

**Part III**

**Infrastructures:  
Labor, Moralities, and Personhood**



Figure 59: Manga, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: Author)

**Chapter 6**  
**Infrastructures:**  
**Genealogies of Sanitation, Moralities of Filth and the Limits of Colonial Imagination**



Figure 60: "At the streetcorner," Majunga 1903 (Source: *Archives, Foiben-Taosarintanin'I Madagasikara*)

***Introduction***

On November 20, 2015, the occasion of "World Toilet Day," the city council of Mahajanga held a public exposition designed to illuminate the problem of "open-air defecation" in the city.<sup>879</sup> Administrators from the Commune and the Ministry of Water organized the public

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879. "Journée Mondiale des toilettes" (World Toilet Day) was officially designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013 to raise awareness about unequal access to improved sanitation, and continues to be coordinated by UN-Water, together with governments and relevant stakeholders. See "World Toilet Day Official – A Day to

awareness-raising initiative, with all twenty-six of the city's municipal head administrators, as well as a number of regional officials, in attendance. Film screenings and photo exhibitions impressed on the public the importance of using latrines, practicing hand-washing, and avoiding *jangoany* (defecation in the open). The news media reported that while the majority of the city's households used household latrines, a sizable portion (at least one-third) of the population still defecated outdoors.<sup>880</sup> Public officials sought to persuade the public of the importance of using latrines, citing the city's continuously high infant mortality rate, and recurrent epidemics of plague and cholera in the early 2000s. Local newspapers reported that the event was sparked by the particular persistence of open-air defecation in the commune of Mahajanga.<sup>881</sup>

The problem of *jangoany* is not particular, however, to Mahajanga or to Madagascar. Open-air defecation, poor hygiene, and lack of improved latrines have been attributed as the leading causes in what many perceive as a worldwide "sanitary crisis."<sup>882</sup> Since the 1970s, UNICEF, World Health Organization, and several large non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as WaterAid, World Toilet Organization, and Global Sanitation Fund have identified the construction of improved sewage sanitation as among the most important interventions to save human lives in poorer countries. Combatting "open air defecation" is the latest watchword among global sanitation proponents. For government and development workers

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think and take action," *World Toilet Organization*, Accessed online 29 April 2016.

<http://www.worldtoiletday.info/about>

880. The articles from Newsmada lists 70% of households using a latrine, and 30% practicing open defecation.

881. "La défécations à l'air libre reste un danger permanent pour la population, particulièrement dans la commune urbaine de Mahajanga." Newsmada, 25 November 2015. Accessed online,

<http://www.newsmada.com/2015/11/25/mahajanga-usage-reduit-latrines/>, 29 April 2016.

882. Maggie Black and Ben Fawcett, *The Last Taboo: Opening the Door on the Global Sanitation Crisis* (London: Earthscan, 2008), 4.

disenchanted by the futility of building more latrines that apparently go unused, public education campaigns about the dangers of open air defecation mark the "the final frontier."<sup>883</sup>



Figure 61: Forum to End Open Defecation, 2015 with Malagasy President Hery Rajaonarimampianina, seated fifth from right (Source: Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council)<sup>884</sup>

Madagascar has recently positioned itself at the forefront of this transnational sanitation improvement movement, with pronouncements from high-ranking Malagasy leaders of the state to reshape toileting practices by raising public awareness. In 2011, the Malagasy Ministry of Water and UNICEF collectively launched a campaign to eliminate open-air defecation by 2018, coined "Sandal" (Sans Défécation Air Libre, 'without open air defecation'). Just months before the World Toilet Day festivities in 2015, this commitment was publicized in a staged event which took place in the plush confines of the Hotel Colbert, the country's exclusive four-star hotel in Antananarivo. President Hery Rajaonarimampianina, flanked by then Prime Minister

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883. "The final frontier: Sanitation in India" *The Economist*, 19 July 2014.

884. "Institutional triggering is achieved, as national authorities convene to end open defecation in Madagascar by 2019" *Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council*, Accessed online 10 May 2016, [www.wsscc.org](http://www.wsscc.org). From mid-left, President of the Republic of Madagascar Hery Rajaonarimampianina, WSSCC Executive Director Chris Williams, credit: FAA/Nirina Roméo Andriamparany.

Jean Ravelonarivo, Minister of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Dr. Johanita Ndahimananjara, and a number of sanitation experts, became the "first chief of state in the world" to sign a pledge to end open defecation in his country (Figure 61).<sup>885</sup>

This broader public health initiative has stretched across the island, inspiring events like the World Toilet Day of 2015 in Mahajanga. Similar public awareness campaigns concerning human waste have been carried out in Antananarivo, Tamatave, and Fort Dauphin over the last decade.<sup>886</sup> At first glance, such public health initiatives seem to correspond neatly with the pressing sanitation concerns facing the poor island nation. Madagascar has been identified as the fourth "worst place in the world to find a toilet," with an estimated 88% of the population lacking access to 'improved toilets' by UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>887</sup> Infant and maternal mortality rates, as well as child malnutrition, are deemed among the highest worldwide.<sup>888</sup> Few would deny that the island's majority suffers from onerous poverty, scant resources, and serious health risks.

A closer examination of the public health war on "open-air defecation" and the impetus to build more latrines in Madagascar, however, reveals assumed claims about "crisis," bodily compliance, and spatial management. Such declarations of the "sanitary crisis" frame the contemporary state of affairs in Madagascar (and beyond) as a presentist problem, effacing the

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885. "Malagasy President becomes the first chief of state in the world to sign a pledge to end open defecation; sanitation success witnessed by international officials, 15 February 2015" *Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council*, Accessed online 3 May 2016, wsscc.org.

886. "Addressing toilet taboos to improve sanitation," 23 March 2012, *Irin News*, accessed online, <http://www.irinnews.org/news/2012/03/23/addressing-toilet-taboos-improve-sanitation>, 2 May 2016;

887. "Madagascar: estimates on the use of water sources and sanitation facilities (1985-2015)," *UNICEF-WHO Joint Monitoring Programme on Water Supply and Sanitation*, 2015, Accessed online 5 May 2016, wssinfo.org; Caroline Wheeler et al, 2015, "It's No Joke: The State of the World's Toilets 2015," Wateraid. "Improved toilets" are defined by UNICEF as flush or pour-flush toilets to piped sewer systems, septic tanks, and pit latrines; ventilated improved pit latrines, pit latrine with slab; and composting toilets. Unimproved toilets include those that are pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines and bucket latrines. See UNICEF's Access to water and sanitation: a few definitions, accessed online at [http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/overview\\_2570.html](http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/overview_2570.html) on 5 May 2016]

<sup>888</sup> "Madagascar," Un Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality, at [childmortality.org](http://childmortality.org), accessed on 3 March 2017.

complexity and historicity of sanitation quandaries. Like the de-politicized nature of contemporary developmentalist discourses, sanitation talk in Madagascar has focused mostly on the 'technical' and behavioral aspects of its intended constituency.<sup>889</sup> Sanitation discourses have paired appeals to international funders for support to improve sanitation infrastructure with admonishments to recalcitrant urban and rural dwellers to abide by toileting norms by defecating only in latrines.<sup>890</sup> Public health approaches geared to shame participants into behavioral change have been documented in Madagascar and beyond.<sup>891</sup> The framing of these public pronouncements both draws on and occludes economic inequality, class disparity, or the state's role—its responsibility and/or its failure—to provide for its citizens. Also elided are the logics that undergird both sanitation infrastructure(s) and toileting practices.

As contemporary activists and development workers have noted, sanitation infrastructure schemes have often failed to bring about anticipated changes among rural and urban populations worldwide. Development workers have been befuddled by the lack of "toilet take-up" among poor inhabitants. Sturdy concrete latrines, sometimes used and often not, have stood as "a new kind of monument to a development folly."<sup>892</sup> But the reasons with which urban dwellers make selective choices about where and when to toilet remain in the shadows. What factors influence

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<sup>889</sup> Ferguson, *Anti-Politics Machine*, 1990.

<sup>890</sup> "Summary of Project Malio" and "Adapting rural CLTS for Urban Settings," *Azafady UK*, Accessed online 15 December 2015. <http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/resource/project-malio-adapting-rural-clts-urban-setting-madagascar>. The authors proclaim that "The underlying concept of Project Malio (Project Clean) [a open defecation eradication campaign in southern Madagascar] matches that of Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS): pride and shame are stronger motivators for change than knowledge."

<sup>891</sup> In a Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) initiative in Fort Dauphin, Madagascar, public health workers used the provocative and highly offensive images comparing a dog and human defecating outdoors to instigate behavioral change. The projection of the image was met with much controversy and anger among urban residents. In B. Lomas and R. Hammersley-Mather, "Shocking Imagery and Cultural Sensitivity: A CLTS Case Study from Madagascar: A Briefing Paper" 29<sup>th</sup> WEDC International Conference, Kumasi, Ghana 2016. The authors, development practitioners suggested that the "shock element" may be integral to the CLTS methodology, even as it should be balanced with "cultural sensitivity" (5).

<sup>892</sup> Maggie Black and Ben Fawcett, *The Last Taboo: Opening the Door on the Global Sanitation Crisis*, (London: Earthscan, 2008), 77. For studies of the failure of latrine construction to ameliorate the open defecation problem in Madagascar, see Marqui, H. Lamaison, 2014, "Lutte Contre le Cholera, our Contre la Culture?," *Health, Culture and Society*, suppl. Madagascar: Past, Present and Future, 7(1): 61-65.

where people choose to defecate? How do we understand the quiet logics that inform defecation practices? In this vein, I aim to elucidate some of the norms, spatial and moral conceptions that have historically shaped the sanitation practices of Mahajanga's residents. In so far as we understand toileting habits to be partly informed by social norms of bodily and spatial integrity, propriety, and management, we might ask, what might be gained from taking seriously the epistemological frameworks of those who opt out of a relationship with the state mediated by 'modern infrastructure'?

World Toilet Day 2015 was not the first time that problems concerning open-air defecation surfaced publicly in Mahajanga's history. Nor was it the only time that latrines featured as robust objects in scatological debates between city administrators, public health officials, and residents. Over the past century, latrines - and more generally sewage sanitation infrastructure - have emerged time and again as contentious devices. This chapter investigates the long-standing norms concerning waste among diverse inhabitants in the city and offers a corrective to this presentist stance. It excavates the tortuous path by which contemporary urban sanitation dilemmas were produced in Mahajanga throughout the twentieth-century. I ask, what were the complicated ways in which contrasting conceptions of proper human waste treatment, technological intervention, and appropriate uses of space collided and coalesced at various intervals? I argue that sewage sanitation and discourses have 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. Studying waste and management practices, I contend, exposes the multifaceted ways Malagasy historical actors have imagined and articulated the moral economies of the city.

In this chapter, I track the biography of the latrine, invented as part of a decentralized system for managing waste in European towns, and follows it as it was introduced by French public health officials to Mahajanga in the early 1900s. Latrines, as infrastructural artifacts together with their accompanying receptacles (privy vault-cesspools, buckets, septic tanks, and sewage pipes), have been remarkably capacious in their ability to contain multiple, often contradictory meanings and values; they have stood as beacons of modernity and perceived tools of coercion, as bearers of health and containers of filth, as things desired by some and evaded by others.<sup>893</sup> Beginning with French colonial efforts to instill particular toilet habits in the early 1900s, latrines have been variably accommodated, avoided, and defaced by Mahajanga's ethno-linguistically diverse population. Over time, however, residential latrines have become more widely accepted, built in the courtyards of many homes and utilized by many city dwellers. Increasing material investments of concrete slabs, water spigots, and mechanical extractors were added, and demanded by many, to maintain the city's sanitation infrastructure from the mid-twentieth century. New labor regimes emerged around sanitation maintenance, at times mapping onto standing ethno-linguistic hierarchies and at other times disrupting them. But as mechanical extraction of waste from latrines became an impossibility in Mahajanga by the 1960s, and following the mass exodus of Comorian sanitation laborers following the 1976-77 *rotaka*, new dilemmas arose about how and by whom latrines could be maintained.

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<sup>893</sup> For contemporary and historical studies of latrines, excremental practices and their significance, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Chalfin, Brenda, "Public things, excremental politics, and the infrastructure of bare life in Ghana's city of Tema," *American Ethnologist* 41:1 (2014):92-109; Jensen, Casper Bruun "Pipe Dreams: Sewage Infrastructure and Activity Trails in Phnom Penh," *Ethnos* (2016): 1-21; Ndonko, Flavien, *Répresentations culturelles des excréments* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 1993), which describes people's resistance to the government's introduction of latrines. Yeoh, Brenda, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 175-204. Even fewer have studied defecation practices, despite their centrality to everyday life and their significance for public health and social functioning.



The chronicle of sanitation technologies in Majunga across the long twentieth century challenges existing literatures on urban planning in French colonial cities. Architectural historians have argued that colonial cities served as “laboratories” for experimentation with new ideas for design and planning solutions to problems plaguing the metropole.<sup>894</sup> But in Majunga, French colonial authorities ultimately transposed what they saw as “good practices” around sanitation to urban Madagascar. In a rather unimaginative gesture to common sanitation expertise they introduced systems long used in French cities to Majunga. They initiated a system based on moveable bucket latrines (*tinettes mobiles*) that served as the normalized infrastructure for waste management throughout France for at least a century. Instituting a similar system in emergent colonies was the logical option for colonial authorities, I suggest, if not a launching point for envisioned infrastructural future. Majunga was a place imagined by colonial officials to be commensurate enough to France to warrant transplanting the same sanitation technology. Yet, these conceptions of Majunga as a place similar enough to French towns soon fell apart, as officials encountered countless, unanticipated problems. This is not a story about innovation and tinkering, but rather one of unoriginality and disillusionment.

### ***Spatial Management in Early Majunga***

Little remains known about how people dealt with waste, or conceived of purity and filth, in the earliest days of the town's formation in the eighteenth century. Antalaotra traders, the "people of the sea" originating in parts of Arabia and East Africa, undertook Indian Ocean trading voyages and founded the town as a key entrepot for their lucrative slave, spice and cattle

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<sup>894</sup> 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). See Helen Tilley's *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2011) for the concept of colonial laboratories more broadly.

commerce.<sup>895</sup> Antalaotra men - like their Swahili counterparts in Zanzibar and along the eastern Africa - intermarried with local women and aligned themselves with key families in the region.<sup>896</sup> In Majunga, these families and women were most often of Sakalava descent, an important ethno-political group and widely attributed as the autochthones of northwest Madagascar.<sup>897</sup> These marriages and their delicate alliance with Sakalava royal monarchical leaders afforded Antalaotra the economic and cultural autonomy to conduct their lucrative trade. Antalaotra brought with them Islamic practices of ritual purification that many of the town's residents followed and continue to do so.

European travelers to Moudzangaie in the mid-1800s described a well-built reservoir and fountain on the north side of town, from which "water would fall in a cascade, in a washing room" and observed that Muslims went there to perform ablutions.<sup>898</sup> Eighteenth century accounts also described that, at the city's apogee in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the town was expansive and "stragglings" stretching nearly one mile along the coastline, with "sandy and generally clean streets."<sup>899</sup> The dispersed configuration of the town would have lent itself to maintaining distance between human dwellings and human waste. The maintenance of separation between human dwelling and human waste was a tactic for managing waste in precolonial settlements. Defecating in unpopulated, overgrown areas would have

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<sup>895</sup> Rantoandro, Gabriel. "Une Communauté Mercantile Du Nord-Ouest, Les Antalaotra." *Omalv Sy Anio* 17–20 (1984 1983): 195–210.

<sup>896</sup> Guillaïn, *Documents Sur L'histoire*, 20-25.

<sup>897</sup> Here I wish to clarify that ethnicity in Mahajanga is complicated, and ethnic identifications are far from clear-cut or bounded. On the contrary, as Michael Lambek has pointed out, inhabitants belong to multiple, overlapping "communities of practice", including ethnic association, kinship groups, religious communities, labor groups and residential quarters in *The Weight of the Past*, 26. When I use "Sakalava" it refers to *practices* identified primarily as ethnically and religiously Sakalava.

<sup>898</sup> Guillaïn, *Documents Sur L'histoire*, 209.

<sup>899</sup> John Osgood. *Notes of Travel and Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscant, Aden, Mocha, and Other Eastern Ports* (Salem, George Creamer, 1854), 8. W.F.W. Owen, *Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar, performed in H.M. Ships Leven and Barracouta under the Direction of Captain W. F. W. Owen*, (R.N. London, 1833), 100.

utilized desiccating properties of sunshine and scavenging mammals (goats and rats) to decompose feces and minimize health risks.<sup>900</sup> The places deemed appropriate to defecate were most certainly far from domestic quarters.

Although written accounts of sanitation practices in precolonial Majunga are sparse, my discussions with local people of various ethnic and residential backgrounds offer other insights. Filth is a core concept in Sakalava conceptions of personhood, as it is universally.<sup>901</sup> In northwest Madagascar, people have historically employed *loto* (*vb. maloto*) to mean "dirty" or "filthy;"<sup>902</sup> *maloto* refers importantly to spiritual contamination, following the death of a royal figure or a commoner and requires ritual purification.<sup>903</sup> But *maloto* can also refer to physical pollution, which is often linked to spiritual contamination. In other Sakalava dialects, *makota* and *voretry* are equally used to describe filthiness;<sup>904</sup> someone or something filthy might be referred to as *ity makota ity*.

Excrement or dung, *tay* (apparently from Malay *tai*) or *kaka* are the most offensive of all matters. While urine is thought by some in Madagascar to have medicinal properties in treating burns, human excrement is considered purposeless.<sup>905</sup> Other linguistic variations of *tay* include *taymaso*, which refers to the excrement of one's eye, *taynify* as the plaque buildup on teeth; *tain-*

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<sup>900</sup> European travelers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century described the abundant populations of goats, which served as sustenance for Muslim inhabitants; Joseph Osgood, *Notes of Travel: Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscat, Aden, Mocha and Other Eastern Ports* (Salem, 1854), 9; Léon Eugène de Beylié, Aubé, *Itinéraire de Majunga à Tananarive*, (Imprimerie Nationale, Madagascar, 1895), 42. Rats were introduced to northwest Madagascar by Arab and Antalaotra traders from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, see C. Brouat et al, 2014, "Invasion genetics of a human commensal rodent: the black rat *Rattus rattus* in Madagascar," *Molecular Ecology* 23(16): 4153-4167.

<sup>901</sup> Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge, 1966).

<sup>902</sup> See James Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, (Antananarivo: LMS, 1885), 600.

<sup>903</sup> Feeley-Harnik, Gillian, *A Green Estate: Restoring Independence in Madagascar* (Smithsonian: Washington, DC, 1991), 125, 143-44; Sharp, Lesley, "Royal Difficulties: The Anxieties of Succession in an Urbanized Sakalava Kingdom," in Karen Middleton (ed) *Ancestors, Power and History in Madagascar* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 1999).

<sup>904</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 40. Also, *voretra* is employed in highland speech varieties to signify 'dirty' and is probably related to sorcery, personal communication with Pier Larson, August, 25, 2016.

<sup>905</sup> Though I did not encounter this idea among inhabitants of Mahajanga, anthropologists have reported the presence of this idea in the highlands. See Rakotomalala, Malanjaona, "La Formation et l'Entretien du Bon être Social" in *A coeur ouvert sur la sexualité merina (Madagascar): Une anthropologie du non-dit* (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 211.

*sofina*, ear wax.<sup>906</sup> Contact with human excrement is particularly problematic, as evidenced in the terms *tiva* and *akeo*. *Tiva* is used specifically to refer either to someone of slave descent, or to someone who has come in contact with excrement and is therefore physically and spiritually polluted.<sup>907</sup> *Akeo*, as one young man explained to me, describes something that is "so dirty, very, very dirty, and something taboo (*fady*). Like if you accidentally splash shit on yourself."<sup>908</sup> Both also denote the concept of impurity that precludes one from participating in Sakalava religious practices involving ancestors.<sup>909</sup> In contemporary Mahajanga, people generally use *loto* to describe varying kinds of dirtiness, ranging from a child's muddy clothing, to dogs and pigs (thought to be filthy because they eat excrement), to the remains of the dead.

Prohibition practices that identified and demarcated "filth" have also been signifiers of ethnic affiliation. Many people described that long-standing prohibitions (*fady*, taboos) on those of Sakalava descent from defecating near or in and thus polluting one's domestic residence (*trano*), family tombs (*fasana*), or sacred shrines (*doany*). Sakalava *fady* bear resemblance to those observed on the island's eastern coast, in which a number of established norms preclude the facile acceptance of latrines for defecation. Some prohibitions forbid the placing of one person's excreta on top of another, or the burying of feces in the ground that might hold the burial remains

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<sup>906</sup> Malanjaona Rakotomalala, "Une Expérience Pluridimensionnelle: La Maladie Chez les Vonizongo du Sud-Est (Madagascar)" (PhD Diss, Université de Lille III, 1990) Tome II, 405-406.

<sup>907</sup> Jorgen Ruud, *Taboo: A Study of Malagasy Customs and Beliefs* (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1960), 153; On slave descent see Sophie Goedefroit, *A L'Ouest de Madagascar: les Sakalava du Menabe* (Paris: Karthala, 1998), 56, 100, 414; Désiré Ramandraivonona, *La Malgache, sa langue et sa religion*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1959, pp. 228-229, as quoted in Eugène Mangalaza, 1981, "Un Aspect du Fitampoha: Le Valabe," *Omalysy Anio*, 13-14: 318.

<sup>908</sup> "zavatra maloto, maloto indrindra, fady..." Fieldnotes, December 10, 2013.

<sup>909</sup> Dahl, Otto. *Malgache et Maanjan* (Oslo: Egede-Institutet, 1951), 54. Dahl related *tiva* etymologically to *tivas* in a sister Austronesian language, Maanjan (Borneo) meaning culpable.

of the dead or grain surplus--both life-giving forces.<sup>910</sup> In southeast Madagascar, defecation in the same place as one's mother or sister amounted to incest, thus precluding the use of latrines.<sup>911</sup>

In twentieth century Majunga, the forested, wild areas uninhabited by humans, or the sea, were appropriate places to shit and pee,<sup>912</sup> and people used the materials of those places - wood, water, and leaves - to cleanse themselves after defecating. Those that disregarded these prohibitions were likely to encounter troubles with ancestors.<sup>913</sup> Contaminations of various sorts necessitated the making of amends with ancestral beings through gifts, offerings, and washing practices. Precise prescriptions provided by ancestors and royal rulers over time instilled avoidance of handling human filth, and simultaneously distinguished Sakalava practices (*fomba*) as distinctively stricter (*sarotony*), more prolific (*befadifady*), more highly valued (*misy valeur cultural*) than practices of other ethno-political groups.<sup>914</sup> To be clear, it is not that only Sakalava practices advised against repeatedly defecating in a single place; indeed, some interlocutors reported that this was true among all kinds (*karazana*). But local constructions of the strictness, multitude, and weight of Sakalava practices, and the corollary strength of ancestral power, served to index Sakalava difference in contemporary Mahajanga.

As anthropologists and ecologists have increasingly taken note, taboos are complex practices-involving both moral and symbolic norms, but also environmental and pragmatic

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<sup>910</sup> André Ramanantsoa (2004) "Rapport final: Capitalization et recherche de solutions sur les latrines à Madagascar," WaterAid Madagascar, Antananarivo, Madagascar, as quoted in Maggie Black and Ben Fawcett, *The Last Taboo: Opening the Door on the Global Sanitation Crisis*, (London: Earthscan, 2008) 82, fn 22.

<sup>911</sup> Fauroux, E., Le Gros, B., Rasoamalavao, C. and David L (collab), 1991, "Le vocabulaire de la propreté dans les langues vernaculaires du sud-ouest de Madagascar: pour une meilleure approche des problèmes d'hygiène urbaine," *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines*, 27:3-4, 355-56.

<sup>912</sup> The Sakalava word *jangoany* signifies this practice of defecating or urinating in outdoor, uninhabited spaces.

<sup>913</sup> Fieldnotes, 10 December 2013.

<sup>914</sup> For this, I am relying on my ethnographic encounters in which people repeatedly referred to the "strictness" of Sakalava practices, and that some described that their identifications with Sakalava ethnicity were stronger when they engaged ritual practices, whether *tromba* (spirit possession), annual *fanompoa* (ritual bathing of royal relics), or observance of *fady*. See also Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*.

dimensions.<sup>915</sup> Respect for ancestrally-preferred practices of prohibition, ritual purification, and spatial management have deep moral connotations across communities of ethnic-religious practice. In Madagascar, observance of these practices qualifies one as an ethically righteous adult person, and a veritable contributor to an ethno-political-religious community congealed by shared abidance.<sup>916</sup> Though *fadys* can be individual as determined by one's cosmological positioning, most *fadys* are understood as shared among ethnic and kin groups.<sup>917</sup> They are moral practices not only because fady observance constitutes a moral subject, but also because they are oriented towards a collective well being which encompasses the living, the dead and future progeny. Observing *fadys* are constitutive acts, making and remaking relationships between the living and the dead, and enabling certain kinds of power and persons.<sup>918</sup>

I have described *fadys* in the context of contemporary Mahajanga, but in probing the deep historical past we might also consider *fadys* as marked by ideas that have traveled across expanses of time. Some have suggested how *fady* are historical records.<sup>919</sup> In this case, I suggest that *fadys* around *tay* have been built from generations of empirical observations of the harmful outcomes of contact with human feces that gave rise to coherent explanations and protective prescriptions. While we cannot assume that the exact prohibitions reflected in contemporary taboos were observed in 18<sup>th</sup> century Madagascar, they do offer us some glimpse into inherited knowledges about the environment and health. Sakalava taboos have also served as ecological

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<sup>915</sup> Golden, Christopher and Jean Comaroff, 2015, "The Human Health and Conservation Relevance of Food Taboos in Northeastern Madagascar," *Ecology and Society* 20(2): 42; Meyer-Rochow, V.B. 2009 "Food taboos: their origins and purposes," *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 5:18.

<sup>916</sup> See Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 327-336; Michael Lambek, *The Ethical Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 72-85. For foundational texts on taboo in Madagascar, see Ruud, *Taboo*, 1960; and Arnold van Gennep, *Tabou et Totémisme à Madagascar* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904).

<sup>917</sup> Ruud, *Taboo*, 1960; Van Gennep, *Tabou et Totémisme*, 1904; Lambek, Michael, "Taboo as Cultural Practice Among Malagasy Speakers," *Man* 27(1992): 245-266; Huntington, Richard, "Time and Space in Madagascar: Spatial Indicators of Social Progress." *Symbols* (1981): 2-12.

<sup>918</sup> Comaroff, Jean, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>919</sup> See Golden and Comaroff, "The Human Health..." 2015, for discussions of dietary *fadys* as "historical records."

practices and served some pragmatic purposes. Sakalava epistemologies around waste worked to prevent illness, by maintaining separation between living bodies and shit. In early Majunga, they were situated in a dispersed landscape that accommodated distance between spaces of inhabitation and places for toileting. Such practices reflected the deep awareness of the polluting and harmful effects of excrement, and served to manage this risk through spatial prescriptions.

During the nineteenth century, as the city grew even more heterogeneous – ethnolinguistically, religiously, economically— traders from South Asia (*karana*) migrated to the city, many of whom shared Muslim ritual purification practices. Sakalava inhabitants continued to be regarded as the “masters” (*zanatany or tompontany*) of the region, and occupied important spiritual-political roles. Although little is known about how Antalaotra - Sakalava mixed families would have combined or reworked their respective practices of washing and separation, it is likely they have taken up aspects of both: respecting the spatial logics that separated defecation from life, and the use of water in ritual purification. The invasion of King Radama's troops (from the competing, highland monarchy) in 1824, furthermore, brought increasing numbers of highland populations (ethnically Merina and Betsileo) who served as soldiers, fonctionnaires, and merchants. Mozambicans (*Makoa*) brought initially through the trans-Mozambican channel slave trade, adopted many of the Islamic purification customs of their Antalaotra and Indian masters.<sup>920</sup> Comorians settled in Mahajanga more permanently around the turn of the twentieth-century. They too observed many Muslim norms, including ritual cleansing and prohibitions on consuming pork and alcohol. These waves of migration increased the overall size of the population but also constituted a sense of the city as a Muslim port town.

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<sup>920</sup> On Makoa and enslavement more generally, see 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, 2007): 183-220.

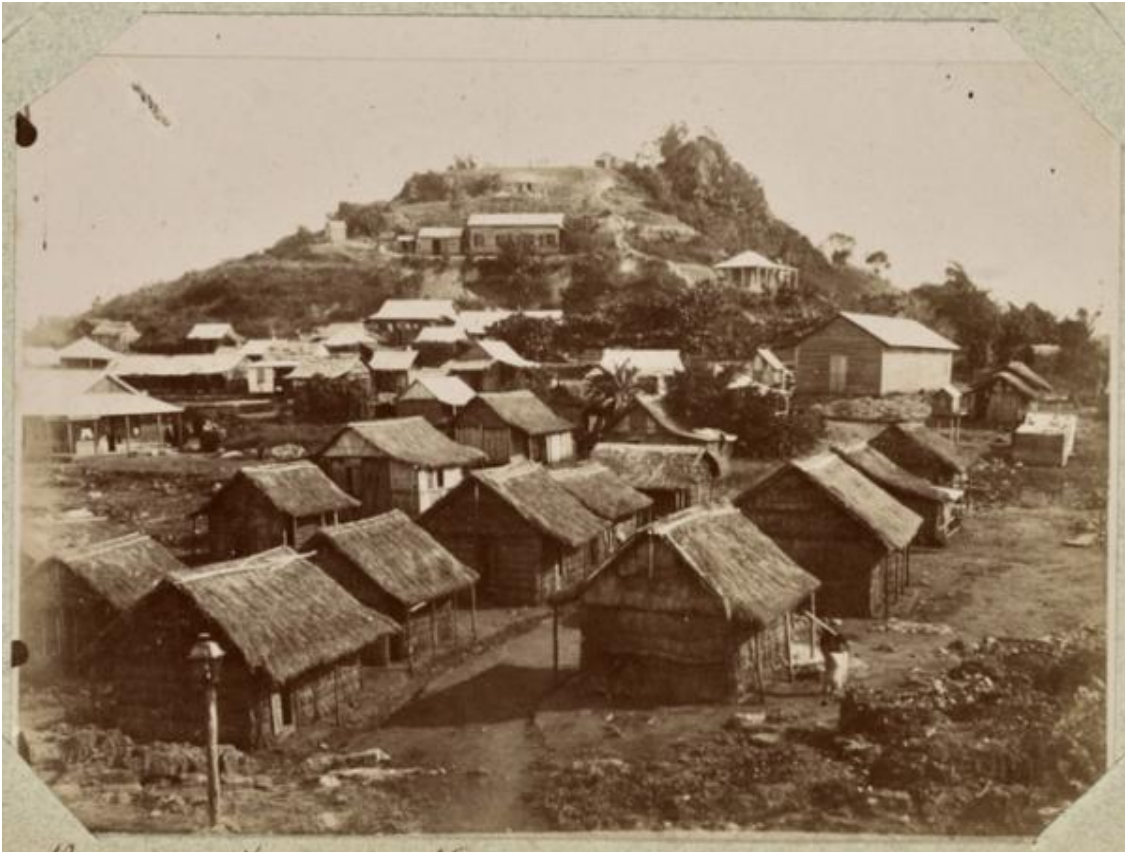


Figure 62: Majunga, 1895 (Note the absence of small outhouse structures)  
(Source: *Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer, FR ANOM 8Fi435*)

### ***Pits, Buckets and Carts: Sanitation in France and Colonial Madagascar***

In the early 1890s, French military troops and colonial explorers surveyed the town's colonial prospects; by this time the urbanity had grown to 8,000-10,000 inhabitants (Fig. 62). Following the French colonial conquest of 1895-6, undertaken through the port of Majunga, military administrators were tasked with (re)envisioning the city's layout and infrastructure. Military officials, however, were weary and lacking in enthusiasm for Governor Joseph Gallieni's immediate pacification campaign.<sup>921</sup> The military expedition leading to the island's conquest had devastated French military troops, costing 6,000 lives due to malaria; less than 20

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<sup>921</sup> Philip Curtin, *Disease and Empire: The Health of European Troops in the Conquest of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Note that the literature on the French military campaign in Madagascar is vast and I discuss the implications of the invasion for Majunga elsewhere in the dissertation.



died due to enemy combat.<sup>922</sup> The stark lethality of the campaign was attributed to the disastrous miscalculations of French military officers, which dealt an unexpected blow to French public morale at a precipitous moment in empire building.<sup>923</sup> Although Majunga was relatively free of worrisome malaria epidemics in the early years of occupation, French military and colonial officials associated Majunga with the ill-fated Corps Expeditionnaire campaign and perceived it as an unhealthy place. Military officials were thus slow to rebuild the city, in contrast to other provincial towns such as Tamatave.<sup>924</sup> Gallieni himself sought to rectify this doomed portrayal of the city by arguing against its "unfortunate" and unwarranted reputation.<sup>925</sup>

Despite the fatigue, some early colonial administrators projected a dream of the city's promising future, taken as they were by its ideal, arid climate lending itself to healthfulness, and its strategic proximity to East Africa and Indian Ocean trade routes.<sup>926</sup> Drawing on the urban planning approach developed in Morocco and other French colonies, Colonel Hubert Lyautey and his colonial cadre in Madagascar sought to conserve the fundamental layout of the cities they encountered.<sup>927</sup> Military officials began to develop plans for improvements to the existing landscape, rather than radical restructuring of the town. City administrators seized on Gallieni's favorable look to Majunga and submitted proposals for improvements to the city's communication, maritime, and local commerce activities. Gallieni in turn enthusiastically committed to the extension of a telegraphic line between Majunga and Antananarivo and a

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<sup>922</sup> Curtin (1998) describes the Madagascar expedition of 1895 as having "the worst reputation for medical failure of any military campaign in the European conquest of Africa." He estimates that there were more French deaths in the 10-month military expedition than in the conquest of the entire territory that subsequently became French West and French Equatorial Africa. *Disease and Empire*, 177.

<sup>923</sup> Curtin, *Disease and Empire*, 194.

<sup>924</sup> From 1896, Madagascar was proclaimed a French colony.

<sup>925</sup> Gallieni, Joseph-Simon, *Neuf ans à Madagascar*, (Paris: Hachette, 1908), 85.

<sup>926</sup> L. Duquenoy, "Rapport sur l'Ile Madagascar," *Revue Coloniale*, Nov-Dec 1901; Centre Archives d'Outre Mers (herein CAOM), BIB/ECOL/4183.

<sup>927</sup> Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 228; Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

fluvial transport system linking Majunga to Maevatanana. Many of the planned infrastructural projects of the late 1890s centered on maritime activity, including the construction of a dike, quay (Figure 63) and lighthouse at nearby Katsepy (Figure 65). Establishing a residence (Figure 64) for the provincial governor was also a critical project and one that was only accomplished through the recruitment of masons from northern and highland Madagascar and forced prison laborers.<sup>928</sup> Soon there after, early French town planners in Majunga sought to build latrines to contend with the human waste of a growing population. To such ventures colonial administrators brought their own conceptions of waste and sanitation infrastructure that diverged dramatically from local perceptions around waste management.



Figure 63: Quay Orsini at the Majunga Harbor, 1903, one of the early infrastructure projects, (Source: CAOM, ANOM 44PA134/20)

Of the many imperatives facing colonial authorities in Madagascar, filth and disorder was imminent. The unpaved streets, sprawling landscape, and varied housing styles appeared to

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<sup>928</sup> ANRDM/DTP 28: Rapport Mensuel sur les travaux executes dans la subdivision de Majunga pendant le mois d'Avril 1898, Adduction eau, etc.



Figure 64: “The Residence” for the provincial governor, 1903  
(Source: CAOM, ANOM 44PA134/3)

threaten the safety and wellbeing of a small, but growing colonial settler population. Colonial officials undertook a broad sanitation initiative over several years, encompassing the construction of canals, water fountains, wells, public hospitals and latrines (Figures 66, 72-3). The first latrines in Majunga were constructed in the 1910s, near public spaces such as the central marketplace and the slaughterhouse. Little archival trace remains about who constructed the public latrines, but at the time French colonial authorities were highly dependent upon prison laborers and migrant laborers from the Comoros Islands, China and the Kutch and Punjabi regions of India to carry out public works projects.<sup>929</sup>

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<sup>929</sup> ANRDM/DTP 28: Rapport Mensuel sur les travaux executes dans la subdivision de Majunga pendant le mois d'Avril 1898; DTP 29: Letter from Resident de France in Moheli, Reè Perrè to Governor General of Madagascar, 22 Aout 1904; La Depeche de Majunga, 27 Avril 1902 and 4 Mai 1902.



Figure 65: Lighthouse near Hospital, 1903 (Source: CAOM FR ANOM 44PA 134/19)

From its inception, sanitation in Majunga was configured as a decentralized system with individual, disconnected latrines constructed in two variations. Either they were conjointly built with a privy vault or cesspool, which were dugout holes in the earth lined with rocks. Or they were configured with a moveable bucket system (*tinettes mobiles*), which consisted of a steel bucket placed atop or inside a concrete or wood platform. This latter method was synonymous with the pail system utilized in many European and British towns throughout the nineteenth century, in which small 5-10 gallon buckets were placed underneath the privy seat.<sup>930</sup> This

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<sup>930</sup> Tarr and McMichael indicated that the pail system was unsuccessfully attempted in some American cities, such as New Orleans and Atlanta. Tarr and McMichael, "The Evolution of Wastewater Technology," 172.

approach was labor intensive, however, since it required human labor to empty the pails (Figure 68). In Majunga, as we will see, this work was initially carried out by prison laborers and later by a range of laborers (Figure 67).

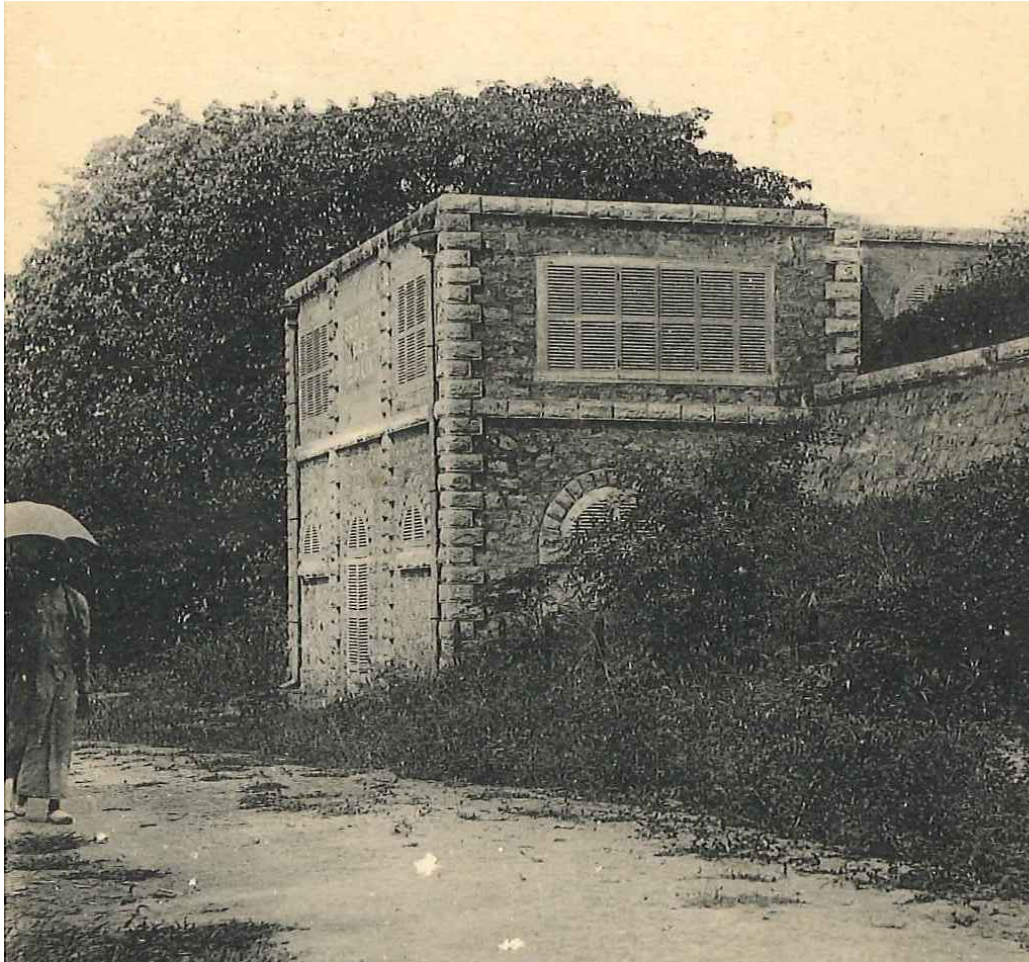


Figure 66: Postcard, Water Tower (La Château d'Eau), (Source: Author's collection)

That French military and colonial authorities didn't initially consider the construction of a centralized sewage system in Mahajanga, consisting of underground sewers, pipes and linkages, is unsurprising when considering the metropole's sanitation situation in the late nineteenth century. Until the late nineteenth century, human waste collection in European and American



Figure 67: Prison laborers, ca 1900 (Source: Archives, Hotel de Ville, Mahajanga, Madagascar)

cities was predominantly of the privy vault-cesspool system. Although well-built privy vault-cesspools allowed the fecal matter to gradually leech into the soil, they required periodic manual emptying and maintenance.<sup>931</sup> When the vat was full, landholders would either empty the vault by hand or simply fill the hole with dirt and dig a new vault. Over time as city populations grew increasingly dense, however, the problems posed by soil saturation, water pollution, and constraints of space became onerous. But it was the introduction of piped water, without a concurrent system to dispose of water refuse, that catapulted engineers and city planners into rethinking the privy vault - cesspool system.<sup>932</sup> With no system to remove the used water, urban

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<sup>931</sup>. Tarr, Joel. "The Separate vs. Combined Sewer Problem: A Case Study in Urban Technology Design Choice" *The Journal of Urban History*, 1979, 309; Tarr, Joel and Francis Clay McMichael, "The Evolution of Wastewater Technology and the Development of State Regulation: A Retrospective Analysis," in *Retrospective Technology Assessment* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Press, 1977), 166-7.

<sup>932</sup>. Ibid.

households disposed of their water in cesspools and gutters, overflowing their privy vaults and dispersing human waste throughout the terrain.<sup>933</sup>



Figure 68: "London Nightmen." Engraving (Source: Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol 2 [London: Griffin, Bohn, 1861-62]: 34-35.)

English and American city administrations soon came to grips with the public health problems emergent from this phenomenon, concluding that privy vaults and cesspools were "nuisances, dangerous to life and detrimental to health."<sup>934</sup> Engineers and city planners sought new technological solutions. In 1858, engineers in London designed and constructed a combined

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<sup>933</sup> Tarr, Joel, "The Separate vs. Combined Sewer Problem", 311; Schultz, Stanley and Clay McShane, "To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late-Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History*, 1978, 65(2):393.

<sup>934</sup> Wohl, Anthony, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1983); Segur, B.A. 1876. "Privy Vaults and Cesspools," *Public Health Papers and Reports*, 3:185-187.

sewerage system consisting of single pipes to remove both household waste and storm water, this system was soon implemented in American cities throughout the 1860s and 70s.<sup>935</sup> The construction of sewage lines quickly correlated with lower death rates, and engineers marveled at their ability to shape human lives through the "grading, drainage, paving, cleansing and policing" provided by sanitation interventions.<sup>936</sup> Relying on the theory of self-purification and purification by dilution of water, engineers routed the flow of storm and sewage water in local waterways, until engineers later designed waste treatment facilities to filter and conserve water sources.<sup>937</sup>

In late nineteenth century Paris, the hub of French urban design, households utilized one of four sanitation systems: 1) privy vault-cesspool configuration (*fosses fixes*); 2) moveable pails (*fosses mobiles*), (Figure 69); 3) moveable receptacles for solid waste only, with urine filtering into cesspools (*appareils diviseurs*); or 4) moveable receptacles constructed of galvanized sheet iron for solid waste, while urine siphoned into sewers (*tinettes filtres*).<sup>938</sup> The vast majority of households (86,000 of 124,220) in 1878 relied on the privy vault-cesspool system.<sup>939</sup> During the Second Empire (1852-1870), Paris city authorities undertook the construction of 630 kilometers of underground sewer, intended only for the disposal of rainwater and street debris.<sup>940</sup> The construction of sewers in Paris was part of a broader Haussmannian scheme for rendering order and symmetry in the city, refashioning it along the lines of classical aesthetics.<sup>941</sup> These initiatives were informed by aspirations to purify the sensorial landscape of the city, obliterating

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<sup>935</sup> Tarr, "The Separate vs. Combined", 314-15.

<sup>936</sup> Schultz and McShane, "The Engineer the Metropolis," 396.

<sup>937</sup> Tarr, "The Separate vs. Combined", 329.

<sup>938</sup> See also Target, Felix, "On the Main Drainage of Paris, and the utilisation of its Sewage," Minutes of Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, (London: Institution, 1878), 53, 201.

<sup>939</sup> Ibid

<sup>940</sup> This section is taken in large part from Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewerman: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 29-36; Barnes, David, *The Great Stink of Paris and the Nineteenth-Century Struggle against Filth and Germs* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2006); Gaillard, Jeanne, *Paris, La Ville (1852-1870)*, (Lille-Paris: Honoré Champion, 1976).

<sup>941</sup> David Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).



foul odors and materializing the ideal of the modern city.<sup>942</sup> Yet, human waste continued to be deposited in cesspools, which were manually emptied in *vidange* carts and taken to the outskirts

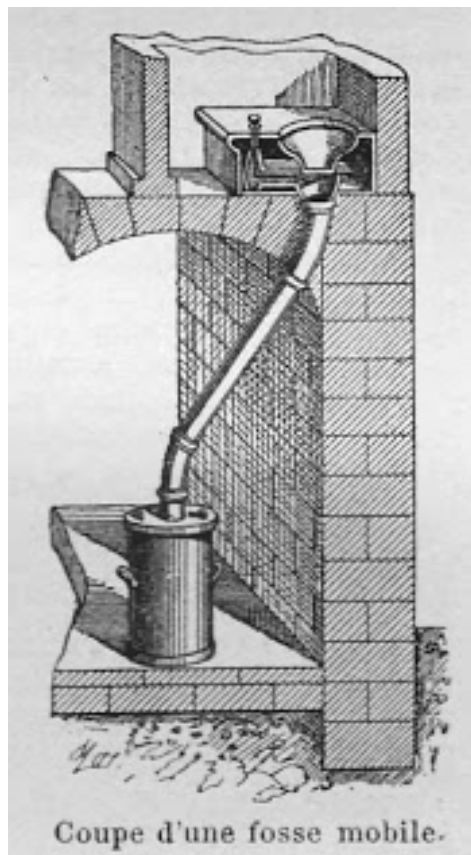


Figure 69: Sketch of a moveable pail latrine system, (Source: Nouveau Larousse Illustré, 1901: 617)

of town where it was often used as fertilizer, creating persistently noxious fumes throughout the city.

In 1870, city officials proposed evacuation of human waste through the sewer lines (*écoulements directs*), but these efforts were delayed partly because of the economic value placed on human waste as fertilizer.<sup>943</sup> This question was hotly debated and contested for nearly three decades by landlords, who feared massive expenses and alterations to their buildings, and by cesspool workers, who risked losing their livelihood.<sup>944</sup> Scientists, including Louis Pasteur,

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<sup>942</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Reid, *Sewers and Sewerman*, 35.

<sup>943</sup> Reid, *Sewers and Sewerman*, 80-82.

advised against the institution of the "all in the sewer" (*tout-à-l'égout*) because of concerns about the poisonous emanations of excrement, traveling underfoot of the city. They proposed instead a separate, piped system that would transport human waste farther beyond the city limits.<sup>945</sup>

Despite these admonishments in 1894, on the cusp of France's invasion into Madagascar, the parliament approved the city council's plan for the all-inclusive sewer (*tout-à-l'égout*). In 1903, the split of households between cesspools and direct evacuation into sewers in Paris was 50/50, but by 1913, direct evacuation served as the sewage infrastructure for the majority of households.<sup>946</sup>

### ***Bucket Latrines as the "Wellbeing of Civilization"***

If the metropole's capital was only beginning to construct all inclusive sewers in 1894, it would have been hardly thinkable for colonial authorities to consider implementing a similar system in this provincial, colonial city set in the Indian Ocean basin. Moveable bucket latrines (*tinettes mobiles*) had served as a normalized infrastructure for waste management throughout France for such a long time, that instituting a similar system in emergent colonies was the logical option, if not a launching point for envisioned infrastructural future. Majunga's sanitation configuration, organized around the manually emptied, moveable bucket latrines, was not unlike that of other colonial cities in Madagascar in the early 1900s.

In Antanananarivo, most fecal matter was disposed of in cesspools. Some European and public latrine sites in the capital city made use of movable bucket latrines, which were emptied

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<sup>944</sup> Jacquemet, Gérard, "Urbanisme Parisien: La Bataille du tout à l'égout à la fin du XIXe siècle," *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 26:4 (1979): 505-548; Barnes, *The Great Stink*, 52-64.

<sup>945</sup> Barnes, *The Great Stink*, 54-55.

<sup>946</sup> Jacquemet, Gérard, "Urbanisme Parisien," 543.

once or twice a week in a designated ditch outside the city.<sup>947</sup> In Tamatave, sanitation improvement efforts were slightly more aggressive. Authorities clamped down on the use and construction of household pit latrines near water pumps, and sought to shift to a system of *sealed* moveable bucket latrines which were dumped on the outskirts of town, and thereafter assiduously disinfected.<sup>948</sup> Moveable bucket latrines were prescribed for colonial subjects and French colonial authorities alike. In 1911, Alexandre Kermorgant, a leading public health expert in the early twentieth century, advised Europeans settling in the tropical colonies to construct their toilets (*cabinet d'aisance*) some distance from their homes, and to use the moveable bucket system. This bucket should be "emptied daily in an earthen pit, away from running water and wells, so not to sully them."<sup>949</sup>

Quite soon after the construction of latrines in Majunga, however, French colonial officials encountered unanticipated public responses. The movable buckets posed problems. People dumped the foul contents of heaping receptacles in undesignated places (though they did not specify where those places were), despite surveillance. "Some of the material sullies the city's soil" one colonial commentator noted, "and in turn the wells."<sup>950</sup> While some reports suggested that the public latrines "are cleaned every morning and function well," others asserted the latrines were perpetually left in a "generally filthy state" despite multiple cleanings each day.<sup>951</sup> More troublesome was the blockage of the pit toilets. French authorities were dismayed

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<sup>947</sup> Roux, Jules-Charles, *Comptes rendu des travaux du Congrès colonial de marseille*, (1907) vol 3-4, 167.

<sup>948</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>949</sup> Kermorgant, Alexandre, *Hygiène Coloniale*, (Paris: Masson, 1911) 37-38. Kermorgant was at the time the General Medical Inspector (Médécine-Inspecteur Général) for the French colonial administration.

<sup>950</sup> Roux, "Comptes rendu des travaux du Congrès" 167. Note that similar problems plagued cesspool operations in Paris.

<sup>951</sup> The first description is from the annual public works report in 1915, notably, while the latter is from an internal letter from the Director of City Services to the Mayor in 1917. See, respectively, ANRDM/IJ 2083-4: Arrondissement de Majunga, "Rapport Annuels Travaux Publics: Commune de Majunga" (1915), and ANRDM/VIIJ 391-061, Letter 14-V, 29 Janvier 1917, from Chef du Service de la Voirie to the Administrateur-Maire de Majunga.

to find that locals threw stones into the pit, which clogged the dugout cavity and risked waste overflowing onto the street.<sup>952</sup>

Seeing the latrines jeopardized by these unexpected popular responses, city administrators were obliged to modify the design by adding a special basket-like receptacle to collect the rocks separately from the waste, which was to be emptied daily.<sup>953</sup> It is worth pausing here to note that not only were French engineers forced to rework their original design because of popular responses to the latrines, but also that such acts of neglect and discard suggest a political dimension to public latrines. Colonial records suggested this was an ongoing problem. And though more research is needed to say definitively, it is possible colonial subjects did not



Figure 70: "Indian" stonecutters, Majunga 1903

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<sup>952</sup> Ibid.

<sup>953</sup> ANRDM/VIIJ 391-061, Letter 29 January 1917 from Chef du Service de la Voirie to Administrateur-Maire of Majunga.

only neglect the latrines, but that they actively defaced them. If that was the case, then those acts would have been defiant gestures against colonial efforts to regulate people's excremental practices or even outright rejections of the colonial infrastructural scheme.

But why rocks? And who precisely was tossing the rocks into the latrines? One French official surmised that town dwellers were using rocks rather than toilet paper to cleanse themselves.<sup>954</sup> This is quite possible, but rocks were also multivalent and had their own geographies of circulation in colonial Majunga. Stone, as a substance, was most often reserved for royal tombs and edifices, and was until the 18<sup>th</sup> century forbidden to use for domestic construction by Sakalava royal decrees.<sup>955</sup> Rocks had a temporality that resonated with that of Sakalava ancestors - lasting, durable, persistent. French colonial efforts to construct latrines using wood and concrete, in this context, would have seemed absurd. But not all Majungais dwellers shared this conception of stone, and for some rocks were objects of labor and sources of financial gain. South Asians (*karana*) were among the early "stone cutters" in the city, hewing large boulders into building blocks and later constructing their homes in stone (Figure 70).

Following the termination of the prohibition on building in durable materials under Queen Ravahiny in the 1780s, stone was used to construct sacred spaces - mosques and tombs - by Antalaotra traders and later by South Asian immigrants.<sup>956</sup> In the early 1800s, stone homes were built by wealthy traders and merchants, so that 25 stone houses stood in the old city (what

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<sup>954</sup> Ibid.

<sup>955</sup> This was the case until Queen Ravahiny's repulsion of this regulation in the mid-1700s. See Chapter Two, "City of Stone and Thatch (*Vato* and *Satrana*): Architectural Governance in Moudzangaie (1770-1824)."

<sup>956</sup> French soldiers dismantled the stones around "Indian" tombs and used them to construct protective walls around their military trenches, see Antoine Perrault, *Escape from Madagascar: Journals of a French Marine, 1884-7*, trans. Marilyn O'Day (Renton, Washington, 2002).

is today known as Majunga Be) in 1842.<sup>957</sup> Initially these inhabitants were Antalaoatra, but over time they were occupied by the various *karana* groups, who grew in numbers and acquired a stronger foothold on trade from the 1830s onwards. Most of the rocks used to construct homes in the city were from nearby quarries from which locals were permitted to extract with city approval.<sup>958</sup> Stone was used to build other colonial infrastructures and built forms such as wells



Figure 71: Construction of a well, Majunga 1903  
(Source: Archives Nationales d'outre mer, Fonds Gallieni, FR ANOM 44PA 134/8)

(Figure 71), civic buildings, and the quay, potently signifying colonial power and fixity. Later, in the 1920s, stone and mud bricks were used to build a Catholic church in Mahabibo (the "native reserve"), under the Spiritains, and to reconstruct the original Catholic church which served the

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<sup>957</sup> Guillain *Documents Sur L'histoire*, 215-6.

<sup>958</sup> ANDRM/F43: Procès-Verbaux des Deliberations 1927-9, contains many council meetings where requests for extraction from quarry were deliberated.

European and "creole" population.<sup>959</sup> While it is impossible to know who was responsible for tossing rocks in the latrines, it is worth noting that for some inhabitants latrines appear to have been objectionable.

Eventually French colonial authorities considered eliminating the public toilets altogether, as they had apparently done in other colonial Malagasy cities like Tamatave and Diego-Suarez.<sup>960</sup> The administrative consideration of closing public latrines reveals a cleavage in the colonial logics of sanitation and a shift towards the state-prompted institution of toilets in residential homes. Although the outcome of this discussion requires more research, the debate around the provision of public toilets persisted into the 1930s. At a city council meeting in March 1931, council members noted that the Mahabibo neighborhood (historically, the labor reservoir for the city) with a population of 20,000, was in desperate need of "more water closets." The suggestions to construct these latrines, however, was defeated when one member described that the septic tank model had been introduced in Majunga earlier, "without success", because of the propensity of "indigenes" to throw objects in the toilet."<sup>961</sup> For French colonial city administrators, such acts were perplexing, aggravating and enervating. City planners were mindful of the ills of haphazard urban development and the need for technological systems; they contended that Malagasy needed to be "guided towards the improvement of their material existence" through the introduction of infrastructure "to attain the greater benefits of the

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<sup>959</sup> *Bulletin de la Congregation, Spiritains. 1923-1924.* "Residence de St. François-Xavier," Janvier 1924, 401: 486-91. Private archive of Pere Barq, Spiritain community, Antanimisaja, Mahajanga.

<sup>960</sup> ANRDM/VIIJ 391-061, Letter 29 January 1917 from Chef du Service de la Voirie to Administrateur-Maire of Majunga. The letter outlined the problems of poor maintenance and filth associated with the public latrines and noted that since "Europeans do not use the public WC, perhaps the answer is the eliminate the WC altogether as has been done in Tamatave and Diego with no hygienic problems."

<sup>961</sup> ANRDM/F44: Proces-Verbaux Séance 26 March 1931.

civilization's wellbeing."<sup>962</sup> The introduction of sanitation infrastructure implied anticipated conformity to the behavioral norms around latrines; compliance was a marker of one's degree of "civilization" and thus, one's humanness.<sup>963</sup>

For city administrators, failure of *indigenes* to use the latrines properly was evidence of their ignorance, their uncivilized ways, and their incomplete personhood.<sup>964</sup> Shitting in place, in short, was aligned with progress. Like Warwick Anderson describes in colonial Philippines, French planners interpreted a confusing and threatening foreign population by crafting a new “official order” of racialized bodies and defecating behaviors.<sup>965</sup> If, in late nineteenth century Paris, sewers were the "civilizing agent,"<sup>966</sup> then in colonial Majunga it was latrines (even if they relied on moveable buckets of sordid shit) that served as the infrastructural means to improved, enlightened human existence. While ostensibly intended to improve the sanitation situation in colonial African cities, the construction of sanitation infrastructure —whether the construction of latrines, wells or gutters— was almost always bound up with the segregationist projects of urban planning.

The expansion of urban populations triggered anxieties among colonial authorities about corporeal contact between Europeans and non-Europeans, and across ethnic lines among Malagasy, Southeast Asians, and Comorians, along with the intractable policing of spatial boundaries. As has been documented in other colonial African urbanities,<sup>967</sup> invoking sanitation

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<sup>962</sup> ANRDM/VIII: 12, "Plans d'Amenagement et d'extension des villes à Madagascar," 24 Decembre 1926, from Ministre des colonies Leon Perrier to President of the French Republic.

<sup>963</sup> Conklin makes this link apparent in direct quotes from French colonial authorities, see *A Mission to Civilize*, 8, 137, 144.

<sup>964</sup> Note that archival documents I reviewed did not reference the recalcitrance of specific ethnic groups to sanitation technologies and European waste practices. The extent to which this was even perceptible to French city administrators is unclear.

<sup>965</sup> Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 106.

<sup>966</sup> Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewerman*, 36.

<sup>967</sup> For African cities, see Maynard Swanson "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909," *Journal of African History* 18:3 (1977): 387-410; Robert Stock, "Environmental



as the official rationale for infrastructural and population control initiatives was a powerful discursive tool to legitimate the reworking of colonial, urban space and control over colonized bodies. The construction of latrines in Majunga served to discipline “natives,” in a Foucauldian sense, to adhere to European toileting habits and adopt the habitus<sup>968</sup> befitting a colonial citizenry.<sup>969</sup>

But what exactly were the excretory practices of French and Malagasy inhabitants in Majunga? Warwick Anderson suggests that sifting out such excremental “truths” from a skewed and saturated archival record is pointless, if not problematic (2006:107). While that may be true, I contend that excavating the logics undergirding historical Malagasy waste practices is critical to understanding what latrines meant to many Malagasy in colonial Majunga. Although we cannot assume a universal system of meaning among inhabitants of Sakalava descent, it is likely that for many in the city defecation “in place” would have translated to attacks on individual and collective wellbeing. Since the latrine system introduced by French planners necessitated increased human contact with excrement (given that the buckets' contents had to be manually discarded) this practice would have denigrated long-held ideas about proper relationships between people and waste matter, the living and the ancestors. Rather than an improvement in one's quality of life, the use of latrines would have been perceived as heedlessness for key ancestral prohibitions on the handling of human waste, and an invitation to personal and familial misfortune. Assuming that these prohibitions were in place in the early twentieth century, the

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Sanitation in Nigeria: Colonial and Contemporary," *Review of African Political Economy* 42 (1988): 19-31. Also see Warwick Anderson, "Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution," *Critical Inquiry* 21:3 (Spring 1995), 640-669; Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>968</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

<sup>969</sup> This is not to suggest that the disciplining of colonized bodies was cohesive or complete rather, as scholars have shown, the application of colonial medical science in African contexts was always fragmented and constrained. See Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Nancy Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

notion of constructing a toilet near or in one's most intimate, domestic space would have been abhorrent for many of the town dwellers of Sakalava descent. Contemporary recollections of the norms regulating toileting practices in Majunga confirm this sentiment.

In a series of late afternoon discussions at his home in 2014, Tsiavono, a city surveyor in his early sixties, described to me the history of sanitation in Majunga. I met Tsiavono through his daughter, Lina, a young woman who helped her mother-in-law, selling biscuits and drinks at the family's small epicerie in Manga, a neighborhood in the center of town. Friends had suggested that since he was *zanatany* and a long-standing administrator in the city's urban planning division, Tsiavono was a reliable authority and highly knowledgeable about urban planning and building practices in the city. At first, when Lina took me to meet her father, he was reluctant to speak with me, citing his busy schedule and his lack of authority on local history, offering the commonly heard refrain that he "wasn't learned and didn't really know the history" (*tsy tena mahay, tsy mahay tsara ny tantara*) of the city. After I persisted and visited him a few times in his office, he acquiesced and whispered that I should come to his home that weekend. He slipped me a piece of paper with his address and telephone number.

Sitting in the courtyard of his home that weekend, he revealed that his decision to talk with me emanated from his long-held frustration with the dominance of unqualified highlanders who had been hand-placed in the city's administration. He wanted me to know his "secrets" (*zavatra secret*) and to share his coveted knowledge about land management in the city.<sup>970</sup> It was in this context that he narrated early sanitation practices in Majunga, "At first, people just made *jangoany*, using wood, water or natural things to clean themselves...they would go inside the

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<sup>970</sup> Despite my efforts to repeatedly explain that I was a researcher gathering information for my dissertation (*boky*), Tsiavono held a persistent belief that I was a CIA agent or otherwise affiliated with the American Government. It was because of my ostensible position of power, he later indicated, that he thought to offer his insider's knowledge especially concerning illicit land titling practices (dealt with elsewhere in the dissertation), although he didn't clearly suggest how he wished I would use that information.

mangrove swamps (*anaty honko*) or the sea."<sup>971</sup> Household latrines were initially perceived as a "vazaha" (European, outsider or someone with affluence) practice.<sup>972</sup> He implied that building a small solid structure dedicated to toileting would have been bizarre (*hafa-hafa*)<sup>973</sup>, since durable (*mafy*) materials were historically been reserved for tombs and ancestral shrines throughout Madagascar. Despite the presence of such counter-ideas to French architectural norms of latrines-in-house, however, city officials persisted in their efforts to secure toileting cooperation throughout the twentieth century.

Since French authorities perceived the Malagasy home as the nexus of ancestral relations, ideas and practices, it seemed the prime site for the colonial cultivation of idealized bodily and mental norms.<sup>974</sup> Domestic architecture in Madagascar has long been shaped by cosmological and astrological auspicious orders.<sup>975</sup> Across the island, houses have long served as material manifestations of kin groups over time, thus symbolizing fertility and longevity.<sup>976</sup> The modification of domestic space, then, offered a powerful colonial technique to ushering Malagasy bodies into compliance with sanitation practices, and minds into more highly evolved states. In 1913, city legislators in Majunga mandated that homes with four or more adults must be "equipped with movable bucket latrines" based on a cement platform or emptied into a sealed

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<sup>971</sup> Interview, B.A., 25 January 2014.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid.

<sup>973</sup> Also has the meaning of something different, improper, unseemingly as well as peculiar, depending on the context, See Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, 217.

<sup>974</sup> Feeley-Harnik, Gillian, "The Sakalava House," *Anthropos* 75 (1980): 560.

<sup>975</sup> Baré, Jean-François, *Pouvoir des Vivants, Langage des Morts: Idéo-logiques Sakalava* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977); Domenichini, Jean-Pierre, "La Conception Malgache du Découpage de l'Espace," in Fremigacci, Jean (ed), *Histoire et Organisation de l'espace à Madagascar* (Paris: CRA-Afera/Karthala, 1989); Hébert, Jean-Claude, "La Cosmographie Ancienne Malgache Suivie de l'Énumération des Points Cardinaux et l'Importance du Nord-Est," *Taloha* (1965): 83-195.

<sup>976</sup> Bloch, Maurice, "The Resurrection of the House Amongst the Zafimaniry of Madagascar," in Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones (eds) *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 69-83; Freeman, Luke, "Separation, connection and the ambiguous nature of émigré houses in rural highland Madagascar" *Home Cultures* 10:2 (2013): 93-100. Philip Thomas, "Conspicuous Construction: Houses, Consumption and 'Relocalization' in Manambondro, Southeast Madagascar," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4:3 (1998): 425-46.

vault or septic tank.<sup>977</sup> While most of the city's residents could not have afforded the construction of these latrines, cultural conceptions concerning the uses of building materials - stone, mud, and grass - and the handling of waste among some Majungaïse residents hindered the actualization of the latrine-abundant city envisioned by colonial planners.

In 1926, city legislators enacted a ruling that all homes newly constructed henceforth in Majunga proper must have a *fosse septique* (septic tank); but since Mahabibo reserve fell outside of the city's boundaries this did not apply to the vast majority of the town's inhabitants.<sup>978</sup> By the 1930s, French urban planners pursued the inclusion of latrines in homes more energetically. Concerned by the "lack of hygiene" found in Mahabibo (the "native reserve") city officials



Figure 72: Postcard, Public Water Fountain, ca. 1940s (Author's collection)

<sup>977</sup> ANRDM, VIIIJ 391, Arrete no. 30 fixant les conditions d'installation des cabinets d'aisances dans la Commune de Majunga, Signed 24 Avril 1913.

<sup>978</sup> ANRDM/VIIIJ 391: Arret no. 257, approved 10 September 1926.

reworked the budget in 1934 to allocate 13 million francs towards the construction of forty Malagasy homes, complete with conveniences and hygienic fittings, including water provision. These homes were to be retained by the city, rented to indigenes; they were to constitute the "beginning of a future native village constructed with all the desirable hygienic conditions."<sup>979</sup> Later records suggest that this project was a frustrating failure for French officials, because of their inability to attract prospective renters for these apartment homes. Threaded through both the



Figure 73: Postcard, Water fountain in Mahabibo  
(Source: Archives départementales de La Réunion)

1913 legislation and 1934 housing project, was the imagining of a colonial populace as homogenously compliant with the toileting regulations; but this vision was later fractured by the

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<sup>979</sup> ANRDM/F44: Procès-Verbaux, 23 Février 1934, "à bon marché qui seront louées par la Commune et constitueront l'embryon du future village indigène de Mahabibo construit avec toutes les conditions d'hygiène désireables-à l'extension du réseau de distribution d'eau de la ville, à l'assainissement, par le comblement d'une partie des marais."

refusal of inhabitants and the regime's scarce resource allocation for managing perpetual dilemmas around waste management.

References to citywide sanitation infrastructural investments in Majunga surface unevenly in archival sources throughout the 1920s and 1930s. From 1925-1927, as the population of Mahabibo grew to some 14,000, city administrators sought to keep pace through the construction of latrines, as well as the extension of existing water pipelines.<sup>980</sup> The density of Mahabibo's population peaked at 200-250 people per hectare (as compared to 30 Europeans per hectare), and the population swelled to 21,172 in 1931.<sup>981</sup> By 1934, covered sewerage drains were finally installed for the discharge of storm water along the Rue d'Eglise bordering Mahabibo, as well as the cleaning and improvement of open sewerage canals in Mahabibo.<sup>982</sup>

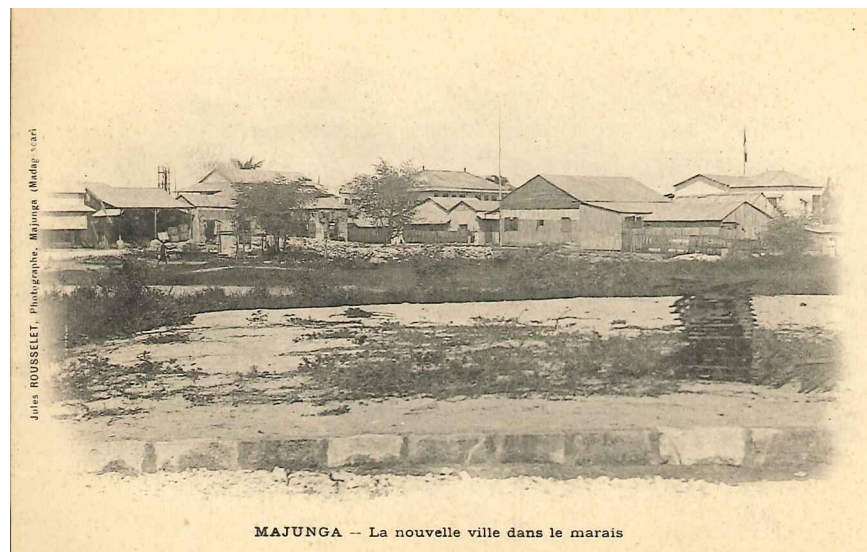


Figure 74: Postcard, “New city in the marsh” (Source: Author’s collection)

These interventions were apparently inadequate and a malarial epidemic swept across the reserve in 1937. Administrators blamed the epidemic on the city's tardiness in constructing ample sewers, failure to pave over the marshlands, and the level gradation that resulted in standing

<sup>980</sup> ANRDM/F43: Procès-Verbaux 26 Février 1927.

<sup>981</sup> ANRDM/VIIIJ 391: Letter, 1 Dec 1932 from Chief of Public Works to Chief of the Subdivision of Public Works in Majunga city. Note that of 21,172, the European population accounted for 2936.

<sup>982</sup> ANRDM/F44: Procès-Verbaux 7 Novembre 1934.

pools of water in the reserve.<sup>983</sup> The Digue Metzinger (Metzinger Dike), which was built partly as a passageway across the marshy areas, prevented the drainage of storm water, creating a breeding ground rife with mosquito larvae.<sup>984</sup> The cesspools constructed by families in Mahabibo, they noted, worsened the situation.<sup>985</sup> These "poorly constructed cesspools" were built in individual household compounds by inhabitants who gradually adopted domestic latrines which comprised the colonial model of decentralized, parceled sewerage infrastructure.<sup>986</sup>

French colonial approaches to sanitation in Majunga throughout the early to mid-twentieth century were characterized by fits and starts, procrastination, and hasty, crisis management. As scholars have described of urban planning and infrastructure projects in other colonial contexts, sanitation infrastructure in Majunga unfolded haphazardly, improvisationally, rather than in a systematic, coherent fashion.<sup>987</sup> The infrastructure work remaining to be done daunted city officials, even as they made convenient choices to procrastinate important infrastructural investments. In 1939, the city council appraised the public works projects that awaited resource allocation - construction of sewers, improvement of hygiene, and the reclamation of wetlands. They weighed them against desired leisure facilities targeted at the European and elite communities, namely the swimming pool and stadium. They bemoaned the city's steep debt of almost 2.5 million francs owed to the central administration in Antananarivo, and the millions of francs needed to support these projects. Orsini, one council member, suggested that the public works projects should take precedence over the swimming pool and

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<sup>983</sup> ANRDM/F45: Proces-Verbaux 11 Mai 1937.

<sup>984</sup> Ibid.

<sup>985</sup> Ibid.

<sup>986</sup> Some people noted a much more recent shift in building practices among Majungaise families regarding toilets: families began with a latrine in the household compound, but often chose to build latrines inside the home when (re)building their homes en dur, using concrete (instead of *toly*, corrugated sheet metal).

<sup>987</sup> Bissell, William Cunningham, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); von Henneberg, Krystyna "Imperial Uncertainties: Architectural syncretism and improvisation in Fascist colonial Libya," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (1996): 373-395.

stadium; but others disagreed, citing the onerous cost of these projects in comparison to the pool and stadium. After lengthy deliberation, the council agreed to approach the central administration for a loan of 500,000 francs to enable the construction of the pool (Figure 75) and stadium, but left the public works projects aside.<sup>988</sup>

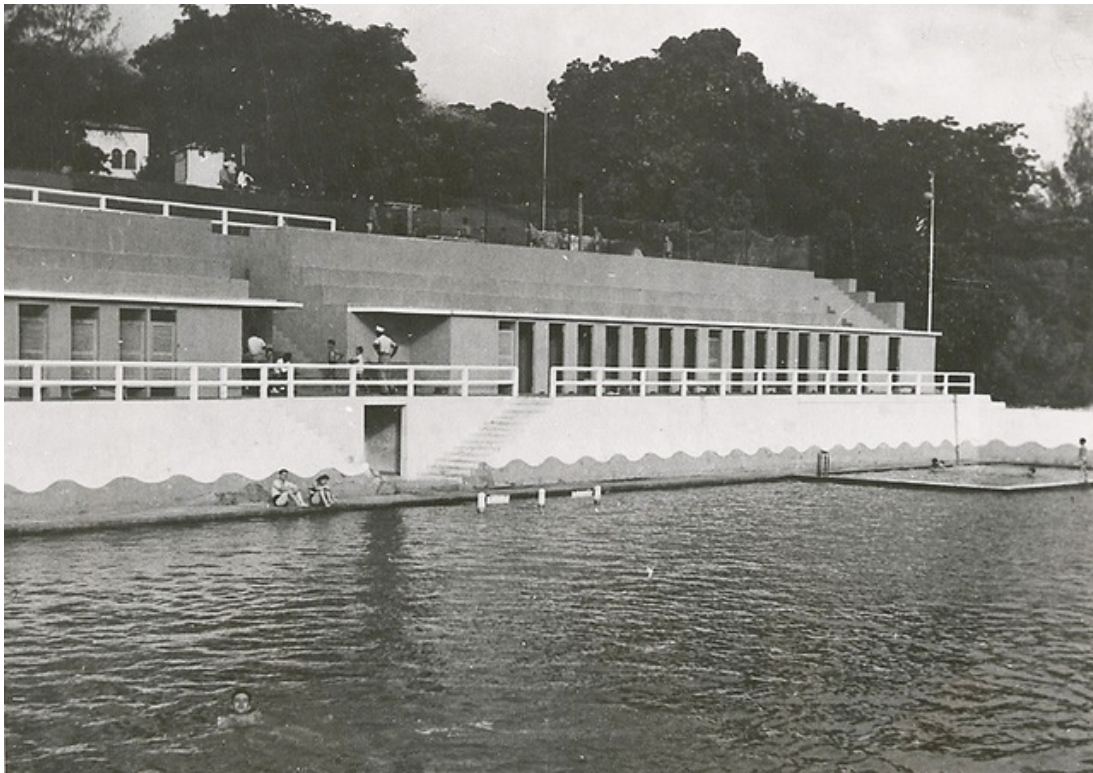


Figure 75: La Piscine (the pool), ca. 1951 (Source: [www.anciens-cols-bleus.net](http://www.anciens-cols-bleus.net), accessed 23 July 2016)

As World War II loomed, the colony's fiscal capacity was stretched and infrastructural investments slowed down. But as more and more families built latrines, either utilizing the movable steel drum or dugout septic vault system, the need arose for a maintenance system and laborers to enact it. Given that the proximity to human waste has long been a contentious issue, in Madagascar and beyond, the constitution of labor regimes to sustain the burgeoning latrine system was problematic. Latrines demanded multiple forms of maintenance labor. The

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<sup>988</sup> ANRDM/F45: Proces-Verbaux 10 Janvier 1939.



introduction of requirements for household compounds shifted the labor burden to individual families charged with building their own latrines, part of an increasing turn to privatized land holding in colonial regulations.<sup>989</sup> The construction of public latrines in the 1920s and 30s was, by contrast, executed by forced laborers (*prestataires*) under the SMOTIG program.<sup>990</sup>

Securing labor for the maintenance of household cesspool-privy vaults proved even more troublesome. Older residents of different ethnic and residential backgrounds described how prisoners fulfilled the initial demand for workers to manually empty the steel, shit-filled vats prior to the 1950s.<sup>991</sup> Several narrated the sanitation history of the city by describing how Malagasy families would dig a catchment hole into which they inserted a steel drum (*bidon*), while French and those with money adopted the *cabinet* (possibly a flush toilet). At nighttime, prisoners (*gadra*) driving a zebu-drawn cart (*charrety*) came to remove the drum, which took and they emptied elsewhere. Tsiavono described, "My father always told me, don't look! You don't need to watch them! (*tsy mila mahita!*) If you look at them or say anything, they will throw shit on you!"<sup>992</sup> Similar narratives, featuring prisoners emptying barrels of feces and urine in the darkness of night, were vividly recalled over and over again in my conversations with established residents, suggesting its importance in popular historical renderings of everyday life in Mahajanga. Another couple, long-time residents in their sixties narrated that "prisoners would come at night, because they were ashamed, and they carried the barrels of shit suspended

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<sup>989</sup> This shift, along with the contradictory and complex dynamics around colonial housing regulations are addressed elsewhere in the dissertation.

<sup>990</sup> See for example, ANDRM/F43: Proces-Verbaux-Séance, 26 February 1927.

<sup>991</sup> Interviews with J.R., Mahajanga, Madagascar, 28 October 2013; B.R., Mahajanga, Madagascar, 25 January 2014; P.T., Mahajanga, Madagascar, 9 December 2013.

<sup>992</sup> Interview with "Tsiavono," Madagascar 25 January 2014.

between long poles of wood. If you dared to tease them, they would dump the waste on your doorstep!"<sup>993</sup>

While the rebellious throwing of shit may have been a subaltern tactic in the face of deeply humiliating labor, others described the strategies prisoners employed to rid themselves of the stigmatized shame of their labor. Since handling shit was so deeply offensive to ancestors (*folaka razana*), some prisoners were obliged to bathe in the sea to purify themselves, upon release from prison, before rejoining their families.<sup>994</sup> Those that were able to accumulate enough wealth to slaughter a cow did so in order to appease angry ancestors and ensure a blessed, more prosperous future.

In this chapter, I have argued that local contingencies and vernacular forms of knowledge mitigated and at times reconfigured pragmatic colonial visions, plans and artifacts for dealing with human waste and filth. The varied responses of Majungaise residents reflected alternative urban visions and logics, some which respected long-standing norms of spatial management and accounted ancestors as importance forces with whom to be reckoned, honored and negotiated. The emplacement of defecation in northwest Madagascar has historically been partly about respecting ancestors and future progeny, and partly about an emergent techno-political economy that has afforded and constrained certain scatological practices. The colonial project of sewage sanitation infrastructure both exposed the fractures in the vision of a cohesive colonial populous and provided unexpected means through which some colonial and post-independence subjects contested the terms of governance, citizenship, and moral notions of purity.

The story of Mahajanga's sanitation could be said to be particular. It does not conveniently fit with other accounts of colonial urban policy, that illustrate how interventions

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<sup>993</sup> Interview with P.T., Mahajanga, Madagascar, 9 December 2013.

<sup>994</sup> Interview with Ben Houssein, Abattoir, Dec. 9, 2013.

were shaped by "a view that the territorial and cultural conditions in the colonies are inherently different on account of race, climate, and history..."<sup>995</sup> Rather French city planners approached sanitation construction in the growing colonial city much as their administrative counterparts had done, and continued to do, throughout France. They failed to account for how the city's sandy soil and low-lying topography, let alone the existing waste practices and cosmological frameworks of urban dwellers, might profoundly alter the course of the same technologies built in the metropole. Nor was Mahajanga clearly a colonial laboratory for testing new sanitation infrastructure, in terms that Wright has described as "a terrain for working out solutions to some of the political, social and aesthetic problems which plagued France."<sup>996</sup> By contrast, French colonial sanitation planners appear to have been quite limited in their capacities to imagine a sanitation system that differed from those commonly found in nineteenth century France. They carried forth a model of decentralized sanitation from the metropole, configured around parceled latrines, and anticipated a compliant topographical landscape and colonial citizenry to enact their waste treatment scheme.

I return here to a question posed at the beginning of the chapter: What might be gained by interrogating the epistemological frameworks of those who have variously rejected a sanitation system mediating their relationship with a colonial state? Studying the logics undergirding waste practices, I suggest, helps to reveal the complicated, rich ways in which Malagasy actors in precolonial and colonial times imagined the moral dimensions of their city, and the practical norms governing proper and respectable relations with kin and ancestors. Though seemingly imperceptible to French colonial agents, Majungaise inhabitants navigated the tenuous demands

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<sup>995</sup> Chattopadhyay, *Unlearning the City*, 77. See also Zeynep Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers Under French Rule* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 1997); Myers, Garth, *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

<sup>996</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1991), 3.

of the living and the dead, of life and danger, by managing space. This is not to nostalgically put forth an imagined past in which nature and humanity were once in harmony, but rather to assert that the seeds for a different kind of urbanity were once there, though now long buried.

### **The Home of Foundi Tsepy**

Short in stature, El Had projected strength and vitality in his animated and engaging manner. El Had lived with his wife and several children in Ambalavola, behind a large sheet metal fence that rattled loudly when you knocked. El Had described how his home was founded by his father, the locally famous *foundi* and mystic “Tsepy.”<sup>997</sup> Tsepy was married three times: first, with an Anjouan woman, with whom he had two children; second, with a Sakalava woman from Soalala, with whom he he had 5 sons (El Had is the second son); Finally, with his third wife, a Sakalava woman from Marovoay, he had 9 children.

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Tsepy was born in Mutsamudu, Nzwani in the 1910s. After years of study in Comoros, his *foundi* prompted him to travel to Majunga in his mid-twenties to spread Islam and strengthen Rifa`i networks. So, he did, arriving into Majunga by boat, and traveling overland to the nearby town of Boanamaray. His early months failed to deliver on the promises made to his *foundi*, and he spent most of his time living simply and learning the new ways of life he encountered (*mijery ny fiainanana*). Hearing of this lackluster start, and frustrated with his promising young student, his *foundi* tracked him down. He insisted Tsepy come to Majunga where he could join with the brotherhood—and two of his *foundi*’s sons— at Moskeriny Rifa`i.

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<sup>997</sup> Tsepy is alternatively spelled “Cêpe.”



Figure 76: “Tsepy” is seated in the middle, ca. 1940s  
(Source: family archives, Family of Ali Mohammed)

Shortly after joining with Moskeriny Rifa`i, however, Tsepy ran into conflicts with the two sons of the original *foundi*. The conflict stemmed from jealousies: Tsepy was a beloved leader and teacher, very dynamic and popular, which threatened others. When tensions escalated, the foundi told him, “you’re the son of my heart, but they’re the sons of my blood (*tsy zanaka’lio, fa zanaka’foko anao*)...you should leave and join the Chadhouli community instead.” Tsepy sought to avoid conflict (*tsy mila miady amin’olo*), but was also determined to make his own path, so he broke off from Moskeriny Rifa`I and opened his own *madrassa* (Qur’an school).

After searching for a permanent location, he and his family found the land on which El Had’s home currently sits in Ambalavola. This was in the late 1930s or early 1940s, and almost all of Ambalavola was occupied by Anjouan. But there was still open land, unoccupied land (*malalaka*), and he was able to purchase the land from another family.

At first, they built the courtyard, inscribing it with Qur'an verses. Then, they constructed a simple house, with a satrana roof. Then, they saved and saved, and built a house of sheet metal (*trano toly*). Finally after more years of economizing, they built a brick home (*trano biricky*).

Tsepy's school was very successful. The French government favored him, invited him to participate in the Children's Festival (Fete des Enfants), because his work was well-established (*mipetraka tsara*). He taught so many students, who have now scattered all over the world...Moheli, Grand Comoros, Anjouan, Paris, Marseille, and of course Madagascar.

After establishing the school, Tsepy and others yearned to build a mosque in Fiofio. Foundi Tsepy had technical, building skills but he didn't have money. Through his charismatic manner, he attracted supportive parents who paid and subsidized the building of the mosque. Tsepy didn't take a salary, and there was no company involved in the construction...the mosque was built by the congregants themselves (*pivavavaka*). Tsepy himself hauled the cinder blocks (*parpaing*) from his house to the mosque, so that it could be built.

After the rotaka of 1976-77, Tsepy fled Majunga to Nzwani, and later France. The house remained, and a renter moved into the house—he wasn't a Muslim, and they drank alcohol, and ate pork here. Three years later, the house burned down.

I grew up in the Comoros and failed at several business ventures, before realizing my destiny to build on my father's legacy. Eventually I settled in Mahajanga, on this land which my father owned with his third wife. Tsepy died in 1990, and afterwards a dispute arose over the property. I lived in the back part and built this part (pointing to the stone house). Here, where you see the open courtyard, there was a wood home before (*trano kety*) which my stepmother (*mamakely*) built. After seven months, while the dispute was still raging, the house burnt down,

with the television and everything inside...everything destroyed! So, my Mamakely finally moved out and then I built the house and Qur'anic school that is here now.

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El had continues to instruct *zanatany* young men on moral education and religious law, and he is widely regarded as a pillar in Mahajanga's Shadhilliya communities.



Figure 77: El Had, at his home and madrasa in Ambalavola, 2014 (Source: Author)



**Chapter 7**  
**Infrastructures:**  
**Maintenance Work and Productions of Difference in Contemporary Mahajanga**



Figure 78: Typical latrine in household compound, Morafeno, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: Author)

***Introduction***

On a balmy afternoon in April 2013, over an instructive preparation of *mokatraway*<sup>998</sup> Mama'Khalid told me an unexpected story about shit. Our conversation revolved around daily life in Mahajanga in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when she traveled to the city as a child. As her

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<sup>998</sup> This is a cardamom-infused rice pudding, commonly cooked by Comorian-Malagasy “zanatany” women in Mahajanga.

narrative shifted to descriptions of homes and the management of domestic life, I asked, "What was the situation of sewage treatment and removal in those years?" She replied,

*"Oh, in those years, Mahajanga stunk! (tamin'ny taloha miambo Mahajanga ô!) Each home kept a steel drum (barika) below the latrine, and they would come weekly at night, the prisoners (gadra), and empty your barrel. If you dared to tease them, as many disrespectful (maditra) young men did, they would come and spill the excrement (miparitaka tay) onto your verandah (baraza)! Or they would throw caca at the kids or smear the fences of houses with it. Everyone knew the prisoners' foreman as 'Madi Tay', boss of the shit! Yes, (she chuckles), Madi Tay, he was their leader. He couldn't read or write, but he became a rich man, owned many houses and now his family still lives here and keeps those properties."<sup>999</sup>*

It was not until the following year that I eventually developed a relationship with the daughter of the man known here as "Madi Tay" and learned at length about her family's history and tribulations. I invoke this conversation with Mama'Khalid<sup>1000</sup> because it offers a point of departure for reflecting on historical debates around sanitation infrastructure, moral rectitude and the production of difference in Mahajanga.<sup>1001</sup>

Madi Tay was a Comorian migrant from the island of Nzwani (Anjouan), who was not formally educated, but nonetheless managed to accrue considerable wealth as a commander of Mahajanga's night soil brigade. As a committed educator, Mama'Khalid's commentary may have been an implicit critique of Madi Tay's means of acquiring wealth, or an amused recollection of life's ironies. I never asked her about that, but it was clear that Madi Tay's position as a city sanitation worker hovered literally and figuratively between the coveted position of urban civil servants and the humiliated rank of prison laborer. Mama Khalid's inference that even an uneducated person could become wealthy through sanitation work suggested the questionable

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<sup>999</sup> Fieldnotes, 29 April 2013.

<sup>1000</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>1001</sup> Ethnicity in Mahajanga is complicated, however, and ethnic identifications are far from clear-cut. On the contrary, as Michael Lambek has pointed out, inhabitants belong to multiple, overlapping "communities of practice", including ethnic association, kinship groups, religious communities, labor groups and residential quarters, in *The Weight of the Past: Living with History in Mahajanga, Madagascar* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 26.

legitimacy of labor involving filth. The teasing, the tossing of excrement on people's porches, and the fact that I heard narratives just like Mama'Khalid's over and over again suggested more was at play in the city's lived experiences of sanitation.

I was introduced to Mama'Khalid and her expansive family early during my time in Mahajanga by a mutual friend. A middle-class family, Mama and Papa'Khalid were of mixed Tsimihety, Comorian (from Grand Comore, Ngazidja) and Sakalava descent. Upon meeting them in their home in Abattoir (one of the older neighborhoods in former Mahabibo), I learned that we shared not only interests in history, politics and education, but also an intertwined genealogy. In their early sixties and early seventies (respectively) with four grown children, Mama and Papa'Khalid were the paragon of stability, strength and vitality in their overlapping communities of the local Muslim association, neighborhood organization (*fikambanana*), and *zanatany*-kin network. Their airy home served as a hospitable bedrock for wide-ranging travelers, friends, and kin alike, who sought comfort in Mama Khalid's delicious *ravintoto amin'voanio* (coconut infused cassava leaves) and respite on their calm, cool verandah that overlooked the city. Their two-story home (*trano étage*) was one of a few multi-storied dwellings in the quarter. It was built over many years through the arduous, collective pooling of Mama'Khalid's meager wages as an elementary school teacher and Papa'Khalid's remittances from Mayotte.

At our initial encounter, Mama Khalid explained that she came from Analalava, where she lived as a schoolgirl until coming to Majunga to attend teacher's college in the 1980s. When she learned I was an anthropologist and historian, she recalled meeting another American anthropologist who lived in Analalava with her husband and small baby in the 1970s. "Mama Vanessa...oh what a good soul she was! (*ô tsara fanahy izy*)!" The realization that she was speaking fondly of my co-chair, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, brought us instant affection and

kindredness. "What a coincidence (*kisendrasendra*)!" I remarked. She politely smiled and nodded. But later, when we knew each other better, Mama'Khalid corrected me, "Our meeting was not happenstance, it was destined (*voa-soratra*, literally 'pre-written')." From our first encounter onward, Mama and Papa'Khalid took me and my family in as kin, relating to us as daughter and son-in-law and regarding us amusingly as their "white" children (*zanako fotsy*).

Mama'Khalid and Papa'Khalid improved and updated their home over the years through savings, modest retirement benefits and remittances sent by their sons residing in France. Their home, unlike many others in the neighborhood, had indoor plumbing and a flush toilet linked to a septic system. Their original latrine, however, remained in their courtyard and was used by their domestic worker, Lanja. Partly because of the substantial material construction of their home (with tile, cement, and lighting fixtures) and its sanitary accoutrements, neighbors and acquaintances speculated that Mama and Papa'Khaled were wealthy (*manam'bola*). And though Mama and Papa'Khalid denied an elite economic status, it is true that their flush toilet was a rarity in the city.

As in countless other cities in the Global South, there is no centralized sewage treatment system in Mahajanga. From its very inception in the early 1900s, Majunga's sanitation infrastructure was designed in the French colonial vision of self-contained (household or communal) latrines emptying into either a privy vault or cesspool, essentially dugout holes in the earth lined with rocks.<sup>1002</sup> Alternatively, latrines in France and in colonial Majunga were configured with moveable steel buckets (*tinettes mobiles*), placed atop or inside a concrete or wood platform. These methods were coexistent and synonymous with systems utilized in many

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<sup>1002</sup> Archives National, Repoblikan'I Madagasikara (herein ANRDM)/IJ 2083-4: Arrondissement de Majunga, "Rapport Annuels Travaux Publics: Commune de Majunga" (1915), and ANRDM/VIIIJ 391-061, Letter 14-V, 29 Janvier 1917, from Chef du Service de la Voirie to the Administrateur-Maire de Majunga.

European and British towns throughout the nineteenth century, and relied heavily on manual labor to empty heaping pails and overflowing cesspools.<sup>1003</sup> Latrines figured centrally in Majunga as French city authorities sought to craft a certain kind of urban, colonial subject who abided by the spatial and bodily norms articulated by French planners, though they were variably accommodated, avoided, and defaced by Majungaise residents throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>1004</sup> During my fieldwork, most middle-class homes had concrete-encased latrines in their courtyards, while poorer residents had simple dugout pit toilets or relieved themselves in the overgrown areas of town or in the sea. Some public latrines existed near the marketplace and post office, but most people avoided them because they were notoriously filthy and ill-kept. Others required payment in exchange for access to toilets, which many in the city could not afford.

The historical organization of sewage disposal in Mahajanga could best be characterized as decentralized, parceled as it is into individual household compounds. In this system, infrastructure does not afford the *movement* of human waste. Unlike sewage systems described elsewhere, there are no pipes, taps or plants linking toilets, households or – indirectly - people to one another.<sup>1005</sup> Shit doesn't flow, but rather accumulates and creates other problems. Excrement

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<sup>1003</sup> Barnes, David, *The Great Stink of Paris and the Nineteenth-Century Struggle against Filth and Germs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2006); Gaillard, Jeanne, *Paris, la ville, 1852-1870: l'urbanisme parisien à l'heure d'Haussmann* (Paris: Champion, 1977); Jacquement, Gérard, "Urbanisme parisien: la bataiole du tout-a-l'égout a la fin du XIXe siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 26 (1979):505-548; Reid, Donald, *Paris Sewers and Sewerman: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Target, Felix, 1878, "On the Main Drainage of Paris, and the utilisation of its Sewage," *Minutes of Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, (London: Institution), 53, 201. Joel Tarr and Clay McMichael indicated that the pail system was unsuccessfully attempted in some American cities, such as New Orleans and Atlanta, "The Evolution of Wastewater Technology and the Development of State Regulation: A Retrospective Analysis," in *Retrospective Technology Assessment* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Press, 1977), 172.

<sup>1004</sup> ANRDM/VIII 391-061, Letter 14-V, 29 Janvier 1917, from Chef du Service de la Voirie to the Administrateur-Maire de Majunga.

<sup>1005</sup> Anand, Nikhil, Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai," *Cultural Anthropology*, 26:4 (2011), 542-564; Chalfin, Brenda, "Public things, excremental politics, and the infrastructure of bare life in Ghana's city of Tema," *American Ethnologist* 41:1 (2014):92-109; Jensen, Casper Bruun 2016 "Pipe Dreams: Sewage Infrastructure and Activity Trails in Phnom Penh," *Ethnos* (2016): 1-21.

stays put in the ground, leaching slowly into the soil over time, but is mostly contained in underground holes and vats. Blockage and stasis is the perpetual state of affairs. In this way, Mahajanga's sanitation system differs from the classic notion of infrastructure as that which 'enables the movement of other matter'.<sup>1006</sup>

If Mahajanga's sewage system challenges conceptions of infrastructure hinging on connection and transmission, it suggests a host of questions about the kinds of relationships afforded by such a material configuration. More specifically, like many infrastructures, Mahajanga's sanitation system is one that is always breaking down. The constructed vats of concrete, stone and mud erode with time, accrued waste, and heavy flooding in the rainy season. The mechanical extractor that once existed in the 1950s and 60s is now either missing or obsolete. Mahajanga's sewage infrastructure, was once-idealized by colonial authorities consisting as it did of platformed latrines, septic tanks and extractors, indeed the past harbingers of modernity.

Today, it exists in an unfolding eruption of decrepitude, conservation, reconstruction, and upkeep. It is in these moments of repair, Steve Jackson urges, that we might find a deeper understanding of the creative, resourceful ways "stability is maintained...rich and robust lives sustained against the weight of centrifugal odds."<sup>1007</sup> This chapter situates a range of historical actors – sanitation workers, inhabitants, royal leaders - in moments of breakdown, repair and maintenance of Mahajanga's sewage system. 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. By infrastructural

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<sup>1006</sup> Larkin, Brian, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42(2013): 329.

<sup>1007</sup> Steven Jackson, "Rethinking Repair" in T. Gillespie, P. Boczkowski and K. Foot (eds) *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 222.

engagement, I mean the processual ways in which people, infrastructures, and material things, become variably and at times increasingly entangled with one another. Building on recent work on infrastructure and cities, this concept takes infrastructural engagements to be corporeal, affective and socio-material encounters through which people, things and places are made and remade.<sup>1008</sup>

Infrastructural engagement departs from Simone's oft-quoted notion of "people as infrastructure," to retain a distinction between the material and socio-political, so that the work of both realms may be illuminated.<sup>1009</sup> Instead, I ask 'when do people become *infrastructurally engaged*?' Under what circumstances are some people involved - either through labor, use, adaptation, or destruction - with infrastructure, and others less so? And what has emerged from these engagements? Here I follow Steve Jackson by taking erosion and repair – in contrast to progress and innovation - as the point of departure, asking what kinds of infrastructural engagements have taken place in the repair and upkeep of Mahajanga's sewage system? Sanitation labor is both restorative and constructive. Those who maintain latrines empty the overflowing shit that abounds, displacing it into the sea or the open street-side channels, and restore septic vats to an earlier state of emptiness. They also at times rebuild the walls, channels and structure of septic tanks to enable the system's longevity. In light of their restorative-constructive work, we might imagine sanitation workers —indeed all repairers of infrastructure-

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<sup>1008</sup> Amin, Ash, "Lively Infrastructure," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 31:7/8 (2014): 137-161; Chalfin, Brenda, "'Wastelandia': Infrastructure and the Commonwealth of Waste in Urban Ghana," *Ethnos* (2016); Chattopadhyay, Swati, *Unlearning the City: Infrastructure in a New Optical Field* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Jensen, Casper Bruun and Atsuro Morita, "Infrastructures as Ontological Experiments" *Ethnos* (2016):1-12; Lancione, Michele and Colin McFarlane "Infrastructural Becoming: Sanitation, Cosmopolitics, and the "Unmaking of Urban Life at the Margins" in I. Farias and B. Anders (eds) *Urban Cosmopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2016); Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics..." 2013.

<sup>1009</sup> Simone, AbdouMaliq, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture*, 16:3 (2004), 407-429.

as ‘repair-makers.’ But in Mahajanga, this work is fraught care, vexed by competing moral norms and the demands of preserving life.

Infrastructural engagements around sanitation have not only been in repair, but also in use and construction. As such, they are bound up with practices of cleanliness and purification. Practices of, and responses to, public urination and defecation, or conversely public bathing, have been constitutive of situational, relational ties between city dwellers, neighbors and kin. At the same time, local constructions of difference – between cōtiers and highlanders, between various ethnic and religious groups, and between newcomers and longstanding residents – were tied to adherence to particular washing techniques thought to be reflective of one’s moral fortitude (or lack thereof). Though these practices are less clearly about the infrastructures at play, they expose the moral underpinnings that inform people’s interactions with sanitation more generally.

This chapter builds on the historic insights offered in Chapter 4 and contends that as latrines became more prevalent, 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 from others. Scholars of Africa have increasingly shown how colonial discourses of racial and ethnic difference, expressive of divergent visions of governance and space, were wrought through political wrangling and intellectual debates.<sup>1010</sup> While rich intellectual histories of the production of difference have emerged, we know less about how

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<sup>1010</sup> Geschiere, Peter, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Brennan, James, *Taiifa; Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012); Glassman, Jonathan, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Hall, Bruce, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Pelican, Michaela “Complexities of indigeneity and autochthony: An African example,” *American Ethnologist* 36:1 (2009):52-65; Prestholdt, Jeremy, “Politics of the Soil: Separatism, Autochthony and Decolonization at the Kenyan Coast,” *Journal of African History*, 55(2014):249-70.



people have forged competing definitions of difference (autochthonous, ethnic, religious) through infrastructural practices. I trace the circulation and adherence of discourses of ethnic and moral difference onto sanitation practices from the 1950s onwards, as city dwellers sought to reconcile the increasing need for maintenance of sewage infrastructure with the debasing nature of that maintenance work. The latter section of the chapter shifts to consider the ways articulations of difference — specifically ethnic and class difference — were threaded throughout popular and public responses to the 1999 cholera epidemic in Mahajanga. There, I track the intertwined discursive, ecological and material forces that gave rise to the epidemic, and probe the ways contemporary sanitation interventions drew on persistent discourses about ethnic practice and difference.

### ***Madi Tay was the Boss of Shit!: Sanitation Labor Regimes and Constructions of Difference***

Madi Tay, characterized in Mama Khalid's narrative above, was not alone. Scores of "Comorian" migrants labored in undesirable city maintenance jobs throughout the twentieth century, but especially during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>1011</sup> Although the ethnonym "Comorians" inadequately captures the multivalent, myriad communities to which these migrants have belonged, I use it, "Ajojo", or "Anjouan" following the usage of those with whom I spoke in Mahajanga. French colonial documents, as well as many contemporary Mahajangaise inhabitants, mistakenly invoked the ethnonym "Comorians" when referring to all those from the Archipelago (comprised of Mayotte, Mwali, Ndzwani, and Ngazidja). French colonial officers noted that those migrating from Ndzwani (Anjouan), preferred not to be called "Comorian," but

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<sup>1011</sup> The complicated history of Comorian migration to and from Mahajanga is addressed in Chapter 5.

rather "Anjouan" (Figure 79)<sup>1012</sup> Historically, as one man explained, Malagasy have not distinguished (*tsy manavaka*) between these communities, grouping them instead under "Comorian" or "Ajojo" (for others, the latter refers only to those from Ngazidja, or Grande Comore).<sup>1013</sup> At any rate, almost all inhabitants agree that "Comorians" came to occupy a critical, dominant position in the city — demographically, culturally and economically by the mid-twentieth century.

By the late 1950s, migrants from the Comorian Archipelago comprised 50% of the Mahajanga's population of about 68,000.<sup>1014</sup> Comorians characterized Mahajanga as a "Comorian city" from the 1950s till the 1970s; the city was estimated to have a larger composition of Comorians than any other city in the world, including Comoros.<sup>1015</sup> While those of Sakalava descent were widely regarded as the autochthones of the region (*tompontany*), Comorians migrated in increasing numbers to the city and provided a steady supply of labor.<sup>1016</sup> Archival sources confirm the mounting population of Comorians over time, the preoccupations of French administrators with the Comorian presence, and the quandaries French colonial officials faced in negotiating rule over an increasingly heterogeneous population.

Contemporary inhabitants in Mahajanga recall that Comorians were eager to work, pursuing a range of employment. Early arrivals from Comores either labored as domestic workers and cooks for Europeans (*mpiasa an'vazaha*), or as city workers charged with sanitation, such as sweeping the streets (*mpamafa lalana*). Others worked as petty traders, dockers and taxi

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<sup>1012</sup> CAOM: Monographie, District Majunga, 1961.

<sup>1013</sup> Interview, J.R. Mahajanga, 22 October 2013.

<sup>1014</sup> Thompson Virginia and Richard Adloff, *The Malagasy Republic: Madagascar Today* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 270; Deschamps, Hubert, *Les Migrations intérieures passées et présentes à Madagascar* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1959), 147.

<sup>1015</sup> Saïd, Mariata Moussa, "Contribution a l'étude des minorités étrangères a Madagascar: Les Comorians de Majunga 1947-1960," *Identity, Culture and Politics*, 1:2 (2007):111.

<sup>1016</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 Anjouan and Ngazidja to Majunga.

drivers.<sup>1017</sup> Still others farmed corn and raised goats. Over time, they came to inhabit an elevated standing in relation to French colonial authorities who favored them for municipal employment, like Historian Gabrielle Hecht described of Merina mineworkers in southern Madagascar.<sup>1018</sup>



Figure 79: “Anjouanais” migrants in Mahajanga, 1904  
(Source: Archives Nationales d’outre mer, Fonds Gallieni, FR ANOM 4PA 135/83)

Hamiz, a forty-something physician and Muslim scholar echoed a common refrain "Comorians sold at the market, oranges, coconuts, meat, everything! All the sellers were Comorian! They were the boat workers and dockers, the fisherman and the taxi drivers. The economy was really in the hands of Comorians! Malagasy did some of this work, but they were in the minority."

Hamiz had grown up in Mahajanga, first in Abattoir where his family rented a home and then in

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<sup>1017</sup> Said, “Contribution a l’étude...”, 2007; 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*. 38-39:113-168.

<sup>1018</sup> Hecht, Gabrielle, “Rupture-Talk in the Nuclear Age: Conjugating Colonial Power in Africa,” *Social Studies of Science* 32:5-6 (2002), 698-704.

Mahavoky where his family built a home (that home would later be lost following the violent conflict of 1976-77).

Largely because he was of mixed descent (with a Comorian father and a Malagasy - Comorian mother) and a widely respected Muslim scholar, Hamiz situated himself in the Muslim-*zanatany* community. When asked about why Comorians were eagerly willing to undertake such a wide range of jobs, Hamiz linked it to Islamic values of labor. He explained, "Allah obliges us to work, as Muslims, so we will work!"<sup>1019</sup> But the choice to labor in municipal jobs, he suggested, was also because of Comorian sentimental attachments to the city. "The reality, despite what people say about Comorians, they really loved Malagasy, and really loved this land. They married Malagasy, built the city together, and they know how to live in community with others (*mahay miaramonina*). This is also why they worked so hard to make this city beautiful...they loved this city." Willingness to work in sanitation was an important economic strategy for some migrants from the Archipelago who found themselves marginalized in their newfound city. But apparently not all Comorians were equally willing to engage with sanitation labor.

Local constructions of servility, industriousness, and humility defined ethnic difference, distinguishing between those from Ndzwani (*Anjouan*) and Ngazidja (*Ajojo*). While Comorians were widely attributed with willingness to do the lower-status work (*asa ambany*), only a select group would undertake sanitation work in the mid-twentieth century. Those originally from Ndzwani (Anjouan) were identified by many as the only ones willing to work as *m'tzaha maji*, cleaning latrines and emptying the moveable steel buckets. Hamiz echoed a widely held idea about the *kinds* of Comorians who worked in sanitation, "Comorians have not been picky about

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<sup>1019</sup> Interview, "Hamiz", Mahajanga, Madagascar, 26 April 2013.

work (*tsy mifidy asa Comorians*), they even cleaned the *visy* (toilet)!<sup>1020</sup> *Anjouans* would come at night, beginning at 10:00pm, and empty the barrels of shit."<sup>1021</sup> While those of Anjouan descent cast these descriptions in valuated terms of the virtuous work ethic of those from Ndzwani, those with Ajojo ancestors tended to frame their commentary around the demeaning aspects of sanitation maintenance. Mama'Khalid (whose father was Ajojo) succinctly surmised, "Anjouan mostly did this denigrating work. Ajojo refused." More broadly, Malagasy of varying backgrounds cast "Anjouans" as hardworking (*mazoto*), more humble (*tsy mibesta*) in contrast to "Ajojo" who were considered less industrious, lazy, and boastful; as one Sakalava man and his daughter put it, "Ajojo were lazier (*kamo*). They didn't even know how to wash clothes (*manasa lamba*) or cook (*mahandro*)..."<sup>1022</sup> While not all Malagasy distinguished between "Anjouan" and "Ajojo," most Malagasy-Comorian *zanatany* did, and they generally forged these distinctions partly from the kinds of work in which one was willing to engage.

### ***The Time of Tsiranana: The Age of Mechanical Extraction***

Comorians were not the only people enterprising in sanitation work. Buried in a heap of documents relating to the Mahajanga municipal decisions from 1930s to the 1940s at the National Archives in Antananarivo, lay tucked a short permit authorizing Ah-thon Antony and his brother to undertake *vidange* (sewerage, or literally "emptying") work in 1937. When I stumbled upon the authorization, I nearly gasped; many friends and research guides in Mahajanga had

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<sup>1020</sup> I note here that "visy" is the common word for latrine or toilet in Mahajanga, from "W.C." (abbreviation for water closet). Although the words for toilet in official Malagasy are "efitrano fivoahana," "lavapiringa," "gabone" and "kabone," I never heard any of these terms used in Mahajanga. When I probed about why "visy" was the word of choice, one man suggested that Malagasy preferred to use foreign (French or in this case British English) variants when discussing sensitive matters such as sex or toileting practices. To use Malagasy terms for these difficult subjects, he explained, risks "breaking the ears" (*manimba sofina*) because the matter is "too hard" (*mafy loatra*). (fieldnotes August 2013).

<sup>1021</sup> Interview, H.D., Mahajanga, Madagascar, 26 April 2013 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>1022</sup> Interview, A.I., Mahajanga, Madagascar, 28 September 2013.

referred to a Monsieur Ah-thon when narrating the city's sanitation history. Finding archival evidence of Ah-thon's existence offered a strange satisfaction, the paper making tangible what had been conjured conversationally. The authorization indicated that Monsieur Antony Ah-thon and his brother were private entrepreneurs of "creole" descent and were granted permission by the city of Majunga to "engage in the work of sewage treatment" in April 1937.<sup>1023</sup> Using a mechanical extractor designed for emptying pits of sewage, Ah-thon and his brother traveled to homes in the city and offered their services. Ah-thon was fondly remembered by present-day residents as a short guy (*madinika*) who arrived in his green truck, promptly pumped out the sewage, and left latrines clean and empty.

After extracting the waste, some recalled that the Ah-Thon brothers disposed of it in Ambondrona, a settlement on the outskirts of town where the University of Mahajanga currently stands. Many recounted that the Ah-thon brothers proffered their services well into the 1960s. One retired school teacher in his seventies remembered that he taught one of the Ah-thon brothers at College Montfort Saint-Gabriel in 1966, and at which time the Ah-thons lived close the famed Zapandis Boulangerie in Majunga Be (the old town). There was some temporal overlap between Madi Tay and his crew and the Ah-Thon brothers in the 1940s to 1960s, but also important distinctions. Though the Ah-Thons were private entrepreneurs, Madi Tay was employed by the city administration. While Madi Tay and his crew manually disposed of the shit-filled steel drums, the Ah-Thons mechanically retrieved waste from underground cement septic tanks (and thus catered to more affluent families).

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<sup>1023</sup> ANRDM/F 47: Arretes et Decision Municipaux (1937-47), Arrete Municipal 111.16, 3 Avril 1937, signed 26 Avril 1937. Note that very few people were identified as "creole" in Mahajanga in colonial documents, and I did not find any living inhabitants in Mahajanga who self-identified as "creole." "Creole" has multiple meanings in Madagascar. Some recalled that the Ah-Thon brothers were of West Indies descent, specifically Antilles, but this is not clear. While on Madagascar's East Coast "creole" denotes those originally born on Reunion island, the Madagascar Guide Annuaire for 1907-8 identifies all those with names "Ah-thon" as of Chinese descent.

But most striking is that the Ah-thons' work was not cast in the same, demoralized terms used to describe Madi Tay and the prisoners' labor of emptying latrine barrels. People often commented that Ah-thon and his brother would work during the daytime since they weren't worried (*tsy vaky loha ireo*) about being watched. Perhaps this was because of the nature of Ah-Thon's infrastructural engagement, relying as it did on mechanical means to extract raw sewerage. Though it's not clear whether the mechanical extractor elicited responses of awe or wonder among spectators, it surely altered the sensorial dimensions of sanitation work, with its hoses and tanks that disguised the revolting appearance and noxious odors of shit and carried it away. Unlike the manual mode of emptying excrement-filled pails, mechanical extraction elongated one's proximity to filth and minimized bodily contact with abject matter. Apparently acting of its own accord, the mechanical extractor could even be said to disseminate the agentive capacity between the operator and machine, disaggregating volition and the shame associated with sanitation work from the vile matter itself.<sup>1024</sup> Through the mechanization of their work, and abetted by their position as relative newcomers to the town, the Ah-thon brothers were relieved of—or protected from—the shame historically associated with sewage extraction.

Contemporary residents often wove wistful recollections of both Madi-Tay and Ah-Thon into larger, nostalgic narratives of the early post-independence moment of the 1960s. This moment, repeatedly described as "fotaona Tsiranana" (the time of Tsiranana, the first post-independence president of Madagascar from 1960 – 1972, see Figure 80), was sentimentally recalled by many contemporary residents as the city's cultural apex, a climatic moment of cultural vibrancy, harmonious ethnic coexistence, and governmental order.<sup>1025</sup> It was also the

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<sup>1024</sup> Latour, *Science in Action*, 130-131, on the automaton.

<sup>1025</sup> The "time of Tsiranana," refers to the period of 1960-1972, under the first post-independence president of Madagascar Philibert Tsiranana. The period under Tsiranana was, however, widely understood as a "neo-colonial" moment which maintained the political and economic configurations of colonialism and the dominance of French

"cleanest" time (*fotaona madira indrindray*) that people could remember in the city's history. People of varied background attributed the cleanliness of the city to the Comorian presence. As one man in his early sixties of Sakalava background exclaimed, "Before, the streets were clean, everywhere was clean thanks to the Comorians!"<sup>1026</sup> A city administrator in his late fifties recalled longingly that "the city was clean then, in the time of the Comorians..."<sup>1027</sup> If the grouping of Tsiranana, Comorian migrants and a clean city served to demarcate a chronological moment, it also indexed a particular temporal register. Those old enough to recall Tsiranana



Figure 80: President Philibert Tsiranana, at inauguration of Lycée Tsiranana in Mahajanga, Madagascar (ca. 1960s) (Source: Archives Hotel de Ville, Mahajanga)

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interests was deeply contested by activists in the early 1970s. The 'time of Tsiranana' and the lively popular culture of Mahajanga in the 1960s are explored in Chapter 7.

<sup>1026</sup> "Taloha, manadio ny lalana, manadio rehetra a grace de Comorians..." Interview, P.K. 29 October 2012.

<sup>1027</sup> Interview with J.R., Mahajanga, Madagascar, 22 October 2014.



narrated their contemporary sanitation situation in relation to the "time of Tsiranana" - often linked with the "time of Comorians" - rather than chronologies of colonialism and postcolonialism; this temporal frame overlapped for some with a temporality which linked them to their ancestors and future progeny.

The "time of Comorians", furthermore, was animated by anecdotal narratives describing key protagonists such as Madi Tay, Ah-Thon, and another man - Madi Sinoa. Madi Sinoa was recounted as an important figure in the material cleanliness of the city during the 1970s. Madi Sinoa, whose nickname reflected both his Comorian background (Madi, a nickname for Mohamed) and his supposedly narrow eyes thought to resemble those of Chinese (Sinoa), held a respected position in the city administration charged with sanitation development. The story went that Madi Sinoa had been a captain of a seafaring vessel which traveled between Mahajanga and France for many years. While docked in Mahajanga, he was approached by a highlander (*bourzany*) man who pleaded with Madi Sinoa to keep him onboard as a stowaway till they reached France. Madi Sinoa agreed, and he hid and protected the man, bringing him safely to France's shores. This man went on to pursue advanced education in France, and later returned to Madagascar where he attained a prestigious administrative post in the central government under Tsiranana. Years passed and Madi Sinoa retired from seafaring. One day, the highlander searched for and found Madi Sinoa, asking him if he remembered him? When Madi Sinoa couldn't recall, the man explained their shared history and granted Madi Sinoa the directorship for the modernization of the city's sewerage system. According to some, Madi Sinoa accepted the position and worked energetically to transform the city's sanitation away from the steel drum, moveable bucket system to one of septic tanks (*fosse septic*). While comprehensive success with

this changeover was apparently elusive, he was attributed with upholding the cleanliness of the city, made visible in the swept streets and cleared canals for storm water.<sup>1028</sup>

Sometime in the 1970s, however, the mechanical sewerage extractor machine broke. The Ah-thon brothers left the city. And Comorians' presence in Mahajanga was increasingly contested by more recent Malagasy migrants in Mahajanga, notably those from the island's southeast who, though from different ethnic backgrounds, were collectively known in the city as *Betsirebaka*. Betsirebaka men were first recruited by French colonial authorities to work on tobacco and rice plantations in the northwest of Madagascar in the 1920s, and later in factories around Mahajanga. In time they grew to a sizeable portion of the migrant population and worked in certain manual labor niches such as rickshaw drivers, dockers, and guardians, thus occupying a marginalized position in the city's political economy.<sup>1029</sup> In December 1976, a dispute involving a Betsirebaka child who defecated on a Comorian neighbor's property exploded into a three-day violent conflict between "Comorians" and "Malagasy" which rocked the town, leaving some 1,000 Comorians dead and 15,000 fleeing the country.<sup>1030</sup> During the *rotaka*, which took in the centrally-located quarters most densely inhabited by Comorians such as Abattoir, Mahabibo, and Manga, houses were torched (often with inhabitants inside), mosques were desecrated, and Comorians were chased and killed with axes, sticks, and machetes.<sup>1031</sup> Though Betsirebaka are widely perceived by contemporary residents in the city to have been the perpetrators of the violent riots against Comorians, sources suggest that other groups were also involved in the

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<sup>1028</sup> Interview, P.K. 14 February 2013, Mahajanga, Madagascar. Later, Madi Sinoa was thought of more suspiciously, because of his seeming impunity during the Comorian *rotaka*. Some suspected he was involved in the *rotaka*, which explained how he was able to roam the streets without harm or retribution.

<sup>1029</sup> Guenier, Noel, *Chemins de l'islam à Madagascar* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 45-46.

<sup>1030</sup> The memories of this conflict will be explored in Chapter 10.

<sup>1031</sup> Gueunier, Noel, *Chemins de l'islam*, 1994; 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*. 38-39:113-168.

pogrom.<sup>1032</sup> The 1976-77 *rotaka* signified a stark temporal and spatial rupture marked by the loss of a vibrant, sizeable group of Mahajanga's inhabitants and the closing of a nostalgic, ambiance-filled chapter of the city's life. It was also an aberration of physical violence in the island's relatively peaceful history.

In the absence of the Ah-thon brothers and the Comorian workforce, Betsirebaka migrants filled the labor gap in sewage maintenance. During my fieldwork in 2012-2014, migrant laborers from southeast Madagascar worked tirelessly in teams of 2 and 3, during the protection of night, to manually clean out latrines. In the absence of a mechanical sewerage extractor, laborers known as *mpanary tay* (those who discard excrement) or *mpangala tay* (those who take away excrement) manually removed the contents of pit toilets and septic tanks, using crowbars, shovels, buckets and pitchers. To conserve the existing cement or wood standing structure and septic tank or cesspool, workers sometimes dug a new hole in the household courtyard where they deposited the retrieved waste. In cases of elevated latrines, they drilled a hole on the side of the sewerage vat and filled buckets with sludge that spewed forth. Sometimes they disposed of the sludge in nearby canals or in the sea. *Mpanary tay* poured petrol in and around the sewage pit, in an attempt to mask the foul odors; but they also rubbed their bodies with petrol to prevent the adherence of odors and sludge matter on their skin. Workers labored with little clothing, often just shorts or a *lambahoany* wrapped at the waist, to avoid the permeation of noxious odors in their attire.

People commonly perceived *mpanary tay* as drunkards, which they attributed to their weak character. At least some workers heavily imbibed before and during the hours-long

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<sup>1032</sup> Radifison, "Conflit ethniques," 2007; Celton, Marie, "Les affrontements entre Malgache et Comorians en 1976 à Majunga: événement isolé ou échec de l'intégration d'une minorité ethnique immigrée?" in C. Allibert (ed) *Les Comorians à Majunga: Histoire, migrations, émeutes, Études Océan Indien*. 38-39:169-319.

operation, which was undoubtedly an effective coping technique for dealing with vile and shameful matters. But others did not. Nonetheless, as they observed these laborers, residents of varied socio-economic backgrounds drew at times on moralizing discourses to criticize the state's failure to provide for sanitation (*tsy mikarakara ny fanzakana*). But many also invoked a moral register to differentiate themselves from the low-class, 'othered' migrants who would sink down to do the work of removing the filth of the city. Some remarked that only the very poor (*maskiny*) or insane (*adaladala*) would consider such work. Tsiavono, the city administrator quoted earlier, remarked that "Nowadays, it's difficult to find anyone to do this work [of clearing latrines - *mangala tay*]. Maybe they're ashamed, maybe they'll do it but insist on wearing a mask! These days, only Betsirebaka and Tandroy will do that work. But this is especially *fady* for Sakalava (*pause*)...you'll never find Sakalava doing this work."<sup>1033</sup>

As for the laborers themselves, it's unclear how they understood their position. Did they find solidarity with one another in their marginal position? Did they reject or rework these stigmatizing discourses.<sup>1034</sup> Some evidence from research conducted in 2010 by the multinational development organization Institut Régional de Coopération Développement (IRCOD), as part of a larger sanitation initiative, suggests that sanitation workers (described in the report as “*opérateurs de vidange*”) were primarily male, in their thirties and forties, and from a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds.<sup>1035</sup> While roughly 40% of the workers consider themselves occasional sanitation laborers, 60% identified cleaning latrines as their primary form of employment.<sup>1036</sup> And though sanitation workers in IRCOD's study cited physical strength and

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<sup>1033</sup> Interview, “Tsiavono”, 15 January 2014, Mahajanga, Madagascar.

<sup>1034</sup> This is envisioned as part of a future research project.

<sup>1035</sup> Larvido, Alix and Pierre-Henri Dodane, 2011 "Assainissement des matières fécales de la ville de Mahajanga: Caractérisation du secteur informel de la vidange des latrines dans la ville," Institut Régional de Coopération Développement (IRCOD), p. 27.

<sup>1036</sup> Ibid.

technical knowledge as important attributes to carry out latrine clearing, many also signaled mental fortitude, described as the need for "having courage."<sup>1037</sup> They reported working primarily in the dry season when the soil was easier to dig and transport. Surprisingly few workers experienced ill health effects from their work. The comparatively lucrative wages earned through sanitation work were undoubtedly what compelled laborers to undertake such difficult work. For cleaning a single latrine over the course of one to two days, workers in 2010 could expect to receive roughly Malagasy Ariary (MGA) 20,000 (approx. USD\$9.50); while the average daily wage in Mahajanga was MGA 1,000 - 2,000 ariary (approx USD \$.50 - \$1.00). The parceled configuration of sewage infrastructure in the city (as opposed to a system of underground pipes and sewers) has thus enabled not only income generation for laborers, but also an active, informal economy that provides critical services to hundreds of thousands of people.

Threading together these contemporary experiences of sanitation work are the conjunctural moments by which some people have *become infrastructural* through their labor. It was through the convergence of multiple events, interventions and practices in Mahajanga over time that engendered the making of infrastructural people. Among these were the introduction of a model of individualized cesspools and septic tanks; the disrepair of the city's mechanical extractor; the teeming city full of overflowing latrines; and a group of marginalized migrants willing to serve as infrastructural laborers. That the labor of sanitation repair-makers is highly gendered as masculine work, and that migrants and newcomers are the ones who have historically performed this disagreeable work resonates with the labor regimes for sanitation

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<sup>1037</sup> Ibid. Unfortunately, the Malagasy terms used in these instances were not cited by the researchers.

elsewhere on the African continent.<sup>1038</sup> In these moments where men engaged with the technologies of filth removal, the 'otherness' of certain ethnically defined groups was tacked onto their sanitation labor role, further entrenching perceptions among some of the otherness of "Anjouan," "Betsirebaka" or low-class bodies. At the same time, these circumstances generated not only a new labor regime to fulfill the needs of the city, but also - for some - a transformed sense of their own human worth.

### *Affective Conditions*

We had known Alain for some time before I asked to interview him in October 2013. In his early fifties, married with three children, Alain was short, agile, and quick with a smile. A skilled electrician, he had helped us with some irksome electrical wiring problems in our home over the span of several months. I had wanted to learn more about his migration journey to Mahajanga and his experiences of daily life in the city since he settled here in the early 1980s. One afternoon, we talked together on our verandah and he recounted how he was born in Mandritsara, north of Mahajanga, into a comfortable family well-supported by his father's position as a schoolteacher and his mother's access to land. Our conversation moved fluidly along, as he recalled how he migrated to Mahajanga in his early twenties and quickly secured work at SOTEMA, the behemoth cloth manufacturer, after easily passing a test as a mechanic. He worked there until 1998 when the factory closed. In the years that followed, he'd worked intermittently at the French School, as a guard for a *vazaha* woman, and as an electrician and handyman.

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<sup>1038</sup> Van Der Geest, Sjaak, "The night-soil collector: Bucket latrines in Ghana," *Postcolonial Studies* 5:2 (2002), 203.

But when I asked him more generally about the historical linkages between kinds of work and kinds of people in the city, our conversation shifted entirely. He remarked on how in the past, Tandroy and Betsirebaka worked as *pousse-pousse* (rickshaw) drivers. "It was Comorians who did the work of cleaning the city," he said slowly, "Comorians did most of the filthy work (*asa maloto*) of emptying the latrines (*visy*).<sup>1039</sup> They usually worked at night, he explained, because "perhaps they were ashamed (*mety menatra*)." "Who does this work now?" I posed. Suddenly, Alain grew silent. After some moments, he began sobbing. He confessed that in recent years, he was obliged to clean his family's latrine, that there was no other choice because of the family's poverty, and that this brought him deep shame. The profundity of Alain's expression of sorrow hung in the hot, thick air, seemingly beyond words. I sat helplessly with Alain, filled with regret for ignorantly probing into such a sensitive spot. At the same time, I was grateful that Alain had revealed to me the far-reaching affective experiences of sanitation work in the city. The labor of emptying the septic pit was loaded and layered, and it frayed Alain's fundamental sense of what it meant to be human.

Alain's maintenance of his family's latrine was an act of care and distasteful obligation, I might suggest. But it came with a great cost. Alain had not thought of himself as "that kind of person" who would clean the septic tank, and doing so challenged his fundamental sense of himself as a dignified person of respectable standing. That he originated from a land-holding, educated family, with a reputable position in his home area, added force to his deflated sense of his possibilities in the world. Long-standing histories of distinctions between descendants of slaves and free in northwest Madagascar were never directly referenced in the context of sanitation by the people with whom I spoke, but those histories remained in the background

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<sup>1039</sup> Interview "Alain", 25 October 2013, Mahajanga, Madagascar.

coloring the hierarchies of labor and class. Cleaning latrines would have been most definitely perceived as many in the city akin to labors carried out by slaves, as work that transforms one into a slave (*mampandevo*).<sup>1040</sup> While I met few others who would confess to cleaning their household's latrine, some noted that their landlord conducted the service to conserve funds. Even if a family could afford to pay laborers, finding willing workers could be troublesome. Some explained that if the work was contained to a courtyard (*lakoro*), (meaning that the current latrine and the secondary hole for depositing the excess shit were in bounds of the household compound), workers would be more willing to consider. But, if the work involved carrying the shit outside the courtyard, it would be nearly impossible to find a sanitation worker. The visibility and containment of sanitation work, then, were pivotal criteria by which laborers gauged their willingness to accommodate the request. Being identified as a sanitation worker left one vulnerable to the kind of shame and judgment that could permeate not semi-public and thus personal appraisals of one's character.

Visibility and personhood surfaced in other ways around defecation practices. People in Mahajanga, as Naipaul once described in India, practiced selective "blindness" when confronted with people defecating or urinating in public.<sup>1041</sup> I first observed this when walking with my friend, Abdou, through town. After passing quite closely to a woman toileting in an overgrown lot near a marketplace, and finding myself embarrassed by the sight, my friend kept our leisurely pace, talking as though he had not seen the woman. Later, when we discussed that moment, he remarked on the lack of toilets in town and the necessity of public acts of urination and defecation. I later experienced this myself when needing to urinate on long taxi-brousse trips from Antananarivo to Mahajanga; as the women stepped just into the bushy areas to relieve

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<sup>1040</sup> This was also true in eastern Madagascar; personal communication, Genese Sodikoff, 21 June 2016.

<sup>1041</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness*, (New York: Macmillan, 1964).



ourselves, the men looked elsewhere as though we were invisible. Averting one's eyes helped to preserve the dignity of both the viewer and the squatter. In Mahajanga, it was also an acknowledgement of the shared commonality of bodily functions and of the limitations of an urban environment in which the spatial contours and infrastructural constraints of everyday life render venturing into the bush (*ambanivohitra*) impossible. Selective blindness was - in short - a tactic for honoring the humanity of the viewer and the defecator.

By contrast, acts of purification and cleansing which served to enhance one's personhood were often publically performed. Much as Kathryn Guerts described in Ghana, I frequently observed how small children in Mahajanga were bathed out in the open of the courtyard, for all neighbors and bystanders to witness (Figure 81).<sup>1042</sup> Mothers bathed their children vigorously, lathering them copiously and scrubbing them energetically, while some children patiently endured and others squealed in delight. Children were taught at a young age, from three or four years, how to thoroughly bathe themselves using the least amount of water and generating the most amount of lather. We were repeatedly chastised by friends and neighbors for allowing our young boys (ages 2 and 5) to venture out and about without thoroughly washing and donning spotless attire each time, something we found nearly impossible to manage with them in the perpetually muddy or dusty terrain. "You don't want people to point and say you're dirty!" one friend exasperatedly exclaimed. Bodily filth or uncleanness was framed as poor practice or habit (*ratsy fomba*) and as a violation of the norms of self care, rather than linked to discourses of hygiene and health.

But washing - and methods for doing so - were not neutral. Local constructions of ethnic and religious differences were tied to particular techniques used for washing. Muslim *zanatany*

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<sup>1042</sup> Geurts, Kathryn Linn, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002), 92.

mothers described the importance of instructing their daughters in proper washing methods to use after urination and defecation, always utilizing one's left hand and washing from front to back. Mastering genital washing techniques was a signifier of Muslim personhood, even for young girls; and continual practice of genital washing after toileting for adults was a marker of proper Muslim, *zanatany-ness*. Some older *zanatany* women grumbled about the laziness of the younger generation of women concerning genital washing. Mama'Clara, a robust, convivial mother of five in her fifties, explained, "the problem with younger women today is that they don't wash themselves properly, they don't enter the vagina and wash with *alamo* (a kind of herb), the way the older generations of women would do."<sup>1043</sup>



Figure 81: A mother observes her young child learning to wash himself, Mahajanga 2013  
(Photographer: David Epstein)

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<sup>1043</sup> "ny olana amin'ny tanora am'zao, tsy mandeha anatan'y, tsy manasa tsara amin'ny *alamo* anatan'[ny fivaviana]" Interview, Mama'Clara, Mahajanga, Madagascar, 31 October 2013.

For many *zanatany*, the practice of using toilet paper to cleanse oneself after urination or defecation was not only hardly hygienic, but plainly disgusting and filthy. Those known to use toilet paper - highlanders (*bourzany*) and *vazaha* - were variably considered by *zanatany* to be lazy, of bad hygiene, and lacking in moral fortitude. Karana were thought by some Malagasy to be orderly in their outwards appearance, but unkempt and filthy underneath. The typical dress of Bohra (one of the Muslim, karana communities) women, namely a special style of a flowing, ornately embroidered *rida* which covered one's head, shoulders and limbs, was said to mask the unwashed body underneath. Those identifying themselves as *côtiers* generally described that they exercised more scrupulous hygiene than highlanders, which some attributed to the extremely hot coastal climate that necessitated frequent bathing. The laziness *côtiers* attributed to highlanders' personal cleanliness was manifest in the term for a quick, incomplete wash up, a "manao fisekinin *bourzany*" (to wash like a 'bourzany;' *bourzany* is a pejorative term for highlanders).

Toileting practices served, furthermore, as among the key criteria by which newcomers might be accepted and accommodated into established family households. Long-standing *zanatany* families who had acquired land or the means to build additional dwellings on their compound over time, and who were known to have an available rental property, were often approached by newcomers seeking housing. Several *zanatany* landlords (*tompontany*) explained to me that toileting practices were one of the critical indices in discerning appropriate renters from the pool of prospective tenants. If the inquiring seeker was a highlander, it was almost certain that they utilized toilet paper, rather than washing themselves. Toilet habits were not necessarily the single most important criteria for tenancy; rather newcomers were gauged by *zanatany* landlords by their broader cultural habitus, which encompassed dietary preferences,

bodily comportment, and *fadys*. But for many *zanatany*, cohabitation with tenants upholding problematic everyday comportments including the consumption of pork and alcohol, (im)modest dress, and the use of toilet-paper was considered intolerable and these prospective tenants were politely turned down.

### ***Latrines in the Time of Cholera***

In March 1999, cholera struck Mahajanga. Having never appeared on the island in remembered times, the epidemic took doctors, public health officials, and the various publics by great surprise.<sup>1044</sup> Public health researchers attributed the arrival of the epidemic to the long-standing maritime routes between northwest Madagascar and the Comores Islands, where cholera had been active since 1998.<sup>1045</sup> The Malagasy Epidemiological Surveillance team erected sanitary barricades at the Mahajanga - Antananarivo provincial border, where oral doxycycline was routinely administered to travelers.<sup>1046</sup> Despite these efforts, the epidemic quickly spread across the island and overwhelmed the country's health system.<sup>1047</sup> To further exacerbate the crisis, Medecine Sans Frontieres (MSF, Doctors without Borders) abandoned its operation in the midst of the epidemic citing government meddling in their work.<sup>1048</sup> The Ministry of Health, for

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<sup>1044</sup> Some epidemiologists contended that cholera had never before struck in the island's history, but one historian has suggested the presence of a cholera epidemic in Mahajanga in 1870 (Campbell, *Economic History of Madagascar*, 150).

<sup>1045</sup> Duval, P., G. Champetier de Ribes, H. Ranjalahy, M. Quilici, J. Fournier, 1999, "Correspondence: Cholera in Madagascar," *The Lancet*, 353:9169, 2068; *World Health Organization*, 1998, "Cholera in the Comoros Islands", Weekly Epidemiological Report, 73:62 as quoted in Duval et al, 1999.

<sup>1046</sup> Dromigny, Jacques-Albert, Olivat Rakoto-Alson, Davidra Rajaonatahina, René Migliani, Justin Ranjalahy, and Philippe Mauclère, 2002, "Emergence and rapid Spread of Tetracycline-Resistant *Vibrio cholerae* Strains, Madagascar," *Emerging Infectious Disease*, 8:3(2002):336-338.

<sup>1047</sup> Dromigny et al, "Emergence and rapid spread...", 2002. Some however maintained that these efforts at "prevention" inadvertently hastened the spread of cholera. The routine and extensive administration of doxycycline at the sanitation border, as well as in hospitals and clinics, had the unforeseen and grave consequence of triggering the spread of tetracycline-resistant strains of cholera. See also Ahmad, Khabir, "Anger over handling of Madagascar's cholera epidemic," *The Lancet*, 4 March 2000: 817

<sup>1048</sup> "Madagascar cholera epidemic," 22 February 2000, *Medecins San Frontieres*, accessed on May 1, 2017 at [www.msf.org/en/article/madagascar-cholera-epidemic](http://www.msf.org/en/article/madagascar-cholera-epidemic).

their part, issued statements defending itself against the patronizing, "dictatorial manner" of MSF, who they claimed treated the country's medical authorities as unable to manage disease.<sup>1049</sup> In total, the epidemic killed some 1,100 people and infected 20,000 more in the span of a year.<sup>1050</sup>

Enunciations of difference - specifically ethnic and class difference - were threaded throughout popular and public responses to the cholera epidemic in Mahajanga. City dwellers recalled that the cholera outbreak of 1999 was partly attributed to the irksome persistence of *jangoany* (outdoor defecation) and noncompliance with latrine-use. *Jangoany* continued to be widely linked to inhabitants of Sakalava and Tandroy descent as evidence of these groups' ostensible tenacity in holding to 'traditional' ways, though was undoubtedly practiced by a wide range of city inhabitants out of choice or necessity. During the outbreak, city administrators came house-to-house inspecting for the presence of a latrine in or adjacent to each dwelling.<sup>1051</sup> If city dwellers used latrines, so the logic went, excrement would not spread and transmit the dangerous bacteria *vibrio cholerae*. Rumors spread during the cholera epidemic, that some "Sakalava" residents constructed latrines only to satisfy the inspectors, but continued to defecate in the open.<sup>1052</sup> Pastor Tovo, an educated pastor originally from the highlands (in his late forties) articulated this widely held assumption, "Sakalava, they have a taboo (*fady*) against making caca in the same place. During the cholera epidemic, the state (*fanjakana*) required everyone to dig a hole (*mangady lavaka*) and make caca there. But for the Sakalava, this was impossible (*tsy*

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<sup>1049</sup> Ahmad, "Anger over handling", 817.

<sup>1050</sup> Champetier de Ribes, C, L. Rakotonjanabelo, R. Migliani, P. Pfister, L. Rakotondramarina, J. Ranjalahy, H. Ratzimbazafimahefa Rahantalalo, 2000, "Bilan d'un an d'évolution de l'épidémie de choléra à Madagascar de mars 1999 à mars 2000," *Cahiers d'études et de recherches francophones/Santé*, 10(4).

<sup>1051</sup> Fieldnotes, 26 March 2013. Interview, P.T. 29 March 2013, Mahajanga, Madagascar.

<sup>1052</sup> Similar practices abounded in southeast Madagascar during the exact cholera epidemic, see Marqui, H. Lamaison, 2014 "Lutte Contre le Cholera, ou Contre la Culture?" *Health, Culture and Society, suppl. Madagascar: Past, Present, and Future*, 7:1, 61-65.

*mety*). So, when the state came to inspect their homes, they would show them the hole, but they didn't actually use it."<sup>1053</sup>

But the epidemic emerged from a complicated constellation of circumstantial factors. The city's rapid growth has entailed the expansion of its spatial parameters, and migrants increasingly sought out available land in the low-lying, marshy areas especially around the Metzinger Valley (*Vallon de Metzinger*). The Metzinger Dike (*Digue de Metzinger*) was constructed sometime in the early twentieth century (see Figure 82). Named after the famed General Metzinger who led the devastating invasion of French troops into Madagascar in 1895,



Figure 82: Map of Mahajanga region (note Metzinger Dike)

<sup>1053</sup> Interview, M.K., Mahajanga, Madagascar. 29 March 2013. This was reiterated in my interviews with Felix (see below) 12 and 14 August 2013, and several other administrators and inhabitants.

the dikes are historical artifacts holding glimpses into the colonial past.<sup>1054</sup> They were designed to prevent flooding of the adjoining land, through valve fittings that serve to prevent excessive seawater from entering the residential areas during high tide. Indeed for some time the dike was apparently efficacious in protecting the "popular" (low-income) neighborhoods during the rainy



Figure 83: Map of Mahajanga, delineated by neighborhoods

<sup>1054</sup> General Metzinger, of the War Ministry and captain of the *Shamrock*, landed with his troops in late February 1895 and set to work clearing the ill-fated path to Antananarivo. M. Barbou, *L'Expedition de Madagascar*, (Paris: Hachette, 2016 [1896]), 306-307.

season. In 1939, for example, colonial reports mentioned that while the neighborhood of Morafeno experienced some flooding in the rainy season, it was protected from severe flooding or submersion by the Metzinger Dike.<sup>1055</sup>

From 1955, as the streams of migration continued and intensified, the city apparently prohibited domestic construction in the marshy areas surrounding the dike, though this was rarely enforced until much later. The population growth of the city overwhelmed the frail infrastructures and presented new ecological, economic and infrastructural challenges. Just after independence in 1961, the city's population was 47,950.<sup>1056</sup> By 1975, the population climbed to 83,815, and by 2005 the commune estimated some 250,000 inhabitants, though some sources estimate as much as 300,000 - 350,000 residents.<sup>1057</sup> The upper part of the marshlands (Tsararano Ambony, Tsararano Ambany, and Mahavoky) were first inhabited, and some sources suggest initially by Comorians and later by Betsirebaka (following the 1976-77 rotaka) (see Figure 83).<sup>1058</sup> Later, migrants gradually settled on the even more precarious waterside regions of Antanimisaja, Fiofio, and Antanambao Sotema. Today these densely crowded settlements, experience severe flooding in the rainy season (see Figure 84).<sup>1059</sup> Majungais inhabitants understand these congested, low-lying areas as unhealthy and undesirable places to live, half-jokingly referring to them as places where one must *mananga zipo* (to roll up one's pants) during

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<sup>1055</sup> ANRDM, Série D: Affaires Politique, D 454, "Repertoire Alphabetique des Localites du District de Majunga," 12 October 1939.

<sup>1056</sup> ANRDM, 268, Monographie de Majunga, (1961).

<sup>1057</sup> Commune urbaine de Mahajanga, "Monographie de la Commune Urbaine de Mahajanga," 2005, 7. In 2011, the Commune estimated 319,644 inhabitants in Mahajanga I and II (the latter comprises the outlying areas of Vallon Metzinger). Accessed online at <http://www.boeny.gov.mg/2014/09/population/#more-121> 20 June 2016.

<sup>1058</sup> Andriamanga, Aubin Rodolphe Heritiana, "Les Impacts de la Renovation du Systeme D'Evacuation D'Eaux à Mahajanga" (Masters thesis, Université d'Antananarivo, Département de Géographie, 2006), 52.

<sup>1059</sup> Estimates of the inhabitants of this areas have ranged from 30,000 - 110,000. "Le Difficile Héritage du Général Metzinger," L'Alsace, 29 Juillet 2003. See Larvido and Dodane, IRCOD report.



the rainy season (*asara*). It was precisely in this region that the epidemic took its greatest toll, particularly in the "second phase" of the epidemic between November 1999 and March 2000.<sup>1060</sup>

The historic configuration of Mahajanga's sanitation system was also an important factor in the epidemic. The decentralized sewage system installed in colonial times has meant that latrine construction and maintenance falls upon the household, rather than the municipality, city or national government. Health officials and development workers reported in the early 2000s that 80% of the homes in the Metzinger Valley had inadequate latrines; most households relied



Figure 84: Mahavoky Neighborhood, Rainy Season (Source: David Epstein)

on several, shallow dugout pit latrines.<sup>1061</sup> And when latrines in these areas were full, they either spilled out with heavy rains or residents were obliged to discard the contents locally, usually at

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<sup>1060</sup> Champetier et al, "Bilan d'une an..."

<sup>1061</sup> These latrines may be only 50-80 cm in depth. Andriamanga, "Les Impacts de la Renovation du Systeme D'Evacuation D'Eaux à Mahajanga" 54.

the water's edge.<sup>1062</sup> Water drainage, furthermore, has been a perpetually troublesome issue for city engineers. Water regularly pools year round due to the shallow depth of the city's water table (50 cm), the level terrain and the relative ineffectiveness of aging drainage canals built mostly during French colonial and early postcolonial times (1960s).<sup>1063</sup> Of the roughly twenty kilometers of existing storm water drainage canals, engineers estimated in 2006 that 40% are non-functioning because of irresolvable clogging with debris and the city's sandy soil, deteriorated inner walls and broken or missing slab covers.<sup>1064</sup> The heavy rains inundating the city during the rainy season, coupled with a malfunctioning and insufficient drainage system, the superficial water table depth and parceled, pit toilets exacerbated the devastating results of the 1999 cholera epidemic.



Figure 85: A man depicts jangoany, from the conference to end Open Air Defecation, 24-25 November 2011, Mahajanga, Madagascar; the caption reads “demonstration of the denounced, poor habit of “jangoany” (Source: L'Express Madagascar, 29 Novembre 2011)

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<sup>1062</sup> Andriamanga, "Les Impacts de la Renovation..",

<sup>1063</sup> Andriamanga, "Les Impacts de la Renovation...", 10, 15.

<sup>1064</sup> Andriamanga, "Les Impacts de la Renovation...", 20-22.

Even after the cholera epidemic, however, local constructions of "Sakalava" ethnic habitus and predicaments of sanitation persisted. As recently as 2011, national newspapers reported that the problem of "un peu partout" (open air defecation) was relentless and endangering the economic, health and aesthetic value of the city.<sup>1065</sup> To address the problem, city administrators and development workers requested Sakalava authorities to support their efforts to educate the city's recalcitrant wrongdoers. Over a two-day "training" in November 2011, Sakalava royal figures (*mpanjaka*) were gathered together in the upscale Roches Rouges hotel in Mahajanga to discuss the problem and identify solutions (See Figure 85). With a recently awarded grant from the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF), city leaders hoped to garner the influence of Sakalava leaders to eradicate *jangoany* throughout the province within four years. Newspaper reports proclaimed that this was a "great first for the Sakalava tribe." Sakalava leaders were apparently selected to inaugurate the campaign against open-air defecation because they were "the majority group in the city."<sup>1066</sup> But the sheer heterogeneous ethnic composition of the city, and the complex ways people construct and practice ethnic affiliations, complicate this simplistic contention. That Sakalava royal leaders were singled out is not only problematic because it narrowly constructs a single, coherent ethnic group and then assumes that group's culpability in the sanitation crisis, but also because it concealed the structural, ecological, and infrastructural forces shaping the city's sanitation situation.

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<sup>1065</sup> L'Express Madagascar, 29 Novembre 2011.

<sup>1066</sup> Ibid.



Figure 86: Wall mural admonishing public defecation, Petite Plage, Mahajanga 2013. The quote reads “Please! Don't defecate here, use the toilet there! (Photographer: David Epstein)

### ***Stagnant Infrastructure: On the Limits of Septic Tanks***

When I first met with Felix, the Interim Director in the Department of Urban Planning of Mahajanga, he looked weary but optimistic.<sup>1067</sup> It was August 2013, and my friend Lezo and I had come to his office in Marolaka inquiring about the city's urban planning history and contemporary challenges. Sitting at his modest desk in his cavernous, vacant, faded seagreen office, Felix was surrounded by towering stacks of files filled with applications for building permits (*permit de construire*). He welcomed us warmly and motioned for us to sit directly

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<sup>1067</sup> Interview, “Felix,” Mahajanga, Madagascar, 12 August and 14 August 2013.

across his desk in two steel and vinyl chairs. Our hour-long meeting was punctuated by a steady flow of interruptions from permit applicants inquiring about the status of their dossiers, as well



Figure 87: Wall mural instructing on hygiene, Petite Plage, Mahajanga 2013; “Clean & Dirty,” the caption reads, “Why are you sick again?” and “Because! I’m really dirty.” (Photographer: David Epstein)

as city administrators and assistants; indeed, Felix's presence seemed central to the smooth functioning of this urban planning department. The buzz of activity in Felix's office testified to the vibrant house-building boom taking place across the city, in which so many households were engaged in long-term building projects which often stretched across years. Despite this heavy workload and incessant demands from applicants, Felix maintained his composure and courteously received all those who entered his office.

When I asked Felix about the city's urban plan, he plainly replied that until very recently "there was no plan." He and other civil workers in the city's administration with whom I spoke vaguely recalled that there was an urban plan dating to the late 1960s, and some showed me concurrent master plans imprinted on overlapping, wispy vellum maps of the city. The original master plans for the city dated from the 1940s to 1960s, he explained, and plotted out the popular quarters of Abattoir, Manga, Morafeno, as well the affluent neighborhoods of Majunga Be, Mangarivotra, and La Corniche. But the newer settlements of Tsararano Anosy Kely, Fiofio, Antanimisaja, and Aranta were never zoned as residential neighborhoods, and people have constructed their homes right up to the water's edge thus violating the city's regulation of a 10 meter minimum distance from the waterside. Such constructions were considered illegal and the state, Felix described, has the right to forcibly move these inhabitants; but after the country's political crisis of 2009, the authorities rarely exercised this provision, in order to maintain harmony during political times that were now precarious and disorderly (*fotoana tsy milamina*).

Beginning in 2013, however, a new urban plan has emerged from a partnership between the city of Mahajanga and a collective of multinational non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which envisioned two large-scale projects. The first was the construction of 550 household latrines throughout the city and 15 public blocks of latrines around Metzinger Valley, and the second consisted of the clearance of the blocked storm water canals and public education about proper waste disposal (*curage des canals*) (Figure 88).<sup>1068</sup> The commissioning of public wall murals in the beach resort area around Petite Plage, instructing people to use toilets (despite their glaring absence) apparently took place alongside these efforts (see Figures 86 and 87). While the outcome and the popular responses of Mahajanga's overlapping residential, ethnic and religious

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<sup>1068</sup> The three NGOs involved are: Institut Régional de Coopération Développement (IRCOD), Assainissement à Mahajanga (ASSMA) and Enda Océan Indien (Enda OI).

communities to these projects are still unclear, a third proposed project failed to materialize in the foreseen plan. A program for collecting human waste, and transforming it into fertilizer (*zezika*) through a composting program, in collaboration with an existing private enterprise, Madacompost, was blocked by popular responses.

Madacompost has worked in Mahajanga since 2001, manufacturing some kinds of waste into usable materials, for example, recycling plastic bags into interlocking paving blocks, and grinding zébu (Malagasy cattle) horns into nitrogen rich fertilizer. Their large-scale composting operation was situated at the landfill at Mangatokana, adjacent to the city's sprawling public burial grounds; the proximity of these two sites is itself source of consternation for many city residents.<sup>1069</sup> Felix recounted how the Department of Urban Planning, together with Madacompost and the three NGOs, appealed to the Commune to collect household human waste for the project; but the public refused, because of strong *fadys* prohibiting contact with human excrement (*vahoaka tsy manaiky satria misy fady be mikasika ny tay*). Madacompost has struggled to gain economic viability in the years since its founding, citing the poor investment of the Mahajanga city administration and the inability of the city's sanitation service to regularly collect and discharge waste to the Madacompost facility. The long term effects and unfolding of these intertwined projects, at any rate, have yet to be known. What is clear, however, is that the inheritance of a colonial sanitation model of decentralized, parceled latrines has had long-lasting ramifications in Mahajanga, and has continued to collide with local constructions of propriety and waste in intractable ways.

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<sup>1069</sup> This conflict around the juxtaposition of the burial grounds with the city's landfill is addressed elsewhere in the dissertation.



Figure 88: Canal in Morafeno, following cleaning efforts, 2014 (Source: Author)

In this closing section, I pull back from the intimate experience of sanitation in Mahajanga to offer some broader observations about the material significance of Mahajanga's sanitation infrastructural design. There is a systemic issue at stake in this story. The colonial institution of individual, parceled latrines that relied on a cesspool (and later septic tank) technology set in motion a certain trajectory that constrained the future possibilities for sewage infrastructure. Thomas Hughes has famously described the process of momentum, in which as a technological system accumulates more organizational investments like physical artifacts, vested interests, fixed assets, and repair and maintenance practices, it becomes entrenched and shapes



society in more profound ways than at the system's inception.<sup>1070</sup> Annique Hommels has further illuminated that in cities, the construction of urban infrastructures leads to an "obdurate", fixed material landscape that limits the possibilities of future urban planning and innovation.<sup>1071</sup>

In Majunga, organizational investments were made very gradually and were ever intertwined with emergent labor economies, competing conceptions of 'good work,' and social-ethnic hierarchies. As a colonial sewage system based on a model of individual household latrines was gradually established, new investments - steel barrel drums, housing regulations, cement septic tanks, mechanical sewage extractors, laboring bodies, and more recently, grant funds for latrine construction - were summoned. These investments, I contend, served to cement the decentralized character of sewage infrastructure of the city and narrow the possibilities for large-scale modifications in the future. This is not to suggest that sanitation infrastructure unfolded in a teleological, deterministic path, but rather that the lamination of increasing material and labor investments have restricted future imaginary and material possibilities for innovation.

But what is intriguing here are the limitations imposed by the historic configuration of Mahajanga's sanitation system for the governance of its citizens. The decentralized sewage system installed in colonial times has meant that latrine construction and maintenance falls privately on the household, rather than the municipality, city or national government. In turn, however, the decentralized, privatized configuration of sewage treatment has also restricted the

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<sup>1070</sup> Hughes elaborates the concept of "momentum" in several publications; here I am drawing from his most recent exposition, "Technological Momentum." In *Does Technology Drive History?: The Dilemma of Technological Determinism*, edited by Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 101-114. For a detailed analysis of how Hughes' theoretical conception of "momentum" changed, see William Shields, "Theory and Practice in the Study of Technological Systems" (Ph.D. diss, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 2007), 13-27.

<sup>1071</sup> Annique Hommels, *Unbuilding Cities: Obduracy in Urban Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).



Figure 89: Piles of garbage, Marolaka marketplace, Mahajanga, April 2014 (Photographer: David Epstein)

The material configuration of parceled sewage sanitation has also, however, constrained *political* possibilities for citizens. While the city's inhabitants have mobilized in political action demanding a variety of services and economic-political changes, sanitation infrastructure has not figured among them. Unlike the forms of belonging enacted through urbanites' claims to infrastructure that Nikhil Anand (2011) describes for water provision in Mumbai, for example, inhabitants in Mahajanga have not obviously put pressure on engineers, city councils or community leaders to make possible a citywide sanitation system that would systematically deal



Figure 90: Protests against the lack of city upkeep of the Marolaka marketplace, including trash pickup, April 2014 (Photographer: David Epstein)

with human waste.<sup>1072</sup> Nor have there been mass actions demanding permanent flush toilets, like those of the "poo wars" in Cape Town, South Africa.<sup>1073</sup> This was brought into stark focus in April 2014, when heaps of garbage gradually amassed on the sides of the roads, especially around the Mahabibo and Marolaka marketplaces, forcing pedestrians to circumvent the usual pathways (Figure 89). When I asked around about the cause for the disarray, friends explained that the municipal solid waste workers were on strike, along with many city administration employees, who were protesting over the non-payment of their salaries. As citizens put pressure

<sup>1072</sup> Though like the informal settlers described by Anand, those in the Metzinger Valley are obliged to produce elaborate dossiers to apply for water connections, to install a flush toilet system. Nikhil Ananda, "Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai," *Cultural Anthropology*, 26:4 (2011), 542-564.

<sup>1073</sup> Robins, Steven, 2014 "Poo wars as matter out of place: 'Toilets for Africa' in Cape Town," *Anthropology Today* 30(1):1-3.

on authorities to deal with the ever-growing mounds of rubbish, made visible through protests by shopkeepers and patrons (Figure 90), the city finally acquiesced and garbage retrieval resumed again.

Decentralized sewage infrastructure, by contrast, has apparently limited the possibilities for residents to collectively organize themselves into a political constituency that makes demands on the state. Dealing with sewage issues - whether it be the construction of a household latrine, the digging of a pit, or the emptying of a full vat - was most often perceived as a *household* problem. As one thirty-something man, Kader, suggested "people are too embarrassed by their shit to make public demands on the government, there's an idea that one should deal with his own filth."<sup>1074</sup> Like Lisa Gezon has described for ecological management in northern Madagascar family and household units, rather than state relations, were the "most intimate political framework" when it came to sanitation dilemmas in urban Mahajanga.<sup>1075</sup>

The point here is not to offer a simplistic critique of neoliberalism by projecting a Dickensian portrait of the sanitation conundrums facing Mahajanga. Nor do I wish to replicate the pervasive, problematic, dystopic discourses of "slum" life in cities of the Global South.<sup>1076</sup> To the contrary, the multiple residential communities of Mahajanga are not easily nestled into typologies of the "the slum" or even the "informal settlement" characterized by all-encompassing lack. There is a functioning logic to Mahajanga's decentralized household-based sanitation system, which requires multiple acts of micro-negotiation between neighbors, tenants, and repair-makers to make it work. Rather than relying on a centrally operated system for sewage, people are obliged to navigate their own solutions. These navigations compromise people and

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<sup>1074</sup> Fieldnotes, 29 March 2013.

<sup>1075</sup> Gezon, Lisa 1999, "From Adversary to Son: Political and Ecological Process in Northern Madagascar." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 55: 77.

<sup>1076</sup> For example, see Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

their sense of their own humanity at times, as in the case of Alain; they also provide pathways to survival, to life. The configuration of sewage infrastructure in Mahajanga has allowed for particular assemblages of people to emerge, for the "thickening of publics" at various times.<sup>1077</sup> The ways in which these assemblages happen, the manners by which certain people are doing certain things about sewage - whether shitting, cleaning latrines, building or propagating latrines – has been shaped by extant ideas of difference. Arrangements of sanitation have served as a means through which city dwellers constructed and contested moral lexicons and valuations of worthy work and human worthiness. And in turn, these assemblages have served to crystallize and (re)produce ideas about difference, whether class, ethnic, generational, religious or gendered difference. Acknowledging these relational workings does not diminish the hardship of extreme poverty or the great challenges people in Mahajanga face to create lives filled with dignity and comfort. But it validates the creative strategies urban dwellers employ to forge everyday life.

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<sup>1077</sup> De Boeck, Filip. "Infrastructure: Commentary from Filip de Boeck." Curated Collections, Cultural Anthropology online, November 26, 2012. Accessed online at: [http://www.culanth.org/curated\\_collections/11-infrastructure/discussions/7-infrastructure-commentary-from-filip-de-boeck](http://www.culanth.org/curated_collections/11-infrastructure/discussions/7-infrastructure-commentary-from-filip-de-boeck), 16 May 2016.

### **The House Began Before it was Built: Mama Jaki**

Mama Jaki moved confidently through town, her presence strong as stone. She was highly respected by some, feared by others. She was known to be strict (*sarotony*), pushing, urging *zanatany* women to properly learn the songs and verses for ritual events. On the veranda of her home in Manga, sat gleaming bottles of sour, salty lemon *achar* awaiting buyers. Mama Jaki's *achar* was some of the best around. One afternoon in 2014, she narrated the founding of the home by her grandmother.



Figure 91: Achar in the windowsill, Manga, 2014 (Source: Author)

My grandfather (*dadilahy*) was born in Ouani, Nzwani, and he met my grandmother (*dadinay*)—Ankaranana Sakalava—in the area around Nosy Be. They married and had a child (Mama Jaki's father) in the late 1910s. But the relationship quickly dissipated. Dady traveled to

the city of Majunga with her infant son (Mama Jaki's father) in tow in the late 1910s or early 1920s.<sup>1078</sup>

After the demise of her first relationship, Dady married another man from Nzwani. He was a *foundi* (an Islamic missionary who had traveled in the northwestern region of Madagascar) and he helped grow the small congregation of the Shadhilya brotherhood. They lived together in Manga, at first in a simple palm leaf (*satrana*) home, just behind the Chez Chabaud hotel. That place, it was a house of, you know, prostitutes, an immoral place- ô! But that's another story (*she smiles*). Over time, they built their house from mud and spent much time praying, praying! Always praying. They had this neighbor, a royal Sakalava queen (*mpanjaka*) who lived in the area in a wood house (*trano ketykety*). And when that queen decided to return to her home area of Ankaranana (in the northern region of Madagascar), she gave all her wood to Dady. At last they built their house of wood and mud!

They made their life in this home for some time. Dady ran a small stand outside the home that attracted passerbys and things went well. But one day, her limits were tested. Her husband, the foundi from Comoros, announced that he would soon return to Ouani, Comoros to collect his "other wife." Stunned by this abrupt declaration she ended the marriage. Malagasy can't tolerate multiple wives. So she left, brokenhearted.<sup>1079</sup> [*It's not entirely clear how Mama Jaki's grandmother left, whether she fled the house red-faced after a heated argument, left silently in the early morning hours, or even where she went next. Those details remain buried in time.*]

Her life soon changed. One day, there was *tombola* (a lottery) for a piece of land in Manga, and Dady bought the last ticket from the lottery. By total chance, she won the land (and

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<sup>1078</sup> Though in theory children often followed with their father upon marital separation, in practice many children of mixed Comorian-Malagasy unions remained with their mother, especially when their father returned to Comoros.

<sup>1079</sup> *Gasy tsy mahazaka mivady maro, dia niala izy, malahelo be izy.*

this is land that Mama Jaki lives on today). She remarried with another Comorian, an Ajojo (from Ngazidja), who worked as a cook for the European Hospital.

Dady lived here, my father was raised here, and once he was older he worked for the Compagnie Batelage, as a chauffeur and also as a fisherman. He worked extremely hard, *miafy*, *miafy* (saving, saving). And he lived at the house with Dady, his aunt's children, and some other children from a cousin. He married my mother, then they separated.

My father lived on this land, in a sheet metal house (*trano toly*), until his death. He stayed here but would often have lunch and meals with me. After his death, I moved here, about 30 years ago. At first kept the *trano toly*, and then after the Cyclone Gafilo in March 2004, we began building a stone house (*trano vato*) with help from my children—who now stay in Mayotte.



**Chapter 8**  
**The Street:**  
**Becoming Zanatany, Poetics and Politics of the City**



Figure 92: Postcard, “Mahabibo: In the Native Village” ca. 1930s (Source: Author’s collection)

He easily looked a decade younger than his late-seventies. Papa Taoaby was lean and sinewy. He spoke with a raspy voice, a glimmer in his eye, and rapid hand gestures, always bringing everyone around into the discussion. Many afternoons he could be found on the breezy, covered veranda of his home with Mama Taoaby, reflecting on times past or debating politics with friends who passed by. Over time, he shared more and more of his observations of the town in our conversations—always nuanced and lively, his storytelling skills honed by his years moving across diverse social circles through his varied work-lives and time abroad. One afternoon in November of 2012, I broached the topic of the 1976-77 *rotaka* with him (a topic rarely raised in casual conversation, and one which I was shy to initiate), by asking what life was

like in Mahajanga *before* the pogrom. “It was a *zanatany* place back then...” Not knowing what exactly he meant, I asked him to clarify.<sup>1080</sup> And then he began,

*Zanatany were a kind of artificial ethnic group (foko artificiel) you could say, a mixture of Comorians, Sakalava, Metis. But really, zanatany was a way of life (fomba fiainana)! It meant being athletic (sportif), fashionable with clothing and dress, of living in a bragging, boastful kind of way (vantard). Men liked to show off (mibiobio). And we loved each other, so we gave to each other, sharing freely. Like if your friend had a cigarette, and you wanted it, you would just reach over and take one out of his pocket... and maybe tuck some money in his pocket or maybe not. This was how we loved each other (mifankatia).<sup>1081</sup>*

It took much time before I fully understood what Papa Taoaby was describing, what the stakes were for young *zanatany* men and women were breathed life into the city, animating it with their verve and vigor in the 1960s and 70s. Clearly his account was saturated with nostalgia, itself his criticism of Mahajanga’s unraveling political-social environment. But his description opened a window into understanding *zanatany* as a mode of urbanism, an exploratory approach to how urban life could be, and an articulation of distinct ethical and aesthetic perspectives.

Papa Taoaby’s invocation of *zanatany*, however, was one among many in a fluid lexical landscape, ever shaped by political and economic possibilities at play. Charting this field, this chapter spans out from this 1960s and 1970s period to probe: What has constituted ‘*zanatany*’ over time? The beginning of the chapter traces the philological movement of this word through written, textual accounts in dictionaries, newspapers, legal codes and municipal reports between the 1890s and 1940s.<sup>1082</sup> Depending on the context, pronouncer and audience, *zanatany* could signify different things. It could denote competing forms of belonging, prevaricate moments of colonial violence, or indicate a moral stance. In colonial-era language, *zanatany* could variably mean a judicial and legal status, an ethno-racial category, or a paternalistic relationship between

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<sup>1080</sup> At this moment I had not yet heard *zanatany* and hardly understood its multiple meanings.

<sup>1081</sup> Interview/fieldnotes with Papa Taoaby, Abattoir, November 6, 2012.

<sup>1082</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford Press, 1976).

the colonized and colonizer. The chapter then narrows the aperture on *zanatany* in Majunga, asking how different actors within this broad grouping have constructed and performed *zanatany* as a critical autochthonous marker. As discussed in Chapter 7, *zanatany* was a generational category, denoting the first generation of mixed Comorian-Malagasy parents, mainly born in the 1940s and 50s.<sup>1083</sup> As these children grew into young adulthood, they drew on material culture and space to enunciate themselves as a distinctive group and projected new ideas about what constituted the proper comportment, or *habitus*<sup>1084</sup>, of the urbanite.

This chapter argues that *zanatany* as an autochthonous idiom has historically been capacious, signaling far more than a position of first-coming. In contrast to other cities in Madagascar, *zanatany* took on distinct meanings in Mahajanga, as a powerful idiom of belonging, an attitude about proper urbanism, and unique expressive and performative practices. *Zanatany* interlocutors, like Papa Taoaby, recounted how the movement of Comorian integration in the mid-late twentieth century gave rise to distinctive speech forms, suave ways of dress, lively fraternal bonds, and a lifestyle marked by conspicuous consumption. Young *zanatany* carved out spaces of vibrant sociality and refashioned the city's ambiance, in lasting ways still vividly recalled by some contemporary residents. *Zanatany* men and women infused the city with their aspirations, which departed from those of their fathers and grandfathers. They did this through specific ways of occupying space, socializing, and comporting themselves, what Mauss once called "techniques of the body."<sup>1085</sup> But these ways of occupying the city contrasted—collided in fact—with established ideas about social and spatial norms of their fathers and other

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<sup>1083</sup> See Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham (eds) *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age and Family in the New World Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>1084</sup> Pierre Bourdieu defines *habitus* as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions... way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body), predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination," *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: New York, 1977), 72, n214). *Habitus* are also historically produced and so deeply naturalized and ingrained that they may remain invisible to all except the "objective" researcher, *ibid*, 79-80.

<sup>1085</sup> Marcel Mauss, "Les techniques du corps," *Journal de Psychologie* 32 no.3-4 (1934 [1936]) 4-23.

Malagasy groups. Many Malagasy of older generations attributed the rise of social tensions in the 1970s to the impetuous comportment of Comorians—especially young Comorian men—and the dominating presence of Comorians in the city’s homes, streets, and public spaces. Ultimately, these frictions culminated in the 1976-77 *rotaka*, an event I contend was fundamentally a struggle over who could chart the moral framework shaping land, labor practices, and everyday forms of urbanism.

### ***Zanatany: Some Genealogies of a Concept***

Though *zanatany* likely has deeper linguistic roots, it is curiously absent from early accounts written in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.<sup>1086</sup> Autochthony is alluded to in descriptions of Majunga as situated in “Sakalava land” or as inhabited initially by Antalaotra migrants, but these allusions were not linked to Malagasy terms of differentiation.<sup>1087</sup> Printed references to *zanatany* first appear in early French-Malagasy and English-Malagasy dictionaries, which were most often compiled by missionary lexicographers working closely with Malagasy interlocutors.<sup>1088</sup> Malagasy authorship and labor is largely rendered invisible in these publications, though they undoubtedly provided crucial roles as translators and explicators. These dictionaries were intended initially as guides for incoming missionaries to gain familiarity with Malagasy, and later became important for Malagasy desiring to learn French and

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<sup>1086</sup> It is notable that *zanatany* does not appear in the canonical collections of primary source materials from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though *tompontany* is referenced. See works compiled by François Callet (ed) 1981. *Tantara ny Andriana eto Madagascan: documents historiques d’après les manuscrits malgache*. 2 vols (Antananarivo, Madagascar: Academie Malgache); and Raombana, *Histoires* (Fianarantsoa, Madagascar: 1980)

<sup>1087</sup> See for instance, C. Pickersgill, “North Sakalava-Land,” 29-43.

<sup>1088</sup> Malzac describes in the preface to *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français* that British missionaries published a dictionary in 1835, followed by R.P. Webber’s *Dictionnaire Malgache* in 1855. See Antoine Abinal and Victorin Malzac, *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français* (Tananarive: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1888), v-vi.

English.<sup>1089</sup> Among the early dictionaries was British missionary James Richardson's *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, published in 1885, which defined *zanatany* as "a native of a place."<sup>1090</sup> Compiling dictionaries were staggered, cumulative affairs, which only came to fruition after successive lives and scholarly endeavors. French Jesuit Antoine Abinal (1829-1887) and Victorin Malzac's *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français*, for example, was originally compiled by Abinal who drew from materials gathered by his deceased predecessor François Callet.<sup>1091</sup> Left unfinished at this death, Malzac resumed work and published it through the mission's printer in 1888.

Common across these dictionaries was the conceptualization of *zanatany* as an autochthonous status. In Abinal and Malzac's dictionary, *zana-tany* is defined as a "native, native to the country/land" (*indigène, natif du pays*).<sup>1092</sup> *Zana-tany* is described as a derivative of *zanaka* (offspring, plants, trees, or bushes which have been transplanted; figuratively, an object which is smaller than another)<sup>1093</sup> and *tany* (earth, terrain, soil, land, country, kingdom). Other missionary-authored French-Malagasy dictionaries, such as Aristide Marre's *Vocabulaire Français-Malgache* define *zanatany* similarly as "indigene," "native" "aborigine"<sup>1094</sup>

Admittedly, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which *zanatany* held a similar meaning at this time across the expanse of the island. Missionaries most often drew on the dialects spoken in the

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<sup>1089</sup> Malzac describes the keen interest among Malagasy for learning French, and the importance of his and Abinal's dictionary for their purposes, *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français* (Tananarive: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1888), v.

<sup>1090</sup> *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary* (Antananarivo: London Missionary Society, 1885), 796.

<sup>1091</sup> Callet (and later Malzac) also compiled documents and oral narratives in the canonical historical source collection for highland Madagascar, *Tantara ny andriana eto Madagascar* (Antananarivo: Imprimerie Officielle, 1908); Boudou, Adrien, *Les jésuites à Madagascar au XIX siècle*, Vol. 2 (Paris: G. Beauchesne et fils, 1938), 141, 160; Jean-Paul Allain, *Dictionnaire de l'Ethnologie Malgache* (Paris: Publibook, 2015), 29.

<sup>1092</sup> Antoine Abinal and Victorin Malzac, *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français* (Tananarive: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1888), 803.

<sup>1093</sup> Other *zana*-terms described by Abinal and Malzac include *zanakazo* (young plant or tree), *zanadandy* (chrysalides of silk worms), and *zanabiby* (offspring of an animal), Abinal and Malzac, *Dictionnaire*, 832.

<sup>1094</sup> (Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1895) *Indigène- Zana-tany, Tompantany*, p. 160; *Natif-Zanatany* 212, *Naturels, Aborigènes*, 9.

highlands region as the normative linguistic reference, yet there were significant dialectal differences between the island's regions. Malzac described that Abinal had a deep knowledge of “customs and language of the Hovas, which has served as basis of dictionaries in the past.” He justified the dictionary's reliance on highland dialect on the basis that “Hova is understood nearly everywhere” and that “many of the words used in the provinces [beyond the highlands] are employed even in Tananarive, so much so that the special words of other dialects are relatively few.”<sup>1095</sup>

In a later French-Malagasy dictionary compiled by Malzac, *zana-tany* was variably equated with “citizen” (*citoyen*), “native” (*indigène*), and “national” (*nationaux*).<sup>1096</sup> Used to contextualize ‘citizen’ (*citoyen*) were the revealing, if somewhat contradictory set of phrases, “French citizens. The *zanatany*, the French masters of the land. To become French, The French nation has arrived.”<sup>1097</sup> ‘Civic’, moreover, was described as that which “relates to the love of ancestral land, relates to the *zana-tany*. Civic virtues...civic rights, that which the *zanatany* does.”<sup>1098</sup> To be clear, *zanatany* was one among a number of lexical terms associated with “citizen” or “native.” Other related words were ‘master of the land’ (*tompon-tany*), ‘subjects of the state, the people, the public’ (*vahoaka*), ‘the nation’ (*firenena*). Whether there was a conceptual or utilitarian shift of *zanatany* in everyday language from “native,” (as seen in the 1888 dictionary) to “citizen” (as described in the 1899 dictionary) is difficult to say. But

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<sup>1095</sup> Translation mine. Original: “On ne trouvera pas dans ce Dictionnaire les most propres aux dialects des Provinces. Nous ne donnons que ceux qui sont usités dans la langue Hova; et l'on peut dire qu'ils suffisent, car le Hova est compris à peu près partout. De plus, par suit des relations plus fréquentes des diverses tribus, beaucoup de mots des provinces sont employés même à Tananarive, de sorte que les mots spéciaux aux autres dialects sont relativement peu nombreux.” Abinal and Malzac, *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français*, v-vi.

<sup>1096</sup> Victorin Malzac, *Dictionnaire français-malgache* (Tananarive: Impr. De la Mission Catholique, 1899), 128-129, 436, 547.

<sup>1097</sup> “*Les citoyens français. Ny zana-tany, ny tompon-tany frantsay. Devenir-français. Tonga vahoaka frantsay*” Malzac, *Dictionnaire français-malgache*, 128.

<sup>1098</sup> “*Momba ny fitiavana tannin-drazana, momba ny zana-tany, . Les vertus civiques. Ny hatsaram-panahy momba ny fitivianan-tanin-drazana. Droits civiques. Izay azon-ny ny zana-tany atao.*” Malzac, *Dictionnaire français-malgache*, 129.

evidently by the late 1890s, French concepts of citizenship, civic duty and virtue were clearly tethered to that of *zanatany* and the ancestral land (*tanindrazana*).

*Zanatany* continued to be linked to notions of citizenship, and the concept of citizen rendered legible through the language of *zanatany*. Time and again, French authorities and missionaries used *zanatany* to communicate, and perhaps cultivate, a sense of affiliation between colonizer and colonized. But it also signified a differentiated legal status, by which Malagasy were identified in frequent official notices when petitioning for land grants. Raharine, for example, was listed as a “*zanatany*” and civil employee when he petitioned the land conservator M. Loussert in the city of Tananarive, on behalf of his father Rajaonina, for a parcel of land in February 1900.<sup>1099</sup> In these notices, *zanatany* appeared primarily as an oppositional juridical category which distinguished “Malagasy” from French and assimilée petitioners, who were unidentified and thus designated as the normalized group. At other moments in the early 1900s, *zanatany* may have denoted those classified as mixed race, or *métis*, and sometimes called “colon” or “creole.” Mr. Bemby Pilipily, for instance, was identified as a “colon, *zanatany*” and spouse to Madama Fandzo, in his appeal for an agricultural concession in the Diego Suarez province in 1908.<sup>1100</sup> French history and geography textbooks oriented to Malagasy students similarly presented *zanatany* as a contrasting category to French citizens. Cadet and Thomas’ *Madagascar: Histoire et Géographie élémentaires* (1901), for example, described the role of

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<sup>1099</sup> In French “fonctionnaire indigène” and in Malagasy “*zanatany*, mpanao raharaha, manao re an-dRajaonina rainy...” “Réquisition n. 1269,” *Journal Officiel de Madagascar et Dépendances*, 28 March 1900, 4186. He and his father wished to name the property “Anosibe” (at the large lake/pond), and desired to farm rice there.

<sup>1100</sup> *Journal Officiel de Madagascar et Dépendances*, 4 January 1908, 18.

“Robin” a French aid to highland monarchal King Radama. He taught French to some *zanatany* and was the first to have written “Hova” in Latin characters.<sup>1101</sup>

### ***Children of the French Fatherland***

Perhaps building on these earlier associations with citizenship, colonial authorities gradually employed *zanatany* to signify “the colony” of Madagascar. Just one year after the disastrous French conquest of Madagascar, on August 6<sup>th</sup> 1896, French lawmakers in Paris passed a law pronouncing Madagascar as a French colony. While the passage of this law is not particularly surprising, what is notable are the terms by which it—and the core concepts of colonization—were translated, rendered legible for Malagasy subjects in official announcements. Published in the official gazette *Journal Officiel de Madagascar et Dépendances Madagascar*, the law was detailed in both French and Malagasy, and bears quotation here. “The island of Madagascar is henceforth a French colony and the residing populations have become French subjects”<sup>1102</sup> the law blandly read.

In the *Ny Gazety Malagasy*, which accompanied the *Journal* and was possibly read by Malagasy elites, an announcement described that “The Resident General of Madagascar, following the announcement of 11 December 1895, hereby releases the law of 6 August 1896, to declare that Madagascar and all its islands become Colonie Française (Zanatany Frantsay).”<sup>1103</sup>

The parenthetical framing left little question that the concept of “French Colony” was equated to

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<sup>1101</sup> Translation mine. “Nampianatra teny frantsay zanatany sasan’ sasany koa izy, ary izy no voalohany nonoratra ny titenin’ny Hova tamin’ny soratra vazaha.” RR. PP Cadet and S.J. Thomas, *Madagascar: Histoire et Géographie élémentaires*, (Paris: Ch. Poussiégué, 1901), 22.

<sup>1102</sup> My translation, original text reads, l’île de Madagascar et maintenant une Colonie Française, et les populations l’habitent sont devenus sujet Français” *Journal Officiel de Madagascar et Dépendances Madagascar*, 9 Octobre 1896.

<sup>1103</sup> My translation, original text reads, “Ny Résident Général-ny Madagascar, Noho ny didy navoaka tamy ny 11 Décembre 1895, Noho ny lalàna navoaka tamy ny 6 Août 1896 milaza any Madagascar sy ny Nosy rehetra momba azy ho Colonie Française (Zanatany Frantsay)” *Journal Officiel de Madagascar et Dépendances Madagascar*, 9 Octobre 1896, p. 51.



“Zanatany Francaise.” But what was intended by the use of *zanatany* in this context? Why was *zanatany* found to be the most appropriate and commensurate concept to “colony,” in contrast to other Malagasy terms such as *tany* (land or terrain) or *vahoaka* (nation)? Sources do not reveal who was responsible for this translation, or the process by which the law was translated into Malagasy. But what is evident is that the use of *zanatany* equivocated the past and yet unforeseen brutality of colonial appropriation and violence.

The discursive linkage of “zanatany” with “the colony” continued in the early twentieth century. In land requisitions, applicants who were temporarily away from the region or overseas were consistently described as “absent from the *zanatany*.”<sup>1104</sup> But the precise meaning of *zanatany*, and its implications for the drafting of property laws and regulations for concessions, was not fixed. French authorities and lawmakers continued to debate ‘zanatany’ and broader norms of property in the early 1910s and 20s. As they drafted and instituted new property regulations in the 1920s, French lawmakers encountered an elaborate, existing set of Malagasy landholding practices.<sup>1105</sup> Explicating land regulations was one way authorities sought to prevent conflicts over property which stemmed from competing colonial imperatives. One on hand, colonial authorities were interested to grant concessions to French settlers with the hopes they would develop agricultural and industrial enterprises. But on the other, they were concerned with stirring resentment, and eventually revolt, among Malagasy landholders who might lose their

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<sup>1104</sup> For example in the case of one Abdallah Ousseny Ismaeldjy in 11 August 1906, “Ibramdjy Aly-Bay mpivarotra, manao amin’ny anaran’I Abdallah Ousseny Ismaeldjy mpivarotra ao Antseranana, izay tsy eto amin’ny zanatany intsony izao...” 11 Aug 1906, *Journal Officiel de Madagascar et Dépendances*, 13883.

<sup>1105</sup> Land-holding and sharing practices under Andrianampoinimerina (late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> C) was an important reference point for French property lawmakers. Addressing this exceeds the bounds of this chapter, but will be addressed elsewhere. Important here is Larson’s discussion of *hetra* and the ways Andrianampoinimerina enacted land immobility, basically tethered people to their land (*tanindrazana*) to mitigate political competition...in other words, *tanindrazana* is perhaps a more recently introduced practice and concept, though it is often depicted as a timeless Malagasy tradition, in *History and Memory*, 176-183, 193-6.

property in these transactions. Conflicts between “Europeans” and “natives” inevitably arose and rapidly proliferated in the 1910s.<sup>1106</sup>

To preempt more conflicts, colonial authorities disseminated a 1921 official reference guide, intended to help officials and legal representatives navigate the complicated framework of property regulations. It described the nineteenth century landholding practices developed under highland monarch Andrianampoinimerina (1785-1809), into which early French legal interventions sought to intervene. Nineteenth century highland monarchical leaders, according to French observers, “solemnly affirmed, on every occasion, that the soil of the kingdom belonged to them” yet they also partitioned land and “yielded them to the benefit of communities or individuals.”<sup>1107</sup> French authorities equated Malagasy land rights during this time with those during the French monarchy. Under monarchical rule, Malagasy across the island “exercised rights very close to those enjoyed under French law” including the right of use (usufruct), transmission upon death, and taxation. In theory, sovereign authorities retained total ownership of all lands, even if this was only “honorific.”<sup>1108</sup> French legal experts intimated that since the time of Andrianampoinimerina, right of land ownership existed in two main forms: “individual and collective.” In this formation, *zanatany* was classified as a veritable type of individual ownership. *Zanatany* was, by French summations, “divided land” (*terres partagées*). Specifically, it meant land that was individually held, like purchased land (*tany-vidiny*) and

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<sup>1106</sup> “L’avenir de la colonization à Madagascar — La domaine, Les concessions” *Bulletin Economique*, (Tananarive: Imprimerie official, 1921), 39.

<sup>1107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1108</sup> Ibid. “But this virtual, theoretical, and honorary right, which should never be exercised over the property held by individuals, should not be given unless the consent of the latter, and even the payment of an indemnity.”

inherited land. By contrast, *hetra* were household parcels collectively owned by the council of elders (*fokonolona*).<sup>1109</sup>

What these instances reveal is the slippage of *zanatany* in the first decades of the 1900s, where it held multiple and competing meanings as both “the colony,” “the colonized,” and customary forms of individual land holding. But French efforts to clarify *zanatany* were not hair-splitting semantics. Rather the very image and legitimacy of the French colonial project was at stake in defining existing forms of landholding including *zanatany*. As one French commentator noted, “It would be inadmissible for French authorities to claim to emancipate the natives from their former servitude [under the highland monarchy], and then to forge new [servitude] by putting land in the discretion of large European owners or relegating [natives] to infertile lands, or areas where the natural and normal increase of population would no longer be possible, or—we shall add—by closing the native off to any access to property.”<sup>1110</sup> French authorities were anxious about the public perception of their colonial occupation as a disingenuous project that replicated the historical exploitation and dominance of the highland monarchy. The conquest of Madagascar was enabled in part by complex constellation of patronage relationships between French military and coastal leaders, in which French troops promised to liberate them from the stronghold of highland monarchical authority.<sup>1111</sup> But once in power, French lawmakers enshrined their far-reaching control over land—whether through land concessions or ministerial dispatches transferring land to the French colonial state.<sup>1112</sup> These collective actions effectively extended

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<sup>1109</sup> On *fokonolona* see Larson, *History and Memory* 180-182; Georges Condominas, *Fokon'olona et collectivités rurales en Imerina* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1961).

<sup>1110</sup> “L’avenir de la colonization à Madagascar — La domaine, Les concessions” *Bulletin Economique*, (Tanaranive: Imprimerie officielle, 1921), 41.

<sup>1111</sup> See, Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 151; Stephen Ellis, *The Rising of the Red Shawls: A Revolt in Madagascar 1895-1899* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 139. Lambek and Walsh, “The Imagined Community,” 145-174.

<sup>1112</sup> “L’avenir de la colonization à Madagascar,”; Thompson and Adloff, *Malagasy Republic*, 330.

the sovereign control of land articulated by and developed under highland monarchs to the French colonial state.<sup>1113</sup> But public perceptions of the French state as an extension of earlier forms of colonial exploitation by highland monarchs would only serve to delegitimize an already precarious authority.

*Zanatany*'s multivalence persisted. In 1926, French authorities published a new directive to eliminate all ambiguity associated with earlier, fragmented domain regulations. Here, *zanatany* surfaced as the colony which sat in opposition to the French state, "the entirety/ensemble of moveable and immovable goods which, in Madagascar and dependences constitute the domain of the state, of the colony (*ny zanatany Madagascar*), of the communes, or of another administrative organism...are divided between the public and private domain. In cases where the state (*fanjakana Frantsay*) and the colonie (*zanatany*) are in opposition, the representation of the colony is entrusted to the Secretary general..."<sup>1114</sup> It is striking is that over the span of thirty years, a shift is evident in the official usage of *zanatany*. In the first legal expression of colonialism in 1896 (described in the beginning of this chapter) *zanatany* suggested an inclusive, paternalistic relationship to France, as that which belongs to France. By 1926, however, as colonial legal rulings proliferated and the bureaucratic apparatus of the colonial state expanded, *zanatany* came to denote a colony in tension with (if not outright opposition to) the French metropolitan state, at least in legal publications.

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<sup>1113</sup> French acquisition of Malagasy land was blocked by a later regulation in 1881, which prohibited Malagasy from selling their lands to foreigners. But Malagasy were, however, permitted to own and transmit their property to other Malagasy. French lawmakers contended that though individual land ownership had long been in existence, it was only with the treaty of 1868, that the right of individual ownership was legally established and enshrined, through the granting of French rights to acquire property

<sup>1114</sup> *Colonie de Madagascar et dépendances. Direction des domaines de la propriété foncière et du cadaster. Textes relatifs à l'application du nouveau régime domanial* (Tana: Imprimerie Officielle, 1928), 2, 44. Original Malagasy text: "Any Madagascar sy ny tany rehetra momba azy, ny fitambarin'ny fananam-panjakana rehetra, tany, trano, fanaka, etc. (biens meubles et immeubles) no atao hoe harem-panjakana (domaine), an'ny fanjakana frantsay, an'ny zanatany Madagascar, an'ny communes, na an'ny antokon'ny fanaovandraharaham-panjakana samihafa miorina any..."

### *Zanatany Vazaha: Race, Class, and Cultural Competency*

But *zanatany* was not solely a judicial or governance category, it has also circulated among European, Malagasy-speakers to signal a distinct racial position: namely those born in Madagascar, who were not of Malagasy origin.<sup>1115</sup> In neighboring islands such as Mauritius and Réunion, *zanatany* has historically been interchanged with the racialized category of the creole, defined as a “person of white race, born in the colonial tropics.”<sup>1116</sup> But in Madagascar, *zanatany* or *vazaha* (foreigner, often European) has prevailed, while *créole* has historically been reserved for those originating in Réunion, Seychelles and Mauritius. In colonial times *zanatany* also indexed lower-middle class status for those of French descent. Those petty merchants, manual laborers, or agricultural workers, also condescendingly known as “little whites” (*petits blancs*) or “provincials” (*broussards*, people living in the ‘bush’), were characterized as having less education and rarely mixing with Europeans in higher echelons.<sup>1117</sup> They were identifiable by where they dwelled, namely in rural areas or in urban neighborhoods populated primarily by Malagasy.<sup>1118</sup>

Race and class, but also birthplace, were critical determinants of *zanatany* identification; some have recently argued that even if one arrives to Madagascar as an infant, they will not be identified popularly as *zanatany*, but rather as “like a *zanatany*,” or “becoming *zanatany*.”<sup>1119</sup> In this sense, the children of French settlers (though not the settlers themselves) were identified and self-proclaimed as *zanatany*. One vituperous commentator wrote defiantly in a newspaper

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<sup>1115</sup> Louis Sagot, “La diversité des Zanatany,” in Laurence Ink (ed) *Madagascar Fenêtres: Aperçus Sur la Culture Malgache* (Antananarivo: CITE, 2009), 81-2.

<sup>1116</sup> Ibid. Note the very vast literature on creole and creolization in southern Indian Ocean including Meghan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Larson, *Ocean of Letters*.

<sup>1117</sup> Sagot, “Les diversité...,” 86.

<sup>1118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1119</sup> Sagot, “La diversité...,” 83. This resonates with our personal experience in Madagascar, where our sons were described as “*lasa zanatany ireo*” (they’ve become *zanatany*) because of their fluent, unaccented Malagasy, daily consumption of rice, and their integration into household activities of our neighbors.

column in 1936, “I was born in Madagascar, and I freely chose French nationality by committing myself for three years [of military service]. Not only did I not have to naturalize, but I am a ‘zanantany’ (sic)...you can translate this word and it speaks for itself.”<sup>1120</sup> This quote also suggests that the ambiguity of *zanatany* meant that it conversely could be used to enunciate one’s residual linkage to France, as citizens of the colony. Those French who retained dual citizenship of Madagascar and France might be considered “*tompontany*” (nationals, literally master of the land), however, rather than *zanatany*.<sup>1121</sup>

Another key aspect of *zanatany* status from at least the mid 1800s was cultural competence and familiarity with Malagasy language. Mention of *zanatany* in this way can be traced as early as 1858, in a letter written from David Johns Andrianado (writing from Mauritius) to James Cameron (at the Cape Colony), in which he describes *olona zanatany* in the sense of a European who had formerly lived in Madagascar, and was familiar with Malagasy.<sup>1122</sup> This meaning of *zanatany* persisted well into the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 30s it could suggest an affiliation, a shared positionality or mutual understanding—at least from the perspective of French settlers— between French colons and Malagasy. In 1931, for instance, Brugaët, compared Madagascar to la Reunion in a column in the daily *Le Madécasse*. He described how the early settlers of Ile Bourbon (Réunion) managed to cultivate a notion of “Bourbonnais” identity from the diverse groups of inhabitants. He lamented that it would be nice to see this same sentiment “dominate over the ethnic differences” in Madagascar like in Reunion. “It is always through a Frenchmen, a *zanatany* like him, that the native better appreciates

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<sup>1120</sup> Pierre Wilson, Réponse to the anonymous author of “L’Onde Française,” *La Madécasse*, Oct. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

<sup>1121</sup> Sagot, “La diversité...,” 85.

<sup>1122</sup> Pers. comm. Pier Larson, 13 March 2017.

France... Only with the restoration of the highland monarchy in Madagascar might islanders find a unified national identity.<sup>1123</sup>

Before moving to quite particular, historical meanings of *zanatany* in Mahajanga, it is important to mention two things. First, over the course of the twentieth century, *zanatany* has been applied to and claimed by several different immigrant groups in Madagascar in addition to those of European descent. Among these groups are the descendants of those who have long migrated from China (*zanatany sinoa*), parts of the Middle East and North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Syria), and South Asians (*karana*). The prevalence of *zanatany* to describe these groups and their progeny, however, has been infrequently employed, compared to the descendants of French settlers. Another key point is that *zanatany* has not been exclusively applied to people. Malagasy described breeds of chickens, cattle and goats as *zanatany*. Cattle herders and merchants in the highlands in the 1970s preferred locally raised *zanatany* cattle, which had already adapted to the harsher climate and colder dry season, to *rantos*, which arrived from the humid, hot west.<sup>1124</sup>

### ***Zanatany Ways of Life: On the Street***

Given the diffuse and widely varying valences of *zanatany* in the broader historical context of Madagascar, the salience of *zanatany* in Mahajanga by the 1950s is particularly

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<sup>1123</sup> “The Spirit of Reunionnais parochoialism” *La Madécasse*, 10 Jan. 1931. Nous aurions bien voulu qu’à Madagascar un esprit de clocher madecasse dominât fortement les différences ethniques comme à la Réunion. C’est toujours à travers le Français, *zanatany* comme lui, que l’indigène voit le mieux la France. Mais ici c’est encore trop neuf et d’ailleurs le problème se pose différemment. La transplantation dans une île, jadis déserte, a beaucoup facilité les choses à la Réunion; ici on ne pourrait obtenir des résultats rapides et satisfaisants qu’en restaurant la monarchie indigène.

<sup>1124</sup> Cori Gilles and Pierre Trama, “Types d’Élevage et de Vie Rurale à Madagascar,” *Travaux documents de géographie tropicale, Centre d’Études de Géographie Tropicale: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, Domaine Universitaire de Bordeaux, France. no. 37, June 1979. In Mahajanga, people also described free-ranging chickens who were fed food scraps, raised without supplemental feed, and widely regarded as more flavorful “*akoho zanatany*” or “*akoho gasy*,” whereas the generally plumper fowl raised with special feed and given antibiotics were “*akoho vazaha*.”

remarkable. This raises a host of questions: Why did *zanatany* become an important idiom in Mahajanga, as opposed to elsewhere on the island? What has it meant to be *zanatany*— for Comorian migrants and their descendants, colonial authorities, and newer migrants from across Madagascar? At the same time, what has been hidden by *zanatany*? How has *zanatany* been used to gloss over social fractures and fissures or exclude people? How did *zanatany* —as a distinctive urbanism—become visible, gain traction and acquire importance over the twentieth century?

Thinking about urbanism as a distinctive mode of everyday life is not novel. It has deep roots in sociological literature, beginning with Louis Wirth’s foundational attempt to theorize the city, by tracking changes in social interactions and relationships that accompanied life in agglomerations. He argued that as much as urban life offered newfound freedom from the constraints of village life, social relations in cities were characterized by “weakening of bonds of kinship, the declining social significance of the family, the disappearance of neighborhood and the undermining of the traditional basis of solidarity.”<sup>1125</sup> In the eighty years since, scholars have upended the universalist assumptions of Wirth and the Chicago School researchers who focused mainly on North American cities, and developed new conceptions of urbanism.<sup>1126</sup> More recently, urban studies scholars have framed the city as comprised of myriad networks and “as a set of spaces where diverse ranges of relational webs coalesce, interconnect, and fragment.”<sup>1127</sup>

Scholars of African cities have argued that town dwellers have tenaciously retained important kin connections and cultural practices at times, while developing vibrant new forms of

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<sup>1125</sup> Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 44:1 (1938), 179.

<sup>1126</sup> Louis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (1958[1938]), among others.

<sup>1127</sup> Ash Amin and Stephen Graham, “The Ordinary City,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22:4 (1997):418.



solidarity at others.<sup>1128</sup> David Coplan and others have documented how urban life gave rise to expressive cultures of jazz, dance and poetry.<sup>1129</sup> Still others have shown how in the wake of independence, cities were rapidly transformed into places of intense contestation over gender, mobility and bodily comportment. Andy Ivaska, for instance, argued that campaigns to police women's dress, gendered work, and movement in Dar es Salaam were efforts to articulate notions of urban respectability in the new nation state.<sup>1130</sup> Through his work with young men on the Zambian Copperbelt in the 1980s, James Ferguson developed an understanding of "style" as that which can be mastered and performed through aesthetic practices.<sup>1131</sup>

This section seeks to build on this literature, by considering urbanism through place-making practices—which are always embodied—in Mahajanga during the 1950s and 60s. But it does so by exploring relational dynamics in a "secondary" or smaller city, where local forms of associational life dominate more than in mega-cities.<sup>1132</sup> It is not at all surprising that city dwellers in Mahajanga would over time develop distinctive social habits, bodily comportment and aesthetic practices associated with urban life more broadly—in short urbanism. But what is intriguing in the case of Mahajanga is that this urbanism was deeply connected to the autochthonous idiom of 'the *zanatany*.' That *zanatany* way of life came to dominate the city—

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<sup>1128</sup> Philip Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the process of urbanization in a South African city* (Cape Town: Oxford, 1971 [1961]); Leslie Bank, *Home Spaces, Street Styles: Contesting Power and Identity in a South African City* (London: Pluto, 2011); Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje, *Langa: A Study of social groups in an African township* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1963 [1973]).

<sup>1129</sup> David Coplan, "Sophiatown: Culture and Community," in *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theater* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008 [1985]), 143-183.

<sup>1130</sup> *Cultured States: Youth, Gender and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham: Duke, 2011), especially Chapter 2 "The Age of Minis': Secretaries, City Girls and Masculinity Downtown."

<sup>1131</sup> Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*; Also see Brad Weiss, *Street Dreams & Hip Hop Barbershops* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>1132</sup> David Bell and Mark Jayne "Small Cities? Towards a Research Agenda," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33:3 (2009): 683-699; Boeck, Filip de, Ann Cassiman, and Steven van Wolputte, "An Anthropology of Secondary Cities in Africa: A (Comparative) Regional Analysis), n.d. accessed 15 May 2017, [http://soc.kuleuven.be/web/files/7/38/Secondarycities\\_synopsis.pdf](http://soc.kuleuven.be/web/files/7/38/Secondarycities_synopsis.pdf)

perhaps overshadowing other, competing urbanisms or subaltern ideas of city life—from the mid-twentieth century onwards is doubly notable. This section delves into the historical practices associated with *zanatany* and this *zanatany* way of life in Mahajanga. I track the dimensions of *zanatany* life through the personal account of Papa Taoaby and others—who are in many ways emblematic of the broader generational group attributed as the first-generation *zanatany*.

Papa Taoaby, with whom this chapter opened, was born in 1942 in Bekodoka (a rural village outside of Besalampy, some 150 miles south of Mahajanga). His father hailed from Ngazidja (Grande Comore), and married his mother who hailed from an affluent, cattle-owning Sakalava family in the area. The marriage dissolved at some point and his father fled. When he was twelve, Papa Taoaby traveled to Mahajanga with his mother and settled on a piece of land in Abattoir—the neighborhood in which Ajojo (from Ngazidja) dominated in the city. To fulfill their brotherly duty to provide for their sister, his maternal uncles purchased land from another Grand Comorian for his mother, who longed to settle in town. They lived on the property in a simple sheet metal home (*trano toly*), while he studied. He attended Qur’anic school led by the famous foundi Tsepy, where like many young Muslim men in the city he found communality and social connections. But beginning in the 1940s, mosques were no longer the only terrain for belonging –and conflict—for Ajojo and Anjouan young men. In late 1950s Majunga, sporting clubs emerged as important sites for the “creation of robust men...and ties of friendship and good comradarie.”<sup>1133</sup> The existence of two sport clubs reflected the fractured, and competing Comorian groups of young men in the city: l’Etoile d’Anjouan (of those from Nzwani), and

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<sup>1133</sup> This was the wording found in the founding declaration of the sports club *Islam Sport* in January 1945, as quoted in Toibibou, “Entre Anjouanais et Grands Comoriens,” 462.

l'islam Sport (comprised of those from Ngazidja).<sup>1134</sup> Papa Taoaby attributed his involvement with the latter, and his athletic agility, with his easy ability to integrate with young *zanatany* men in town.



Figure 93: Anjouan Festivities, Majunga (1904) (Source: CAOM FR ANOM 44PA135/80)

But the improvisational and ceremonial occupation of shared, public spaces—especially streets—were the centrifugal points of *zanatany* sociality. Countless long-time residents of Mahajanga (across a wide spectrum of ethnic and religious backgrounds), recalled the grand performances of singing and dancing by Comorian men. Extending centuries old practices from Ngazidja (Grande Comore) young men claimed these public spaces.<sup>1135</sup> With men enrobed in the *kofia* cap and *kanzu*, a long, white flowing robe originating in Omani, these performances were

<sup>1134</sup> CAOM: MAD/GGM/D6(9)25, “Rapport: L’Islam Dans la Province de Majunga” p. 35. For a detailed account of the conflicts between these clubs-and tensions more broadly between Grand-Comorians and Anjouan, see, Ali Mohamed, especially pgs 462-465.

<sup>1135</sup> Sophie Blanchy, *La Grande Comore en 1898* (Paris: JOUVE, 2007), 37.

visually arresting (Figures 93, 95). Like in Comoros, it was often for auspicious occasions, such as the first entry of a groom into his wife's home, that sacred dances such as *kanja* and *toharabo* were held.<sup>1136</sup> Sometimes these festivities were accompanied by bullfights (Figure 94). *Daira*, a circular dance form associated with the *Shahiliya* order, was (and still is) performed on the seventh and fortieth nights following a death.<sup>1137</sup> Led by learned older men of the *twarika* (brotherhood), younger men played drums and sang verses in a proud display of their acquired knowledge. Mastering such refined musical techniques was a marker of the formation of Muslim young men.<sup>1138</sup> These collective performances served to bind participants together, enacting a sense of connectivity through rhythmic syncopations, and the suspension of everyday tempos.<sup>1139</sup>

But it was precisely the ways these festivities interrupted the usual rhythms of urban life that drew the attention of French colonial officials, who found them suspect and concerning. At first, authorities complained about the prevalence and sound emitted from “*tam-tams*.”<sup>1140</sup> Beginning in 1910, they required “natives” to secure prior authorization from the city before orchestrating *tam-tam* festivities.<sup>1141</sup> They also added a tax of 5francs to tam-tam celebrations, but after several years decided the tax ought to be raised. “The natives are too often engaged [in

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<sup>1136</sup> Blanchy, *La Grande Comore...*, 38.

<sup>1137</sup> Fieldnotes, Nov. 1, 2013; Martin Ottenheimer and Harriet Ottenheimer, *Historical Dictionary of the Comoro Islands*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>1138</sup> Anthropologists have noted how Muslim congregants in Comoros often sing and pray in a language unfamiliar to them, leading to what Michael Lambek has called an experience of Islam “characterized by a vitality counterposed with a feeling of inadequacy.” “The Ludic Side of Islam and its possible date in Mayotte,” *Omalý sy Anio*, 25-26 (1987), 102. The same could be said to be true in Mahajanga. Historians and anthropologists have expansively documented the ways converts and congregants adapt and rework religious practice according to the local political, economic, and social conditions. A fuller treatment of the changing practices of Islam in Mahajanga, however, falls beyond the scope of this chapter, but have been fruitfully explored by Gueunier, *Les Chemins d’Islam*, and others.

<sup>1139</sup> See Michael Lambek, “The Ludic Side...” for a full ethnographic analysis of *daira* and *mulidi* in Mayotte in the 1980s. He described the affective dimensions, especially euphoria and jubilation, of these sacred dances.

<sup>1140</sup> Note that while “tam-tam” in colonial Majunga signified drums, this term has been used to denote a wide array of musical instruments including metal gongs and cymbals in Indian, Caribbean, African and North American contexts. See J. Edwin Hill, *Black Soundscapes White Stages: The Meaning of Francophone Sound in the Black Atlantic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 4, for thoughtful insights into tam-tams in imperial contexts.

<sup>1141</sup> ANRDM/F 52, Séance du 27 Octobre 1911, no. 68. “Projet d’Arrete concernant les Tam-Tam.”

these festivities] and it's important to instill regular work habits" the mayor proposed.<sup>1142</sup> Raising taxes on festivals was seen as way to curb the frequency of Comorian performances, with the added benefit of more revenue for the municipality.<sup>1143</sup> City dwellers were not deterred, and six months later the city council was frustrated by the inefficacy of their proposed scheme.

Over the next decade, the tam-tam celebrations apparently increased with the growing population of Comorians and *zanatany* in town. Not only had the tax failed to reduce the number of festivities, but city administrators complained that tam-tam parties began to interfere with the labor rhythms on account of their wild popularity. In 1928, the city council wrung their hands in confusion, perplexed about how to resolve the problem.<sup>1144</sup> "The natives are great fans of these festivities, and take advantage of them to abandon their work sites...this state of affairs is

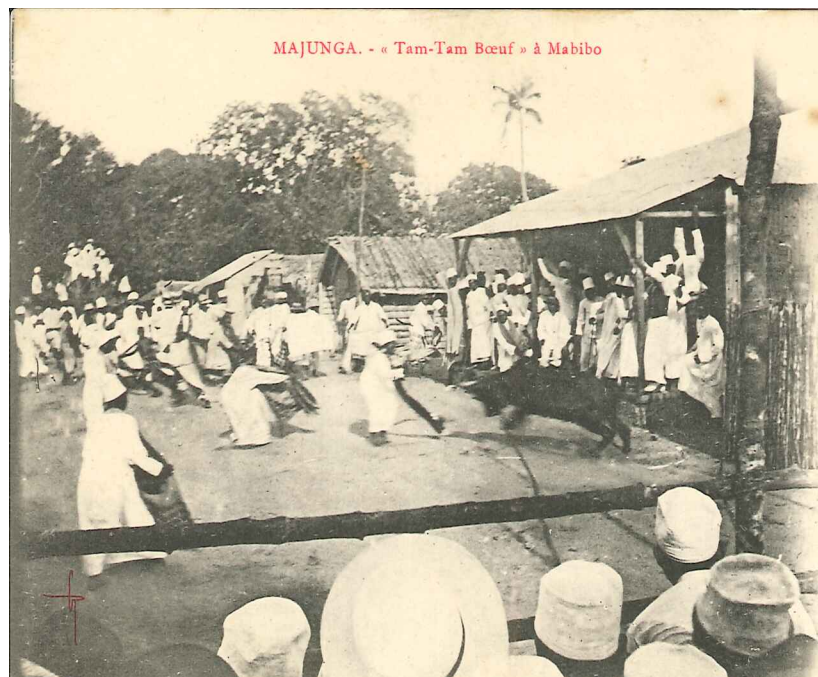


Figure 94: Postcard, Comorian Tam-Tam, with a bullfight in Mahabibo  
(Source: Author's collection)

<sup>1142</sup> ANRDM/F41, Extrait du Registre des Deliberations de la Commission Municipale de Majunga, 19 Nov 1918.

<sup>1143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1144</sup> ANRDM F46: 1928: Session Extraordinaire Commission Municipale, 14 Juin 1928.

harming the economic life of the city.”<sup>1145</sup> Once again, taxation and regulation were seen to be the optimal bureaucratic technologies for shaping urban space and social norms. The city council president reminded council members that the tam-tams were an important source of revenue, and they determined to raise the tax on tam-tam parties from 5fr20 to 30 fr. Two days later, a group of companies in town presented a petition to the city council, pleading for regulation that would



Figure 95: Postcard, Comorian Dance, Majunga ca. 1930s (Source: Author’s collection)

limit tam-tam festivities to Sundays and holidays only.<sup>1146</sup> The Municipal Council agreed, and they approved an act which instituted the 30 fr tax and the restriction to Sundays and holidays.<sup>1147</sup> Outraged, a group of “Comorians from Mahabibo” accosted the city administrators and demanded that the regulations be modified to accommodate festivities on Saturday evenings.

<sup>1145</sup> “Les indigènes qui sont grand amateurs de ces manifestations en profitent pour délaissier leurs chantiers et cet état de choses porte atteinte à la vie économique de la Ville.”

<sup>1146</sup> ANRDM/F43: Session Extraordinaire 16 June 1928.

<sup>1147</sup> ANRDM/F 43: Municipal Order No. 93, approved by City Council June 14, 1928, signed by Mayor on August 3, 1928.

They successfully negotiated that tam-tam gatherings could take place between 7:00-10:00pm on Saturdays, providing the city's "economic life" was not disrupted.<sup>1148</sup>

Colonial authorities responses to the tam-tam—and of Malagasy and Comorian performances more broadly— however were mixed. Some images (see Figure 96) hint at the fascination, even pleasure experienced by authorities who witnessed the revelry. Such an

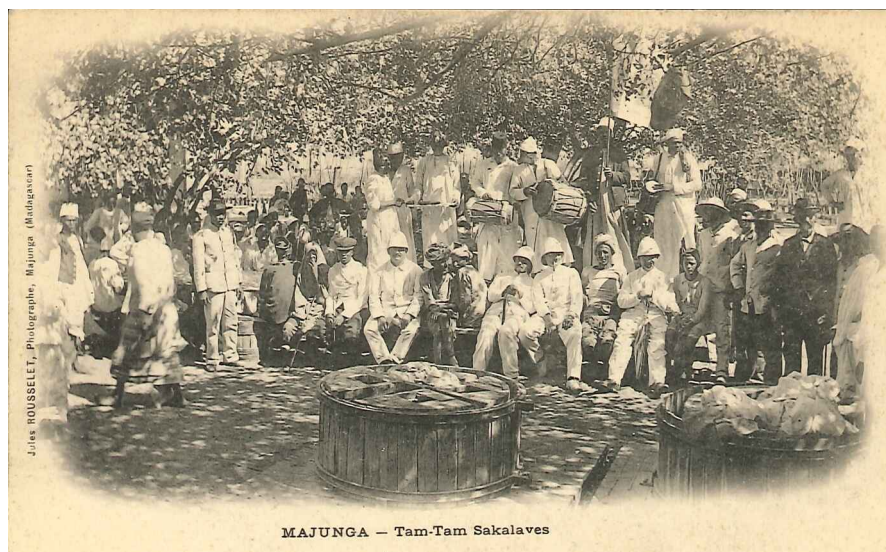


Figure 96: Postcard, "Sakalava Tam-Tam" (Source: Author's collection)

ambivalent valuation of the tam-tam comes, as Edwin Hill reminds us, "from the ambivalence of the colonial machine itself, which fetishized the sonic site of the other in musical culture, creative expression, and natural history since before the Enlightenment."<sup>1149</sup> Even as colonial authorities sought to contain the reverberations of the beating drums, Comorians, infused the soundscape—whether the ceremonial beating of "tam-tam" drums, singing and public banter, or noisy funerary and marriage processions—with competing articulations of a morally-informed

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<sup>1148</sup> ANRDM/F43: Procès-Verbaux Séance, 5 November 1928. "de nombreux Comorians du Village de Mahabibo sollicita au nom de tous leur camarades l'autorisation d'organiser des tams-tams le Samedi soir après la fermeture des bureaux c'est à dire de sept heures à dix heures. Cette demande ne soulève aucune objection l'organisation de tams tams le samedi soir ne portant aucune atteinte à la vie économique. L'AM soumet au Conseil un projet d'arrêté contenant ces dispositions et l'assemblée à l'unanimité donne son adhésion." Note that *karana* residents who enjoyed marriage processions, replete with drums, were also subject to regulations instituted in 1928, limiting these festivities to hours before 10pm. Their tax, however, for festivities was 10 times more at 300 fr.

<sup>1149</sup> Hill, *Black Soundscapes White Stages*..., 104.

urbanism. To play tam-tams and dance in the streets was at once a vehement insistence that city spaces belonged to equally to [male] colonial subjects, and an affirmation of linkages to Sufi communities in Majunga and beyond, in the past and present. At stake in the acoustic struggles between colonial institutions and city residents was not only control over the landscape, but also conflicting norms about urban temporality, moral norms of an urban citizenry and the value of shared spaces.

Increasing efforts by colonial technocrats to regulate tam-tams were enmeshed in a broader project of governing the city's soundscape. Authorities frequently framed their anxieties about the limitations of their political authority in terms of the sensorial "disturbances" of Mahajanga residents, and sought to manage public space by tempering the sensorial landscape in which they found themselves. It is possible that colonial authorities believed they could limit the growth of Muslim communities in town by restricting tam-tam celebrations—similar to their logics of housing and property regulation discussed earlier. Or perhaps officials feared that the beating of tam-tams was a covert mode of communication through which city dwellers could galvanize anti-colonial solidarity.<sup>1150</sup>

It is worth diverting to note that the political mood of the late 1930s and into the 40s in Majunga—and indeed Madagascar—was one of increasing colonial apprehension, as anti-colonial sentiments grew and congealed in urban spaces. Across the island, the increasing movement of people from rural to urban areas in the 1920s and 30s gave rise to new forms of political organizing, labor unions, and hometown associations.<sup>1151</sup> Although French colonial authorities made modest concessions towards autonomy, for instance in appointing Malagasy

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<sup>1150</sup> I thank Pier Larson for this suggestion.

<sup>1151</sup> Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 166. Also, see Faranirina Esoavelomandroso, 'Des rizières à la ville. Les plaines de l'ouest d'Antananarivo dans la première moitié du XXème siècle,' *Omalysy Anio*, 29-32 (1989-1990), 321-337.



representatives to the French National Assembly, by and large citizenship remained a distant mirage. As elsewhere across the faltering empire, cities were the clusters of political discussion and organizing among those agitating for change.<sup>1152</sup> And the German occupation of France brought to light the vulnerabilities of colonial power and exacerbated existing feelings of mistrust and instability among colonial officials towards Malagasy and Comorians. In Madagascar and elsewhere, Malagasy dissidents were emboldened by the presence of the Vichy regime to stake more explicitly oppositional to French colonial authority.<sup>1153</sup> In Majunga, police had worked to stifle outbursts of anti-French sentiments. In 1941, for instance, hecklers in the “Malagasy section” of the theater whistled and cheered support when images of Marshal Petain splashed across the screen.<sup>1154</sup> Police closed the theater and ramped up surveillance throughout the city.<sup>1155</sup>

That same year, city authorities grew alarmed by the stirrings of disloyalty among the Comorian population. Anti-French sentiments were brought to the attention of authorities inadvertently, however, exposed by the raw fractures within the Moskeriny Chadhouli that at one moment required official arbitration. An altercation erupted in the mosque one day in July 1941, in which Ahmed Cheick accused Abdoul Razakou of lying about a small issue concerning the distribution of a prepared meal to congregants.<sup>1156</sup> According to reports, the dispute fell along ethno-racial lines: “Métis” (or *zanatany*) congregants backed Cheick, while “Anjounais”

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<sup>1152</sup> See Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and culture in the making of Tanganyika nationalis, 1955-1965* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005).

<sup>1153</sup> Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Petain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>1154</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in Tropics*, 77.

<sup>1155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1156</sup> CAOM/PM//526/0922, Testimony of Ali Kouli, tailor, residing in Manga.

supported Razakou. So serious was the argument that leaders halted prayers, evacuated the mosque, and closed the building until a resolution could be reached.<sup>1157</sup>

In the days that followed, police carried out interviews with congregants on both sides of the conflict. Several congregants testified that this argument was only the latest iteration in long-standing struggles plaguing the congregation. Specifically, from at least 1937, Anjouanais and Métis had diverged around the volatile nationalist campaign of Jean Ralaimongo: Anjouanais supported Ralaimongo, while “métis” did not.<sup>1158</sup> Even before the encroaching of Ralaimongo’s campaign in the northwest in 1937, deep fissures had emerged among congregants over some Anjouanais’ strong anti-French sentiments.<sup>1159</sup> Others claimed the “moral separation” of the two groups had deeper roots that related to the lack of Qur’anic knowledge among métis (*zanatany*), rather than political differences.<sup>1160</sup> On account of their superior knowledge of the Qur’an, some concurred, “pure” Anjouanais maintained leadership positions, which led to resentment among Métis. And though the disagreement was said to largely fall along ethnic lines with “pure” Anjouanais on one side, and Anjouanais-Malagasy métis on the other, there were exceptions.<sup>1161</sup> Eventually, the conflict was resolved through *kabary* and discussion, but tensions persisted.

*Zanatany* began pulling away from their Anjouanais congregants. Led by Mohamed Vita (Madi

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<sup>1157</sup> CAOM/PM//526/0922, “Enquête relative à l’incident de la Mosquée Anjouanaise, le 22 Juillet 1941,” Exécution Transmission n. 2644-District.”

<sup>1158</sup> CAOM/PM//526/0922, Procès-Verbal, 25 July, 1941, “Enquête a.s.d’un incident à la Mosquée Anjouanaise le 22-7-41” by Police Commissioner Louis Boucher. Ralaimongo and his campaign will be discussed in more detail on Chapter 9.

<sup>1159</sup> See especially Ali Mohamed Toibibou’s account of the ‘Abdulatif Affair’ in 1934, which was also mentioned by colonial authorities in the reports of the 1941 dispute. In that incident, Abdulatif, who was the imam of the Anjouanais Mosque, was ousted by his congregants for his strong separatist discourses. He was subsequently welcomed into the Moskeriny Zoma (of those from Ngazidja-Grande Comore), and was accused of seeking revenge on his former adversaries at the Anjouanais mosque by instigating dissent. Tensions between the two communities—“Grande-Comorians” and “Anjouanais” erupted in a conflict requiring police intervention, “Anjouanais et Grands-Comorians à Majunga (1908-1960),” *Cultures citadines dans l’océan Indien occidental XVIIIe-XXIe siècles*, (Paris: Karthala, 2011), 460-462.

<sup>1160</sup> CAOM/PM//526/0922, Testimony of Abdoul Razakou, boat owner, residing in Mahabibokely.

<sup>1161</sup> “Ahmed Cheik” was identified as Anjouanais but aligned with the métis, for instance. CAOM/PM//526/0922.

Vita), the group founded a separate “Malagasy Society” (*Société Malgache*) to assist members with a death in the family, or in need of financial assistance under extenuating circumstances.<sup>1162</sup> Pooling their resources, they sought to secure a structure in which they could locate their society, though it is not clear if this reflected an intention to establish a new mosque altogether.<sup>1163</sup>

As Comorian and Comorian-Malagasy “metis” debated what the Vichy moment might mean for them, however, colonial authorities grew increasingly alarmed by the stirrings of disloyalty among the Comorian population. They initiated an investigation into one particularly suspicious Anjouan, Abdullah Allaoui, a wood seller and former head of the Manga municipality, who was thought to harbor “anti-French sentiments.”<sup>1164</sup> For some time, they tracked who entered and left from Allaoui’s home, and began interrogating them one by one. One of them, Ali Kouli, a 63 year old tailor living in Manga, described that one day he passed by Allaoui’s home and heard him pronounce, “We will gladly welcome the Germans to Madagascar enabling us to work because they will give us much money...the French Government has not learned anything. Unlike the British who teach the natives to work well.”<sup>1165</sup> Ali Kouli told the Police Commissioner, Louis Boucher, that he protested, pointing out to Allaoui that the French government had in fact instructed him, and appointed him in his administrative role. Kouli then distanced himself from Allaoui, explaining “Allaoui is an Anjouanais, and me, I’m a métis

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<sup>1162</sup> CAOM/PM//526/0922, Déposition de Temoin, October 8, 1941, of Mohamed Vita, by Police Commissioner Louis Boucher, with assistance of Mze Ahmed.

<sup>1163</sup> In some accounts Madame Soilihy refused to accept the funds, suggesting that she was also likely part of the métis community, and supportive of their cause. CAOM/PM//526/0922, Déposition de Témoin, October 4, 1941, of M’ze Ivesy by Police Commissioner Louis Boucher, with assistance of Mze Ahmed. But in her own account, she denied the transaction, claiming that she was deceived and the Madi Vita was a thief, taking congregants’ money for the fake cause of the Society. CAOM/PM//526/0922, Déposition de Témoin, Sept. 30, 1941, of Fahida Benti Soilihy, by Police Commissioner Louis Boucher, with assistance of Mze Ahmed.

<sup>1164</sup> CAOM MAD/PM//526/0922, Procès-Verbal, 5 August 1941.

<sup>1165</sup> Vivement que les allemands viennent à Madagascar que nous puissions travailler, car eux nous donneront beaucoup d’argent...le gouvernement francais ne fait rien appris. ce n’est pas comme les anglais, qui apprennent a bien travailler aux indigenes.

(*zanatany*). He knows that I don't have the same political ideas as him... I know that he doesn't like the French Government.”<sup>1166</sup>

Notwithstanding internal disagreements between the police and the mayor, city administrators decided to drop the allegations against Allaoui to avoid inciting more adversarial sentiments against the colonial regime. The concluding report justified this decision on the nature and relative size of the Anjouanais population. The “Anjouanais are the most turbulent among the native emigrés from the Comorian Archipelago. In Majunga, their number is considerable (close to 3,000)... We are not in favor of a [accusatory] statement whose evidence remains uncertain, given that we are in the presence of a religious community with whom it would be most awkward to retain subjects... who are more or less interested in stirring trouble.”<sup>1167</sup>

Choosing the path of least resistance, colonial officials side-stepped overt conflict with what had become a most overwhelming community of Comorian congregants and preserved peace in the city. I raise these various incidences reveal because they offer a sense of how *zanatany* (here framed as *métis*) as a coherent group was forged in conflict with Anjouan congregants during the 1930s and 40s. Disagreements over where one's political loyalties should lie—whether with the burgeoning nationalist movement of Ralaimongo, or with the steadfast French colonial regime—was a point of divergence for *zanatany* and their Anjouan congregants. This may have been rooted in the longstanding mistrust between those of Sakalava descent and those from the highlands (Ralaimongo was from the highlands). But also at stake were debates about the relationship between mosque leadership and depth of sacred knowledge. As we will see,

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<sup>1166</sup> “Allaoui est un ‘Anjouanais,’ et moi un ‘métis.’ Il sait que je n’ai pas les mêmes idées politiques que lui, aussi ne me tenu de tels propos qu’en cette circonstance. Je sais cependant qu’il n’aime pas le Gouvernement Français.”

<sup>1167</sup> CAOM MAD/PM//526/0922, Letter from Chef du District to Administrateur Supérieur de la Région de Majunga, 28 August 1941.

*zanatany* men would continue to contest the authority of those who oversaw the religious life of Muslim communities.

### ***Taking to the Streets: Zanatany Women and Performances of Power***

*Zanatany* womens' performances apparently did not attract the same scrutiny of colonial authorities as mens' dances. Some contended this was because womens' celebrations usually took place *inside* housing compounds, but others suggested young *zanatany* women challenged these norms over time. As one older *zanatany* woman described, "Silamo [Muslim, *zanatany*] women would stay in the courtyard, playing (*misoma*), cooking (*mandoky*) singing and dancing there. But they rarely ventured in the public places, except for the bazaar. To go out (*mivoaka*) went against customs for respectability of Silamo women. Before, they never went to mosque, but now the young women, they go and pray regularly in mosque."<sup>1168</sup>

Comorian migrants in the early 1900s brought with them specific ideologies about gender and spaces, that shaped early practices in the city. In early twentieth century Comoros, noble women performed their ritual dances in semi-private courtyards where they were shielded from the prying eyes of men. Servants, however, danced on the streets. Sophie Blanchy described how one particular dance, the "tam-tam des pileuses de riz" in which dancers pulverize rice in rhythmic beats, "dramatized the coordination (or rivalry) of domestic workers in their everyday work."<sup>1169</sup> But she also noted how this dance form changed under the influence of Comorians of Madagascar and Mahorais. Suggesting perhaps a generational shift, this dance became known as "wadaha" (as it is still known in Mahajanga) and was organized by associations of young women, "rivaling seduction, on the rapid rhythms played by orchestras of young men. Judged as

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<sup>1168</sup> Interview with M. T., Abattoir, April 29, 2013.

<sup>1169</sup> Sophie Blanchy, *La Vie Quotidienne a Mayotte*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990), 224; Blanchy, *Grande Comore*, 38.

licentious, it has today been replaced in Comoros (during the Grand Marriage) by male or female concerts (*twarab*).<sup>1170</sup>

Over time, Comorian and *zanatany* young women upended rigid norms around public space as masculine ritual and performative space, by gradually occupying the streets to collectively perform *wadaha* and *ambio* (another performance form using wooden rhythm sticks).<sup>1171</sup> Some contemporary residents recalled how *wadaha* spectacles in the '60s and '70s captivated all passerbys and drew large crowds; this persisted and was still true in 2012.<sup>1172</sup> Sacred singing and dancing almost always took place on the street, as did cooking (Figure 97-98). Senior women would often be found dividing food and supervising the distribution of gifts from inside the home. At times, though, participants constructed a loose curtain around the perimeter of the space, providing semi-privacy and effectively demarcating it as an exceptional, ritual site. And *zanatany* women regularly emphasized their virtuous character in it terms of immobility, as in “I don’t go out and about, I stay at home” (*Izaho tsy miboaka, fa mipetraka an’trano foana*).<sup>1173</sup> Other times some *zanatany* found freedom in alternative public spaces, like the Sakalava *doany* (royal compound) during the annual *fanompoa* (ritual washing of the relics); in these moments *zanatany* invoked their Sakalava background.<sup>1174</sup> Others enjoyed the airy evenings on the Bord de la Mer, when young people and families would venture out for brochettes and socializing.

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<sup>1170</sup> Ibid, my translation from original french.

<sup>1171</sup> Interview with Mama Bonhomme, Manga, October 30, 2013.

<sup>1172</sup> “Misy fotoana misy manao fete, dia olo jiaby mijery the wadra...” Interview with Francois, Abattoir, Feb. 3, 2014.

<sup>1173</sup> In fact, some *zanatany* friends chastised me for going out and around too much, probably questioned my character. They were aghast to discover that David frequently did our shopping at the bazary, noting that this task was exclusive to women, and the primary reason for which women did venture into public.

<sup>1174</sup> See Michael Lambek’s *The Weight of the Past* for a thorough exploration of spirit possession, ritual practices and significance of the *doany*, and Sakalava conceptions of history.



Figure 97: Women cooking in Tsaramandroso for wedding festivities, 2014 (Source: Author)

But ritual events offered a legitimate opportunity for many women to occupy public spaces in highly visible ways. On ritual occasions, women danced in synchronicity, amplified by their identically matching dress (*salovona complet*) (Figure 99). These were intense experiences, overflowing with joy, exuberance, and even euphoria; they required stamina, sometimes extending over several days. They were also lavish events, requiring the slaughter of cattle, consumption of bottled drinks, and preparation of elaborate dishes and desserts. Often kin (*havana, famille*) in Comoros, Mayotte or France bore the expenses, which served to connect diasporic *zanatany* communities with those in Mahajanga. In our women's *fikambanana* in Manga, great excitement emerged among organizers in planning the details of such events. Women would proudly explain to me that I was to witness “how *zanatany* women play (*misoma*) and celebrate,” and throughout the festivities, many took it upon themselves to instruct me in the significance of these distinctive *zanatany* performance style.



Figure 98: Women performing *wadaha* with onlookers in background, 2014 (Source: Author)

Among the key tasks was choosing the most pleasing cloth wrap (*salovana*) for members to wear at the ceremonial occasion. For others, however, these events brought dread; some declined participation if they disliked or could not afford the designated cloth.<sup>1175</sup> *Zanatany* daughters of mixed Comorian-Malagasy unions have continued to appropriate public spaces – streetscapes and courtyards- in the conspicuous, pious and emotive performance of religious and life-cycle events. For many *zanatany* women, these efforts are a prideful assertion of their belonging to the city amidst an urban socio-political landscape that has become increasingly ambivalent to their inclusion in the urban citizenry. These events have created openings in which *zanatany* women enunciated themselves as a distinctive moral and religious community; enacted

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<sup>1175</sup> Fieldnotes, Interview with R.M., Manga, October 7, 2013.



the legitimacy of their belonging to the city; and strengthened linkages to transnational, kin and religious networks.



Figure 99: Younger age-set women in foreground, with matching *salovana*, 2014 (Source: Author)

### ***Raising Zanatany Men, Rising Zanatany Men***

While older *zanatany* men described large ritual events of *daira* and publicly visible, sacred dances as multi-generational events, they also described places and moments when this inter-generational cohesion broke down. In Comoros, especially in Ngazidja—the home of the grand marriage—generational hierarchies were prominent, and manifest in the spaces of villages and towns. Blanchy described the historical age set-generational system in late nineteenth century Comoros in which men were either: “sons of the city” (*mnamdji*) or “accomplished men” (*mndru mbaba*). “Only the latter enjoyed full citizenship: he had the right to sit and speak in the assembly of his city, where he represented his matrilineal house. Men encountered each other in

mosques but also on border places where they held assemblies of the “accomplished” who had made Grand Marriage...but under the kiosk...was reserved for unmarried classes.”<sup>1176</sup>

Contemporary residents of Mahajanga framed this distinction in terms of “consideration”; those



Figure 100: Older men discussing (mikalizy), Moskeriny Zoma, Ambovoalanana (Source: David Epstein)

Ajojo who had not completed the *grand mariage* were “not considered” (*tsy considere*). And to a certain extent, some of these spatial expressions of generational and status differences remained visible in contemporary Mahajanga.<sup>1177</sup> Older men, for instance, dominated the benches around the perimeter of the towering Mokeriny Zoma (Figure 100)<sup>1178</sup> or the Vy Lava (literally, long

<sup>1176</sup> Blanchy *Grande Comore*, 37.

<sup>1177</sup> More generally throughout the city (with the exception of Majunga Be, which will be discussed in Chapter 9), people spontaneously occupied sidewalks, storefronts, civic building entrances, and any shady spot. This kind of improvisational inhabitation of space was perceived as a positive (rather than negative) addition to the space, a creation of a kind of sociable atmosphere.

<sup>1178</sup> One afternoon early in my fieldwork, I was nearby the Moskeriny Zoma, waiting for someone, and looking for a place to sit. I noticed that only older men were sitting at the mosque’s edge, and finally a young woman selling her

iron), the fence bordering the Moskeriny Zoma. Younger men sought out other spaces—hotelys (small restaurant stands), parks such as Jardin Cayla, and the steps near the post office. Many inhabitants perceived the younger men who occupied these spaces as threatening, and dismissively labeled them as thugs (*maboto*).<sup>1179</sup>

But in Mahajanga during the 1960s, there were other forms of sociality exclusive to younger *zanatany* men. Social clubs (*kilabo*) situated in Abattoir and Ambovoalana neighborhoods afforded the constitution of *zanatany* masculinity and the integration of newer (Comorian, or Comorian-Malagasy) migrants. *Kilabo* were single-story houses, usually constructed from sheet metal, that served as gathering points in the Mahabibo area. Residents recalled that *kilabos* were dominated by Ajojo from Ngazidja (Grande Comore), and that three existed, delineated around regional places of origin: 1) for those from the Moroni, 2) Iconi, and 3) Fouboni (see Figure 101). These clubs were long since defunct and the houses now occupied by private families.<sup>1180</sup> But Papa Taoaby, and many others in their sixties and seventies, vividly recalled the unmistakable presence of *kilabo* as key sites of young *zanatany* sociality in the city in the 1950s - 1970s. “Back before, young people used to socialize (*mamangy trengo*) and party (*misoma*) in Abattoir,” Mama Marta described to me one morning, “men and women, they all

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wares waved me over. She explained that “women shouldn’t sit there [on the mosque’s edge] because women are dirty (*maloto*), especially when there’s blood, when they’re menstruating (*misy ra, misy fotoana*)” and she offered a place next to her. She explained that migrated to the city from the south (Tandroy) and was married to a Mohelian man who instructed her in these matters. Fieldnotes, Nov. 2013.

<sup>1179</sup> The figure of the “maboto” is that of a gangster or druglord, who wears his pants low, smokes cigarettes, and runs in packs as typified in the music of Shao Boana, a local musician in Mahajanga.

<sup>1180</sup> Although it was difficult to precise the location of these former *kilabos*, they were roughly recalled as: 1) near the public bathhouse in Mahabibo, 2) near the Qur’anic school (madrassa) in Abattoir off of Avenue des Comores, and 3) in Ambovoalanana, near the money exchange shop.

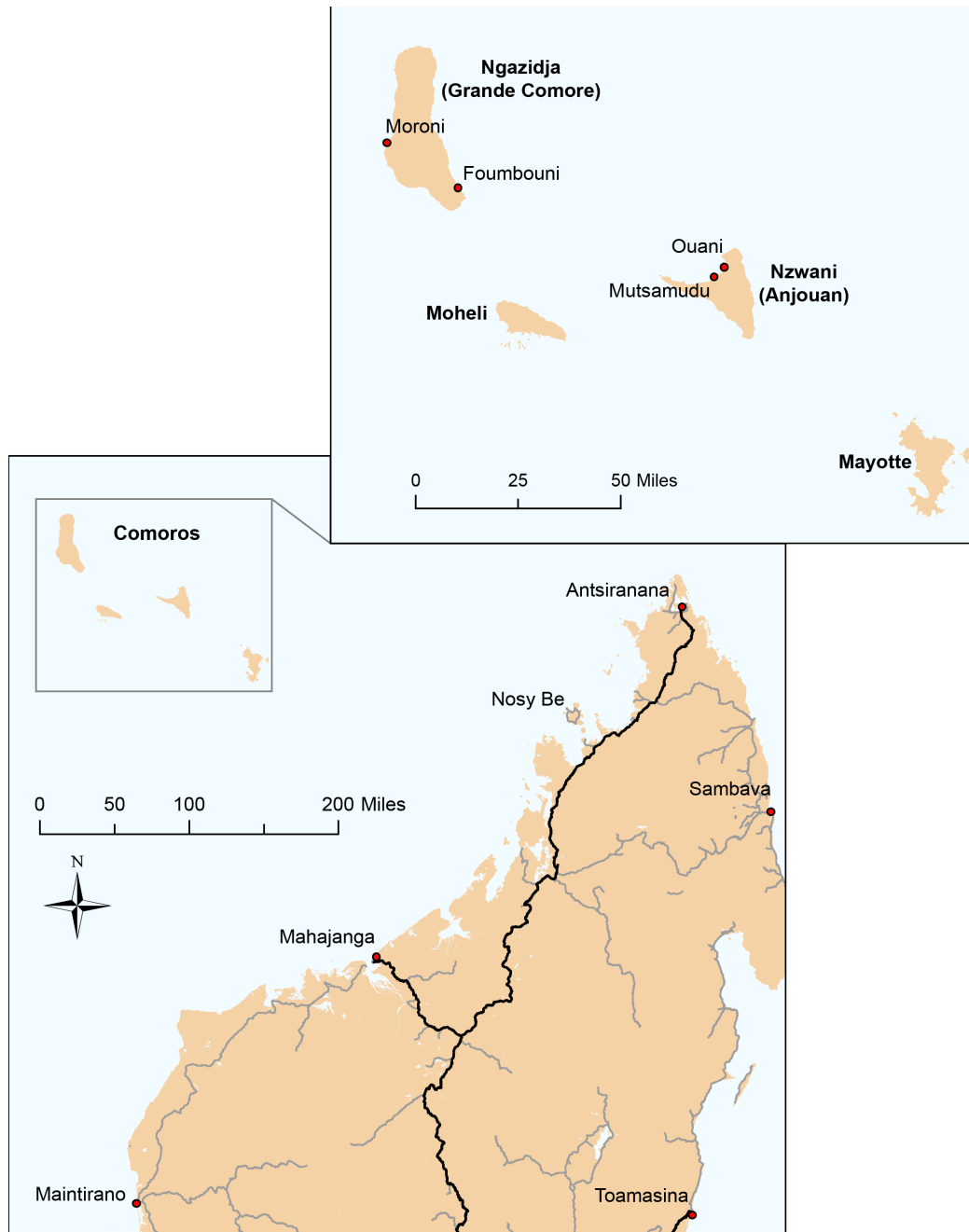


Figure 101: Map of Comoros and northwest Madagascar

mixed in those *kilabo*.”<sup>1181</sup> The daughter of strict Catholic, Betsileo parents, Mama Marta was not permitted to go to the *kilabo* as a young woman—because they were seen by other Malagasy as places of licentious mixed-gender sociality. Most *zanatany*, however, maintained that these were exclusively male spaces (*societe lehilahy*), although women could be members. Members

<sup>1181</sup> Interview with Mama Marta, Morafeno, Dec. 15, 2013.

paid a small contributing fee (*cotisation*), and gained access to the club, where they might play cards, dominos, *katra* (a mancala game) and socialize (see Figure 102).<sup>1182</sup>



Figure 102: “Mahabibo Village, Game of Cards” (Note typical men in distinctive Comorian garb), ca.1930s-40s Postcard (Author’s collection)

*Zanatany* men nostalgically recalled the *joie de vivre* that characterized everyday life, and described how they effectively knit together arduous waged work and insouciant entertainment. Within a single day, many *zanatany* transformed themselves from grubby manual workers into dapper, stylish men, ready to immerse in the city’s buoyant nightlife. One day, Papa Taoaby described these labor and aesthetic practices, and clarified how *zanatany* men of different generations engaged with these forms of expression,<sup>1183</sup>

Papa Taoby (PT): Comorians and *zanatany* would work hard (*miasa mafy*), work all day, as dockworkers, taxi drivers, guardians, small grocery shop (*epicerie*) owners. Then, they would return home at the end of the day, wash up and get really clean (*madio tsara*).

<sup>1182</sup> Interview with Papa Taoaby, Abattoir, April 16, 2013. Interview with Mama Mariam, Manga, March 17, 2014.

<sup>1183</sup> Interview with Papa Taoaby, Abattoir, April 16, 2013.

They'd dress in beautiful clothes, and then they'd go play all evening long. Especially on Saturdays, they wouldn't sleep! They'd play and party all day long!<sup>1184</sup>

Tasha (T): So, what did they do at these parties? Did they drink alcohol or smoke?

PT: They didn't dare to smoke or drink alcohol in this quarter (Abattoir), though there was a bar in Manga. There was marijuana (*jamala*) but they'd smoke it elsewhere.

T: Most of the men who practiced this *zanatany* lifestyle, were they older men or younger men?

PT: It could be older men, or younger men. The older men left some of those behaviors behind, like wearing the fancy young clothes and going to the kilabos. But they would show off in other ways, say by having big parties.

Some city inhabitants attributed the carefree attitude among young *zanatany* men to the circulation of money during the city's thriving industrial past. Sprawling, vacant warehouse and factory spaces testified to the range of factories that once produced cloth (SOTEMA), soap (Barday and SIB), and fiber cords (FITIM). At its peak in the 1960s and 70s, SOTEMA alone employed more than 4,000 workers, but by the 1990s the company closed.<sup>1185</sup> Others intimated that since many *zanatany* lived in houses owned by their parents, they had disposable income that other young people did not. Whether they worked or didn't work, studied or didn't study, they could be ensured of familiar support for their basic needs. It was easy living at its best. This was reflected in the saying, "*mamboly voky, tsy mamboly voky*" meaning, "you're belly is full if you farm; your belly is full if you don't farm".<sup>1186</sup> Other Malagasy explicitly linked the abundant movement of money through the city with habits of conspicuous consumption among young *zanatany*. For many Malagasy the critical difference between *zanatany* and Malagasy was the extent to which one invested in their ancestral lands, a marker of proper fulfillment of kinship

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<sup>1184</sup> Interviews with Papa Taoaby, Abattoir, Nov. 6, 2012, Feb. 14, 2013 "mizara vola isan'andro...dia sasana...tsy matory amin'ny matonaly, fa misoma foana..."

<sup>1185</sup> *Dans le Media Demain* (29/08/1996; no. 489), private papers of Fr. Roland Barq, Spiritain Order, Antanamisaja.

<sup>1186</sup> Interview with Papa Taoaby, Abattoir, Dec. 9, 2013; Interview with Pastor Tovo, Mahabibokely, March 29, 2013.

obligations As Pastor Tovo relayed, “the *zanatany* way of life was to earn your money, then spend it all (*manam-bola, dia mandany ny vola*), not to think about your ancestral lands (*tanindrazana*) anymore. When you stop thinking of your *tanindrazana*, and just spend your money here, then you become *zanatany (lasa zanatany)*!”<sup>1187</sup>

Despite very few references to political activism in my discussions with older *zanatany* men, the 1940s and 50s were times of rapid mobilization and the formation of multiple political parties that would push the country towards independence.<sup>1188</sup> The Mouvement Démocratique de la Renovation Malgache (MDRM), led by intellectuals from the highlands; Parti des Desherités Malgache (PADESM), comprised of those of *mainity* status<sup>1189</sup> and coastal elites; as well as some smaller parties.<sup>1190</sup> The feverish pace of nationalist movements gave way to a violent anti-colonial rebellion in 1947, which spread across the island’s east coast.<sup>1191</sup> Pivotal in this movement were the veterans who had returned home from World War II, invigorated to fight for autonomy on their homeland.<sup>1192</sup> With the declaration of independence in Madagascar in 1960, optimism swept across the country. Many *zanatany* men intimated that these events were clustered in Antananarivo and the east coast, and never really reached to the northwest. Others described the deep feelings of loyalty to the French colonial government whom their parents and families attributed with emancipating them from the stronghold of the highland monarchy in the late nineteenth century. Still others described that their Comorian fathers or uncles were hired as

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<sup>1187</sup> Interview with Pastor Tovo, Mahabibokely, March 29, 2013.

<sup>1188</sup> See Solofo Randrianja, *Société et luttes anticoloniales à Madagascar (1896 à 1946)*, (Paris: Karthala, 2001).

<sup>1189</sup> *Mainity* denotes descendants of former slaves.

<sup>1190</sup> Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Malagasy Republic: Madagascar Today* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965); Maureen Covell, *Madagascar: Politics, Economics, Society* (New York: Francis Pinter, 1989).

<sup>1191</sup> Jacques Tronchon, *L’Insurrection Malgache de 1947: Essai d’Interpretation Historique* (Paris: Karthala, 1986).

<sup>1192</sup> Raymond Kent, *From Madagascar to the Malagasy Republic* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1962), 102-103.

police or militia by the colonial authorities to suppress anti-colonial movements, a recollection confirmed in some historical scholarship.<sup>1193</sup>

When I asked *zanatany* men and women about the political climate in Majunga in 1950s and early 1960s, they described the promises held in this moment. But others bitterly recounted the lack of change and instead the continuities between President Tsiranana's time and the colonial regime before it, describing Tsiranana's rule as "carrying on" the colonial era.<sup>1194</sup> Like those in Analalava described by Feeley-Harnik, some in Majunga recalled disappointment about the failure of Tsiranana to fulfill his promises to develop the city and neighboring port of Katsepy.<sup>1195</sup> Others recalled their parents' connections to Tsiranana enabled them to acquire land, working through patronage networks, which would have otherwise been unavailable to them.<sup>1196</sup> When I inquired about political involvement during this time, most swept my questions aside with a melancholic sigh, noting that "politics were ruined."<sup>1197</sup>

But if the 1960s failed to usher in much longed for progress, they did mark a moment of increasing generational fractures—and perhaps the glimpse of new possibilities for the younger generation— between Comorian men and their *zanatany* sons. Older forms of enforcing patriarchal authority and disciplining young men for transgressions, such as public humiliation and hazing, apparently dissipated beginning in the 1960s.<sup>1198</sup> For many older Comorians, the problem was not that their *zanatany* sons failed to think of their ancestral land (as Pastor Tovo suggested above), but that they began challenging their authority in overt ways. Some refused to

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<sup>1193</sup> Cite Thompson and Adloff, *Malagasy Republic*, 169, 271.

<sup>1194</sup> "Mitohy or mitondra my fanjakana frantsay"

<sup>1195</sup> Feeley-Harnik, *Green Estate*, 386-389; Interview with A.I., Tsaramandroso, Sept. 2, 2013.

<sup>1196</sup> Interview with A.M. Mahavoky, Feb. 12, 2013; Interview with Pauline, Morafeno, Dec. 13, 2013.

<sup>1197</sup> "Efa robaka ny politiky"

<sup>1198</sup> Older *zanatany* men recalled that junior men who violated the expected ethical norms, for instance stealing, would be confronted by a comprised of men and women at their home (this shaming the whole family). They initially gave a warning, but if the wrongdoing occurred again, the crowd would accost the young man, smearing him with mud, charcoal, and clay, assault him with a stick, and follow him throughout the neighborhood banging on a steel drum for all to witness.



attend Qur'anic school. Many no longer spoke the language of their fathers, Shikomoro.<sup>1199</sup>

Older men were left with little recourse to regulate their unruly sons.

Nowhere was this more pronounced than in mosques—the same sites that had once been the bedrock of solidarity among new Comorian migrants. *Zanatany* old and young alike recalled the collective building projects, spearheaded by determined Comorian migrants who arrived in the 1920s and 30s. But as their *zanatany* sons became adults, they sought to take leadership roles in mosque communities and pushed aside the “old Comorians” (*vieux Comorians*) who had long dominated.<sup>1200</sup> Though these conflicts over management fell more tightly along generational lines, the tensions resonated with earlier fissures in mosques communities during the late 1930s and early 1940s. At other times, this generational tension intensified around debates concerning the particularities of Islamic practice in mosques. While sermons had long been pronounced in Arabic at Moskeriny Zoma, for instance, a group of younger *zanatany* mobilized and pressed for Malagasy to be the language of preaching.<sup>1201</sup> Congregants reached a compromise, and today sermons are pronounced in both Malagasy and Arabic.<sup>1202</sup> In more recent times, some *zanatany* men (mostly in the twenties and thirties) embrace *wahabism*, leading them to question whether the Sufi practices of their fathers and grandfathers (let alone the small, but growing Malagasy Shia community) are legitimately Muslim.<sup>1203</sup>

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<sup>1199</sup> Mzé Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena’...,” 32.

<sup>1200</sup> Field notes, 8 April 2013. Interview with N.M., Morafeno, April 10, 2013; Taoaby, Abattoir, April 11, 2013.

<sup>1201</sup> Field notes, 22 April 2013.

<sup>1202</sup> Other mosques such as Moskeriny Chadhouli and Moskeriny Rifa`I, however, have retained Arabic sermons.

<sup>1203</sup> At least some of these young men have traveled to Saudi Arabia and other scholarly Islamic centers through programs funded by Wahabi leaders, and in which they have been instructed in Arabic and conservative Islamic theology. One man described that once home, these young men were brazen, intimidating older men with their more extensive linguistic skill and theological knowledge.

### *The Politics of Speech, Sound and Authenticity*

Inhabiting the spaces of the city was a thoroughly embodied undertaking. Bodily comportment was a critical index of a host of social values and norms in Mahajanga, for Malagasy and *zanatany* alike. *Zanatany* forms of sociality contrasted starkly with those of many Malagasy, by their relative sound and temporality. One *zanatany* man summed it up as, “The Malagasy, they would take their money, drink alcohol (*toaka*), then quietly visit their kin. But the Comorians and Comorian quarters, they were lively! The other quarters in town would be quiet, quiet, but here in Abattoir, Manga it was loud and lively (*resaresaka*, literally ‘talk’!)” While the Mahabibo marketplace bustled throughout the day, this vibrancy did not stop in the evenings. Many described that *zanatany* assumed a different lived temporality, one which was nocturnal. Men took advantage of the cool evening hours, a welcome respite from the heavy heat of the day, to relax and engage in intense banter about politics and news, a practice—with specific speech forms— known locally as *mikalizy*.<sup>1204</sup> They often congregated in front of Quincaillerie Hatim (a hardware store) or Moskeriny Zoma debating issues for hours, in a distinctive style that some Malagasy found combative and tiresome. One Malagasy man bemoaned, “the *zanatany* men here really like to *mikalizy*, to try and persuade another of their opinion and when they tire of it, they take it up the next day, talking loudly, brashly (*bevava*).”<sup>1205</sup>

This spirit of *zanatany* vibrancy, togetherness and conviviality was also cited as one of the leading reasons Comorians could establish themselves and integrate in the city. Comorians “like to have relationship with people,” “like to socialize,” and “connect with people” (*tia*

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<sup>1204</sup> See Jean Rogers Sylvain Randrianjafy, 1985, *Ny Kalizy: Lahabolana Ankananika, Literatiora Avaizo*, Unpublished thesis, University of Madagascar, Antananarivo, Madagascar.

<sup>1205</sup> Fieldnotes and interview with Casimir, Mahajanga, Jan. 7, 2014.

*mifandray olo Comorian*).<sup>1206</sup> They easily made relationships with neighbors, a fostered cohesion and tight-knit interdependent neighborhood relations, encompassed in the term '*jirany*'. Another way this social ease was framed was in terms of the peripatetic histories of Comorians, who have long traveled throughout the Indian Ocean basin and more recently comprise a major immigrant population in France. Wherever they travel, many told me, Comorians immediately find ways to integrate and settle. In Majunga, El Had described, "Comorians were 'at home' (*nous sommes chez nous*) and that's why they settled here, building houses and mosques."<sup>1207</sup> They were already "*tamana*," meaning "to already be accustomed" (*efa zatra*) to a previously unfamiliar place, to "not need to return home any longer" (*efa tsy mila mipody intsony*). This became most clear in a conversation with Maitre Youssef one day in July 2013. When I questioned him about the tactics by which Comorians integrated in the city, he vehemently rejected my interpretation, asserting that "Comorians did not strategize to integrate here! They integrated without effort...this was something natural. There was great understanding between Comorians and Malagasy (*mifankahazo be*), and Comorians were at home here." The Comorian attaché in Mahajanga put it another way, "Comorians refused to be guests (*tsy vahiny*). Comorians have always been this way, wherever they go...they don't consider themselves *vahiny*, here in Madagascar, even in Marseille!"<sup>1208</sup>

But Malagasy commentaries on the historical presence of Comorians allow glimpses beyond the veil of mythical acceptance and easy synthesis presented by many *zanatany*. Many Malagasy from elsewhere on the island, or newer migrants, took this Comorian "at-home-ness" as arrogance and presumption. A few indicated Comorians were snobby and aloof (*miavona*).<sup>1209</sup>

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<sup>1206</sup> Interview with Mama Zala, Manga, Nov. 4, 2013.

<sup>1207</sup> Interview with El Had, Ambalavato, April 18, 2014.

<sup>1208</sup> Interview with Attoumani, Mahajanga, April 18, 2013.

<sup>1209</sup> Interview with E.D., Amborovy, Feb. 7, 2013.

But others recalled the daring, bold way Comorians inhabited the city. They suggested that this vexed Malagasy and was one of the contributing factors in the unleashing of violence in the 1976-77 *rotaka*. Valentin, a former manager at the SOTEMA factory and now in his seventies, recalled, “Comorians thought of themselves as the masters (*tompon-tany*) here. They dared to speak in a loud voice, called themselves *zanatany* without any shame, spoke loudly. Even while people would tease them, calling them names like “mavorandzo” (ankles covered in dust) or “bory satroka” (roundhats).”<sup>1210</sup>

Others described that it was especially young Comorian men—and particularly Grande Comorian men—who were notoriously disrespectful. In their jest, they teased and belittled people (*manamby olo sasany*) and incited anger among Malagasy.<sup>1211</sup> Still others characterized Comorians as vain (*misekoseko*, *miebibio*) and conceited (*mibesta*).<sup>1212</sup> Dadi’Paul, a soft-spoken Merina principal of a private school who settled in Abattoir in the late 1980s, described it this way “[before the *rotaka*] Comorians were high-intensity (*mahery vaika*), they were rude and irreverent to neighbors (*maditra amin’ny fiaramonina*), and stubborn.”<sup>1213</sup> Such behaviors challenged longstanding norms among most Malagasy about generational hierarchy and respect for elders (*ray’amen’dreny*), and many Malagasy bristled in response. This came to light one day during my research during a walk with Casimir, an early-twenties university student from Fort Dauphin. We observed a group of young *zanatany* men approach an older gentleman and greet him in the form distinctive to Mahajanga, “Karakory baba? Inona kabary? Ahoana bwana?” Afterwards, Casimir pointed out to me, “you see, that’s a very informal way of speaking, especially to an older person (*olo be*). That’s a typical *zanatany* way of talking. Back home [in

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<sup>1210</sup> Interview with Valentin, Antanimisaja, Feb. 7, 2014. See also Mzé Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena’...40.

<sup>1211</sup> Interview with Dina, Ambovo, March 21, 2014.

<sup>1212</sup> Interview with Rochelle Ducaud, Mangarivotra, Oct. 11, 2013.

<sup>1213</sup> Interview with Dadi’Paul, Abattoir, Feb. 16, 2014.

Fort Dauphin] you must take account of who you're speaking with and respect elders (*tsy maintsy mifanaja, mikaonty*), by greeting them with the polite greeting, "Salama, manao ahoana tompoko?"<sup>1214</sup>

Young people like Casimir grappled with the historical meaning of *zanatany*, in positioning themselves in the heterogeneous and ever-shifting city. For many young people who were newer migrants to the city, there was an element of shame or embarrassment attached to their potential identification as *vahiny*. Probing the length of time people lived in Majunga, or their stories of migration, could be sensitive. Being *vahiny* in Mahajanga implied that one's family was poor, or did not own land (a marker of enslavement in earlier times), and thus lacked the resources to sustain the family in the home area. Almost everyone —young and old— with whom I spoke confirmed that it was preferable to be *zanatany* than *vahiny*. But many young people were redefining what and who could be *zanatany*, producing more inclusive understandings of nativism.

When I asked young men and women (in their twenties) in town what or who qualified as "*zanatany*," many signaled the Comorian-Malagasy descendants and their associated spatial and aesthetic practices described here. Others layered this established understanding of "*zanatany*," however, with new conceptions of belonging. Some explained that being born in Mahajanga — regardless of one's ethnic background—qualified you as *zanatany*, while others insisted you must dwell in the city for a decade or two to properly understand the local way of life. Some might alternatively claim or be identified as "*valofotaka*," if they had lived in the city for decades or were well-integrated. "*Valofotaka*" meant that one had acquired knowledge of the "Mahajanga way of thinking" (*saina Majunga*) and skill in performing locally-specific ways of

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<sup>1214</sup> Fieldnotes and interview with Casimir, Mahajanga, Jan. 7, 2014.

talking and carrying oneself. Although it's difficult to know precisely the etymology of this term, it conjures a connection with the soil "*fotaka*" (mud), but one forged through years of dwelling (rather than birthplace).

Still other signaled the necessity of mastering *zanatany* speech forms (*kalizy fomba*). Eriky, in his thirties with a young son, was born and raised in Mahajanga by his Betsimisaraka mother and Saint Marian father (from Île Sainte Marie). We knew each other through a youth writing and photo diary project that I'd organized and in which he participated. One day I asked him if he felt (identified himself as) "*zanatany*"? He replied at length, illustrating his accrued cultural fluency and flexibility,

*I feel zanatany because I was born here, and I understand the way of thinking in Majunga (saina Majunga), the way of speaking (fomba fiteni). But it's not the same as the zanatany who live in center town [Comorian-Malagasy], because I've always lived on the outskirts. I mix with all kinds of people, and I can switch my way of speaking depending on the kind of person I'm talking to. But I feel zanatany because I've lived here a long time. [I ask him to clarify the way of thinking in Majunga]. One of the important things is trust. Really, there's trust here and you can get it quickly. But people don't like trickery or to be cheated, there's no tolerance for this.*

Chana, a young woman in her early twenties of mixed Vezo-Merina-Sakalava background, similarly cast *zanatany* as a fluid and attainable position.<sup>1215</sup>

Tasha (T): So, how would you describe the meaning of *zanatany*?

Chana (C): You should be born here to claim yourself as *zanatany*, or least have lived here for a really long time to know (*mahay*) the situation of everything in the city. To know the character of Mahajanga (*toetra Majunga*).

T: How would you describe the character of Mahajanga?

C: Oh, you know, lots of socializing, talking, hanging out with people, teasing people...there's ambiance, people like to party, like to socialize at night, go to the seaside.<sup>1216</sup>

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<sup>1215</sup> Interview with Chana, Mahavoky, Jan. 31, 2014.

<sup>1216</sup> "beresaka, bevava, tia trengo, misangysangy, mivazavaza, misy ambiance, tia misoma amin'ny matonaly, mifampiresaka, mitsangasangana an' ny Bord"

T: How does this connect with kinds (*karazana*) of people? It seems like young people are more interested to call themselves *zanatany*, than, say, Betsileo, Merina, Sakalava. But maybe I'm wrong about that?

C: No, no that's definitely true. You know, we've already progressed (*efa mandroso*), we already have Facebook. We don't rely on this idea about *karazana* as much anymore.

It is tempting to take Chana's words as a reflection of a broad shift away from ethnicity and towards autochthony, but we ought to be wary of easily accepting this kind of teleological progression. Though some have argued for a historical explanation that claims autochthony is the "new form of ethnicity,"<sup>1217</sup> this cannot be said to be true for all places, people or in all contemporary moments. People in Mahajanga, like elsewhere, articulate and express ethnic affiliations in highly contextual and situational ways. Those of mixed Sakalava-Anjouan descent express feeling "most Sakalava" during the ritual bathing of relics at the *doany*. My neighbors described their "Antaimoro-ness" to me in terms of how they distinctively wrapped their *lamba hoany*, performed funerals, and preserved their childrens' umbilical cords (*foitra*) to later deposit in the Mananara River in Southeast Madagascar. In other words, practices through which people mark themselves as belonging to an "ethno-linguistic" group matter very much in Mahajanga today. At the same time, Chana's remarks intimate that for younger people these forms of identification may have less salience, in an urban landscape where recognition is more tightly linked to the performance of aesthetics, fashion (*lamody*), and cultural fluency—all historically associated with *zanatany*. For young people like Chana, the city is a terrain full of possibilities for refashioning the self through embodied, speech and social practices. Yet her possibilities are not endless, and they are always mediated by the economic uncertainties, material resources, and cultural norms that saturate the places through which she travels.

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<sup>1217</sup> Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, "Capitalism and Autochthony," 424.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter has taken brought together a philological approach with historical and ethnographic methods and sources, to trace the lineages of *zanatany* in its multiple meanings. For colonial authorities, *zanatany* was a linguistic medium through which the project of paternalism and imperialism could be translated for Malagasy audiences. Colonial authorities drew on *zanatany* to frame the relationship between metropole and colony—and in so doing, they projected the colonial project as one of kinship, implying protection and provision, but also unyielding power and authority. The meaning of *zanatany* in colonial contexts, signifying “citizen,” “native,” and “aborigine” was slippery and intractable. As colonial officials struggled to grasp existing land holding practices, and implement new laws, they variably defined *zanatany* as a particular form of shared land holding, as a legal category for Malagasy, and as the colony itself. But *zanatany* was (and still is) also a racial category, employed by settlers (mostly French, but also Chinese, Indian) and their children to express a relationship of belonging to Malagasy soil, while distinguishing themselves based on descent.

Words are restless, refusing to be tethered to single moments and meanings. And in Mahajanga, *zanatany* contained signification tightly aligned with a generation of children of mixed Comorian-Malagasy backgrounds. I have argued that *zanatany* is not only an autochthonous idiom. It has over time been intertwined with urbanisms— arguments about the moral dictates of the city—of reciprocity, inclusion, and the public constitution of communal ties through performances. At times, those identifying as *zanatany* came to differentiate themselves from their Comorian brothers and fellow congregants through expressions of mistrust for highland-based nationalist movements, and through their desires for leadership and recognition as fully participating members of the Muslim community.



Central to the concept of *zanatany* were the rich performances of dance and song carried out by men and women young and old. These performances were an expression and realization of the ties that bound together Comorians in Mahajanga with the kin and Sufi networks stretching to Comoros and across the Indian Ocean. In the early 1970s, after the country's independence, city administrators noted that public dances and festivities continued to be wildly popular. One official noted, Comorians "are a fairly undernourished people, but contradictingly indulge in family festivals for which they incur a great deal of expense."<sup>1218</sup> Some have argued in more recent times that these performances (at least in neighboring Mayotte) have lost their integral meaning as ritual work, rather becoming "leisure" activities a "compartmentalized form characteristic of capitalist societies."<sup>1219</sup> While that may be true, there is another side to these historical performance modes, one of cultivating an urban ambiance saturated with liveliness and vitality.<sup>1220</sup> *Zanatany* and Comorian communities generated a distinctive atmosphere of joyful conviviality in the city, by drawing together the street infrastructure and sensory realm—the syncopating sounds of beating drums and roaring bulls, lilting voices and rhythmic clapping, the movement of bodies, and the excitement and anticipation.

At the same time, appropriations of public space by Comorian men and women were intertwined with an 'at-homeness' that many Malagasy interpreted as exclusionary and disrespectful. Some Malagasy migrants articulated competing ideas about urban life—for

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<sup>1218</sup> ANRDM: Monographies, 1090: Monographie Majunga Sous-Prefecture (1972) "Ils se révèlent un peuple assez sous-alimenté mais contradictoirement se livrent à des fêtes familiales occasionnant beaucoup de dépenses."

<sup>1219</sup> Lambek, "The Ludic Side," 121.

<sup>1220</sup> There is a vibrant literature emerging among geographers on the production of affect, atmosphere, and ambiance through place-making practices. See Tim Edensor, "Illuminated Atmospheres: Anticipating and reproducing the flow of affective experience in Blackpool," *Environment and Planning D* 30:2012, 1103-1122; Jean-François Augoyard, "La construction des atmosphères quotidiennes: l'ordinaire de la culture," *Culture et Recherche*, 114-115 (2007), 58-60; Phil Jones and Chris Jam, "Creating Ambiances, Co-Constructing place: A poetic transect across the city," *Area*, 48:3 (2016), 317-324; B. Anderson, "Affective Atmospheres," *Emotion, Space and Society* 2(2009), 77-831; B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Nigel Thrift, *Non-representational theory: space, politics, affect* (London: Routledge, 2008).

instance, that respect ought to be demonstrated through generational docility and polite forms. They juxtaposed their ideas with *zanatany* practices, seen as brazen and unceremonious. Eventually these differences, coupled with the dominance of Comorians in jobs, houses and land, a declining economic landscape, and a new conception of Malagasy nationhood introduced under President Ratsiraka in the mid-1970s, intensified and imploded. But the exuberant ambience that animated urban life in the 1930s and 40s endures today, and continues to inform contemporary notions of what it means to be *zanatany*.

### **The House of Stone: Mama Zala**

You ask about this town, about how Majunga came to be? Well, long ago, before even the French came, we lived in Katsepy, the homeland of my grandmother. But when the French came, they told everyone in Katsepy “you must move to Majunga!”. And in Majunga Be, they told the Makoa they had to leave as well. There would be too much water rushing up the channel, they said, and our land would be flooded. Oh, those French - they were *fetsyfetsy* (crafty)! Because as soon as the Makoa left, the *karana* (South Asians) all moved in and took over their places. They colonized the town! But eventually, that channel of water did rise. The French were right about that. And where we used to be able to cross the channel on foot at low tide, it became impossible. Some people refused to move, like one man whose name was Mwana Akili. He refused to go, and when the water came it killed him (*mahamaty izy*). To this day, his spirit (*lolo*) dwells in the waterway between Katsepy and Majunga, and if you cross near that place where he died, the waters become very turbulent.

And our family, how did we settle here? So, when our people — Sakalava and Makoa — first came to Majunga they settled in Ambovoalanana, and in Manga, which was brimming with mango trees. Then, the Comorians came later. They came here to work during the time of the French, and they built houses and became the landlords of Abattoir. How did they acquire so much land? Well, they came and worked hard, and took up the unoccupied land (*mamaky tany*). You see, they really knew how to coexist with people (*tia mifrandray olona*), and they knew how

to work. They weren't picky about work (*tsy mifidy asa*), and they'd work anywhere, in the hospital, cleaning the streets, selling bananas, cassava, coconut...they did it all.

But you know, the Makoa and Sakalava were the true masters (*tompony*) of Majunga! Not the Comorians. Zala, where are you? (Zala comes). Zala help me explain this! You see, the Makoa were from Africa, and to be Makoa means you're linked to Africa, and so the really early founders of Majunga were really Africans. Yes, this town has African roots.

You want to know about the history of this house? Now, this house...hmmm, this house has a story (*misy tantara mikasika trano ity*). My grandfather was a sailor and he earned enough money to buy some houses in Ambovoalanana and Abattoir, including this house where we now sit. But at first, this house was built of *kety* (wood, literally twigs and branches) with a *satrana* (thatch) roof. Then, we rebuilt it with *toly* (corrugated steel) in 1971. My parents were still living then and I urged them to rebuild it into a stone house (*tranovato*), a double-story stone house. But she and her brother refused! They could never imagine living on the first floor, with the children living above them - inconceivable! This was absolutely against their ways, their Sakalava habits (*tsy mety amin'ny saina Sakalava, fomba Sakalava*). But, over time Comorians, Karana, and even many Sakalava began to build their homes in stone. And finally, *alhamdulillah* (praise be to Allah) just a few years ago, I was able to realize this dream and rebuild the house. Now it is a house of stone.

-Fieldnotes, November 4, 2013