

Part IV

Neglected Spaces, Hidden Places



Figure 103: The Old Artillery Building, Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

Chapter 9
The Park:
The Multiple Lives of Le Jardin Ralaimongo



Figure 104: Placard at Jardin Ralaimongo, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

Looking from above through the aerial purview of a 1902 map, a small white square marked “Place Mauriès” centers the gaze on the heart of Majunga (Figure 104). Set at the heart of a burgeoning Indian Ocean port city, Place Mauriès apparently intended to serve as a public square, a leisure space, a commemorative garden to memorialize a key French military officer, and a symbolic site of French colonial power. The unanticipated trajectory of the Place, however,

would eventually expose the fragility of colonial power and the indeterminacy of colonial urban plans and projects in this African city. By the 1940s, the Place devolved into a peripheral site, rarely frequented and falling into disrepair. Shortly following Madagascar's independence in 1960, energetic effort was taken to efface the material traces of Mauriès in the park, and commemorate the park after an anti-colonial activist, Jean Ralaimongo. The park, however, was uniquely chosen as a site of post-independence transformation, even while other roads, parks and buildings in Mahajanga carried forth their colonial-era names and character. Over time the park again lapsed into deterioration, until a group of residents of South Asian descent appropriated the site in the early 2000s to revere their beloved religious leader. Their proprietorship over the park, however, made evident the residual tensions and contestations over the parameters of belonging to the city.

The story of Place Mauriès (now named Jardin Ralaimongo) presents several puzzles. Why is it that some public places have been cultivated, beautified and frequented over time, while others have not? What was it that gave the successive commemorative projects of Jardin Ralaimongo salience at the times they were enacted? Why was Place Mauriès singled out for post-independence transformation, while other colonial-era sites remained with their given names and features? And if the park's history, in part, can be understood as laminated layers of remembrance and forgetting, then who exactly has forgotten and neglected the Jardin across these passages of time? More broadly, how do we understand processes of decay and abandonment, and their relationship to the silencing of memory?

In Malagasy history, erasing parts of the past and retaining others has always been part of staking post-independent and transnational identities.¹²²¹ A sustained scholarly interest in memory and history in Madagascar has richly documented how narrative, ritual and embodied practices have been critical means through which ancestral, political histories are carried, continued and disseminated.¹²²² Invocations of the past are generationally-specific, and might be understood as “moral projects” reflective of individual and collective aspirations for meaningful life.¹²²³ Tombs and rural land in particular have historically served as devices for staking lasting claims to belonging and authority, through the invocation of ancestors.¹²²⁴ But processes of historical consciousness and claim-forging are ever intertwined with effacement and compression of other histories. Some pasts – whether of ancestral genealogies or traumatic colonial violence – are necessarily, and actively *forgotten* by successive groups in Madagascar to make room for other memories, figures and narratives.¹²²⁵

Over its 100-year history, this public square was founded, forgotten, and reincarnated over again as a memorial to a succession of revered leaders, thus serving as a kind of living spatial register of the historical socio-political changes that have given rise to the city. This chapter pulls back from the forging of *zanatany* through place-making projects, to explore more broadly how contestations over belonging have endured and been enacted over strategic sites on

¹²²¹ See Cole, “The Work of Memory in Madagascar,” *American Ethnologist* 25:4 (1998):610-633; and *Forget Colonialism*; Esoavelomandroso (1990); Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*; Galibert “Fonder le territoire..”; Larson, *History and Memory*.

¹²²² Cole and Middleton “Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power,”; Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*; Graeber, *Lost People*; Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*; Karen Middleton, *Ancestors, Power and History in Madagascar* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Sharp, *The Sacrificed Generation*.

¹²²³ Cole, “The Work of Memory in Madagascar,” and *Forget Colonialism*; Sharp, *The Sacrificed Generation*.

¹²²⁴ There exists a bountiful body of literature documenting the critical significance of tombs and ancestors across the island, see Astuti (1995); Bloch, *Placing the Dead*; Cole, “The Work of Memory in Madagascar” and *Forget Colonialism*; Cole and Middleton “Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power”; Zoe Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in highland Madagascar: material signs and traces of the dead* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*; Graeber, *Lost People*; and Larson, *History and Memory*.

¹²²⁵ Cole, “The Work of Memory in Madagascar,” and *Forget Colonialism?*; Graeber, “Dancing with Corpses...”.

the urban landscape such as the current-day Jardin Ralaimongo. In considering the biography of Jardin Ralaimongo, I try to elucidate the ways different socio-political groups have drawn on



Figure 105: Map of Majunga, with arrow indicating Place Mauriès (1902)
 (Source: Archives National, Repoblikan'i Madagasikara)

architectural sites to negotiate differences, frame collective memories, and legitimize their claims in the city. I seek to contribute to a growing body of literature about the ways colonial public

monuments and spaces become entangled in contestations over belonging between different ethnic, religious and class groups in post-independent African contexts.¹²²⁶

This study builds on scholarship around memory, place, and authority in Madagascar,¹²²⁷ by bringing these insights into conversation with colonial monuments and urban built environments. The case of Jardin Ralaimongo, I argue, also departs from existing scholarship because it exposes the active, formative roles of urban material sites and built forms in shaping the workings of memory, historical consciousness, and claim-making. Within the vibrant literature on historical consciousness and ritual practice in Madagascar less attention has centered on the mechanics of silence, recollection and belonging in everyday, urban spaces. One wonders, how might the urban, built environment shape that which can be invoked, celebrated, and effaced? If the urban cityscape is a text that can be both read and written, then what material conditions enable the sight, recollection and enunciation of the past? How does the city's built environment shape why, when and by whom some pasts remembered, while others are forgotten?

Using a spatial lens, I show how as city inhabitants have reworked the spaces of the garden, so too has the park itself — its layout, material artifacts and location within the city — constrained the possibilities for what could be remembered and forgotten, and who can be cohered, in contemporary times. Places have not merely been instrumental or passive recipients of inscriptions; rather, the material detritus of the park has afforded some possibilities for claim-making and limited others. Neglect and decay of the park, moreover, might be understood as

¹²²⁶ Çelik “Colonial/postcolonial intersections”; Annie Coombes, *History after apartheid: Visual culture and public memory in a democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Deacon, H. ‘Remembering Tragedy, Constructing Modernity: Robben Island as a national monument’, in S. Nuttall and C. Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). de Jorio, Rosa “Politics of Remembering and Forgetting: The Struggle over Colonial Monuments in Mali,” *Africa Today* 52:4(2006):79-106.

¹²²⁷ Bloch, *Placing the Dead*; Cole, *Forget Colonialism?*; Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*; Graeber, *Lost People*; Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*; Larson, *History and Memory*.

cumulative, active gestures towards managing the stubborn obstinance of enduring material relics. As some groups abandoned the bronze and stone obelisk that adorned Place Mauriès their actions effectuated silencing of some pasts. Material traces of the colonial past, I suggest, are not always reworked into local constructions of belonging, but are sometimes best forgotten by neglecting them. The story of Jardin Ralaimongo thus complicates declensionist narratives¹²²⁸ – which contend that humans have destroyed or neglected urban environments - that characterize much public rhetoric around urban decay, city planning and heritage protection in post-independent African cities. Neglect and decay can also be sometimes understood as active processes of disconnecting, forgetting or perhaps suppressing the pasts, rather than the singular consequence of insufficient material, technical and knowledge-based resources.

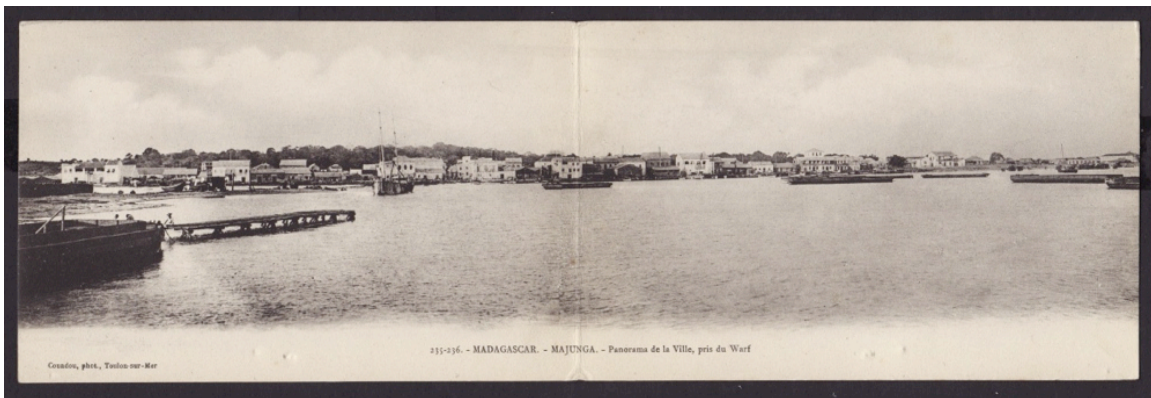


Figure 106: Postcard of Majunga, circa 1890-1900 (Author's Collection)

Situating Place Mauriès

French colonial urban planners in Madagascar sought to control and constrain the everyday lives of colonial subjects through spatial design, in ways that resonated with colonial interventions elsewhere in Africa.¹²²⁹ Early French urban planners consolidated the sprawling

¹²²⁸ See Martin Melosi (2010) 'Humans, Cities, and Nature: How Do Cities Fit in the Material World?' *Journal of Urban History* 36 (1): 3-21, for a discussion of how this narrative continues to dominate scholarly and popular understandings of the urban environment.

¹²²⁹ Çelik, *Urban Forms*; Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*; Myers, *Verandahs of Power*; Rabinow, *French Norms*; Wright, *The Politics of Design*.

lower residential and commercial settlement into linear arrangements of *rues*, parks, and *places*.¹²³⁰ Following the 1895 conquest, French military officers worked from the lower town outward, erecting large, imposing monumental buildings including a covered marketplace, prison, tribunal, governor's residence, town hall, and later infrastructural interventions like roads, gutters, and port improvements. They concretized the bifurcation between the lower and upper towns with a single main artery, the Avenue de France, which still runs from the sea to the current Town Hall. In so doing they incorporated the famous baobab tree, a precolonial landmark and important political-religious Sakalava symbol, into the colonial design.¹²³¹ This road was soon extended to provide a critical conduit between the two separate areas: the envisioned European city of Majunga and the *indigene* village of Mahabibo, located about 2 kilometers east of the lower town.

French planners across the empire retained the existing arrangement of towns, but sought to refashion urban character and aesthetics through naming and decorative features.¹²³² Important to colonial interventions were physical impressions of their presence through the use of toponyms, memorials and monuments.¹²³³ In Majunga French planners named the streets after famous French-colonial era figures and sought to recast it in "European" design, while retaining what they perceived as the distinctive 'Indo-Arab' texture of the town.¹²³⁴ Gardens, promenades

¹²³⁰ H.W. Grainge, "Journal of a visit to Mojanga and the North-West Coast," *Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine*, 1(1875):11-38.

¹²³¹ Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 131.

¹²³² Rabinow, *French Norms*, 228; Wright, *The Politics of Design*.

¹²³³ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An exploration of landscape and history*; Garth Myers, "Naming and Placing the Other: Power and Urban Landscape in Zanzibar," in *Critical Toponyms: The Contested Politics of Place Naming* (UK: Ashgate, 2009); L. Bigon, "Names, Norms and Forms: French and indigenous toponyms in early colonial Dakar, Senegal," *Planning Perspectives* 23(2008): 479-501.

¹²³⁴ Louis Catat, *Voyage à Madagascar* (Paris: Hachette, 1895).

and ornamental spaces¹²³⁵ took on great importance for French colonial planners as places in which they could cultivate aesthetic sensibilities, promote leisure lifestyles, and perform nationalistic and cultural ties to the metropole. Nineteenth-century arguments about the causal link between disease and environment, between menacing ‘miasma’ and urban pandemics, further added to the imperative of allocating gardens and open space in city planning.¹²³⁶ In the swampy, scorching hot town of Majunga, the need for expansive places where residents could theoretically enjoy the salubrious benefits of the sea breeze was unquestionable.

Place Mauriès was founded in 1902. It is striking that the Place was not accounted for in the city’s Plan de Campagne for 1901 or 1903. It was rather founded outside of these master plans and prior to many massive infrastructural projects including the adduction of water, road building, and the construction of marketplaces.¹²³⁷ While it may have been the case that French military officers enjoyed the benefit of bypassing the tedious bureaucratic urban planning process that characterized the work of the Department des Travaux Publics, it also suggests the profound symbolic significance of this envisioned Place Mauriès. The Place was and still is situated in the midst of the ‘lower town’ (present-day Majunga Be), now largely inhabited by shopkeepers who came from South Asia during the mid-nineteenth century. Though locally referred to as “Karana,” this group is in fact comprised of heterogeneous, multiconfessional communities of South Asian descent residing throughout Madagascar. The employment of Karana is not without problems, as it both glosses over the complexity and diversity of the composite groups, but also carries a pejorative meaning. Drawing on the work of Sophie

¹²³⁵ In this chapter, I use the terms ‘square’, ‘garden’, and ‘park’ interchangeably, to refer to an open, public area in an urban center. Within the colonial archival record, French administrators employed the terms *place* and *jardin* interchangeably when referring to Place Mauriès.

¹²³⁶ Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in nineteenth-century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990):74.

¹²³⁷ ANRDM/F40, Documentation relative à la Municipalité de Majunga (1931), which describes the brief historical dates of the Place Mauriès and other gardens.

Blanchy, however, I use this term throughout this chapter because it reflects local usage and designates “a reality, an originality and a specific identity.”¹²³⁸ It should also be noted that many Karana *are* Malagasy citizens, but I contrast Karana with Malagasy groups throughout this chapter, in following with the practice of Karana groups who differentiate themselves from Malagasy.

In the early 20th Century, however, the lower town was historically ethnically mixed and variably composed of stone, thatch and wood houses. While Karana owned and occupied most of the stone houses in the lower town, some Europeans and *Assimilées* leased work and residential space from them. Wood and thatch homes would have been more commonly occupied by Sakalava, Antalaotra, Makoa, and newer Karana migrants, though these may have been cleared for the founding of the park. An earlier map from 1898 reveals plans to designate this square into a public marketplace, but by 1902 the place was clearly demarcated and founded in memory of Capitaine Mauriès. In so far as Place Mauriès was planted firmly in the center of this heterogeneous neighborhood, it stood as a key symbolic reference to French military memory and omnipotence.

Mauriès and the Making of Colonial Roadways

Late nineteenth-century French military officers explicitly framed their project of colonial conquest as a kind of pioneering, of forging into unchartered and unclaimed territory. In Madagascar as other colonized territories, diverse Malagasy populations and other newcomers had long inhabited these lands. But it is the perception that is worthy of consideration, for to be a pioneer suggests being the *first* to come. Among both Malagasy and French, being the first

¹²³⁸ Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 15-16.

settler has historically implied a naturalized right to the land. Understanding themselves as pioneers, weary French colonial settlers gathered confidence and a sense of legitimacy in their troublesome work. Road building was perhaps the infrastructural activity that most aptly epitomized the colonial conquest in the eyes of French military officers. Roads served as a living artifact testifying to the primal presence, aspired omniscient powers, and technological prowess of French colonial power. Forging a road was the one of the most obvious materializations of the figurative work of colonial domination over places and peoples.

To tell the story of Capitaine Mauriès, and why French military officers were compelled to commemorate his life and work in the form of a monument and public square, is to unravel the haunting threads of colonial conquest and pacification in Madagascar. In 1897, following the military invasion of the island, Gouverneur General Joseph-Simon Galliéni appointed Mauriès, then Capitaine d'Artillerie de Marine, to manage the massive road construction project between the capital city of Tananarive and Majunga. To clarify the significance of this project, it might help to explain first that Majunga had reached its apogee as the northwest coast's most significant trading port during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth-century, through a cohesive political-economic alliance between ruling Sakalava groups and Antaloatra traders, as well as smaller numbers of Arab, Indian, European, and American merchants.¹²³⁹ French military commanders strategically selected Majunga as the site of colonial invasion, after cultivating cooperative relationships with Sakalava royal rulers with whom they united against the Merina. Despite these efforts and the relatively bloodless takeover of Majunga, the military invasion inland towards Tananarive was disastrous. Corps Expeditionnaire troops found

¹²³⁹ Campbell "Madagascar and the Slave Trade,"; Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 132.

themselves ill equipped¹²⁴⁰ and poorly prepared for the long, overland traversal, and half of the some 15,000 colonial soldiers died en route, mostly from malaria, starvation and exhaustion.

This major loss of French troops was not only demoralizing for the leaders of the French colonial project abroad, but also threatened the near-complete loss of popular French support for the civilizing mission.¹²⁴¹ As Galliéni, Lyautey and colonial military administrators sought to recuperate their mission and legitimize their colonizing project with a tenuous hold on power, they shifted resources and attention away from this westerly road and its harrowing memories and towards the improvement of the road to and port of Tamatave, on the east coast.¹²⁴² This easterly route had long been politically and economically viable, serving as the conduit through which Merina rulers were able to expand in part by controlling trade in cattle and slaves between Tananarive and Tamatave, the linkage between Madagascar and the colonial sugar plantations in the Mascarenes, and the route through which European missionaries and Merina emissaries passed in 19th and mid-20th centuries.¹²⁴³ Despite the fact that road building was explicitly central to Galliéni's pacification strategy, the road to Majunga remained neglected for two years after the conquest. With the realization that the northwest coast remained an underutilized strategic site and entryway to the East African trade routes, Galliéni ordered the construction of a *carroussable* route to be built between Tananarive and Maevatanana, and subsequently extended to Majunga.

¹²⁴⁰ Rabinow, *French Norms*, 154.

¹²⁴¹ On France's civilizing mission generally, see Alice Conklin. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹²⁴² Léonce Jacquier, *La main-d'oeuvre locale à Madagascar* (Paris: H. Jouve, 1904): 165-8, "Sa faiblesse ne permettait pas de maintenir deux lignes de communication avec le mer et l'on avait sacrifié Majunga, tombée dans le discrédit après les malheureux événements qui sont encore dans toutes les mémoires." Also ANRDM, IJ 1472, Rapport sur la construction de la Route de l'Ouest, Capitaine Mauriès, 18 Avril 1901.

¹²⁴³ Gerald Berg, "Writing Ideology: Ranavalona, the Ancestral Bureaucrat," *History in Africa* 22(1995): 73-95; Campbell, "Labour and the Transport Problem," 1980; Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*; Larson, *History and Memory*.

Galliéni appointed Mauriès (Figure 106), an esteemed military officer, to tackle the challenging technical and socio-political dimensions of the road construction. Like many French soldiers, Mauriès hailed from a small, provincial town, that of Graulhet, located in the southern province of Tarn.¹²⁴⁴ Renowned for its tannery production, due to the close proximity of grazing pastures, forests of oak trees rich in tannin, and neutral freshwater from the Dadou River, Graulhet had a population of 6,000 at the beginning of the twentieth-century.¹²⁴⁵ Mauriès had



Figure 107: Capitaine Mauriès, circa 1887-1901
(Source: Conseil Général de La Réunion, Archives départementales)

¹²⁴⁴ De Gondi, P. 'Le Monument de Majunga à la mémoire du capitaine Mauriès', *Armée, Marine, Coloniale*. 1 (1903): 61.

¹²⁴⁵ Jarrige, F. 'Une invention de Jaurès? La grève de Graulhet entre hygiénisme et machinisme au début du XXe siècle', *Cahier Jaurès* 1:199 (2011): 9-26.

participated in the fated Corps Expeditionnaire invasion in 1895, and witnessed the strategic errors taken in the navigation of the overland course to Tananarive. Drawing on his prior experience and memories, Mauriès began an exploratory investigation to locate the ideal trajectory for the road in March 1897.¹²⁴⁶ Within four months, Mauriès had surveyed a viable preliminary route that corresponded to Gallièni's requirements for a plan that would allow for rapid construction, minimal expense, and avoidance of the most arduous passages of the existing Malagasy footpath (which had been used by the Corps Expeditionnaire).¹²⁴⁷ In June 1897, construction began. Mauriès grew deeply frustrated in his efforts because of the minimal resources allocated to the project, which he blamed on the exhaustion of state funds to construct the route to the east.

Underpinning the entirety of the project was an utter reliance on scarce, forced Malagasy laborers.¹²⁴⁸ Colonial archival records are littered with graphic references to the resistance, suffering, and escape that characterized Malagasy experiences of forced labor.¹²⁴⁹ In July 1900, Governor Gallièni wrote that although he recognized Mauriès' potential embarrassment about the flailing road project, it was impossible to recruit a single *prestataire* beyond those already provided. All the labor pools were exhausted. District officers had become so desperate in their

¹²⁴⁶ The description that follows is taken from Mauriès' report to Gouverneur Général J-S Gallièni, ANRDM, IJ 1472, Rapport sur la construction de la Route de l'Ouest, Capitaine Mauriès, 18 Avril 1901.

¹²⁴⁷ The study itself presented numerous difficulties because of the absence of local resources in the sparsely populated northwest regions, the uneven terrain, the insalubrity of the region, and the periodic anti-colonial uprisings by Sakalava rebels along the way.

¹²⁴⁸ Almost all of the laborers appear to have been forcibly recruited. Like other French colonies, local Malagasy populations were obliged to provide forced labor, usually in 30-day, renewable increments, for the completion of massive infrastructure projects; See Libbie Freed, L. 'Conduits of Culture and Control: Roads, states and users in French central Africa, 1890-1960', (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006); Tamara Giles-Vernick, T. (2002) *Cutting the Vines of the Past: Environmental Histories of the Central African Rain Forest*. (Charlotte: University Press of Virginia, 2002); Christopher Gray, *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon ca. 1850-1940*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002).

¹²⁴⁹ Beginning in 1898, Governor Gallièni, following the requests of Mauriès, issued orders for the furnishing of extraordinary numbers of forced laborers in the regions along the road. These demands ranged from 30 to 10,000 laborers. Initially district officers could fulfill some of the smaller demands. But by 1900, the work stopped due to the impossibility of recruiting laborers from the already exhausted, sparsely numbered rural population.

recruitment that they forcibly sent a disproportionate number of sickly, elderly and underage men, to the detriment of the “sanitation” situation at the job site.¹²⁵⁰ A large number of these laborers died or became ill from their labor on the road.¹²⁵¹ Tales of the harsh and tiresome labor conditions circulated around highland villages. Upon the approach of Malagasy enlisting agents, Malagasy villagers fled their communities.¹²⁵² These abuses would persist on other public works construction sites across the island throughout colonial times.¹²⁵³

Owing to the labor dearth of the northwest region, thousands of able-bodied men were pulled from highland regions such as Ambositra, Betafo and Miarinarivo populated largely by Merina and Betsileo communities.¹²⁵⁴ Disproportionate numbers of these laborers died or became ill from their labor on the road, and tales of the harsh and tiresome labor conditions circulated around highland villages. Upon the subsequent approach of Malagasy enlisting agents to these highland villages, Malagasy fled their communities.¹²⁵⁵ One district officer reported that following the completion of one month of forced labor, there was a total exodus of villages in his region, in response to calls for a second period of 30 days of forced labor.¹²⁵⁶ Many district officers understood their position as betwixt and between the colonial administration and the

¹²⁵⁰ ANRDM, IJ 1472, Letter from Gouverneur Général Galliéni to Lieutenant Colonel Commandant l’Artillerie du Corps d’Occupation, 31 Juillet 1900.

¹²⁵¹ Owing to the labor dearth of the northwest region, thousands of able-bodied men were pulled from highland regions such as Ambositra, Betafo and Miarinarivo, populated largely by Merina and Betsileo ethnic communities. Laborers from Majunga and Maevatanana provinces, perhaps finding themselves closer to home, deserted their posts in disproportionate numbers with little chance of being found by frustrated colonial officers.

¹²⁵² ANRDM, IJ 1472, Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Goulet, Commandant Territoriale de l’Ouest to Gouverneur Général Galliéni, 2 Aout 1900.

¹²⁵³ Jean Fremigacci ‘Travail et main d’oeuvre dans le pays Betsileo: Les prestations (1916-1922)’, *Omalysy Anio: revue d’études historiques* 23-24 (1986): 319-333.1986; Lesley Sharp ‘Laboring for the Colony and the Nation: The Historicized Political Consciousness of Youth in Madagascar’, *Critique of Anthropology* 23: 1(2003): 75-81; Genese Sodikoff ‘Forced and Forest Labor Regimes in Colonial Madagascar, 1926-1936’, *Ethnohistory* 52: 2 (2005): 407-35.

¹²⁵⁴ ANRDM, IJ 1472, Rapport sur la construction de la Route de l’Ouest, Capitaine Mauriès, 18 Avril 1901.

¹²⁵⁵ ANRDM, IJ 1472, Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Goulet, Commandant Territoriale de l’Ouest to Gouverneur Général Galliéni, 2 Aout 1900.

¹²⁵⁶ ANRDM, IJ 1472, Telegramme Official, Tamatave, from Colonel Chef de Cabinet Hubert Lyautey to Gouverneur Général Galliéni, 8 Aout 1900.

local communities they presided over; if they forced residents to enlist as *prestataires*, they risked total revolt or abandonment of their regions, which would leave little possibility of enhancing their territory. Laborers from Majunga and Maevatanana provinces perhaps finding themselves closer to home, deserted their posts in disproportionate numbers with little chance of being found by frustrated colonial officers.¹²⁵⁷ Towards the end of 1900, Mauriès' campaign was supplied with between 1000 and 3000 workers, which allowed for the long-anticipated completion of the road construction. French colonial officers celebrated the opening of the 342 kilometer-long road in December 1900. The waterway from Maevatanana to Majunga remained the primary route until 1933, when the existing overland route was extended. In a paradoxical twist, Mauriès lost his life to the road. Finding himself physically depleted from his work on the road campaign, he died of exhaustion eleven days after completing his final report to Gouverneur Galliéni on April 29, 1901.¹²⁵⁸ His body was temporarily buried in Tananarive and in July 1902, his remains were exhumed and repatriated to his home village of Graulhet.¹²⁵⁹

Monumentalizing the Pioneer, Masking Affliction

French military officers unveiled the Place Mauriès in 1902 to celebrate Mauriès for his 'pioneering' work in the colonial conquest and to proclaim their domination over the land.¹²⁶⁰ In a clearing equivalent to a small city block, they carved a public square marked by crossing paths in the form of an 'X', and erected a towering obelisk, approximately six meters high, made of stone at the far southeastern side. Eventually, large iron cannons were situated circularly around

¹²⁵⁷ ANRDM, IJ 1472, Telegramme from Maevatanana to Tananarive, 29 Oct 1900; Telegramme, from Majunga to Gouverneur Général Galliéni, 17 Nov 1900; Telegramme, to Ankazobe from Antsafabositra, 6 Nov 1900.

¹²⁵⁸ Guide-Annuaire de Madagascar et dépendances, 1902.

¹²⁵⁹ Anonymous 'Obsèques du capitaine Mauriès', *Revue de Madagascar* Paris: Comité de Madagascar. 4:2(1902): 362.

¹²⁶⁰ De Beauprez, 'Informations', *Revue de Madagascar*. Paris: Comité de Madagascar. 4:2(1902):339.

the obelisk, amplifying the performance of French military potency. Designed by French architect Paul Fouchard, the obelisk was adorned with a large bronze medallion crafted by Henri Coutheillas, a renown sculptor. Coutheillas sculpted a relief, portraying a deeply pensive and ‘invincibly energetic’ Captain Mauriès, donning his military medals and surrounded by laurels (Figure 107).¹²⁶¹ Early photographs of the square show a dusty place, barren of people and trees, and dwarfed by the disproportionately tall obelisk (Figure 108). Later photographs reveal the addition of streetlamps, trees, and a wooden fence enclosure (Figure 109).



【Médaille du monument élevé à Majunga à la mémoire du capitaine Mauriès.

Figure 108: Bronze medallion of Capitaine Mauriès, placed on original stele
(Source: *Armée et Marine*, 1903, vol. 204:5)

¹²⁶¹ De Gondi, P. ‘Le Monument de Majunga à la mémoire du capitaine Mauriès’, *Armée, Marine, Coloniale*. 1(1903): 61.



Figure 109: Postcard, Place Mauriès, circa 1903 (Source: Author's collection)

French military officers and colonial settlers who helped usher the Place into fruition were likely informed by the iconography of public squares in the metropole, especially in small, provincial towns from which many French soldiers hailed. In nineteenth-century French towns, public squares were mutable, flexible kinds of places. They were sites of boisterous wedding processions, festivals and dancing, lively markets which brought together villagers from dispersed hamlets, and of darker forms of governance including public punishment and execution.¹²⁶² They served as a kind of central anchor in small towns, rooting the social,

¹²⁶²Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of France, 1870-1914*. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 10-11, 379, 392. Though research documenting the socio-political significance of squares in provincial France is more limited, scholars have richly documented how in Paris, squares were highly politicized places witnessing revolutionary marches, manifestations and contestations C. Tilly, *The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). In Paris and bigger cities, nineteenth century parks and gardens were places for play and urban entertainment, with nature as a background, for pleasure-seeking, flirting, and dancing, both for respectable bourgeoisie and for servants and domestic workers, thus leveling out class hierarchies temporarily (Green, *The Spectacle of Nature*, 73). By the Napoleonic era, Parisian parks were appropriated for Haussmann's urban planning schemes, and envisioned as instruments for the placation of various

symbolic and political lives of the village in a highly visible, but contained place.¹²⁶³

Monumental statues in public spaces of provincial France were symbolic and pedagogical devices harnessed for emblemizing liberal and secular values, building local patriotism, and envisioning the imagined community of Frenchman smoothing the wrinkles between Royalists and Republican factions.¹²⁶⁴ In late nineteenth-century, provincial towns erected monuments to celebrate colonial exploits and their fallen heroes in order to unite Frenchmen, instill national pride and mobilize young men for future war.¹²⁶⁵

Influenced by these historical conceptualizations of public squares and monuments, colonial authorities aspired, through their choices of stone and metal, to create a lasting, enduring memorial to Mauriès. Indeed, for some time this space was an important site for the performance of military power and French domination. In the 1900s and early 1910s, military troops held a fortnightly music concert at Place Mauriès on Sunday evenings, as well as at the military hospital and public garden.¹²⁶⁶ The image of the Place figured prominently in postcards and military bulletins, emergent communication technologies through which French imperial power was represented and consolidated to publics in the metropole and beyond. But by 1912, the Place's popularity began to diminish. City administrators halted the concerts at Place Mauriès because of low attendance. Mayor Carron reported that Place Mauriès was generally less frequented by the

political constituencies, development of distinctive quarters, and the demonstration of conspicuous bourgeoisie consumption, H.M. Schenker, H. M. 'Parks and Politics During the Second Empire in Paris', *Landscape Journal* 14:2(1995): 216-17; (2009) *Melodramatic Landscapes: Urban Parks in the Nineteenth Century*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

¹²⁶³ James Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural contact in rural France during the nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995): 37, 41.

¹²⁶⁴ M. Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1879-1880*. trans. Janet Lloyd. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); W. Cohen, 'Symbols of Power: Statues in Nineteenth-Century Provincial France', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:3 (1989): 491; Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 388, 437.

¹²⁶⁵ Cohen, "Symbols of Power," 507-8.

¹²⁶⁶ ANRDM, D 454, Letter from A. Carron, Adjoint-Marie de Majunga to Gouverneur General Galliéni, 3 Mai 1912.

Majungais population because of the “rampant mosquitos” and “lack of ambiance.”¹²⁶⁷ European and *Assimilé* residents generally preferred the *Bord de la Mer*, where the breeze blew and the mood was lively.

But not everyone agreed. One year later a public petition of European residents demanded the resumption of the military music concerts every Thursday evening, from 8h30 to 9pm.¹²⁶⁸ The City Council ruled to allow occasional concerts at Place Mauriès, but noted that regular concerts would take place at the *Bord de la Mer* and the military hospital. The city allocated modest sums to maintain and embellish the Place throughout the 1920s, including the construction of an improved fence enclosure in 1927.¹²⁶⁹ By 1945, the significance of the garden had seriously declined. The financially strapped city council deliberated whether to auction part



Figure 110: Postcard, Place Mauriès, circa 1910 (Source: Author’s collection)

¹²⁶⁷ ANRDM, D 454, Letter from A. Carron, Adjoint-Marie de Majunga to Gouverneur General Galliéni, 3 Mai 1912.

¹²⁶⁸ ANRDM, F40, Procès-Verbaux des Deliberations, Commune de Majunga, 18 Juin 1913.

¹²⁶⁹ ANRDM F40, Documentation relative à la Municipalité de Majunga, 1931.

of the grounds to generate income to buy a new hearse. In a desperate attempt to resolve an ever-increasing deficit, the council sold a section of the garden, leaving a more modest public square intact.¹²⁷⁰ Although the garden was a site of childhood play for nearby residents, few public events seem to have transpired there after 1940.¹²⁷¹ By the 1950s, many locals reported, the garden was neglected and had decayed into a veritable wasteland. Within the span of forty years, the Place became a peripheral site paradoxically set within the center of the burgeoning city.



Figure 111: Place Mauries, ca. 1903
(Source: Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer, FR ANOM 44PA134/24)

Detritus and Deletions: Imaginings of Post-Independent Mahajanga

Little about the Place Mauriès after 1945 remains in the archival record. Sometime in the post-independence period, most likely during the 1970s, Place Mauriès was renamed to Jardin

¹²⁷⁰ ANRDM, F45, Procès-Verbaux des Deliberations, Commune de Majunga, 13 Aout 1945.

¹²⁷¹ Interview, M. Tourabaly, Majunga Be, 4 July 2013.

Ralaimongo.¹²⁷² Jean Ralaimongo was a key nationalist leader in the early anti-colonial struggle (Figure 111). Born in 1884 in highland Madagascar, Ralaimongo was enslaved at an early age. His master later adopted him and he was liberated after the French colonization of Madagascar at the age of 14.¹²⁷³ He pursued teacher training in Malagasy Protestant missionary schools, and over time he became conscious of the contradictions between French Republican principals and the disparate political and economic rights between Malagasy and French. Ralaimongo's political commitments were further solidified through two more years in France, where he collaborated on political publications with other progressive colonial intellectuals, such as Ho Chi Minh and Louis Hunkarin.¹²⁷⁴ After his final return to Madagascar, he undertook a spirited campaign during the 1920s and 30s, advocating equal political and civil status between Malagasy and French, as well as labor regulation reform.¹²⁷⁵ He and his compatriots drew on French Republican discourses of equality and justice to promote their claims in opposition to the colonial regime, only later abandoning the goal of assimilation and striving towards national independence. He died in 1942, following years of exile in the northwestern town of Port Berge, long before the independence of Madagascar would be realized in 1960.

At first glance, the decision to rename the garden in Ralaimongo's memory resonates with the efforts taken in many post-independent African nation-states to honor anti-colonial figures. Post-independent African regimes have sought to capitalize on the lasting, political efficacy of erecting new memorials honoring pre-colonial leaders, nationalist heroes and

¹²⁷² The author(s) of this name change remain unknown. Local Karana and Malagasy residents in Majunga vaguely recollected that the city administration renamed the park, but no archival documentation to support, refute or contribute to this perception could be found.

¹²⁷³ J.P. Domenichini, *Jean Ralaimongo (1884-1943), ou, Madagascar au seuil du nationalisme*. (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1969).

¹²⁷⁴ Brent Edwards, 'The Shadow of Shadows', *Positions: Asia Critique* 11:1(2003): 15; Driss El Yazami, 'France's Ethnic Minority Press', in A. Hargreaves and M. McKinney (ed) *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*, (New York:Routledge, 1997): 116; A. Spacensky, *Madagascar: 50 ans de vie politique (de Ralaimongo à Tsiranana)* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1970): 28.

¹²⁷⁵ Bonar Gow, 'Madagascar', in M. Crowder (ed) *The Cambridge History of Africa*. 8(1984): 674.

allegorical figures. But as scholars have shown, these honorary monuments often efface the regional, political, and ethnic differences that threaten to rupture the notion of a homogenous, unified nation-state.¹²⁷⁶ In Madagascar, state-sponsored actors have also transformed certain anti-colonial activists and events into national heroes, positioned to stand as icons of national identity.¹²⁷⁷ Performative efforts at building an imagined cohesive nation state through the elevation of key figures have revealed their ambiguity as symbolic figures.¹²⁷⁸ The commemorative monument to the 1947 anti-colonial rebellion that sits prominently in Tulear beckoning the viewer to “remember the struggle of the Malagasy on 29 March 1947,” for example, laminates a national imaginary onto a region unyoked to – or at least relatively uninvolved in – this historical event.¹²⁷⁹ Commemorative monuments thus reveal the instability, ambiguity, and patchiness of national identity and memory.

In this vein, the incongruous commemoration of the rural-cum-urban intellectual Ralaimongo in Mahajanga is particularly striking. Ralaimongo’s nationalist campaign was not far-reaching across the island, and thus exposed the long-standing disjunctures between the

¹²⁷⁶ Mary Jo Arnoldi, “Symbolically Inscribing the City: Public Monuments in Mali, 1995-2002,” *African Arts* 36:2(2003): 56-68, and “Bamako, Mali: Monuments and Modernity in the Urban Imagination,” *Africa Today* 54:2(2007): 3-24; Heike Becker, “Commemorating Heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana: Memory, Culture and Nationalism in Namibia, 1990-2010,” *Africa* 81:4(2011): 519-543; R. Chirambo, R. M.” A Monument to a Tyrant or Reconstructed Nationalist Memories of the Father and Founder of the Malawi Nation, Dr. H.K. Banda” *Africa Today* 56:4(2010): 2-21.

¹²⁷⁷ See Tronchon, *L’insurrection malgache*, 77, for a discussion of how President Ratsiraka carried out the inhumation and reburial of Ralaimongo from his ancestral burial ground near Fianarantsoa to the mass cemetery and commemorative site of the victims of the 1947 anti-colonial massacre in Moramanga. Ratsiraka selected the 30th anniversary of this famed anti-colonial protest, in 1977, to transfer Ralaimongo’s remains. In so doing, it could be argued that he enacted a compression of anti-colonial figures, in fact quite heterogeneous in their objectives and actions, into a singular national body. See Katherine Verdery *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postcolonial Change*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) and D.W. Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo Cohen, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992) for comparative discussions of the transformative capacities of corpses.

¹²⁷⁸ Didier Galibert, “Fonder le territoire. État postcolonial et enjeux de mémoire à Madagascar,” *Journal des Anthropologues* 104-105(2006):287-306.

¹²⁷⁹ Galibert “Fonder le territoire,” 8; For thorough accounts of the 1947 insurrection, see Tronchon, *L’Insurrection malgaches*; Eugène-Jean Duval *La Révolte des Sagaies: Madagascar 1947* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2002); Francis Arzalier and Jean Suret-Canale (eds) *Madagascar 1947: La Tregédie oubliée* (Pantin, France: Temps des Cerises, 1999). For studies of memory and the 1947 revolt, see Jennifer Cole, *Forget Colonialism?* and Jean Fremigacci ‘Madagascar: La grande Révolte de 1947’, *Les Collections de l’Histoire* 49(2010):65-67.

highlands and the coast. In an ill-fated strategy to expand his anti-colonial movement into the northwest region, Ralaimongo aligned himself with the mother of Sakalava queen, Soazara, who resided in Analalava, north of Majunga. He sought and secured her written permission to bring



Figure 112: Jean Ralaimongo, Malagasy Stamp (1971)
(Source: madagascar-library.com)

Soazara to Port Bergé and to involve her in his nationalistic campaign in September of 1936. But this misstep was interpreted as an attempted kidnapping and invoked the rage of royal Sakalava dignitaries (the veritable authorities of Soazara), dearly costing Ralaimongo regional support.¹²⁸⁰

In Mahajanga. Ralaimongo's outreach efforts were met with disdain by Sakalava dignitaries who

¹²⁸⁰ Ballarin, *Les reliques royales*, 288-298; Gillian Feeley-Harnik "The Political Economy of Death: Communication and Change in Malagasy Colonial History," *American Ethnologist* 11:1(1984): 15; Solofo Randrianja, *Société et luttes anticoloniales à Madagascar (1896 à 1946)*, (Paris: Kathala, 2001): 300. It seems, however, that Ralaimongo enjoyed some strong support in Port-Bergé in 1932, leading up to the Soazara affair, where he was able to generate mass opposition to colonial, forced labor (SMOTIG) and tax regimes, see p. 299-308.

regarded him as an outsider and rejected his “foolish” anti-French campaign.¹²⁸¹ Ralaimongo’s story resonates with the contingent ways in which anti-colonial movements coalesced elsewhere.¹²⁸²

The acute casting of Ralaimongo as an outsider in the 1930s, followed by the (re)composition of the city’s ethnic fabric in the decades that followed, rendered his symbolic emplacement in the heart of old Majunga even more paradoxical. As the city of Majunga grew over the 1930s and 40s, it became increasingly heterogeneous, populated by Sakalava, Tsimihety, Merina, Betsirebaka (migrants from southeast Madagascar), Makoa (descendants of East Africans) and Comorians, not to mention Karana and Europeans. By the 1950s, the city was resolutely dominated by Comorians and *zanatany* descendants. While Jardin Ralaimongo sat in predominantly-Karana Majunga Be, the remainder of the city’s landscape was shaped by the vernacular building initiatives of Comorians, Comorian-Malagasy metis (*zanatany*) and other Malagasy migrants. Comorians occupied subaltern administrative posts, including the police and commune, as well as manual labor positions as dockers, small shopkeepers, and domestic workers.¹²⁸³

Although the population of Majunga was at least 50% Comorian, the Merina population estimated at around 20% in 1959 exercised a considerable economic and political influence over

¹²⁸¹ Ballarin, *Les reliques royales*, 291; Randrianja *Société et luttes*, 301. Randrianja notes that he was presented by the Bemihisatra Sakalava dignitaries in Analalava region as an ‘ambaniandro’, and that this seemed to be encouraged by the French colonial administration who collaborated with and nominated inherited leaders to administrative posts. (Ibid). Ambaniandro literally means “behind the sun”, or “behind the sovereign”, thus suggesting a social standing subordinate to the royal nobility. From the late 19th century, this term was applied to refer to highlanders or ‘Hova’ by other ethnic groups, see Richardson *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, 28. Ballarin further confirms that it was primarily to establish relationships with Christian highlanders that Ralaimongo went to Majunga, in *Les Reliques Royales*, 181.

¹²⁸² Frederick Cooper, “French Africa, 1947-48: Reform, Violence, and Uncertainty in a Colonial Situation,” *Critical Inquiry* 40:4(2014): 466-478.

¹²⁸³ Radifison “Conflits ethniques,” 137.

the town's inhabitants.¹²⁸⁴ One scholar noted that while many mid-ranking administrative officials were 'côtiers', the majority of high-ranking administrators in the city were identified ethnically as Merina.¹²⁸⁵ That Merina still occupy these valuable posts and disproportionately dominate the administrative life of Majunga is a common refrain today, just as it reflects the sociocultural, political and economic advantages acquired by Merina groups during monarchical times and accentuated at times during French colonization.¹²⁸⁶ And while it is impossible to say for certain, the decision to rename the Place Mauriès to Jardin Ralaimongo in the 1970s or 80s likely served the interests of a city administration dominated by highland migrants. How, why, and exactly when the decision was made to rename the park remains unknown. The elevation of Ralaimongo as a national independence hero, however, smoothed over the troubling, long-standing fissures between highlanders and côtiers, between urban elites and rural peasants, and between enduring political factions, to erect an imaginary, integrated political corpus.

It is notable that minimal efforts were undertaken to inscribe Ralaimongo's memory on the park. The name change to Jardin Ralaimongo was marked by a simple placard on the outside fence today of the garden. Sometime in these years, however, considerable effort was undertaken to dismantle and efface the physical remnants of Mauriès on the standing obelisk. The ornate bronze medallion depicting the visage of Mauriès was removed and confiscated, though the identity of those involved and the whereabouts of the medallion today remain unknown. The engraving of Mauriès name and title were rubbed out of the obelisk's stone face. The giant heavy chain that had tethered the cannons to each other was removed. Tactics of renaming and razing colonial-era monuments and memorials, like these, have been common strategies to

¹²⁸⁴ Deschamps *Les migrations intérieures*, 90, 188-189.

¹²⁸⁵ Verin 1990:184, as quoted in Radifison, "Conflits ethnies," 133.

¹²⁸⁶ Radifison "Conflits ethniques," 132-5.

dememorialize the colonial past throughout post-independence Africa.¹²⁸⁷ And like Celik describes about Place des Martyres in Algiers, these changes to transform Place Mauriès into Jardin Ralaimongo effectively superimposed a new symbolic order on an existing space, without reworking the site's fundamental spatial character.¹²⁸⁸

What is notable, however, is that this particular garden was *uniquely* chosen as a place of post-independence transformation. Neither of Mahajanga's other two gardens, the Jardin Cayla, named for the former colonial Gouverneur General, nor the Jardin Damour, named for the city's principal architect in the 1930s, have been renamed. All of the street signage in the immediate vicinity, and in fact most of town, reverberate the echoes of French colonial-era figures like Gallièni, Marechal Joffre, Flacourt, Jules Ferry, and Pasteur. The overall layout of the town, with its wide boulevards and prominent colonial-era administrative buildings, hark back to the colonial past.¹²⁸⁹ The reasons for why this garden represented a site worthy of tedious alterations, name changing, and symbolic metamorphosis are unclear: perhaps the conspicuous monument too boldly recalled French colonial domination; perhaps it was part of a larger project of renaming that was left undone; or perhaps because the garden sits in the midst of the Karana merchant community, a community that most Malagasy have historically understood as dominant outsiders, it seemed critical to stake independent Malagasy national identity there.

In order to elucidate these layerings of historical (re)presentation of the Jardin Ralaimongo, one might ask, how have post-independent Malagasy regimes more broadly sought to negotiate the country's ties to the colonial past? Lesley Sharp has described how the post-

¹²⁸⁷ R.K. Autry, 'The Monumental Reconstruction of Memory in South Africa: The Voortrekker Monument', *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(2012): 146-164; Coombes, *History after Apartheid*; Deacon "Remembering Tragedy,"; de Jorio "Politics of Remembering..."

¹²⁸⁸ Çelik, "Colonial/postcolonial intersections," 66, 69.

¹²⁸⁹ This is true for quite a few Malagasy towns and cities. Jennifer Cole similarly described the residual colonial remnants of the Betsimisaraka village where she conducted research, Ambodiharina in *Forget Colonialism?*, 68, as did Gillian Feeley-Harnik for Analalava in the 1970s in Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 236-239.

independent Madagascar state has historically cast itself in the form of ‘Franco-Malagasy hybridization’, drawing both on ‘indigenous notions of power and French republicanism’ in its public rhetoric, symbolism, and performance.¹²⁹⁰ This is evident in the customary framing of post-colonial chronological periods as successive *Republics*,¹²⁹¹ as well as in the post-independent state slogan that reverberates French republican ideals, ‘Tanindrazana – Fahafahana – Fandrosoana’ (Ancestral Land, Liberty, and Progress).¹²⁹²

The First Republic, under President Philibert Tsiranana (1960-1972), is widely understood to be an extension of the French colonial administration. Significant shifts in post-independent Malagasy state definitively took place under President Didier Ratsiraka (1975-1993, 1997-2002), who instituted a radical socialist regime and fashioned a national Malagasy language that effaced dialectical differences. It was also during this 1970s moment that the post-independent Malagasy state appears to have made the most visible alterations to the material legacy of the colonial regime. City toponyms were modified away from French iterations to conform to perceived pre-colonial phonetic pronunciation, so that Tananarive became Antananarivo, and Majunga became Mahajanga. And in 1972, the ever-present image of former Gouverneur General Joseph Galliéni, on the colonial monetary currency *Madagascar-Comores CFA franc*, was replaced by depictions of endemic flora and fauna, and classic, romanticized Malagasy ethnic portraiture in the newly minted *Malagasy franc* (renamed again in 2005 to

¹²⁹⁰ *The Sacrificed Generation*, 54.

¹²⁹¹ Tronchon, “Le modèle républicain,” These Republics are, in chronological order, the First Republic led by President Philibert Tsiranana (1960-1972); Transitional period of military rule (1972-1975); Second Republic, under Didier Ratsiraka (1975-1991); Third Republic, under President Zafy Albert (1993-1996), President Didier Ratsiraka (1997-2002), and President Marc Ravalomanana (2002-2010); High Transitional Authority, under Andry Rajoelina (2010-2014); Fourth Republic (2014-current) under President Hery Rajaonarimampianina.

¹²⁹² Sharp, *The Sacrificed Generation*, 55. The bureaucratic sense of *Tanindrazana* in the national slogan is intended as ‘homeland’ or ‘nation’ akin to the French concept of *patrie*, yet for most Malagasy *tanindrazana* means ‘ancestral land’ and is deeply personal and localized, Sharp “Youth, Land and Liberty,” 209.

Malagasy ariary).¹²⁹³ History textbooks and curriculum were thoroughly revised to centralize the island's position in the regional and global historical landscape.¹²⁹⁴

Anthropologists have richly documented how these post-independent enunciations of Malagasy nationhood and the colonial past have been variably taken up, silenced, and recrafted into localized, meaningful forgings of historical consciousness. Jennifer Cole demonstrated how town dwellers in eastern Madagascar reworked colonial symbols and systems of rule associated with the built landscape into local constructions of community, such as the road which contained memories of French forced labor and also of ancestral protection and blessings.¹²⁹⁵ In her study of historical consciousness among youth in Ambanja, Sharp shows how students narrated their position within Malagasy political history through local experiences of youth resistance and protest, rather than the meta-narrative moments delineated in textbooks (such as the 1947 revolution). For young people in northwest Madagascar -- and many c tier dwellers in Mahajanga -- ideological constructions of a unified Malagasy nation were ever-ambiguous, since their ties to *tanindrazana* (homeland) were in fact 'enforced through language, burial practice and *fomba*' [custom] all of which are intensely localized.¹²⁹⁶

¹²⁹³ For images of currency in Madagascar from 1925, see the website for the country's national bank, Banky Foiben-i Madagasikara, <<http://www.banque-centrale.mg>> accessed on 14 October 2014.

¹²⁹⁴ Indeed this shift towards revisionist, nationalist history appears to have endured to present times. A cursory review of Malagasy history textbooks available and in use during my fieldwork in Madagascar in 2014, for example, showed the collapsing of colonial history into abridged chapters with much more expansive pedagogical attention to Malagasy precolonial, monarchal and post-independent histories. For example, one 175-page history textbook targeted to 7eme level (approximately equivalent to 5th grade in the American educational system) dedicated seven pages to the French colonial period, none of which listed names or specific figures related to the colonial administration, Francinet Ratsimaholy, *Tantara: Fandaharam-Pianarana Ofisialy* (Antananarivo: Editions Le Laur at, 2011).

¹²⁹⁵ In "The Work of Memory," 620. Cole describes how other 'social technologies of memory' such as cattle sacrifice and house-cleaning rituals served to reconstitute memory by reworking public representations through the lens of individual consciousness. Yet, the painful memories of anti-colonial violence and repression (in Cole's study the events of the anti-colonial rebellion of 1947) are notably contended with through silence. Silence, however, does not amount to forgetting or repression of memories, but rather there is a 'tacit agreement *not* to remember the terrible things that happened...until conditions that enable that directed forgetting broke down.' See Cole, *Forget Colonialism* 224.

¹²⁹⁶ Sharp, *The Sacrificed Generation*, 71.

So what are we to make from these contrasting hybridized and fragmented compositions of nationhood in post-independent Madagascar, and their relevance for the historicity of Jardin Ralaimongo? In some ways, the Jardin Ralaimongo can be understood as a palimpsest site that effectively performs a hybridized Franco-Malagasy history, by the very retention of some physical remnants of the colonial era. While the text and imagery associated with Mauriés on the overbearing obelisk was erased in the 1970s, neither the obelisk itself nor the cannons that surround it were removed. Instead, these artifacts were juxtaposed with a hastily placed sign honoring Ralaimongo, at a moment when the socialist regime was pressed to conjure a unified Malagasy state. Imaginings of a cohesive post-colonial Malagasy island nation have been fraught, continually refracted through more intimate and exigent ties to locality, regionalism and ancestral lands. Yet, in the case of Jardin Ralaimongo, the material traces of Mauriés and the colonial past were not subsumed into local constructions of belonging, but rather left aside to decay. It was only with the initiative of a different, specific group of city dwellers that the space was once again appropriated and imbued with new meaning.

Blood and Sap: Binding Together Land and Aspirations for Belonging

Emplaced in the heart of the Karana majority neighborhood Majunga Be, the park is interwoven into childhood memories of many older residents. Older Karana inhabitants described how the garden began to deteriorate through total neglect, devolving into a neck-high weedy, uncultivated tangle throughout the 1950s and 60s.¹²⁹⁷ In the increasing absence of communal waste disposal services, people began to toss their rubbish into park, and use the space as a public toilet. Dismayed Karana residents described this decay as descent into a kind of

¹²⁹⁷ Although Karana adults recall playing in the park in the 1940s, little archival trace remains to shed light on how the park related to the broader neighborhood from the 1950s onwards.

‘bidonville’, referring to the vast shantytowns in the metropole. Karana, who largely occupy the city’s wealthier strata, narrated how the garden was gradually invaded by careless, presumably lower class, Malagasy who did not hold the same values as they did for preserving the space.¹²⁹⁸ From that point forward, the park largely remained a burdensome eyesore and desolate wilderness within the city until the 2000s. Karana inhabitants’ nostalgia for the more Eden-like time of the Jardin Ralaimongo, as well as the city more generally, signify both a critique of the present political situation and a sorrowful loss of an imagined time when socio-spatial boundaries were more heavily policed.

Even if some Karana residents longingly recall the past, almost all Karana living in Mahajanga have long struggled with the tensions of belonging in Madagascar. South Asian migration from Kathiawar peninsula and the Gujerati district to Madagascar emanated from centuries long Indian Ocean trading activity. From the mid-1800s South Asian petty merchants and traders settled more permanently in Majunga, and established strong commercial enterprises and networks in Majunga from the early 20th Century. When Europeans departed Majunga during the economic crisis of the 1930s, Karana became the primary proprietors of real estate and assets in the city.¹²⁹⁹ Throughout the 1940s, Karana families expanded beyond export-import trade into industrial production of oil, soap, and fibers and opened some of the largest factories in the city’s history.¹³⁰⁰ By 1950, it was estimated that Karana owned some 80% of real estate in Majunga and in contemporary times Karana have come to be generally regarded as indispensable

¹²⁹⁸ It could be argued here that the “invasion” of Malagasy into the park could rather be understood as transgression of semi-public space and transformation of the park’s original design and purpose, thus revealing the suggestive nature of architecture and urban planning (see Gil Doro, “The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression”, *City* 4:2 (2000): 247-263.)

¹²⁹⁹ Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 169.

¹³⁰⁰ Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 170.

to the sheer functioning of the Malagasy economy.¹³⁰¹ If Karana hold economic hegemony within the town, this is instantiated in the spatial dominance of their towering shophouses that enclose the perimeter of the square in which Jardin Ralaimongo sits.

While Karana firmly lodged their economic presence on the city's everyday life, their juridical citizenship status have been more precarious. During colonial times, Karana were perceived suspiciously by French authorities who resented and mistrusted their position as economic competitors.¹³⁰² Their status as Muslims and (often) British subjects¹³⁰³ contributed to their ambiguous positioning vis-à-vis the French colonial government. Legislation passed in 1928 allowed French naturalization for some foreigners, but by 1958 less than 5,000 non-Malagasy had secured citizenship.¹³⁰⁴ Following Madagascar's independence in 1960, citizenship was granted on a *jus sanguinis* basis, through descent rather than place of birth. The sale of land to foreigners, furthermore, has long been prohibited in Madagascar. Though many Karana have found ways to garner citizenship or access to land through kinship connections with naturalized Karana in Madagascar, there still remain an estimated 5,000 Karana without any citizenship.¹³⁰⁵ In short, the citizenship status of many Karana is tenuous and contributes to an insecure sense of belonging to their natal land.¹³⁰⁶

¹³⁰¹ Sophie Blanchy "Indians in Madagascar: Religion, Ethnicity and Nationality" in A. Pal and T. Chakrabarti (eds), *Critiquing Nationalism, transnationalism and Indian diaspora*. (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2006), 102; Bardonnet 1964:158, as quoted in Blanchy, "Indians in Madagascar," 101.

¹³⁰² Jean Fremigacci, "Autocratie administrative et société coloniale dans la région de Majunga (1900-1940). Les dominants: appareil administratif, colons français et minorités indigènes," *Omalysy Anio: revue d'études historiques* 16(1983): 426-432.

¹³⁰³ British citizens, that is, prior to India's independence in 1947.

¹³⁰⁴ Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 261; The legislation of 1928 stipulated naturalization could be granted to two categories of foreigners: 1) persons born outside in French colonies of a father, himself born in a French colony; and 2) persons born in the domicile of the colonies (Thuiler 1990, as quoted in Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 261). The later category was suppressed in 1933. Blanchy describes elsewhere that some communities of Karana were encouraged to ask for French nationality, but that many refused fearing their sons could be mobilized into the French military, "Indians in Madagascar, 101.

¹³⁰⁵ Sophie Blanchy, "The Impact of Political, Economical and Juridical Context on Identifications in Indian Gujerati 'Diaspora.'" Paper presented at International Conference on 'Global Gujerat and its Diaspora,' Patan

While most Karana share a linguistic field with Malagasy, they strictly demarcate their everyday life - through their dress, speaking of South Asian languages, schooling, marriage practices, and life-cycle rituals- from the Malagasy population. It should be reiterated here that “Karana” are in fact a highly heterogeneous composite of diverse groups of South Asian origin. Among the Karana population of 20,000 in Madagascar are three groups of Shiite Muslims, one group of Sunni Muslims, and a small contingent of Hindus (variably referred to as Banians). The profound socio-religious differences among these groups have precluded any lasting attempts at unification. Despite these rifts, most Karana have historically and collectively understood themselves as a minority group working to preserve their lifestyle, religious and cultural practices amidst an inhospitable social milieu.¹³⁰⁷ Indeed, most Malagasy perceive Karana as elitist and snobby (*miavona*), as evidenced by their social distance and general disinclination to intermarry with Malagasy, and as dishonest and cruel, regularly cheating Malagasy customers and demeaning Malagasy workers (*manao andevo* or *manandevo*: *literally to enslave someone, or to treat like a slave*). A common stereotype and critique of Karana’s position in the capitalist economy is that they are greedy and value their wealth over interpersonal relationships (*mpangoron-karena*, literally a person who gathers, seizes wealth).¹³⁰⁸

A series of popular uprisings, in which Karana have been targets, have validated Karana perceptions of their vulnerability in a hostile social environment across Madagascar. Popular unrest and a military coup in 1972 marked an abrupt break from an earlier post-independence era

University, Patan, India, Jan 17-19, 2008: 5; See also Caroline McNerney, “Assessing Malagasy Citizenship: The nationality code and its impact on the Karana,” *Tilburg Law Review* 19:1-2 (2014), 182-193.

¹³⁰⁶ Though they might retain citizenship and distant kinship ties to Pakistan and India, most feel estranged linguistically, culturally and politically from these ancestral lands, see Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 16. Stemming from the French colonial connections, many Karana families have linkages to France, and often retain French citizenship, have relatives residing abroad, and ensure their children have strong French education.

¹³⁰⁷ See Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, for a thorough study of Karana communities in Madagascar.

¹³⁰⁸ See Marie Celton, “Les affrontement entre Malgaches et Comorians en 1976 à Majunga: événement isolé ou échec de l’intégration d’une minorité ethnique immigrée,” in *Les Comorians à Majunga: Histoire, migrations, émeutes*, ed. Pierre Vérin and Claude Allibert (Paris: INALCO, 2007), 251.

of Malagasy political and economic history.¹³⁰⁹ Private industries and real estate were gradually nationalized in the 1970s. French, but especially Karana, as significant landholders and commercial agents across the island feared the repercussions of Ratsiraka's socialist program. They increasingly found themselves the targets of rising and vociferous xenophobic sentiments. By the late 1970s, pillaging of Karana-owned shops and official pronouncements against Karana presence rippled across the island nation. But in Mahajanga, xenophobic sentiments were rather targeted pointedly at Comorians during the 1976-77 *rotaka*.¹³¹⁰ Still, Karana experienced vulnerability in this event and over the following decades as the economic landscape wavered and collapsed. In 1987, 1991 and again in 1994, they faced direct attacks on their shops and property in the island's major cities, including Mahajanga.¹³¹¹ Karana defended their position by asserting "We are *zanatany*, but we are not the *tompontany*!"¹³¹²

It was in this vein that Karana residents emphatically described to me their deep love of Madagascar as their natal land, and justified their own sense of belonging here through their generations-long presence in Mahajanga. And it was to demonstrate their allegiance to the city and to honor their revered international religious leader, that one Karana group - the Muslim Dawoodi Bohra congregation - initiated a restoration of the neglected garden in the 1990s. The Mahajanga Dawoodi Bohra congregation is part of a larger, one million person worldwide community of which mostly reside in India, but also along the East African coast.¹³¹³ They have

¹³⁰⁹ Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History*, 187-199.

¹³¹⁰ See the following: Nathalie Radifison, "Conflits ethniques,"; Mze Mohamed, "Les 'Sabena'"; and Marie Celton, "Les affrontement entre Malgaches et Comorians,"; Also Gueunier, *Les Chemins de l'Islam*, 43-49.

¹³¹¹ Karana relayed to me that they have continued to feel vulnerable and mindful of the city's potential volatility. This confirms other ethnographic accounts describing how Karana perceive that "the situation is going to explode one day or another." See Celton, "Les affrontements...", 246-8.

¹³¹² Literally, "we are children of the land, not the masters of the land"; Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 177.

¹³¹³ Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

been described as a ‘minority within a minority’, partly by virtue of their esoteric beliefs, and have protected themselves from repeated persecution by other Muslims through insulation.¹³¹⁴



Figure 113: His Holiness Syedna Muhammed Burhaddin, Mahajanga, 1963
(Source: <<http://www.majungajamaat.blogspot.com>>, accessed 2 Sept 2013)

Their former spiritual leader, His Holiness Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, was believed to be directly in contact with a lineage of hidden imams who have been remained concealed since the 12th century.¹³¹⁵ He served not only as a guide on religious matters, but also more generally on marriage, business, health and wellness, and humanitarian practices.¹³¹⁶ According to local adherents, the Holy Leader himself visited Mahajanga three times over the years (Figure 112), and on his last visit encouraged the community to undertake revitalization of the garden as its social improvement project.

¹³¹⁴ Blank, *Mullahs on Mainframe*, 274; Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 200.

¹³¹⁵ Blank, *Mullahs on Mainframe*, 274.

¹³¹⁶ Blanchy, *Karana et Banians*, 200.

Inspired by the Holy Leader, Mr. Tourabaly, a Bohra congregant and local resident took leadership within the congregation for the garden renovation. Beginning in 1995, the Bohra congregation cleared the weeds, traced out walking paths, and planted trees bushes, using clippings that had been brought by residents. Although the congregation initially provided financial support, most of the upkeep is now financed through the sale of advertising placards on the outside of the garden's fence enclosure. In 2003, the mayor of Antananarivo came to inaugurate the park, showing support for the work of the Bohra Congregation. Mr. Tourabaly has taken much pride in his work on the garden, but has done so in this ever-oscillating socio-political landscape of exclusion and inclusion. Indeed, the congregation's appropriation of the park can be understood as a reflection of their intention to durably inscribe on the urban landscape their identity as citizens of the city. When Tourabaly asked the Commune to place his own or the congregation's name on the park, however, they rebuffed him, "But you're an outsider (*étrangere*) here!" Tourabaly justified his belonging to the city on labor in the park "If I was really a foreigner...I wouldn't be cleaning and caring for this garden!"¹³¹⁷

On a balmy evening in 2013, he and I walked through the garden and he pointed out the acacia, limra, and bougainvillea trees. He explained how he was deeply inspired by the Holy Leader's horticultural metaphor that trees are living things, with deep connections to human beings, as evidenced by their blood-like sap, and therefore require care and respect. Tourabaly likened his own efforts to restore the garden to a kind of meditation. "Cleaning is like praying," he said. These imagined connections between people and plants, between the body of the person and the health of the land, cut across many different cultural and temporal contexts. And it was perhaps these imagined connections between people and plants, bodies and place, and between a

¹³¹⁷ Interview with M. Tourabaly, Majunga Be, 4 July 2013.

diasporic population and its revered leader, that gave the restoration project salience and meaning. By erecting a placard to honor their beloved leader, Bohra residents superimposed their history and sense of belonging onto the local urban landscape and strengthened their transnational ties to their religious community. At the same time that they memorialized their celebrated imam and the legitimacy of their own belonging to the city, they actively forgot – or perhaps silenced - the colonial history tied to Mauriés and the anti-colonial history of Ralaimongo, both previously inscribed on the park. Remembering and forgetting were here, as scholars have shown elsewhere, coeval processes undertaken by particular actors advancing their aspirations and recollections, in relation to the broader socio-historical processes of the times.

The more vexing issue at stake is, who exactly is doing the forgetting here? If we understand forgetting to be not only the silencing of some parts of the past, but also as



Figure 114: Jardin Ralaimongo, stripped obelisk stands in the background, August 2013
(Source: David Epstein)

characterized by inaction, then who precisely is neglecting the park? Karana, as well as many Malagasy residents attribute blame to Mahajanga's city administration, which is widely regarded to be unethical, corrupt and irresponsible in all matters concerning the care of the town. City officials themselves confirm that the Commune has historically had little involvement or interest in the garden, aside from budgeting for the gardener's salary. They maintain that the city prioritizes much more urgent matters of sanitation and basic infrastructural support.¹³¹⁸ City dwellers who consider themselves *zanatany* or *côtiers*, moreover perceive city administrators as homogenously composed of privileged, educated, elite Merina outsiders, who manage to secure desirable bureaucratic positions through access to kinship, professional and ethnic networks. A closer look suggests that the commune administration is perhaps more heterogeneous, yet several *zanatany* city workers alluded to the ethnically demarcated labor hierarchies in which they felt marginalized in lower-ranking roles in the commune.

While the city administration is an obvious actor in neglecting the park, we may also wonder why Malagasy city residents, beyond the Bohra community, have ignored the park. Jardin Ralaimongo remains a kind of deserted and underutilized space. At any given time, one finds a handful of passerbys, suggesting that the place does not hold much popularity or significance for most of the residents of Mahajanga. Many people with whom I spoke suggested that gardens are simply frivolous and insignificant in the current political and economic crisis, where most Malagasy struggle daily to secure basic food and shelter. Others suggested that the act of passing time in a park is a *vazaha* (outsiders, especially referencing non-Malagasy, European outsiders) custom that Malagasy find unappealing and perplexing. Yet, it is remarkable that Mahajangais residents take extraordinary efforts to occupy, present themselves, and

¹³¹⁸ Interview with M. Jean de-Dieu Rakotoarisoa, Ambovalanana, 23 August 2013.

socialize in other public spaces in the city. Take the famous boardwalk (*Bord de la Mer*) where young and old take evening strolls and eat brochettes, the edges of mosques in which men cluster and debate politics, and the Sakalava royal compound (*doany*), which are vibrantly occupied especially during the annual *fanompoa-be*. And if we accept that the most frequented, crowded places are those that hold socio-economic and symbolic significance, then it is clear that these are the places that matter for today's city dwellers.



Figure 115: Majunga Be, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

I suggest that the precise location of Jardin Ralaimongo in the heart of Majunga Be, a neighborhood dominated by the imposing, if not crumbling colonial-era shops and residences of Karana residents, renders it a marginal place in the everyday life of Mahajangaise dwellers. Residual tensions between Malagasy and Karana communities have perhaps been historically

mediated through the inhabitation of separate places for leisure and residence in the city, yet Malagasy experience this segregation as inhospitable and discriminatory exclusion. As one 30-something *zanatany* man described to me,

*You see, people in Mahajanga, they like ambiance! They like to sit on the steps in front of the mosque, Cathedral or post office, to talk, socialize, take in the street scene. But we wouldn't dare do that in front of a karana shop, because they'll tell us to leave. They don't like us to be near their spaces...but if you're vazaha or karana, then they don't mind.*¹³¹⁹

Just as Malagasy residents avoid occupying Karana storefronts in other parts of the city, so too is the neighborhood of Majunga Be perceived to be a *Karana*-dominated space in which many Malagasy can never be fully at ease or embraced. In the reclaiming of Jardin Ralaimongo by Bohra congregants, Karana residents have signaled their ownership over some public space in the city. They have further entrenched their dominating presence in the city's landscape, while Malagasy residents have sought out and made salient other public spaces.

Conclusion

The history of Jardin Ralaimongo in all its reincarnations, reveals the interconnectedness and active processes involved in remembering and forgetting. It is emblematic of how inhabitants across diverse cultural and geographical contexts in Madagascar have established territorial claims by invoking ancestors and linking them through ritual to material residues, usually of tombs. Whereas in other parts of Madagascar, social organization is effectively tethered together through tombs so too could the communities discussed above (French, Malagasy, Karana) be said to be enacted, called together through the (re)appropriation of this

¹³¹⁹ Fieldnotes, 17 February 2014.

garden.¹³²⁰ These ritual practices are acts of *care*. They are the means through which authority is expanded and territoriality is grafted onto spatial landscapes.

But the case of Jardin Ralaimongo illustrates that such mnemonic practices are not bound to tombs, or ritual practice, but have been enacted and extended to everyday, urban spaces. By raising a monumental stone and bronze obelisk in a centrally-located square, French military officers created a concretized topographical *lieu de memoire* that would have maximum public exposure and would physically endure the passage of time.¹³²¹ This site of memory, was designed to stir the romantic nostalgia for the colonial triumph of clearing, claiming and curating new territories. At the same time, the difficult pasts that threatened this mythical rendering, what Saul Friedlander calls *heimatsgeschichte* were elided, namely the histories of violence, suffering, and fearsome tyrannies over toiling Malagasy bodies, and the inescapable mortal vulnerabilities that bound together colonizers and colonized.¹³²² With the memorialization of Ralaimongo, the memory of Mauriès was suppressed and literally erased from the topographical landscape, to make room for the celebration of a mythical nationalist activist serving to unify a distressed island nation. And the memorialization of the living leader His Holiness Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin encompassed a submersion of these earlier histories, allowing the Dawoodi Bohra community to proclaim their enduring ties to Mahajanga.

The Jardin's biography also illustrates the profound meaning of neglect and decay, and the way in which these processes have been transformative and worked to diminish the power of places and political figures. In order to memorialize one revered figure, earlier the material markers of historical personages – whether Mauriès' plaque, or Ralaimongo's sign - had to be

¹³²⁰ Graeber, "Dancing with Corpses..." 262.

¹³²¹ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representations* 26(1998):7-24.

¹³²² *heimatsgeschichte* as described in D. LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 26.

actively concealed through defacement and desuetude. The symbolic space of this garden, it seems, could not hold the living memories of Mauriès, Ralaimongo and His Holiness Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin in the same space and time. Or perhaps memorializing all of these figures together would expose all the fractures that threaten to cleave the tenuous socio-political and ethnic relationships of the very different groups that comprise Mahajanga. While Huyssen suggests that public monuments ‘stand simply as figures of forgetting, their meaning and original purpose eroded by the passage of time’, I suggest that something quite different has been taking place in the case of Jardin Ralaimongo.¹³²³ Forgetting here *has* in part transpired passively over time, but has also, and perhaps more importantly, been actively enacted through material processes of effacement and desertion. Like empty émigré houses in highland Madagascar, decay is “meaningful” as a purposeful negotiation of tenuous social relationships.¹³²⁴

Calls to construct and imagine a unified citizenry - be it the French Malagasy colony, post-independent Malagasy nation-state, or even the Bohra community - through consecutive reworkings of the city’s landscape have been inherently rife with ambiguities. The case of Jardin Ralaimongo suggests that the historical refashioning the city’s built environment has necessarily entailed erection and elevation, intertwined with burial, erasure, and abandonment. In an effort to disentangle the detritus of previous pasts from the living memory of the city, competing groups have aspired to re-envisioned futures of communal cohesion - and - exclusion. The history of Jardin Ralaimongo draws our attention to the ways ideological notions of colonial or postcolonial nationhood have been superseded by ties to specificities of local places. It also illustrates how active and passive recollection and forgetting are constituted through the

¹³²³ Andreas Huyssen, A. (1993) “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6(1993): 249.

¹³²⁴ Luke Freeman, “Separation, connection and the ambiguous nature of émigré houses in rural highland Madagascar,” *Home Cultures* 10:2(2013): 95.

remaking of intimate, local places. It is perhaps precisely through these repetitive acts of forgetting and abandonment that the residents of Mahajanga have laboriously sustained their tense and indeterminate coexistence over time.

Secret Stories
Mama Mariam's Memory of the '76-'77 Rotaka

She told me a story. But it wasn't a story I had expected.

I'd passed by her home many times, admiring the thick cement walls, plastered in ochre, punctuated with an ornate steel grate over the window. I noticed that she was gradually building a small addition on the front. It was from there that she and her son soon began to sell small things. Biscuits. Soap. Salt. And "syrop," a refreshing, cold water drink with forest-green, mint syrup. It was the latter that she began offering me, each time I paused to greet her. The chilled green sweet water was the elixir, lubricating our conversation and enabling a relationship of sorts to bud.

Mama Mariam was most often found cooking in the narrow passageway, juxtaposed between a small sleeping area on one side, and a kitchen-storage room, heaped with nested bowls, pots, and cooking utensils, on the other. This covered space opened out to the courtyard, where stood the household's latrine, shower, and concrete wash basin. She supported herself with a small stool, squatting as she labored over the pastry, grating coconut, and crushing garlic. She welcomed countless interruptions to her task, children popping in, a ringing phone, a neighbor asking to borrow or buy rice. And it was here that our conversations returned over and again to familiar topical terrains, gradually the deepening grooves, until new edges could be revealed.

One day, after chatting about her home, there was a silence. "You know," she said, "we almost lost this house." I asked what she meant by that, and then she began,

It was in 1974 or 1975, or maybe it was 1976, I can't remember exactly the date. I was already married by then, and I was very, very pregnant. My belly out to here [she motions her swollen belly with her hand]. My mother, she was away, making Hajj, on pilgrimage to Mecca. So it was me, my father, my brother and my sister here, keeping the house. Now, at that time we had some renters in this one part of the house [she points to the deep sky blue room] and we lived in the other; they were a young couple, he was Betsirebaka or Tandroy and the woman, she was Tsimihety.

Things were beginning to feel tense around town, and we could sense trouble emerging. By Monday evening, we'd gotten word that Comorians were in danger, that anyone with Comorian blood was going to be killed.

By Monday evening, our family went into hiding...My father, he hid (nififi) in the cabinet (the toilet), my little brother hid in a closet, but then moved to behind a fence in the courtyard, and my sister hid under the bed in the bedroom. But me, I was so pregnant, I was going to have the baby any day! I couldn't squeeze into a small place and hide like that.

So, our renters, they said "Come! Come stay with us in the front of the house. We'll protect you." They kept open the windows and doors, so that nothing looked suspicious in the house. Those houses all closed up, they were torched or stormed because the attackers assumed Comorians were hiding inside. So our renters, they kept everything open so it wouldn't attract attention.

Finally, at long last, late at night, a group of attackers came to the house. They began beating on the door, demanding "Comorians-we're know you're in there! Come out!" Everyone knew this house had Comorians...my grandfather, remember? He was a famous foundi. Everyone knew that, and our house had a reputation for being a Comorian home. So, after some

time of this banging and yelling, the renters opened the door and spoke with the attackers.

“There’s no Comorians here!” they insisted. The attackers, all men, they didn’t believe them and so they barged into the house, began looking around. They’d been drinking, ô you could smell the alcohol! You could see they’d been smoking jamala (marijuana)...their eyes looked crazed, red, bloodshot.

Then they saw me. They approached me, one of them came slowly towards me, holding up his machete over top of me. “You’re a Comorian!” he shouted at me. I thought that was it-I was going to die! [voice rising, she covers her eyes with her hands].

But then, the renters, especially the man,¹³²⁵ He stepped up, “She’s our sister!” [zananay izy, literally “she belongs to us, she’s our kin”] he said, “She’s not a Comorian.” But the attackers, they were not convinced. They were suspicious. Somehow, they decided to move on from me. They were convinced other people were hiding out in the house, so they began going around, roving through the house, looking around for others. They went in the courtyard, they looked in the cabinet (toilet), and by some miracle –Alhamdulillah!- they didn’t find my father, nor my brother or sister. Eventually, they gave up, they left and went elsewhere.

*It was only through this act of bravery and kindness of our renters, that we survived...
God protected us. Alhamdulillah!*

I sat speechless. Helplessly overcome with the horror and the precarity of every moment in her story. The air felt suffocatingly thick, suppressing my voice, rendering words impassable from my throat. I glanced down at our bowls of rice, once adorned with shimmering, garlicky-

¹³²⁵ Mama Mariam described the renters in terms of their ethnic background, the man was identified as Tandroy or Betsirebaka (an umbrella term used in Mahajanga to denote all migrants from southeastern Madagascar), while the woman was identified as Tsimihety (from northern Madagascar). Part of what made her story so remarkable is the man’s ethnic background; As Mama Mariam pointed out, the perpetrators in the pogrom were widely attributed to be Betsirebaka and Tandroy, and it was perhaps partly because of this man’s ethnic affiliation that he was able to successfully protect Mama Mariam.

gingered sautéed greens that now sat limply, half-eaten. We'd been sitting together on the front veranda, our legs tucked and folded underneath us, brushing against the woven mat's worn edges. Propped against the cool cement wall, our backs finding support. I looked at Mama Mariam, and offered insufficient, small words of empathy and gratitude, acknowledging the magnitude of what she endured and her boundless generosity to share her precious, painful memory with me. And we sat together for some time more.

Bachelard poignantly described the house as the “topography of our intimate being,” and suggested that corners were the most treasured places. Corners and secluded, hiding spaces, he suggested are symbolic “of solitude for the imagination.” They offer us “a haven,” that ensures “one of the things we prize most highly—immobility.”¹³²⁶ But there is another side to those hiding places. One revealed in Mama Mariam's intimate recollection of survival in the 1976-77 rotaka. Hiding spaces can protect, but they might also absorb terror. Walls soak in the secrets and sweat of inhabitants. Cracks in the floorboard entrap fear. Places hold flickers and figments of memory. As she narrated the story of her family's extraordinary survival, Mama Mariam drew on the spaces of the house—underneath the bed, the corner of the cabinet, behind the wall—as memory aids, as the landmarks by which she navigated the rocky, mnemonic journey to a troubled moment of her past. Those intimate spaces must've elicited unbearable memories of horror for inhabitants at times in the immediate aftermath of the rotaka. But with time, with daily passages in the hallways, sweepings under the bed, wiping away of dust in the corners, with the birth of babies, laughter and banter, and the sweetness of deep sleep, more layers accrued.

¹³²⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958] 1994), 136-137.

Chapter 10
Conclusion: History and Memory in Deserted Places,
Recalling the 1976-77 Rotaka

Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state...
-Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984: 108)

The rotaka, by all accounts, began with a single incident involving filth, soil, and a child.

In the last days of December 1976, a small child defecated in the open courtyard of a housing compound inhabited by an “Antesaka” family and a “Comorian” family. Enraged, the Comorian owner took and smeared the child with his feces, who immediately ran to his parents. The child’s parents demanded that the Comorian family make recompense (*fandemenina*) for the grave offense. Some say the Comorian family refused, others say the Antesaka parents lost patience when the Comorian family was slow to make redress. In frustration and protest, the Antesaka parents marched to the Police headquarters in Mahabibo. From there, the details become hazy, and the accounts and recollections multiple. Most recall that a crowd gathered in support of the Antesaka family and word spread. Within hours, a mass killing spree was underway in which those aligned with the Antesaka (said to be Betsirebeka and Tandroy) picked up machetes, sticks, and stones to drive Comorians out from the city.

In their first-hand accounts of the pogrom, *zanatany* conveyed the sheer terror of these moments. They described hiding in latrines, under beds, behind fences, in their own homes. Some recalled the courageous acts of protection and sheltering provided by friends and neighbors who offered them safe haven in their closets and toilets. Laced into some narratives

were the heroic accounts of parents who had harbored refugees, risked their lives by protecting and hiding Comorians, and of alliances and covert agreements between *zanatany* and Betsirebaka to offer rescue and refuge.

In desperate attempts to ward away attackers, Malagasy and many *Zanatany* placed a green branch (*famatarana maintso*) outside their homes, and scrawled “Malagasy eto” (Malagasy here) in chalk on their doors and walls. Some marked their bodies as Malagasy, wearing green branches in their hair.

But the violence and destruction came, and devastated.

When I asked people what they recalled about the *rotaka*, people now in their late forties and older, many had visceral responses.¹³²⁷ Eyes covered. Hands splayed. Furrowed brows. Distant gazes. Silence. Gasping. One woman buried her face in her hands and cried in a voice “There was no sense! No idea!”¹³²⁸

These gestures were linked to moments of witness, of glimpsing unspeakable atrocities. Beheadings. Machetes raised and descending. Limbs scattered on the street. Pandemonium.

One Sakalava woman, who was about twelve at the time, recalled being curious. She wanted to go out into the streets and see what had happened. She remembered bodies everywhere, unrecognizable body parts here and there, blood streaming down the roads.

¹³²⁷ *Rotaka* is a general term for tumult, upheaval. Other events in Mahajanga have been referred to as *rotaka*—for instance the standoff between Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana in 2002, and earlier conflicts around labor issues in 1972.

¹³²⁸ Tsisy hevitra!

Some recalled houses burning for days, the streets littered with the bodies of dead goats (the beloved livestock of many Comorians), and mosques desecrated by the urine of humans and smashed doors, dogs running rabid about.

In the aftermath, chaos ensued. Those that could took refuge in the Gendarmes camp, the Catholic Church at Mahabibo, and the French Consulate in Majunga Be. Some recalled those days were filled with anguish, uncertainty, and lawlessness. The gendarmes could not accommodate the thousands of people temporarily housed there. Toilets were blocked. Food and water was scarce. Within a matter of days, Belgian Sabena planes and boats transported the refugees to Comoros.

Emplacing the Rotaka in Malagasy History

In people's narratives of the *rotaka*, the attribution of blame ranged widely. Many described the defecation incident as a small thing that ignited a fire for those who felt marginalized from the city, because Comorians "had all the houses and all the jobs."¹³²⁹ Common refrains among some Malagasy blamed Comorians for their tendency to demean (*manambany*) Betsirebaka and other Malagasy, teasing them (*mivazavaza*) and making them suffer (*mampijaly*). Others suggested that politicians were bent on expelling Comorians (or attracting them back to Comoros, depending on the perspective). Some invoked the côtier-highlander distinction, suggesting it was Merina (*bourzany*) who manipulated Betsirebaka for their own interests of gaining Comorian land and business; and others cited sheer differences of religion and ethnicity (*entre foko*). Still others contended that this was a misunderstanding of customs and perspectives, in which Comorians failed to understand how matters relating to

¹³²⁹ "zavatra kely lasa nampiretra afo... nahazo asa sy trano jiabyjiaby Comorian, dia lasa mialona Betsirebaka" Interview with P.D., Abattoir, Feb. 16, 2014.

excrement (*tay*) were very provocative and taboo for Betsirebaka. Some drew stereotypical correlations between the temperament of Betsirebaka and Comorians, that they both were “hot-hearted” (*mafana fo*). Still others blamed the tumult on the economic decline under Ratsiraka’s regime, a time when jobs were scarce, economic crisis loomed, and competition between groups in town intensified.

Others however, more closely aligned and attuned with Sakalava royal ancestral practices offered an alternative explanation tying together moral decline, with fights within the Sakalava dynasty and ancestral disappointment.¹³³⁰ Dadi’lahy Kassim, Sakalava spirit medium in his seventies, offered this,

“When I moved here [from Analalava] the land had a master (mananan-tompo), and at that time people knew to follow the customs here, and things moved along smoothly. But the royal descendants (razan’olo) haven’t followed the customs properly at the doany and other sacred sites in town. They have committed ‘wrongdoings against the land’ (helokontany manjary). At the doany, people just enter the gate, women come in bikinis, nobody stops them! It’s being run like a business! People disobey the taboos at the seaside, urinating in the ocean, eating pork. Ndriamisara was enraged by these acts. This is why the rotaka happened! And just as these wrongdoings are spread around (paritaka), so too is the suffering spread among all who lived here.”¹³³¹

Kassim’s explanation is certainly not one embraced by all, and may in fact be idiosyncratic.¹³³² But it is intriguing because it intimates the inextricable connections between place, moral rectitude, and subsequent suffering (which will be discussed below).

There are strands of truth in all these interpretations. But this study offers another explanation, one rooted in the politics of labor and the forging of place. It contends that deep attention to built forms—and the labor and inhabitation practices that have constituted them—reveals how the seeds of this conflict were sown at key historical moments and germinated

¹³³⁰ Others have discussed and analyzed these contestations in great detail, see Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*, and Ballerin, *Les Reliques Royales*.

¹³³¹ “mahay manaraka ny fomba ety, dia milamina tsara”

¹³³² Personal communication with Michael Lambek, May 16, 2017. Note too that “heloko” could also possibly mean ‘anger’ in this context, giving Dadi’lahy’s description a slightly different signification.

incrementally over time. French colonial recruitment of laborers from Comoros, and political and ecological upheaval in Comoros throughout the early 1900s, set in motion a process of intensifying Comorian migration to Majunga throughout the twentieth century. As Comorians came and settled in the city over decades, they refused the position of *vahiny*. Feeling themselves ‘at home’ (*chez lui*), they appropriated land and jobs, projected their ideas about morally upright comportment, and built the city to their liking. As some scholars have put it, Comorians and their *zanatany* progeny “colonized” the city.¹³³³ They occupied the central parts of town as landowners and homeowners, from whom newcomers were obliged to rent. In the labor arena, they occupied the petty commerce, and held many of the highly-sought jobs in industry and the municipality. And quite a few Comorians and *zanatany* assumed important political positions in the national government under President Tsiranana, including cabinet members, the Minister of Education, Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Defense.¹³³⁴ They animated the public life of the city, holding festivities, life-cycle celebrations in spectacular forms, which further impressed their dominant presence in the city.

But Comorians’ refusal of *vahiny* status had another dimension, one suggested in the alternative definition of *vahiny* as “guest.”¹³³⁵ When Malagasy noted the bold public comportment of Comorians, or the ways they assumed access to urban spaces, (as in the examples above) they intimated that Comorians failed to keep accord with the principles of being a guest by most Malagasy standards, of performing deference and civility. Yet, the conception of Comorian migrants as guests falls apart when placed in a broader historical frame that accounts for French colonial occupation and labor recruitment. Migrants from the Archipelago did not

¹³³³ Mzé Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena’...”, 35.

¹³³⁴ Ibid.

¹³³⁵ Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, *vahiny*, “a stranger, a sojourner; a guest,” 724.

come to Mahajanga in the early to mid-twentieth century for hospitality, but rather as unskilled laborers to build roads, clean latrines, and police the city. They also came to spread and share Islamic practice, and expand kinship networks.

Yet as Mireille Rosello argues in the case of 1950s and 60s France, framing immigration through metaphors of hospitality conflates “the language of social contracts and the language of excess and gift-giving.”¹³³⁶ In the case of Mahajanga, framing Comorian migrants up to 1960 as “guests” or even “outsiders” was further challenged by the legislative linking of Comoros and Madagascar into a single colonial territory. In oral accounts, adult *zanatany* repeatedly referenced that “Comoros and Madagascar were one,” united in a juridical and governmental sense, sharing currency, boundaries, and administrative structures.¹³³⁷ Although the legal attachment of Comoros to Madagascar was decisively severed with the independence of Madagascar in 1960, the regime shift under President Tsiranana signified little change in the position of Comorians and *zanatany* in Mahajanga. If anything, Tsiranana’s rule served to strengthen relations with Comoros and Comorians in Madagascar; in fact, Tsiranana was perceived by political opponents as a “protector” of Comorian interests.¹³³⁸

By 1970, Tsiranana’s hold on power was tenuous at best.¹³³⁹ Mounting economic problems, a series of cyclones, and Tsiranana’s failing health allowed new openings in which opposition voices gained strength. Tsiranana was ousted altogether in the 1972 May Revolution, in which students—together with labor activists, Leftist youth movements, artists and

¹³³⁶ Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), as quoted in Andrew Shryock, “Thinking about Hospitality, with Derrida, Kant and the Balga Bedouin,” *Anthropos*, 103:2(2008), 410.

¹³³⁷ Interviews with Youssef, Manga, July 16, 2013; Interview with R.P., Manga, Nov. 12, 2013; Interview with M., Fiofio, October 28, 2012; Interview with H., Manga, Dec. 11, 2013.

¹³³⁸ Mzé Mohamed, “Les Sabena,” 56.

¹³³⁹ The account that follows draws largely on Maureen Covell, *Madagascar*, 42-75, and Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 184-209.

musicians— mobilized a mass protest against entrenched French interests and insisted on a new independence marked by veritable liberation. At the heart of this movement was the slogan “Malgachization” which denoted an aspiration for autonomy over education, economic and military domains which had long been dominated by French presence. Through a transition period between 1972-1975, a series of military officers commanded the country. But in 1975, a young naval officer central to the military junta, Didier Ratsiraka, won the seat of power, and garnered voter approval for the Charter of the Socialist Revolution.

Promising the “flowering of the collective and individual Malagasy soul,” the Charter set out to reorganize Malagasy society and economy to reflect “Malagasy” interests.¹³⁴⁰ Bearing some resemblance to Nyerere’s socialist revolution in Tanzania, Ratsiraka’s regime drew on a “traditional” Malagasy institution of *fokonolona* (village unit) as the primary unit of the newly decentralized socialist state.¹³⁴¹ Malgachisation was infused with new force, as state officials nationalised French-owned businesses, took public ownership of banks and leading industrial companies. Across the island, widespread discourses and institutional refashionings along the lines of ‘Malgachization’ promoted a strong awareness of a Malagasy national identity, that had hitherto been inconceivable.¹³⁴²

But in Mahajanga, a city long-supportive of Tsiranana,¹³⁴³ these sweeping political and economic reformations unfolded quite differently than elsewhere on the island. Mandates to prioritize “nationals” for manual labor jobs were not always taken seriously by companies in Mahajanga, who had long relied on a strong Comorian workforce.¹³⁴⁴ Economic recession and

¹³⁴⁰ In Covell, *Madagascar*, 59.

¹³⁴¹ Randrianja and Ellis, *Madagascar*, 195-6.

¹³⁴² Radifison, “Les Conflits,” 150.

¹³⁴³ Randrianja and Ellis note that in the 1959 municipal elections, “Of all Madagascar’s main towns, only Majunga did not fall into the hands of parties opposed to Tsiranana and his governing PSD.” *Madagascar*, 180.

¹³⁴⁴ Radifison, “Les Conflits,” 151.

decreasing wages, following the devaluation of the Malagasy franc when Madagascar departed from the French franc zone in 1973,¹³⁴⁵ fueled the competition for jobs in the city.¹³⁴⁶ And resentment towards Comorians and their dominating presence in the city grew. On December 17, 1976, just days before the tragic *rotaka*, union organizers associated with FITIM (the jute manufacturing company) organized a mass strike in protest against the favoritism shown by the *zanatany* Chief of Personnel towards Comorian employees.¹³⁴⁷

It was in this specific local and regional context of 1976—marked by heightened nationalist sentiments, economic constriction, and public displays of political insurgency—that the long-brewing enmity towards Comorians was harnessed and mobilized for collective action in Mahajanga. Comorians and *zanatany*, I suggest, were targeted—rather than say Karana or French ‘outsiders’—because of their *proximity* to Malagasy, the stark visibility of their elevated position in the labor market and their dominance in urban spaces. And it is here where the built environment—the homes and mosques and streetscapes of the city—are crucial to the story. Comorians, *zanatany* and newcomer Malagasy migrants lived in contiguity with one another, often sharing household compounds, streets and paths, marketplaces, and neighborhoods.¹³⁴⁸ For many marginalized inhabitants in the city, the lasting built structures belonging to Comorian and *zanatany* families were prominent evidence of their entrenched presence and acquisition of wealth (albeit relatively modest) over time. Time and again throughout my research, town inhabitants of varied backgrounds specified that before the *rotaka*, Malagasy grew despairing and resentful of Comorians’ overbearing, loud (*bevava*), and entitled presence in the city.

¹³⁴⁵ Mohamed, “Les Sabena,” 48.

¹³⁴⁶ Radifison, *Les Conflits*, 151.

¹³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* After two days of negotiations, union organizers and company management came to an agreement and workers returned to FITIM.

¹³⁴⁸ While French and Karana generally resided in the west side of town, the neighborhoods in and around Mahabibo were inhabited by Malagasy and Comorian, for almost a century (Chapter Four).

Expunging “Comorians” from the city through the violent actions of the ’76-77 *rotaka* was the most robust denial of *zanatany* claims to autochthony.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I found the links between the ’76-77 *rotaka*, Malgachization, and the formation of a “Malagasy” national identity more explicit and suggestive. When I asked informants whether they would agree that the 1976-77 *rotaka* was a turning point in local articulations of “Malagasy” identity, many agreed. Some cited that in earlier times, other kinds of ethnic, residential, or home association affiliations were more pronounced. But during and after the *rotaka*, the category of “Malagasy”—was juxtaposed with “Comorian,” “outsider” (*vahiny*), or “migrant” (*mpiavy*)—resonated in a new way. One man of



Figure 116: “Malagasy: One Country, One People,” framed poster (ca. 1970s-early ‘80s) suggestive of efforts to create a unified Malagasy identity, displayed in private home, Tsararano Ambany, 2014 (Source: Author)

Antesaka descent who recalled his father fighting on the side of Betsirebaka, described how in the *rotaka* “the Gasy united and became one people” (*nitambatra gasy, dia olo iray*) in opposition to “arrogant” and “exploitative” Comorians. And it was the uniquely disproportionate presence of Comorians in the city, many attested, that gave rise to the *zanatany* street culture of the 1960s and 70s, and the subsequent eruption of the *rotaka*. Taken together, these accounts suggest that the mid-1970s Malgachization program (manifest in public discourses, and economic, legal and educational reform) combined with urban tensions (over spatial dominance and economic marginality) fostered an environment in which people could begin to think of themselves as “Malagasy” in new ways. In many ways the *rotaka* seemed to elucidate a “Malagasy” national affiliation—rendering visible where the line between “Malagasy” and “other” stopped and started, in the inscriptions of “*Malagasy eto*” on homes, the annihilation of mosques, decimation of bodies, and the expulsion of people deemed “outsiders.”

Absence and Abstention

There was little question for most older inhabitants in the city —*zanatany* and migrants alike—that the *rotaka* was a rupture. There was before the *rotaka* when life was good, ambiance was lively, and politics were calm (*milamina tsara*). Accounts from older Comorians and *zanatany* who fled after the *rotaka* described that relationships between “Malagasy” and “Comorians” were tranquil, if not affectionate and affective. “We dwelled in good rapport, without any problem, as if we were of the same race,” one older man described.¹³⁴⁹ Another said, “in the beginning, the Malagasy were good with us, like between two brothers, like people of the

¹³⁴⁹ Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena,” 34.

same origin.”¹³⁵⁰ Still another man relayed, “The Malagasy were like brothers. We *zanatany*, we were considered more Malagasy than Comorian. It was an honor to be called Comorians.”¹³⁵¹ Many Comorians and *zanatany* echoed this sentiment that Comorians enjoyed a great degree of respect, especially during the time of Tsiranana.¹³⁵²

For those who remained, life after the *rotaka* was characterized by economic austerity, ration lines and rampant filth in the streets. Many described how a palpable malaise settled over the city. Abandoned houses of *zanatany* were pillaged and taken over by Malagasy families, in the absence of their owners. The city plodded along, reeling from the violence and seeking a stable aftermath. According to a French lawyer who witnessed the *rotaka*, authorities held a trial at the Naval Academy in town for perpetrators of the attacks, but state officials were so fearful of inciting more violence that they flew in judges from Antananarivo to preside.¹³⁵³ Fearing for their lives, the judges left their decision with a court baliff, only to be opened after they had boarded the plane to return to Antananarivo. “Every last one was ruled guilty,” he said, but the numbers of those indicted were relatively small.¹³⁵⁴

Over a period of months and then years, Comorians and *zanatany* kin slowly began to return to the city. Families recalled that they came one member at a time, testing the waters to gauge whether they would be received peacefully and communicating with kin in the Archipelago. In many of these cases, families found their homes occupied by former renters, enemies, and neighbors. Court cases abounded, in which former homeowners pressed for the

¹³⁵⁰ Mzé Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena’...,” 35.

¹³⁵¹ Mzé, Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena’...” 34.

¹³⁵² Mzé Mohamed, “Les ‘Sabena’...” 32.

¹³⁵³ Interview, M. Ducaud, Majunga Be, October 8, 2013.

¹³⁵⁴ Ibid.

legal return of their home—with varying degrees of success.¹³⁵⁵ But even after they returned, the force of *zanatany* status had diminished, and returnees were tempered and tentative. *Zanatany* was reconstituted as an identifier, but one laced with the sense of an outsider. For *zanatany*, the *rotaka* also signaled an irreparable tear through the urban social and economic fabric they had woven for generations. Many cited that once they returned to the city from Comoros, the sense of vibrant community (*fiaramonina*) was lost; neighborly relations (*jirany*) were ruined (*robaka*); and the moral ethos that had once maintained order eroded.

As the stories of the *rotaka* unfolded in my conversations with informants, I grew ever more aware of the absence of any public marker, site or event commemorating this historic catastrophe. The only marker of violence of any kind in the city was an aging, decrepit monument to the 1947 anti-colonial rebellion, that seemed unnoticed and unremarkable for most inhabitants. But after some time, I began to see that it was the deserted places and ruined places that contained the residues of the horrific violence, and through which inhabitants recalled the split moral fibers of the city.

One of these places was Mangatokana (*the lone mango tree*). Since at least the early 1970s, Mangatokana had served as the public cemetery for Malagasy in the city. Other abandoned cemeteries throughout the city were still recalled and thought to be haunted by restless ghosts. In earlier times, Antalaotra and Silamo had been buried at the hilltop still known as “Plateau des Tombes.” In the 1970s, long after the graves had been overlooked, the city seized this land to construct the Administrative Block. When construction workers dug into the land

¹³⁵⁵ My efforts to locate court records associated with these cases were not fruitful. Court officials, up to the President of the Tribunal, explained that all records relating to the *rotaka* and its aftermath were “confidential and unable to be consulted.” Fieldnotes, July 3, 2013.

they discovered the skeletons of Antalaoatra, buried with their heads towards Mecca.¹³⁵⁶ The other ancient cemetery lay at Manjarisoa, now a residential neighborhood known to be populated by highlander migrants; some recalled that if you walked there at night, you might be slapped by



Figure 117: “Vazaha Cemetery,” Mahajanga, 2014 (Source: David Epstein)

an angry ghost. Several other cemeteries dotted the town: the vazaha cemetery near Mangarivotra (Figure 115), the Bohra cemetery in Majunga Be, and a Zanatany Muslim cemetery in Antanimisaja.

Yet, the Mangatokana public cemetery was the subject of much talk and consternation for many Malagasy. Sprawling across several acres, it was notoriously difficult to navigate and find one’s kin. Many migrant families buried their kin there temporarily, with the expressed intention of exhuming them and reburying them in their ancestral land (*tanindrazana*) once they had gathered funds. Others never accumulated the resources, and carried immense guilt that they

¹³⁵⁶ Construction was halted and archaeologists were called to the site to excavate the area. Ramilisonina, personal communication, January 26, 2012.

allowed their kin to languish there. Burial practices have long been a critical way Malagasy constitute attachments to place, and inability to fulfill one's kinship obligations could incite anger among ancestors that might bring more misfortune.¹³⁵⁷ But Mangatokana stirred concerns among city residents for another reason. In the early 2010s, the city designated the adjacent terrain as a landfill. Rumors abounded about the origins of this decision. Some claimed a private company began tossing rubbish on the site, and that the city only followed suit. At least one city administrator affirmed that the municipality chose the site because the land was abundant. Initially officials planned to clearly demarcate the cemetery from the landfill, by building a concrete wall. But as funds failed to materialize, the wall was never built, and in turn the massive garbage heaps gradually spread, encroaching onto the tombs. Some accused the city administration of neglect, others claimed city administration was dominated by rich highlanders who were insensitive to the concerns of local families, while still others blamed the citizenry for not holding the city more accountable. Either way, the close juxtaposition of filth and sanctity remained a widespread point of distress for city inhabitants.¹³⁵⁸

Mangatokana was also the place reputed to hold the remains of those killed in the 1976-1977 rotaka. With this in mind, I visited the Mangatokana cemetery on two occasions, each time asking people there tending to graves whether they could direct me to the Comorian grave (*fasana*). But my attempts were unsuccessful. Either people genuinely did not know of the site, or wanted to avoid delving into this uncomfortable past with an odd *vazaha* visitor. But in the last weeks of my time in Mahajanga, Twawilo offered to accompany me there.¹³⁵⁹ Twawilo was

¹³⁵⁷ Bloch, *Placing the Dead*; Graeber, *Lost People*; Jennifer Cole and Karen Middleton, "Rethinking Ancestors and Colonial Power in Madagascar;" Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*, 56.

¹³⁵⁸ This was relayed in oral accounts. Some newspaper accounts reveal these concerns as well as debates to halt the trash dumping at Mangatokana. Vanessa Zafimahova, "Fahadiovana: Tsy azo anariana fako intsony ao Manapatanana fa eny Mangatokana indray," *Inona Vaovao*, 24 June 2011.

¹³⁵⁹ This passage is taken from my fieldnotes, Dec. 18, 2013.

a revered leader in the Mosque at Fiofio, the mosque once constructed by Tsepy and his comrades, and the self-appointed caretaker of the Comorian gravesite. As we drove on the rocky



Figure 118: Mangatokana Landfill, 2014 (gravestones across the road, not visible in photo)
(source: Madacompost)

road ascending Mangatokana, Twawilo pointed out that the road leading to the cemetery was demarcated in 1972 under Tsiranana. He explained that in those days, the dead of Muslims and non-Muslims were buried separately, but now with so much overcrowding in the city, people claimed open spaces there to farm corn, cassava, and to plant banana trees, and everything was mixed up (*mikorontana*). We parked the car, and walked several hundred feet through matted grass dotted with plastic wrappers strewn by the wind and cracked tombstones. The surrounding landscape seemed to me completely unreadable, and even Twawilo himself seemed uncertain of the precise location of the graves. There were three mass graves in total—one long and narrow, and a small and large circular mound. We found them, loosely marked off with stone, but

otherwise unnoticeable. As we quietly observed the site, I recalled stories people had told me of bulldozers digging the soil and tumbling the bodies, hastily wrapped in white cloth, into the earthen gaps. We stood in silence, as the clouds swirled overhead and the wind blew.

After a few minutes, I asked Twawilo, Were there efforts in the past to create a memorial plaque to mark the site? He responded that there had been some inquiries, and that the city agreed to allow the erection of a small plaque of 30 cm high. Perhaps in a reflection of his own ambivalence, Twawilo then explained that he and his congregants prioritized the construction of a post demarcating the Muslim tombs at Mangatokana, over the establishment of a memorial marker at the *rotaka* grave. “Older *zanatany* don’t teach younger people about this history of *rotaka*” He confessed. “No, no they don't. They don’t want to bring this history up, because it will distinguish and differentiate them from other Malagasy. Long ago we held a memorial service, but that hasn’t take place in several years. And the state corroborates this because they fear memorializing this site will incite racial tensions. They are ashamed (*menatra*)...” It was those who had escaped from the city and remained in Comoros who pushed for a memorial, he explained. But those in the city abstained from remembering.

This resonated with conversations I had with others in the city indicating that it was “no longer fashionable to be *zanatany*.” By this, they specifically referenced the conception of *zanatany* as Comorian-Malagasy métis people and practices. *Zanatany* men and women regularly noted dismally that if you had a Muslim name, you should expect that government bureaucrats (thought to be mostly highlanders) would discriminate against you. Said Hassan, in his seventies, tied the rise in “racism” to the 1972 coup by General Ramantsoa, followed by the socialist revolution and regime under President Ratsiraka (1976-1993). “Under Tsiranana, things were still very good (*mbola tsara be*). But in 1972, there was a force pushing for Malgachization...

once the country was led by Merina (*Merina mitondra*), racism began to emerge (*manomboka racisme*) against côtiers.”¹³⁶⁰ This distancing from “zanatany” markers—by those of Comorian-Malagasy mixed descent— was further revealed in an ethnographic encounter.

One morning in February 2013, Taoaby and I met with the head of the *fokontany* (local neighborhood office) in Abattoir, a quarter historically dominated by Comorians (from Ngazidja) and *Zanatany*. In his early thirties with a small child, he answered my questions about the historical and contemporary demographics of the neighborhood, by way of his own family composition. “Abattoir is very mixed. You see, even myself, my mother is Sakalava and my father is Sihanaka (an ethnic group historically located in central northeastern Madagascar). And I’m married to a Merina woman.” After we conversed a bit more and finished the meeting, we thanked him and left. When we returned back to Mama and Papa Taoaby’s home, I mentioned to them his comments about his own background. Mama Taoaby exclaimed, “Ha! I knew his parents and his father was actually Comorian-Gasy. I taught him as a student before, and I know he has a Comorian background.” Everyone agreed that the *fokontany* leader had reframed his ancestral background to appear more “Malagasy.” Then Papa Taoaby chimed in, “It’s ironic. You know, in earlier times, he might’ve overemphasized his Comorian background, but now in this political moment he tries to appear more Malagasy.”

Restless Places

Despite the absence of public markers relating to the *rotaka*, other places in the city refused to be silenced. Among these were the houses, neighborhoods and lands once inhabited by

¹³⁶⁰ Malgachization was the official policy and approach under General Gabriel Ramanantsoa (1972-1975) and Ratsiraka that included nationalizing the economy, educational reform leading to instruction exclusively in Malagasy, and the fostering of a new, unified national identity. Maureen Covell, *Madagascar: Politics, Economics, and Society*, (London: F. Pinter, 1987); Sharp, *The Sacrificed Generation*.

Comorians but since abandoned. Some remarked that if one wanders the streets of Abattoir at night, you can still hear the cries of distress of the ghosts of Comorians who once lived here and who were violently killed in the '76-'77 pogrom. One afternoon, Papa Taoaby relayed the story of the house next door. It “refuses to let people live in peace” he explained. A continuous stream of renters had been haunted by strange happenings, including the sounds of tortured moans and sounds of strangulation and even some mysterious deaths. The origin of these incidents was the house’s original owner, a Comorian man, who fled in the midst of the violence. When this man returned to reclaim his house from his Malagasy neighbors several years later, they refused, and he began legal proceedings of reclamation through the town’s Tribunal. Before the case went to court, however, he was visited by a diviner (*moasy*) who advised him on the Malagasy family’s behalf to abandon his legal case. He rebuffed the diviner’s warning and on that very night he choked on a fishbone and died. From then on, “the people staying in this house have had many strange things happen to them.”¹³⁶¹

Papa Taoaby’s story was one of many I heard about the residual disturbances of the spaces once marked by the *rotaka*. Many recalled that Comorians and *zanatany* hastily pleaded with trusted friends and renters to watch over their homes and their belongings. Others gave a procuration—either quickly before they left, or working through intermediaries once they were in Comoros—to kin or neighbors who remained in the city. One woman whose family rented a home from Comorians in Ambalavola recalled that they hid their landlords until they could usher them to safety. The Comorian family allowed her brother to live on their land free of rent for the years to come.¹³⁶² Even those who did not necessarily seize homes owned by Comorians, but found themselves renting them, however, experienced troubles. One woman, of mixed Vezo-

¹³⁶¹ Fieldnotes, Nov., 6, 2012.

¹³⁶² Interview with A. Nov. 13, 2013.

Betsileo background, described how her family rented a home in Ambalavato that had once been owned by Comorians killed during the *rotaka*.¹³⁶³ The house was regularly disturbed by ghosts (*lolo*), however, which terrorized the family. She recalled her mother's attempts to drive out or silence the *lolo*, through a powerful act of penetration, reburial and transformation,

“You know, some Comorians had a hole in their home, where they buried the fluids from their dead, after washing them. This house had a hole like that, where the Ajojo used to pour the water from their dead. Well, my mother she wanted to drive out those ghosts. So she opened up the hole, and she heated up pig lard (menaka kisoa), turning it into liquid. Very carefully, she poured that fat into the hole. And never again were we bothered by those ghosts...”

Mama Tiana was the only person who described this particular way of suppressing the disturbances of ghosts, the traces of those who had once lived in the home. And though we do not know how widespread this approach was, it speaks to the ways homes exerted a force on their inhabitants, one which inhabitants were obliged to contend with and mediate through other ritual means.

It was not only occupied homes, however, that caused these odd occurrences. People also linked these incidents to the belongings and objects once owned by Comorians, but wrongly seized by Malagasy. In most cases, Comorian and *zanatany* families fled with little time to collect their belongings, leaving behind their furniture, cooking pots, and even jewelry. Dadi'lahy Kassim recalled witnessing Betsirebaka carrying away suitcases filled with cloth and gold from Comorian houses, which they dispersed amongst themselves. Malagasy who remained in the city clamored to take over the houses that stood, vacant and wanting. Yet, strange, haunting things befell those who had confiscated Comorian goods and property. One woman exclaimed, “those things were Comorian things, they were Comorian houses!” So many people became crazy (*adaladala*), many died of mysterious diseases. One Tsimihety woman who lived

¹³⁶³ Interview with R.M., Ambohidamina, Feb. 14, 2014.

through the *rotaka* recalled, “A good Comorian friend warned us after the *rotaka*, ‘Don’t touch a single thing from Comorians, not even a sewing needle! So we didn’t. But those who took things from Comorian houses, they really found themselves troubled, with bad dreams, tormented.”¹³⁶⁴ Stories abounded of those who appropriated the empty houses or used the belonging of Comorian owners, only to be driven to insanity or death. “Looted” objects and houses were saturated with the traces of their former owners, their rightful owners. As people described these stories, it seemed clear that vacant houses and left-behind things exerted a kind of force on those who occupied them.¹³⁶⁵

These narratives are not unlike those excavated by anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin in Turkish Cyprus, which revealed how “looted” personal objects and houses forcefully appropriated from Greek-Cypriots during the war of 1974 exuded “emotive energies” over and elicited moral imaginings from the Turkish-Cypriots inhabiting them.¹³⁶⁶ The Cypriot landscape of confiscated ruins emitted “an affect of melancholy,” and so too did Turkish-Cypriot inhabitants infuse them with melancholy, even as they debated and historicized the ruins through everyday discursive practices.¹³⁶⁷ But unlike the Cypriot situation, many Malagasy interpreted these accounts of ill fortune as retribution for wrongs committed during the *rotaka*, which they linked to the superior capacities of Comorians—especially Ajojo—to harness supernatural forces through Muslim practices. It was through *badri*, many Malagasy maintained, that Comorians were able to bring divinely ordained justice to bear on Malagasy perpetrators.

¹³⁶⁴ Interview with L.D., Tsararano Avaratra, April 4, 2014. “Tsy milamina saina, lasa adaladala”

¹³⁶⁵ See also Nancy Munn’s study of landscapes laden with spirits and memories and understood to have “enduring agentive powers”, exerting power over human actors in authoritative, prohibitive and concrete ways, “Excluded Spaces: The Figure in the Australian Aboriginal Landscape,” *Critical Inquiry* 22:3(1996): 451.

¹³⁶⁶ Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). See also, Laurie Kain Hart, “The Material Life of War at the Greek Border,” *Social Analysis* 61:1(2017):69-85.

¹³⁶⁷ Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space*, 15.

Most could not exactly explain the mechanics of *badri*, except that it was constituted through rituals and prayers. But what they emphasized was the immense and disproportionate strength of Comorians through *badri*. When I asked Dadi'lahy Kassim about *badri* he explained it like this, “After the Comorians fled, then the Malagasy took or destroyed all the Ajojo belongings. But afterwards, Ajojo did *badri* and those who had done wrong things were struck. Even if you were royalty (*mpanjaka*), if you took something that belonged to the Ajojo, then you would be struck by *badri*. Only *Silamo* could undo the work of *badri*.”¹³⁶⁸ I asked him, “So does that mean the power of Comorians through *badri* was stronger than the power of royal ancestors? And he replied, “The *mpanjaka* is strong, but if they took something, they would also be the victim of *badri*. They could not avoid it.”

These recollections of things infused with dangerous traces of their rightful owners were both a moral indictment against the wrongs committed by those involved in the *rotaka*, and a parable warning of the power of unseen forces. And unlike the Cypriot situation, many Comorians *did* eventually return to Mahajanga to (re)claim their houses and things, producing new chains of personal and public contestations over space and belonging. In the absence of public discourses around the painful history of exclusionary violence, people spoke about these events through the idioms of place. And the surrounding houses, streets, and public spaces also “spoke”—and continue to—“speak” back to inhabitants, bringing the uncomfortable history of the *rotaka* into the present, and perhaps even demanding recognition of unresolved histories of loss and appropriation.

¹³⁶⁸ Interview, Tsaramandroso, Feb. 10, 2013, “rehefa alefa ny Comorians, dia manjary lasa gasy tompony. Nandrava fananana Ajojo (they destroyed all the belongings of the Ajojo)...but the Ajojo nanao badri, apres the rotaka, dia ny olona nanao ratsy mamango.”

The point here is one with broader significance than the granular particularities of Mahajanga's history. These stories taken collectively signal the active ways built forms and urban spaces can shape people's everyday lives, constituting how urban dwellers understand the stakes of belonging and forge their own ties to the city. They invite us to consider how—in the absence of noisy debates and public markers—contestations over belonging endure through people's engagements with the things and places of the city. The spatial practices through which people negotiate, interpret and construct senses of belonging are sometimes public and highly visible, for instance in the elevation of the towering stele monument to Mauriès at Jardin Ralaimongo or the performances of Comorian men and women on open streets of Mahabibo. But in many other moments, these practices are quiet and hidden, like Mama Tiana's story of burying pork fat in the home once owned by Comorians or the whispers exchanged between friends in a private courtyard. These moments can rarely be found in documentary sources and instead demand an attunement to the unseen, the nuanced dimensions of everyday life.

There are many unseen moments and gestures that escape this study and fell beyond my comprehension and scope. These could constitute what anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski famously referred to as “confessions of ignorance and failure,” namely those areas that eluded the researcher or presented exceptional difficulties to investigate.¹³⁶⁹ In the course of this project, some subjects arose with little time to properly interrogate them with informants in Mahajanga. The lives and perspectives of sanitation workers; everyday conceptions of waste in the age of plastic; the gradations and specificities of taboos and practices around waste management among different groups; and the ways in which new non-governmental programs to build latrines are

¹³⁶⁹ “Confessions of Ignorance and Failure,” (Appendix II) *Coral Gardens and Their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands, II (The Language of Magic and Gardening)* (London: New York, 2002 [1935]), 452-482. I'm indebted to Gillian Feeley-Harnik for this reference.

changing dynamics around sanitation are all areas that could be explored in future studies. At other times, I was constrained by gender. The ways in which men inhabit and conceptualize mosque spaces, debate the politics of leadership in contemporary Muslim orders, and instruct their children on purification practices, for instance, was beyond my reach. Undoubtedly there were countless other moments in which people kept things from me, owing to my status as a *vazaha*, Dutch-American woman, or which I failed to grasp.

Emplacing Difference and Autochthony

This study was born from the concerns of *zanatany* families about the relationship between urban space, the politics of belonging and the moral norms of city life. It was an effort to read historical productions of difference and nativist claims through the urban materials and building processes of diverse city inhabitants. I have tried to show that experiences of—and contestations over—belonging are not only ideological, intellectual debates. Heartfelt struggles over who is native and newcomer are not necessarily plotted out in newspapers, journals, letters and written accounts. Rather, the case of Mahajanga shows how these debates were waged in the open expanses of the city, the gravel streets, and the dirt and concrete floors of homes.

Looking into the deeper past, I have argued that architectural forms and materials have been taken up by city inhabitants and authorities to make claims to authority, express loyalty and differentiate themselves from the time of the city's earliest days in the late eighteenth century. Colonial authorities grafted new imperatives for labor and infrastructure onto an emergent urban landscape, through the technologies of urban planning and housing regulations informed by ideas of ethno-racial difference. Town dwellers of varied ethno-linguistic backgrounds responded in their own ways, leveraging the uneven enforcement of property regulations, the inefficacy of

surveillance measures, and the discourses of citizenship to establish households. Comorians, more than any other migrant group to the city in the first half of the twentieth century, managed to transform themselves into insiders, through marriage with Malagasy, labor practices, and economic associations. Building and maintaining homes, mosques, and infrastructures were critical means through which Comorians and their zanatany progeny constituted themselves as morally distinctive from other migrant groups and as authentic natives to the town. Yet their growing dominance in the town—spatially and in the labor market—became more problematic as newer Malagasy migrants contested the moral norms shaping urban life, and the overshadowing Comorian presence in the town. The 1976-77 *rotaka* was the culmination of these longstanding resentments, and signified a rupture in the city's history that remains today.

This contemporary moment of pervasive debates around nativism—in Madagascar and beyond—demands deeper understandings of the ways people forge claims to belonging. Mahajanga is not unique in the incidence of a post-independence violent conflict in which one group disputes the legitimacy of another group in extreme terms. Scholars have considered how in the wake of decolonization, conflicts emerged across East Africa as African racial nationalist movements put forth competing articulations of authentic bases of citizenship to the postcolonial state.¹³⁷⁰ Just fifteen years before Mahajanga's *rotaka*, Zanzibar experienced a conflict in which Arabs were targeted following the 1961 elections. Historian Jonathan Glassman traced the conflict to eighteenth century Arabocentric ideas about racial nationalism touted by reigning Omani Sultanate, which were reproduced during the British Colonial period.¹³⁷¹ Racial

¹³⁷⁰ See Jeremy Prestholdt, "Politics of the Soil: Separatism, Autochthony, and Decolonization at the Kenyan Coast," *The Journal of African History* 55:2(2014):249-270; James Brennan, "Realizing civilization through patrilineal descent: the intellectual making of an Africa racial nationalism in Tanzania, 1920-1950," *Social Identities*, 12:4 (2006), 405-423.

¹³⁷¹ Jonathan Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

categories were taken up by two competing nationalist groups: the Zanzibar National Party (ZNP) a multi-ethnic group of elite families emphasized a unified multi-racial Zanzibar nation, and Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), comprised of “subaltern intellectuals” who drew on tropes of blood ties and descent as the basis for citizenship. Charting debates in newspapers and publications, Glassman demonstrated how contestations between these competing nationalist groups gained momentum over time, combined with strikes and political actions, and culminated in the 1961 riots.

Set in productive contrast to Zanzibar’s case and those described elsewhere in Kenya and Tanzania,¹³⁷² Mahajanga’s *rotaka* tells quite a different story. Like Glassman argues for Zanzibar, ethno-racial distinctions in Mahajanga had much deeper roots in the late eighteenth century and possibly earlier. But unlike elite intellectuals who were victims of violence in Zanzibar, Comorians and their *zanatany* progeny were not widely recognized as the leading intellectual forces, nor the most vocal political voices pushing an envisioned nationalism in the city.¹³⁷³ Rather, it was—by the mid-twentieth century—other groups of Tsimihety and highlanders who were the leading proponents of nationalist thinking in the northwest region and in Antananarivo.¹³⁷⁴ Neither were the newer migrants from southeast Madagascar (Betsirebaka) involved in the conflict apparently engaged with a particular party, or primarily motivated by a coherent nationalist platform. Rather, it was uneven access to wage labor, the built homes, and the spaces of the city— and the moral norms that ought to shape the urban landscape— that fueled the ’76-77 *rotaka*. Mahajanga’s *rotaka* was less a struggle between elites and intellectuals over the new nation state, and rather a collective action of ‘ordinary’ people refuting the

¹³⁷² Prestholdt, “Politics of the Soil”; Brennan, “Realizing civilization.”

¹³⁷³ Though it should be noted that some Comorians were involved in local politics and held some important positions in regional and national government, as discussed previously.

¹³⁷⁴ Radifison, “Les Conflits,” 138.

historical inequities of the city and demanding a new urban life. In Mahajanga these tensions brewed quietly but continuously, taking the form of murmurings and rumblings in homes and passageways, until spilling forth into the streets and neighborhoods of the city in most visible and violent ways.

I have suggested an expanded understanding of how people produce belonging and nativism beyond an arena of claims, public banter, and written words, and into built and deserted spaces. In cities, the performance of difference and nativism hinges not only on ‘claims’ to land or discourses of nationalism, but on the physical inscription of families through housing construction and occupations of places. Shifting the lens to these physical places and things makes visible the *economy* of autochthony, that is the way autochthony comes (at times) to have traction through specific processes of accumulation of capital and accrual of wealth. *Zanatany* in Mahajanga did not necessarily position, perform and defend themselves as natives through ‘claims’ to land. But rather through their inhabitation of highly visible architectural forms—built through generations of labor, moral and collective practices, as signaled by Mama Nasra’s narrative in the opening of this dissertation. Articulations of difference and autochthony can be slippery and plastic, easily appropriated by competing actors longing to garner resources and authority in historical contexts of scarcity. As people labored to build and rebuild the city—homes, mosques, infrastructures, parks and streets— they transformed that slippery social capital into enduring forms of economic and symbolic capital. And in turn these places and dwellings, now sedimented over the long expanse of time, continue to inform and impel inhabitants, beckoning them to moments past and yet unseen.

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