ocean of Letters*; Jean Martin, *Comores: quatre îles entre pirates et planteurs*, Tome 1 and Tome 2 (Paris: Harmattan, 1983); Micheline Rasoamiaramanana, “Aspects Economiques et Sociaux de la Vie a Moudzangaie entre 1862 et 1881” (PhD diss, Université de Madagascar, 1983).

<sup>408</sup> “At the time of the opening of trade with Madagascar Zanzibar was a small settlement, and no trade was carried on there, gum-copal, the principal staple being carried to Indian by the Sultan’s vessels, to be cleaned.” Duane Hamilton Hurd, *A History of Essex County Massachusetts with Biographical Sketches of the many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men, Vol 1*. (J.W. Lewis and Co., Philadelphia, 1887), 84.

the Madagascar trade.”<sup>409</sup> While Americans seem to have established a trading counter in Moudzangaie in 1830,<sup>410</sup> they only shifted their operations to Zanzibar in 1837.<sup>411</sup>

American traders were central to the early nineteenth century trading climate of Moudzangaie, hungry as they were for fat, skins, and dried flesh of cattle that were readily available from herders and traders on the northwestern shores of Madagascar.<sup>412</sup> Tallow, the rendered and purified fat of the animal, was among the most valuable cattle-derived products exchanged in these transactions. Nathaniel L. Rogers and Brothers, of Salem, Massachusetts, was perhaps the first company to forge commercial ties with Madagascar in the late 1810s. Their vessel, *Beulah*, traveled from “Mocha” (Mukha, Yemen) to Madagascar where they purchased a “small quantity of tallow.” Increasing American demand for tallow drew ships back to Moudzangaie. Once purified, tallow was an effective lubricant for machinery, as well as critical ingredient for candle and soap production. By 1821, *Thetis* (also owned by Rogers and Brothers) arrived in Salem in with 215,519 pounds of tallow from Madagascar.<sup>413</sup> Just as gum copal from East Africa was an essential commodity for New England’s burgeoning industries so was tallow critical to textile and furniture industries.<sup>414</sup> It is possible that American merchants

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Grandidier, *Histoire physique, naturelle et politique*, 614.

<sup>411</sup> This is when the first U.S. Consul, Richard Waters, was appointed in Zanzibar. Norman Bennett and George Brooks, eds, *New England Merchants in Africa: A History Through Documents 1802 to 1865*, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), xxvii.

<sup>412</sup> In the 1820s, the voyage from Salem to Moudzangaie took about 99 days. “The log of the brig Virginia, 1828” in Norman Bennett and George Brooks (eds), *New England Merchants in Africa: A History Through Documents, 1802-1865* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 151. See also Jean Valette, “Les Relations Americano-Malgaches aux XVIII et XIX Siecles,” *Bulletin de Madagascar*, 1970, 20:965-983.

<sup>413</sup> Hurd, *A History of Essex*, 84.

<sup>414</sup> Prestholdt *Domesticating the World*, 73.

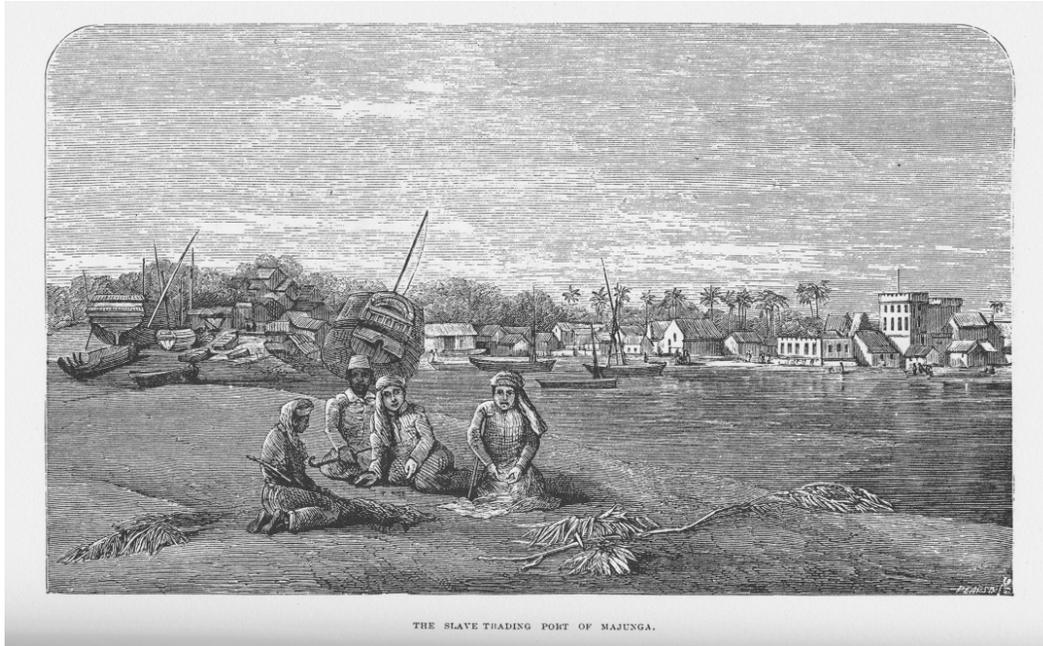


Figure 13: Majunga, 1869  
 (Source: Colomb, *Slave-Catching in the Indian Ocean: A Record of Naval Experiences*,  
 (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1873))

preferred the tallow from Madagascar to the “inferior” American tallow that was often considered overly soft and oily.<sup>415</sup>

Although shells, sandalwood, and rice were among the commodities desired by Americans in the port city, it was cattle products that most interested them. Beef jerky and hides were widely popular with American traders. Americans established a trading counter in Moudzangaie, where they “salted and dried the beef meat and the skins, and wrapped the fat in other skins; they also bought foodstuffs [cattle derived] that locals had prepared, and...thus carried 3 to 4,000 head of cattle per cargo load, because they did not take the bones.”<sup>416</sup> One British sailor observed that while the slave trade was the prime economic activity at the city’s

<sup>415</sup> Peter Bancroft, “New Process of Refining and Purifying Animal and Vegetable Oils and Grease” *American Journal of Pharmacy* (1835-1907), 12:4 (Jan 1847): 297-8.

<sup>416</sup> James Hastie and Jean Valette, “Journal de M. Hastie, Partie II: du 26 Mai 1824 au 2 Novembre 1824,” *Bulletin de l’Académie Malgache*, 4 (1918-1919): 186. Charles Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire, la géographie et le commerce de l’Afrique orientale de Madagascar*, (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1845), 217; P. Vaissiere, *Vingt ans à Madagascar, Colonisation, Traditions Historique, Moeurs et Croyances* (Paris, 1885), 22. See also Campbell, *An Economic History*, who contends that the industry for raw and salted hides for export surged after the “Merina”

founding (see Figure 13), the mainstay of the 1820s was “the extensive traffic in bullocks which they are now engaged in with the Americans, who jerk the beef, preserve the tallow and cure the hides on the spot.”<sup>417</sup> One American ship captain described Moudzangaie in 1840 as, “a beautiful bay being easy of access and egress. There is plenty of Bullocks, of the Buffalo kind, of a superior quality. Their meet [sic] is delicious and they are sold reasonably.”<sup>418</sup> So dear was cattle to the economic life of the city that butchered slabs and scraps of meat were omnipresent in its urban space. James Hastie, a British envoy who visited the town with King Radama of Imerina in 1824, described the repugnant pervasiveness of offal. “The city of Moudzangaie is quite unhealthy and dirty” he remarked, “due to the animal entrails which [once tossed at sea] are brought back by the tide and deposited near the doors of houses.”<sup>419</sup>

Cattle were not only a key source of revenue for the town. They were also important sources of leisure and entertainment. Leigh described a bullfight of 1837 in which the cattle herds were gathered into a pen, and when the bull entered the arena, “some mixed together and others stayed away while the bull circled. At last, one of the majestic beasts discerned an

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military expansion of 1824 (186). The demand, however, seems to have intensified even before the occupation by Radama’s troops.

<sup>417</sup> W. Owen. *Narrative of voyages to explore the shores of Africa, Arabia, and Madagascar*, 2 vol. (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), 101. Note that the slave trade may have persisted into this time, but was less visible to traders. Colomb described that when the British vessel *Nymphe* left Moudzangaie in 1869, the crew encountered a canoe with several men who reported two dhows “landed a large cargo of slaves only a few days before” in Moudzangaie. The *Nymphe*’s captain confronted the “Hova” Governor of Moudzangaie who “dubiously” claimed he had already observed two suspicious “Arab dhows with 194 Mozambicans” and that they had been seized and detained in the prison at Moudzangaie. Colomb, *Slave-Catching in the Indian Ocean: A Record of Naval Experiences*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1873), 318-319. J. Elton in 1857, however, surmised that “no slave dhows are ever now run to Moudzangaie.” James Frederic Elton, [ed H.B. Cotterill], *Travels and Researches among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa, from the journals of J. Frederic Elton*, (London: Cass, 1968), 161.

<sup>418</sup> “The log of the Bark *Palestine*”, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 188. The log also noted that “poultry was abundant and vegetation is scarce. There is plenty of wood on the opposite side of the Bay. In short it is a very good place for ships.” Another account, however, disagreed about the overall quality of Moudzangaie, but conceded that the beef “is very good.” See fn 3, 188.

<sup>419</sup> James Hastie and Jean Valette, “Le journal d’Hastie du 14 novembre 1824 au 7 mai 1825.”

adversary before him and drove a horn into the flank of the bull...this is the famous bullfight.”<sup>420</sup>

Cattle were also key figures in the annual festivities of the *fandroana* (the ritual bathing of royal Sakalava relics), for which Sakalava commoners from across the northwest region gathered in Moudzangaie. Celebrants would initiate a “kind of preparatory game which consisted of teasing and exciting the animal, in the fashion of toreadors,” after which they slaughtered the beast.<sup>421</sup>

American buyers accumulated cattle skins and dried jerky, but they were also key suppliers of wanted goods to the consumer market of Moudzangaie. Guillain perceived that Americans prevented anyone else from trading, by keeping a monopolistic trading post in Moudzangaie since at least the 1830s; in these years, six or seven American ships would stop annually en route to Zanzibar.<sup>422</sup> The American trading agents in Moudzangaie were of the same company as those in Zanzibar, namely Salemites, and the movement of ships was deliberately coordinated to link the operations of these two trading houses.<sup>423</sup> Fulfilling the demands of purchasers in Moudzangaie for cloth provided American suppliers with enough revenue to obtain large quantities of ivory and copal resin in Zanzibar.<sup>424</sup> Like their Zanzibari neighbors, Moudzangaians demanded up to 250 bails of printed *hami* cloth, and up to 30 crates of other textiles, annually.<sup>425</sup> The people of Moudzangaie, along with Bombay clients, were one of the largest consumers of American biscuits and “comestibles.”<sup>426</sup> Other items in great demand included umbrellas, cutlery, tools, pottery, clothing, writing paper, wallpaper and firearms.<sup>427</sup> The latter were particularly important. The *Thetis* captain William Bates, returned several times

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<sup>420</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 19.

<sup>421</sup> Nèple, *Guide de l'immigrant à Madagascar*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1899), 340-341. This description comes from a much later source, but Leigh alludes to similar practices in the 1830s.

<sup>422</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*.

<sup>423</sup> Hurd, *A History of Essex*, 87.

<sup>424</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>425</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 217.

<sup>426</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>427</sup> *ibid.*

to Moudzangaie between 1823 and 1825, laden with guns. During one of those visits, Captain Bates easily fulfilled Radama I's request for 200 firearms of the mark Y.A.W.R., which he traded for two bulls per musket.<sup>428</sup>

Americans were not the only trading partners of Antalaotra and South Asian agents in the early and mid nineteenth century. Ships from Surat, Kutch and Diu of Gujerat arrived annually in Moudzangaie. They brought South Asian clothing and textiles, and occasionally silver. Trade with "Arabs" in beeswax, rice and gums was also ongoing, though "of secondary importance" to American trade.<sup>429</sup> British vessels, by way of Mauritius, also came prior to the 1820s to purchase and "prepare salted meats" until strict imposition of steep taxes under Radama made this endeavor too costly.<sup>430</sup> A British trading company attempted to establish a post in Moudzangaie in 1836, only to fail in 1840 because of fierce competition with American traders.<sup>431</sup> In 1824, all ships were subject to an anchor tax of \$70, but those dealing in dried beef paid more. They were required to deliver two hundred heads to the chief at a price of five dollars each, fifty to Hussein (a local administrator) and the same quantity to the harbormaster at a price of four dollars each.<sup>432</sup> Despite these duties, the trade remained lucrative since American buyers rarely paid more than two dollars per head of cattle; this, according to Guillain, allowed American merchants to "build the necessary warehouses and start their operations."<sup>433</sup>

Some historians have confirmed this. Campbell contended that following Radama's invasion and Ramanetaka's fire of 1825, Antalaotra and Indian shopkeepers fled, creating an

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<sup>428</sup> In this exchange, Bates also sold to Radama an 'escopette' (musket) and a heavy flintlock musket at the price of \$120 dollars. Hastie and Valette, "Le Journal d'Hastie," 192.

<sup>429</sup> Owen, *Narrative of voyages*, 101.

<sup>430</sup> Leigh mentions that salt was fabricated on the nearby "plains which are covered by the sea in the springtime." Leigh and Allibert "Le Journal de J.S. Leigh," 64; Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 218.

<sup>431</sup> Alfred Grandidier, *Histoire physique, naturelle, et politique de Madagascar*, vol. 4, (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1885), 604.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

economic vacuum that Americans eagerly filled (2004:170). Moudzangaie, he argued, offered American traders a key entrepot between 1824 and 1833, but the gradual return of “Indian and Swahili” traders prompted Americans to shift their base to Zanzibar (ibid). Despite this move, 82% of the U.S. vessels that sailed to Zanzibar from Madagascar between 1832 – 1844 came from Moudzangaie.<sup>434</sup> Campbell’s assessment perhaps exaggerates the consequential significance of Radama’s occupation, since a good number of America ships stopped by Moudzangaie before 1824, and Antalaotra and South Asian merchants remained in Moudzangaie afterwards. At any rate, Moudzangaie continued to attract American traders through the mid-1840s.<sup>435</sup> Moudzangaies, through their demands for particular guns, cloth, and comestibles, in turn influenced the production of commodities and composition of ship cargoes coming from Salem and beyond.<sup>436</sup>

This section has addressed the ways in which the environmental conditions of the northwest region, coupled with intensifying regional and global trade, shaped the possibilities for Moudzangaie to become “urban.” The founding and growth of the city hinged on the symbiotic relationship it developed with its hinterlands. Ample pasture enabled a trade in cattle—the town’s seminal economic activity— while an exterior demand for cattle products refashioned rural hinterlands. Moudzangaie’s importance in early-mid nineteenth century trading networks suggests we reshuffle our understanding of ports in the southwest Indian Ocean. Moudzangaie was initially a primary site for American traders, due to the exodus of South Asian and

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> This was due to a ban imposed by Radama I’s government on British, French and American trade at ports. At this point, American and European traders transferred their Malagasy base to Nossi-Be. Campbell’s broader argument here is that the kingdom of highland Madagascar rose to become an island empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that state-run efforts at autarky failed, and the centralized economy collapsed over time. Note that while the text offers many valuable economic insights, it fails to draw on the archives of the highland monarchy itself. A forthcoming text from Pier Larson will provide a comprehensive history of the kingdom, working directly from the monarchy’s records.

<sup>436</sup> Cyrus Brady, *Commerce and conquest in East Africa, with particular reference to the Salem trade with Zanzibar* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1950); Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*, 72-3.

Antalaoatra traders after 1825. It was only with the gradual return of these merchants that Americans and British shifted their operations to Zanzibar. Like their Zanzibari counterparts, Moudzangaïans continued to shape global demand for cloth, firearms, and comestibles through their tastes and preference.

### ***Moudzangaïe's Social Geography: "The Lower Town"***

Moudzangaïe's lower town was an ethnically and architecturally mixed neighborhood, with houses of various materials and people of mixed parentage. European observers found these encounters entirely confusing, even if they had already visited other Indian Ocean port towns.<sup>437</sup> Moudzangaïe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a pluralistic encampment of diverse linguistic and ethnic groups: Antalaoatra, Sakalava, Makoa, South Asian immigrants, Comorians and Malagasy inhabitants. Most all of these groups could be found at the lower town, where people gathered when ships arrived.<sup>438</sup> Estimates of the town's population in the early to mid nineteenth century were around 8,000. But by 1875, census records showed 1,327 homes, and an overall population of 10,000. Within this population one missionary described that the presence of highlanders was "very strong," with 50 "Indians", a few Sakalavas, and "very numerous" African slaves called "Mojambikas."<sup>439</sup> Others described the town as composed of "descendants of Islamite wanderers," Sakalava who still regarded the town as "their head-quarters," thousands of "lately freed Africans, mostly belonging to the Makua tribe,"<sup>440</sup> and a "whole bazaar of muslin-robbed

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<sup>437</sup> Europeans made sense of their 19<sup>th</sup> century encounters in Zanzibar in similar terms, William Cunningham Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos and Colonial Power in Zanzibar*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2011), 22-5.

<sup>438</sup> Leopold von Jedina, *Voyage de La Frégate Autrichienne Helgoland Autour de l'Afrique ... Traduction de ... Vallée. Ouvrage Illustré, Etc.* (Paris, Corbeil, 1878).

<sup>439</sup> Joseph Mullens, *Twelve Months in Madagascar*, (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1875), 314-5. Mozambikas are "Makoa."

<sup>440</sup> Pickersgill also noted that the Makoa reveled in the "tomtom" (or tam tam). *Ten Years Review of Mission Work in Madagascar, 1870-1880*, (Antananarivo: LMS Press, 1880), 99.

Hindi traders...from Kutch and Bombay.” Of the latter, the governor of Moudzangaie tried to ascertain the nationality, but “they proved to be much too cosmopolitan to be satisfactorily classified; for there were not only Malagasy, English, and French Hindis, but also Hindis of the United States of America.”

As commerce intensified in the early nineteenth century, traders constructed new buildings—notably of stone—in which they conducted their trade. John Studdy Leigh, a young agent of the London merchant firm Newman, Hunt and Christopher, traveled across the Indian Ocean and visited Moudzangaie several times between 1836 and 1840.<sup>441</sup> On his first disembarkation in August 1836, just a decade after the invasion of Radama’s troops, Leigh immediately encountered on the shore “a beautiful edifice” which was the office of the trading company. Alfane ben Ali, a local inhabitant, served as the manager for Newman and Company.<sup>442</sup> The building was constructed of stone and “sumptuously crowned with a reed covering.”<sup>443</sup> Nestled around this structure were some 100-200 huts “all constructed of palm leaves, but seemingly clean.”<sup>444</sup> The seaside “lower” town was a decidedly heterogeneous blend of housing, ranging from coral rag “stone” houses to homes constructed of vegetative materials. The rich abundance of coconut leaves and grass found in the countryside furnished inhabitants with materials to construct their homes.<sup>445</sup>

Traders with the wealth to do so commissioned rocks which came from the quarries and “neighboring mountains” to construct homes of stone. In the 1820s, about 100 homes and two mosques, of around 800 total homes, were built in stone, while the others were “Malagasy

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<sup>441</sup> John Studdy Leigh and James Kirkman, 1980. “The Zanzibar Diary of John Studdy Leigh, Part I”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13(2), 283-284.

<sup>442</sup> Leigh only mentions this manager on a later visit in 1839, *Deux Voyages*, 57.

<sup>443</sup> Leigh, J.S., and J. Marshall, Claude Allibert and Florence Verin (eds), *Deux Voyages inédits sur Madagascar et les Comores autour 1840*, (Paris: INALCO, 1991), 15.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> Guillaïn, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 95.

cabins.”<sup>446</sup> At least one of these stone homes was inhabited by Mr. Marks, a well-known and well-connected American merchant who resided in a two-story house, plastered with “chanum.”<sup>447</sup> Some of the surrounding one-story dwellings were constructed of yellow mud, with slanted, thatch roofs composed of straw and cocoa leaves, others without mud.<sup>448</sup> Moudzangaie bore much resemblance to nineteenth century Zanzibar, in which the homes of wealthy and poor were nestled closely together, stone houses and straw and mud huts were intermixed.<sup>449</sup> Yet the highly flammable construction of many homes in the lower town also rendered it vulnerable to fire, which could quickly overtake the whole quarter. Fires were rampant and frequent in the early 1800s. And at times these incendiaries had political and social dimensions that reflected broader contestations over power.

Over the course of the early nineteenth century, the political and economic relationship between British officials and highland monarch King Radama intensified. British authorities worried about the expansive French and Omani influence in the Indian Ocean and sought to strengthen their regional hold through their ties to Madagascar. By 1817, the British offered their support to Radama to submit the entire island to his control, in exchange for Radama’s agreement to abolish the slave trade.<sup>450</sup> One British official urged Radama to conquer the town of “Mazungay” specifically in order to eliminate the “nest of slave dealers” comprised of “Arabs, Moors and Indians.”<sup>451</sup> Emboldened by British backing, Radama ordered his Hova troops to invade the southerly Menabe Sakalava kingdom and established various garrisons in 1808-1809,

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<sup>446</sup> Historians have cast doubt on the veracity of Leguevel de Lacombe’s account (1840:76), however, and many conclude that he gathered accounts second-hand from observers. See Verin, “Les Échelles,” 458-9.

<sup>447</sup> Joseph Osgood, *Notes of Travel: Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscat, Aden, Mocha and Other Eastern Ports* (Salem: Creamer, 1854). Chanum is lime plaster, composed of sand, water and lime.

<sup>448</sup> Nathaniel Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa: Descriptive of the Zoolus, Their Manners, Customs, Etc.* (Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa: E. Churton, 1836), 360-1.

<sup>449</sup> Sheriff, 2002, in Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos*, 30.

<sup>450</sup> Jane Hooper, “An Empire in the Indian Ocean: the Sakalava Empire of Madagascar” (PhD diss, Emory, 2010), 224.

<sup>451</sup> Hooper, “Pirates and Kings” 236.

1820, 1823.<sup>452</sup> The Menabe Kingdom splintered under the external force of Radama's military incursions and internal struggles for succession, though Radama never firmly controlled the territory.<sup>453</sup> After calculating his strategic mission to overtake the Boina region, Radama departed in spring of 1824 and arrived first in Belengo. He was preceded by James Hastie, who served as an envoy conveying Radama's wishes for a peaceful occupation.

Once settled in Majunga, Hastie remained for some weeks negotiating diplomatic and economic agreements with the city's leaders. But on the evening of July 6<sup>th</sup>, the city was shaken. A fire had ignited, and spread rapidly by fierce winds through the 'lower town' neighborhood situated just on the coast. An estimated one-third of the homes, as well as large quantities of wood for the building of the port, were destroyed. "The inhabitants" he wrote "declared that accidents of this nature are rather frequent and that the damage which results is generally repaired in thirty to forty days." That fires were a frequent occurrence in 19<sup>th</sup> century Moudzangaie can be attributed at least partly to its material composition. Roof materials in Moudzangaie, palm and coconut leaves—were especially prone to ignition. And the months of June, July and August were the driest months of the year, transforming the vegetal roofs into ready kindling. Although we learn little about how the fire began, Hastie indicates that after the fire's immediate ignition, Radama's army offered assistance to the town's inhabitants who eagerly accepted aid. The military troops "rapidly transported the roofs of certain houses into the sea, in order to produce a void 50 steps wide; the course of flames was stopped without any

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<sup>452</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 88; Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 54-67: See also Raharijaona and Valette 1959, as quoted in Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 88.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid. But the northern Boina kingdom remained in Sakalava hands until the Hova invasion in May of 1824. Towards the end of 1822, Andriantsoly received two British ships from Mauritius, under Commodore Nourse who during the course of his visit made it known that the governor of Mauritius desired to maintain peaceful relations with Radama. Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 70.

serious accidents.”<sup>454</sup> And thanks to the city’s ecological offerings, homes were quickly rebuilt from palm and coconut leaves. But what this moment revealed was the flammability of homes offered an opening in which Radama troops could ingratiate themselves to a hostile urban population.

### ***Performing Authority and Extinguishing Opposition***

Like Sakalava monarch Ravahiny, King Radama envisioned buildings as instructive mechanisms through which he could shape his growing polity. He expected that by constructing buildings and forts and transplanting thousands of individuals, soldiers, and middle-class administrators from the highlands to his newfound territory, he would create “model colonies.” These model colonies would hopefully “attract indigènes, habituate them little by little to live peacefully among hovas...and to know...the advantages of a more social and civilized state than their own.”<sup>455</sup> To establish the dominance of this new regime, Radama’s troops constructed the fort at hill (site of the *doany*, mentioned in Chapter 2). They built an assemblage of houses from leaves and straw, in the customary fashion found in the countryside, but only one stone house.<sup>456</sup> The house was designated for the governor, and its construction had been entrusted to Antalaoatra masons.<sup>457</sup> It had the circumference of around “demi-mille” and was protected by a wall of bamboo trees, in which two openings served as the entrances. The first opening was in the southerly direction of Moudzangaie, and the other in the northerly direction.<sup>458</sup> In a figurative

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<sup>454</sup> Hastie and Valette, “Journal de M. Hastie” 192. [my translation]

<sup>455</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 91.

<sup>456</sup> Rakotoarisoa, “The Fort Merina,” 97.

<sup>457</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 95, 208. This is a rare historical reference to the ethnicity of the builders of these stone houses. It is hard to say if Antalaoatra typically worked as masons, or if this was exceptional.

<sup>458</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*, 95-6.

arrangement, three large guns, one of which was mounted, were placed at the opening facing Moudzangaie.

Radama installed his cousin Ramanetaka in this encampment to serve as provincial governor for the Boeny region. The latter settled in his newfound role and took possession of the enslaved people previously belonging to the deceased governor Houssein. These enslaved individuals however, became important actors in a critical turning point early on in the Hova occupation of Moudzangaie. In January, six months after the installation of the Ramanetaka, they objected to their new arrangement and complained bitterly of the treatment they endured under their new master. That month, thirty of the slaves revolted, escaped and established themselves with Andriantsoly in his residence at Anfiaounah.<sup>459</sup> This led to a fierce and mounting disputation between Andriantsoly and Ramanetaka over the ownership of the slaves, and the purported customary laws dictating the norms for inheriting the slaves.<sup>460</sup> The discord culminated with Ramanetaka taking the slaves from Andriantsoly by force.<sup>461</sup> Andriantsoly and his two key confidants, Mari-ben-Roussi and Raivala, then decided to retaliate with an armed attack on the Hova fort at Moudzangaie. Andriantsoly and his supporters made a wide appeal to Sakalava in the region to rise up, travel by foot and descend upon Moudzangaie to fight Ramanetaka. After Ramanetaka was surreptitiously informed of the impending attack, he began hurriedly working to shore up the fort by building additional supports on the fence and situating an artillery piece at each opening. Since the highland population of 500-600 men within the fort

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<sup>459</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 94.

<sup>460</sup> Andriantsoly justified his ownership over the slaves by invoking Sakalava custom that at the death of the reigning governor, the slaves reverted to the successor king. He added that they came to him of their own volition, and that he intended to keep them permanently.

<sup>461</sup> Ramanetaka apparently sent a legion of fifty soldiers to enter the home of Andriantsoly and take the slaves by force, Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 94. Unfortunately, little archival trace is left of the slaves' experiences, perspectives, or fate in this conflict.

was detrimentally immobilized due to malaria and failing health, he sent an urgent plea for reinforcements to Radama.<sup>462</sup>

After garnering support along the way, the armed Sakalava faction grew to 2000 and finally arrived in Moudzangaie after about one week.<sup>463</sup> Andriantsoly himself with sought refuge in Ambondrou and awaited word of the battle's outcome. The Sakalava troops attacked the fort at the first daybreak after their arrival and were met with strong resistance. Eventually they were forced to retreat, and the majority fled to Andriantsoly's hideout in Ambondrou. Others remained in town "hiding behind walls and gardens" from where they continued to shoot their firearms at the Hova. What transpired next amounted to a sheer calamity. Guillain reported,

*"Ramanetaka decided to burn the city to eliminate the [stealthy] attackers, and since all the houses were made of wood and leaves, the town was instantly devoured by the fire. Upon the arrival of the Sakalava at the Hova camp, all inhabitants of Moudzangaie who had the means boarded their families and most precious belongings onto the ships at the port. But at the time of the fire of the city, the majority had not yet left and had only time to run to the beach, abandoning their properties and belongings which were then destroyed by the flames. Fifty three boats and sixteen Arab dhows, as well as many boats and canoes were used to transport to the other side of the bay, to Katsepy, these poor people and their things which had escaped from destruction."*<sup>464</sup>

Andriantsoly and his closest aides fled eventually settled on the island of Mahore (Mayotte) in the Comoros Islands, under the tutelage of Arab Sultan of Nzwani.<sup>465</sup> The majority

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<sup>462</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 95-6. Owen, *Narrative of voyages*, 187-189.

<sup>463</sup> Guillain reports that the faction encountered conflicts with Ramanetaka's troops at the outpost of Beda-beda en route, thus delaying the Sakalava group. (1845:26). Owen, *Narrative of voyages*, 188 reported that the Sakalava were armed principally with muskets.

<sup>464</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 97. My translation. Include original French here. Owen in *Narrative of voyages*, (188-189) describes the events quite similarly but adds that "the fragile wooden buildings cracked and fell upon them [the Sakalava warriors]; they were soon obliged to make a precipitate retreat to the sandy jetty...they fled, panic-stricken, to their vessels."

<sup>465</sup> Andriantsoly left his sister Oantity in Marovoay. Guillain discusses how he intended to flee to Maiotte (Mayotte) where he hoped to find asylum with Mahouan-Amadi, the governor there whom was "authorized to regard him [Andriantsoly] as a son, since he had made kinship ties with Ouza, his father through *fatidra* (blood ritual). But the boat that carried him, on account of the bad weather, passed Comoros and took him to the east coast of Africa. Andriantsoly disembarked on the island of Monfia, where he apparently caught a dhow to Zanzibar, with the Arab prince Séif-ben-Ahmed. It was there that he sought the aid of the sultan Séyid-Said. Séyid-Said and Andriantsoly engaged in lengthy negotiations, with Séyid-Said at one point demanding the cessation of Moudzangaie. Apparently the negotiations were abruptly cut short when Andriantsoly learned of the death of Radama I and returned to

of Antalaotra traders opted to follow Andriantsoly rather than face the catastrophic loss they endured, and their foreseen political marginalization, the combination of which would have rendered the continuation of their trade unworkable. Others had limited ties of belonging to Moudzangaie, and returned to their homelands of Mozambique, Zanzibar, or the Comoros Islands.<sup>466</sup> Those that remained in the smoky embers of the city were a small number of inhabitants, some of whom were subsequently honored with chiefdoms by Ramanetaka for their loyalty to him. In addition to the Antalaotra traders and Sakalava who stayed behind,<sup>467</sup> a number of “American beef salters” and perhaps other European traders were apparently unaffected by the fire.<sup>468</sup> But the fire had destroyed the once vibrant lower town, turning it into a “a mass of cinders, roofless huts, and walls blackened by fire; the herbage was parched, the gardens destroyed, and nothing remained but misery and desolation.”<sup>469</sup>

The city did not quickly recover from the calamity of 1825. Almost twenty years later, on traveler noted the struggling Antalaotra population that remained (estimated at 615 free individuals and 250 slaves) following the conflict with Ramanetaka lived in the lower town.<sup>470</sup> He described their neighborhood as consisting of “about 100 straw huts which were rebuilt on the previous location of the old city, of which the remains consisted of 25 stone houses, most of

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northwest Madagascar in a vain attempt to regain his territory, eventually settling permanently in Mayotte *Documents sur l'histoire*, 113-115.

<sup>466</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 98-99.

<sup>467</sup> Owens, *Narrative of voyages*, 189 also notes “If the Arab inhabitants of Majunga did not personally assist the assailants, some were evidently concerned in the affair, as the Seclaves [Sakalava] were in possession of dollars which they could not have obtained through any other medium than that of the Arabs.”

<sup>468</sup> J.D. Potter, 1891. *Pilot Guides: Islands in the Southern Indian Ocean, Westward of Longitude 80 east, Including Madagascar*, (Great Britain: Hydrographic Dept). Potter referred to the complete destruction of the town from fire in the “Sakalaves-Hova battle of 1825”, and that while “natives and Arab traders fled...the American beef salters remained unmolested.” (209).

<sup>469</sup> Owens, *Narrative of voyages*, 189.

<sup>470</sup> French geographer Barbié du Bocage makes very similar observations, but appears to have drawn primarily from Guillain’s account rather than visited firsthand, Victor Amédée Barbié de Bocage, *Madagascar possession française depuis 1642; ouvrage accompagné d'une grande carte dressée par V.A. Malte-Brun* (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1859), 152-5.

them falling down and 7 mosques of which only 3 were calling believers to the prayers.”<sup>471</sup>

Some highland Malagasy, South Asians, and Sakalava, most of whom were former chiefs, dwelled among the remaining Antalaotra in the “old town.” Guillain contended that the Sakalava were mistreated by the Antalaotra, partly because they thought the Sakalava chief Velou was a puppet figure of the “Hovas.”<sup>472</sup>

Between 1840 and the 1860s, city inhabitants rebuild the city, and were distinguishable—at least to European travelers—based on the material composition of their houses. One British sea captain suggested that the homes were “one-half Arab and the other Malegash”, which correlated with the ethnic composition of the population.<sup>473</sup> Stone houses were associated with wealth, and were almost exclusively inhabited by groups of “Indian” and “Arab” traders. When the Austrian captain von de Jedina approached the city in the 1860s, he noted “a few, very nice stone constructions which belonged to rich Indians...and houses as clean as those owned by the Hovas in the fort.”<sup>474</sup> He contrasted this with the “majority of the population which are...Arabs, Sakalaves and Cafres...who live in very dirty huts where at every new visit you are disgusted by an awful smell.”<sup>475</sup>

By the 1870s, “several high castellated houses stood near the shore” in the lower town, which now extended “one-half mile, with houses five-rows deep (see Figure 14).<sup>476</sup> They were strongly built and inhabited by “Arab” traders. About 40 homes belonged to “Hindu” and “Arab”

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<sup>471</sup> Guillain *Documents sur l'histoire*, 215-6.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid. One of the reasons the Antalaotra despised Velou, was because he “respected the customs and wore the uniform” of the “Hovas”. Velou undoubtedly adopted his own survival strategies in the face of an uncertain political moment.

<sup>473</sup> W. Owen. *Narrative of voyages*, 100.

<sup>474</sup> Jedina, Leopold von, *Voyage de la Frégate Autrichienne Helgoland autour de l'Afrique*, (Paris: Maurice Dreyfous, 1878), 179.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Grainge, H.W. 1875. “Journal of a Visit to Mojanga and the North-West Coast”, *The Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine*, No. I., p. 31-32. Mullens, Joseph. *Twelve Months in Madagascar*. (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1875), 313.

traders, and they were “built on the Indian pattern; they are of solid material, stone or brick, cemented with lime dug from the hill; they are of two or three stories; have flat roofs and terraces, and contain small rooms. Malagasy workmen were the laborers of these homes.” Others noted that in addition to the “stone” houses, were simpler homes constructed of “rubble, mortar, and thickly plastered lime” and many others of wooden posts and palm-leaves.<sup>477</sup> Homes composed of raffia and palmetto leaves, plucked and carried from the surrounding area, were attributed to “Sakalava.”<sup>478</sup> The homes were constructed of a wooden frame, with palmetto leaved-panels, forming a “pretty pattern,” and thatched with coconut and palm leaves.

### ***Worldly Goods***

What did their stone homes and the objects within mean to the wealthy inhabitants of Moudzangaie? Few European travelers seem to have entered into the domestic spaces of the lower town, but those that did offer some valuable insights.<sup>479</sup> J. Ross Browne, an Irish-born American traveler visited Moudzangaie in the early 1840s aboard a whaling ship. After spending some time at the port he became friendly with a certain Mohammed Desharee, a native of Anjouan, who was “reputed to be a man of wealth and distinction.”<sup>480</sup> Browne and Desharee

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<sup>477</sup> Pickersgill, W.C. 1882. “North-West Madagascar-Mojanga”, *The Evangelical Magazine and Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*. October. P.324-5. In surveying a potential site for a LMS missionary house, the LMS sought to capitalize on the strategic emplacement of the hill. H.W. Grainge found that the midpoint leading to the Rova would be ideal, but that laborers would need to be brought from the highlands since local laborers either lacked the skills, demanded excessive wages, and “declined to work for more than two or three hours daily”, “Journal of a Visit”. Pickersgill also described how the LMS school and church was located near the top of the hill, and that when classes were held with Makoa and “Hova” students, Hindi and other children would sit and watch on the street side, attracted by the singing. (“North-West Madagascar”, 328).

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> And even fewer entered into sacred spaces. One American who happened to be the first diplomat assigned to Zanzibar, Richard Waters, apparently visited a mosque when he touched down in Majunga on 10 February 1837, Cyrus Brady, Jr., *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa*, (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1950) 102.

<sup>480</sup> J.Ross Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 251. Browne’s work apparently inspired American writers Herman Melville and Mark Twain. See J. Ross Browne Collection, University of Pacific Library, Stockton, CA. Accessed online 25 February 2016, [http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt3s20369w/entire\\_text/](http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt3s20369w/entire_text/)

developed their relationship through gift giving, and Browne expected that Desharee would honor him and his crew with a fine meal. They arrived at his home which was “quite a palace”



Figure 14: Castellated house, Majunga, ca. early 1880s  
(source: W. Pickersgill, “North-West Madagascar-Mojanga”,  
*The Evangelical Magazine and Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*. October 1882,324-5.)

compared with most dwellings in the lower town; it was constructed of bamboo “thatched with palmetto, and whitewashed outside.”<sup>481</sup> But once they stepped inside, they were astonished with the worldly goods with which the home was decorated, “the walls were covered with Chinese plates, American looking-glasses, Arabian fans, flags of different nations, Chinese pictures, old copper plates with inscriptions, Egyptian relics and charms, and various other curiosities. In the sitting room were two sofas, with silk cushions, ornamented with a gaudy fringe-work.”<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, 251-252.

Also remarkable about Browne's encounter was the way in which Desharee described his relationship to his home and land. In a prideful assertion, Desharee explained that "this house was his; all this property was his..." and he listed his wealth in his landed properties as well as his four wives, two slaves, 400 heads of cattle, and additional properties in Anjouan and Majunga's hinterlands.<sup>483</sup> After the meal, Desharee and Browne took a stroll to Desharee's plantation about a half-hour walk from town. There Browne observed the lush mangroves, coconut trees, orange and plum trees, as well as rice and maize fields; they sat under the shade and drank the "rich, sweet milk" of the verdant coconuts.<sup>484</sup> In this lavish display, Desharee may have been asserting his connections and networks, and therefore demonstrating this credit worthiness. But Desharee's interaction with Browne is notable not only because it was a staged performance of his wealth, but also because it reflects at least one inhabitant's conception of property ownership at the time.<sup>485</sup>

The interior of homes displayed and demonstrated the complex Indian Ocean connections that linked Majunga to other places and times. One British naval captain, Colomb, who visited the port in 1869, described the domestic space of a South Asian family. After the Governor-appointed interpreter led him to a large stone house, he ascended the top floor by climbing a ladder. Colomb found himself in a large room which he described in the following manner, "the apartment was not over clean, the floor was covered with pieces of matting, and the tables, of which there several groaned [sic] between loads of glass and crockery...the whitewashed walls decorated with small looking-glasses disposed in contrast to varieties of saucers and plates."<sup>486</sup> Colomb was impressed by the aesthetic sensibility of the inhabitants, which was marked by the

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<sup>483</sup> Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, 252.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> This relates to the points made in Chapter Three about how private ownership over specific property was one – among many- ways in which claims to land and belonging and first-coming were leveraged.

<sup>486</sup> Colomb, *Slave-Catching*, 324.

juxtaposition of luminous objects of varying sizes and shapes. In the confines of single-room living, beds were draped with curtains to allow for privacy. From one of these beds emerged an English-speaking woman “swathed, Indian fashion, in voluminous folds of pink muslin. She was adorned, with a pierced nose, “earrings of stupendous proportions in her ears, necklaces and bangles on her neck and wrists.” She was originally from the Cape Colony, but had lived for many years in Majunga with her husband, a “native of Kutch,” a British subject, and a trader between Madagascar and Comoros Islands.<sup>487</sup> They conversed in English before Colomb and his crew were escorted to the Governor’s hilltop fort. Although these accounts are rare, they suggest that some wealthy residents drew on decorative objects to enunciate their ties to other lands—whether Kutch, the Cape Colony, or Comoros.

### ***Public Spaces, Sacred Spaces***

The city’s thriving economy brought diverse groups of inhabitants together, and various kinds of constituencies could be brought into being through the strategic uses of space. Under the occupation by King Radama I’s troops (1825-1880s), the large town hall in the center of the lower town was one important place in which subjects of the highland monarchy gathered. Von Jedina noted that the building, called a “lapa” by “Hova” inhabitants, was a large, stone building with a veranda. The structure was garnished with a flag of the Merina monarchy, and served as the primary site for public speeches (*kabary*), council meetings to resolve administrative issues, and public announcements of the Queen’s intentions and directives.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Colomb, *Slave-Catching*, 325.

<sup>488</sup> “At the end of the veranda, there’s a mast carrying the Malagasy flag indicating this is a governmental building. My informant told me this was the lapa, the town council building, where they hold public speeches (*kabary*). There from time to time, the higher members of the assembly get together when they need to resolve issues affecting the commune. When the queen sends her orders, the governor communicates these to the chief of the lower town, who calls the *kabary* and informs them of the queen’s wishes. Every member has to ensure that all these communications

Mosques were also enduring landmarks and important gathering points for multiple Islamic communities. One British Admiralty Agent who drafted nautical charts for the British navy, described in 1891 some stone-houses inhabited by “Hindoos from Bombay, who also have a mosque,”<sup>489</sup> in addition to the “Arab” mosque. Few Europeans entered these spaces. One exception was John Studdy Leigh, who entered the Karana mosque during Ramadan on November 28, 1839.<sup>490</sup> He described the mosque as filled, “with all the Karana and their wives, the latter of who were behind a partition. Praying, sleeping and eating in the mosque all night, such was their program. The mosque was clean, properly lit with chandeliers but what seemed strange to me was the presence of illustrations on the walls; one represented a lion and a bird, others some flowers. There were also two mirrors.”<sup>491</sup>

Other sacred spaces abounded in the multi-confessional city. Burial sites offered important means through which inhabitants organized space: while the “Indian” cemetery was near the lower town, Antalaotra kin were buried at the hilltop, just behind the royal compound.<sup>492</sup> For Sakalava, however, the most significant site was likely the *zomba* or *doany*. At some point in the invasion of King Radama’s troops in 1824, the Sakalava relics were taken from the Sakalava capital of Marovoay by Radama’s forces and transferred to the hilltop fort at Moudzangaie,

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are well understood and if required the council is summoned a second time. Thanks to this organization, the law and news are quickly known on the outside. And no body can pretend to ignore them.” Von Jedina, *Voyage de Fregate*.

<sup>489</sup> “Hindoos” was a misleading ethnonym used by many 19<sup>th</sup> century explorers to denote those who came from parts of South. Most that came, however, were not Hindu by religion, but were Muslim. To be sure there was, and continues to be, a small but critical population of Hindu South Asians in Madagascar. They were also sometimes referred to as “Banians” by European observers.

<sup>490</sup> Leigh was not the only American to visit a mosque in Majunga. The first American diplomat assigned to Zanzibar, Richard Waters, apparently visited a mosque when he touched down in Majunga on 10 February 1837, though little remains of his impressions Cyrus Brady, Jr., *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa*, (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1950) 102.

<sup>491</sup> Leigh noted, “Badrudine [an important merchant] directed the prayers”, *Deux Voyages*, 75.

<sup>492</sup> This burial site was discovered quite accidentally in the 1970s when the city sought to clear the land for the construction of civic buildings, Vérin, *History of Civilization*, 19, also personal comm., Ramilisonina, Feb. 2, 2012.

where they were stored “inside the Governor’s stockade” and guarded by “Hova muskets”.<sup>493</sup> As other scholars have noted, the appropriation and possession of Sakalava relics by colonizing forces – be they highland monarchal or French - was a means of enunciating their dominance and keeping Sakalava inhabitants subordinate.<sup>494</sup> Radama also hoped that the continued possession of the relics would attract Sakalava inhabitants to remain in the area, rather than dispersing.<sup>495</sup> King Radama’s appointed governor and his staff did not just possess the relics, however, they also took great lengths to venerate them in public displays of ceremony.<sup>496</sup> In so doing, King Radama’s authorities subsumed the critical semiotic device of Sakalava political and religious power into their regime and sought to secure the loyalty of their vanquished subjects. The significance of the hilltop Merina fort as the geographically paramount site of the city was further reinforced and enhanced by the possession of relics.

Radama’s efforts to retain the Sakalava population through the holding of the relics appeared to have been somewhat effective. Although a great many of the Antalaotra plebeians

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<sup>493</sup> There are various accounts of the events around the relics. Pickersgill described that “Learning that the tribe’s sole rallying point was neither a living chief, not reigning sovereign, but the relics of an ancient king, Radama conceived the idea of securing these as a means of keeping his new subjects from dispersing beyond his reach. For a time his search was fruitless: the fetish had been hidden in the forest. At length, however, a heavy bribe induced a Sakalava to tell of its whereabouts, and a seizure was made by a party of soldiers guided by the informer. For this important service the latter was placed beyond law for the rest of his life, and his family still ranks first in Iboina.” (1893:38-9). Feeley-Harnik cites archival sources that describe how the relics were taken to Antananarivo by the Hova, upon the French invasion in 1895, to incite the followers of Queen Ramboatofa to follow them; eventually the French returned to Mahajanga area by them, though they used them to “control the population in *A Green Estate*, 89, 505 n.60). Lambek however notes that contemporary Bemihisatra and Bemazava have alternative accounts, which include the relics being taken to Antananarivo [at a much earlier time than Feeley-Harnik suggests] by Ndramfeharivo, the daughter of Ravahiny, who married King Radama to protect the Bemihisatra, in *Weight of the Past*, 90. At any rate, the relics appear to have been relocated to the Hova fort by at least 1893, following Pickersgill’s firsthand account.

<sup>494</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 89; cf 505 n. 60; Lambek *Weight of the Past*, 88; Verin *History of Civilization*, 376.

<sup>495</sup> Pickersgill, “North Sakalava Land,” 38.

<sup>496</sup> Guillain reported the presence of some relics in Moudzangaie, which were likely abandoned by Andriantsoly, were kept by the Hova governor Raen’zaro, following the 1824 Hova invasion and which helped to retain some of the Sakalava population. “Raen’zaro maintains piety [towards the relics] by, at various times in the year, taking them to be ceremoniously washed in the sea, with much pomp and gunshots.” Guillain likened this action to the “barbaric” efforts of Roman conquerors towards the gods of the nations they conquered in *Documents sur l’histoire*, 215. Other sources support this same observation including Leigh’s account from the late 1830s, see S. Pickersgill “North Sakalava Land,” 39.

and traders fled the city after Ramanetaka's incendiary intervention, a sizeable community of Sakalava, in addition to "lately-free Africans" known as Makoa, and "Indian" traders remained in the city, perhaps at least partly on account of the presence of the relics (ibid). A British missionary who lived in the city, W. Clayton Pickersgill, commented in the 1890s that "the Sakalava also continued to regard the town as their head-quarters, their chief being resident there and holding an influential position in the government of the province; but a large number of them had gone up the river to live near the rice-fields and cattle pastures."<sup>497</sup> Their valuation of Moudzangaie as a Sakalava center and a sacred place was brought to life each year when they gathered "with rum and drums and wild singing."<sup>498</sup>

The *doany* was the sacred house where the relics of former kings were kept in small boxes, and where royal followers met every Friday to sing and pray to the ancestors. Mullens described that the house which contained the relics of Sakalava kings "for the moment seemed to peacefully coexist" in the upper town, along with large houses and the garrison church.<sup>499</sup> When Leigh's second visit overlapped with the ritual bathing of the Sakalava royal relics on Friday, 30 December 1836, he reported "a small building carefully constructed of leaves" in which was placed the reliquary "covered with a single sheet...a veil covered the mysterious objects contained there." The event blended the use of communally occupied and enclosed, prohibitive spaces as people gathered en masse near and around the relics, spilling into the streets and pathways. Leigh listened to the "melancholic" songs of men and women, imploring the spirits of deceased kings. At last the drape was pulled, but "nothing appeared except some gilded boxes placed on some ebony wood supports draped with black cloth." Leigh later learned that the boxes

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<sup>497</sup> Pickersgill, "North Sakalava Land," 34.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Mullens, *Twelve Months*, 313. Note that most of Radama's soldiers would have practiced Christianity, owing to the long history of British missionaries in the highlands.

contained “some teeth, nail clippings, and tresses having belonged to the kings.”<sup>500</sup> This accounts suggests that Sakalava royal practitioners managed the space of the *doany*, and thus access to royal power, through acts of veiling and unveiling.

Streets and pathways, in their multiple forms, were not only conduits leading from one place to another, but were often gathering points in their own right. The path leading to the fresh fountain was bordered with trees “which provided a mysterious shade” and a pleasant coolness during the day’s burning sun; Guillain surmised that these trees had been deliberately planted.<sup>501</sup> Other paths abounded. Either soldiers from King Radama’s mission, or earlier inhabitants, carved multiple paths outwards from the military fort.<sup>502</sup> Almost all 19<sup>th</sup> century European visitors remarked on the large, wide street that led to the hilltop fort, impressed by its grandeur and perhaps its resemblance to idealized thoroughfares in their homelands. Commandant Fournier, who explored the town in the 1850s noted that “one arrives to the house of the governor by a vast and beautiful avenue which leaves from the wharf, crosses the Hova villages and arrives at the principal door of the fort.”<sup>503</sup> This avenue was not simply a passage between the seaside village and the fort, but also a site for public entertainment and leisure. On one evening promenade, Leigh witnessed a raucous boxing spectacle (*morengy*) on the road.<sup>504</sup>

The “luxuriant decoration of trees”<sup>505</sup> was nourished by the heavy seasonal rainfall that soaked and sustained the lush flora, giving momentary relief to the intense heat, and shaping the temporal rhythms that would come to regulate everyday life for early town dwellers.

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<sup>500</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 18. Invisibility, by draping or closing spaces, was nonetheless an important means of enacting power in public, cosmological practices. Invisibility and enclosure of places, using vegetative elements, were powerful tools with which Majunga’s ruling regime protected itself from unknown outsiders.

<sup>501</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l’histoire*: 209.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Notes on exploration of Commandant Fournier, from Christian Mantaux, “La Baie de Bombetoka”, 1971; See also Mullens, *Twelve Months*, 313.

<sup>504</sup> Leigh, *Deux voyages*, 58.

<sup>505</sup> Von de Jedina *Voyage de la Frégate*, 166; Mullens, *Twelve Months*, 313.

Throughout the seaside town were dense pockets of coconut, mango and grenadine trees, and interspersed with gardens and tombs.<sup>506</sup> But most famously, the city was filled with tall, magnificent magnolia trees that dramatically transformed the landscape with their annual budding of beautiful white flowers.<sup>507</sup> They emitted a gentle and intoxicating perfume that filled the air. Antalaotra inhabitants also appreciated the magnolia flowers, weaving them into crowns that adorned brides in their wedding ceremonies.<sup>508</sup> Leigh in the 1830s noted the presence of coconut trees, mango trees, and cashew trees here and there, and a tomb set in a cluster of trees and encircled by stone mounds at the seaside settlement.<sup>509</sup> He described the unique configuration of stones, flora and human remains, “in a cluster of trees, there was a sort of burial place, two or three emplacements delimited by some rocks arranged on an embankment, and mounded with stones.” Mangroves grew in this surrounding region of the town, and the soil became swampy. Others noted dense forests of cocoa, lime, lemon, orange and other fragrant trees.<sup>510</sup> Von Jedina marveled at the magnolia trees and folded them into an idyllic, exoticized portrait of the town, “Everything is in harmony with the picturesque scenery made by the costumes and skin of the people, who returned from the fields. As we left, we saluted the flag with a cannon shot and they [Hovas] returned it with a shot of their own.”<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire*, 206.

<sup>507</sup> The enduring image of Majunga has a flowered city continues to contemporary times. Many city dwellers described to me the important presence of angaya (magnolia)-check this- trees in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which added to the city's beauty.

<sup>508</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 20. This practice of using the angaya flowers as a bridal crown or necklace is still important in muslim, “zanatany” weddings, as I observed between 2012-2014. Brides often wear an ornate headband of magnolia blooms, and honored family members will be adorned with a boutonniere.

<sup>509</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 16.

<sup>510</sup> Osgood, *Notes of Travel*, 3.

<sup>511</sup> Von Jedina, *Voyage de la Frégate*.

### *The Fort and Saribengo Hill*

The *Saribengo* hill was the most defining and recognizable geographical landmark with which approaching ships identified the site as Majunga. The hill rose some 120 meters above the sea level settlement nestled below, and onto which was built the “Hova” military compound (on the place previously occupied by the Sakalava *doany*). The fort or “fortified camp” was established around 1825, following Radama I’s invasion. Leigh observed in 1836 some one hundred cannons, many disassembled, stood on the pathway (escalade) leading to the hilltop fort; he surmised that these were carried by their vessels in the previous year.<sup>512</sup> These were perhaps placed as an instrumental and symbolic performance of power, as mnemonic artifacts referencing the Radama’s conquest of the town. The following year, he observed some 60 cannons “of strong dimensions” which protected the fort.<sup>513</sup> Radama’s troops arranged the site in symbolically powerful ways. Three large guns, one of which was mounted, were placed at the opening facing Majunga. Like that encompassing the royal capital of Antananarivo at this time (Rajoanah 1995), the Majunga fort was enclosed by a circumscribed ditch.<sup>514</sup> Ditches, having a much earlier history in Malagasy town-making (Radimilahy), continued to offer important means through which space was demarcated and boundaries between political authorities were instantiated.

European passersby, driven by their curiosity and often charged with imperial scouting sought to penetrate the fort at least once during their stay. Some were ceremoniously received by the governor, often with extravagant meals, vermouth and leisurely conversation. Leigh

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<sup>512</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 15.

<sup>513</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 17.

<sup>514</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 17; Later travelers took note of the ditches as well, see Mullens, *Twelve Months*, 313.

remarked that the “Yamalamboe”<sup>515</sup> governor welcomed them into a meeting room supported by pillars, served them wine and conversed through his interpreter, General Raiengo.<sup>516</sup> They shared meals together several more times with abundant amounts of beef, sherry and port wine, testimonies to the town’s global trading connections.<sup>517</sup> But many Europeans were not privy to the fort’s interior.<sup>518</sup>

By the 1860s, the two distinct sections of the city became more deeply entrenched through the construction of wood homes, roads, and placement of military artifacts. The magnolia-tree covered hilltop that had earlier been crowned with the military compound and governor’s house, now also included a “hova” neighborhood. Between the 1830s and 1860s, the majority of buildings in this area were converted from thatch to wood, with “extraordinary elegance and cleanliness.” Von Jedina, an Austrian ship captain admiringly described the composition, purity and stylistic decoration of hilltop homes, noting the “artistic decoration” of woven palm-leaved walls.<sup>519</sup> The emplacement of military detritus, even if beyond use, was apparently one strategy Radama’s troops and governor utilized to mark political authority. Von

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<sup>515</sup> “Ambolambo” was a historically specific ethnic term for highlander Malagasy, which became pejorative after the death of Andrianampoinimerina in 1810, Pier Larson, “Desperately Seeking ‘the Merina,’” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22:4 (Dec 1996), 550.

<sup>516</sup> Leigh, *Deux Voyages*, 15. Leigh took great notice to the details of General Raiengo’s attire, remarking on “his blue overcoat, vest and pants, uncovered neck, and adorned by a hat like that of a London cart-driver.”

<sup>517</sup> Leigh and the ship’s crew apparently developed an amicable relationship with the governor, marked by his parting gift to them: a long, silver chain, *Deux Voyages*, 16.

<sup>518</sup> Leigh commented “Malagasy avoid the Europeans seeing the inside of the fort; but I do not know the reason since there is nothing in particular there” in *Deux Voyages*, 17. Note Owen’s account of being chased away by the fort’s guards around 1825, just following the invasion by Radama’s troops, *Narrative of voyages*. Guillain was similarly dismissed from the fort’s entrance when he was snooping around the premises. *Documents sur l’histoire*, 209.

<sup>519</sup> “The wood foundations of each structure support an elevated, peaked roof, covered with palm-thatch. The outside walls of the houses were artistically decorated with palm leaves in an ornate, tightly woven fan pattern. Inside, cloth made from ‘rabanes’ and mats covered the walls and ground. Everywhere it is extremely clean. The furniture is generally rather simple. It consists of the ‘kitanda’ bed made with fiber, and a few low chairs. The important people have however sometimes European furniture.” *Voyage de la Frégate*, 166.

Jedina noted that cast iron guns, likely some 30 years old, surrounded the outer walls of the fort. They were carefully preserved against the elements by a grass roof, despite their obsolescence.<sup>520</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter was mapped the city's thriving economic history, and documented the growing built environment that Moudzangaie's bustling commerce enabled in the nineteenth century. The city was a shared space inhabited and cultivated by its diverse inhabitants, who built trading posts, assembled homes and dug tombs, erected sacred shrines and constructed mosques, and cleared pathways. They inscribed their presence on the town by occupying shared spaces for ritual and performance events—for instance, the annual bathing of the Sakalava royal relics, marriages and dances. Nineteenth century travel accounts offered some insights into how town dwellers thought about urban places, visibility and invisibility, and about the value of objects. This chapter drew on published travel accounts, images, letters and journals to weave together a tapestry of how different groups—traders, royal figures, political leaders, and everyday people—inhabited and imbued cultural meanings into the spaces and structures in which they dwelled. But those that could afford to do so filled their houses with ornate embellishments and decorative objects from China, India and Europe. Some of these traders drew on the objects inside their homes to perform their wealth to travelers and passerbys, perhaps in an attempt to establish themselves as viable trading partners to prospective clients. For others, these objects may have been ways of remembering, and retaining ties with, places beyond Madagascar, former homelands in the Indian Ocean basin. Charting the city's historical

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<sup>520</sup> Von Jedina remarked that the old cast iron guns from the navy “would be as dangerous as the operators as for the enemy,” *Voyage de la Frégate*, 166.

social geography provided the necessary context for understanding how people differentiated themselves from one another in the decades to come.

**Part II:**

**Places: Entangled Landscapes, Enunciations of Difference**



Figure 15: Marovato Abattoir, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: Author)

**Chapter 4**  
**The Quartier:**  
**Colonial Property Regulation, Place-Making, and Designs of Desire (1890s – 1930s)**



Figure 16: Marovato Abattoir, Moskeriny Zoma in the distance, 2014 (Source: Author)

The day began like any other, but ended in catastrophe. It was September 1912. What likely began as a small cooking fire in the courtyard of a home, quickly expanded into a mass conflagration. Sweeping northwestern winds carried the flames across the expansive Mahabibo Village, the “popular” neighborhood inhabited by diverse groups of Malagasy and Comorians, located just adjacent to the city of Majunga. In the end, the fire voraciously consumed some 580

homes, transforming a patchwork of tightly nestled *satrana*,<sup>521</sup> wood and cement homes into heaps of ashes and angst. French city administrators solemnly conveyed reports of the destruction and appealed to the Gouverneur General for restoration aid, while they anxiously conjectured the best course of reparation for the city's primary labor depot.<sup>522</sup> They determined to allocate a new terrain, just near to Mahabibo, to which the "natives" (*indigènes*) would be transplanted and permitted to erect their homes anew. Unlike the earlier settlement of Mahabibo, however, this space would be delineated into ethnic enclaves, so that "Comorians" lived with "Comorians," and "Antaimoro" with "Antaimoro" and so on.<sup>523</sup> Casting themselves as benevolent protectors of the town-dwellers, city administrators appointed a French contractor to work with "natives" to construct homes in an orderly fashion, of durable materials more resistant to the rapacious properties of fire.<sup>524</sup>

Perhaps predictably, this proposal was not satisfying to all residents. Among those who opposed this intervention was a group of seven men from Nzwani (Anjouan), Comoros who submitted a carefully crafted letter to the Gouverneur General Albert Picquié of Madagascar in November 1912. They pleaded with him to remain in their existing dwellings, rather than be forcibly removed to the newly assigned land. They posited that because their homes were still standing, constructed of durable materials (cement and wood), and the "fruit of their modest savings," they should be permitted to remain on their existing parcel. They wrote,

*Dear Monsieur Gouverneur Generale,  
We have the honor to kindly submit to you the following. Residing in the city of Majunga since 1895, ...where we were given parcels on which we settled. Since then, we've constructed our homes there, some in cement, some in wood. These constructions are the*

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<sup>521</sup> *Satrana* is the vernacular name for *hyphaene coriacea*, a useful palm which grows abundantly in the grasslands of western Madagascar

<sup>522</sup> ANRDM/F52: Letter 14 Feb 1912, Maire Carron to Gouverneur General.

<sup>523</sup> ANRDM/F52: Urbanisme (1898-1941), Extrait du registre des délibérations de la Commission Municipale de Majunga, Séance 27 Sept 1912.

<sup>524</sup> ANRDM/F52: Letter 24 Octobre 1912, from Maire Carron to Gouverneur General.

*fruit of our modest savings that we have been able to accumulate during this time in Majunga by doing some work. Today...a great part of the village has been burnt. The administration has decided that residents can no longer make any reparations to their homes and cannot remain on their parcels, even if their homes were not touched by the fire. We appeal to you to keep us in our current locations, since our homes are made of durable materials, without a single change. Our sheet metal, wood and all our building materials will not be of a single value if we are displaced...*

*Signed,*

*Moucheda Ousseney, Youngca, Sidy Omady, Bakary Naouda, Abodou Boina, Salimon, Sidi Hamadi, Charifou Abdallah, and Boudoury, Anjounais Living in the Mahabibo Village (habitant tous au village de Mahabibo (Majunga))*<sup>525</sup>

This chapter tells the story of the founding, emplacement and regulation of Mahabibo, the city's "native" quarter and envisioned labor reservoir in colonial times. From its establishment in the late 1890s to the 1930s, colonial authorities drew on technologies of property legislation and regulations around building materials to craft Mahabibo's demographic composition. Drawing on this 1912 post-fire moment as an entry point, I track how the aspirations and investments of different groups of city dwellers—especially migrants from Comores and across Madagascar—intersected with the imperatives of colonial authorities in the early twentieth century. I contend that the things with which people built - wood, sheet metal, stone, grass -mattered dearly for the political claims urban residents could make over space, belonging, and rights. At the same time, colonial authorities envisioned a fully refashioned city— one ordered along ethnic lines and grid patterns—that conflicted, but sometimes accorded with, the desires of its inhabitants. This chapter pours over archival traces of clay and foliage, metal and wood, and paper and ink, to distill how competing colonial imaginaries of futurity were registered through the built environment of early twentieth-century urban Majunga. I consider how and why some parts of the city were (re)made durable and lasting, while others were maintained in ephemeral materials, and still others comprised of both. These transformational processes came about through a

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<sup>525</sup> ANRDM/F51, Letter of 9 Nov 1912.

constellation of material and political-economic interventions, and engendered by city dwellers' energetic efforts to construct homes and mosques. Through these structures of stone and steel, migrants entrenched themselves in the town in durable ways.

This chapter is about how ethno-racial difference was articulated—and contested—in these overlapping projects. Early in the 1900s, city administrators attempted to negotiate the complicated spatial coexistence of different ethno-linguistic groups in Mahabibo through highly ambiguous legislation around property regulation. Colonial planners conceived of the city as a source of laborers; a symbolic site of domination on the northwest coast; and as it was a port town, a conduit for the flow of supplies, goods and bodies. They saw the urban space as a template to be sectionalized, surveilled and defined in legal terms that governed the permissible activities that would support the broader colonial project. Inhabitants of Mahabibo—variably cast as ‘Malagasy,’ ‘Comorian,’ and ‘Indian,’ by contrast, conceived of the city as a site in which they could accumulate material and knowledge-based resources, develop kinship networks, and establish themselves - either permanently or semi-permanently. One of the arguments of this chapter is that city dwellers harnessed the ambiguity of housing regulations for productive, material means, whether building a house *en dur*, accumulating multiple land holdings, or settling in a vacant terrain. Others, like the Anjouanais petitioners of the above letter took up discursive means, mobilizing discourses of citizenship to place land demands on the colonial government. Mahabibo residents seized these moments to establish their lives in the city, knowing that the inconstancy and patchy enforcement of property regulations offered openings for negotiation with administrative technocrats.

Scholars of urban Africa have long documented the intersections between colonial governance, urbanization, and African social practices.<sup>526</sup> Laurent Fourchard, however, recently provoked historians by suggesting “the notion of African cities is inappropriate,” because it forcibly groups together cities across the continent that are in fact shaped by very different global influences.<sup>527</sup> He urged historians to move beyond the “traps of localism” and to engage more broadly with “exchange of commodities and social and cultural practices beyond continents.”<sup>528</sup> Fourchard’s critique raises valuable points about the need to think carefully about what constitutes the bases for comparison and commensurability in urban histories of Africa, and productively invites scholars to move beyond myopic regionalism. At the same time, it is suggested here we need local histories as much as broader historical studies of global exchange. Certain historical moments call for studies deeply rooted in spatial sites, using what some have called a micro-historical approach, to fully grasp the particularities which give rise to new political, economic, and social formations. This chapter tells one such “local,” fine-grained story of how state efforts to shape the temporality of migrants’ residence in Mahabibo through housing regulation were frustrated by migrants’ ceaseless mobility and the paucity of colonial technologies of surveillance. By the 1910s, migration from Comoros to Majunga intensified, precipitated in part by French demands for labor. Faced with the inefficacy of housing regulations to curtail the growing population of migrants from the Comorian archipelago, colonial authorities shifted their efforts. They channeled scarce resources into regulating the

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<sup>526</sup> Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), and (ed) *Struggle For the City: Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983); David Anderson and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Africa’s Urban Past* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Andrew Burton, *African Underclass: Urbanisation, Crime and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

<sup>527</sup> Laurent Fourchard, “Between World History and State Formation: New Perspectives on Africa’s Cities,” *The Journal of African History*, 52:2 (2011), 226.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*

construction of religious edifices, with the hopes of curbing the overwhelming “Comorian” population, but they failed to account for the generative nature of religious networks and the centrality of mosque building projects for Muslim communities. Nor did they fully grasp how the collective labor of building homes and mosques was constitutive of social and fraternal-religious communities.

But this is not only a local story, for those that founded and continued to build the city—whether Antalaotra, Comorian, or migrants from across Madagascar—imagined themselves as belonging to multiple worlds. The city they built reflected those other imagined and inhabited worlds, sometimes in quite literal and material ways. Early migrations from Comoros formed the basis for the lasting Comorian influence in the city, which shaped the performance of language, the ways urban spaces could be used, and ultimately the fractured social geography of the city during the *rotaka* of 1976-77. The latter part of the chapter draws on oral accounts and *zanatany* family histories of early migration, to chart the nature of these migratory streams and the implication for the town’s formation. Collectively, these accounts suggest that beginning from the 1920s and 30s, many Comorian migrants were particularly able to mobilize material resources, garner land, and build lasting structures, through labor and economizing practices.<sup>529</sup> I argue here that early building projects—especially mosques—were key means through which Comorian migrants constructed a sense of belonging to their newfound city, while simultaneously intensifying their kinship, economic and sentimental connections to their Comorian homelands, and ultimately to transnational, transoceanic Sufi communities.

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<sup>529</sup> This is the subject of this chapter and Chapter 5, which focuses specifically on domestic dwellings.

*A City on the Precipice of Time*

Sixteen years before the devastating fire, Majunga was emerging from the upheaval associated with the French military conquest in 1896. In the years that followed, the town grew to between 5,000-7,000 inhabitants and continued to maintain its reputation as a “veritable tower



Figure 17: “Malagasy Tirailleur (Makoa Race)”  
(Source: Archives, Foiben-Taosarintanin’I Madagasikara (FTM))

of Babel.”<sup>530</sup> In 1898, Gallieni positively appraised the resurgence of Majunga’s economic prosperity, noting the burgeoning colony of Indians, Anjouanais, and “other exotics” involved in the trading networks.<sup>531</sup> According to some accounts, Sakalava made up the “the great majority”, but other groups included Makoa, and those from the Comorian archipelago, “Arabs,”

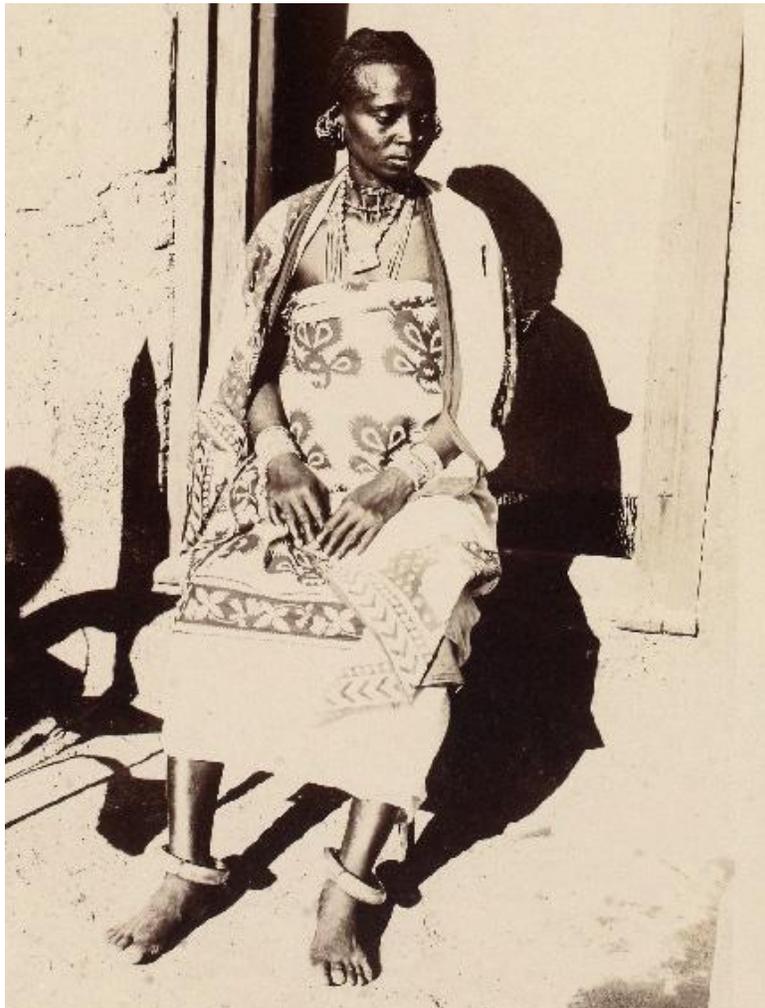


Figure 18: Antalaotra Woman of Katsepy, 1897-1899  
(note earthen mud home, with wooden door frame)  
(Source: CAOM FR ANOM 44PA167/145)

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<sup>530</sup> Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mers (henceforth CAOM) BIB/ECOL//3905, *De Majunga à Tananarive: Renseignements et Impression de voyage* (Tananarive: Imprimerie Officielle, 1900), 7.

<sup>531</sup> Joseph Gallieni, *Neuf Ans à Madagascar* (Paris: Hachette, 1908), 132.

highlanders, South Asians, Betsimisaraka (from eastern Madagascar), Antalaotra, and different European groups (French, German, British and Greek). The city was, according to one observer, an “assemblage full of rich varieties of the human species.”<sup>532</sup>



Figure 19: “Group of Indians,” 1903 (Source: Archives, Foiben-Taosarintanin’I Madagasikara FTM)

Dress was an important marker by which town inhabitants affiliated and differentiated themselves from one another. Sakalava men were distinguishable by their distinctive braids and ties around their waist. Sakalava and Antalaotra women pierced their nostrils and ear lobes, and elongated them to accommodate wooden or metal rounds (Figures 18, 20, 21). Makoa were described as “the most soberly dressed,” donning simple rags or a cloth bag through which they passed their heads and arms (see Figure 17). Men from Comores were recognizable by their red or white fez hats, and long white flowing robes. South Asian men often wore a “jacket made

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<sup>532</sup> CAOM: BIB/ECOL//3905, *De Majunga à Tananarive: Renseignements et Impression de voyage* (Tananarive: Imprimerie Officielle, 1900), 7.



Figure 20: "Sakalava woman, Majunga," 1904 (Source: CAOM ANOM 44PA135/86)



Figure 21: “Sakalava woman, Majunga,” ca. 1896-1905 (Source: CAOM FR ANOM 44PA222/35)

of light white material, beneath which a shirt emerges in the front and back, large trousers of the same material, cinched at the ankles, and red, leather slippers with long pointed toes (*poulaines*)” (see Figure 19). South Asian women commonly adorned themselves with precious jewel nose

studs. Wearing straw hats, highlanders draped themselves tunic wraps (*lamba*); some chose to dress in European garb.<sup>533</sup>

Some travelers noted that the town emitted a kind of melancholy, dotted with ruins that spoke to an earlier, more prosperous and populated time of the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>534</sup> Despite the physical traces of this painful, violent past, the town was regarded by colonial authorities as having the foundations of order, plenty of architectural character and sure economic promise. At the time of the colonial invasion (1895-6), the town was comprised of four main clusters. “Old Majunga” (*Majunga Ancien*) nestled at the southernmost point of the peninsula, was home primarily to South Asian, European and Assimiliée families. French colonial authorities concentrated their early and most intensive urban planning initiatives in Old Majunga in the 1890s and early 1900s. Colonial travelers were particularly enchanted by the neighborhood’s broad, “horizontal and well-aligned” streets, built from the late 1890s onwards, which promised an ordered, linear colonial city in times to come. Some sixty stone houses, of which at least two were two-story, were covered with corrugated tin roofs (*tôle, toly*). It housed the town’s primary economic site: the busy wharf which regularly received ships from along the northwest coast of Madagascar, Comorian Archipelago, and Europe (especially France, England and Germany) and the United States (see Figure 22).<sup>535</sup>

The second cluster was the hilltop palace (*rova*), the important symbolic and ritual site for Sakalava monarchs and highland political authorities. The tomb of a Sakalava royalty was said to lay near the stone ruins of the palace, though contemporary accounts do not confirm

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<sup>533</sup> This section relies heavily on the description of Majunga in *Revue française de l'étranger et des colonies*, t. 20 (1895), 77, but see Gustav Landrieu [de Raulin]. “Mojanga, Son Importance et Son Avenir,” *Revue Maritime et Colonies* (Nov. 1894), 310-328.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>535</sup> *Guide Annuaire de Madagascar et dépendances*, 1907:365.

that.<sup>536</sup> Like a crown, the *rova* adorned the lush hill, densely covered with mango, jujube (*ziziphus jujuba*), and baobab trees. Beyond Old Majunga lay the remaining two settlements, which were populated by the mixture of Sakalava, Makoa, Comorian, highlanders, Betsimisaraka (from eastern Madagascar), and Antalaotra families: Village of the Mangos (*Village des Mangues*), and the Village of the Cashews (*Village de Mahabibo*).<sup>537</sup> European observers juxtaposed the jumbled “disorder” of these outlying villages with the clean lines of



Figure 22: “The Wharf, Majunga” 1898 (Source: CAOM FR ANOM 44PA 123/55)

‘Old Majunga.’<sup>538</sup> But those in these quarters undoubtedly enjoyed the abundant fruits of the trees, availability of wood and thatch, and proximity to the marshland where they could harvest rice, and find sustenance from the crabs and small fish that swam in the muddy reeds. In the late

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<sup>536</sup> CAOM, *De Majunga à Tananarive: Renseignements et Impression de voyage*, 5.

<sup>537</sup> Mahabibo, sometimes spelled Mabibo, is the Malagasy word for cashews, and cashew trees (*anacardium occidentale*). Note that the present-day quartier of Manga was the Village of Mahabibo.

<sup>538</sup> *Revue française de l'étranger et des colonies*, t. 20 (1895).



administrators noted that they engaged laborers from the village to clean and improve the roads of “Mabibo” (see Figure 24).<sup>539</sup> These workers were most likely forced laborers (*prestataires*) employed under the SMOTIG program, notorious among Malagasy, but the documentation does not specify this. Like many colonial cities in the early twentieth century, Majunga was planned with distinctive spaces for different ethno-racial groups: Old Majunga was designated for Europeans, Assimiles and Indians on one hand, and Mahabibo for Malagasy, Comorians and Makoa on the other. Housing regulations were the colonial reflexive to institutionalizing



Figure 24: “Work on Flacourt Road, 1902” (Source: Archives, Hotel de Ville, Majunga)

segregated living spaces. And also like other cities in Africa, spatial engineering interventions were almost always bound up with public health and sanitation initiatives and comprised a wide-reaching constellation of biopower measures. In the case of Majunga, a sweeping smallpox outbreak in 1901 precipitated the municipal ruling identifying Mahabibo as a “native reserve” that same year. Following that epidemic and a subsequent plague outbreak in 1902, colonial

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<sup>539</sup> ANRDM/DTP 28, Rapport Mensuel sur les travaux executes dans la subdivision de Majunga pendant le mois d’Avril 1898.

public health authorities took action to demolish numerous houses deemed “unhealthy” (*insalubre*). They mandated the construction of spacious and clean homes in the Mahabibo indigene village, thus offering colonial authorities broad latitude to control domestic spaces.<sup>540</sup>

As scholars have shown for elsewhere, the notion of separate geographies—whether segregated neighborhoods or households—was endlessly contested and negotiated by inhabitants, in this case the heterogeneous groups of Mahabibo.<sup>541</sup> The story of Mahabibo reveals that boundaries (both spatial and legal) were ambiguous and frequently transgressed, through residents’ diverse mobility, aesthetic and material practices. Despite their efforts to maintain certain distance between “natives” and “Europeans,” for example, European residents relied on Mahabibo residents as domestic workers, dockworkers, and personal cooks in Majunga Be.<sup>542</sup> City authorities could (or would) not prevent inhabitants of Mahabibo from the disturbances of the drunk French sailors who stumbled into their neighborhood on Saturday and Sunday evenings, and to whom they refused to open their doors.<sup>543</sup> As Bissell argues for Zanzibar and beyond, colonial plans in Majunga-Mahabibo to shape a “dual-city” often remained aspirational or were implemented in patchy, uneven ways.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> CAOM, MAD/GGM/2 D 133, Rapport Politique et Administratif, 1903; CAOM BIB/SOM/ePOM/603: Dispatch from Majunga, 15 Juin 1902. Such epidemics were likely precipitated by increasing transnational, Indian Ocean trading networks across the southeast Asia, Arabia and East Africa, in which northwest Madagascar was deeply imbricated. It was determined by public health officials that the epidemic was brought via a shipment of seeds en route to Mayotte, originating in India and passing through Zanzibar before reaching Majunga.

<sup>541</sup> Cooper, “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking African History,” *American Historical Review* 99 (1994), 1516-45; Lynn Schler, “Ambiguous Spaces: The Struggle over African Identities and Urban Communities in Colonial Douala, 1914-45,” *Journal of African History* 44:1 (2003), 51-72. In Asian context, see Swati Chattopadhyay, “Blurring Boundaries: The Limits of “White Town” in Colonial Calcutta,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59:2(2000), 154-179.

<sup>542</sup> Interviews; CAOM/MAD/GGM/2D/137: “District de Majunga Ville: Rapport Politique,” 1934.

<sup>543</sup> *La Depeche de Majunga*, 25 Mai 1902.

<sup>544</sup> See also Schler, “Ambiguous Spaces” A full consideration of the ambiguities and fixities of the dual-city configuration, however, lies outside the scope of this chapter. For analyses of the dual-city colonial configuration in African and Asian contexts see Abu-Lughod, “A Tale of Two Cities,” 1965; Goerg, “From Hill Station...”, 1998. See Bissell, “Between Fixity and Fantasy,” for a thoughtful discussion of the ways scholars have historically treated both the fixity of colonial segregationist planning and the ambiguity of these geographies. For a discussion of the

At any rate, construction materials lay at the heart of colonial efforts to control not only domestic spaces, but also the temporality and mobility of Mahabibo inhabitants' lives. Homes in Mahabibo were to be constructed "in the native fashion in light-weight materials."<sup>545</sup> Bricks or masonry were forbidden.<sup>546</sup> Lightweight materials used in home construction in these years included *satrana* (palm reeds), thatch, and wood. Later amendments specified that not only did materials need to be lightweight, but that homes were to be constructed so that they could be disassembled within fifteen days, if need be.<sup>547</sup> Infused into these acts (and materials) was a colonial vision of Mahabibo as a *temporary* settlement, an opportunistic labor depot which could be easily dispersed. Perhaps colonial authorities imagined Mahabibo residents returning to rural areas seasonally for rice harvesting, cattle farming, or other agricultural endeavors which would feed the city's budding population. It could be that city administrators understood longstanding Malagasy customs of usufruct land holding, and hoped to bypass the rightful claim to land which came to those who cultivated or constructed shelter in place. Or perhaps they intended that Mahabibo would temporarily house migrants from the Comorian archipelago and elsewhere in Madagascar, who would labor on public works projects and then return home. Whatever the justification, this act was not strictly enforced. Only in rare cases did the city take action against inhabitants for constructing in durable materials (*en dur*).<sup>548</sup> City administrators lamented in subsequent decades that they had not properly surveilled the construction materials of homes,

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'dual-city' paradigm in voluminous South African urban history, see Vivian Bickford-Smith, "Urban history in the new South Africa: continuity and innovation since the end of apartheid," *Urban History* 35 (2008), 288-315.

<sup>545</sup> ANRDM/F43, Arrete Municipal 14 September 1902; This act is referenced in subsequent years during city council meetings, see for instance, ANRDM/F43:PV-Séance Extraordinaire 13 Avril 1929.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> ANRDM/F46, Arrete 114, Articles 11 and 12.

<sup>548</sup> One such case was that of Rachidy, deliberated by the City Council in April 1929. Rachidy apparently was dispossessed of his land parcel in Mahabibo for infracting the Municipal Act of 14 September. He constructed a home of bricks, on the parcel which rented from Ali Moussa for 200 fr/month. Owing to his failure to remove the brick home from the property in the allocated time, the city reappropriated the property and he was forced to abandon his building materials. ANRDM/F43: PV-Séance Extraordinaire 13 Avril 1929.

and that many villagers had built with more durable materials.<sup>549</sup> But in 1902, one colonial officer described in a self-congratulatory report that city's prosperous future would most certainly be achieved, because its "streets have been delineated in a standardized fashion, its native quarter is clean and rigorously regulated by an urban police force such as happens in no other port city on the island."<sup>550</sup> In 1902, Mahabibo was apparently a model native quarter.

As Mahabibo grew and became increasingly heterogeneous, city administrators tasked themselves with managing the everyday occupation of land. They also grew more invested in fostering conditions favorable for a more sedentary laboring population. Like other French colonies, land in Mahabibo was initially accorded as publically owned and could be rented from the city, but not privately owned in perpetuity.<sup>551</sup> City administrators increased the city's revenues and regulate land holding by residents of Mahabibo through the institution of an occupation tax of 1 franc/month/plot (*droit d'occupation*).<sup>552</sup> Mahabibo dwellers soon objected and many strategized to avoid the onerous tax through mobility: By moving to a previously unsettled area, they escaped burden of fees.<sup>553</sup>

At least one group took another tactic, and organized themselves into a delegation. They took the occasion of the Governor General Jean-Victor Augagneur's visit to the city in 1906 to air their grievances.<sup>554</sup> Augagneur lent a sympathetic ear and deemed their occupation tax to be excessive; he encouraged the city council to reduce it by half, which sparked a debate among council members anxious about the city's revenues. Mayor Lacaze, however, concurred with

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<sup>549</sup> ANRDM/F43: PV-Séance Extraordinaire 13 Avril 1929; The act was apparently countered by Gouverneur Général Hubert Garbit who, upon his visit to Majunga in 1921, authorized inhabitants to build in masonry to "reduce the risk of fire in the village." City council then acted to amend the municipal act so that those who were forced to leave their parcels might receive an indemnity for their building materials.

<sup>550</sup> CAOM/BIB/ECOL/4183: VII, "Rapport sur l'île Madagascar," L. Duquenoy Chargé de Mission (1902), 20.

<sup>551</sup> Thompson and Adloff, *Malagasy Republic*, 331.

<sup>552</sup> It is not clear at this point if the city demarcated plots, or allowed migrants to settle and determine their own plots. Later, the demarcation was tightly regulated.

<sup>553</sup> ANRDM/F41: Nov. 1906, Session Ordinaire de Novembre 1906.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

Augagneur that decreasing the tax amount would benefit the city by attracting more migrants to the town, thus compensating for the lost revenues of evaders. The ultimate decision was to reduce the tax to .50 fr and formalize land holding by instituting a registry on which land occupiers would log their name, date of occupation, and date of payment. In tying the land to the textual counterpart of the registry, city officials hoped to constrain the mobility of the city's population and secure a steady flow of revenue. This registry book had a life of its own. It had a lasting presence as a physical object, and in the memories of contemporary residents who recalled invoking land ownership by paying the property tax and inscribing their names on a "large map" (*plan bevata*) in the city's land administration office, during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>555</sup>

Tax evasion was not the only problem city administrators encountered concerning property in the early 1900s. South Asian ox cart drivers (*banian charretiers*) who provided the main transportation of goods throughout the city, perturbed officials too (see Figure 25). They



Figure 25: Zebu-drawn chariot transporting bananas, ca. 1910s  
(Source: Author's collection)

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<sup>555</sup> Interviews with I.A. 19 April 2013.

shared the space around Mahabibo, parking their oxen at the entrance of Mahabibo village (between Avenue de Mahabibo and Avenue d'Ambovo). Ox-cart drivers apparently occupied the land freely and avoided paying rental fees for almost a decade.<sup>556</sup> Following a fire in the area, however, city council members deliberated that urgent matters were required. The charioteers “maintain there a repulsive and unhealthy filthiness; it constitutes an ongoing danger for the village of Mahabibo, from which they are separated by a band of land.”<sup>557</sup> The City Commission soon agreed that they would regulate charioteers by requiring them to move to a designated cattle park to the east of town, which could be rented for .05fr/square meter.<sup>558</sup> Goat herders similarly moved their livestock about the city spaces with unfettered access, taking them to pasture in a range of places. City authorities, dismayed at their traversal into Majunga, soon stipulated that livestock animals were not permitted beyond a 300-meter radius of Mahabibo.<sup>559</sup> Appeals by one resident, Ranaivo, to secure land for a cattle park in 1920 were declined because of “constant extensions” to the Village of Mahabibo.<sup>560</sup> At odds here were competing ideas about the appropriate uses of urban spaces. Colonial authorities conceived of urban space as an exclusively human domain, informed by early twentieth century ideologies of disease prevention and the control of animal waste. Charioteers and goat herders, on the other hand, had a more capacious idea of urban space as that which could accommodate people and animals, the latter of which provided sustenance and labor to sustain human life.

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<sup>556</sup> ANRDM/F41: Proces-Verbaux de la séance de la Commission Municipale, 28 Aout 1909.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

<sup>558</sup> ibid. Nothing further was mentioned, and apparently the charioteers acquiesced.

<sup>559</sup> ANRDM/F41: Séance de 9 Mai 1916.

<sup>560</sup> ANRDM/F41: 1920: Séance de 27 Jan 1920.

### ***Solidity and Citizenship in the Aftermath of the 1912 Fire***

A devastating fire in 1912 destroyed much of Mahabibo Village, and proved to be the pivotal turning point in colonial efforts to manage the urban landscape.<sup>561</sup> City administrators identified a terrain adjacent to Mahabibo to which some 2000 victims without shelter would be relocated and encouraged to build new homes.<sup>562</sup> This land had previously been the site of the Lazaret, which was the quarantine site for contagious diseases during recent plague epidemics in the town.<sup>563</sup> This space, as mentioned in the introduction, would be delineated into four ethnic enclaves; two enclaves would house Comorians, Anjouanais and Makoas; Sakalava on another; and the fourth would be for “Hova, Bourjanais and Betsileo.” Streets would be aligned into a grid pattern, each measuring 6 meters wide with a large central boulevard of 28 meters width.<sup>564</sup> The Health Commissioner, furthermore, proposed to extend canalisation to Mahabibo, and to install ten new water fountain intake pipes, in case of fire in the future.

Like colonial interventions elsewhere in Africa, French colonial urban planners in Majunga seized this moment of devastation to reshape the everyday lives of colonial subjects through spatial design and minute regulations.<sup>565</sup> With obstructing houses now razed, city planners broadened existing roads and carved new ones.<sup>566</sup> At the same time, city officials were concerned that these rebuilding efforts would disrupt the daily rhythms and labor of Mahabibo inhabitants, and strove to mitigate the interruption. Administrative concerns about the

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<sup>561</sup> The precise cause of the fire was unclear. City officials did, however, praise the courageous efforts of “the Senegalais Boubou” who entered a burning house to retrieve 3 kg of gunpowder which would have exploded and caused great damage. To reward him for his valiant efforts, he was permitted to freely exploit the nearby stone mine, ANRDM/F52: Urbanisme, Extrait du registre des délibérations de la Commission Municipale de Majunga, Séance 27 Sept 1912.

<sup>562</sup> ANRDM/F 41, Letter 14 Feb. 1912 from Mayor Carron to Gouverneur General.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid, and ANRDM/VIIJ382 re: debates about rebuilding Lazaret.

<sup>564</sup> ANRDM/F52, Letter from Administrateur-Maire Carron to gouverneur General, 14 Fevrier 1913.

<sup>565</sup> Çelik, *Urban Forms*, 1997; Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 1988; Myers, *Verandahs of Power*, 2003; Rabinow, *French Norms*, 1989; Wright, *The Politics of Design*, 1991.

<sup>566</sup> ANRDM/F 52, Letter 14 Feb. 1913 from Mayor Carron to Gouverneur General.

possibilities of future fire heavily influenced the city's next steps. Majunga Mayor Carron pleaded with Gouverneur General Picquié to aid in the construction of 1000 homes in bricks or concrete, with limestone whitewash and tin metal roofs.<sup>567</sup> These proposed homes would be standardized, measuring 6 meters by 3 meters, divisible into two rooms by a partition and separated into parcels, to avoid the linking together of houses which was seen to propagate fires.<sup>568</sup> Penal laborers would be deployed, as needed, to dig out clay for the construction of mud and dung homes (*pisée*), apparently in cases where people could not afford more durable materials. Parcels of land would be annually taxed at 10 francs each. The city managed the parcels in a rent-to-own scheme that would generate tax revenue in which residents could rent homes at 8 francs/month (below market rate of 10 fr/month) and become owners in 10 years of continuous, timely pay.<sup>569</sup> This intervention, the Mayor argued, would allow “the native” to become the owner of a solid house, “presenting all the conditions of desired hygiene and assuring a sedentary Majungais population which is precious to the development of commerce and industry.”<sup>570</sup> Solidity of the home, from the perspective of city planners, would necessarily engender a stationary lifestyle. And while it is not clear how many town inhabitants shared that interest in a sedentary life, many did desire homes built of durable materials.<sup>571</sup>

In the wake of the fire, city administrators appointed a French contractor, Monsieur Raullet, to work with residents to construct homes in an “orderly” fashion, of durable materials more resistant to the rapacious properties of fire than *satrana*. City Council encouraged the

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<sup>567</sup> ANRDM/F52, Letter 12 October 1912 to Gouverneur General.

<sup>568</sup> ANRDM/F52: Urbanisme, Extrait du registre des délibérations de la Commission Municipale de Majunga, Séance 27 Sept 1912.

<sup>569</sup> ANRDM/F52: Letter, 12 October 1912, from M. Raullet to Gouverneur Generale.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

“De plus, l’indigene, sans s’en apercevoir et a un prix inferieur à celui qu’il paie actuellement, se trouvera propriétaire d’une case solide, présentant toutes les conditions d’hygiène désirable, ce qui assurera à Majunga une population sédentaire, dont le concours est précieux au développement du Commerce et de l’Industrie.”

<sup>571</sup> ANRDM/ F52, 16 Oct 1912, Extrait du registre des délibérations de la Commission Municipale de Majunga.

population of Mahabibo to construct their homes in “solid” materials (*solide*), such as wood, cement and sheet metal (*tôle, toly*). For their means of communication, authorities were obliged to disseminate their program through long-standing Malagasy oratory genres. They called a *kabary*, an ancient Malagasy forum of oral public exchange and discussion, to present the City Council’s proposal.<sup>572</sup> In the *kabary*, French city administrators explained that Mahabibo residents were free to choose either to work with Monsieur Raulet, free of charge, or to build on their own. Remarkably, out of the 150 families who initially submitted their decisions, only seven opted to collaborate with Monsieur Raulet.<sup>573</sup> In this forceful act of rebuffal, Mahabibo residents declared autonomy over the design and composition of their living spaces. Perhaps Mahabibo dwellers rejected the city’s proposal because they were suspicious of state-sponsored interventions into their domesticities and mobility; because the parameters of the proposed housing required more materials and expense (since the proposed houses were not joined with a shared wall); or perhaps because relinquishing control over home construction would disrupt important cycles of social reproduction that accompanied house building. By some accounts, nineteenth and early twentieth century thatch and mud homes were easily and quickly assembled in two days time.<sup>574</sup> Such efforts undoubtedly involved mutual dependence and collaboration within the kinship and residential communities of the city. Rebuilding one’s home would have thus taken place in a dense network of exchange and reciprocal transactions, which further enacted belonging to the city. Whatever their grounds for rejection of the city’s proposed renewal plan, French city administrators were left with little recourse to mandate otherwise.

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<sup>572</sup> On *kabary* more generally see, Jennifer Jackson, *Political oratory and cartooning an ethnography of democratic processes in Madagascar* (Chichester: Wiley and Sons, 2013).

<sup>573</sup> ANRDM/F52, Ltr 24 October 1912, Mayor Carron to Gov Gen.

<sup>574</sup> Grainge, H.W. 1875. “Journal of a Visit to Mojanga and the North-West Coast”, *The Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine*, No. I., p. 31-32.

Among those who opposed this intervention was the group of Anjouanais men—Moucheda Ousseney, Abodou Baina, Salima, Sidi Hamadi, Charif Abdallah, Boudoury—who wrote the letter to the Gouverneur General Albert Picquié of Madagascar, with which this chapter opened.<sup>575</sup> In their letter, the men petitioned Picquié to remain in their existing dwellings, rather than move involuntarily to the newly assigned land. They explained that they lived in Majunga since 1895, but were displaced in 1897 from Bostany, just west of Mahabibo, when authorities determined that the area belonged to “Indian” owners.<sup>576</sup> At that time, they were given parcels of land on which to settle by Geometre Bournel, where they constructed their wood and cement homes.<sup>577</sup> They reasoned that their labor and economic investments in their homes, combined with the value of their materials, justified their continued emplacement. Should they be forced to move, their durable building materials (cement and wood) “would be valueless.” It would have undoubtedly been more cost effective for the city administration to allow Mahabibo residents to construct their homes on their existing plots, using their salvaged materials. But this apparently pulled against the colonial impetus to reorder the city and disaggregate the island’s population into delineated ethno-racial groups. The Anjouanais petitioners were in fact exposing the contradictory logics of the city’s forced displacement scheme, and the racial assumptions which undergirded it.

In a side note, Mayor Carron commented to the Gouverneur General that the Anjouan signatories were disgruntled about the spatial “partition of races.”<sup>578</sup> This ethno-racial segregation had been ordered by Picquié himself in 1911, on the basis that it served to facilitate

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<sup>575</sup> ANRDM/F51, Letter 9 November 1912, from petitioners to Gouverneur General.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>578</sup> ANRDM/F51, Ltr Fev 1913.

police surveillance.<sup>579</sup> Picquié's initiatives were extensions of Gallieni's early racial governance policy ("politiques des races"), which relied on the development of an imagined racial cartography of the island.<sup>580</sup> In effect, Gallieni's *politique des races* was brought to bear on the smaller scale on the neighborhood of Mahabibo. This was especially evident when Carron confessed that the city administration opportunistically seized upon the fire of September 23 to implement racially-organized governance measures in Mahabibo. "[The fire] gave us an occasion to take the general measures to determine for each race an emplacement to occupy from this point forward...this will involve the displacement of other "natives" and prohibition on some to repair their homes. This is why the signatories are protesting...they want to repair their homes."<sup>581</sup> In a partial victory for the Anjouan signatories, the Gouverneur General determined that the city ought to proceed with racial segregation in Mahabibo, but specified that if houses were in good condition residents could be permitted to remain on their current sites.<sup>582</sup>

In question here were competing ideas about the basis for citizenship, justice and fairness—whether material, spatial or ethno-racial—and the relative reach of colonial authority. The Anjouanais' oppositional letter is notable, not only as an important gesture of resistance against colonial spatial engineering, but also as an appeal justified by the *building materials* at play. It is noteworthy that the signatories grounded their appeal in the value and permanency of their building matters tethered to the land on which they stood, rather than say their long-standing presence on the land, primacy of their occupation, or normative arguments about state-

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid

<sup>580</sup> See Gilles Boetsch and Eric Savarese, "Photographies anthropologiques et politique des races: Sur les usages de la photographie à Madagascar (1896-1905)," *Journal des Anthropologues* vol 80-81:4 (2000), 247-258, on how anthropological photography was another critical medium through which Gallieni's *politiques des races* was realized.

<sup>581</sup> ANRDM/F51: Letter 4 February 1913 from A. Carron, Chef de la Province et Maire de Majunga to Gouverneur General A. Picquié.

<sup>582</sup> ANRDM/F51: Letter 14 March 1913 from A. Picquié to A. Carron, Aide-Maire de Majunga.

sponsored forced removals. French colonial planners leveraged the post-1912 fire moment to implement their technological visions for “the city yet to come,” governed in an orderly, racialized pattern.<sup>583</sup> But the letter writers seem to have found little value in the proposed relocation scheme, and instead privileged the value of materials and the investments they signified. For their part, the Anjouanais signatories drew on the solidity and obduracy of their housing materials—in this case cement and wood—to durably fix their presence in the city. Housing regulations were terrains of negotiation, in which some town inhabitants found openings to lay claim to belonging through the materials of belonging (the cement and wood building supplies) and city administrators were obliged to concede at times to their demands.

### ***Disciplining Ethno-Racial and Spatial Boundaries***

Despite the momentum around the 1912 legislation oriented to building a sedentary population and durable structures, it appears that either it was not fully enforced or somehow fell by the wayside. But many of the proposed interventions to refashion the spaces of Mahabibo and the newly allocated terrain of Lazaret *did* materialize: the streets were newly traced in spectacularly straight perpendicular and parallel lines, parcels measuring 18 x 9 meters were delineated.<sup>584</sup> And the village’s population was demarcated along ethno-racial lines, though it is not clear on what bases city administrators categorized Mahabibo residents, or whether residents self-identified and clustered around kinship or ethnic affiliations on their own accord. “Comorians, Anjouanais and Makoas” were grouped in the southern section (today’s Abattoir), while highlanders (“Hova, Bourjanais and Betsileo”) were relocated to Tanambao. “Sakalava,”

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<sup>583</sup> Simone, “City yet to come”; Hommels, *Unbuilding Cities*, 332.

<sup>584</sup> ANRDM/F51: 14 February 1913 Letter 4 February 1913 from A. Carron, Chef de la Province et Maire de Majunga to Gouverneur General A. Picquié.

deemed to be “the most numerous” were situated in Lazaret, while “Antaimoro” (from southeast Madagascar) were assigned to Mahabibokely.<sup>585</sup>



Figure 26: Postcard, “Beautiful Sakalava Girls,” Mahabibo (note thatch and wood home in background)  
(Source: Authors collection)

Mahabibo inhabitants worked tirelessly to reconstruct their homes, and the city provided some wood to encourage household construction. People drew on a wide range of materials: coursed mud, wood, cement, sheet metal, thatch and palm leaves. But not all materials were regarded equally, nor available to all. Renters most desired houses made of sheet metal, but also found them the most expensive to rent. Thatch homes were cheaper to rent, but less optimal. Early assessments of the rebuilding efforts suggested that distinctive differences between the rate and kinds of construction taking place in these enclaves—perhaps because of uneven economic means, but longstanding prohibitions on building among some groups on building homes in durable materials may have played a role. In the “Comorian quarter,” for instance, fourteen

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<sup>585</sup> ANRDM/F52: Extrait du registre des délibérations de la Commission Municipale de Majunga, Séance 24 Sept 1912.

homes were built of sheet metal, twenty-one of thatch, and two of concrete. In Lazaret, by contrast, where Sakalava and highlanders lived in respective quarters, ninety-eight homes were built of mud, five in thatch, and ninety-two in palm reeds (*satrana*) (see Figure 26). Some, however, found themselves without the means to rebuild and apparently sought work in nearby Boanamy and Marovoay, with the hopes of earning money and returning to Majunga to build their homes.

By this point in time, the demographic fabric of Mahajanga distinctively reflected the influence of Comorian-Malagasy networks that would persist over the next half-century. In the immediate aftermath of the 1912 fire, colonial authorities estimated the population of Mahabibo at 4,286 individuals, with those from the archipelago comprising the greatest majority. In a nod to the ongoing movement of inhabitants, they also acknowledged a “floating population” of 1,500 people. Migration—whether to and from the Comorian Archipelago or Malagasy hinterlands—would have been an important strategy for families engaged in trade, cattle farming, or rice farming. The 1912 census breakdown reveals not only the town’s heterogeneity, but also the colonial framework of ethnic affiliation at the time (see Figure 27):

“Comorians, Anjouanais, Arabes, Zanzibaristes, Mayottais, Somalis, et Makoas”	2,030
“Hovas, Betsileo, and Antaimoro”	1,701
“Sakalavaes (sic) from Nossi Be et Maintirano”	300
“Europeans, Assimiles, Indians”	201
“Sénégalais” <sup>586</sup>	28
“St. Mariens” [from Ile Sainte Marie, just east of Madagascar]	26

Figure 27: Census record, 1912 (source: ANM/F41, Census, October 1912)

The mobility and migration of families into and out of Mahabibo, however, became more worrisome to French city administrators in the 1910s, as did the twinned imperatives of segregation and sanitation. European inhabitants were anxious and aggravated about the

<sup>586</sup> Note that those categorized as “Senegalais” were tirailleurs who accompanied French troops in the 1895-6 invasion through the port of Majunga, some of whom remained in Majunga following the conquest.

unfettered movement of Mahabibo inhabitants—especially prostitutes who conducted their commerce in the evening “in view of the whole population” and “nomadic” men who “laid in wait to commit thievery.”<sup>587</sup> Prostitutes were apparently not tolerated in Mahabibo, and instead gathered in the streets near the port.<sup>588</sup> At a Municipal Commission meeting in June 1912, the Commission acted decisively on these worries. To improve sanitation, members ruled for the construction of a washhouse for European linens, the digging of a ditch for manure, and the installation of an incinerating oven at the slaughterhouse to dispose of offal.<sup>589</sup>

In response to the demands of European residents, the city unanimously passed a municipal act in 1919 that reiterated that Mahabibo was a designated “native reserve.”<sup>590</sup> The act described that although the village had been created for “natives,” “numerous natives” defied the order and continued to dwell in various neighborhoods throughout the town. Because their habitations were deemed to be “without any concern for the most elementary rules of hygiene,” they posed a “permanent danger for public health and constitute a case for epidemic.”<sup>591</sup> This new act more forcefully prohibited “natives” from residing anywhere outside of Mahabibo, and justified the strict segregation of “native” and “Europeans” on the grounds of sanitation, to “prevent transmittable maladies” to Europeans. That authorities felt obliged to duplicate the already existing 1902 regulation<sup>592</sup> suggests that they found themselves out of control of an

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<sup>587</sup> ANRDM/F41: Procès-Verbaux de la séance de la Commission Municipale, 8 Juin 1912. Note that in the early 1920s, concerns about high rates of venereal disease were explicitly linked to women prostitutes, ANRDM/F41: PV-Séance 16 Mars 1923.

<sup>588</sup> ANRDM/F42: PV-Séance 16 Mars 1923.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> ANRDM/ F46: Arrête Municipal 17 April 1919 and 23 October 1919. The act exempted two categories of inhabitants: 1) “Native owners or renters of homes in the European quarter, who resided in buildings known and recognized as healthy by the commission of hygiene and provided with water-closets” and 2) “Natives who are not subject to the indigene court of law (Les indigènes non justiciables de l’indigenat)”, perhaps an ambiguous reference to assimilées. Note that the act references a similar act passed in New Caledonia on which this one was based, suggesting the transference and mobility of legal codes across French colonial territories.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid

<sup>592</sup> ANRDM/ F46: Arrête Municipal, 14 September 1902; Also 30 August 1901.

unwieldy, growing town. Casting Malagasy homes as “unhygienic” not only justified segregation, but effectively placed Malagasy beyond the temporal and spatial realm inhabited by Europeans. This served to truncate any sustained consideration of the reasons underlying crowded housing conditions in Mahabibo. Nor did officials contend with the incompetency and limitations they faced in implementing the housing plans or cityscape they envisioned.

The 1919 act also, however, raised the occupation tax of land parcels to 12 francs per year.<sup>593</sup> Much to the surprise of the city council, this stirred the fury of women living in Mahabibo. One day in February, a delegation of women confronted the mayor and promptly submitted a petition insisting that the former tax rate of 10 francs per year be maintained.<sup>594</sup> This forceful act of protest by women was apparently uncommon, and the mayor took their demands seriously. The women’s visit sparked a vigorous debate among council members. Some contended that taxes were raised too abruptly, and should have been gradually increased. Others posited that the sheer numbers of migrants who rent land parcels “but refuse to work” was evidence that Mahabibo residents were able to afford the tax increase. Ultimately, the former argument won. City Council determined to meet the womens’ demands, halting the tax increase for one more year as “an act of benevolence.”<sup>595</sup>

Over the next two decades, French city administrators overlaid additional housing regulations onto the legal precedents set in the immediate post-1912 moment. Of rising concern to city authorities was the demographic profile of who inhabited and owned parcels in Mahabibo. During the 1920s, city officials perceived that families of South Asian descent (*karana*) were securing land titles for parcels in Mahabibo, and in turn renting them to “natives.”<sup>596</sup> City council

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<sup>593</sup> ANRDM/ F46: Arrête Municipal 17 April 1919 and 23 October 1919.

<sup>594</sup> ANRDM/F41: Extrait du Registre des Deliberations de la Commission Municipale de Majunga, 14 Feb 1919.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> For example, ANRDM/F 40: Séance 26 April 1920.

members expressed anxieties about the “hindoo” presence in Mahabibo and the need to curtail Indian purchases of land there.<sup>597</sup> These anxieties were couched in paternalistic language, with city authorities interested in protecting vulnerable Malagasy and Comorians who might fall prey to unscrupulous Indian landlords. It is not clear if French authorities were motivated by a desire for ethno-racial bounding, or a fear that karana landlords could make housing prohibitively expensive and risk driving away the labor pool of Mahabibo. French officials perceived South Asians as an economic threat, competing for business with French retailers (Figure 28).<sup>598</sup>



Figure 28: Postcard “Mahabibo Village, Hindo Commerce,” ca 1920s or 30s (Source: Author’s collection)

Municipal acts unequivocally asserted that only “natives” could purchase a single land parcel in some parts of Mahabibo, and that Europeans and Assimilées who “did not have the possibility of living in the city” were permitted to rent parcels subject to authorization by the

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<sup>597</sup> ANDRM/F48: Terrains Commune (1899-1930), See Note de Presentation to Gov. Gen., 9 March 1922, which discusses the threat of “Hindos” seizure of Mahabibo. Officials were also concerned about economic competition between French and “Indian” merchants, see for instance ANDRM/D754: Letter, 3 Mars 1937 to Ministre des Colonies from Georges Bousset, Conseil Superieur des Colonies, Delegation de Madagascar.

<sup>598</sup> Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*.

city.<sup>599</sup> But in the day to day management of urban land titling, city authorities betrayed the rigid legal language, and made repeated concessions to Indians seeking land in Mahabibo. Take the case of Kassim Ramjee in 1931.<sup>600</sup> In the preceding years, Ramjee apparently had various “irregular” negotiations with the city and succeeded in acquiring four parcels of land. Eventually the city intervened and revoked two parcels, leaving one titled to Ramjee, and another titled to Ramjee’s mother. At the city council meeting where the deliberation over Ramjee’s case took place, one council member argued that Mahabibo was “invaded [by Indians] and daily requests are lodged by them for land grants.”<sup>601</sup> Requests by South Asians to acquire land and open shops in Mahabibo were faced with intensified scrutiny from city council, and downright refusal at times, in the late 1930s and 1940s.<sup>602</sup>

By the mid-1920s, Mahabibo had grown considerably and was becoming crowded. As one administrator noted, every last parcel was occupied.<sup>603</sup> Immigrants sought new areas surrounding the city to settle, and only afterwards did city administrators begin to consider secondary sites for another “native reserve.” In 1924, some twenty-seven “natives” settled on the communal terrains of Mahavoky, and then approached the city to ask for concessions to settle permanently on the site.<sup>604</sup> Some of these migrants had even cultivated the land (*mis leur terrain en valeur*), lending further weight to their appeal. Ultimately, the city notified them that they must reintegrate into the Village of Mahabibo.<sup>605</sup> At other times though, authorities were pushed

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<sup>599</sup> Land purchases were permitted in the section to the east of Avenue d’Eglise (today known as Morafeno). ANRDM/F48: Terrain Commune (1899-1930), Arrete 1930, 74M, Article III; ANRDM/F46 Arrete 114, 1929. The addition of this article to the existing legal act suggests that the number of Europeans and Assimilées interested in living in Mahabibo was possibly increasing, and persistent enough to warrant regulation.

<sup>600</sup> ANRDM/F44: PV Séance 23 Janvier 1931.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> See the case of Goulamaly Kassimaly, in PV Séance 22 Aout 1936; Case of Mohandal Kalidas, ANRDM/F45: PV-Séance 8 Nov 1941

<sup>603</sup> ANRDM/F42: PV-Séance 12 Fevrier 1926.

<sup>604</sup> ANRDM/F42: PV-Séance 23 August 1924.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

to demarcate a designated village by those that had already settled there. For instance, in February 1926, Ismaeil Djina requested a plot of land near Corniche, on the road to Amborovy.<sup>606</sup> But city council members admitted that this was the site of the coveted “Antaimoro Village,” and that this village ought to be reserved and demarcated as such.<sup>607</sup> The vision of a planned city, where French authorities could graft tidy gridlines on vacant spaces and deliberately channel the local population, was crumbling away. Instead, city officials raced to keep pace of the expanding city, teeming with newcomers and families who sometimes compelled administrators to recognize (or work around) their established settlements.

### ***Defining Proper Citizens and Debating Propertied Citizenship***

In the late 1920s, the city began shifting towards a new form of property ownership. Instead of the state holding all the land as “communal terrain” and renting out part of it, they would permit land purchases in part of Mahabibo, while retaining the rest in the long-term leasing arrangement which they had long done. In 1928, the city upheld legislation that divided Mahabibo into two parts, cut down the middle by the Avenue d’Eglise: The first westward part would be rented to migrants in conditions dictated by the city; the second part to the east would be parceled out and sold. For the latter, they maintained that land could be sold or rented in Mahabibo to “natives only,” and that all titles to land were revocable and precarious.<sup>608</sup> Whether this was done to generate revenue for the city, or to instill an ethic of property ownership is unclear. But at the time, French lawmakers in Madagascar were embroiled in broader debates

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<sup>606</sup> ANRDM/F42: PV-Séance 10 Febrier 1926.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> ANRDM/F43. Proces-Verbal Séance 2 October 1928; Arrete Municipal 148, 12 October 1928; See also ANRDM/F43: PV-Séance 5 Novembre 1928; ANRDM.F.46.1929.Arrete 114, Article IV.

about the role of property ownership in the formation of citizenship and rule over colonial subjects.

Lawmakers in the 1910s and 1920s contended with Malagasy historical landholding practices under successive highland monarchies, and the implications of that history for instituting contemporary French colonial property law. They understood that under highland monarchal rule in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, land belonged to the king or queen, and that inhabitants were free to enjoy the use of land on which they built structures or cultivated (usufruct rights).<sup>609</sup> Under colonial occupation, lawmakers extended this arrangement, and position the French colonial state in the role of the highland monarchy. In sum, the entirety of land in the island colony belonged to the French Republic, and inhabitants retained usufruct rights.<sup>610</sup> But this conception of colonial state control over land conflicted with the potential of private property ownership, which authorities envisioned as a transformative mechanism for the French civilizing mission. As one colonial authority summed it up, “The notion of individual ownership, attachment to the land.... must be developed in our subjects with all possible force... history illuminating the way the development of civilization among a people is a direct function of the appropriation of land.”<sup>611</sup> Thus, authorities in Mahajanga and elsewhere sought property ownership as a means through which Malagasy could be inculcated with an attachment to land and fashioned into proper civilized subjects. Such interventions, however, consciously

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<sup>609</sup> “L’avenir de la colonization à Madagascar — La domaine, Les concessions” *Bulletin Économique* (pub. Par les soins du gouvernement general; Tana-Imprimerie officiel) no. 4, (1896) 40-42.

<sup>610</sup> Civil code 23, articles 2230; 9 March 1896, as discussed in “L’avenir de la colonization à Madagascar — La domaine, Les concessions” *Bulletin Économique* (pub. Par les soins du gouvernement general; Tana-Imprimerie officiel) no. 4, (1896) 40-42.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid. “La notion de la propriété individuelle, l’attachement à la terre doivent, au contraire, être développés chez nos sujets avec toute la force possible, l’histoire faisant ressortir, d’une façons lumineuse, qu le développement de la civilization chez un peuple est en fonction directe de l’appropriation de son sol.”

overlooked the customary means by which land had been divided and managed, and the enduring attachments to land long enjoyed by many Malagasy.<sup>612</sup>

Administrators in the 1910s added more municipal housing laws to this existing legal framework, with more specificity about permissible modes of housing construction. These mounting interventions were designed to bring the lives and spaces of Mahabibo residents under purview of, and into closer engagement with, colonial bureaucracy. Inhabitants who rented a land parcel from the city were required to erect a home within one month, or they risked confiscation of their parcel.<sup>613</sup> Dwellers could receive an indemnity for housing materials if moved off the land for urban planning and redistricting purposes.<sup>614</sup> Once again, the city council strictly prohibited the construction of homes of durable materials (*en dur*) on *rented* parcels. The sheer variety of prohibited materials testified to ways Mahabibo inhabitants had creatively appropriated available materials for housing construction: “brick...steel barrel drums, boards coming from packing crates, similar waste.”<sup>615</sup> Homes erected of sheet metal or thatch required a permit for construction.<sup>616</sup> But those who managed to secure long-term leases on land parcels, and could afford to do so, were highly encouraged to build durably.

Embedded in these regulations was an orientation to establishing a certain *kind* of sedentary population. At first glance, it appeared that city administrators worked to conserve the temporary nature of labor migration. This was evident, for example in the stipulation that houses on rented parcels were to be built with lightweight materials, that could be dismantled in a period

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<sup>612</sup> But note that tanindrazana as a custom and practice was a rather recent practice introduced under Andrianampoinimerina, Larson, *History and Memory*, 179-182.

<sup>613</sup> ANRDM/F44, Arrrete 114, 1929.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> ANRDM/F46.1929.Arrrete 114, Article XII.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid

of fifteen days at most.<sup>617</sup> But this was only the case if residents rented a parcel from another landowner, as most surely did.<sup>618</sup> For those who held long-term leases on land parcels, or purchased parcels in the post-1928 scheme, on the other hand, the city permitted housing construction in durable materials. Moreover, the city aimed to foster family situations conducive for population growth, as specified in a 1930 amendment that parcels would only be allocated to households of no more than six persons, inhabited by “two sexes who had already reached adult status.”<sup>619</sup> This dizzying array of legislative interventions amounted to a contradictory, and inconsistently enforced, regulatory terrain.

A tension persisted in the city’s approach to property regulation. One on hand, colonial authorities aspired to create housing and property conditions (long-term land leases, mandates to build durably) to enable the settlement of a manageable, sedentary population which would ensure a long-term labor supply. On the other, they endeavored to constrain the flow of new migrants and the growth of existing families, by placing legislative limits on the kinds of housing materials they associated with transience (*satrana*, thatch, steel drums). Yet this approach collided with the economic realities of the city, in which few long-term residents chose or could afford long term land leases and durable materials. Instead, families apparently chose to invest their earnings elsewhere—perhaps sending remittances home, supporting broader kin networks, or investing in collective building projects, like mosques (discussed below). It also failed to account for the historical practices around building materials that may have shaped families’

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<sup>617</sup> ANRDM/F/46: 1929 Arrete 114, Article IV.

<sup>618</sup> Beginning around 1930, extensive debates emerged about which categories of citizens could purchase long-term land leases in Mahabibo. That year, Edouard Ratsimanohatra, an employee of the Compagnie de Batelage, filed a petition to purchase lot 19, ilot (parcel) 8. Mr. Ratsimanohatra had naturalized as French citizen in the year prior, and thus was deemed to have “lost his native status,” thereby disqualifying him from buying a long-term lease in Mahabibo. Debates ensued in the city council about how to handle requests from this “category of individuals” which were estimated at around twelve. Should they be considered as Europeans? Or can they retain some benefits of natives? The end resolution to the debate was not entirely clear. See ANRDM/F44: PV Séance 27 Mai 1930; Also ANRDM/F 48: Terrains Commune (1899-1930), Note Documentaire.

<sup>619</sup> ANRDM/F 48: Terrains Commune (1899-1930), Arrete 1930, 74M, Article IV.

efforts to construct urban homesteads, for instance longstanding restrictions (*fady*) on building homes, rather than tombs, in lasting materials (wood, stone).<sup>620</sup> Finally, the regulations placed the city in a situation of perpetual peril by prohibiting housing construction in fire-resistant materials. A single unruly fire could—and did in fact in 1931—quickly decimate the entire quarter. The memory of the 1912 fire in Mahabibo, hastened by the flammable thatch, wood and palm housing constructed, had faded away.

In 1931, Mahabibo dwellers were tragically reminded of the destructive force of fire. This time, some 5000 people were left without shelter. The city carefully examined the topographical conditions of Mahabibo area and determined that due to low-lying nature of Abattoir (a large quartier within Mahabibo), the quartier was particularly susceptible to fire.<sup>621</sup> In an about-face, the city authorities issued an absolute prohibition on the construction of homes in thatch in Abattoir. Fences constructed of *satrana* “utilized by Comorians” were now forbidden.<sup>622</sup> They required that all rental homes to be built of sheet metal and privately owned homes of adobe-covered stone.<sup>623</sup> Any residents who were without means to construct in sheet metal or adobe and stone would be forcibly relocated to Miarinarivo where thatch homes were permitted. Furthermore, colonial authorities tied durable housing to proper home ownership, mandating that landowners could only retain their land if they built durable housing (that of mud-covered stone or sheet metal).<sup>624</sup> Within one year, they were forced to amend this to allow for the construction of rental homes in mud, because most residents were without means to purchase sheet metal.<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2. Note that this was true for those of Sakalava descent, as well as highlanders.

<sup>621</sup> ANRDM/F44: PV-Séance 21 Aout 1931.

<sup>622</sup> ANRDM/F44: PV-Séance 19 Aout 1931.

<sup>623</sup> ANRDM/F44: PV-Séance 21 Aout 1931.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> ANRDM/F44: PV-Séance 11 Juin 1932.

The continual changes in housing regulations must have been confusing at times for Mahabibo residents, and the push for durable housing would have new implications for infrastructure, class stratification and belonging within Mahabibo from the mid-twentieth century. By the time of the 1931 fire, the village of Mahabibo had grown to a veritable city of 20,000 practically overshadowing the original town of Majunga. City administrators worried about the escalating Comorian population and noted that the vast numbers of those able to build durable housing seem to have been long-residing Comorians.<sup>626</sup> And yet infrastructure was sorely lacking. There were only 18 water fountains, for example, to serve the entire population.<sup>627</sup> In an apparent resignation to their inability to shape housing construction practices, city council members shifted their gaze away from housing regulations and towards the management of permits for religious buildings and the introduction of infrastructure. Both would be central priorities for the city in the decade to come.

In this section, I have shown how in the span of thirty years, from 1902 to 1932, city officials grew ever more invested in mapping and intervening in “native” quarters. Over this time, city administrators radically changed housing policies, moving from prohibitions on durable building materials to prohibitions on *non*-durable materials. Like other French colonial cities, officials were forced to continually reinvent their approach to spatial management by city inhabitants who envisioned a different kind of life for themselves. City authorities found their efforts constrained and truncated, by a withering colonial state lacking in resources to manage urban spaces.<sup>628</sup> Mahabibo residents worked to refashion ambiguous regulations—either by

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<sup>626</sup> ANRDM/F44, Letter 14 Feb. 1913 from AM Carron to Gov. General, Anatananrivo.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> See Bissell, *Urban Design*; Schler “Ambiguous Spaces,” 53.

ignoring them, defying them, or openly contesting them— and obliged authorities to improvise regulations along the way.

### ***Paths Taken: Overseas, Overland***

As Majunga grew in the early decades of the 1900s, French colonial authorities considered new possibilities for shaping the city's demographic composition through property regulations. Among the most pressing concern about the city's demography beginning in the 1910s was the ever-rising population of migrants from the Comorian archipelago. Their presence was made manifest in the proliferation of mosques throughout the city between the 1890s and 1930s. This section considers critical flashpoints in intensifying migration from Comoros to northwest Madagascar during this time, and how different groups from the Archipelago generated collective ties which formed the bases for enduring claims to the city, through communal mosque building projects. By documenting this early colonial history of migration, this chapter provides the necessary context for understanding how Comorian migrants and their descendants positioned themselves in the city's social geography and legitimated their claims to *zanatany* status in the mid-twentieth century.

Owing to its unique location in the Indian Ocean basin, inhabitants of the Comorian archipelago—comprised of Nzwani, Ngazidja, Mayotte and Moheli— have long been enmeshed in Indian Ocean movements of goods, ideas and people.<sup>629</sup> Migration between Comores and northwest Madagascar persisted for centuries leading up to French colonial occupation in the region. This is evidenced in the strong linguistic, religious, and kinship commonalities across the

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<sup>629</sup> Jean Martin, *Comores: quatre îles entre pirates et planteurs*, 2 vols (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983).

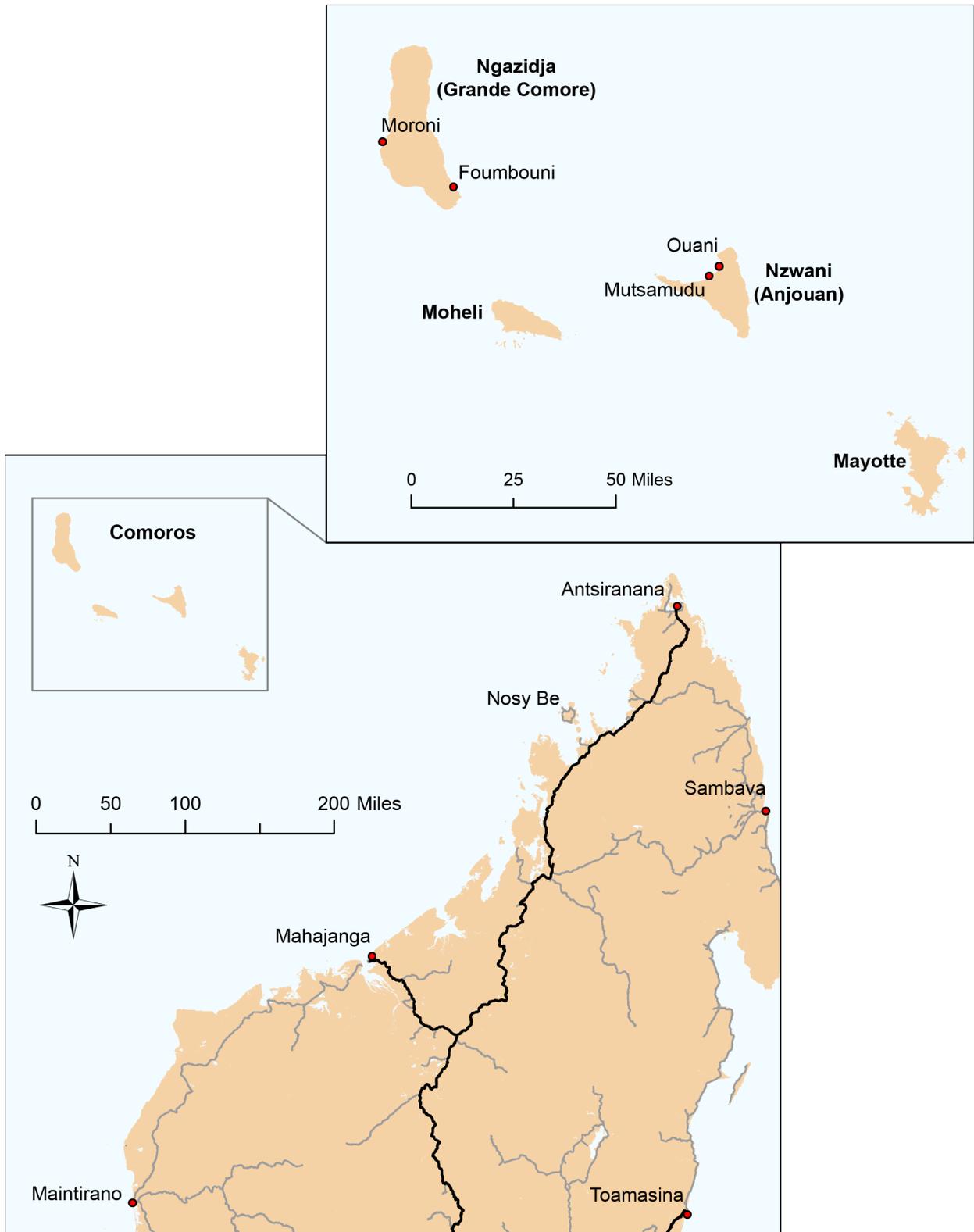


Figure 29: Map of Comoros and Northwest Madagascar

region, which continue today. In the early nineteenth century, Nzwani sultans cultivated increasingly elaborate relationships with British emissaries lubricated by, what Jeremy Prestholdt referred to as, their strategic employment of similitude—linguistic and cultural practices which appealed to British sensibilities. Nzwani sultans sought British military assistance to thwart encroaching threats from Malagasy and Comorian neighbors, especially between 1790 and 1840. British dignitaries for their part were interested in expanding their Indian Ocean presence, beyond Mauritius, in the face of advancing French interests. Following upheavals in the highland monarchy in the late 1820s and 30s, in which Sakalava monarch Andriantsoly and Majunga governor Ramanetaka fled to Mahore (Mayotte) and Mwali (Moheli), respectively, where they drew more Malagasy migrants to the islands (see Figure 29).

Ngazidja (Grande Comore) was governed by competing sultanates, with whom French dignitaries negotiated to secure timber and to recruit laborers. By the mid-nineteenth century, Comoros was enmeshed in an imperial maelstrom of competing French and British interests, and slaving economies, in the Indian Ocean.<sup>630</sup> Andriantsoly sold Mayotte to the French in 1841, who established it as a protectorate. Njazidja late 1870s, Sultan Sayyid Ali (also known as Sultan of Bambao), opted to concede an enormous land concession to Léon Humblot and later fled to Majunga in 1894. Similarly in Nzwani (Anjouan), Sultan Abdallah (1855-1891) ceded some 75% of the island's terrain to European companies, pushing Anjouanais to seek land and possibilities elsewhere. Finally, Abdallah tired of British pressures to abolish slavery and sought French aid in 1882, effectively relinquishing control of the island. By the mid 1887, Comoros lay within French imperial grasp and the archipelago—long divided by political interests and

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<sup>630</sup> This section follows from: Jean Martin; Malyn Newitt, *The Comoro Islands: Struggle Against Dependency in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984); Edward Alpers, "Slavery, Antislavery, Political Rivalry and Regional Networks in East African Waters, 1877-1883," *Afriques* [Online], 06 (2015).

distinct cultural practices—was brought into being as a single territorial unit. Even if there was little economic gain to be had, Comores Islands offered the French empire a strong counterpoint to the specter of British presence in the Indian Ocean.

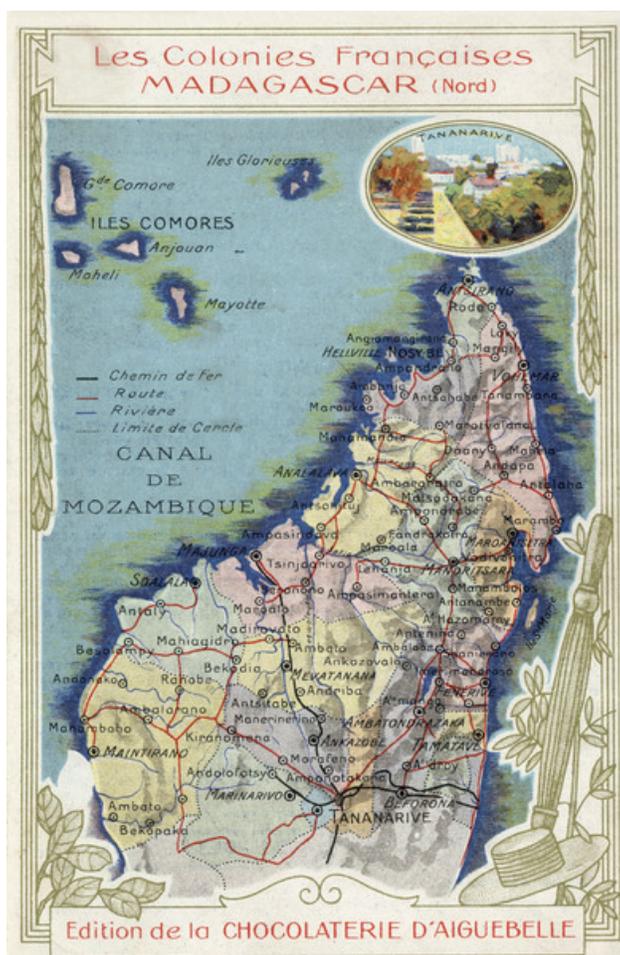


Figure 30: Les Colonies Françaises Madagascar Nord, by Chocolaterie d’Aiguebelle (Drôme, France), ca. 1910. Chromolithographic chocolate card. (Source: Author’s Collection)

Over the decades that followed, French authorities allocated concessions of fertile land to colons who established plantations of vanilla, sugar, cloves and ylang-ylang across the archipelago. Young Comorian men who could not find wage labor in these plantations, or could not tolerate submission to European employers, sought contractual work in northwest Madagascar—either as laborers constructing roads, building administrative buildings, or in

agriculture.<sup>631</sup> At other points, even those who labored on plantations were forced to find work elsewhere when ecological or economic crises hit. The sugar plantations of northern Ndzwani, for instance, all but collapsed in 1905 due to the global decline in sugar prices.<sup>632</sup> French officials in Madagascar, for their part, were well served by this exodus of young men from Ndzwani and Njazidga to Majunga. In the earliest days of the foundering French imperial occupation in Madagascar, colonial authorities in Majunga agonized over the daunting infrastructure projects awaiting them and the interminable dearth of laboring bodies to bring their visions to fruition. Sometime between 1898 and 1901, French colonial officers began preliminary efforts to recruit laborers from parts of Comoros Islands. Early efforts to formally recruit workers from Comores, however, were negligible. In 1901, for instance, public works overseers surmised that Chinese laborers contributed 698 days, while “Makoa” and “Anjounais” collectively worked 148 days. The bulk of public works labor was undertaken by prison laborers (Figure 31).<sup>633</sup> But over time Comorian migration to Madagascar intensified.

It is difficult to determine the exact numbers of immigrants from Comores to northwest Madagascar, because colonial surveillance of human traffic was minimal and when it existed, many men avoided official scrutiny. Also elusive are the exact, disaggregated breakdown of where migrants came from *within* Comoros. French colonial aspirations to consolidate their regional imperial holdings together were realized in 1908 when the archipelago was linked, by

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<sup>631</sup> Mariata Moussa Said notes that French called Comorian contractual workers “coolies”, as they did indentured workers from India and China, but does not provide a source; I did not encounter this term in relation to workers from the Comorian archipelago in my archival research.

<sup>632</sup> See source for Comoros. Also, David Vincent Trotman, *Crime in Trinidad: Conflict and Control in a Plantation Society, 1838-1900* (Univ of Tennessee Press, 1986) 188. A later example was the 1950 cyclone which devastated arable land across the archipelago and drove many young men to Madagascar in search of work, Said, “*Contribution à l’étude...*”, 111.

<sup>633</sup> ANRDM/DTP 28: Travaux Publics Rapport Annuel 1901.

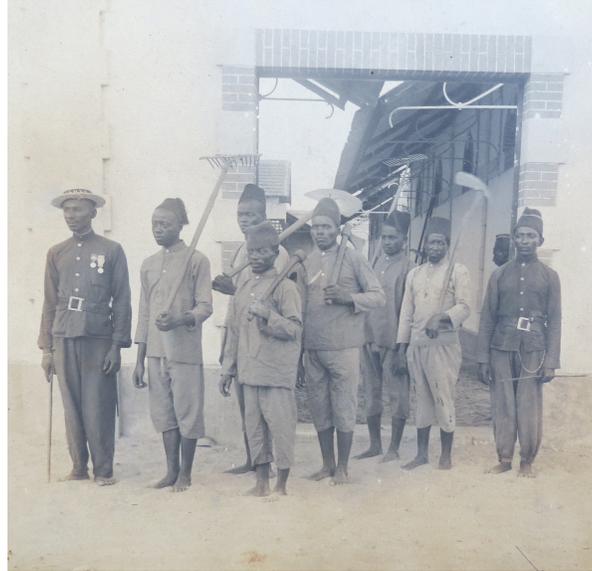


Figure 31: Prison laborers, ca. early 1900s  
(Source: Archives, Hotel de Ville, Mahajanga)

legislative annexation, to the by-then colony of Madagascar (Figure 30).<sup>634</sup> This legislative binding of Madagascar and the Comorian archipelago was partly a superficial grafting of colonial regulation onto already entrenched migratory movements. But it also facilitated, channeled and intensified the movement of predominantly male migrants from Nzwani and Ngazidja to Majunga in the 1920s and 1930s. French colonial officials in Madagascar gradually found themselves in contest with their counterparts in Comores, over the retention of laborers. By the 1910s, it was a vexing point for colonial administrators in Comores.<sup>635</sup> In 1910, one provincial administrator in Mayotte described how there was a population dearth in Mayotte

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<sup>634</sup> This was decree of 9 April 1908, Article 2. See Ibrahime, Mahmoud, *État Français et Colons Aux Comores (1912-1946)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1997), especially Chapter 1 “Le régime précédent”, p. 29-31; See also, C. Hachede, *Des groupements de Colonies. A propos du projet de rattachement à Madagascar des îles des Comores et de la Réunion* (Paris: Henri Charles-Lavauzelle, 1908) for a discussion of how the attachment of Comores and Madagascar was envisioned as a foundation for further extension to La Réunion, until that measure was vociferously opposed by colons in Réunion.

<sup>635</sup> It is difficult to be precise about the mounting numbers of Comorian migrants. Henry Rusillon indicated in 1922 that “The people of the Comoro Islands, who have come in large numbers these last years, owing to their new connections with the people of Madagascar, have joined themselves to the former slaves of the east coast of Africa. They all speak Swahili more or less correctly. They have been able to understand each other and thus give a false impression as to the number of Moslems in the country...The true Indian and Moslem centre is to-day at Majemga. Formerly it was at Nosibe.” In “Islam in Madagascar,” *The Muslim World* 12:4 (1922): 386-389.

because of “unfettered emigration to Madagascar.”<sup>636</sup> By 1926, the Governor in Mayotte fretted in a letter to the Governor General in Madagascar about the “vigorous” emigration from Mayotte to Madagascar; to this the Governor General harshly reminded him that Comores and Madagascar “actually constitute the same group of colonies” and consoled him by suggesting that he could ramp up his enforcement of their identity cards upon departure.<sup>637</sup>

At other times, however, colonial authorities in Madagascar appealed to intermediaries in Comores to recruit laborers reticent to work for French entrepreneurs or officials. One such mediator was that of Prince Saidina, captain of the boat “Star of Anjouan” (Étoile d’Anjouan), who was so successful in sending laborers to Madagascar that French administrators granted him a governorship in the province of Mahavavy, near present-day Ambilobe.<sup>638</sup> The name of Saidina’s boat suggests that he recruited laborers from Nzwani (Anjouan), and likely came from Nzwani himself. Saidina, however, may have been a more complicated figure. Historians have elsewhere documented that a noble named “Saidina,” who was given a position as a local governor, was also a key figure in the propagation of *tariqa Shadhiliyya*. *Shadhiliyya* was one of the four oldest Sufi orders in the world, and it gained strength in Comores in the mid-late eighteenth century. A series of foundis (learned scholars) are attributed with bringing *Shadhiliyya* to northern Madagascar in the late 1880s and establishing a series of mosques.<sup>639</sup> In these accounts, Saidina, was said to be the brother of Sultan Sayyid Ali of Ngazidja.<sup>640</sup> He

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<sup>636</sup> ANRDM/F52: Urbanisme 1902: D 756: Emigration, Rapport Economique, Mayotte et Dependences, 1910.

<sup>637</sup> ANRDM/F52: 1902 D 756: Emigration: Telegram 988-T, 3 Aout 1926, from Administrateur Superieur a Dzoudzi, to Gov Gen Mada Response Telegramme 4394 AP, 29 Aout 1926, from Gov Gen to Adm Sup.

<sup>638</sup> Said, “Contribution a l’étude...” 105. Said’s description of Saidina is based on personnel dossiers found at the Archives National de Madagascar. Unfortunately, these files were unavailable during the period in which I conducted archival research and I was unable to consult them directly.

<sup>639</sup> For this history, see Gueunier, *Les Chemins*; Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks*.

<sup>640</sup> This was documented by A. Dandouau in his collection of oral histories in the 1910s and 20s in northwest Madagascar, *Contes Populaires des Sakalava et des Tsimihety de la Région d’Analalava* (Alger 1922, Vol 1); Also, Saidina was described as “brother of Said-Ali of Grande-Comore...and Said-Omar sultan Anjouan”, in relation to the world exposition in 1900, Jules Charles-Roux, *Les Colonies Françaises: l’organisation et le fonctionnement de*

apparently began his missionary efforts to establish *Shadhiliyya* in the northern region of Madagascar among Ankarana. <sup>641</sup> He was considered by at least one French military officer to be the ideal candidate to thwart the encroachment of Muslims (who threatened to dominate Sakalava) in northwest Madagascar, owing to his “devotion to the French cause” and the “high estimation of his co-religionists.”<sup>642</sup> Whether these accounts are referring to the same man, is unclear. But what these multiple references to Saidina reveal is the overlapping projects of labor recruitment and the extension of Islamic religious networks in which important Comorian men were involved. I turn now to the latter.

### ***Building the “Cradle of Islam” in Madagascar***

Not all Comorians migrated in search only of wage labor. Some came primarily to spread their Islamic faith traditions. One woman, Mama Jaki, whose family history was reflective of broader migratory trends, described how her grandmother married a *foundi* from Nzwani. <sup>643</sup> He had traveled in the northwestern region of Madagascar, and was enmeshed in a broad network of Comorian religious leaders. <sup>644</sup> He was part of a small, flourishing congregation of the *Shadhiliyya* brotherhood, founded in the twelfth century by al-Shadhili in Morocco. <sup>645</sup> Some historians have attributed the spread and relative strength of *Shadhiliyya* in Comores and

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l'exposition des Clonies et pays de protectorat (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 230; Bang maintains this in, *Islamic Sufi Networks*, 77.

<sup>641</sup> Gueunier, *Chemins d'Islam*, 55-56.

<sup>642</sup> Lt.-Col. Breveté Prud-Homme, “Observations on the Sakalava,” trans. In *Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine*, Vol. 6:1 (1897), 430. Prud-Homme also surmised that “his official elevation to such a position would of itself constitute a guarantee for the loyalty of the Arabs, so great is the well-merited prestige that he enjoys.”

<sup>643</sup> Interview, Mama Jaki, Manga, October 18, 2013.

<sup>644</sup> Christian missionaries took as much, if not more, notice of the presence of Muslim missionaries as French colonial authorities. One missionary commentator noted “On the north-west coast there are Moslem propagandists who travel from port to port and visit the villages. Some of them come from Zanzibar and others from Arabia...Most of those who turn to Islam are women...” W.L. McClenanahan, “Notes on Current Topics: Islam in Madagascar” *The Muslim World* 4:1 (1914), 85.

<sup>645</sup> Gueunier, 75; “Shadhiliyya Tariqah,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*.

northern Madagascar to the charismatic leadership of Muhammaed Ma'ruf (1853-1905) and his students, among others.<sup>646</sup> Owing to Ma'ruf's efforts, Ngazidja (Grande Comore) in particular became an important center for Shadhuli (Shadhiliyya) dervishes.<sup>647</sup> Like other classical Sufi orders, Shadhiliyya was regarded to be one branch of a shared tree of Sunni Islam. Shadhiliyya and the classical Sufi orders were distinctive for their emphasis on fidelity to the group's discipline (*sheikh, foundi*) and on fraternal connections, in which adherents understood themselves as sharing the same path (*twarika, toarika*). Meditative songs and dances, for instance were to be performed collectively by groups of men.<sup>648</sup> Rifa'i order, originally founded in sixth century Iraq, was also important in Majunga.<sup>649</sup> While some mosques, such as Mosque Chadhouli and Mosque Rifa'i in Abattoir, were built by communities aligned with particular Sufi orders, other communities were founded by migrants who hailed from the same home towns villages in Anjouan or Ngazidga.<sup>650</sup> Still other religious groupings were comprised of pupils of prominent instructors (*foundi, moalimo*) known for their specialized Qur'anic knowledge and skills.<sup>651</sup>

From at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the construction of mosques was a prioritized project for the prospering communities of migrants from Comoros. Many older generation residents with

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<sup>646</sup> Ma'ruf was born to an elite family in Ngazidja, then religiously trained in Zanzibar by his uncle. After taking pilgrimage, he encountered a Shadhili teacher and eventually he linked with the Shadhili order through a friend, Abdallah Darwish. His missionary efforts led him into multiple conflicts with the Sultan of Anjouan, among others. N.J. Gueunier estimates that Shadhiliyya brotherhood was introduced to northern Madagascar, among Antankarana groups, in the late nineteenth century, *Chemins d'Islam*, 55-6; Anne Bang dates the formal initiation of the Shadhili order in northern Madagascar to 1876, in *Islamic Sufi Networks...*, 43. See also Ali Mohamed Toibibou, *La transmission de l'Islam aux Comores* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008); B.G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 152-155.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid, also Samuel Zwemer, "Islam in Madagascar: A Blind Spot," *The Muslim World*. 30:2 (1940), 165.

<sup>648</sup> Gueunier, *Chemins de l'Islam*, 74-75.

<sup>649</sup> Gueunier, *Chemins de l'Islam*, 76.

<sup>650</sup> Interview with Maitre Youssef, July 16, 2013.

<sup>651</sup> In 2014, several *zanatany* groups maintained their constituency through religious celebrations in honor of their renowned teacher. For corollary practices elsewhere in northern Madagascar, see Laurent Berger and Olivier Branchu, "L'islam à l'épreuve de l'ancestralité dans les villes et campagnes du Nord de Madagascar," in Muriel Gomez-Perez (ed) *L'islam politique au sud du Sahara: identités, discours, et enjeux* (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 87.

whom I spoke in 2013-2014 suggested that once Comorians arrived in the city “they always had the idea to first build a mosque.”<sup>652</sup> Several described Majunga as “the cradle” (*berceau*) of Islam in Madagascar, nurtured by the streams of Comorians who “carried Islam” to the city (*mitondra silamo*).<sup>653</sup> Comorians’ secured land for mosques, houses and gardens through a range of means, but foremost among them was the practice of *mamaky tany* (literally, to go over the land; divide the land).<sup>654</sup> *Mamaky tany* is historically a customary practice of usufruct land tenure throughout Madagascar, in which unoccupied, fallow land can rightly be appropriated by any family and reworked in productive ways—either by farming, constructing a home, or—in this case—a mosque. Little archival trace or living memory remains about the politics of these early land acquisitions by Muslim congregations, but stories of building the structures endure.

To be clear, mosques constructed by Comorian migrants were not the only, nor the first mosques, to be built in Majunga. Mosques were enduring landmarks on the city’s horizon for over a century before French colonial officials grappled with regulating them, and were observed by European travelers passing through the town as early as 1792.<sup>655</sup> One of the earliest mosques mentioned in Mahabibo area was known as Moskeriny Zanatany (or Mosquée des Makoas), founded in the Al-Shafi’i tradition in 1897.<sup>656</sup> Moskeriny Bambao (known today as Moskeriny

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<sup>652</sup> Interview with “Khalil,” 11 July 2013; H.D. 6 February 2014; H.A. 9 July 13, Mahajanga.

<sup>653</sup> This interpretation would surely conflict with accounts among Ankarana Muslim communities in northern Madagascar, or even southeast Madagascar, who understand that Islam first arrived on their shores. See Gueunier, *Chemins d’Islam*; Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks*.

<sup>654</sup> Other means were purchase or accessing land through one’s inlaws, though this was reportedly much less common. Note that “mamaky” also means “to break” and “to read”, Richardson defines this as “To range or go through the land; to divide out a piece of land; to refuse to join with others in any business” in *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, 728). This is also the name of a Sakalava ceremony for preparing the land for burial of dead, described by Goedefroit, Sophie, *A l’ouest de Madagascar: Les Sakalava du Menabe* (Karthala) 1998: 53; and Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, p.,373. This practice will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>655</sup> Dumaine, Julien-Pierre. 1810. *Idée de la côte orientale de Madagascar depuis Ancouala au nord jusqu’à Moroundava en 1792*, *Annales des Voyages*, t. XI. Archaeological evidence suggests that mosques and muslim tombs were constructed near Majunga in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and even earlier in areas of northern Madagascar. See Pierre Verin, *Les échelles anciennes du commerce sur les côtes nord de Madagascar*. 2 vols. Paris, France: Service de reproduction des thèses de l’université de Lille III, 1975.

<sup>656</sup> ANRDM/ F161: Ltr 30 Avril 1912, from AM Majunga A. Carron to Gov Gen.

Ambalavola) in Morafeno, was said to have been founded by the loyal followers of Sultan Sayyid Ali (Sultan of Bambao) who fled Ngazidja after handing over land concessions to



Figure 32: Postcard, “Comorian Mosque, Majunga” ca. 1920s (Source: Author’s Collection)

Humblot.<sup>657</sup> Other mosques in town included those of various South Asian communities in Old Majunga: Khodja Mosque founded in 1897, Bohra Mosque built in 1897 in stone, Khodja Ismael Mosque, and the Suni Mosque.<sup>658</sup> It is important to note the plurality of Muslim communities across the city in the early nineteenth century, and the persistence of divisions and fractures among different groups. Ngazidjans (Grand-Comorians) and Nzwanis (Anjouanais) lived in “perpetual rivalry” in Majunga, and generally fell along distinct congregational lines.<sup>659</sup> South Asian and Comorian congregations remained segregated and congregants rarely, if ever, visited

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<sup>657</sup> Accounts conflict about whether Sayyid Ali took exile in Mahajanga, or in Tamatave. Either way, it is clear there was a contingency of loyalists to Ali who established the Moskering Bambao in Mahajanga. See Said, “Contribution a l’étude...”, 106, who asserts Ali took refuge in Tamatave, based on oral accounts. For the alternative perspective, see Said Bakari Bin Sultani Ahmed, L. Harries (ed) *The Swahili Chronicle of Ngazija*, (Bloomington, IN: Indian University African Studies Program, 1977).

<sup>658</sup> ANRDM/ F161: Ltr 30 Avril 1912, from AM Majunga A. Carron to Gov Gen; Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 63-67, 84-88.

<sup>659</sup> Toibibou, “Entre Anjouanais et Grands-Comorians,” 457.

each other's mosques.<sup>660</sup> And though *karana* mosques were important in Majunga Be, in Mahabibo, Comorian communities were at the forefront of mid-twentieth century place-making.

The remarkable presence of migrants from the Comorian archipelago, and their robust place-making initiatives bewildered French colonial administrators. In 1912, Mr. Carron, the mayor of Majunga, described his frustration at the swelling numbers of migrants arriving from Comoros, who propagated Islam among Malagasy with great success. As French colonial administrators imposed proliferating bureaucratic regulations on property, they faced intense pressure from some Muslim congregations to grant land concessions and authorize building permits. At the time, eight mosques stood in the city, in contrast to two churches and one Hindu temple.<sup>661</sup> But administrative anxieties about the solidified spatial presence of the Muslim Comorian communities was reflected in their fretting communications up and down the administrative hierarchy. In 1912, Mayor Carron described to the colony's Governor General his perplexity about how to handle the Comorian issue.

Although migrants from Comoros had long traveled back and forth from northwest Madagascar, Carron knew that this migratory stream was further facilitated by legislation binding together Comoros and Madagascar into a single colonial territory in 1908. French administrators in both Comoros and Majunga expressed exasperation with the limited legislative means at hand to curb emigration of predominantly young men from Comoros. In searching for a way to constrain their power, Carron lamented that he and his colleagues had no recourse to slow Comorian migrants' penetration into the city. "It is regrettable that not a single regulation permits us to prohibit their entrance to the colony, because these individuals –who have left their

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<sup>660</sup> This remained true in 2010s, and was a source of contention and resentment for many Malagasy who maintained that while *karana* were welcome in their mosques, the hospitality was never reciprocated. Malagasy and *zanatany* experienced this as racist exclusion on the part of *karana*.

<sup>661</sup> CAOM/2D 134.

land under the pretext that they cannot find work there- are generally lazy and draw most of their resources by exploiting the local population.” He continued noting that they exert a “real influence” over Sakalava converts, fostering animosity to “our denomination.”<sup>662</sup> “The most pernicious example is the Sakalava who want to imitate them and follow their advice.”<sup>663</sup>

But there was one possibility. The city administration could restrict the number of new mosques constructed, Carron suggested, and regulate the expansion of existing mosques. Mosques were not the only religious edifices which French officials regulated; churches were also required to secure permits for land tenancy and building construction.<sup>664</sup> But unlike the regulation of churches, colonial authorities made explicit linkages in their foreseen ability to curb undesirable Comorian migration through tightening of mosque building construction. Spatial regulation seemed to offer the colonial administration a promising means to constrain the teeming Comorian population and spread of Islam. It also allowed authorities to maintain the appearance of *laicite*, the French republican value of secularism. Since urban terrain was under the jurisdiction of the city administration, land use and building construction were legitimate arenas for state intervention. But even Carron admitted that such regulatory undertakings could be stymied. These Islamic communities had “already existed for a longtime” in the city without any state regulation, he revealed, which would render any new regulatory initiative very difficult to implement.<sup>665</sup> Carron was right. Migration from the Comorian archipelago to Majunga had much deeper roots, as well as more contemporary, direct connections to French imperial

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<sup>662</sup> ANRDM/F: F161, Letter 30 Avril 1912 from A. Carron to Gouverneur General.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

<sup>664</sup> See ANRDM F 119; ANRDM F 125; ANRDM F 161. Churches were required to gather a petition of 80 congregants at minimum to secure approval for building a new church structure. This was a source of enormous frustration among LMS missionaries in the early-mid twentieth century, for instance, who struggled to find sufficient numbers of congregants in rural areas. They often interpreted this regulation as hostility to their religious propagation, if not their British presence, on the part of French colonial agents. See, for example, London Missionary Service Archives (henceforth LMS), Madagascar Reports 1918-1927. Box 10; Kendall Gale, Report of a Journey to the Marofotsy, The Sihanaka and the Bezanozano. 30 November 1918.

<sup>665</sup> ANRDM/ F161: Ltr 30 Avril 1912, from AM Majunga A. Carron to Gov Gen.

imperatives. Mosque construction would not be so easily curbed by colonial authorities. Building homes and mosques, as we will see, was a critical strategy through which migrants emplaced themselves, and forged ties of sociality and solidarity in the city and beyond.

At last the Mayor resolved that the city ought to limit the overall number of mosques, by prohibiting construction of any *new* mosques. He acquiesced that existing mosques in Mahabibo would be granted authorizations since they had long existed. Among these was the Moskeriny Zanatany, or “Mosque of Makoas” (Mosquée des Makoas), whose latter name suggests that Makoas were the primary congregants. In the 1912, city administrators noted that the mosque was frequented by about one hundred followers, and led by Mohamadi Cadi, a former police agent who was apparently “fired following a conviction for a theft.”<sup>666</sup> The largest of all was the “Mosque of Comorians” (known today as Moskeriny Zoma) constructed of wood and corrugated steel in 1897 and frequented by some 400 congregants from Ngazidja (Figure 32).<sup>667</sup> Finally, was the “Anjouanais Mosque,” (known today as Moskeriny Chadhouli) located just meters from the Mosque of Comorians, and frequented by migrants from Nzwani.<sup>668</sup> Controlling building permits initially seemed to offer a promising solution for effectively controlling the spread of unwanted religious and ethnic groups. But by the 1920s and 30s, the city appears to have loosened its policies on building permits and land grants to Muslim congregations. In 1920, the “Anjouanais Mosque,” (Moskeriny Chadouli) was reconstructed in a centrally located plot of land-near the present-day town hall. In the mid-1920s, an observer noted the presence of at least two mosques,

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<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid. Note that the delineation among these mosques suggests that French colonial officials grasped to some extent the divisions and differentiation among groups from Comoros as early as 1912. This runs contrary to other historical accounts which suggest colonial officials only made these distinctions from the 1930s, see Muhamed, “Entre Anjouanais et Grande-Comorians,” 457.

one for “Sunni Zanzibaris and Comoro natives” and another for “Shi’ite Indians.”<sup>669</sup> And in 1936, a group of muslims from the “Refaky” –Rifa`i brotherhood deriving from Syria-congregations successfully won the concession to a parcel of land situated in the center of town, on which they could construct their mosque.<sup>670</sup> In 1944, the existing community of an unnamed “Comorian” mosque (likely Moskeriny Zoma) was authorized by the city to take over 144 sq. meters of adjacent land to enlarge their structure.<sup>671</sup>

Finally, it was not only through mosques that Sufi orders established their presence in town, but also the construction of cemeteries and occupations of public spaces. In 1928, an Anjouan group led by Abdallah Said Allaoui appealed to the city for a 1-hectare parcel of land on which a “Comorian cemetery” could be established. The terrain they requested had apparently already been granted to Sakalava royal family, but was due to transfer back to the city. The city stalled on granting the land, however, because a quarry was situated there.<sup>672</sup> Allaoui and his group were not alone in seeking a cemetery apart from the public cemetery of Mahabibo designated for “natives.” Around the same time, city officials inadvertently discovered that Makoa residents had been burying their kin in other sites—in Mahavoky and Miarinarivo—without administrative authorization.<sup>673</sup> They immediately ordered it to stop, and the reasons for which Makoa, and Allaoui and his fellow petitioners, longed to bury their kin separately from the Mahabibo cemetery are not clear. Perhaps since both groups practiced Islam, they wished to have a dedicated cemetery in which all burials were observed in the same manner. Whatever the

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<sup>669</sup> J. Walker, “Islam in Madagascar,” *The Muslim World* 22:4 (1932), 395 drawing on Massignon, *Annuaire du Monde musulman* (Paris, 1925). The author also mentioned “Isma’ils have endeavored to extend Islamic missionary influence in the island, but the only place where the Mohammedan faith is not moribund is on the west coast.”

<sup>670</sup> ANRDM/F44: PV Séance 22 June 1936.

<sup>671</sup> ANRDM/F45: PV-Séance 21 Nov 1944.

<sup>672</sup> ANRDM/F43: PV-Séance 21 Novembre 1928. The outcome is not clear, but there exists today a Muslim *zanatany* cemetery in Antanamisaja.

<sup>673</sup> ANRDM/F44, PV-Séance, 20 February 1931. Administrators were alerted to these noncompliant burial practices by Madame Joséphone Razanadrasoa who requested that the city remove the Makoa remains which were found on her parcel of land in Miarinarivo.

reasons, it suggests that tombs and cemeteries were important sites through which town inhabitants articulated their differential practices and religious-social ties.

### *Architectures of Memory: Mosques in early twentieth century Mahabibo*

In 2013, about halfway through my research stay I was introduced to Maitre Youssef, a refined, elegant man in his late sixties. Of mixed Anjouan-Sakalava descent, Maitre Youssef was formally educated as a teacher and taught mathematics for years at the local high school in town before retiring some years prior. Friends had advised me to consult him, since he was a known authority on the history of Moskeriny Chadouli (Shadhiliyya), and the *zanatany* community more broadly. On a breezy July afternoon, I visited him and his wife in their home. As we discussed the historical presence of Comorians, Maitre Youssef described Comorian efforts to build houses in the mid-twentieth century as tied their diligent work ethic (*mazoto miasa izy ireo*) and their industrious opportunism.<sup>674</sup> At the heart of building enterprises driven by Comorian migrants, he and others explained—whether mosques or homes—were cooperative economic practices that enabled household accumulation of means, while ensuring equitable distribution of wealth among members. According to Maitre Youssef and many others, Comorian migrants brought with them a cooperative sharing arrangement called *shikoa*.

Accounts of the early collective mosque building projects suggest that Comorian migrants in Majunga expanded *shikoa* to include congregants from across generational lines and from different villages to generate funds, material and labor.<sup>675</sup> *Shikoa* relied on a shared moral

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<sup>674</sup> Interview with Youssef, Manga, 16 July 2013. The description and quotes below follow from this interview transcript and my fieldnotes.

<sup>675</sup> Michael Lambek noted that in Mayotte, *shikoa* were mainly carried out by women, (personal communication, May 16, 2017). But in twentieth century Majunga, *shikoa* apparently included Malagasy and Comorians of varying ages and backgrounds; but typically *shikoa* groups were comprised of either men or women.



Figure 33: Moskeriny Chadhouli, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

lexicon, in which asceticism, frugality and collectivism were emphasized. Built on mutual trust, familiarity, and affinity, these saving circles proved remarkably effective—though undoubtedly there were also conflicts. It is worth noting the long-standing social institution of *shunggu* in Comoros, a ceremonial exchange system in which groups—either age set members (*shikao*) or entire villages reciprocated gifts of food, livestock, and money in pre-designated amounts, often for the performance of grand feasts.<sup>676</sup> It is not clear or even likely that *shikoa* was adapted from *shunggu*, but they certainly shared attributes of reciprocity and exchange of wealth.<sup>677</sup> In

<sup>676</sup> Sophie Blanchy, 1990, *La vie quotidienne à Mayotte*, (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1990), 60-62. Also Michael Lambek, “Exchange, Time and Person in Mayotte: The Structure and Destructuring of a Cultural System,” *American Anthropologist* 92:3(1990):647-661; Historians of Africa have documented the rise of cooperative economic and production units in postcolonial Tanzania Andrew Bowman “Mass Production of Production by the Masses? Tractors, Cooperatives and the Politics of Rural Development in Post-independence Zambia” *Journal of African History*, 2011 52(2):201-221.

<sup>677</sup> Personal communication, Michael Lambek, May 16, 2017.

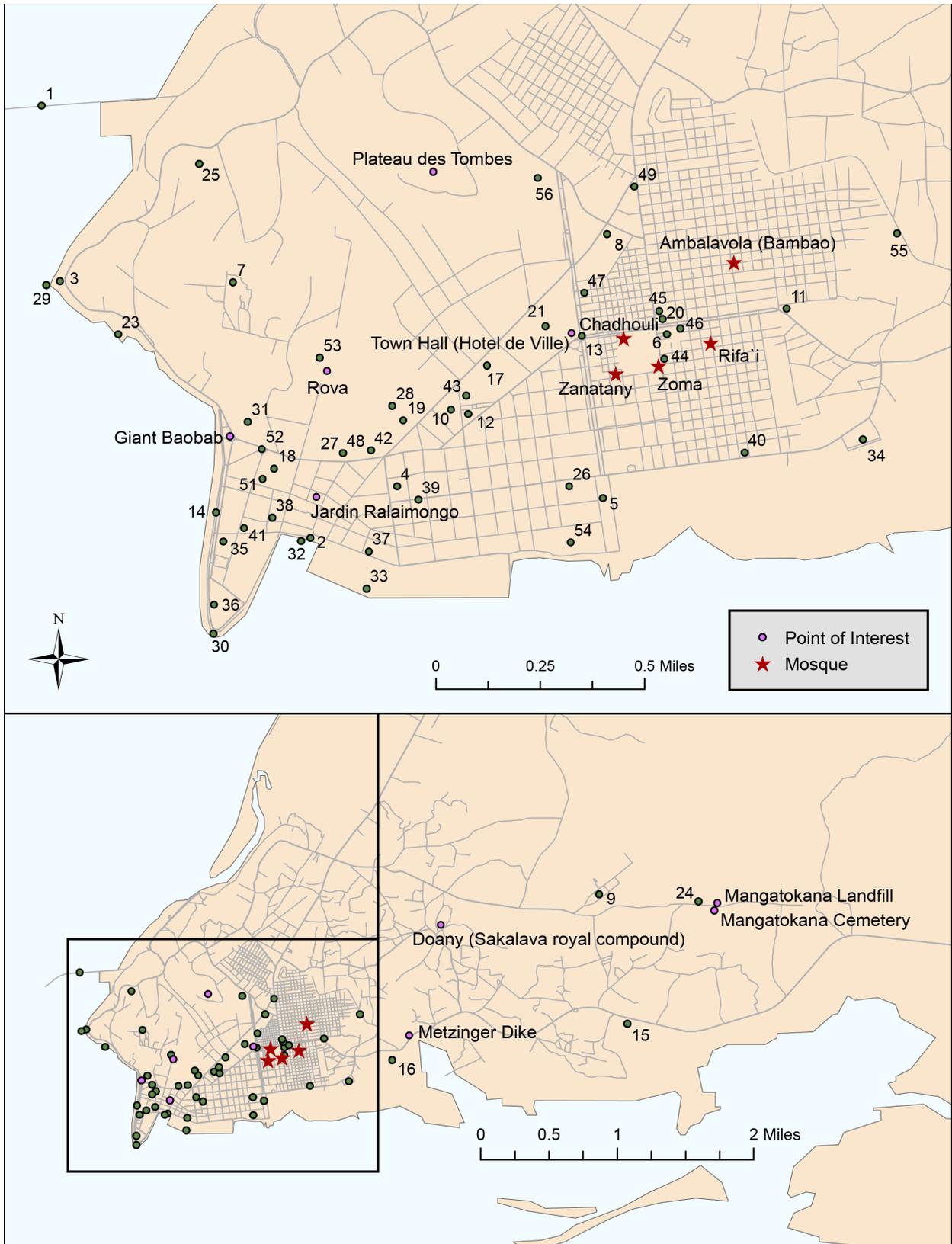


Figure 34: Map of Mahajanga

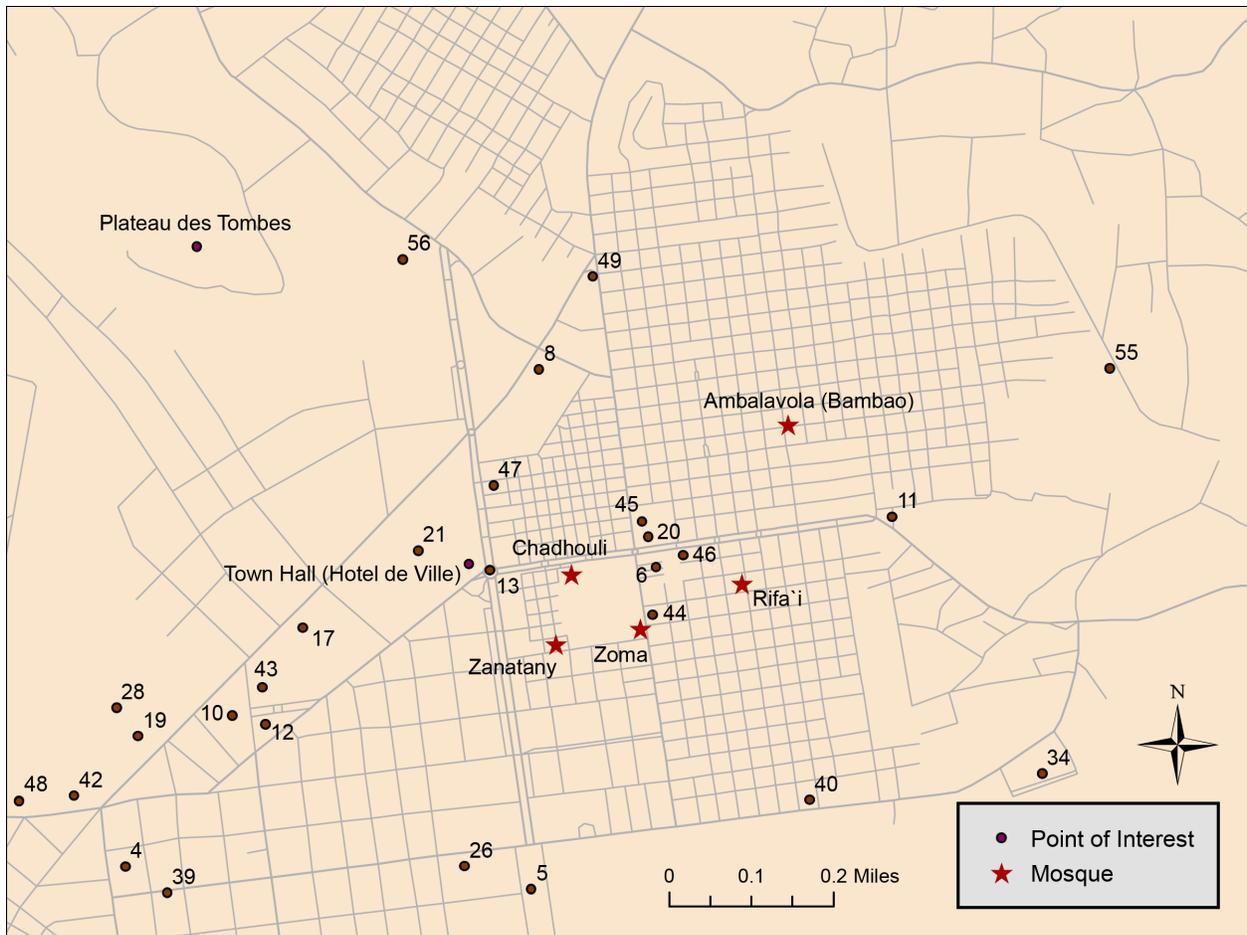


Figure 35: Map of Mahabibo, with mosques indicated

describing the building efforts of these early communities, descendants of the founding members narrated the cohesive fraternal bonds that gave rise to durable mosques (see Figures 34 and 35).<sup>678</sup> Moskeriny Chadhouli, for example, was initially founded by men from the region around Mutsamudu, Ndzwani who first formed a congregational community (see Figure 33). Colonial records suggest that the community existed at least from 1897, but that over several decades, congregants collectively generated labor and materials to construct their mosque through *shikoa*.<sup>679</sup> By 1920, construction began. Maitre Youssef emphasized that it was “simple people”

<sup>678</sup> As I’ll discuss in Chapter 5, these narratives were similar for homes.

<sup>679</sup> ANRDM/ F161: Ltr 30 Avril 1912, from AM Majunga A. Carron to Gov Gen. It is not clear where adherents gathered for prayers before the construction of the mosque, but it is likely people gathered in homes or repurposed

(*olo tsotra*) who poured their labor and energy into designing and constructing the mosque. “You know” he emphasized, “those that founded and constructed the mosque, these were everyday people, not learned people or elites. These were people accustomed to building things!<sup>680</sup> They worked as cooks, gardeners, and guardians for Europeans (*vazaha*), and they didn’t have much means, but they longed for this mosque...so they worked hard!” Daughters, sister and wives also labored for the mosque – hauling rocks, cooking collectively in large cauldrons.<sup>681</sup> The effort to construct Moskeriny Chadhouli was so energetic that it attracted Mutsamudans (those hailing from Mutsamudu, Nzwani) as far as Marovoay (90km from Majunga) to join the collective building. Youssef narrated how men hauled limestone (*tsoka, chaux*), and mixed it together with egg whites, which adhered the chalky, crumbly stone. Walls were built thickly, up to 50 centimeters, so to withstand the intense heat and powerful tropical rains. When they could buy cement and sand they hauled it on their backs, “sweating, working so hard, because they so *desired* this mosque.”<sup>682</sup> Sweat mixed with limestone, binding together the bodily secretions of labor and longing with the soil of the earth. On 4 September 1921, the mosque opened.

The impetus to build mosques among migrants was surely nurtured by the recollections of mosques as central pillars in Comorians towns and villages.<sup>683</sup> Migrants carried with them the memories of the vitality and sustenance sacred spatial forms afforded, and infused mosques in Majunga with similar practices. Mosques in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mahajanga were rooting places, centrifuges of fraternal sociality, where people could “gather and know each other.” They were

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public places like streets for prayer and gatherings. Some koranic schools, built usually within the foundi’s household compound, also served as gathering points for learned men.

<sup>680</sup> “*tsy olona mianatra, fa olo tsotra, olo zatra manamboatra!*”

<sup>681</sup> Interview with Papa Taoaby, Abattoir, April 12, 2013.

<sup>682</sup> Interview with Youssef, Manga, 16 July 2013.

<sup>683</sup> Also notable was the case of Sultan of Bambao who had been exiled from Msafumu to Mahajanga, and died in 1875, there remains a Mosque named for the region of Bambao in Mahajanga. See Edward Alpers “Slavery, antislavery, political rivalry and regional networks in East African waters, 1877-1883” *Afriques* [Online] 6(2015).

also nodes in a broader network of Islamic communities, serving as sites of hospitality for Muslim travelers passing through the city.<sup>684</sup> Adherents were deeply invested in mosques and madrasas as spaces of sanctuary from corrupting influences—whether the intrusive petitions of Christian missionaries or the threat of losing fluency in Arabic and holy texts.<sup>685</sup> But above all



Figure 36: Moskeriny Rifa`i, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

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<sup>684</sup> Carron lamented that “muslims, especially Anjouan, take refuge in the Mosque des Anjouanais...they only rarely stay in the sectors (in neighborhoods) without a domicile.” ANRDM/ F161: Ltr 30 Avril 1912, from AM Majunga A. Carron to Gov Gen.

<sup>685</sup> One French missionary associated with the Société des Missions Évangéliques, Henry Rusillon, complained “nothing has been done up to the present to reach these people. They shut themselves up in their mosques, preserve most carefully their language, have their schools and take care to have no contact with Christians.” “Islam in Madagascar,” *The Muslim World* 12:4 (1922), 386-389.

they were both mnemonic and anticipatory sites, conjuring a sanctuary of a remembered home and envisioning a durable, lasting presence in the city. “No matter where they migrate,” Harifodine, a physician and learned Islamic scholar in his late forties, said to me one afternoon, “Comorians don’t forget their religious roots.”<sup>686</sup> This not forgetting one’s religious roots, or a coercive force to remember, was not only a driving force, impelling migrants to construct mosques. It was also built into the very architectural forms and norms of the mosques themselves.



Figure 37: Friday Mosque, Mutsamudu, Comoros (Source: David Alexander)

Moskeriny Rifa`i (Fig. 36) sits nestled on a small hill in Abattoir, a neighborhood long dominated by *zanatany*—spatially, culturally and economically. Its striking green and white minaret towers above the corrugated steel roofed-homes of the city. In 1936, a group of Comorian migrants hailing from Ndzwani (also from Mutsumudu, but from the “Refaky” – Rifa`i brotherhood) appealed to the city for the parcel of land on which this mosque is now

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<sup>686</sup> Interview with H., Abattoir, April 26, 2013.

located. They won.<sup>687</sup> In designing their mosque, congregants took inspiration from their home mosque in Mutsamudu, which was built of “white coral rock” (Figure 37 and 38).<sup>688</sup> They constructed an almost identical form in Majunga.



Figure 38: Minaret, Friday Mosque, Mutsamudu, Comoros  
(Source: Stephen Battle, Aga Khan Trust for Culture)

In a similar fashion, the Moskeriny Zoma (Figure 39, 41) was constructed in striking resemblance to the large mosque found in Moroni, Ngazidja replete with a squarish minaret with rows of two openings (Figure 40). It wasn't only mosques in their Comorian homelands that inspired migrants' architectural choices in Majunga. It was also the sacred architectural forms found in faraway lands across the Islamic world. Moskeriny Chadhouli (Figure 41) for instance, was said to have been replicated from a key mosque in Saudi Arabia. The original vision for the mosque's form was said to have come from Said Twahiry, a Comorian working as a warden in

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<sup>687</sup> ANRDM/F44: PV Séance 22 Juin 1936.

<sup>688</sup> Samuel Zwemer, “Islam in Madagascar: A Blind Spot,” *The Muslim World*. 30:2 (1940), 165.



Figure 39: Moskeriny Zoma, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)



Figure 40: Friday Mosque in Moroni, Comoros, 2003  
(Source Stephen Battle, Aga Khan Trust for Culture)

the city's prison, and a key congregant of the Chadhouli community.<sup>689</sup> In the 1910s, Said Twahiry encountered an architect from the highlands who was transferred to Majunga's jail as a political prisoner, a kind of exile from the highlands. One day, Said Twahiry brought him a photograph of a mosque in Mecca, and he asked him, "Can you design this?" "I can do that!" (*vitako*) responded the man. One way to understand these strikingly similar forms is through the concept of "architectural mimicry," developed by architectural historians drawing on the work of

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<sup>689</sup> Interview with Youssef, Manga, 16 July 2013.

Homi Bhabha and others.<sup>690</sup> Some have shown, for instance, that architectural replication of foreign cities and landscapes in China were statements of conspicuous consumption by elites, validated by an appreciation of “the good copy.”<sup>691</sup> Others have argued that postcolonial nation building initiatives in Turkey drew on the architectural mimicry of classical Ottoman mosques to



Figure 41: Moskeriny Chadhouli, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

resurrect a national identity tethered to Islam.<sup>692</sup> But the story of architectural mimicry evident in Majunga is altogether different from these instances. As collective spaces of worship, these mosque replications were not statements of consumption, wealth or sophistication. Nor did

<sup>690</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 121-131.

<sup>691</sup> Bianca Bosker, *Original Copies: Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

<sup>692</sup> Bulent Batuman, “Architectural Mimicry and the Politics of Mosque Building: Negotiating Islam and Nation in Turkey,” *The Journal of Architecture*, 21(2016):3, 321-247.

migrants from the Archipelago understand the construction of mosques in Majunga similar to those in Comores as a form of nationalistic identification. If anything, their fraternal ties superseded nationalistic identifications, and suggested a kind of ‘national indifference.’<sup>693</sup> As one man insisted, “For Comorians, there was never really a spirit of nationalism, of Comorian nationalism, but rather the spirit of religious fraternity which has always revolved around [a shared] Muslim faith.”<sup>694</sup> This form of mimicry diverges dramatically from Bhabha’s conception of mimicry as subversive, that which exposes the artifice of power.<sup>695</sup>

Instead, I suggest that congregants invoked architectural forms reminiscent of other times and places to articulate desires for belonging. The construction of mosques in Majunga not only served to (re)create fraternal ties among congregants, but also to reenact the spatial forms that enabled solidarity in Comoros and beyond. This resonates with what Lisa Malkki describes as people conjuring “homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases – not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit.”<sup>696</sup> But in this case, Comorians conjured homes in material, architectural forms. These acts of replication of sacred architectural forms are suggestive of the ways migrants from the Archipelago imagined themselves—and desired to be— not only connected to their land of birth, but also connected to broader transnational, transoceanic Sufi communities. Architectural forms—their envisioning and building—were one way Comorians could make visible these ties, and boldly concretize their nostalgic, remembered pasts and their longed for futures. These mosques were generated by desires, but they were also informed by particular ethical positions—ones

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<sup>693</sup> Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69:1(2010): 93-119.

<sup>694</sup> Interview with H., Abattoir, April 26, 2013.

<sup>695</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” 121-131.

<sup>696</sup> Lisa Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 7:1 (1992), 24.

informed by norms concerning the value of labor, the importance of reciprocity, and of disciplining of the body. In the cooperative networks of *shikoa*, and in the buildings they gave rise to, *zanatany* congregants expressed visions for, and indeed undertook, new urbanisms than the ones they encountered. Their urbanism continued to unfold into the 1960s and 70s, into what some contemporary residents described as “the *zanatany* way of life.” Animated by acts of exchange and reciprocity, of sharing money, food, and labor, these ties of solidarity strengthened over time.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has documented how urban spaces were invented, attributed with competing values, and constructed as “native quarters” through negotiations over housing and property regulations in Mahabibo between the 1890s and 1930s. In the early 1900s, colonial authorities drew on property regulations as an idealized instrument, through which they could shape the flow and composition of the city’s burgeoning migrant population. But Mahabibo village took on a life of its own, expanding in ways unforeseen and overwhelming the available technologies of colonial urban planning. Mahabibo residents navigated, negotiated and reworked fluid property legislation through their building practices and their use of durable materials. City administrators sought to avoid conflicts with and antagonism of migrant groups through the ongoing reinterpretation of regulatory acts. The process of creating a lasting, inflammable built urban environment was continually renegotiated by city administrators themselves who struggled to find appropriate ways of governing the material, social and economic landscape of the city. It is suggested here that over time, colonial authorities were forced to confront the limitations of land and housing regulations as means to constrict the swelling migration from Comoros.

Flabbergasted, they attempted to regulate the construction of religious edifices, especially mosques. Even this tactic, however, was stifled by the momentum built over successive waves of Comorian migrants to the city.

It is not surprising that French colonial authority in Mahabibo was fragile. Nor is it surprising that regulating the city through the technologies of property legislation and urban planning was fraught. Historians of French empire have copiously documented the papery thin hold on power that characterized colonial life. Though city administrators in Majunga rarely directly referenced other colonial cities or legislative dilemmas elsewhere, they were likely influenced by experiences of property regulation and urban planning elsewhere in the French empire. What this story reveals, however, are the creative ways Mahabibo residents appropriated the malleability of property regulations to forge their lives in their newfound city. Through building homes and mosques, migrants could leverage their material existence to make claims on the state for protection, support, and recognition. This leverage accrued incrementally, over time. With the successive construction of increasingly durable homes and mosques, Mahabibo inhabitants justified at times their belonging to the city and make further demands on the city, for instance for land tenancy or compensation for building materials in cases of forced displacement.

While French city administrators wrung their hands at their incapacity to fully anticipate, account for, and manage Comorian migrants, they were also obliged to accommodate the place-making efforts of Comorian and Comorian-Malagasy *zanatany* families. In turn, male migrants funneled their life energies and hard-earned wages into collective mosque building projects, which served to deepen their fraternal, religious ties to one another and root their attachments to their newfound town. In contrast to city administrators' preoccupations with regulating the durability of construction materials, mosque builders were heavily invested in the architectural

forms they created and in the collective labor that rendered them possible. These structures are best understood as processes, as pivotal means through which migrants could enunciate their lasting ties to their beloved homelands and invigorate their historic connections to Sufi communities that spanned the Indian Ocean. In short, building mosques allowed young men from Comoros to belong here and there, then and now—at once.



Figure 42: Moskeriny Zoma, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

**Chapter 5**  
**The Home:**  
**Building the Zanatany City Through Sediment and Sentiment (1920s-1960s)**



Figure 43: House of a *Zanatany* Family, Manga, 2014 (Source: Author)

***Introduction***

Early on in my research I met Mama Jaki, in her late sixties and the matriarch of a well-respected *zanatany* family who lived in the central quarter of Manga. We were introduced by our dear mutual friend, Mama Taoaby, who considered her among the “knowledgeable” and “good-

spirited” women established in *zanatany* communities.<sup>697</sup> After our initial meeting, some time passed before I mustered the courage and gained enough proficiency in Malagasy to return to Mama Jaki’s home. And then I passed by her house more regularly until my arrival became something of an unremarkable event. One of these visits proved to be pivotal, shifting our conversations into something more akin to collaboration. On this afternoon, I happened to comment on the sturdiness of her “stone” home (*trano vato*), and the sure protection that it would offer her family from the soon-to-come torrential downpours.<sup>698</sup> Constructed of plastered cinder blocks, with bright red steel doors, and a thick corrugated steel roof, Mama Jaki’s home was by no means the biggest, but was certainly one of the strongest houses in the neighborhood. “My father built this house... little by little (*tsy kely kely*)” she responded. When I probed her about the background of the house and land, she began to narrate a complex family history, spanning four generations, multiple journeys across the Mozambique Channel, and the interweaving of families between the Comoros and northwest Madagascar. Her family’s story, along with several other accounts, was emblematic of how migrants from the Comorian archipelago gradually became *zanatany* —or autochthones— over time.

This chapter traces the means— economic, spatial, and performative— through which migrants from Comores crafted themselves into *zanatany* over the twentieth century. Drawing on municipal records, oral accounts, and family histories it narrates how *zanatany* families’ accrued material and relational investments into land, built structures, and religious and neighborhood exchange networks. As young male migrants made their way into the city, they occupied key

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<sup>697</sup> She was described as “mahay,” a person knowledgeable about customs or regional history, and “tsara fanahy” meaning someone with a good heart, trustworthy, and of integrity (literally ‘a good soul’).

<sup>698</sup> We exchanged the usual pleasantries of inquiring about the respective family’s health and wellbeing, and our conversation moved to the forthcoming rains, and the suffering that soon would envelop the city. Rains brought replenishment to the thirsty crops nestled in the hinterlands, for sure. But in the city, the rains meant stagnant pools of knee-deep water, hefty winds, rampant illness, and the threat of a devastating cyclone.

niches in the labor market, married with Malagasy women, and drew on cooperative saving schemes to establish themselves in the city. In this chapter I argue that these families constructed a sense of belonging to the city through the incremental construction of their homes in increasingly durable materials. The spatial entrenchment of Comorian-Malagasy *zanatany* (hereafter *zanatany*) families—through mosque and housing construction—gave rise to new expressive and cultural forms that both reinvigorated and challenged longstanding norms around fraternal sociality and gendered spatial practices. By the 1960s, a vibrant *zanatany* urban culture emerged in the city, animated by embodied modes of place-making, bodily comportment, and aesthetic practices.

This story of *zanatany* calls for a broadening of how we understand autochthonous categories more generally. Autochthonous categories need to be understood as spatial processes—as well as intellectual stances— I suggest, animated by embodied modes of place-making and informed by contested moral norms. Forging senses of belonging were incremental, accrued over time, and made durable and visible in the physical edifices of homes and mosques. As people shared their recollections of the intertwined histories of their homes and families with me, they highlighted how these processes of acquisition were made possible through collective strategies—at once morally upright, deliberate, and aspirational. But the city is, by its very nature, a shared space. And the sense of autochthony, moral righteousness and ideas about proper urban life expressed by *zanatany* families were not shared by all. Other groups in the city—especially newer Malagasy migrants—perceived *zanatany* as arrogant and boastful and resented their entitlement to the spaces of the city. Equipped with new regulatory and discursive openings in the wake of the country’s socialist revolution, newer migrants gradually pitted Comorians—and their present-day Comorian-Malagasy descendants—as outsiders. These

tensions embroiled social relations in the city and culminated in the tragic *rotaka* of 1976-77 in which some 1,000 *zanatany* were brutally killed, and another 15,000 people were repatriated to Comoros. In this and the chapter to follow, I track the conditions that fostered the 1976-77 *rotaka*, a conflict best understood as a contestation over the moral norms guiding the city's present and future.

### ***Laboring to Build the Zanatany City***

This section considers the tempos of early Comorian migration and the kinds of labor which migrants from the archipelago pursued, which allowed them to acquire land and establish households. Through colonial records and family histories that are emblematic of broader historical forces and social patterns among Comorian-Malagasy *zanatany*, I trace the foundations for the making (by some) of Mahajanga as a *zanatany* city. In many of the narratives, *zanatany* families cast migration as a masculine enterprise, emphasizing how men journeyed to northwest Madagascar. Stories were rich with references to fathers, sons and brothers, and highlighted issues of masculinity and labor, male sociality, and fraternal-religious ties. They revealed in more subtle ways how women were critical in the making of *zanatany* households and in the shaping of Mahajanga into a *zanatany* city, through marriage and labor practices. Historians have attributed the sharp rise of Comorian male migration in the early twentieth century to the need for manual labor in northwest Madagascar, the multiple political and economic upheavals in Comoros, and the attraction among migrants to new life possibilities in northwest Madagascar.<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> Mariata Moussa Said, "Contribution a l'Étude des minorités Étrangères a Madagascar: Les Comoriens de Majunga 1947-1960," *Identity, Culture and Politics* (2007), 1:2 101-130; Didier Nativel, "Les Migrants Comoriens à Majunga et Diego-Suarez durant l'époque coloniale (1895-1960)" in C. Coquery-Vidrovitch (ed) *Être étranger et migrant en Afrique au XXe siècle: enjeux identitaires et modes d'insertion* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003) 117-132; Toibibou Ali Muhamed, "Entre Anjouanais et Grandes Comoriens à Majunga (1908-1960), in F. Rajaonah (ed)

My research builds on this literature, by tracing these movements through close readings of municipal files, family narratives and oral accounts that, taken collectively, offer enriched portraits of the dynamics of kinship, affiliation, and moral emotions which bound together *zanatany* families.

Let's return to Mama Jaki. That day in 2013, Mama Jaki explained that her paternal grandfather was born in the very late 1800s in Oauni, Nzwani (Anjouan) and migrated to Nosy Be, a town some 300 km north of Mahajanga, where he met and partnered with her grandmother, who came from a Sakalava Antankarana family. Though Mama Jaki couldn't be certain what brought her grandfather to northwestern Madagascar, he was likely part of the early stream of voluntary migrants—predominantly young men—seeking wage labor, adventure, or perhaps seeking spaces of reprieve from generational dominance where young men could establish themselves. This latter point was especially important for young men coming from Ngazidga (Grande Comore) who have historically been expected to parlay their savings into a lavish, opulent marriage celebration which marked adult masculinity. Migration to northwest Madagascar offered young Comorian men in the early twentieth century either the promise to gather wages for bridewealth with which they could return home, or conversely the possibility of escaping onerous customary, kin obligations and instead building a life in their newfound land.

Migrants from Comoros pursued a wide range of work. In the early years of 1900s, many from Nzwani (Anjouan) and Ngazidja (Grande Comore) worked in public works projects (Fig. 45).<sup>700</sup> But over time, they took other jobs tightly aligned with the French colonial administration, such as municipal workers, court translators, and couriers.<sup>701</sup> Several *zanatany*

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*Cultures Citadines dans l'Océan Indien Occidental, XVIIIe-XXIe siècles: pluralisme, échanges, inventivité* (Paris: Karthala, 2011), 457-466; Noel Gueunier, *Les Chemins d'Islam à Madagascar* (Paris: Harmattan, 1994).

<sup>700</sup> As discussed in Chapters 4 and 7.

<sup>701</sup> Interview with A.H., Abattoir, 19 June 2013.

adult children recollected that their fathers and grandfathers had worked as police officers for the French, who favored them for their loyalty and reliability. Mama Beatrice, an iconic figure among *zanatany* families and an important spirit medium in Mahabibo, described that her father

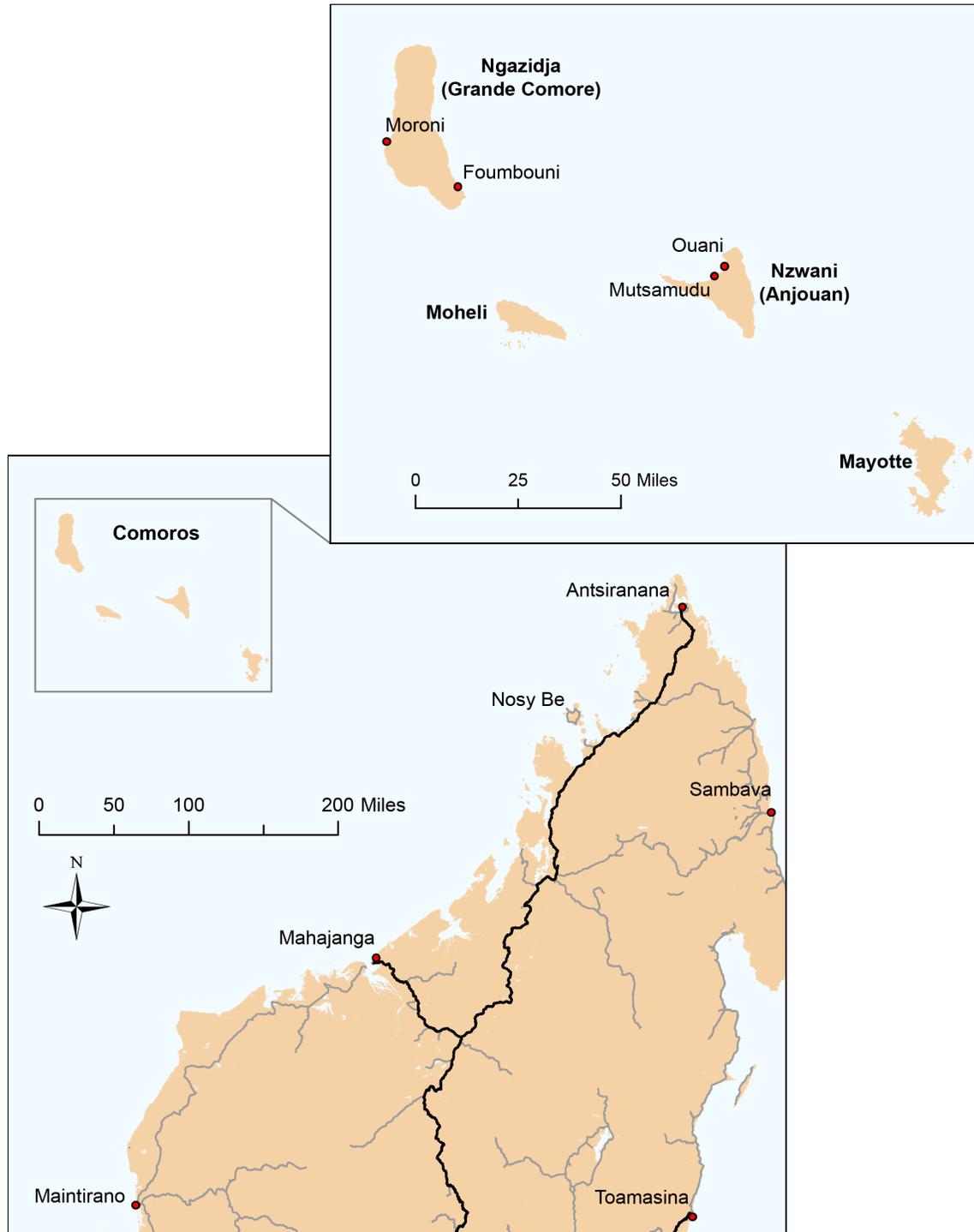


Figure 45: Map of Comoros and northwest Madagascar

migrated from Ngazidja in the 1920s or 30s. He worked initially as a fisherman until he secured coveted work as a police officer with the city. Mama Beatrice laughed as she recounted that her father garnered this work because the French liked him for his uncompromising manner, even though he was not formally schooled (beyond Qur`anic school), and didn't really know how to read and write.<sup>702</sup> “He was very strict (*masiaka*)” she said, “and he would stand at the crossroads of Mahabibo and pull people over and they were scared (*mavozo*) of him!” Others, however, worked quietly to subvert coercive colonial power. Hasandrama, a *zanatany* healer and *foundi* (Islamic scholar) in his nineties, recalled a Comorian inspector charged with ensuring that all Malagasy in Majunga had identification cards, and enforcing fines on those without. “When he approached a household, he would signal to those whom he knew didn't have the card...he looked as though he was calling them, but really he was telling them to flee and hide!” This was apparently perceived by many Malagasy as an act of love and generosity on the part of the Comorian inspector. “In earlier times, people loved each other...this was the *zanatany* way of life” (*taloha, mifankatia olo...ny fomba zanatany izany...*), he trailed off.<sup>703</sup>

It's hard to know for certain how migrants found their work—whether through word of mouth, public notices, or kin networks—but one thing is certain. By the 1920s, Comorian migrants occupied a sizeable amount, if not the majority, of the available jobs in the city. Most

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<sup>702</sup> Fieldnotes 14 October 2013. Note that Mama Beatrice's recollections of her father were bound up with her own unrealized childhood aspirations for institutionalized learning. Comorian parents in the 1930s and 40s customarily sent their girl and boy children to Koranic schools, but not secular, French colonial schools. Many older Comorian *zanatany* women described their deep desires and occasional good fortune if able to pursue formal, secular schooling.

<sup>703</sup> Interview with Hasandrama, Tsaramandroso Ambony, 2 February 2014. Hasandrama's family and personal history was reflective of the tremendous mobility and heterogeneity of families in northwest Madagascar the early twentieth century. His father was a Swahili-speaking Makoa, from Zanzibar who worked on a boat. His mother was part Anjouan (on her father's side) and Sakalava (mother's side). His parents met in Analalava, where he was born. His father, however, was forced into road-building in the region of Ambalazanakomby, and Hasandrama came to live with his father's sister (angovavy) in Marovoay, then in Mahajanga when he was 7 years old.

migrants from Comoros opted to settle in town—rather than the countryside— and work in unskilled jobs.<sup>704</sup> In 1921, one city council member bemoaned that migrants from Ngazidja and Nwani comprised the great majority of the city’s police force, primarily because they were “undaunted by night rounds and long hours.”<sup>705</sup> But this was lamentable, he remarked, because more recent migrants from southeast Madagascar (“Antaimoro and Betsileo”) had fewer opportunities and instead shouldered the greater burden of manual labor work.<sup>706</sup> These recent migrants, moreover, were often obliged to leave the city for *corvée*, the dreaded forced labor schemes with which colonial authorities built public works projects and roads.<sup>707</sup> City council members decided that should Comorians or Anjouanais voluntarily leave their employment with the police force, they ought to be replaced by “natives of other races” to correct the ethno-racial imbalance.<sup>708</sup>

Around this time, French officials looked to other groups for labor recruitment to the northwest, and identified those from southeast Madagascar. These diverse migrants— known ethnically as Antaimoro, Antasaka, Antafasi, and others— were grouped together under the umbrella ethnonym “Betsirebaka.”<sup>709</sup> They shared a common history of migration beginning in the early 1900s, and accelerating in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>710</sup> Young men sought wage earnings elsewhere on the island, with which they could return home and contribute to elaborate funerary

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<sup>704</sup> Nativel, “Les migrants Comorians à Majunga...,” 120.

<sup>705</sup> ANRDM/ F 42: PV Séance 3 Mai 1921.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

<sup>707</sup> On forced labor schemes in colonial times see, Leslie Sharp “Laboring for the Colony and the Nation: The Historicized Political Consciousness of Youth in Madagascar,” *Critique of Anthropology*, 23(1) (2003): 75-91; Genese Sodikoff “Forced and Forest Labor Regimes in Colonial Madagascar, 1926-1936”, *Ethnohistory*, (2005) 52(2):407-35.

<sup>708</sup> ANRDM/ F 42: PV Séance 3 Mai 1921.

<sup>709</sup> The meaning of ‘Betsirebaka’ is the “many who will not be conquered.” This ethnonym persists in Majunga today, but it’s important to note that most migrants from the southeast do not self-identify as Betsirebaka, but rather with specific subgroups.

<sup>710</sup> Hubert Deschamps, *Les Migrations intérieures passées et présentes à Madagascar* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1959), 27-43.

events, purchase cattle for bridewealth, and enjoy a prestigious standing in their home communities.<sup>711</sup> What began for many as temporary migration, however shifted into long-term settlement. French administrators recruited those from the southeast to northwest Madagascar to work on agricultural plantations and industrial enterprises.<sup>712</sup> In Majunga, Betsirebaka filled important labor voids in road-building and public works projects. One administrator complained that existing laborers in Majunga demanded increasingly high wages, and the arrival of “Antaimoro” alleviated the problem because they worked for less; administrators determined to recruit more workers from Farafaganana.<sup>713</sup> In 1936, Deschamps estimated that some 10,000 “Antesaka and other people of the southeast” migrated to the province of Majunga, comprising roughly 10% of overall population.<sup>714</sup> Similarly in the 1930s, Antandroy men migrated from the deep south of Madagascar to Majunga, enticed by the possibility of wage labor during and harsh realities of famine. They settled on the outskirts of town and worked primarily as dairy farmers, selling their milk each day in town and accumulating funds for bridewealth.<sup>715</sup>

Migrants from Comoros labored—sometimes side by side— with these newer migrants in the city’s emergent industries. One manager of FITIM<sup>716</sup> (a company manufacturing jute fiber cords) reported in 1933 that half of his manual labor force was “Comorian.” So sizeable was the Comorian staff at FITIM, that the company constructed a prayer room.<sup>717</sup> “They are the slowest to adapt to the work” one company representative described “but thereafter they accomplish it

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<sup>711</sup> Deschamps, *Les Migrations*, 45.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.

<sup>713</sup> ANRDM/IJ 2214: Arrondissement de Majunga, “Rapport Annuels Travaux Publics” (1925).

<sup>714</sup> Deschamps, *Les Migrations*, 31.

<sup>715</sup> Suzanne Frère, *Madagascar: Panorama de l’Androy* (Paris: Aframpe, 1958), 131. During our time living in Amborovy, it was still the case that most dairy farmers who sold their milk in the area self-identified as “Tandroy” and were perceived by many as having necessary skills and inclination to raise productive dairy cows.

<sup>716</sup> Filature et Tissage de Majunga (FITIM)

<sup>717</sup> Nativel, “Les migrants Comorians...,” 124.

with the utmost regularity.”<sup>718</sup> They were joined by other migrants from the highlands and “locals” (likely Sakalava or longer-standing migrants from elsewhere.)<sup>719</sup> Some recalled that most of the butchers and meat sellers were Comorian. “They knew how to pray while slaughtering the animal” said one older woman, “and then others could trust that the meat was okay, that the animal had been killed in the proper fashion.”<sup>720</sup> Still others labored as guards, domestic workers, petty merchants, and dockers. Dockworkers were especially critical to the economic prosperity of the town, and seemingly some of the easiest jobs to come by for newcomers. Hasandrama narrated that before Comorians came it was “Arabo” [those from Yemen and parts of Arabia] who worked as dockworkers (*dockera, batelage*).<sup>721</sup> Archival sources affirm that “Arabs” —migrants from Yemen especially—were frequently employed contractually as dockers in the early 1900s by the private Compagnie de Batelage de la Côte Ouest de Madagascar.<sup>722</sup> The Compagnie was responsible for paying the migrants’ return transportation costs, and migrants were required to pay a tax following the completion of their contract.<sup>723</sup> But by 1911, administrators complained that “Arab” migrants arrived with few resources, and that they avoided tax payment by “moving, changing their name or hiding themselves to escape fiscal inspectors.”<sup>724</sup> Migrants from the Comorian archipelago, in turn, gradually took more of these low-paying wage jobs.<sup>725</sup>

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<sup>718</sup> ANRDM Series D 366: Rapport de Tournee, 23 Juillet au 19 Aout 1933, Region de Majunga, Inspection du Travail, no. 137.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> Interview, E.D., Ambovo, Feb. 7, 2013

<sup>721</sup> Interview with Hasandrama, Tsaramandroso, 2 February 2014 and April 10, 2014; Interview with Bachir, La Corniche, April 2014.

<sup>722</sup> ANRDM/D754, Ltr from Admin. Des Colonies DEMARSY Chef de Province et Maire de Majunga to Gov Gen, 6 Avril 1911.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid. Dockers were paid around 1 fr per day.

But by the 1930s, French administrators in Mahajanga were deeply preoccupied by the city's large Comorian migrant population. Indeed, census records (notwithstanding the problems of aggregate statistics) affirm the accelerating population of migrants from Comoros in the 1930s. By 1936, "Comorians" comprised 23% of the total population of 40,090.<sup>726</sup> In annual reports and letters, authorities described the "withering state" of Sakalava (whom they perceived as the original inhabitants) and the need for "new elements and migration" to develop the area.<sup>727</sup> They were after a certain kind of migration, one that would balance out the ever-rising numbers of Comorian men seen to be "arrogant." Here, one sees the emergence of schizophrenic colonial characterizations of Comorians. While earlier colonial reports characterize Comorians as ready laborers, "very intelligent" and "more conscientious" than Malagasy, by the 1930s colonial officers the large numbers of unemployed Comorians as a threat to the city's stability. "More than any other city or region, Majunga and its native quarter of Mahabibo are affected" one authority wrote in disgust about the streams of migration from Comoros.<sup>728</sup> Even more "miserable" than those established and without work, were the "hungry newcomers" and more concerning still was the increase in burglaries that were "surely the work of an organized band of Comorian bandits."<sup>729</sup>

Despite the homogenous portrait in which French authorities depicted migrants from the archipelago, there were key particularities and differences within this group. Among the four islands comprising the archipelago, most migrants came from Ngazidja and Nzwani. While in

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<sup>726</sup> CAOM/D755: Rapport Annual, 1941.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid. Similar sentiments were expressed at the national scale, by Gallieni himself who described Comorians in 1903 as "lazy and vicious" and those who are involved "especially in prostitution and thievery as a means to living." As cited in Nativel and Fremigacci, "Insecurite, banditisme, et criminilite..." 308. Note, however, that Nativel in "Les migrants Comorians...", 126 and Toibibou in "Entre Anjouanais et Grandes Comorians," 462 see a gradual shift of colonial thought about Comorians from "brutal" and "delinquents" in the 1930s, to a perception of Comorians as loyal subjects from the 1940s onward. My sources challenge this clear teleological shift, and rather suggest a vacillating, ambivalent stance of French colonial officials vis a vis Comorians over the mid-twentieth century.

the first half of the twentieth century, Anjouan (from Nzwani) dominated numerically, Ajojo (from Ngazidja, Grande Comore) were more numerous following World War II.<sup>730</sup> Migrants from Ngazidja (Grande Comore) tended to migrate temporarily, typically for five years or less. Those from Nzwani were more inclined to settle permanently in Madagascar.<sup>731</sup> This was tied to the pressure on young Ngazidjan men (known as “Ajojo” in Mahajanga) to gather sufficient funds for the grand marriage festivities that would enable them to attain adult male status. As Mama Beatrice explained, “Ajojo almost always searched for wage labor (*mitady vola*), and then sent money back to Comoros. They wanted to go back to Comoros, buy land, cattle (*omby*), and get married, and make a life there. But Anjouan made their life here.”<sup>732</sup> Ideas about “good work” and work ethic differed significantly between these groups. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, many noted that those from Nzwani (Anjouan) were willing to do the denigrating work of sanitation, while those from Ngazidja refused. Anjouan were often cast as generally hard-working and industrious, while Ajojo were less so. One man of Sakalava descent, in his seventies, recounted a commonly heard caricature “Anjouan were really hard-working and eager (*mazoto*) to work as butchers (*boucherie*), taxi drivers, dockworks (Compagnie Marseilles, Compagnie Lyon, dockera), or cooking brochettes (*mousakiky*). They found vacant land and farmed corn or vegetables. But Ajojo were lazy (*kamo*)... they relied on Malagasy (*gasy*) women take care of them.”<sup>733</sup>

Most *zanatany* and other Malagasy in town recalled that it was primarily *men* who migrated from Comoros—and less so women. Some explained this in terms of inheritance

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<sup>730</sup> Nativel, “Les migrants Comorians...,” 122.

<sup>731</sup> This is from Chappelet, cited by both Nativel, “Les migrants Comorians,” (2003), 121 and Toibibou, “Entre Anjouanais et Grandes Comorians,” 458.

<sup>732</sup> “*manao tanana any Ajojo, fa Anjoany mipetraka eto...*” Interview with Mama Beatrice, Manga, 26 September 2013.

<sup>733</sup> Interview with Ibrahim Amana, Tsaramandroso Ambony, Sept. 28, 2013.

customs in the Archipelago, whereby daughters would inherit land and houses from their fathers and uncles. Enjoying the fruits of their family wealth and obliged by cultural norms to remain close to home, daughters rarely left the Archipelago. Others suggested, as did Mama Beatrice, that men migrated because they were more pressed to earn wages with which they could support their families, and return home and establish their own households. Some scholars, furthermore, have echoed these perceptions and claimed that men from Comoros migrated much more than women.<sup>734</sup> Yet, these accounts conflict with some colonial statistics (Figure 45) that suggest the presence of more *women* than men, from Comoros.

	Men	Women	Boys	Girls	Total
Comorians	2,071	2,399	670	990	6,130
Anjouanais	1,158	1,186	326	431	3,101
Total	3,229	3,585	996	1,421	9,231

Figure 45: Composition of Comorian Population of Majunga, 1936<sup>735</sup>

While it is difficult to fully explain this discrepancy, one contributing factor may lie in descent-based forms of colonial recognition in the early-mid twentieth century. During French colonial times, nationality generally followed from descent-based paternal lines, based on *jus sanguinis*.<sup>736</sup> In cases where a father was a national, permitting that the parents were married, the child would assume French nationality.<sup>737</sup> This would have significant repercussions for minority Muslim and karana groups in later decades, but leading up the 1940s and 50s most “Comorians” and “Malagasy” were not eligible for citizenship and were rather grouped together

<sup>734</sup> One source that confirms this is that of F. Chappelet who conducted an inquiry in two villages in Ngazidja (Grande Comore), and cited in Nativel, “Les migrants Comorians...,” 121.

<sup>735</sup> CAOM/ MAD/PM/0436/0831; Also see Nativel, “Les migrants Comorians...” for very similar statistics from 1932.

<sup>736</sup> French nationality, of course, was not granted to most Africans throughout the empire. Inhabitants in colonial territories were classified in one of three citizenship categories: 1) French citizens (*citoyens français*), typically of Europeans descent or mixed descent; 2) French subjects (*sujets français*), claimed by few non-Europeans or 3) “natives” (*indigènes*), pertaining to most Africans. Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and association in French colonial theory, 1890 to 1914* (New York: Columbia, 1961); Ruth Ginio, *French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 97-105; Bronwyn Manby, *Citizenship Law in Africa*, (Cape Town: African Minds, 2015), 6.

<sup>737</sup> Manby, *Citizenship Law in Africa*, 41.

as “natives.” Colonial bureaucratic infrastructures—like the census— were likely influenced by patrilineal norms associated with citizenship. This means that children born of “Comorian” and “Anjouan” fathers, regardless of their mothers’ categorization, would have probably been classified as Comorian, following their fathers’ line. To be fair, however, Comorian societies across the archipelago have historically been matrilineal.<sup>738</sup> And for most Malagasy genealogical affiliation was—and continues to be— flexible. Malagasy grown children could claim their maternal or paternal line, depending on the circumstances and context at play.<sup>739</sup> In those cases, children of Comorian-Malagasy marriages may have chosen to self-identify as either Comorian or Sakalava, Makoa, or another ethno-racial group associated with their maternal line. It could also be that the memories of *zanatany* families of overshadowing Comorian male migration reflected a wider perception that the father’s line was considered more powerful, strong (*mahery*). To understand these narratives about genealogies and relative strength of lines of descent, let us now turn to the marriage practices fundamental to the creation of *zanatany* families.

### ***Constituting Families, Cultivating Ties: Marriage in Majunga***

Unwrapping histories of marriage and work practices in *zanatany* families proved to be challenging, and required much time, trust, and fluid rapport. Municipal and local-level archives were remarkably silent on marriage practices between Malagasy and Comorians.<sup>740</sup> Instead, oral

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<sup>738</sup> Blanchy, *La vie quotidienne à Mayotte, archipel des Comores*, (Paris: Harmattan, 1990).

<sup>739</sup> Maurice Bloch, *Placing the Dead. Tombs, Ancestral Villages, and Kinship Organization in Madagascar* (Waveland: Prospect Heights, 1994); Paul Ottino, *Les champs de l’ancestralité à Madagascar* (Paris: Karthala, 1998); Violaine Tisseau, “Madagascar: une île métisse sans métis?: La catégorie ‘métis’ et son contournement dans les Hautes Terres centrales de Madagascar pendant la période coloniale (1896-1960),” *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 382 (2014):27-44.

<sup>740</sup> Historical studies of marriage in colonial Africa have drawn heavily on court records as rich source material, See for example, Emily Burrill, *States of Marriage: Gender, Justice, and Rights in Colonial Mali* (Athens: Ohio, 2015).

accounts from the *zanatany* children of these relationships provided insights into understanding how Comorian men came to wed Malagasy—usually Sakalava—women. Although a common refrain was “Comorians would come...and then they married Sakalava women,” it was difficult to move beyond this trope into specificities of marital arrangements. I found these conversations were almost always more easily broached with women, with whom I had spent a great deal of time through the women’s association of Manga (*fikambanana*).<sup>741</sup> One such woman was Mama Mariam, of mixed Anjouan-Sakalava background in her early fifties, who was a key figure in the *fikambanana*. Tall, slender, and graceful, Mama Mariam was the portrait of poise and calm. She spoke in a deep, reverberant voice, her head adorned with beautifully wrapped cloth. But she was also ever reserved and indifferent or uninterested in the strange *vazaha*<sup>742</sup> researcher. My feeble attempts to forge a rapport with her for the better part of a year had gone unnoticed. Eventually though, Mama Mariam invited me into her home.

Before I ever visited Mama Mariam in her home, however, I’d learned things about her family and about her house. “You know” Mama Taoaby, my trusted guide, told me one day in a hushed tone, “some people, some Anjouan worked as sanitation workers, dealing with the shit (*tay*) of the city.<sup>743</sup>” So she continued that day, “There was one guy who supervised the workers emptying the barrels of waste from the houses (*pause*). They called him Madi’Tay (boss of shit)! Ha! Yes, that wasn’t his real name, but that was his nickname, how everyone called him. But Madi’Tay, he went on to become rich. He built many houses and now his children live in those

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Unfortunately, however, I could not access local court records in Mahajanga; This section draws primarily on oral sources to account for the ways that families understood marriage as a strategy for Comorian and Sakalava men and women.

<sup>741</sup> *Fikambanana* is an association of affiliation—based either on residential proximity, place of origin, or other common interest. The *fikambanana* to which I belonged was a solidarity organization of women in one neighborhood, Manga, that assisted one another and cooked for large neighborhood, religious and life cycle celebrations.

<sup>742</sup> *Vazaha* means “foreigner,” and is most often used to describe Euro-Americans.

<sup>743</sup> Fieldnotes, December 14, 2013; The story of Madi Tay and sanitation labor will be addressed in Chapter 7.

homes, all over the town.” Several months later, after I’d grown familiar with the deep interconnections of families in town, Mama Taoaby offered another kernel. “You know Mama Mariam, the one in your *fikambanana*?” Yes, I answered, unsure of where she was leading me. “Well, she’s one of the daughters of that man Madi’Tay that I told you about.” I was stunned. Sanitation labor was shameful work for those in Mahajanga (and beyond, really), and my impressions of Mama Mariam didn’t fit with this history of her father’s involvement in sordid work. This deepened my interest in learning more about Mama Mariam’s perspectives on her family history.

On the April day when Mama Mariam invited me into her home, I hesitatingly asked her about her family history.<sup>744</sup> “My lineage goes back to Nzwani (Anjouan)” she began.

*“My father, he was from Moya, a town on the southwest coast of Nzwani. And my mother, she was from that same town, but she was born here in Mahajanga. Her mother was Sakalava-Anjouan and her father was an Arabo<sup>745</sup> and a famous Islamic scholar. He was well-known and people from all over sought him out to study with him. My father was already a grown man when he arrived here in Mahajanga, and once he was settled he began looking for a prospective wife.”*

Mama Mariam did not specify where her father had stayed when he first arrived, but he likely lived with kin who were already established in the area. She described how once a newly arrived young man had garnered sufficient resources to marry, he would begin to seek a wife from a local family. “Like men often did in those times, he began by asking around, inquiring with other families from Moya, about whether they could guide him to a respectable young woman” with

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<sup>744</sup> The narrative that follows draws from my interview with “Mama Mariam” and my fieldnotes, 14 April 2014. I hedged my words carefully, searching for the middle ground between specificity and openness that might be most generative, and being sure to avoid direct questions. Asking someone directly about their past or their family history, I’d learned the hard way, was likely to shut down conversation as people would feel embarrassed, invaded or defensive with such unabashed aggression. Far more productive was a general listing of one’s interests, framed as a neutral statement, and expressed as an earnest desire to learn. Yet, this also required surrendering control, allowing the narrator to steer the story, and stepping away from the “research questions” to faithfully follow a process that led to unknown places and moments. There were times the story I really wanted to know *was* not the one people wanted to tell, and there were plenty of other times when I didn’t really know what I didn’t know.

<sup>745</sup> In the context of northwest Madagascar “Arabo” usually denoted someone of Persian Shirazi descent, though it was also used to denote Yemeni migrants in the city. Mama Mariam was using it most likely in the first sense.

whom marriage might be a possibility. He was really Comorian, you know, but my mother, she was *zanatany*.”<sup>746</sup>

Working through established neighborhood and fraternal-religious networks to identify a respectable wife was a strategy employed by many Comorians migrants who lacked extensive kin networks in town. Some described that after a man glimpsed a beautiful woman in the street, he would approach a “*zanatany, foundi*, or long-time resident, and ask about her respectability.”<sup>747</sup> Unlike Malagasy migrants who accessed multiple kin networks in the city, Comorians drew extensively on their neighborhood connections to identify suitable marriage partners.<sup>748</sup> Hasandrama explained, “Men would ask around the neighborhood, who is a good woman (*olo tsara*)? Then, after they would take her as their wife (*ampakari*).” After finding their prospective bride, Comorian men would employ the help of a revered senior man who was familiar with the young woman’s family to approach the family. Sometimes, though, Comorian men had difficulty securing Sakalava brides. In those cases, the commonality of Islamic practices could sometimes enable marriage. Hasandrama described that “Even if you had money, or worked for *vazaha*, and you asked for the hand of marriage of a Sakalava woman, they often

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<sup>746</sup> “*baba tonga eto efa misy jery, tena Comorian, mitady manangy, manotany olo from Moya, dia mahita mamako...fa mamako teny zanatany izy*” Her description affirmed what I’d already heard and sensed about Mama Mariam: that she identified strongly with her Comorian background. Some women in our association commented discreetly that she “wasn’t *really* Malagasy,” on account of her strong Comorian lineage. Since the father’s line is thought to be more powerful (*mahery*) among many Malagasy in shaping one’s ethnic and kinship identity, women like Mama Mariam were considered “more” Comorian than Malagasy by most standards. But in the women’s association where we worked together, her deep knowledge of Shikomoro, of time-honored recipes for Comorian-influenced cuisine we often prepared—*godrogodro* (coconut cake), *girigitzi* (beef with coconut and tomato sauce)—and of her continuous connections to (often wealthier) kin in the Comorian archipelago and in France, were also assets enabling her a position of authority. When noisy disagreements ensued about how much salt should be added, or whether the proportions of coconut to rice were right, it was Mama Mariam who arbitrated.

<sup>747</sup> Fieldnotes, 24 April 2014.

<sup>748</sup> Malagasy newcomers to the city could access kin relations, as well as those from *fatidra* (blood siblings) and *ziva* (joking allies). Though no informants mentioned it in our conversations, Mzé Mohamed describes that Comorian migrants to Majunga undertook blood sibling ties (*fwareida*) with Comorian men, in the presence of their spouses, and that these relationships became important economic and kinship networks. “Les ‘Sabena’ de la Grande Comore,” 19.

wouldn't agree. They were aloof (*miavona*).” It was only because of their shared Muslim faith that many Comorians did succeed to marry Sakalava.<sup>749</sup>

In citing the reasons for which Comorians sought Malagasy brides, some mentioned aesthetics and invoked caricatures of “beautiful” Malagasy. *Zanatany* and long-term Malagasy residents of varied ethnic backgrounds across the city frequently quipped that Comorian men married Malagasy women because they had a “better character” (*toetra*), were “more beautiful,” “more calm” or even “cleaner” than Comorian women.<sup>750</sup> Mama Taoaby described that Comorian women failed to tidy up (*mampierna*), and their kitchens were always messy and disorganized.<sup>751</sup> Still others reasoned that marrying a Malagasy women was less onerous, less expensive (*mora*) than marriage to a Comorian woman; this was especially true for men from Grande Comore (Ngazidja) who were obliged to carry out the grand marriage.<sup>752</sup> Some Comorian men described that romantic relationships of all kinds with Malagasy women were simply more accessible and possible, and less bound by the conventions of custom than they experienced in Comoros.<sup>753</sup>

By all accounts, Anjouanais and Ajojo men most often pursued marriages with Sakalava or Antaloatra women, who were thought to have a “Comorian sensibility” (*manana Comorian sens*).<sup>754</sup> In these marriages, both partners found ease afforded by shared customs (*fomba*), prohibitions (on pork, for instance), and Islamic religious practice between Comorians and

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<sup>749</sup> Interview, Hasandrama, Tsaramandroso, Feb. 2, 2014.

<sup>750</sup> Interview with Bebe'Papiso, Ambondrona, Feb 8. 2013.

<sup>751</sup> Fieldnotes, April 29, 2013.

<sup>752</sup> Interview with Attoumani, April 18, 2013; Interview with Papa Taoaby, Abattoir, April 12, 2013.

<sup>753</sup> This resonates, and may derive from, with the stereotype of hyper-sexualized Malagasy women as sexually free and promiscuous, which was projected from colonial times onward. For example, see Kirsten Stoebenau, “‘Côtier’ sexual identity as constructed by the urban Merina of Antananarivo, Madagascar,” *Études Océan Indien*, 45 (2010), 93-115.

<sup>754</sup> Interview with El Had, Ambalavola, April 18, 2014.

Sakalava.<sup>755</sup> And for some, marrying into Malagasy families was cast as the fulfillment of an aspiration to strengthen Islamic networks, by developing them.<sup>756</sup> Since wives and children were expected to follow the religion of husbands and fathers, marrying non-Muslims (or those who were minimally observant) was a way of expanding the Islamic community.<sup>757</sup> Also significant were the similar practices between Sakalava and Comorians regarding inheritance. While Comorians privileged bequeathal of wealth to *daughters* over sons, Sakalava have bilateral conceptions of kinship, in which either daughters or sons can inherit.<sup>758</sup> Common practice of most other groups in Madagascar, what people called generically “*fomba gasy*” followed more strictly inheritance of sons, or evenly divided inheritance among all children, but not preferential to daughters.<sup>759</sup> Shared inheritance customs between Comorian and Sakalava families—in theory—helped prevent family disputes. As one Sakalava man, a spirit medium in his seventies, explained, “For Sakalava, the inheritance should go to the daughter (*zanakavavy*), just like the Silamo, Comorian, because...if the parents pass on the house to their son, then the son will always be looking for the father’s wealth, he’ll never seek his own fortune (*mitady vola, mitady harena*).”<sup>760</sup> In other words, inheritance to daughters was understood by many families as a means to avoid generational competition between fathers and sons.

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<sup>755</sup> One man described this in terms of “agreement”, “Mifanaraka ireo...tsy mihinina kisoa, amalona, soaboka...” Also important were the shared burial practices. Whereas many Malagasy groups practice ritual exhumation and reburial, Comorians and Sakalava do not.

<sup>756</sup> One man described this as “the faith was developed by taking Malagasy,” “mangala gasy dia fomba mampanandroso ny finoana.” Interview with Youssef, Manga, July 16, 2013.

<sup>757</sup> In practice, many wives—but not all— did follow the religion of their husbands, converting from Christianity in some cases. But importantly, upon death Malagasy women often reverted to their *fomban’dravana* (ancestral customs) for burial rituals—either because of their expressed intentions which family members followed, or because of the sway of the extended family (*havana*) of the wife.

<sup>758</sup> See interviews with Mama Beatrice, Manga, October 16, 2013.

<sup>759</sup> Thompson and Adloff, *Malagasy Republic*, 329; Daniëlle Müller and Sandra Evers, “Case Studies of Land Access Practices in Fianarantsoa Province, Madagascar,” *Taloha* 18, (20 Nov. 2007), accessed May 21, 2017, at <http://www.taloha.info/document.php?id=589>.

<sup>760</sup> Interview, Dadilahy Kassim, Tsaramandroso Ambony, October 6, 2013.

Even if both families shared customs and practices, these marriages could be messy. *Zanatany* adult children gave conflicting and wide-ranging accounts of the customs and rules governing legitimate Comorian - Malagasy marriages. Marital practices were often a matter of interpretation, debate and contestation, even and especially within families. Some maintained that for Comorians—unlike Malagasy— cross-cousin marriage was permissible (children of sisters could marry children of brothers). In these cases, marrying within the extended family (*havana*) could ensure familial protection and the retention of wealth.<sup>761</sup> But children of two sisters (*pravavy*), or two brothers (*pralahy*), that is parallel-cousins, were forbidden from marrying.<sup>762</sup> Others argued that children of sisters could marry, but not children of brothers, because of the disproportionate strength (*matanjaka, mahery*) of the father’s side that would be “too much” for the child.<sup>763</sup> Most asserted that casual sex or promiscuity (*frandata, manao sipasipa*) between extended kin was absolutely forbidden. And still others maintained that the more pressing issue for many Comorian families was about marrying Europeans (*vazaha*), non-Comorians, or those with radically different customs (*fomba*). One man, the forty-something son of a famous foundi in Ambalavato, described that even this differed between Anjouan and Ajojo.

*Among those from Ngazidja, if you marry outside of the Comorian community and have children, then those children are not really Comorian. And the expectation is that if you leave Comoros, you need to send support back to family in Comoros. But among Anjouan, marrying non-Comorians is not a big problem. It’s true that you must invite family, reciprocate to other kin at the time of the wedding...this is a moral duty. (tsy maintsy mamaly, morale trosa).<sup>764</sup>*

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<sup>761</sup> Interview, El Had, Ambovoalanana, April 18, 2014. He described this as “the family doesn’t extend/go far, it keeps the family together” “*tsy mandeha lavitra, garder famille*”.

<sup>762</sup> Fieldnotes, 26 April 2014

<sup>763</sup> This was debated over and again, sometimes within families, over my conversations with *zanatany* families. Fieldnotes, April 14, 2014.

<sup>764</sup> Interview with El Had, Ambalavola, March 26, 2014.

Some *zanatany* recalled that Comorian fathers and grandfathers had especially sought wealthy Malagasy women to marry, which enhanced their access to resources and prestige.<sup>765</sup> Mama Taoaby drew on the example of her own family history to illustrate this to me one day. Her father, originally from Ngazidja, arrived in the Analalava region around the 1920s. There, he sought out her mother for marriage. She came from a wealthy Tsimihety<sup>766</sup> family owning much land and cattle, and many prospective suitors had already passed by whom the family had declined. At the time, the customary bridewealth of *vodi-ondry* (literally, the sheep's rump) was the expected contribution of husbands. "It wasn't very expensive," she explained, and wealthy families could be choosier about their daughters' husbands. But many families were "willing to give their daughter in marriage to Comorian men even if they lacked funds, because they were hardworking (*mazoto*)." The family accepted the appeal of her father, not because he was wealthy, but because he was educated and gainfully employed as a nurse in the state hospital.

While inheritance norms prevented Comorian husbands from acquiring land, marrying into a wealthy Malagasy family could ensure *conditional* access to land, other forms of support, and some authority in the household. More importantly, Comorian migrants could leverage these forms of support to establish their own households. In an extensive conversation with Mama Taoaby, she explained,<sup>767</sup>

Tasha (T): So, did Comorian men inherit land through marriages to Malagasy women?

Mama Taoaby (MT): Comorian men didn't aspire to inherit land from a Malagasy family, they just wanted to lower their expenses. This way, if he is living with his wife's family, they provide housing and possibly food. This means he avoids paying rent and for food, which gives him more means to improve this business, or buy his own piece of land or build a house, or send money back to Comoros.

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<sup>765</sup> Interview with Hamidou Ali, Abattoir, July 9, 2013; Interview with Mama Jaki, Manga, October 1, 2013.

<sup>766</sup> An ethnic group associated with northern and northwestern Madagascar. Peter Wilson, *Freedom by a Hair's Breadth: Tsimihety in Madagascar* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

<sup>767</sup> Fieldnotes, Abattoir, 7 May 2013.

T: But didn't this create an inferiority complex for Comorian men, about being the junior man in their wife's family?

MT: No, this was the custom for Comorian men. When men marry, they join their wife's family (*matrilocal, uxorilocal*), even though their religion and other customs (*fomba*) follow (*manaraka*) from their father's side. So, moving in with Malagasy families presented no fundamental challenge to their practice (*fomba*) or ego. But there were times that the Malagasy family might think he's a gigolo (*jaoloko*) (*she's giggling*) since many Malagasy have the custom for daughters to move out and stay with their husband's family.

While some disputed the suggestion that Comorian men sought Malagasy women from wealthy families, they agreed that Comorian men pursued women from "respectable" families, "noble" families.<sup>768</sup> Always more important than the wife's family wealth, *zanatany* emphasized, was the industriousness of Comorian migrants and the value they created through their labor. Harifodine, a well-regarded *zanatany* physician in his late forties, argued, "often Comorians married modestly and grew their lifestyle through hard work. Their prestige only came *after* their hard work."<sup>769</sup> Marriage was thus one of a multitude of strategies Comorian migrants drew on to build their lives and accumulate capital in their newfound home.

Comorian-Malagasy marriages gave rise not only to new livelihood possibilities for migrants, but also to a generation of children henceforth known as *zanatany*. Although historical usages of *zanatany* have been contested (explored in Chapter 8) at least one critical conception is that of a *generation* of mixed Malagasy-Comorian children.<sup>770</sup> Colonial officials first noted the presence of "*zanatany*" in a 1959 district report, that also estimated "Comorians" comprised

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<sup>768</sup> This could have been an implicit reference to histories of enslavement, but none with whom I spoke directly referenced slavery. Interview with H., Abattoir, July 11, 2013.; Interview with Mama Kama, Abattoir, June 28, 2013.

<sup>769</sup> Interview with H. Abattoir, July 11, 2013.

<sup>770</sup> Note that this is only one conception of *zanatany*. *Zanatany* has been a flexible, capacious concept over time. It meant very different things to different historical actors, and I will explore this expansive historical lexical field in Chapter 8.

35% of the town's overall population of 46,484.<sup>771</sup> “Among the Comorians (in the sense of inhabitants of the Archipelago) we have those in Majunga who are called ‘Zanatany.’ The latter are those who were born in Madagascar. It should be emphasized that among them are métis whose mothers are Antalaotra or Sakalava.”<sup>772</sup> Contemporary residents of the town invoked *zanatany* in a similar fashion. One woman, Pauline, in her late forties who was born and raised in Mahajanga described, “*Zanatany* are really the product of Comorian-Gasy mixing (*mifangaro*), they were the next generation born here.”<sup>773</sup> Some cast *zanatany* not only as a generational category, but one saturated with ethnic identification. Pastor Tovo, also in his late forties, recalled, “Comorians came and mixed with Gasy. This gave rise to a new ethnic group (*foko-vaovao*), a new way of life, new customs (*fomba vaovao*), and this is *zanatany*.”<sup>774</sup> Even young people who were newer migrants to the town recognized that in Majunga, *zanatany* denoted “Comorian-Gasy metis.” Casimir, a college student in his early twenties who migrated from Fort Dauphin, explained “Back home, *zanatany* are the Antanosy. But here in Mahajanga, *zanatany* really refers to the Comorian-influence, the mixed Comorian-Gasy families that live in town.”<sup>775</sup> This generational conception of *zanatany* was widely recognized by contemporary residents though, as we will see, some took issue with legitimacy of the implicit autochthonous claim.

Before many Comorian migrants (and later their children) claimed *zanatany* status as a signifier of autochthony, however, they invested tremendous energy into establishing households in the city. Oral accounts emphasized that Comorians transformed themselves into *zanatany* or

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<sup>771</sup> ANRDM/Monographies de Majunga/267: District Majunga (1959). Within two years, officials estimated the Comorians at 50% of overall city population.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid. Translation mine. “Parmi les Comorians (dans le sens de habitants de ‘Archipelago) nous en avons à Majunga qui se font appeler Zanatany. Ces derniers sont ceux qui sont nés à Madagascar. A souligner que parmi eux en trouve des métis don’t les mères sont des Antalaotra ou des Sakalava.”

<sup>773</sup> Interview with Pauline, Manga, Dec. 13, 2013. Also, Interview with Severine, Mahvoky Avaratra, April 2, 2013.

<sup>774</sup> Interview with Pastor Tovo, Mahabibokely, March 29, 2013.

<sup>775</sup> Interview with Casimir, Majunga Be, Jan. 7, 2014.

*tompontany* (masters of the land) during the mid-twentieth century through hard work and specific economizing practices. But the entrenchment and gradual accrual of wealth by some Comorians in Majunga had broader repercussions. It created dramatic shifts in the demography and marriage practices in Comoros throughout the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>776</sup> And it set in motion a process of intensifying inequality, in which newer migrants to the city found themselves on the margins—economically and spatially. The following section traces how ideas about land, occupancy, and ownership circulated in the city and shaped the autochthonous practices and historical imaginings of *zanatany* families,

### ***Customs Sit in Places (Mipetraka an'toeran ny fomba)***

Early on in my research, I met Mama Beatrice at an afternoon wedding of a Comorian *zanatany* young woman and her Muslim Betsileo groom in Abattoir, where I was cooking with the *fikambanana* of nearby neighbors. A large, rotund woman with a booming voice, she commanded respect and charged through the compound inspecting the preparations and debating the proper protocol with the other senior women. I buried my head in the *sahafa*, studiously picking stones from the rice, to avoid making mistakes and attracting Mama Beatrice' clamorous attention. She marched right past me and carried on with her orchestration of the marriage celebration.<sup>777</sup> I later learned that Mama Beatrice' family—its establishment and uprooting from Mahajanga— was emblematic of *zanatany* families and reflective of broader political and economic shifts in the city's history.

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<sup>776</sup> Mzé Mohamed, "Les Sabena...", 12-25.

<sup>777</sup> The marriage culminated with a vociferous dispute about which guests had received bottled sodas first only overshadowed with the joyous dancing and presentation of the young couple.

Mama Beatrice situated her family's establishment in Mahajanga with her maternal grandfather. Originating from Hantsindzi, Ngazidja (Grand Comoros), he migrated to Mahajanga sometime in the 1910s - 20s and worked as a carpenter.<sup>778</sup> It was there that he met his wife, an Ankararana Sakalava woman from Nosy Be whose family had fled at the time of a conflict with another Sakalava group seeking to enslave them. As a child of this mixed grand-parentage, Mama Beatrice resolutely identified as *zanatany*. And it was these grandparents that Mama Beatrice attributed with the founding of their familial homes in the central Mahabibo quarters, and the establishment of a family tomb near Antanamisaja (about 4 km outside of town). They first occupied a piece of land in Manga (now owned by Mama Jaki, Mama Beatrice' cousin) and then subsequently appropriated another parcel of land (now inhabited by Beatrice, Mama Beatrice' firstborn daughter).

*When they first settled in Manga in the 1920s and 30s, my (maternal) grandmother remembered that there were few houses and they were populated predominantly by Antaloatra and Sakalava inhabitants. There were still many mango trees! As more and more Antaloatra penetrated (miditra) the area, the Sakalava residents fled to the countryside because they did not like to study and wanted to preserve their customs (niala tany ambanivohitra, satria tsy tia mianatra ireo). So, in earlier times, it was really the Antaloatra who were the landowners (tompony) here.<sup>779</sup>*

Mama Beatrice' narrative reveals several important threads around land occupation practices and perceptions in early twentieth century Majunga, worth unwinding: references to mobility, modes of land acquisition, and perceptions of first-coming. When *zanatany* like Mama Beatrice recalled the how their ancestors' came to possess land, they almost always referenced *mamaky tany*, meaning 'the occupation of uninhabited land' or 'the taking of land.' "Mamaky" however is multivalent, meaning to read, to split or cross, to break and perhaps signals multiple ways in

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<sup>778</sup> Based on fieldnotes, September 15, 2013.

<sup>779</sup> Interview with Mama Beatrice, Manga, September 26, 2013.

which people understand the taking of land.<sup>780</sup> Indeed, some town dwellers—specifically those who originated from the highlands or other parts of Madagascar—described to me to the need to *read* the land, to converse with ancestral spirits before and during the early stages of house-building and before taking occupancy. The practice of consulting a diviner to discern the optimal orientation and day for constructing, prior to constructing a home, is well-documented throughout Madagascar.<sup>781</sup> But for most *zanatany*, *mamaky tany* denoted their ancestors’ useful occupation and cultivation of otherwise fallow land. Many described that when Comorians arrived the land “wasn’t titled” (*tsy borné*), and so they staked it out using stones or building a palm leaf fence (*manao valavala satrana*).<sup>782</sup> Others described how their parents and grandparents cleared the forests—of mango and palm trees—to claim land. In the early decades of the 1900s, most of the available land was in “Mahabibo Village” (present day Manga). But as Mahabibo grew more congested with time, Comorian migrants sought out land in Tsaramandroso, Mahavoky, Tsararano, and the outskirts of town.<sup>783</sup> Papa Raissa, in his early sixties, described that when his father arrived in Mahajanga in the 1950s, he took some vacant land (*mamaky tany*) in Ambovoalanana. “Back then, it was forest (*ala*) and you could cut down the trees (*manapaka kakazo*) and build your home.”

In these narratives, *zanatany* and long-time town dwellers of all backgrounds alike implied that the land was vacant prior to the arrival of their Comorian ancestors. At first glance,

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<sup>780</sup> Other definitions include: “To range over or go through the land; to divide out a piece of land.” (Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary* (1885), LMS, p. 728).

<sup>781</sup> Suan Kus and Victor Raharjaona, “Where to Begin a House Foundation: Betsileo ‘mpanandro’ and the creation of tradition, in Claude Allibert and N. Rajaonarimanana, *L’extraordinaire et le quotidien: variations anthropologiques* (Paris: Harmattan, 2000); Susan Kus, “The role of the mpanandro in the preservation of Betsileo traditions,” *Bulletin de l’Académie Malgache*, 65:1-2 (1987): 105-110; Raymond Decary, *Contribution à l’Étude de l’Habitation à Madagascar* (Paris: Imprimerie Marrimpouey Jeune, 1958), 46-70 (for Sakalava house-construction practices); see other refs to mpanandro; Jean-Pierre Testa, 1972, “Habitat Traditionnel Ancien,” *Revue de Madagascar*, 73-110.

<sup>782</sup> Interview with Mama Jaki, Manga, Oct. 1, 2013. The meanings of boundaries and demarcation can vary, but in this case they served as markers of ownership, must as they have in parts of Europe. See Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>783</sup> Interview with Papa Raissa, Manga, Nov. 12, 2013.

these references to vacant land resonate with discursive practices of ‘first-coming’ found elsewhere. Scholars working across African contexts have signaled how claims to autochthony have hinged on narratives of first-coming, and that these narratives consistently emphasize the empty, and thus ostensibly available, nature of the lands first settled.<sup>784</sup> Yet on closer inspection, *zanatany* narratives challenge the established notion that discourses of autochthony are legitimated through first-coming narratives. Geschiere and Lentz (2007, 2013) both assert the “emptiness” of autochthonous discourses, which make blanket assertions without reference to the textures and tumult of history.<sup>785</sup> Lentz explains that the first-comer claims so central to autochthony, “are inherently contradictory because they combine notions of mobility (having come ‘first’ implies having immigrated from somewhere) with the apparently natural legitimacy of being autochthonous (having been there before the arrival of others).”<sup>786</sup> In this formulation, positioning oneself as an autochthone necessitates the assertion of first-ness, which negates the existing presence of others.

Yet, many *zanatany* did not actually claim that their fathers and grandfathers were necessarily the first (they attributed Sakalava as first comers). Nor did these narratives silence and efface *zanatany* family histories of mobility. *Zanatany* children almost always wove in the journeys undertaken by their fathers and mothers—from Comoros, Nosy Be, or Analalava—that brought them to Majunga. Recognizing these histories of movement did not seem to challenge their legitimate claims to nativism. Autochthony here was not the “mystification of ancestry,”<sup>787</sup> but was rather the revelation of ancestry—specifically the ways ancestors’ marriage and labor

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<sup>784</sup> Carola Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 4; Bucyalimwe Mararo, “Land, Power, and Ethnic Conflict in Masisi (Congo-Kinshasa), 1940s-1994,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 30:3 (1997), 508.

<sup>785</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, 12, 28, 103.

<sup>786</sup> Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*, 19.

<sup>787</sup> A. Leonhardt, “Baka and the Magic of the State: Between Autochthony and Citizenship,” *African Studies Review* 49:2 (2006), 70.

practices produced a veritable claim to belonging to the city. *Zanatany* cited the value their ancestors added and the labor they invested—erecting fences, building houses and mosques, cultivating land—that secured their rightful place in the city. These arguments bear some similarity to early twentieth century Gikuyu migrants in central Kenya who claimed territory on the grounds that they had “once hewn the homesteads from the encroaching forest.”<sup>788</sup> And to more recent immigrants in contemporary Bamako who link woodcutting to territorial claims<sup>789</sup>, or those in Nairobi see themselves as the “rightful, industrious” inhabitants because of their back-breaking labor to transform the land.<sup>790</sup> This distinction—between autochthony as first-coming vs. autochthony as transformation of space—is crucial. Mathieu Hilgers made a similar point, asserting that the ‘first-coming’ has overlaid (and obscured at times) the “contribution of a group to the prosperity of a collectivity that resides in a given space.”<sup>791</sup> In other words, *zanatany* discourses of autochthony reveal the centrality of ‘added value’—through cultivation or building projects—whether fences, houses and mosques. These transformative efforts to add value to the land were pivotal to the staking of autochthonous claims.<sup>792</sup>

Though the land of Majunga was apparently un- or sparsely inhabited by human beings, *zanatany* and others understood the region as belonging to Sakalava through the presence of Sakalava royal ancestral spirits.<sup>793</sup> Quite a few inhabitants—both of and not of Sakalava

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<sup>788</sup> Derek Peterson, “Be Firm Like Soldiers to Develop the Country” Political Imagination and the Geography of Gikuyuland,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37:1 (2004),72.

<sup>789</sup> Denis Gautier, Baptiste Hautdidier, and Laurent Gazuli, “Woodcutting and Territorial Claims in Mali,” *Geoforum*, 42:1 (2011), 28-39.

<sup>790</sup> John Lonsdale, “Soil, Work, Civilisation and Citizenship in Kenya,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2:2 (2008), 306, 309.

<sup>791</sup> Mathieu Hilgers, “Autochthony as Capital in a Global Age,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 28:1 (2011), 38.

<sup>792</sup> Also see Erik Gobbers, “Ethnic associations in Katanga province, the Democratic Republic of Congo: Multi-tier system, shifting identities and the relativity of autochthony,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 54:2(2016): 211-236.

<sup>793</sup> Note here that throughout, I do not wish to reproduce notions of a bounded ethnic group known as “Sakalava;” Sakalava has historically been a collective ethnic term used to denote a wide range of groups in northwest Madagascar who share common practices associated with reverence for living and dead royalty. My interest here is

descent—adamantly asserted that the “true masters of this land” (*tena tompony/tompontany eto*) were Sakalava, *not* Comorians.<sup>794</sup> *Zanatany* and other contemporary residents of the city frequently quipped that Sakalava were the masters of the land before. Some suggested that as the town grew, Sakalava left because of their “nomadic” nature, suggesting that “they didn’t have the idea to settle permanently in town” or that they “preferred not fight or disagree with newcomers...they respected themselves and left.”<sup>795</sup> Others, like Mama Beatrice quoted above, claimed that they “didn’t like to study.” Still others attributed Sakalava recession to onerous colonial exploitation. Some dated this purported exodus to the 1960s. One state worker of Tsimihety-Sakalava background, in his late forties, explained,

*“Sakalava were the masters of the land here before (tompony eto tamin’ny taloha). But during the time of the French and into the First Republic under Tsiranana, the Sakalava began to recede (mihembotra), to move out of the city, because they are very strict with their lifestyle, and they don’t like to socialize with many people (sarotony fiainanana, tsy tia mifanerasera). The French liked to use/enslave people but Sakalava didn’t like this, so they fled (mampiasa olo ny Frantsay, fa ny Sakalava tsy tia, dia nilefa).”*<sup>796</sup>

In some ways, these accounts echo characterizations found in colonial reports. Colonial ethnographic reports are rife with descriptions of Sakalava as “nomadic,” as reflected by the temporary construction of their homes in vegetative matter. One report from 1920 described, Sakalava homes as made from “latanier or satra [satrana] leaves...built on any terrain in the mud or in the sand. The Sakalava is a nomad who likes nothing but the forest and builds a hut only because he is obliged to do so.”<sup>797</sup> Such assumptions, however, failed to account for the deep

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to explore how Malagasy narrators invoked categories of “Sakalava” to make sense of Mahajanga’s history, and of their own position in that historical frame.

<sup>794</sup> One older woman also insisted that Makoa were, together with Sakalava, the true tompony of the city, see interview Mama Zala, Manga, Nov. 14, 2013.

<sup>795</sup> “tsy miady, manaja tena...dia nilefa ireo” Interview with Papa’Khaled, Ambalavato, October 29, 2012.

<sup>796</sup> Interview with R.J., Plateau des Tombes, October 22, 2013. Also, interview with Pastor Tovo, Mahabibokely, March 29, 2013.

<sup>797</sup> ANRDM/D113: “Rapport sur les coutumes et institutions indigènes” 27 November 1920. “Des cases basses en latanier ou en feuilles de satra, construites sans aucune règle d’orientation et sur n’importe quel terrain dans la boue ou dans la sable. Des portes étroites en feuilles de satra fermant mal qu’ils placent presque toujours au Nord ou au

historical prohibitions on constructing in durable materials, as prescribed by royal ancestors. They also glossed over the complex ecological strategies, spanning a spectrum of sedentary and nomadic practices, that Sakalava pastoralists had long employed to sustain livestock in Majunga's semi-arid hinterlands.<sup>798</sup> There are kernels of truth in these characterizations. Cattle have historically been important to Sakalava families for ritual and economic reasons, thus giving rise to pastoralist lifestyles for some. And in other parts of northwest Madagascar, Sakalava royal figures and followers drew on mobility practices to circumvent the exploitative forced labor schemes of French colonial authorities.<sup>799</sup> There is some evidence to support the notion that Sakalava lived in the hinterlands, rather than in central town. The Catholic Spiritain fathers noted that the population of Majunga's hinterlands were comprised "especially of Sakalava and Tsimihety," who were particularly resistant to their evangelizing efforts.<sup>800</sup>

But the common claim that Sakalava exited the city of Majunga en masse—repeated in conversations and reproduced by scholars<sup>801</sup>—over the twentieth century is less convincing. First, such arguments clash with the histories of widespread marriage between "Comorians" and "Sakalava" cited by many interlocutors; in fact, almost every *zanatany* family whom I interview claimed one "Sakalava" parent (usually mother). Colonial census records, moreover, suggests a steady presence of "Sakalava" through the first half of the twentieth century, with population

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Sud, pas de fenêtre, rarement des verandahs. Une seule piece où s'entassent pele-mele hommes, femmes, enfants, chiens, poules, canards, ou on couche, où on fait la cuisine et où on mange. Le sakalava est un nomade n'aime pas autre chose que la forêt et ne construisent une case que parce qu'on l'y oblige."

<sup>798</sup> Scholars have studied these practices among pastoralists in southern Madagascar, see Jeffrey Kaufmann, 2009, "The Sediment of Nomadism," *History in Africa* 36:235-264; Jeffrey Kaufmann, 2004, "Prickly Pear Cactus and Pastoralism in Southwest Madagascar," *Ethnology* 43(4): 345-361.

<sup>799</sup> Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 92-103; Leslie Sharp "Laboring for the Colony and the Nation: The Historicized Political Consciousness of Youth in Madagascar," *Critique of Anthropology*, 23(1) (2003): 75-91; For eastern Madagascar, see Genese Sodikoff "Forced and Forest Labor Regimes in Colonial Madagascar, 1926-1936", *Ethnohistory*, (2005) 52(2):407-35.

<sup>800</sup> *Bulletin de la Congrégation du Saint Esprit*, no.401 (Janvier 1924): 486-491, "Residence de St. François-Xavier" (Paris: Maison-Mere, 1924).

<sup>801</sup> Raymond Kent, *From Madagascar to the Malagasy Republic* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1962), 23-24; A. Dandouau and G. Chapus, *Histoire des Populations de Madagascar* (Paris: Larose, 1952).

*growth* in the 1960s (Figure 46). Taking into account the profound problems of ethnic categorization, given the contextual and fluid nature of ethnicity, these figures suggest some degree of constancy in the presence of Sakalava in town. My intention here is not to prove or disprove the veracity of claims, reify a staid category of “Sakalava,” or even to make a definitive argument about demographic shifts in the city.<sup>802</sup> Rather, I gesture to these inconsistencies because they reveal that something more at work in the narratives of the past.

Year	1913	1936	1949	1962	1967	1969
	2203	2349	2022	2929	3380	4391

Figure 46: Population of Sakalava, Majunga Commune<sup>803</sup>

*Zanatany* narratives may hold historical inaccuracies, but they also reveal the complexity of autochthonous claim-making and the nuanced conceptions of land use. *Zanatany* adult children justified their parents’ and grandparents’ rightful appropriation of land on the grounds that the land was vacant, and had long been abandoned—or never inhabited—by Sakalava forebears. But interestingly, most *zanatany* equally maintained that the region itself was “Sakalava land,” that though Sakalava were the masters of the land before (*tompontany tamin’ny taloha*), the land itself retained some Sakalava distinctiveness. One way that people expressed this was in relation to prohibitions and norms around land use. Specifically some informants argued that customs ought to remain tethered to the land—regardless of the preferences and habits of the current occupants. As Said Hassan, a former state worker and local dignitary<sup>804</sup> in his early seventies explained, “It should be that customs are tied to the place (*fomba mipetraka*,

<sup>802</sup> This is beyond the scope of this chapter, and would require more evidence to make solid conclusions.

<sup>803</sup> This is compilation of multiple sources: CAOM/MAD/PM//0436/0831; ANRDM/Monographies de Majunga/267, (1949), (1962), (1967), (1969).

<sup>804</sup> Said Hassan was a member of the *Sojabe*, a 15-person exclusive committee of *olo be* (big people, wise people) from across the city, who were called upon by the mayor in cases of difficulties. For instance, they were asked to intervene in student uprisings at the Université de Mahajanga, to negotiate a peaceful resolution.

*literally customs “live” or “sit” in place*). Mahajanga, has long been a Muslim town, and people coming here should respect norms like not consuming pork, especially in certain parts of town.”

Others, however, explained the rootedness of *fadys* (taboos) in place through specific Sakalava histories and the presence of royal ancestral spirits.<sup>805</sup> This was especially the case in certain parts of town in which observance of prohibitions and norms were critical—even for one’s survival. These areas included the *doany* (sacred Sakalava compound, Fig. 47),<sup>806</sup> but also the seaside in the areas of Village Touristique (Atsahabingo) and Petite Plage, in which the



Figure 47: Sakalava *doany* (royal compound), Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

consumption of pork was absolutely forbidden. During vacation months, the seaside attracted large crowds of highlanders and outsiders who often violated this taboo by cooking or carrying

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<sup>805</sup> Sakalava *fady* and norms governing land use around Mahajanga emerged out of negotiations and dialogue between the living and the dead, between people and ancestors, over time.

<sup>806</sup> Marie-Pierre Ballarin, *Les reliques royales à Madagascar: source de légitimation et enjeu de pouvoir (XVIIIe-XXe siècles)*. (Paris: Karthala, 2000); Michael Lambek, *The weight of the past: living with history in Mahajanga, Madagascar*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

pork. *Zanatany* and long-standing residents remarked on vacationers' carelessness for the *fadys*, which angered Sakalava royal ancestors and resulted in the deaths of several people each year—by drowning or by the *lolon'drano* (ghost/spirit of the sea). Dadi'Elio, a Tsimihety woman in her late seventies, explained, “the *lolon'drano* has long been in the sea, but before it didn't take people (*maka olo*). Then Ndriamisara became angry because of the *bourzani* (perjorative, for highlanders) coming to the sea, and eating pork.”<sup>807</sup> Then, things spun into chaos (*lasa mikorontana*).<sup>808</sup> Long-standing town dwellers attributed the town's general moral decline, and the rotaka of '76-'77, to newcomers' failure to abide by established Sakalava *fady*.<sup>809</sup>

The point here is that if in some way *zanatany* narratives of land occupation reflect the value for appropriation of “idle” land, they also account for the multitude of ways land can belong—or be tied to—several groups at once. This is not a simple juxtaposition of “individual, private ownership” vs. “collective ownership.” Early on, historians of Africa drew on these bifurcations, pitting African perspectives of property as communal against colonial, Euro-American notions of inviolable private property.<sup>810</sup> More recently, Sara Berry, Carola Lentz and others have pushed back on this assumption, by showing that African notions of property ownership are more complex and predate colonial intrusion. What the case of Mahajanga

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<sup>807</sup> The history of Ndrianamitsara is much more complex and tied to the Sakalava origin story of Mahajanga; he was the healer (*moasy*) of the king (*mpanjaka*), and helped carry the king when he was ill into Mahajanga, and particularly to the seaside—apparently the site of Village Touristique— where the king was healed (*dia sitrana*). The king henceforth declared the water “Mahajanga” (to make well, to heal), and bestowed the town's name.

<sup>808</sup> Interview with E.D. Amborovy, Feb. 7, 2013.

<sup>809</sup> The destruction of several buildings alongside the sea in Village Touristique was attributed to the egregious dismissal of *fady* by a group of Catholic nuns and highlanders (*bourzany*) who consumed pork (*kisoa*) there in the 1940s. In 1999, the encroachment of the sea destroyed one of the two existing hotels there, the Greek-owned, Hotel Sakanyes. The one remaining, Hotel Karon, was left remaining (*tavela*) because the owners and patrons observed the appropriate customs and avoided consumption of pork on the seaside (*tsy mety mihinina kisoa amoran'ny ranomasina*).

<sup>810</sup> Elizabeth Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement: The Impact of the Kariba Resettlement Upon the Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 1971); Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Paul Bohannan, “Africa's Land,” in G. Dalton (ed) *Tribal and Peasant Economies* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 51-60.

suggests is particularly nuanced conceptions of land ownership on the part of those claiming nativism, one which accommodates both the historical belonging of land to some and the contemporary belonging of that same land to others. These accounts of interwoven “Sakalava” and “Comorian” presence, I argue, point to the possibility of coexisting—if competitive at times—articulations of history.<sup>811</sup> Remembering early histories of Comorian migration and settling, did not preclude the recollection of Sakalava ancestors and histories, nor did it necessarily invalidate *zanatany* claims to belonging. Thinking about historical narratives around autochthony this way may also move us away from thinking of nativism in a sum zero field, in which winners are natives and losers are strangers.<sup>812</sup>

Ancestral (and thus historical) associations with land imbued it with certain Sakalava properties, taboos and expectations which were to be respected by migrants and later-comers. And the active presence of royal ancestral spirits (and their mediums) helped maintain the sense of Mahajanga as ‘Sakalava land,’ in ways similar to cases described elsewhere in Africa.<sup>813</sup> Lentz points out in Black Volta region of West Africa, some “first-comers” encountered landscapes inhabited by spirits of the land, as embodied in earth shrines. They were obliged to forge pacts with earth gods and land spirits, which their descendants’ invoked as a legitimization of their ancestors’ rightful autochthonous claim to the land.<sup>814</sup> But the situation in Majunga was not so straightforward. Though some in Comoros—particularly in Mayotte—share similar

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<sup>811</sup> This is inspired by Michael Rothberg’s argument against “competitive memory” and formulation of “multidirectional memory” in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2-6.

<sup>812</sup> Mathieu Hilgers, “Autochthony as Capital in a Global Age,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 28:1 (2011).

<sup>813</sup> Joost Fontein, “Graves, Ruins, and Belonging: Towards an anthropology of proximity,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17:4 (2011), 706-727; Deborah James, *Gaining Ground? Rights and Property in South African Land Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Joseph Mujere, “Land, Graves and Belonging: Land reform and the politics of belonging in newly resettled farms in Gutu, 2000-2009,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38:5(2011), 1123-1144; Marja Spierenburg, “Strangers, Spirits and Land Reforms: Conflicts about Land in Dande, Northern Zimbabwe” (Unpublished thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2004).

<sup>814</sup> Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*, 18.

practices around royal ancestral spirits, *zanatany* did not attribute their parents' successful establishment in the city to ancestral arbitration. *Zanatany* did not, in other words, indicate that their Comorian fathers negotiated with Sakalava spirits to enable their presence on the land.<sup>815</sup> It was rather the congruence of behavioral norms and common prohibitions between Comorians and Sakalava, that *zanatany* cited as the basis for Comorians' establishment in the town. *Zanatany* contrasted their and their ancestors' respect for local taboos with highlanders and other outsiders' who flagrantly disregarded these long-standing norms. The net effect, in this logic, was the successful appropriation and integration of Comorian migrants into Mahajanga over time. Herman, a Sakalava musician in his late fifties framed it this way, "It's absolutely necessary (*tsy maintsy*) for outsiders (*vahiny*) to adapt to Sakalava customs (*adapte fomba Sakalava*), for example, by avoiding pork which is prohibited here. Comorians knew this, they adapted, they knew the customs. But other groups haven't adapted like this, but rather expect to carry on with their customs here. This is where we have problems."<sup>816</sup>

### ***The Sediment of Houses***

Building a home was—for many Comorian migrants and their *zanatany* progeny—a foundational process, one that established their present and future presence in the city. By building a house, Comorians enacted collective networks of reciprocity that deepened their ties to one another and to the town. This section ventures to unpack the ways houses in Mahajanga, Madagascar have been at the heart of inhabitants' spirited efforts to transform themselves from

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<sup>815</sup> It is important to note, however that many *zanatany* have linkages to Sakalava royal ancestral spirits and practices—or are themselves spirit mediums. Most claimed that Comorian ancestors refused these practices, seeing them as counter to Islam, but many Sakalava spouses and *zanatany* children in past and contemporary times maintain linkages with spirit mediums and spirit possession. Indeed, among the members of the Manga *fikambanana* to which I belonged, at least one-third of the *zanatany* women were active with spirit possession gatherings.

<sup>816</sup> Interview with Hervé, Manga, Dec. 11, 2013.

outsiders to insiders, from newcomers to natives over time. Inhabitants of Mahajanga, from a wide range of ethnic, generational, and residential backgrounds, concurred that over time Comorians became the “tompony” (masters) of certain quarters of the Mahabibo area—like Abattoir, Manga, Morafeno, Ambalavola, Ambovoalanana. A common refrain, sometimes uttered nostalgically and sometimes bitterly, was “before, Comorians owned all the homes here.”<sup>817</sup> One adult *zanatany* described, “Comorians, they built so many houses in town. This is why many Malagasy thought Comorians were boastful, because they built big houses, they were carpenters and knew how to build.”<sup>818</sup> Almost all directly attributed the *rotaka* of ’76-77 to the overpowering presence of Comorian-*Zanatany* homes—combined with the perception that Comorians occupied most of the available jobs—throughout the city.

Houses, I suggest, have been at once artifacts, archives and medium for cultivating senses of belonging—and exclusion—among migrants in the Mahajanga. As artifacts, houses are material sites, built and rebuilt by human inhabitants in moments in time. They are highly visible in the urban landscape, and cast an enduring presence over the town. But houses also bear traces of the past, etched on the walls, floors, and doors of the structures, bearing witness to the lives of dwellers. Like archives, they are partial mnemonic repositories, only revealing and containing some stories of the past, while silencing others.<sup>819</sup> And finally, houses shape their inhabitants by structuring, containing, and perpetuating kin, marriage and ancestral relations.<sup>820</sup> Houses serve to

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<sup>817</sup> “Ny fotoana taloha, Comorian tompon-trano [literally, homeowner or landlord, sometimes people swapped this for tompony-masters] olo jiaby” Interview with M, Fiofio, October 28, 2012.

<sup>818</sup> Interview with Mama Beatrice, Manga, October 16, 2013 ; Interview M.A. Feb. 7, 2013.

<sup>819</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “The House, from Cellar to Garret, the Significance of the Hut” In *The Poetics of Space*, 3-37, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Bahloul, Joëlle. 1999. “The Memory House: Time and Place in Jewish Immigrant Culture in France.” In Donna Birdwell-Pheasant and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, eds. *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe*, Oxford: Berg. Pp. 239-49; Christopher Morton, “Remembering the House: Memory and Materiality in Northern Botswana,” *Journal of Material Culture* 12:2 (2007), 157-179.

<sup>820</sup> Louis Henry Morgan, *Houses and House-life of the American Aborigines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965 [1881]); Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1975 [1982]. “The Social Organization of the Kwakiutl.” In *The Way of the Masks*, trans. Sylvia Modelski, 163-87. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

mediate tensions, contain economic production, and symbolize freedom and restriction.<sup>821</sup> But as Waterson (1990) has demonstrated, houses are processes (rather than finished objects), having biographies of their own, often extending beyond the lifespan of their inhabitants. It is precisely because of their sedimentary and processual nature that studying houses might help reveal the ways senses of belonging are incrementally forged over time. The biography of a house, in other words, can illuminate how kinship, materiality, and space are entangled in broader historical processes of change and continuity.

Uncovering the histories of houses was not initially an object of my initial research. It was rather a means to unwrapping the layered *zanatany* family histories that illuminated how forces of migration, labor, and morality shaped everyday lives in the mid-twentieth century. Early on in my research, I found my inquiries about the city's past repeatedly turned down by those who described themselves as "unlearned," "not really knowing the history";<sup>822</sup> sometimes this was explicitly linked —by themselves or others— to their generational position (too young), gender (women), or migrant status (newcomer or *vahiny*). The politics of speech and history-telling in Madagascar are complex. Authority to tell the city's history was rarely linked to formal educational achievements; to the contrary, those most widely regarded as individuals learned in the area's history often had little formal schooling and worked as police officers, factory workers, manual laborers, and ritual specialists.<sup>823</sup> But it was linked to social hierarchy, generation and gender (often proprietorship of men), and proximity to Sakalava royalty.

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<sup>821</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 1973 [1992]. "At the Kabyle House or the World Reversed" in *Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Roxana Waterson, 1990 *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

<sup>822</sup> *tsy mahai, tsy mahai tsara ny tantara*

<sup>823</sup> Even Mama Jaki, when narrating her family's history, mitigated her own authority by repeatedly offering the disclaiming refrain, "I didn't see this, but this is the story..." (*Izaho tsy mahita, but ny tantara*). This discursive strategy served to protect oneself in case of uttering wrong statements. It was also reflective, perhaps, of the widespread conception of the capacity of speech and spoken words to bring about harm.

Knowledge about the past was and is a powerful political resource, like elsewhere, and historical consciousness is a contested terrain in Madagascar.

After my frustrated attempts to seek out perspectives beyond those of older men, I discovered that asking women about their homes and the objects inside of them proved to be an endlessly fruitful way of probing the past. This emerged organically at first, by virtue of spending countless hours in homes with women cooking and talking. But after time, I approached this spatial-family history –via artifacts and material culture— more systematically. Direct questions about one’s life, family genealogy, and intimate relationships are embarrassing and inappropriate — though sometimes more tolerated from a foreign researcher— in much of Madagascar. Perhaps this was because unadorned, naked questions about one’s background, genealogy, or status threatened to expose hidden histories of enslavement (both historic and contemporary), pain, and degradation. So it was that anchoring my research in the house, replete with eclectic and mundane belongings, illuminated the connections between everyday life, global processes, and changes in the city.

In recalling family histories of labor and place-making, Comorian-Malagasy descendants narrated the founding of their homes in moral registers about work. They juxtaposed their ancestors’ labor and economizing practices, cooperative associations, and religiously inspired ascetism with other town residents and newcomers who were perceived not to share these morally informed practices. Comorians were dynamically energetic (“dynamique” “volontaire”) in their efforts to work and accumulate resources to construct their homes.<sup>824</sup> They economized (*manao economie*), stashing away funds (*miafy*) to purchase building supplies. *Zanatany* constructed ideas about the distinctive virtue and moral propriety of Comorians in contrast to the

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<sup>824</sup> Interview with Attoumani, Village Touristique, April 19, 2013.

perceived corrupt social mores of “Malagasy.” While “the Malagasy” wasted their wages on “alcohol, food, pleasure and women,” migrants from Comoros knew how to “work hard, save money” and abstain from bodily pleasures—like alcohol and sex—to pursue aspirations for material improvement.<sup>825</sup> “They didn’t always have to eat abundantly, or well” one *zanatany* man asserted, “they could go hungry and work and work.”<sup>826</sup>

Key to their capacity to accumulate wealth was the Comorian social institution of *shikoa* (described briefly in Chapter 4), which required members to pay an allocated sum each month, and then rotated the recipient monthly.<sup>827</sup> In this way, *shikoa* bears much resemblance to savings groups and practices long documented elsewhere in Africa.<sup>828</sup> Organizers decided in advance the allocated sum each member would contribute and the designated longevity of the group. *Shikoa* ran in temporal cycles—of three months, six months, a year, or more—depending on the preordained amount of contributions and members’ expectations. For a *shikoa* cooperative to function smoothly, members had to share a commitment to monthly contributions, patience and trust among one another to keep their promise, and a finite, structured timeline. One woman noted that the key to successful *shikoa* was a stern, strict (*masiaka*) leader, who would hold all members accountable.<sup>829</sup> Expectations to fulfill one’s contribution were very high; if a member couldn’t gather the necessary funds, they were expected to borrow from family members or sell off belongings to fulfill their obligations. The functioning logic of *shikoa* was (and is) one of

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<sup>825</sup> These were common refrains among contemporary *zanatany*, “*manao plaisir, manangy, misoatra toaka ny Malagasy*”

<sup>826</sup> “*ttsy maintsy mihinina tsara foana ireo [Comorians]*” Interview with P.R. 12 Nov. 2013, Mahajanga. Interview with Commandant, Manga, October 25, 2013.

<sup>827</sup> Interview with Said Hassan, Majunga Be, May 7, 2013. There may have been similar economizing practices among Malagasy, but interlocutors repeatedly stressed the Comorian origin of this institution in Majunga.

<sup>828</sup> Dan Soen and Patrice de Comarond, “Savings Associations Among the Bamilèkè,” *American Anthropologist* 74:5 (1972):1170-1179; F. Bouman and K. Hartevelde, “The Djanggi, A traditional form of saving and credit in West Cameroon,” *Sociologia Ruralis* 16:1(1976):103-119; Rogier van den Brink and Jean-Paul Chavas, “The Microeconomics of an Indigenous African Institution: The Rotating Savings and Credit Association,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 45:4(1997):745-772.

<sup>829</sup> Interview with Pauline, December 13, 2013, Manga.

indebtedness; that is, members felt obliged to fulfill their contributions, since they had already (or soon would) received the contributions of others. But these groups disciplined members' commitments to short-term austerity, in the interest of long-term gain in material comforts. They also fostered hope and visions of a more abundant future, filled with a home, furniture, and appliances. *Shikoa* was also a device of integration, bringing Comorians together with Malagasy on an equalized terrain. Mama Mariam explained though *shikoa* was originally a Comorian practice, in Mahajanga Comorians *and* Malagasy together joined in savings circles.

In her family's case, after they secured land, her mother especially acquired savings through *shikoa* that enabled them to construct a home. Mama Mariam narrated the incremental hardening of home, enabled through her mother's unwavering efforts to economize through *shikoa*.

*"My mother, she got this house because she was economical. She did shikoa—you know shikoa? [I have an idea, but I give her an uncertain look so she can explain in her own words] Shikoa, well this was a Comorian practice (fomba), the Comorians brought it, but they did it with Malagasy. It was done before between both, not only among Comorians. They would pool their funds, and help each other; twenty people or so would get together each month and give a certain amount, and then each month the money went to one person. This way, one member could withdraw a large sum once a year and build a house or start a business.<sup>830</sup> And so, she made shikoa and that's how she finished the house. She built the house from sheet metal (toly), before I was even born. By the time I was a young woman (efa misy jery), we'd already rebuilt the home in concrete (vato-literally stone, but in this sense, cement). And then she built three other houses in the city [in Manga and Ambalavola]. It's also how she bought all her furniture (fanaka). She was very clever (fetsy) [clicking her tongue]."*<sup>831</sup>

The absence of her father in the house-building narrative was glaring, so much so that it seemed rude not to ask, "What about your father?" She replied quickly, "Oh, he did all kinds of different work. He worked in *bricolage*, doing all kinds of building projects." Mama Mariam

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<sup>831</sup> Although Mama Mariam didn't discuss her siblings and their wealth, it was widely known that several of her brothers and sisters lived in France where they accrued funds to purchase more properties in town.

stopped there. She never indicated that her father was directly involved, indeed famously integral, to the city's sanitation labor regime; and I never pushed her on that for fear that it would embarrass or expose her in unwanted ways. But as we sat quietly I reflected on this strange, unauthorized knowledge I had that this house had been constructed with the hard-earned money from her father's stigmatized labor of waste management. I felt uneasy with my entanglement in webs of gossip and hearsay, with the layers of secrecy and performances of ignorance that were paradoxically obligatory to maintaining and cultivating relationships of trust with people in Mahajanga. Anthropologists and historians have long argued that rumors and gossip serve as potent means by which boundaries between insiders and outsiders are demarcated, and at times contested.<sup>832</sup> Trusting unverified information may be dangerous, but so too can acts of verification inflict harm. So I let it be.

Some clarified, however, that not all Comorians yearned to acquire land and build homes. Many Ajojo pursued temporary labor migration, always with an eye to returning home to Ngazidja.<sup>833</sup> *Zanatany* adult children ruefully recalled the propensity of Ajojo to partner with *gasy* women, only to eventually abandon them and their children.<sup>834</sup> This was captured in the proverbial warning "the value of a *gasy* child is less than a gunny sack of rice"<sup>835</sup> Papa Taoaby, in his early seventies, bitterly recalled that his own Comorian father abandoned his mother and their family. He reflected one afternoon on how —like many *zanatany* in this situation—he harbored resentment and revenge (*kankay*) for years, until he had his own children. But many from Ngazidja *did* establish households and build homes, clustering in Abattoir. And some stood

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<sup>832</sup> Gluckman, Max. 1963. "Papers in Honor of Melville J. Herskovits: Gossip and Scandal." *Current Anthropology* 4, 3: 307-316; White, Luise. 1994. "Between Gluckman and Foucault: Historicizing Rumour and Gossip," *Social Dynamics* 20:1, 75-92.

<sup>833</sup> Interview with Ibrahim Amana, Tsaramandroso, Sept. 28, 2013; Interview with Mama Beatrice, Manga, Sept. 26, 2013.

<sup>834</sup> Interview with Said Hassan, Majunga Be, May 7, 2013.

<sup>835</sup> Original Malagasy "zanaka'malagasy valeura an'azy sitrana gonin'ny vary," (a gunny sac is 50 kg of rice).

by their *gasy* children, while preserving ties to kin in Comoros. Mama Beatrice's father, for example, maintained contact with family in Comoros whom he would regularly visit there. Mama Beatrice and her eleven siblings,<sup>836</sup> however, did not accompany him on these voyages. He claimed that his children would suffer there (*mijaly*) because there was no water and life was arduous. It was only after the devastating '76-77 *rotaka*, that they fled to Comoros and Mama Beatrice understood her father had shielded them from rejection by her Comorian kin.<sup>837</sup>

It was those from Nzwani (Anjouan)—like Mama Mariam and Papa Raissa's families—who were thought to be the most ambitious in land acquisition and home construction. Anjouan settled in some of the central quarters of Mahabibo (Manga, Ambalavola, Fiofio, Morafeno) but also on the outskirts of town in Tsaramandroso and Tsararano.<sup>838</sup> They were more likely to accumulate funds through *shikoa*, construct a home on their land, and then acquire more land and housing—"building up a kind of enterprise."<sup>839</sup> Papa Raissa's family was one example of this pattern. His father traveled from Nzwani to Madagascar—first to Moramanga as a soldier in the French army (*miaramila*) in the 1940s, and then to Majunga upon retirement.<sup>840</sup> There, he met Papa Raissa's mother, a Sakalava woman originally from the nearby town of Boanamaray. At that time, he purchased a parcel of land in Manga from a *karana* family on which stood a sheet metal home. They lived there, and his father reaped an income trading and selling wood, and participating in *shikoa* until he amassed enough savings to buy another parcel of land. This time, he also bought from a *karana* family, a parcel with both a sheet metal and a thatch home, in

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<sup>836</sup> These siblings are *kibo iraiky*, that is all sharing one mother or 'one stomach'.

<sup>837</sup> "Tsy mila zanaka Malagasy ireo"

<sup>838</sup> Interview with Mama Jaki, Manga, October 1, 2013.

<sup>839</sup> Interview with Ibrahim Amana, Tsaramandroso, Sept. 28, 2013.

<sup>840</sup> Though it is possible, Papa Raissa did not say for certain whether his father was involved in suppressing the anti-colonial uprisings around Moramanga in 1947.

Mahabiboky.<sup>841</sup> He kept and rented those homes, while living in the first house in Manga. Many residents in Mahajanga commented that a good number of Anjouan acquired houses, which they rented. But Anjouan were not widely regarded as having a monopoly on rental housing, or occupying a “rentier” class like James Brennan describes of South Asians in Dar es Salaam.<sup>842</sup> Town inhabitants and municipal leaders consistently signaled that landholding and landlordism was enjoyed by a range of ethnic groups—especially Comorians-*Zanatany*, Merina, and Karana. And for Anjouan renting homes were one of a diverse range of income-generating activities pursued in Anjouan households.

The practice of acquiring land and building durable homes among *zanatany* families was often contrasted with other groups’ ideas about wealth, the value of built forms and inheritance. *Zanatany* themselves signaled the multiple forms of investment in their households, and specifically that *zanatany* women “needed” gold, furniture, and appliances. When I asked about the range of housing practices, *zanatany* friends would point out that others in town—particularly Tandroy and Betsirebaka, identifiable by their dress and speech patterns— often lived in thatch or sometimes sheet metal homes. Some rightly attributed this to economic means. Quite simply, these migrants had more recently arrived, and could not afford to acquire land, let alone build expensive homes. But others referenced the competing ideas of wealth production and security among other groups. As Mama Beatrice explained to me one day, “For Tandroy, a mud house (*trano motramotrakwa*) is acceptable. If there aren’t cattle, then you’re considered

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<sup>841</sup> The house that Papa and Mama’ Raissa lived in 2013, in Manga, however had a different lineage. It was his father’s sister (angovavy) and her Comorian husband who purchased the land and the house in the 1950s. They lived there with their children until the rotaka of 1976-77, when they abandoned the house and fled. In their absence, the President of the local fokontany—a man of mixed Betsileo and Tsimihety background— appropriated the house. When Papa Raissa was prepared to return to Majunga in the early 1980s, his aunt gave him the procuration with which he could establish his legitimate ownership to the house. Initially the fokontany president refused to leave, but shortly thereafter, Papa Raissa won the case in court by presenting the bill of sale, and procuration.

<sup>842</sup> James Brennan, *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).

poor (*raha tsy misy omby, dia mahantra*). So they take their money and place it there. Also, the tomb (*fasana*) is very important for them, they need a nice tomb. And those from the highlands, if you don't have a rice field (*tanimbary*), then you're poor."<sup>843</sup> Mama Beatrice reflected ideas that have long been documented by anthropologists working across the island about the diversity of wealth production and accrual practices. But in reality, not all migrants succeeded in building lasting forms of wealth. Many migrants struggled to accumulate even enough earnings to send back home. Dadi'lahy (Grandfather) Saondra, who migrated from Vangaindrano to the east and then west coasts in the late 1950s (on foot!), described how fleeting wages were, "Back then, you got your salary, filled your belly, sent a little to you children, and it was— gone!"<sup>844</sup>

### ***Keeper of Wealth, Keeper of Secrets***

Comorians, by contrast, sought out land and built homes with gusto. Comorians brought the idea of land ownership with them, from established land-holdings practices in Comoros. One *zanatany* man, a retired electrician in his seventies attributed Comorians' propensity towards land acquisition to "the strong Arabic influence" and the high population density coupled with the "smallness" of Comoros which leads to "everyone wanting their own place."<sup>845</sup> Others described that for Comorians, houses are precious and markers of prestige. Harifodine commented that for Comorians, by contrast to Malagasy, "the house of the living is precious...no one can come and insult you in your home."<sup>846</sup> A house contains and reflects "value" (*trano am-vaieur*), not just monetary investment, but enhancement of one's personhood. Some described the phenomenon in Comoros today, of large, beautiful—but inhabited homes—built with

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<sup>843</sup> Interview with Mama Beatrice, Manga, October 16 2013.

<sup>844</sup> "*Tamin'ny taloha, nahazo karama, kibo voky, dia anefa zanaka-lany!*" Interview with Dadilahy Saondra, Mahavoky Avaratra, October 19, 2013.

<sup>845</sup> Interview with Hamidou Ali, Abattoir, July 9, 2013.

<sup>846</sup> "*trano olobelona sarobidy...*" Interview with Harifodine, Abattoir, July 11, 2013.

remittances by migrants in France or abroad. Comorians are not alone in this phenomenon of houses built from migrants abroad, as testified by a burgeoning ethnographic literature on the subject.<sup>847</sup> As Mama Beatrice described, “in Comoros, if you don’t have a house, it’s a big problem (*problem be*) and you’re a disgrace (*tena manompa anao*).<sup>848</sup>

Building a house reflected a distinctive set of ideas about wealth, inheritance practices, and security. Investing in a strong house offered financial security and longevity for the family. One man explained, “a house won’t get ruined [like other investments]. For instance, if there’s a car, then one day you’re in an accident-everything is lost, ruined. But if you build a nice house, a strong house, then it won’t get ruined, it’s strong and lasts till old age. The first thing to do, should be to build a house...in a home, there’s value, and you can bequeath it.”<sup>849</sup> This was particularly salient in the city. Whereas in the countryside, cattle was the marker of wealth (*brousse omby tresor*), in the city “the house is the cattle” (*trano ao omby*).<sup>850</sup> Without a house, there is no value, no treasure.<sup>851</sup> *Zanatany* described that the providing for daughters was a critical imperative, motivating Comorian fathers and their families to build a house (if not more than one) for their progeny.<sup>852</sup> Comorian fathers were obliged to construct a home for their adult daughter, or risk shame and the possibility that no suitor could be secured for marriage (*tsisy olo*

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<sup>847</sup> Caroline Melly, “Inside-Out Houses: Urban Belonging and Imagined Futures in Dakar, Senegal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:1 (2010), 37-65; Luke Freeman, ‘Separation, connection and the ambiguous nature of émigré houses in rural highland Madagascar’ *Home Cultures* 10:2(2013): 93-100.

<sup>848</sup> Interview with Mama Beatrice, Manga, October 16, 2013.

<sup>849</sup> Interview with Dadilahy Kassim, Tsaramandroso Ambony, 6 October 2013, “Tsy mandrava ny trano. Raotra, raha misy automobile, dia amaray misy accident, mandrava jiaby. Fa raha mahavit trano tsara, trano matanjaka, dia tsy mandrava, matanjaka jusqu’a matoy. Ny voalohany zavatra, tokony manomboatra trano. Fa amin’ny trano fonenana, dia tena misy valeur, mandova trano.”

<sup>850</sup> Interview with D., Tsaramandroso, Sept 21, 2013.

<sup>851</sup> “*tsisy trano, tsisy valeur, tsisy trano, tsisy tresor*”

<sup>852</sup> Some families chose to build houses for their daughters in Mahajanga, and others build homes (beyond their primary residence) in Mahajanga.

*manambady*).<sup>853</sup> Building a home was, in other words, foundational to social reproduction and continuation of the family line.

But there was also a moral connotation to owning a home for many *zanatany*, as expressed in the proverb, “*jaolahy (or jaolboto) manana trano, sarotra lazaina olona ratsy*” (If a thief has a house, it’s difficult to say he’s a bad person). In other words, those without an established home were thought to have suspect moral character. Homeowning *zanatany* often described that owning one’s home was linked to a “good character, a clean character” (*toetra tsara, toetra madio*). This was explained to me in great length one sunny afternoon in a family discussion with Mama and Papa Taoaby, and their eldest son Taoaby, which I cite at length,<sup>854</sup>

MT: People who own a house have prestige they have value. If you have a party or a meeting, and you’re a homeowner, then people draw you close, they want you to sit by them. Wealth makes you important (*vola maharanga*). If you don’t have a house, you’re not considered (*tsy considere*), you’re unimportant (*tsy masinteny*; literally, *don’t have the right to speak*).<sup>855</sup>

Taoaby: If you don’t have a house, you have to shut up, you can’t talk! (*tsy miteny*)

MT: If you have money, the first thing you should do is to build a house! This is not the same for people from the highlands (*afovoantany*) for them the house *and* the tomb are both very important. And for Tandroy, the tomb (*fasana*) is the most important, and the house matters little. But for people from the coast (*côtiers*), the house is of utmost importance.

Mama Taoaby continued to explicitly link homeownership to “insider” or “native” status, and to the extension of the family beyond the confines of the city,

MT: If you rent a house, even a big, luxurious house, you’re still insignificant (*tsy considere*) You should rather take that money and build yourself a house. If you rent a house, it shows that you’re a newcomer (*vahiny*). But if you own a house and you go afar, say to Diego or Ambanja and introduce yourself to people, they may very well recognize you, place you as, “Oh, you’re the owner of that double-story house (*trano-etagey*) in Abattoir...” Having a house is what gives you prestige and value in society.

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<sup>853</sup> Interview with D., Tsaramandroso, Sept 28, 2013; Interview with Youssef, Manga, July 16, 2013.

<sup>854</sup> Fieldnotes, April 11, 2013.

<sup>855</sup> Note that “having the right to speak” is a critical marker of personhood and legitimate authority. In Madagascar, orality—like elsewhere—is extraordinarily valued as a mode of communication and positioning.

As the conversation continued, however, it was clear that homeownership offered not only social prestige, but also protection against those who might wish to do harm to you.<sup>856</sup>

MT: All of your secrets, they are inside this house. The house is a kind of protection, if someone wants to do something bad (*manao zavatra ratsy*), they will hesitate to enter the courtyard (*lakoro*). But if you rent, then you're more vulnerable because there are probably other renters there, more traffic in and out. You may also have the landlord coming and entering your home, trying to get the rent that you're late in paying. This is also why it's important to stay in one house...if you move a lot, then it's like you leave a bad reputation in those places where you stayed, like you left a trace of yourself, then everyone knows your business.

When Mama Taoaby mentioned that people leave “traces” of themselves in homes, she did not mean this only figuratively, but also quite literally. The home was not only the keeper of secrets, but also the container for bodily fluids and matters connected to critical moments in the lifecycle. *Zanatany* and other Malagasy, for example, described the importance of the father or grandfather burying the infant's placenta (*tavony*) and umbilical cord (*foitra*) in the courtyard of the family's home, where it would remain protected.<sup>857</sup> Burying an infant's placenta in the family courtyard served to root the child to the household, literally emplacing him or her in the soil.<sup>858</sup> Failure to do so could mean the child's heart would be easily startled (*titra*) or unstable. In death too, the relatives of the deceased *zanatany* followed prescribed Muslim norms of washing and purifying the body—which generally took place in the privacy and protection of the home. These fluids were then (ideally) deposited in the home.

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<sup>856</sup> The issue of social harm, witchcraft, and jealousy was one which emerged frequently in my conversations with city dwellers of all backgrounds. The relationship between space, homes, and spiritual insecurity will be addressed more fully in future works, but fall beyond the scope of this chapter.

<sup>857</sup> Many *zanatany* wrapped the placenta in a simple white cloth, then in a woven mat (*lamaka*) before burial. Most often, it was the father or grandfather who buried the placenta. And while the cardinal directional placement (whether north, east, etc in the courtyard) varied across families and kinds (*karazana*) of people, what was critical was that the burier should not turn his head from side to side (*mitoditodika*), lest the child fall cross-eyed (*gila*). Also important to some was the relative ‘coolness’ of the chosen location in the courtyard.

<sup>858</sup> Philip Thomas describes very similar processes of placenta burial and rooting in southeastern Madagascar, see “The River, The Road, and the Rural-Urban Divide: A Postcolonial Moral Geography from Southeast Madagascar,” *American Ethnology*, 29:2 (2002): 371.

One afternoon, I learned in great length about these practices during a visit to my friend Farida, in Morafeno. In her early thirties and a mother of two daughters, Farida had grown up in Antsohihy area in a *zanatany* family (Anjouan-Tsimihety) with many siblings. Her husband worked overseas as crew on an Italian cruise ship, which allowed him to amply support the family. But his long absences taxed Farida. She rented a two-room home from her sister-in-law, a Sakalava woman who was not Muslim and with whom she had a tenuous relationship. After we finished lunch, the conversation turned to a recent death in the community of an elderly *zanatany* woman, and the specific duties required of the family. Farida described how immediately upon the death of any *zanatany*, when the body is still supple, the family warmed the water for the bath (*rehefa lasa ny fofokaina, dia mamana ny rano*). Junior family members were sent to retrieve a special rope cot from the mosque, which would allow the drainage of fluids from the dead. Same-gender family members (*havana*) performed the ritual cleansing. Immediately following the ritual bathing, she emphasized, the fluids from the dead should be poured into a dugout hole in the center of the home.<sup>859</sup> “Why inside the home?” I asked. She described, “because those fluids...they’re sacred, and if they’re seen or taken outside the house, then people can begin to talk about the dead disrespectfully, remarking on how much filth left the body.”

When I asked other *zanatany* families about this practice, they confirmed that this is what happened in earlier times. Some maintained the custom and even built their homes with this in mind, leaving an unfinished, dirt opening in the concrete slab of the floor for this purpose (Figure 48). Protecting the dead (and their family) from social harm at this most critical juncture was contingent on invisibility and interment, afforded by the barriers of the home. In reality,

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<sup>859</sup> Zanatany noted that in situations where the family rented a home, complications emerged, and sometimes arrangements had to be negotiated. One woman described that some landlords—particularly if they were of other ‘kinds’ (*karazana*)—feared that burying the fluids of the dead would entrap or attract the dead’s spirit/ghost (*lolo*).

however, many families no longer observed this the custom. After Farida described this elaborate ritual, I looked around her home and asked her where the hole was in which this burial might take place. She laughed and responded that they didn't have one. “Nowadays, many families simply toss (*arina*) the fluids in the toilet (*WC*) or even in the [open sewage] canals outside.” Others confirmed this though they lamented the loss of this practice, noting that in-home burial was better (*tsara kokoa*).<sup>860</sup> Most families still carried out a ritual washing of the home itself



Figure 48: Designated site on floor of home, for pouring of postmortem fluids (Source: Author)

following death— a practice many deemed as Sakalava or “Malagasy” in origin.<sup>861</sup>

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<sup>860</sup> Interview with Ibrahim Amana, Tsaramandroso, Sept. 28, 2013.

<sup>861</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to witness these practices firsthand during my research and archival sources are thin on these kinds of burial practices in Majunga. City inhabitants described—and some archival research also suggests—that historically Sakalava families either abandoned or burnt the homes of the dead. See Joseph Aubry, *A Madagascar La Tribu des Sakalava*, (Imprimerie Lorraine, 1910), 58-59. “les Sakalava attachent une idée de souillure, d’impureté contagieuse à un cadavre humain; tous ceux qui se sont trouvés en rapport avec le cadavre, les parents du défunt, les assistants aux funérailles sont frappés du tabou et doivent se purifier avant de reprendre le cours ordinaire de la vie. Les Sakalava jettent les ustensiles qui appartenaient au mort et délaissent la maison; parfois meme, ils abandonnent le village.” This, some maintained, was true in Majunga until the 1960s. In the late 1950s, several spirit mediums gathered and invoked the important ancestors (*tromba maventy*) to find an acceptable

What these discussions and practices suggest are the multiple ways through which *zanatany* homes were made and remade. Houses were brought into being through acts of burial, interment of precious bodily liquids, and the melding together of the living and the dead with the physical structure of the home. In these acts, inhabitants infused the fleshy and fluids substances of the living and the dead into the fixity of the [concrete] home, transforming it into a secret, sacred vessel, layering it with histories of lives lived and lost. These practices of emplacement and home-making are not unique to *zanatany*. An abundant anthropological literature documents how houses are processual, how the “material world” of the home is constructed over time through the cumulative interventions of social actors.<sup>862</sup> And, to be clear, *zanatany* families did not cite these practices as necessarily the definitive makers of their autochthonous position or ‘*zanatany-ness*’. Rather, it was the combination of these ritual practices, their family genealogies, and the commanding presence of their homes (replete with histories of their own) that amounted to their legitimate *zanatany* status.

### ***Fabricating Homes, Fashioning Selves***

For all of the discussion of the incremental durability of homes, many *zanatany* families said remarkably little about the actual construction of their family houses. As with mosques,

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alternative to setting alight or abandoning the deceased’s home. The *razana* (ancestors) guided them to change the practice, into a ritual washing using honey (*fandrama*), special herbs and minerals (*fangahaheliko*-literally, remover of anger-which is a mixture of 6-8 herbs; and *antanamilandy*). Interview with Dadilahy Kassim, Tsaramandroso, October 11, 2013; Also Interview with J., Mahavoky, October 19, 2013; Interview with A., Morafeno, February 18, 2013.

<sup>862</sup> Bahloul, Joëlle. “The Memory House: Time and Place in Jewish Immigrant Culture in France.” In Donna Birdwell-Pheasant and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, eds. *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe*, (Oxford: Berg, 1999): 239-49; Birdwell-Pheasant, Donna and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga. *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe* (New York: Berg, 1999); Bourdieu, Pierre. “At the Kabyle House or the World Reversed” in *Logic of Practice*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973 [1992].); Carsten, Janet and Stephen Hugh-Jones, eds. *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Rosemary Joyce and Susan Gillespie (ed), *Beyond Kinship: Social and Material Reproduction in House Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Kriszti Fehérváry, Krisztina. “American Kitchens, Luxury Bathrooms and the Search for a ‘Normal’ Life in Post-socialist Hungary.” *Ethnos*. 67:3(2002):369-400; Waterson, Roxana. *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia*. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Comorians were attributed with carpentry skills and pragmatic knowledge of house-building; in short, *zanatany* families recalled that their Comorian ancestors built their own homes in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>863</sup> In more recent times, *zanatany* families with the means to do so hired contractors. Often support for house construction came from kin overseas (*vola andafy*), especially in France but also Réunion and Mayotte. But the construction workers themselves frequently came from the highlands—Antananarivo or Fianarantsoa—where the most skilled carpenters were thought to live. They were considered not only more knowledgeable about construction than locals in Mahajanga, but also highly motivated to complete the project in a timely fashion to return home. But hiring highlanders also came with risks for *zanatany* families, since it allowed outsiders close proximity to the family’s most intimate—and vulnerable—space.<sup>864</sup>

Most of the homes in the central quarters of town—the neighborhoods where *zanatany* had historically dominated—reflected a wide range of stylistic influences, materials and techniques. In architectural form, many *zanatany* houses bore no difference from the houses of many other relatively affluent Malagasy. Homes were almost always constructed in a rectangular fashion, mirroring the rectangular shape of land parcels throughout the central quarters of the city.<sup>865</sup> Historically Malagasy across the island have respected cosmologically and astrologically auspicious orders that determine optimal times and directions for the emplacement of homes.<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>863</sup> Interview with Mama Beatrice, Manga, October 16, 2013; Interview with El Had, Ambalavola, March 26, 2014.

<sup>864</sup> One *zanatany* family experienced this in a most devastating way, when their long-time domestic worker was brutally killed in their home—and witnessed by their young child—by the contractual construction workers they hired from Antananarivo.

<sup>865</sup> Dimensions of land plots in this area are generally 9 m x 9 m. Rectangular homes are thought to be from the southeast Asian influences in Madagascar, since by contrast many homes across Africa are round.

<sup>866</sup> Domenichini, Jean-Pierre. “La Conception Malgache du Decoupage de l’Espace: Un Aspect de l’Unité Culturelle Austronésienne”, In *Histoire et organisation de l’espace à Madagascar*, edited by Jean Fremigacci, 6-45. *Cahiers du C.R.A. No. 7*. (Paris: Édition AFERA, Diffusion KARTHALA, 1989); Esoavelomandroso, Faranirina Ravoahangy, and Jean Fremigacci. “Héritage de l’histoire et mode d’urbanisation malgache: Tananarive.” In *Histoire*

Almost all city dwellers could cite the appropriate customs for orienting homes in north-south alignment. But in many cases this was not followed—either because the grid pattern of Mahabibo, designated during French colonial rule, or the topographical location, did not permit. Some described prescriptions around directionality of the body—both living and dead—in the home, where the head ought to face north or east, and the feet south or west. This was often (but not always) said to be honored in the positioning of beds and sleeping spaces, as well as the arrangement and removal of the dead out of the home. But some *zanatany* families outright dismissed these as “Malagasy beliefs,” and argued that what was more important were cleansing practices central to Islamic practice.



Figure 49: Home constructed of sheet metal (toly), steel drums (barika), with thatch and wood roof, Andovinjo, Mahajanga, 2014, (Source: Author)

Throughout the city, homes could be constructed from a combination of mud (*trano fotaka*), wood (*trano ketikety*), steel drums (*trano barika*), sheet metal (*trano toly*), or concrete or

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*et organisation de l'espace à Madagascar*, edited by Jean Fremigacci, 71-82. (Paris: Édition AFERA, Diffusion KARTHALA, 1989) ; Feeley-Harnik, Gillian. 1980. “The Sakalava House”, *Anthropos*, 75:559-585.

cinder block (*trano vato, parpaing*) (Figs. 49, 50, 55). In 2014, most homes throughout the city were made from cinder block, sheet metal or palm leaves (*satrana*). Wood homes were said in earlier times to be cooler and airier than mud homes.<sup>867</sup> But most in Mahajanga eschewed wood because of the pervasive presence of termites (*abwaly*), which lead to their quick destruction (*manimba*). Rather, over time sheet metal (*toly*) has become a prestigious building material despite its tendency to trap and hold heat. People cited *toly*'s aesthetic appeal, that once constructed, it laid neatly, was shiny and new looking. While pounded steel drums (*bidon*) were seen to be stronger and more durable than *toly*, they brought shame to families (*menamenatra*)



Figure 50: Trano toly (sheet metal home), with concrete floor, and wooden baraza on front side, Morafeno (Source: Author)

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<sup>867</sup> Gillian Feeley-Harnik, "Sakalava," *The Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

because they lacked the clean, smooth appearance of *toly*.<sup>868</sup> Some suggested that while *satrana* has historically been associated with Sakalava practices, *toly* was associated with Comorians, partly because of their relative economic capacity to purchase expensive building materials.<sup>869</sup> In earlier times, traders brought sheet metal from the highlands, specifically from a factory in Antsirabe (*tsy boka ivelany, fa an'ny usine any Antsirabe*). But in 2014, there existed at least one sheet metal factory in Mahajanga (Figure 51). It was owned by a prominent *karana* family who built their fortune in raffia trade and who now supplied much of the town's demand for *toly*.<sup>870</sup> Similarly, while cement was formerly produced in nearby Boanamary, that operation has



Figure 51: Factory in Mahajanga, fabricating sheet metal for local market, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

<sup>868</sup> Interview with D. Amborovy, Nov. 5, 2013; Interview with J., Tsaramandroso, October 8, 2013.

<sup>869</sup> One man described how sheet metal (*toly*) had long been associated with Comorians because “they were really the masters of money (and now the euro), they can buy it.” Interview with Dadilahy Kassim, October 6, 2013.

<sup>870</sup> This company imported the sheet metal from India in flat sheets, and molded into the corrugated form in their factory in Mahajanga.

long since ceased—testifying the country’s industrial boom in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and decline in the ‘80s and ‘90s. In 2014, most bagged cement was imported from Pakistan.

Simple homes were typically two rooms: a salon and a sleeping space, with an outdoor courtyard that encompasses a cooking area and the bathhouse-latrine. In the salon, was frequently found a living room set of sofa, chairs and coffee table, television, some decorative items, and a dining set. Though many *zanatany* families boasted beautiful dining room sets (Figure 52), families usually preferred to eat seated on a woven mat (*lamaka*) on the cool



Figure 52: Typical Dining Set, *zanatany* home, Morafeno (Source: Author)

veranda.<sup>871</sup> As some families have grown and acquired more wealth, they build additional sleeping spaces, especially for teenage sons. Multi-story homes in the city continue to mark wealth (Figure 55). In nineteenth century northwestern Madagascar, women cooked inside on a stone hearth placed on the southern side of the home.<sup>872</sup> French colonial authorities, however, insisted on the construction of separate kitchens (*lakozy*), which was positioned in the courtyard. In 2014, most families in Mahajanga—whether *zanatany* or not— have a small sheltered area, perhaps walled off, with kitchen supplies. The actual cooking is almost always done on the



Figure 53: Kitchen (on left) and latrine (on right) in courtyard of household compound, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: Author)

<sup>871</sup> Some remarked that eating at a table is a *vazaha* practice, unless it was a formal, celebratory event—in which case elder men and women would assume the chairs.

<sup>872</sup> Gillian Feeley-Harnik, “The Sakalava House,” *Anthropos* 75 (1980), 559-585; See also A. Jully, “L’Habitation à Madagascar,” *Notes, Reconnaissances et Explorations* 4 (1898): 899-934; Raymond Decary, *Contribution à l’etude...* 1958.

veranda (*lavarana*) that usually sits on the edge of the open courtyard (*lakoro*) (Fig. 53). The toilet and shower (*visy*, *WC*, *ladouchy*) are usually also outside this home, and around the courtyard. Almost every home in town has a fence (*valavala*) of some kind (wood, sheet metal, or *mokanazi*, a prickly bush) around the perimeter. Fences have long been valued for their ability to maintain privacy, but also to eliminate conflicts with neighbors over the property borders.<sup>873</sup>

Perhaps most striking however was the way in which *zanatany* homes were generally constructed with layered interiority protecting the inner courtyard and inner rooms, depending on



Figure 54: Trano vato (“Stone” or cinder block house), Abattoir, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

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<sup>873</sup> In 1970s Analalava, *lakoro* and fences were most closely identified with *Silamo* and signified distance and protection, Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 239-42.

the configuration. The courtyard was a space reserved for the family and often a highly gendered space, usually occupied by women talking, cooking and eating. Guests unfamiliar to the family were usually received at the street-side veranda (*baraza*), though guests known to the family were welcomed into the salon. In cases when the courtyard abutted the main entrance or *baraza*, unfamiliar guests were received in the courtyard. Sleeping rooms (*trano fitoriana*) were very private, and guests were not privy to these spaces. The parents' room, in particular, was precious and to be respected (*tena zavatra saropady*); older children—especially sons— were forbidden



Figure 55: Trano étagey (double-story home), Abattoir, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

from boldly entering, or casually sitting on their parents' bed.<sup>874</sup> Adult brothers would avoid entering his married sister's room, or sitting on her bed, as these places were of sexual relations. While homes could be built in several different layouts, one common configuration is shown below (Figure 56). It is notably similar to home layouts in Ngazidja, as described by Blanchy, and as shown below (Figure 57).<sup>875</sup> Homes configured in this way contained nested layers of visibility, protecting inhabitants from the peering eyes of curious—even malicious—neighbors

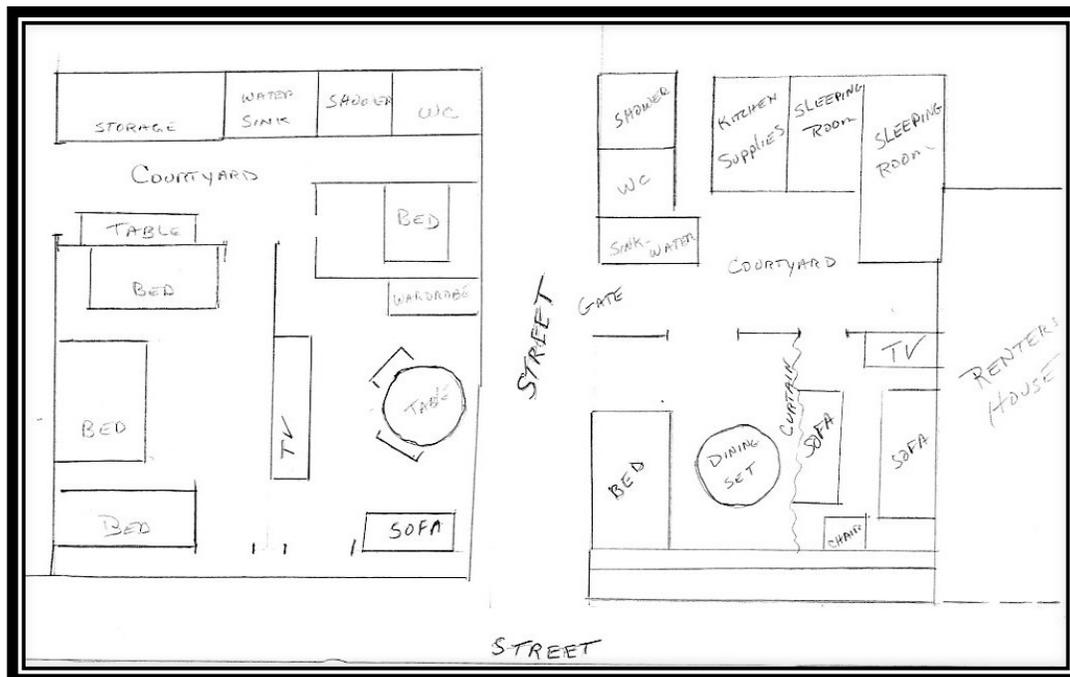


Figure 56: Floorplan, Home, Manga (Source: Author)

and strangers, something called “catching the eye” (*tratra maso*).<sup>876</sup> And though neither contemporary residents nor archival sources could confirm, I suspect that this arrangement afforded families increased comfort and refuge from the intrusive glare of French authorities in colonial times.

<sup>874</sup> These practices are similar to those described by Blanchy in Mayotte, *La Vie Quotidienne*, 36-7, but are also observed across Madagascar and Comoros more broadly.

<sup>875</sup> Blanchy *La Vie Quotidienne*, 35; More research needs to be done to draw definitive conclusions about how these housing forms traveled between Madagascar and Comoros, and in the Indian Ocean basin more generally, over time.

<sup>876</sup> Though this falls beyond the scope of this chapter, there are pervasive ideas and experiences of bodily and familial harm thought to come from the jealous and pernicious looks of strangers (*mason'olo*), and from which city dwellers are ever concerned to protect themselves.

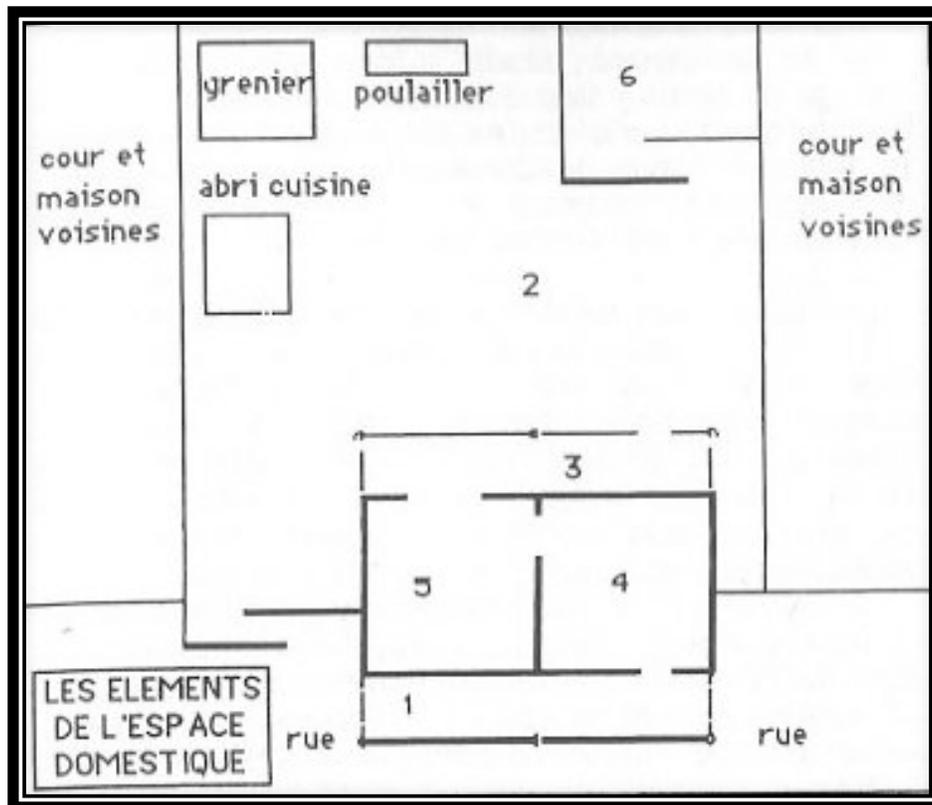


Figure 57: Floorplan of home, Ngazidja (Source: Sophie Blanchy, *La Vie Quotidienne*, 35.)

Some *zanatany*, however, cited other architectural influences from Comoros that were distinct to *zanatany* homes. The construction of a built-in bench, on the outside perimeter of the home, allowed for resting and sociality during the day or in the evening. While these settees were visible at several mosques through town, it was far less common to find them in existence on the perimeter of residential homes (*trano fonena*). Others mentioned the presence of the certain trees and flowering bushes marked a *zanatany* home. *Zanatany* women were said to use the fragrant white flowers of Angaya trees—for which Mahajanga was famous—for hair decorations or to prepare a guest's bed. *Zabibo* trees produced a distinctive fruit used in cooking *mokary*, a Comorian sweet bread using cardamom. But what was distinctive to contemporary *zanatany* homes were the decorative objects and furnishings within, signaling the family's commitment to Islam, belonging to Muslim networks, and attachments to kin overseas: tapestries with Arabic

inscriptions; vases overflowing with colorful plastic flowers; sets of glasses and pitchers; and oversized, ornately carved wood furniture. These household objects were variably gifts intended to invoke ties of reciprocity,<sup>877</sup> inherited things from parents, and indulgent purchases on a whim. Displaying decorative pieces from family or voyages overseas to Comoros or Mayotte was one way families could mediate the tensions between migration and itinerancy, and rootedness, much as anthropologists have described elsewhere in Madagascar (Figure 58).<sup>878</sup>



Figure 58: Souvenir wall hanging, sent by family in Mayotte, 2014 (Source: Author)

<sup>877</sup> Marcel Mauss [1925]1990 *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. W.D. Halls, transl. New York: W. W. Norton.

<sup>878</sup> Philip Thomas, “Conspicuous Construction: Houses, Consumption and ‘Relocalization’ in Manambondro, Southeast Madagascar,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4:3 (1998), 425-446.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter documented the labor pursuits of migrants from Comoros and the ways they and their *zanatany* progeny grew demographically in the early decades of the 1900s. During these decades, many Comorian migrants established households and began to inscribe their presence in Mahabibo in important, lasting *spatial* forms. Marriage was a strategic means for many Comorian men to deepen their links to the city, build religious networks, and maximize their wage earnings to accrue more capital. For Malagasy women and their families, these marriages offered labor, possibilities of accessing resources, and opportunities to expand their connections to kin and Islam communities. These relationships gave rise to a new generation, known as *zanatany*, who would indelibly shape the city's cultural and economic landscape in the decades to come. Oral narratives of *zanatany* adult children about their Comorian parents' arrival and establishment in the city emphasized migration as a masculine enterprise. These accounts, however, complicate existing scholarly understandings of processes of demarcation and "territorialization" as a rural practice, crystallized through colonial governance and hinging on historical narratives and land-altering labor. Unlike stories of first-coming elsewhere, these accounts did not efface their family histories of mobility, of travels of back and forth from Madagascar to Comoros. And though they identified the lands on which Comorians settled as "vacant" (*malalaka, tsisy olo*), interlocutors also affirmed the deep history and sense of Mahajanga as "Sakalava land."

People's sense of the land as "Sakalava," was linked to the presence of ancestral spirits, and manifest in the requirements for rigorous adherence to prohibitions and proper uses of different spaces. This form of belonging did not preclude Comorian migrants and their *zanatany* families from staking their claims to property and asserting their belonging to the city through

space. Some Malagasy however, invoked this historical Sakalava claim to land as evidence that Comorians were not the first ‘masters’ of the soil. I have argued that the amalgamated accounts of “Sakalava” and “Comorian” presence on the land challenges existing formulations of autochthony as necessarily linked to ‘first-coming’. Instead, they signal how historical reckoning of belonging can be constituted—even affirmed—by multiple articulations of the past presence of different groups. More precisely, the case of Majunga reveals how different groups claim different kinds of ownership to land—some through compliance and honoring ancestral spirits, and others through investments of labor and stone.

Assembling stories of house building were moments in which *zanatany* children made connections across genealogical expanses. I contended throughout that it was through the cumulative processes of fabricating homes that Comorian-Malagasy families have established themselves as tied to the land, and as belonging to the city. Comorian-Malagasy energetically built their homes, they also constructed ties of belonging to the city. families Comorian parents were attributed with the initial construction of homes; these homes instantiated and enabled the performance of kin obligations, ties between fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters, and the provision of protection. They served as evidence of the moral righteousness of their inhabitants, testimonies to the strenuous labor, hardships of hunger, collective solidarity and fierce determination of migrants from the Archipelago. But it was the children who rebuilt—often in more durable substance—these homes. They also regenerated them materially, infusing and interning them with the bodily substances of the dead, the young and the just-born. Rebuilding was not only a way to link generations, but a form of affirming the moral norms by which *zanatany* distinguished themselves and their ancestors from their neighbors and adversaries.