

Why not marry them?

**History, essentialism and the condition of slave descendants
among the southern Betsileo (Madagascar)**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the condition of slave descendants among the southern Betsileo of Madagascar. Unlike previous research, which has focused on the dependency of those slave descendants who stayed as share-croppers on their former masters' land and on the discrimination against slave descent migrants, the present study focuses on a group of slave descendants, the Berosaiña, who own their land and have acquired autonomy and wealth. Based on fieldwork in a rural area south of Ambalavao, the thesis presents an ethnographic study of the ambivalent relations between the Berosaiña and their neighbours of free descent. It shows that the Berosaiña's knowledge of local history and of their ancestor's role in the region's settlement is one of their key stakes in local politics, while the free descendants' refusal to marry them is the most serious obstacle to their integration. A close study of slave descendants' genealogies and of local marriage practices suggests that, although a few 'unilateral' marriages occurred, no 'bilateral' marriage between commoner descendants and the Berosaiña ever took place. After suggesting an explanation for the avoidance of marriage with the Berosaiña, the thesis proceeds by showing that the category 'slaves' is essentialized by commoner descendants. The essentialist construal of 'slaves', it is argued, is likely to have become entrenched only in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, because the circumstances in which it occurred prevented a large number of freed slaves to be ritually cleansed and because a number of established cultural practices made it difficult for freed slaves to marry free people. Finally, the thesis analyses the peculiar predicament of the Berosaiña in light of the strict marriage avoidance observed by commoner descendants and of commoner descendants' highly essentialized views about 'slaves'.

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For David, who is making his way in social science

For Camille, who is asking her first why questions

MAP OF MADAGASCAR

with main locations mentioned in the thesis



INTRODUCTION

I first met Redison in 2005, during a two-week trip in the southern highlands of Madagascar. Although we only spent a week together, we had built up a good rapport and promised to stay in touch. Two years later, while I was in London preparing for my fieldwork, I thought that Redison could be of slave descent. I do not remember exactly why this idea came to my mind but certainly it was a consequence of my diving into the historical and anthropological scholarship of Madagascar. At that time, I was reading about the history of slavery on the island and was already thinking of doing research on slave descendants' communities in the southern highlands because the ethnographies of Kottak (1980) and Evers (2002a) had aroused my interest in such a place and topic. Maybe I thought that Redison could be a slave descendant because I remembered him telling me that he had studied at a Catholic seminary to become a priest?¹ Whatever the reason, this vague intuition and the memory of Redison's warmth led me to re-establish contact with him from London, to ask whether I could come to see him when I next visited Madagascar. He replied enthusiastically, saying I was very welcome to stay at his place as long as I wanted. Several months later, on a hot and wet day of early February 2008, I arrived at Redison's house in Beparasy.

My initial intuition proved wrong – but not *entirely* wrong. As I was going to discover, Redison himself was not considered to be of slave descent but part of his closest family was. It turned out that Redison's mother had lived for more than three decades with a man of slave descent and that Redison had been raised by him until his twenties, together with the man's children from a previous marriage. Redison therefore had a slave descent foster-father and slave descent foster-siblings. Although I had initially planned to stay only for a short period of time at Redison's, the

¹ Before French conquest Catholic missionaries were mostly successful among the slaves and the subject peoples of the Merina, because Protestantism was associated with the Merina monarchy (Bloch 1971: 26).

discovery of this story led me to change my plans and I remained his guest for 25 months.

Focus of the thesis

To speak of the ‘focus’ of a thesis is a common metaphor, but for the sake of this introduction I would like to push the optic trope a bit further than usual. Schematically, the thesis can be thought of as the outcome of my inquiry into three questions and of my use of three different types of ‘photographic lenses’ to answer them.

The aim of the thesis is to contribute to the study of the condition of slave descendants in Madagascar. The existing literature suggests that there is, in some societies of the island, a strong pattern of discriminatory practices towards slave descendants and that in the southern highlands this kind of discrimination is particularly strong. The question I ask is: why is there such a strong discrimination among the southern Betsileo? To frame and try to answer this question, I use a wide-angle lens. By this, I mean that I compare what I learned during my fieldwork with what is known of the situation of slave descendants in other parts of present day Madagascar. I also place my data in the light of what is known about past slavery, its abolition and the history of freed slaves and their descendants after the abolition. Using a wide-angle lens thus means that I engage in some comparative and historical forays. My comparative effort involves closely re-examining a previous account on slave descendants among the southern Betsileo.

I take off the wide-angle and put instead a normal lens when I address a more narrowly framed question. Since my free descent informants told me that the only problem they have with slave descendants is that it is forbidden to marry them, and since I could see that senior members of free descent groups make indeed many efforts to prevent their relatives from marrying slave descendants, the question I ask is: why is this so? Why do free descendants categorically refuse to marry slave descendants? This second question I approach with a normal lens, by which I mean that I give a descriptive-interpretative account of what I could understand of the

relations existing between people of free and slave descent in the small community of Beparasy, with specific attention to the question of marriage.

My use of a third type of lens is motivated by a particular aspect of the answers I received when I asked my free descent informants why they could not marry slave descendants. These answers led me to think that free descendants essentialize the category of slave descendants and that this essentialization is crucial to explain the existing prejudice and discrimination against slave descendants. Thus the third question I ask is: why do free descendants essentialize the category of slave descendants? To answer it, I take off the normal lens and put a long-focus lens. With this lens, I try to look ‘into my free descent informants’ minds’, so to speak. I make an ‘educated guess’ about what could explain their essentialized representation of slave descendants. This guess draws on three decades of research on psychological essentialism in cognitive and social psychology.

For a photographer, each type of lenses has its own merits. The great merit of the normal lens – usually it is the 50mm lens – is that it is the closest to the human eye. It makes the pictures that look the more ‘natural’ to us, whereas the wide-angle and long-focus lenses produce pictures significantly different from those forming on the retina through the natural lenses of our eyes. It is the reason why the normal lens is called normal and why it is the standard lens for photographers. I believe that something similar can be said about the merit of the descriptive-interpretative approach in anthropology. Interpretative descriptions are highly valuable because they are ‘experience-near’ accounts – they provide accounts that are the closest to human experience.

However, just as photographers do not only use the normal lens on the ground that it produces the pictures that are the closest to human vision, there is no reason to think that ethnographers should limit themselves to ‘experience-near’ interpretative descriptions when they conduct fieldwork and write ethnographies. Photographers use lenses other than the normal lens for various reasons, which can be technical, aesthetic or practical. In anthropology what I called the wide-angle lens, i.e. comparative and historical approaches, is usually recognized as a legitimate part of

the ethnographer's 'camera bag'. The addition of a long-focus lens – a cognitive lens – is more controversial.

What could be the merits, then, of using a cognitive lens in ethnography? One possible answer is Jon Elster's (2007) idea that social scientists need to resort to a toolbox – a large collection of theoretical tools – rather than to a unified or narrowly-defined set of methods or theories. In order to explain social phenomena, Elster contends, it is necessary that investigators may have recourse to the greatest possible variety of concepts and theories because the utility of a toolbox comes precisely from the diversity of the tools it contains. Elster's theoretical pluralism unsurprisingly includes the concepts and theories of cognitive psychology, since he considers them useful to account for the mechanisms underlying various social phenomena.

Another possible answer is that the addition of the cognitive lens is a necessary move if social scientists want to produce explanations that are more sophisticated than those they have achieved so far: "it would be preferable, for the sake of simplicity, if a sophisticated understanding of social phenomena could be achieved with little or no psychology, but (...) this is as implausible as achieving a deep understanding of epidemiological phenomena without a serious interest in pathology" (Sperber & Mercier forthcoming; see also Sperber 1996).

A third answer is that anthropologists, since they study culture, have to deal with cognitive issues such as for example memory or categorization (Bloch 1991). If they leave these notions unexamined and refer to cognitive processes in only vague terms, Bloch argues, they are doomed to produce accounts that are only naive or, worse, blatantly false. Bloch stresses that sheer ignorance of cognition is one of the main reasons why anthropologists tend towards extreme forms of cognitive relativism. Focusing on rituals and other non-ordinary contexts, they take what is said during these events as a reliable guide to how people think. But what people say during the specific occasion of a ritual does not necessarily correspond to how they think in ordinary life. By mistaking ritual communication for ordinary communication, anthropologists are inclined to exaggerate the idea that others do not think like us

(Bloch 1977). One way to try to avoid these pitfalls is to use what I call a cognitive lens in ethnographic research.²

Methodological considerations

Participant observation fieldwork was conducted during 25 months from February 2008 to March 2010. Most of the research took place in Beparasy, a region located south of the nearest town, Ambalavao, although at times I also conducted fieldwork outside Beparasy (see map on page 12 for an indication of this wider area).

Almost all of the people living in Beparasy identify themselves as Betsileo. The region is, by local standards, very rural and poor. Almost all villagers make a living as rice-growing peasants. The wealthiest families raise cattle that they can sell at the Ambalavao market in case of hardship or special needs. Beparasy has remained fairly remote and isolated until today because of it is difficult to access by car, especially during the rainy season. There is no power supply and peasants do not use powered machinery to work their fields. Not a single villager owns a car or a motorcycle. Most people walk when they need to go to Ambalavao, except those who own a bike. The journey on foot takes an entire day.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was accompanied by my wife Anjasoa, who is Malagasy but not Betsileo. Since most interviews were conducted in the Malagasy language, her help was invaluable, from the formulation of my questions to the translation of my informants' answers.

Anjasoa and I first lived in a room at our host Redison's, then we spent some time in another house in the hamlet before eventually moving to the house that we built with the help of our neighbours and friends. By doing so, we gradually moved from our initial status of *vahiny* (a word meaning 'guests' but also 'people who are estranged to the place') to that of villagers belonging to the local community. "You're not guests anymore" (*anareo tsa vahiny ko*) was the main compliment that people addressed to

² Writers who have also argued in favour of "weaving together culture and cognition" (Astuti 2007a) include, among others, Brubaker (2004), Cole (1998), Hutchins (1995), Shore (1998), Sperber (1996) and Strauss & Quinn (1997).

us after we had moved to our newly-built house. Our local status also significantly changed with the birth of our daughter in November 2009. Thereafter, people used almost exclusively the teknonymic *papan'i Camille* and *maman'i Camille* as terms of address and reference. After we had become parents, built our house and established our own hearth, people seemed to view our presence differently. Many clearly changed their behaviour towards us, for the most part in a positive way. While until then we had been the guests of Redison and his family, we gained independence as a separate household and received our share of courtesy visits. Our visitors in turn often invited us to come and visit them in their village. At one point, it almost looked as if we were on our way towards becoming local *ray aman-dreny* – ‘mothers and fathers’, an expression used for the senior members of a local descent group but also, by extension, for the notables in a particular place.

Yet the building of trust was no easy task at first. Conrad Kottak, who wanted to do fieldwork in a place close to Beparasy in 1966-67, recalls in his book how he finally decided to choose another field site because of the hostility and suspicion that he faced in the region, compared with another village further north where people were wealthier, more educated and more used to the presence of foreigners (Kottak 1980: 22-23). Although in 2008-10 the situation on that matter was probably better than in 1966-67, many Beparasy villagers still considered the presence of a ‘white foreigner’ (*vazaha*) among them as potential threat. I regularly heard that some people thought that I was there to steal people’s land – expressing fears inherited from the French colonial period – or the bones of their ancestors, since a persistent rumour in Madagascar has it that foreigners export these bones to make powerful medicine. Our dog was not spared and earned the rather unfair reputation of eating small children.

I considered people’s suspicions seriously and took care not to do anything that could worsen them. I avoided, for example, approaching the tombs when I was walking alone. The initial mistrust prevented me from collecting systematic data such as genealogies and kinship networks until I had reached an advanced stage in my fieldwork. The suspicious reactions I encountered when I started a census of the small village of Ivondro, which was close to the hamlet where I had just arrived a few months earlier, served as a reminder of Kottak’s difficulties. The first young mother

who I asked for the names and the ages of her children refused to answer. Accepting finally (but reluctantly) on the insistence of a friend, she asserted: “If something bad happens to my children, I will hold you responsible.”

During the first 6 months my fieldwork benefited from the cheerful support of Naina, a young man in his mid-twenties and the brother of our host’s wife. Since he was our neighbour and could speak some French, I had recruited him as a part-time field assistant and interpreter. He facilitated my first meetings with local families, accompanied me on the long walks that I undertook to familiarize myself with the topography of the region and helped me to draw a map of Beপরাস্য. In order to do this we visited more than one hundred villages and hamlets on foot. During this initial period my main goal was to acquire some autonomy in the Malagasy language and in developing contacts with people. Villagers became increasingly accustomed to my presence and soon identified me as ‘the *vazaha* (white foreigner) who is the host of Redison in Soatana’. It was during this period that I started to participate in agricultural work or other tasks at the invitation of some families, and I continued to answer positively to their invitations throughout my fieldwork. In consequence I was regularly in the fields working the land, in the forest fetching firewood or in villages helping with house building. I attended meetings of a political or religious nature, including Christian ceremonies, as well as various kinds of family gatherings. I did not record any of the informal conversations I had with people on a daily basis, but I used a digital recorder to keep trace of the lengthy, more formal interviews that I conducted at a later stage.³

Since I made a case above for the value of a cognitive lens in the thesis, I probably need to make clear from the outset that I did not conduct any psychological experiments in Beপরাস্য. Yet I certainly had a cognitive lens with me, since during my pre-fieldwork time at the LSE I had become acquainted with research in cognitive science that was directly relevant to anthropological questions in broad terms and to the kind of questions that I am addressing here. This background provided me with a

³ If not stated otherwise, all the excerpts of conversation that figure in the thesis were transcribed from recordings and the transcripts in the original language of the conversation (Malagasy or French) are provided in the appendix.

number of conceptual tools that I carried with me in the field and made me particularly attentive to ethnographic-cognitive issues.

Ethical concerns

Conducting research on slave descendants in the southern highlands of Madagascar poses specific ethical problems because of the nature of the discrimination that exists against them. As we shall see, prejudice and discrimination are principally based on knowledge of people's 'origins', that is, on the knowledge of the places where people's forebears came from and on the knowledge of descent. Researchers need to be aware that disclosing genealogical or historical data about individuals or families can therefore contribute to their discrimination.

I witnessed forms of prejudice and discrimination existing against a local descent group because, it was alleged, this group was of slave descent. These people, however, denied having slaves among their ancestors. Since I wanted to disentangle this issue, I had to form my own opinion as to whether they were really of slave descent or whether there might be other reasons for the discrimination they faced and the ascription of an inferior status to them. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that they most probably did have slaves among their ancestors. But would it be right, I asked myself, to write this in my ethnography? Would it not mean, in practice, taking the side of the free descendants and writing 'against' those who deny having a slave ancestry? After all, even though I became convinced that they probably are slave descendants, I have of course no indisputable evidence for that. To make things worse, the topic of slave ancestry is a very sensitive issue in the region, to the point that people can be fined an ox if they say or only imply that someone is of slave descent. In the thesis I will deal with this issue as follows: I will explain in detail how I came to form my opinion about these people's alleged slave ancestry and how I came to better understand the difficult problem of being of slave descent, hoping that the 'positive' effect of giving a precise account of the reasons for their discrimination will counterbalance the 'negative' effect of confirming their slave origins in spite of what they say.

Another related dilemma I encountered was whether it is ethical to write that some of my slave descent friends probably lied to me. In the thesis I will sometimes make apparent that some people probably did so. It is an important point, since lying is one of the slave descendants' few means of resisting the peculiar kind of discrimination they face. I therefore consider these lies as a strategy of resistance, even though in some instances they also look like a kind of self-deception. Ethnographers are sometimes forced, for good reasons, to lie to their informants. They should also be ready to explain that well-disposed informants have sometimes little choice other than lying to them. However uncomfortable we feel about this, it is certainly an important part of the practice of ethnography (Metcalf 2002).

As a way to offset these decisions, names of persons and places – except for a few places and some historical figures – have been changed, to ensure that my slave descent informants cannot be too easily identified. Some specific aspects of the region of Beparasy – including parts of its history – and of the lives of my main informants will be omitted too, since their inclusion would make it too easy to identify them. These precautions are taken at the cost of historical and ethnographic accuracy, but I think they are very important given the current situation of slave descendants.

‘Marriage’, ‘slavery’ and ‘caste’

In the thesis I shall make an extensive use of the words ‘marriage’ and ‘slavery’ but refrain from using ‘caste’, even though it is sometimes employed by scholars of Madagascar. Since each of these three terms has been the subject of important anthropological debates, I would like to make some remarks concerning them.

Marriage as an anthropological concept has been famously discussed by Leach (1961) and Needham (1971), and both have argued that it was not possible to define it universally. For Leach a marriage consists of a ‘bundle of rights’ and thus there cannot be a universal definition for it since some rights can be present and others absent in different cases of marriage. Carrying Leach’s argument forward, Needham argued that ‘marriage’ was a polythetic term. Anthropologists use it on the basis of the family

resemblance that the social relationships they observe have with those that have been previously called 'marriage'.

Leach's and Needham's arguments about marriage apply to the concept of slavery. Whereas early anthropologists were all interested in kinship and marriage, anthropological interest in slavery only began in the 70s under the lead of Marxist anthropologists (Kopytoff 1982). As with marriage, when cases of slavery found in various societies became increasingly documented, social scientists were tempted to try to find a definition of slavery because the cases reported significantly differed from those that were the most familiar to Western scholars, i.e. domestic slavery in classical antiquity and plantation slavery in the New World. The debates between Africanists on whether there is a continuum between slavery and kinship (Miers & Kopytoff 1977), or whether slavery is on the contrary "the antithesis of kinship" (Meillassoux 1986: 86), can be viewed as yet another illustration of the pitfalls of thinking in terms of universal definitions and "interpretive generalizations" (Sperber 1996: Chapter 2), since it is always possible to find cases that fit either of the two arguments well (Larson n.d.: 7).

Some scholars working on slavery still seem to worry about a universal definition (e.g. Testart 1998). Since various forms of exploitation (e.g. human trafficking, debt bondage or child soldiers) are now often called 'new slavery' (Bales 2004) or 'modern day slavery' (Sage & Kasten 2008), some have recently argued for the need of a new reconceptualization, either to narrow the meaning of the term for the sake of clarity in scholarly debates (Rossi 2009: 5-7), or to make conventions against abuses more enforceable, because without clear definitions courts cannot launch successful prosecutions (Miers 2004: 11-14).

While it is certainly important to agree on a definition of slavery in international law, I consider, with Leach and Needham, that from a theoretical point of view attempts at formulating a universal definition of this concept are pointless. 'Slavery', just like 'marriage', is a word used by scholars to describe particular kinds of social relationships that share a family resemblance with others.

Scholars of Madagascar too have recently argued over issues of definition. Basing their argument on a careful examination of historical documents, Bakoly Ramiaramanana and Jean-Pierre Domenichini have questioned the translation of *fanandevozana* by the French word *esclavage* (slavery) on the ground that the *fanandevozana* was very different from the Western conception of slavery (Domenichini & Domenichini-Ramiaramanana 1982; Domenichini-Ramiaramanana & Domenichini 1998; 2010). They proposed instead the term *sujétion privée* (private subjection) to stress that the relation of slaves to their owner was similar to that of free subjects to their ruler. Ramiaramanana and Domenichini's proposal was received with hostility by some scholars, who accused them of revisionism (see Rantoandro 2005). People apparently understood their argument as an attempt to attenuate the oppressive nature of the system of slavery in Madagascar. The reasons for this hostile reaction to what seems otherwise a good point in terms of scholarly research are complex, but it must be kept in mind that the abolition of slavery is, in history and ideology, inseparable from the French colonization of Madagascar. Anti-slavery ideology played an important role in the French conquest of Madagascar and the early studies of Malagasy slavery by French officials tended to justify colonization (e.g. André 1899; Piolet 1896).⁴

These political issues aside, it must be recognized that since slavery as an anthropological or historical concept was first used to describe the cases of domestic slavery in Greece and Rome, and then later the cases of chattel slavery in the New World, the word is not well-suited to refer to the *fanandevozana* of pre-colonial Madagascar. If no further explanation is provided, the uncritical use of the term 'slavery' can even obscure the understanding of what the *fanandevozana* really consisted of. There is nonetheless enough family resemblance between the *fanandevozana* and many other cases that have been described as slavery to use the term 'slavery' in order to give an idea of the kind of phenomena we are dealing with. I shall therefore do so in the present thesis.

⁴ See Miers' interesting remarks on the politics of defining slavery (Miers 2004: 9-11).

'Caste' is the last theoretical term that I want to discuss briefly. It is often used to describe the different social groups that made up pre-colonial Malagasy society (e.g. 'nobles', 'commoners' and 'slaves') and still have importance today. Given that these groups were endogamous, descent-based and that ideas of uncleanness were also sometimes present, they seem indeed to be 'caste-like'. Nonetheless, I prefer to use the term 'status group' proposed by Max Weber (Gerth & Wright Mills 1948: 186-187), mainly because 'caste' evokes the South Asian context where a complex hierarchical system of many castes and sub-castes is based on occupational difference and is justified by religion. These features are not clearly present in the Malagasy context, and therefore it seems to me that the use of the term 'caste', while not entirely irrelevant, would obscure my account rather than illuminate it.⁵

Outline of the thesis

I start by highlighting the particular importance of slavery in the recent history of Madagascar. A review of two different comparative perspectives on the legacy of slavery follows, and drawing upon them I frame the two main questions which justify my use of a wide-angle, comparative lens in the thesis. I then introduce a few recent studies of the legacy of slavery in Madagascar and some ethnographic accounts that touch upon the issue in Betsileo country. Chapter 1 ends with a short sketch of southern Betsileo society and a brief history of Beparasy, my field site. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to introduce the Berosaiña, the group of slave descendants living in Beparasy. I portray a few members of the group, stress their ownership of land and tombs, and show their varied social situations. Some glimpses into the history of the Berosaiña and the reasons why they are considered as slave descendants are provided in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 is concerned with a description of the process of customary marriage as well as with other kinds of marriages and alliances in Beparasy. I provide evidence that free descendants strictly avoid marrying the Berosaiña in Chapter 5, before analysing and comparing three cases of prohibited unions that I observed. Chapter 6 seeks to answer the following question: why it is so important for free

⁵ Dumont briefly discusses the case of Madagascar and concludes that it is not a caste system (Dumont 1970: 215). Bloch (1968a: 132) disagrees with Condominas' (1961) decision of using the term 'caste' in a loose sense for the Merina case. My decision of not using the term is driven more by pragmatism rather than by the reasons given by Dumont or Bloch.

descendants to avoid marrying the Berosaiña? In Chapter 7, I attempt to explain why slave descendants are considered irredeemably 'unclean' by the southern Betsileo. In the last chapter, I bring together the results of my inquiry to explain the nature of the difficulties faced by the Berosaiña in Beparasy and by other slave descendants in the Betsileo southern highlands.

CHAPTER 1: POST-SLAVERY MADAGASCAR AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF BEPARASY

I was about half way through my fieldwork when I joined *Monsieur le maire* for lunch in a small restaurant near the Avenue de l'Indépendance, in downtown Antananarivo.¹ I had left my field site for a week to sort out administrative issues in the capital, and by coincidence *Monsieur le maire* happened to be there too. Like me, he had made the long journey in a bush taxi (*taxibrosy*) from Ambalavao, where he had learned from a common acquaintance that I was also off to Antananarivo. He then phoned me one morning to say that he was in town to see his political mentor at the Malagasy Parliament, adding that he would be happy to meet up with me if I had some time. I eagerly accepted the offer, since the country was in the middle of a political turmoil and I was curious to have insider views on what was happening. Two months earlier, President Marc Ravalomanana had been ousted from power by a popular uprising led by his young rival, Antananarivo's mayor Andry Rajoelina.

More than once, *Monsieur le maire* and I had shared uncomfortable seats on *taxibrosy* or on motorcycles during trips between Vohimarina, where his office was located, and Ambalavao, the region's administrative and economic centre where he lived with his family. Because of his kindness and the genuine interest he took in my research, *Monsieur le maire* had gradually become one of my most trusted and friendly informants. A self-made career politician, albeit a local one, he had come to the capital in the midst of the country's crisis to seek advice about strategies to survive politically and run as a potential MP for Ambalavao in the next parliamentary elections.

¹ *Monsieur le maire* was the head the *commune rurale* of Vohimarina, the rural district that includes Beparasy, the region where I did my research. Most people used the French phrase *Monsieur le maire* ('Mister mayor') to refer to him, as well as to address him.

We were having lunch and discussing the recent political events when suddenly *Monsieur le maire* stood up and waved at someone. He had recognized a familiar figure among the customers entering the restaurant. *Monsieur le maire* introduced me to Rajaona, a man in his thirties, by saying that he was probably the most famous person coming from Beparasy. Rajaona had won awards in Western countries as a musician and had lived abroad for years. Now he was living and working in Antananarivo. *Monsieur le maire* explained that Rajaona's mother was from Beparasy. We invited him to sit at our table and he enquired about the last news in Vohimarina. *Monsieur le maire* talked enthusiastically about his project of organizing a concert with Rajaona as main star. Trying to join the conversation, I casually asked Rajaona whether he still had many relatives living in Beparasy. He replied, "You know, in Beparasy we are all related... apart from these people, there, in Mahaso..." He had made a sign of disgust while pronouncing the second half of the sentence and a short silence had followed. *Monsieur le maire* looked at me to see my reaction and then asked, lowering his voice, "Did you understand why he said that? You know, the people of Mahaso... The slaves!"

Rajaona's reply took me by surprise. Not so much because of the allusion to slave descendants but because this comment was made by someone who had never lived in Beparasy and did not know me at all. We had met for the first time only a few minutes earlier and were having this conversation in French, in the centre of urban Antananarivo, more than 500km away from rural Beparasy. In such a context, I wondered, why was it so important for Rajaona to tell me that 'the people of Mahaso' were not his relatives? Reflecting afterwards upon that conversation, I thought that Rajaona could have simply replied "you know, we are all related in Beparasy" and left it at that. But he didn't. Presumably, he wanted to make sure that I would not misunderstand his sentence and think for even a second that he might be related to people with slave ancestry.

I have told this anecdote to illustrate the idea that slavery is an important key to understanding contemporary social relations among the southern Betsileo, where having even one slave among one's ancestors can be a difficult burden to bear and can bring about deep prejudice and enduring discrimination. One of the aims of this thesis

is to suggest an explanation for the existence of such prejudice and discrimination against slave descendants. While the explanation I propose concerns the specific case of the southern Betsileo, I shall argue that it might provide a useful basis for the comparative study of prejudice and discrimination against slave descendants across Malagasy societies.

Undoubtedly, slavery has a long history in Madagascar. This history may even be as long as the history of the human occupation of the island. Scholars seeking to reconstruct the first arrivals find it plausible that slaves were among the early groups of settlers, since ship crews from Austronesia were probably made of people with different social statuses and may have included slaves (Randrianja & Ellis 2009: 39, 219-228). If not earlier, slaves were certainly a part of the population of Madagascar as early as in the 10th century. By that date there was a double commercial system in the Western Indian Ocean (Allibert 2005). One was in the hands of Arabs from the Persian Gulf who traded along the coast of East Africa and eastwards to North India, and the other was in the hands of Austronesians who went down the eastern African coast to the Comoros and Madagascar.² Slaves were traded in both systems but may have circulated in opposite directions between the 10th and 12th centuries. The Arabs brought African slaves home (in particular to remove salt from the marshes of the Tiger and Euphrates regions) while the Austronesians, Allibert argues, put African slaves to work in the intensive iron industry of their settlements of the Comoros and Madagascar. There is evidence that the iron was produced in these settlements using Austronesian techniques and was exported to India because it was judged of good quality (Allibert 2005: 21-23).

This thesis, however, is not concerned with the history of Malagasy slavery per se but with 'post-slavery' issues. That is, the focus is on the consequences of slavery and abolition in a contemporary Malagasy society rather than on the history and nature of slavery before abolition.³ More precisely, it deals with the trajectories of former slaves

² The questions surrounding the first migrations to Madagascar (e.g. Were the first groups of settlers from Africa or Austronesia? Did they come in different 'waves'?) are still debated. Most scholars however agree that Madagascar was already inhabited by the 7th century CE (see, among others, Dewar & Wright 1993; Randrianja & Ellis 2009: Chapter 1; Allibert 2007).

³ Since the renewed interest in slavery sparked by Marxist anthropologists in the 70s (see Kopytoff 1982 for a review), anthropological writings have concentrated in reconstructing local systems of

in southern Betsileo country after their emancipation, and with the social condition of their present-day descendants.

In this introductory chapter my aim is twofold. My first goal is to place the ethnography into a historical and comparative framework. I do so by first highlighting the particular significance of slavery in the history of Madagascar during the late 18th and 19th centuries. This being done, I draw from two essays on Malagasy post-slavery to frame the two comparative questions that will inform the ‘wide-angle’ perspective of the thesis. I then briefly review anthropological works that have addressed the situation of slave descendants in Madagascar, as well as ethnographies that offer insights on their condition among the Betsileo. My second goal in this chapter is to introduce the region of Beparasy, where I conducted my research. I do so by providing some background information on southern Betsileo society and by sketching a short history of the early settlement of Beparasy.

The ‘trauma’ of slavery in late 18th- and 19th-century Madagascar

For the purpose of this thesis, one of the most important events in the island’s history of slavery is the transformation that occurred in the late 18th century.

As already mentioned, Muslim networks have traded slaves for centuries in the western Indian Ocean. But from the middle of the 19th century a new network started to export slaves from Madagascar to Réunion and Mauritius. According to Larson (1997; 1999; 2000), between 1770 and 1820 highland Madagascar supplied about 70,000 slaves to the French colonies of Ile de France (Mauritius) and Ile Bourbon (Réunion).⁴ Even though the average population loss to export slavery may seem rather low compared with that of other African countries, this export slave trade provoked nonetheless “profound, economic, and cultural dislocations that flowed from practices of enslavement and highland Madagascar’s links to a global economy

slavery (see, for example, the essays in Meillassoux 1975; Miers & Kopytoff 1977; Watson 1980; Reid 1983; Condominas 1998; see also Patterson 1982 for a comparative study and Koubi 2011 for a recent and nice example of this kind of scholarship). They have made comparatively little effort to study the consequences of abolition or the condition of slave descendants in the present.

⁴ On the slave trade in Madagascar and the Mascarenes see also, among others, Armstrong (1984), Barendse (1995), Campbell (1981; 2005: Chapter 9), Filliot (1974), Ratsivalaka (1979) and the studies in Rakoto & Mangalaza (2000).

of mercantile capitalism. (...) Because its merchants and citizens played a direct role in producing and transporting captives, highland central Madagascar became a key component of the regional economy of the western Indian Ocean” (Larson 1999: 341). As Larson further explains:

The impact of the external slave trade was deep and broad. By the turn of the nineteenth century, everyone knew some close kinsperson who had been enslaved. By 1820, perhaps as many as 70 percent of highland Malagasy households experienced the loss of a member to the export slave trade. The existence of an export market for human beings dramatically transformed the relationships between common people and their rulers. During the late eighteenth century, the rulers of several minikingdoms competed with one another for the political loyalty of highland farmers and for the wealth of international trade. The first highlanders to enslave persons for export, and those who accumulated the most wealth for participation in the trade were highland kings. Most rulers created and sold slaves from among their own subjects, a practice that swiftly produced a disloyal populace searching to transfer its allegiance to kings who promised to enslave only from *outside* their realms. The slave trade to Ile de France and Bourbon significantly contributed to political instability and a social climate of extreme distrust and personal insecurity within highland Madagascar.

After 1785, Andrianampoinimerina, ruler of one of the many minikingdoms of highland central Madagascar, managed to corner the supply of slaves to European merchants on the island's east coast. He conquered all the highland minikingdoms, united them into a single polity (commonly called the Merina kingdom), and captured the popular support of common folk. He monopolized the slave trade by besting his competitors at supplying foreign slave traders on favorable terms and preventing French merchants from gaining commercial access to his political rivals in the Malagasy highlands. (ibid.: 341-342)

In 1820, a treaty signed between the British and Andrianampoinimerina's son and successor Radama I made the export slave trade illegal but internal slavery then became significant, as the Merina rulers launched wars to expand or defend their kingdom until French colonization. During these wars, Merina soldiers brought captives back to Imerina. Throughout the 19th century slavery kept playing a crucial role in the economic development of the kingdom⁵ and a market for slaves continued to flourish until the abolition of slavery by French colonial power in 1896.⁶

⁵ There is some disagreement among scholars on this issue. While many have followed Bloch who argued that the economy of the Merina kingdom relied essentially on slave labor (Bloch 1980), Campbell (1988; 2005: Chapter 5) has claimed that slavery played a significant role only in the kingdom's early economic development. Later in the century, Campbell argued, the economy relied more on *corvée* labour (*fanompoana*) than on slavery.

⁶ I will come back to the circumstances of the abolition in Chapter 7.

The contemporary legacies of slavery in Madagascar must be understood in the light of these “transformations in slavery” (Lovejoy 2000). The commoditization of slaves, the increase of the number of slaves in the Malagasy population (especially in the highlands), the perpetual risk of enslavement and the role played by slavery in the political history of 19th century Madagascar have been accompanied, almost paradoxically, by an apparent effacement of explicit memories relating to these ‘traumatic’ histories, as if it were a case of collective amnesia. Yet these “painful memories” are present, albeit “somewhat veiled and indirect” (Graeber 1997: 375), both among free and slave descendants, and are often implicit in ritual symbolism as well as in historical narratives (Larson 1999: 339; Graeber 1997).⁷

It is interesting to note on that matter that, compared to other countries with a recent ‘traumatic history’ of slavery and in spite of a steady scholarly interest, academic conferences on slavery took place only very late on the island.⁸ And it is also noteworthy that, according to some who attended these first meetings, they were emotionally-charged events: even though they were scholars, many Malagasy found it difficult to talk about these issues. If anything, these academic meetings showed clearly that slavery was, more than a century after its abolition, a very sensitive topic in Madagascar.

Comparing Malagasy post-slave societies

The contemporary legacies of slavery have been investigated first and foremost in Imerina. An obvious reason for this concentration of academic attention is that Imerina, as explained above, once heavily relied on slaves for its economy and in consequence it had the largest number of slaves in its population on the eve of abolition.⁹ In comparison to this body of research, the study of post-slavery in the rest

⁷ On the complex interplay of practices of remembering and forgetting in Madagascar, see Cole (2001). Cole’s study deals with memories of a more recent ‘traumatic’ past – colonialism and colonial violence – but her analysis is relevant to understand the paradoxical aspects of Malagasy ‘amnesia’ concerning slavery. On trauma and memory see also the studies in Antze & Lambek (1996).

⁸ The first conferences on slavery in Madagascar were held in 1994 in Antananarivo and in 1999 in Tamatave (Toamasina). They resulted in the publication of two edited volumes (Rakoto 1996; Rakoto & Mangalaza 2000). Gerbeau (2002) and Rantoandro (2005) provide comments on these conferences.

⁹ Estimates vary between about 30 percent (Campbell 1988; 2005) and 50 percent (Bloch 1971: 35).

of Madagascar has remained largely overlooked until very recently. Yet ethnographic accounts indicate that in other Malagasy societies the condition of slave descendants would also be worthy of close attention.¹⁰

If it is true that, as Peter Wilson put it, “although there are some exceptions, anthropologists have invariably chosen to study ‘underdogs’” (Wilson 1992: 2), then it is striking that in the anthropology of Madagascar the ‘underdogs’ called *andevo* (‘slaves’, i.e. slave descendants) have often been studied only in passing. Few anthropologists have sought to put themselves in their shoes and see society from their perspective. Most of them have described the condition of slave descendants from the point of view of free descendants, indicating what they lacked or how they differed from free descendants – as if they were a residual category – instead of focusing on their specific historical experience and the particular social organization that resulted from it. These implicit biases are still present in much of the anthropological scholarship on Madagascar. It seems to me that anthropologists’ tendency to describe slave descendants as ‘people who lack X’ (where X can be ‘land’, ‘tombs’, ‘ancestors’, ‘history’ and so on) has somewhat hindered the detailed and intimate study of how slave descendants experience their condition in the various societies of the island.

In Maurice Bloch’s seminal study *Placing the Dead* (1971) little is said about slave descendants even though, as Bloch commented, “if the difference between *andriana* [‘nobles’] and *hova* [‘commoners’] was never great [in traditional Merina society], the difference between these two groups and the *andevo* (slaves) was fundamental” (Bloch 1971: 71). This quasi-absence of slave descendants in the monograph that arguably set the standard for modern anthropological work on Madagascar is particularly striking because Bloch made clear at the same time that slave descendants formed a very large part of the Merina population.¹¹ I write with the privilege of

¹⁰ See in particular Feeley-Harnik (1982; 1991), Goedefroit (1998) and Lambek (2004) for insights on slave descendants among the Sakalava, and Beaujard (1983) on slavery among the Tanala.

¹¹ About the slave descendants (who in Imerina are often called *mainity*, ‘blacks’), Bloch wrote in his introduction: “The ‘blacks’ are for the most part descendants of slaves captured by the Merina in other parts of Madagascar and also of some aboriginal peoples from the area now dominated by the Merina. Some of the “blacks” whom I knew could remember ancestors of Betsileo, Antaifasy, Bara and Betsimisaraka origin and others would call themselves by the names of people who had traditionally always lived in the area where they are now. However, I was unable to get a

hindsight, of course, but some of Bloch's early reviewers noticed the paradox and exhorted the author to focus on slave descendants in the future. Thus, for example, Razafintsalama, reviewing Bloch's PhD dissertation and referring to slave descendants, urged that "it will be necessary to address someday this question" (Razafintsalama 1971: 225), while Louis Molet wrote in his review of the book in *L'Homme* that he would like to see Bloch publish another careful study "on the part of the population he has neglected so far," i.e. the descendants of slaves (Molet 1972: 149).¹²

A few years later, Bloch addressed the issue in two essays. In the first, he compared the social implications of freedom for the slaves who were held by the Merina and for those who were held by the Zafimaniry (Bloch 1979). The second essay made use of the same comparative material but framed the question somewhat differently, in terms of modes of production and ideology (Bloch 1980).¹³

According to Bloch, the position of slaves in traditional Merina society was that of junior members of families who could never become full members of society because they had no ancestral territory and their children were condemned to the same fate: slaves "were outside the social system in its ideological representation" (Bloch 1979: 276). After abolition, ex-slaves had mainly three options: (1) to return back to the areas from which they had been taken (if this was possible); (2) to stay in the villages where they were slaves and to keep working on their former masters' estates (often on a share-cropping contract); or (3) to find empty land where they could start a new life

satisfactory picture of the origins of the "blacks" as a whole. This was because there are many difficulties in obtaining this kind of information, as the unwillingness to admit slave origin leads many descendants of slaves to claim origin from non-Merina peoples in order to stress their, ultimately, free descent" (Bloch 1971: 4).

¹² It is meaningful to see that Molet misread one of Bloch's comments on slaves. Bloch wrote: "The position of the slaves was the subject of much missionary writing and so we know a certain amount about their role, though their actual condition is difficult to guess" (Bloch 1971: 71). Quoting the end of this sentence in his review, Molet translated 'actual' by the French *actuel* (in the sense of 'current') and thus he thought that Bloch was mentioning the lack of sociological knowledge on slave descendants *in the present* whereas he was in fact stressing the lack of historical knowledge about the condition of slaves *in the past*, i.e. in pre-abolition times.

¹³ Later Bloch came back again to the topic of slavery in an essay on slave descendants in Antananarivo's slums who are possessed by royal spirits (Bloch 1994). In this paper Bloch argued that the crucial problem of slaves (and former slaves) was "the interruption in blessing" that occurred during enslavement: "When people are taken as slaves, their ties to their ancestors are broken, because they no longer receive blessing from their ancestors at the various familial rituals" (ibid.: 135).

by building terraces and cultivating rice. While the consequences of the first option are difficult to evaluate, the most important consequence of the second option was the continuation of a type of obligation between former masters and former slaves in ancient Merina villages. The slave descendants played the role of caretakers for the free descendants' land and tombs (known as *valala miandry fasana*, i.e. 'the grasshoppers who guard the tombs'), and sometimes provided servants, often children, for their houses in Antananarivo or elsewhere. This was because, as documented by Bloch, many free descent Merina left peasantry to take up opportunities in education, in the administration or in business, and only kept their ancestral land for ideological reasons. Even though they accepted this situation of dependency, the descendants of slaves resented it bitterly.

Those among the freed slaves who chose the third option and went to new empty lands found themselves in the company of the free Merina who could not live on their ancestral land because of the increase of the population and a resulting land shortage. Although they started off on an equal footing, ex-slaves and free Merina usually lived in separate villages. What happened was that, because of their endogamous marriage rules, the free Merina were at first less able to form local kinship networks than the former slaves, who could marry whoever they wanted provided it was not close kin. So while the free Merina remained somewhat isolated in the new lands, former slaves were able to organize agricultural and political cooperation more easily. This advantage turned to a disadvantage because the free descent Merina, through their endogamous marriages, kept kinship links with administrators, teachers or businessmen who lived in town, and through these links they had access to new sources of power and wealth, whereas slave descent rural peasants did not.

The situation was very different when the slaves of the Zafimaniry were liberated. Unlike in Imerina, the slaves held by the Zafimaniry had access to land. But the Zafimaniry are shifting cultivators and free Zafimaniry tended to give their slaves the already semi-exhausted lands. Since they had land, however, most of them stayed in their villages after being freed. Later the ex-slave villages were the first to turn to rice-irrigation and they benefited most from education through Catholicism, from the trade of wood-carvings and from tourism. In consequence, present-day Zafimaniry slave

descendants are generally better off than the free descendants. Since the ex-slaves have no positive marriage rules, they can marry outside Zafimaniry country and have therefore kinship links outside the rather cramped territory where the free descendants must marry. Bloch concludes that, unlike in the Merina case, slave descendants among the Zafimaniry have been more successful than the free descendants.

The first of the two main comparative goals of the present thesis is to extend the kind of analysis made by Bloch about the Merina and Zafimaniry to the case of the southern Betsileo. As we shall see, the slave descendants that I studied chose the ‘third option’ following abolition, i.e. they did not go back to their region of origin, choosing to leave their masters’ estate and migrate to new lands in Betsileo country, where they built rice fields. Following Bloch’s model, my goal is to explain the consequences of their choice and to compare it with the Merina and Zafimaniry cases. I call this research problem “the Bloch question”: what happened to the descendants of former slaves who, after abolition, went to new lands in southern Betsileo country?

The second attempt at comparing the situation of slave descendants in Madagascar is a stimulating essay by Margaret Brown (2004). The essay starts with the relative ease with which slave ancestry is acknowledged in an ethnically mixed (Makoa/Betsimisaraka) community of the Masoala peninsula, in the north east of Madagascar (see map on page 12). Such ease surprised Brown because much Malagasy scholarship had shown that slave ancestry is not easily acknowledged and that the topic is difficult to discuss openly. She writes:

When villagers in northeastern Madagascar first began to tell me they descended from slaves, I took note because I had not expected such ready acknowledgement of their ancestry. After that initial interest, I ignored it. Slavery did not seem to be having much impact on village life. There were no derogatory remarks about Makoa being dirty. People of slave descent did not complain about their status, and they worked, played, worshipped, participated in rituals, and even had children with people of free descent. Slave descent was not something that had to be overcome or negotiated. It just was. (Brown 2004: 640)

What factors, asks Brown, would explain the social acceptability of slave ancestry in some Malagasy societies and its concurrent stigmatization in others? She argues that the common ideology of ancestral power – according to which people’s lives depend heavily from their ancestors’ power – and the fact that slaves had been wrenched from their own ancestors, is not sufficient to explain why stigmatization occurs, because the people she studied shared the same reverence for the ancestors as other Malagasy and yet readily discussed slave ancestry and intermarried with people of free descent.¹⁴ Brown suggests that acceptability and stigmatization vary according to three factors: (1) social structure (absence or presence of rank; nature of the kinship system; marriage rules); (2) resource availability; (3) historical patterns of migration and ethnic mixing.

A question directly inspired by Brown’s essay constitutes the second comparative goal of the thesis. Since slave ancestry among the southern Betsileo has been presented in the literature as a topic that one cannot easily mention, let alone openly talk about, and since Betsileo slave descendants have been represented as stigmatized and marginalised people, the question is: what are the factors explaining the strong prejudice and discrimination against slave descendants in contemporary southern Betsileo society? I refer to this question as “the Brown question” and will provide an answer to it in the last chapter of the thesis.

Apart from Bloch’s work, a few authors have included insights on slave descendants in their ethnographies, especially those who have worked on the Merina (e.g. Vogel 1982; Ramamonjisoa 1984; Razafindratovo-Ramamonjisoa 1986), but it is only recently that anthropologists have placed the legacies of slavery at the centre of their research.

¹⁴ See also Keller (2005; 2008) on slave descendants in the Masoala peninsula. Keller’s observations confirm Brown’s: slave descent has become “invisible” and slave descendants engage “in the same daily activities and the same ritual practices as those of free descent,” mainly because, she argues, the availability of land in Masoala allowed slave descendants to shed their status of slaves by anchoring themselves to a *tanindrazana* (Keller 2008: 660).

Three recent studies in Malagasy post-slavery

The first ethnography that I would like to mention here explores at length the causes and consequences of a disastrous communal ordeal that took place in 1987 in Betafo, western Imerina, where descendants of nobles (*andriana*) and descendants of slaves (*mainty*)¹⁵ live side by side (Graeber 2007). The 1987 ordeal was called by the communal assembly of Betafo to invoke the power of the ancestors in order to punish the perpetrators of the frequent acts of petty thievery threatening the solidarity of the community. The ordeal consisted of drinking water mixed with earth taken from the ancestral tomb. The problem, however, was that the people of Betafo were of two different kinds of ancestries – *mainty* and *andriana*. So the organizers of the ordeal decided to take earth from two different tombs: from the main *andriana* tomb in the centre of Betafo and from the tomb of the ancestor of the *mainty* astrologer Ratsizafy, who had come to represent the ancestor of all the *mainty* of Betafo. The organizers mixed these two handfuls of earth together with water and all Betafo residents drank some of the mix. Soon after the ordeal, heavy rains fell on Betafo and swept away all the rice harvested by Ratsizafy, and only his. It was interpreted as a sign that it had been a deep mistake to mix the two kinds of earth and it led to a profound divide between the *mainty* and the *andriana*. They were still on very bad terms when David Graeber arrived in 1990.

Although the context of Betafo is very different from the place in southern Betsileo where I did my research, Graeber's account offers interesting points of comparison with my ethnography. Two of them stand out particularly. The first is that, according to Graeber, the starting point for the series of events that led to the ordeal and the definitive split between *andriana* and *mainty* in Betafo was the marriage between the

¹⁵ In contemporary Imerina people routinely confuse the category of *mainty* (blacks) with *andevo* (slaves). The *mainty* were, in pre-colonial Imerina, royal servants, not slaves (see Domenichini-Ramiaramanana & Domenichini 1980). Today free descent people use the term *mainty* instead of *andevo* to refer to slave descendants since it is judged as less injurious. But for the Merina this semantic change, together with the (equally false) belief that all slaves in Madagascar had been brought from Africa, means that today the Merina with more 'African' phenotypes (black skin and frizzy hair are the most commonly used criteria) are almost automatically perceived and classified as *mainty* and considered as slave descendants. In other words, there seems to be an increasing racialization of 'slave' status in Imerina. It is not clear to me whether or not such a racialization of the issue also happened in other Malagasy societies, but I can testify that in the region where I conducted my research it did not: slave ancestry was never suspected or ascribed on the basis of phenotype.

mainty astrologer Ratsizafy and a local *andriana* woman twenty years earlier (Graeber 2007: 329). It was because of this marriage that Betafo's *andriana* could not continue to ignore, as they had done up to then, Ratsizafy's claims that he was *andriana* himself. The marriage thus divided the community of Betafo's *andriana* into two sides: the defenders of Ratsizafy and his opponents. It was the increase of these tensions that finally led to the catastrophic ordeal of 1987. The point to emphasise here is that it was an 'inappropriate' marriage between a wealthy *mainty* (claiming *andriana* status) and an *andriana* that sparked the enduring conflict that Graeber chose to study in detail. As it will soon be clear, the question of why such marriages are inappropriate is at the core of the present thesis. At a later stage I will explain why I think that my account, in spite of all the contextual differences, could be relevant to partly explain the reluctance of some *andriana* of Betafo to accept Ratsizafy's marriage with one of theirs.

A second interesting point for comparison is Graeber's argument that the socio-economic situation of the *andriana* in Betafo has been worsening since the early 20th century, because very few of them remained on their ancestral land and those who did became impoverished. Comparatively the *mainty* have, on average, seen their condition improve since the 60s. It is precisely because he managed to make a fortune by buying the land of bankrupt *andriana* families that Ratsizafy was able to construct a tomb resembling those of the *andriana* and to marry one of them. These changes in power and class relations in Betafo are most easily seen when one looks at differences in the up-keep of tombs: those of the *mainty* of Betafo reflect their economic success, whereas the tombs of the *andriana* are left decaying. Note that Graeber's account of the relative success of the descendants of slaves over their former masters contrasts with Bloch's earlier accounts well as with Razafindralambo's study, to which I will turn in the next paragraph. Both of them portray slave descendants as still in a worse condition than free descendants. In Chapter 8 I will come back to this analysis in terms of 'relative success' and discuss whether the slave descendants I observed in Beparasy have fared better through the 20th century than their free descent neighbours.

Another piece of ethnographic research recently conducted in Imerina has, like Graeber's, focused primarily on the relations between descendants of former slaves and people of free ancestry in a village (Razafindralambo 2003).¹⁶ The village studied by Lolona Razafindralambo, named Amboditany, differs however from Graeber's Betafo in at least two respects. Firstly, the village is much closer to the capital Antananarivo than Betafo and many of its inhabitants abandoned peasantry to take up jobs in the city or in industries that opened in the capital's suburbs. Secondly, its population does not only comprise of descendants of nobles (*andriana*) and descendants of slaves (*mainty*), but also includes descendants of commoners (*hova*).

For comparative purposes, three aspects of Razafindralambo's analysis are worth stressing. Firstly, she argues that the historical confusion between the categories of *mainty* and *andevo* (see footnote above) has been accompanied by the rapprochement of the descendants of nobles (*andriana*) and commoners (*hova*). Such a rapprochement has occurred due to the fact that they all recognize themselves in the category of 'white' (*fotsy*). In consequence, the difference *mainty-fotsy* structures today, as a kind of simplification of past differences of status, the relations between Amboditany villagers in such a strong way that it seems to relegate the other differences to lower registers. This is the most visible at the protestant church and at the local administrative office (*fokontany*), Razafindralambo explains, because the *fotsy* do not accept that power positions fall in the hands of *mainty*, even though the latter are more numerous in the village and some of them have become relatively wealthy. According to Razafindralambo, the reason why *fotsy* can keep the power in local elections is because *fotsy* candidates are able to find large electoral support through kinship links, all local *fotsy* families being related through intermarriage, whereas the *mainty* tend to marry outside the village and therefore *mainty* villagers are not closely related (Razafindralambo 2003: Chapter 6).

Secondly, Razafindralambo reports that 'mixed' marriages do take place in Amboditany today, even if they are not frequent and if it is not always easy for *fotsy* families put up with it (Razafindralambo 2003: 341). What seems to matter more than

¹⁶ The first chapter of Razafindralambo's thesis is a close study of the conception of slaves in 19th century Merina law.

the avoidance of marriage, according to Razafindralambo, is the affiliation that the children of these unions will choose, since one can only be *fotsy* or *mainty*, one identity excluding the other. Thus if the *fotsy* are well-disposed to accept them as a member of their family, children will tend to affiliate with the *fotsy* for reasons of prestige and in consequence they will be considered as *fotsy*. If, on the contrary, a *fotsy* family cannot easily put up with the ‘mixed’ marriage of one of its members with a *mainty* and does not want to integrate the children born from this union, they will have no other choice than to affiliate with their *mainty* family. By so doing, they will be identified as *mainty*. It seems therefore that status ascription depends both on the willingness of ‘mixed’ children to be affiliated with one parental side rather than the other and on the willingness of the *fotsy* side to accept them as members of their group.¹⁷

Thirdly, Razafindralambo stresses that tombs, land and ancestors do not have the same value for the *fotsy* and the *mainty* of Amboditany (Razafindralambo 2003: 342). Most *fotsy* have kept their ancient tombs while *mainty* have all built new tombs – their ancestors having been buried in individual graves in the pre-abolition era. Since rituals of *famadihana*¹⁸ publicly demonstrate, among the Merina, the existence of a descent group rooted in a territory and because *mainty* lacked this kind of rooting before the abolition of slavery, they tend to hold *famadihana* very often and at regular intervals, whereas *fotsy* organise a *famadihana* only when a corpse is transferred to the ancestral tomb or when a new tomb is built. A similar contrast is visible with respect to family patrimony, since *fotsy* are not interested in increasing their ownership of land in the village, this land being of little economic value. *Fotsy* only need their ancestral land to keep their status and power in the village. *Mainty*, on the contrary, have tended to increase their ownership of land since for them land ownership means achieving a new status of ‘master of the village’ (*tompon-tanana*).¹⁹

¹⁷ Razafindralambo does not explain how a *fotsy* family deals, in case of a ‘mixed’ marriage, with the burial of children in the *fotsy* ancestral tomb. I therefore assume that having a *mainty* parent does not pose an intractable problem on that matter. As we will see, the situation is very different among the southern Betsileo.

¹⁸ *Famadihana* are rituals where the ancestors are taken out of the tomb and rewrapped (see, among others, Bloch 1971; Graeber 1995; Larson 2001).

¹⁹ See also Razafindralambo (2005; 2010).

Even though it does not deal specifically with the relations between free and slave descendants, a third ethnography has recently highlighted other aspects of the remnants of slavery in Madagascar (Somda 2009). Dominique Somda's research was conducted in a place very remote from Imerina and the highlands: the region of Fort Dauphin (*Taolañaro*) in the south-eastern corner of Madagascar. This study addresses the social memory of the past among the Tanosy and their "obsession with slavery" (Somda 2009: 13), an obsession that seems to be the hidden counterpart of the egalitarian ethos that they constantly stress in their political and religious assemblies. Somda explores the puzzling coexistence – at least for the foreign observer – of a hierarchical ideology inherited from the past which keeps the descendants of slaves at the bottom of society and present-day egalitarian relations that hide (and simultaneously reveal) the inferiority of status that seems to be so resilient. Tanosy seem to view slavery as a moral problem and as a source of shame and embarrassment, thus as an unacceptable part of Zafiraminia royal history. As I will show, the southern Betsileo free descendants I studied can also be said 'obsessed with slavery' and they too seem to conceive slavery as a moral issue. Yet there are interesting differences between the Tanosy and the southern Betsileo cases, and thus the conclusions that I will draw about the 'obsession with' and the 'moral problem of' slavery will differ from Somda's.

Slave descendants among the Betsileo

Three book-length ethnographies (Kottak 1980; Freeman 2001; Evers 2002a) offer valuable insights on the condition of slave descendants among the Betsileo, although only one of them focuses specifically on the legacy of slavery (Evers). Since these works sparked my initial interest in the issue that has become the subject of the thesis, it may be useful at this stage to sum up what their authors wrote about slave descendants. While Freeman did his research in the northern part of Betsileo country, Kottak and Evers conducted fieldwork in the southern part, in locations very close to mine.

Luke Freeman's ethnography is concerned with social differentiation and formal schooling in the village of Ambohipo, Fisakana.²⁰ It provides a vivid description of how Tongatrazo, the western quarter of Ambohipo inhabited by slave descendants, seemed "physically a place apart" (Freeman 2001: 26) and how "the shabby poverty of its houses" (ibid.: 29) – in a rather prosperous village where "by the end of the twentieth century the only mud and thatch houses (...) belonged to the descendants of slaves" (ibid.: 86) – was perturbing for Freeman, as was "the stigma of low status that lurked in the shadows of local social knowledge and about which [he] was slowly coming to learn" (ibid.: 29).

For the comparative purpose of this thesis, I would like to highlight five points in Freeman's account. The first concerns, once again, the issue of marriage. Freeman reports two 'mixed' marriages between slave and free descendants. The first was the marriage between a slave descent girl from Tongotrazo working as a housekeeper in Antananarivo and the house's gardener (who was from the next valley and presumably of free descent) because the girl had become pregnant with the man's child and their employer had made them marry. Freeman explains, however, that the man's family did not give their blessing to the union, that the usual marriage customs were not observed and that for sure the man's family will not allow the girl or her children to be buried in the family tomb, because it was not what Freeman calls a "regular marriage" (ibid.: 28). The second 'mixed' marriage was that of a slave descendant who had become a teacher and married the free descent daughter of the school's director, although the girl's family "naturally opposed the match, and severed ties with her" (ibid.: 187). The possibility of this marriage is attributed by Freeman to the slave descent man's education and work: "Without [his] educational achievement and employment as a schoolteacher it is unlikely he would have married the director's daughter" (ibid.: 187). Freeman recalls, moreover, that in his host family the topic of slave descent was discussed with him only once. At one occasion, his host mother felt she should 'teach' him about that topic too and said: "You know, those people – they're not like us. (...) They are a different kind. They are... slaves. (...) We do not marry them, us clean people. I have always made sure the children don't get involved

²⁰ The region of Fisakana is located in the northeastern corner of Betsileo country (see map on page 12).

with them.” Then she added: “You mustn’t talk to them about it. Nothing at all. It makes them too ashamed” (ibid.: 29-30).

A second point for comparison can be stated very succinctly: Freeman acknowledges that, in his historical reconstruction of the region’s settlement the histories of slaves are “muted” (ibid.: 47) and “the descendants of slaves appear as incidental actors in the stories of the free – they are largely ‘people without history’” (ibid.: 93). The third point worthy of comparison is the issue of movement and migration, that Freeman discusses at some length (ibid.: Chapter 3). He observes in particular that because of the increase of population density in Fisakana during the twentieth century the uncultivated spaces of the mid west beyond the highlands became attractive. Freeman writes: “Removal to the mid west was a drastic, risky but potentially rewarding strategy. Yet for many families, *particularly those of slave descendants* (...) it offered the only reasonable option” (ibid.: 117, my emphasis). This is mainly because slave descent families in Ambohipo possess no land and have little prospects of acquiring some, so in their case “the break with the *tanindrazana* is easier when it has never meant much in the first place” (ibid.: 122). The fourth point concerns the slave descendants’ belonging to named descent groups and their ownership of land and tombs. Freeman explains that the slave descendants of Togontrazo were “without named descent groups at all” (ibid.: 146) and that “rather than being loosely defined by their descent, [they] were strongly defined by their lack of it. (...) The social and ritual marginalisation that came with ‘being without ancestors’ placed great limitations on their agency. (...) Rather than being guided by descent, these people were fixed by birth. This limitation is inseparable from [their] economic marginality (...)” (ibid.: 164). As share-croppers slave descendants had no ancestral fields and their tombs were “secluded and humble, not prominent and celebrated like those of people of free descent” (ibid.: 121). Freeman observed a tomb ceremony among slave descendants and described their tomb as a “shabby tomb hidden away on the edge of a wood. It served as a rather indiscriminate burial place for people of slave descent from the whole valley. They were united in the tomb through the stigma of their status, rather than through marriage or blood” (ibid.: 183).

The fifth and last point that I would like to mention is perhaps not really a point for comparison but it is, to my opinion, of interest for the main purpose of this thesis, which is to contribute to the study of the condition of slave descendants in Madagascar. Echoing – and following – his host mother’s advice, Freeman expresses, in the introduction of his thesis, his sheer reluctance to discuss the topic of slavery with slave descendants and even write about this issue, as if doing so was an ethical faux pas in itself:

(...) [T]he subject of slavery was never raised by the descendants of slaves themselves, so I never discussed it with them. I consider my understanding of their position to be deeper for this rather than shallower, for empathy is often a better research tool than enquiry. It is unnecessary, alienating and arrogant to probe delicate subjects in the name of anthropological analysis. I am reluctant even to write about slave status. Yet that subject matter is crucial to this analysis. (Ibid.: 40)

As we shall see, the first four of the five points I have just highlighted are central issues in this thesis. I shall come back to the fifth point on the ethics of conducting research and writing about slave descendants in my conclusion.

Conrad Kottak’s book (1980) is based on fieldwork conducted in 1966-67 in the region of Ambalavao. Although he undertook extensive survey work in a large perimeter around Ambalavao, Kottak concentrated his intensive research in three villages. While one of them was situated at an equal distance between Fianarantsoa and Ambalavao, to the east of the *Route Nationale 7* that crosses the central highlands and links Antananarivo to Toliara (see map on page 12), the two others were both located south of Ambalavao, not far from my field site. But it was in the first village that Kottak lived and conducted most of his research. In this village, Kottak could easily identify the slave descendants but “as far as [he] could determine” (ibid.: 149) no slave descendants lived in the southern two villages. Like other ethnographers of the Betsileo after him, including myself, Kottak noted that because of the stigma attached to slave ancestry it was usually very difficult to identify slave descendants and he acknowledged that in the extensive survey work that he undertook he had probably failed to do so (ibid.: 20).

Where he lived however Kottak could closely observe slave descendants since there were four households of slave descent in the village and other slave descendants resided in satellite hamlets. They were the descendants of slaves who had stayed on their former master's estate after abolition and had continued to farm the plots that were assigned to them as slaves. They were granted a legal right to continue to use this estate (i.e., they could not be dispossessed), and this right could be transmitted to their descendants, but it was legally part of the descendants of the former masters – if slave descendants had no offspring their rights to use the land reverted to the legal owners. As in the case analysed by Freeman, Kottak stressed that the slave descendants in and around his village remained in a subordinate position and were poor compared to free descendants. They were expected to assist other villagers in agricultural work and, despite the fact that agricultural help is supposed to be mutual, they often did not receive anything in return. “In a thousand encounters in everyday life, Kottak writes, they are reminded of their origin” (ibid.: 104). At ceremonies they received the legs of slaughtered cattle, traditionally the part of jural minors, and in large assemblies where a seating order had to be observed they sat with junior free descendants at the south of the room. Because they had remained poor since the abolition they provided a cheap labour force for wealthy free descendants, who hired them to work in their rice fields, for example for weeding (ibid.: 103-105).

Sandra Evers' (2002a) observations on slave descendants strikingly differ from Kottak's and Freeman's. One of the differences stems from the fact that, unlike them, she did not study the descendants of former slaves who stayed on the estate of their former masters after abolition and lived either in the same village as the descendants of these former masters or in satellite hamlets. Evers' ethnography focuses on the relations between migrants and land owners in a village where the founders ascribe the status of 'slaves' (*andevo*) to those among the migrants who do not give enough evidence of their free origins. But Evers' account is, above all, different because the picture she provides is one of very harsh discrimination against slave descendants, whereas the two other authors describe a form of discrimination which remains 'mild' because it is counterbalanced by the free descendants' paternalism and patronage towards the descendants of their ancestors' former slaves.

By contrast, Evers shows how poor migrants are maintained in a miserable condition on the basis of allegations of their slave descent. The harshness of their situation evokes the case of outcast groups such as the Antevolo on the east coast (Beaujard & Tsaboto 1997; Rolland 1998). Evers' ethnography is, with respect to the condition of slave descendants, more extreme than anything that has been previously described in Madagascar. Karen Middleton (1999: 29) found the case difficult to reconcile with the fluidity, performativity and inclusiveness of Malagasy identity – and, I would add, personhood – as they have been described by ethnographers (e.g. Southall 1986; Bloch 1993; Astuti 1995a; 1995b).

The situation analysed by Evers took place in a village located on the Route Nationale 7, between the towns of Ambalavao and Ankaramena (see map on page 12). Her ethnography examines the ways in which the founders of the village and their descendants exploited migrants arriving with the prospect of making money in the cassava business, since the region is known for its important harvests. Upon arrival migrants were asked by free descent families to say where they were from, that is, to locate their village of origin within Betsileo country. If they did not answer these questions, or answered them vaguely, local families allocated them a place in the western side of the village, which was one of the least favourable.²¹ This is because villagers presumed that if the migrants did not indicate with precision where they were from, they were certainly *andevo* ('slaves') and they called them 'dirty people' (*olo maloto*). Villagers exploited these migrants, Evers contends, by giving them only poor land to lease while keeping the best land for themselves. As a result, the alleged slave descendants were caught in an inescapable circle of indebtedness, which forced them to regularly perform unpaid labour for the free descent villagers (Evers 2002a: Chapter 4).

One of the strongest claims made by Evers is that the founders of the village were probably of slave descent themselves and were able to achieve free descent status, Evers suggests, because they managed to acquire land and to build an ancestral tomb. She argues that *andevo* migrants, to the contrary, had no land, no tombs and did not

²¹ West, south and more especially south-west are the least favourable directions according to the Malagasy astrology (Hébert 1965; Bloch 1968b).

engage in ancestralization practices, as most visibly manifested by the fact that they did not hold funerary rituals for their dead (ibid.: 168-169; 2006). Having no tombs and no ancestors, these slave descendants were “people without history” (Evers 2003) and people who had been “expropriated from the Hereafter” (Evers 2006). According to Evers, the founders of the village managed to escape such a difficult predicament by constructing a fiction about their own origins, thanks to their economic successes, their acquisition of land, their building of a tomb and their ancestralization practices (Evers 2002a: 29-30). The irony of the story is that, even though they were themselves of slave descent, they were apparently eager to reproduce the prejudice against slave descendants whenever migrants of unknown origins asked for the permission to live in the village.

Given the importance of land, tombs and ancestors in Madagascar, the argument that some people in the southern highlands are landless, tomb-less and ancestor-less is a particularly strong and provocative claim. According to local standards, Beparasy, the area where I carried out research, is very close to the village studied by Evers – it is less than one day’s walk away. Yet the data I collected during fieldwork does not support Evers’ strong claims. Throughout the thesis, I will therefore indicate some points of divergence between my account and hers and, in the last chapter, I will re-examine her strongest claims and propose a possible explanation for some of the observed differences. But before I begin my own ethnography, I want to briefly introduce the society of the southern Betsileo.

Southern Betsileo society in a nutshell²²

The people known today as the Betsileo occupy a large territory of the southern highlands of Madagascar. Administratively speaking, Betsileo homeland is situated in the two regions (*faritra*) *Amoron'i Mania* and *Haute-Matsiatra*, formerly part of the province (*faritany*) of Fianarantsoa.²³ In geographic terms, Betsileo territory is

²² Extensive accounts on Betsileo society can be found in the massive monograph written by a French missionary (Dubois 1938), in the oral traditions collected by a Betsileo protestant pastor (Rainihifina 1956; 1975) and in Kottak’s ethnography (1980). Earlier accounts by missionaries and French officials include Besson (1897), Haile (1899; 1900), Johnson (1900), Moss (1900), Richardson (1875), Shaw (1877; 1878) and Sibree (1898).

²³ The administrative level of the province has, in theory, disappeared since the state reform of the third Malagasy republic.

roughly situated between the mountains and the Mania river to the north and the Andringitra chain and the Zomandao river to the south. The eastern side of Betsileo territory ends approximately when the rainforest starts. The western part of Betsileo territory extends into vast areas that are only scarcely populated until one reaches the region inhabited by the Sakalava. The immediate neighbours of the Betsileo are the Merina (north), the Betsimisaraka (north east), the Zafimaniry (north east), the Tanala (east), the Bara (south) and the Sakalava (west).

The use of the name 'Betsileo' for the people living in the southern highlands is recent and dates back to the creation of a Betsileo province by king Radama I (1793-1828) after his conquests towards 1820. Prior to being subjected to Merina rule, the region that was going to be known as Betsileo comprised many petty kingdoms. The kingdoms of Isandra and Lalangina are usually seen as the most important of these polities since they had a state-like organization (Kottak 1977; 1980: 66-87). To the north of Isandra and Lalangina was the kingdom of Manandriana; to the south was the region constituted of separate kingdoms (Tsienimparihy, Vohibato, Alananindro and Homatsazo) and which came to be known as Arindrano after its 'unification' by Radama I.²⁴

Most scholars draw a distinction between the north and the south of Betsileo country because of their different history.²⁵ North Betsileo includes today the regions of Manandriana, Ambositra and Fisakana, which are located north of the Matsiatra river. This area was once part of the sixth division of Imerina before it was later annexed to the Betsileo province and administrated by the Merina governor of Fianarantsoa. Except the region of Manandriana, which has a long history, the area now called North Betsileo became densely populated and politically organized only under Merina rule in the 19th century (Kottak 1980: 304-305; Freeman 2001: Chapter 2). As a result,

²⁴ Before the 19th century there were more petty kingdoms in Arindrano than those I have cited, and there were smaller polities that were not yet part of Lalangina and Isandra. I omit these details here for the sake of clarity. On the history of the southern Betsileo region see in particular Dubois (1938), Rainihifina (1956), Kottak (1980), Ralaikoa (1981), Raherisoanjato (1984a) and Solondraibe (1994).

²⁵ It is also common, today, to distinguish between northern, central and southern Betsileo regions which are centred around the administrative towns of Ambositra, Ambohimahamasina-Fianarantsoa and Ambalavao. To keep it simple, I will follow the tradition and use the landmark of the Matsiatra river to distinguish between northern and southern Betsileo.

its inhabitants are something of a mix between Merina and Betsileo. The region south of the Matsiatra river, by contrast, had an important political and economic history long before Merina annexion.²⁶ For this reason the region is sometimes called in the literature the ‘historical’ Betsileo. Yet, although the Betsileo as an ethnic group is by and large an invention of Merina administration that was subsequently taken on by French colonial rulers, today all the people from the northern and the southern parts of the territory call themselves Betsileo. It is nonetheless important to bear in mind that the people I studied, who live in the extreme south of the Betsileo region, acknowledge that their ancestral customs (*fomban-draza*) differ from the Betsileo who live further north.²⁷ Such differences and awareness make it difficult to give an encapsulated description of Betsileo society that would unambiguously apply to the north and the south.²⁸

Today, the majority of southern Betsileo are rice-growing peasants living in villages and hamlets in the vicinity of their rice fields. People also raise zebus (*omby*), especially in the extreme southern region, but they do so in a much smaller proportion than their southern neighbours, the pastoral Bara. In a fairly recent past cattle raising was more important and rice cultivation did not occupy the central place that it has now in southern Betsileo economy. The local economy shifted to an intensive rice-growing agriculture under Merina rule during the 19th century, not least because the Merina directly encouraged rice cultivation. Local peasants had to grow rice because of fiscal pressure: they had to cultivate it intensively in order to make a surplus to generate income. This income was required in order to pay the heavy taxes imposed by Merina rulers (Ralaikoa 1981: 34).

This transformation of the economy also deeply modified the rural settlement patterns of the southern Betsileo. During the 18th century and until the second half of the 19th, people mostly lived in fortified villages on hilltops. It was important to protect oneself

²⁶ The Merina called this region *andafy atsimon’i Matsiatra* (‘south across the Matsiatra’)

²⁷ Even though, as we shall see, many of my informants claimed that their ancestors came from northern Betsileo.

²⁸ The thesis will therefore concern the southern Betsileo in the first place. I am not denying, of course, that there are many similarities between the northern and southern Betsileo. I am stressing the existence of north-south differences because I found that often scholars tend to generalize about ‘the Betsileo’ in spite of the fact that cultural homogeneity is sometimes problematic. Differences appear very clearly when one compares the extreme north with the extreme south.

in fortified sites because wars between local lords and raids from outsiders were frequent. In wars as in raids, captives were taken to be sold as slaves. When the risk of inter-polities war decreased under Merina rule and when southern Betsileo had to become wet-rice cultivators in order to pay their taxes, things changed rapidly: the fortified village on a hilltop was no longer seen as the most desirable mode of settlement. Land was allocated to people and families established themselves close to their rice-fields, forming small hamlets protected by a circular hedge of thorny trees and cactuses. These hamlets were named *vala* (cattle pen) since they were organised around a corral. Manure was transported down to the rice fields thanks to a canal passing through the pen. This ingenious and efficient technique allowed peasants to increase their production of rice.²⁹ At the same time, however, the move to the *vala* and the general impoverishment of the population because of heavy fiscal pressure meant that the number of heads of cattle owned by southern Betsileo peasants significantly decreased, in particular in the region of Ambalavao (Ralaikoa 1986: 299).

The basic units of southern Betsileo social organization are the tomb-centered, named local descent groups (*foko*; *firazanana*). Membership to these groups is cognatic, optative and non-exclusive, but shows a strong patrilineal bias since most people prefer patrilocal post-marital residence and they are most often buried in their father's tomb than in others (Kottak 1971; 1980), even though they have the right to be buried in any of the tombs of the descent groups to which they belong. Ancient Betsileo society was made up of three endogamous status groups: 'nobles' (*hova*), 'commoners' (*olompotsy*) and 'slaves' (*andevo*). As the present thesis will show in some detail, this division of all Betsileo into three categories continues to be relevant up to this date.

²⁹ See Dubois (1938: 76-77) and Raherisoanjato (1988) for a more precise description and drawings of a *vala*. Note that Raherisoanjato argues that some *vala* had already appeared before Merina occupation, probably in the 18th century.

Betsileo polities were independent state-like formations organized around a ruler (*mpanjaka*) of noble (*hova*) descent.³⁰ They had capitals which were fortified hilltop villages with a *lapa* (royal residence) and a number of people surrounding the rulers, i.e. advisers, servants, soldiers and slaves. These categories of people had different names in the different southern Betsileo polities.³¹

Inter-polities wars were endemic in the southern highlands but were put to an end by Merina rule, which became effective in the southern part of Betsileo country only after the conquests of Radama I between 1810 and 1820. Nonetheless, a climate of general insecurity continued to exist in these regions, since on the fringes of the kingdom Merina garrisons could only exert a loose control and could not prevent the raids by outsiders, especially the Bara neighbours.³² In the south of Arindrano, the Merina established in 1852 a garrison in Ambohimandroso which became the administrative and economic centre of the area, headed by a Merina governor (*komandy*).³³ In 1899, General Gallieni decided to make the then small village of Ambalavao the new administrative and economic centre. Since then, Ambalavao has remained the main town in the extreme south of the Betsileo homeland, with a current population of around 20,000 inhabitants.

A brief historical sketch of Beparasy

The region of Beparasy is located in the south of Arindrano, between the basin of Ambalavao and the Andringitra chain, a mountain range forming a natural frontier between Betsileo and Bara areas. Because of the region's altitude, its proximity to high, rocky mountains and its exposure to the winds, its climate is pleasantly mild during the hot season but can be relatively cold for the rest of the year. Considering

³⁰ The Betsileo are well-known in the anthropological literature for the long and elaborated funerals of their 'sacred' rulers (Edholm 1971; Rahamefy 1997; Razafintsalama 1983). Genealogies seem to indicate that the ancestors of those who established themselves as 'noble' and 'sacred' rulers of many small polities came from the eastern coast in the early 18th century (Raherisoanjato 1984a; 1984b).

³¹ See the table in Rainihifina (1956: 143-144).

³² A missionary from the London Missionary Society, travelling in the region in 1895, reported that the Bara from the west had lifted 500 heads of cattle and carried off 300 men and women into captivity a few days before his visit (Knight, quoted in Portais 1974: 19-20).

³³ It is also in Ambohimandroso that the Christian missions first established themselves in the region (Raherisoanjato 1982b).

the high level of insecurity that existed in the southern highlands until the end of the 19th century, one may find it somewhat surprising that people decided to make this cold, remote, and somewhat risky corner their home. In this section I want to explain why they chose to do so and the particular circumstances through which it happened. My account is mostly based on oral histories that I collected in Beparasy, Vohimarina and Ambalavao.³⁴

Beperasy is located in the former territory of a polity that was part of the Arindrano. This polity was divided in the early 19th century by Radama I, as part of his political strategy after the relative failure of trying to unite the polities of Arindrano under the authority of Rarivoarindrano (Raheisoanjato 1984b: 230). The polity was then split into a northern and a southern part, with two different rulers. The ruler of one of these two halves established his royal residence (*lapa*) on the top of a hill that I shall call here Ambatofotsy.³⁵

The hilltop village with the royal residence in Ambatofotsy was abandoned a long time ago and the *fanjaka* (government) is to be found today in Vohimarina, the village which is the seat of the *kaominy* (commune). Vohimarina is situated in a valley close to Ambatofotsy hill and descendants of the former rulers live in the village. Their house stands at its centre, besides a large gathering place (*kianja*) with a massive standing stone (*vato lahy*), and is still called *lapa* by Vohimarina villagers. A few other descendants of nobles (*hova*) live in the area around Vohimarina, notably in Ambalamasina. Oral traditions recall that the polity governed by the rulers of Ambatofotsy was sparsely populated until the beginning of the 19th century, with the arrival of many people fleeing Radama's wars, most notably after the massacres committed by his army at Ifandana and the enslavement of part of the population (on this tragic episode see Dubois 1938: 223-226).

³⁴ As in the rest of the thesis, names of places and individuals have been changed to protect anonymity. Moreover, for the reasons explained in the introduction, I intentionally omit the historical and geographical details that would allow to easily locate the region of Beperasy and the people who are at the centre of this study. The only purpose of the fictitious and schematic map I provide below is to ease the reading of the thesis, since some place names will reappear in subsequent chapters and the reader may find convenient to refer back to this map.

³⁵ A *lapa* is the house of a sovereign or a noble (Richardson 1885). Southern Betsileo *lapa* were built with wooden planks, whereas most other houses were made of plaited bamboos on a wooden architecture. The houses made of mud and bricks which are now found everywhere in the Betsileo countryside only appeared in the late 19th century.

Located a few hours' walk away from Vohimarina, the region of Beparasy remained unoccupied until an even more recent date. I was told that only *mpiarakandro* ('those who go with the day', i.e. cattle herders) went up seasonally to let their zebus graze on the banks of the river meandering through its valleys. These herders came mainly from the north, but also occasionally from the west. Beparasy elders tell stories about the blood bond (*vakirà*) that a Betsileo noble once contracted with a Bara ruler to strengthen their agreement on the sharing of pasture land. The agreement stipulated that the Bara would drive their zebus towards Andonaka, to the west, whereas the Betsileo would lead theirs to Beparasy. Local historians also explain that in a much more distant past the region was inhabited by *vazimba*,³⁶ whose presence is testified, they say, by the ancient tombs and megaliths found in the nearby mountains. Contemporary Beparasy villagers thus see themselves as the third wave of inhabitants of the region, after the *vazimba* and the seasonal herders.

It was only towards 1880 that people started to cultivate land in Beparasy. According to my informants, 'looking for spacious land' (*mitady tany malalaky*) was the principal reason for their ancestors' arrival. As I have explained, since the transformation of the Betsileo economy into an intensive rice-growing agriculture people have been continuously forced to migrate to find new cultivable land. A few people also recalled that their forebears fled the heavy burden of royal service (*fanompoana*) and taxes (*hetra*) imposed by Merina administration in northern Betsileo, where these obligations were probably more easily enforced than in the recently conquered and less administered south. Another possible factor encouraging the move towards the less populated and remote southern regions, although it was never mentioned to me, may have been the many epidemics that plagued the more densely populated Betsileo areas during the 19th century (Campbell 2005: Chapter 6). Whatever the reasons, it seems that most of these settlers came from parts of the southern highlands that are now considered Betsileo. While some arrived from other

³⁶ *Vazimba* are, in oral histories, the people who originally inhabited Madagascar before the arrival of the ancestors of the current Malagasy. They are portrayed in various ways but are often considered as having rudimentary way of life and customs (e.g. they lived in caves). The 'historical' existence beyond the myths of such a population has been (and, to a certain extent, still is) discussed by archaeologists and historians. On the importance of the *vazimba* see, among other studies, Bloch (1986) and, for the Betsileo more specifically, Raheisoanjato (1982a).

parts of Arindrano, many came from much further north, sometimes from regions located to the north of Fianarantsoa.

What made the region of Beparasy particularly attractive to newcomers in spite of its cold climate and remoteness was the abundance of water. Sources coming from the nearby mountains provide water during most of the year and the river that passes through the region never dries up, even during the most severe droughts. By comparison, permanent water sources are rare in the basin of Ambalavao, where only two of the basin's numerous rivers never dry up (Portais 1974: 17). Above all, any peasant wanting to cultivate wet rice needs to find a site that allows a good and easy management of water supplies. The region of Beparasy offered good opportunities for such endeavours.

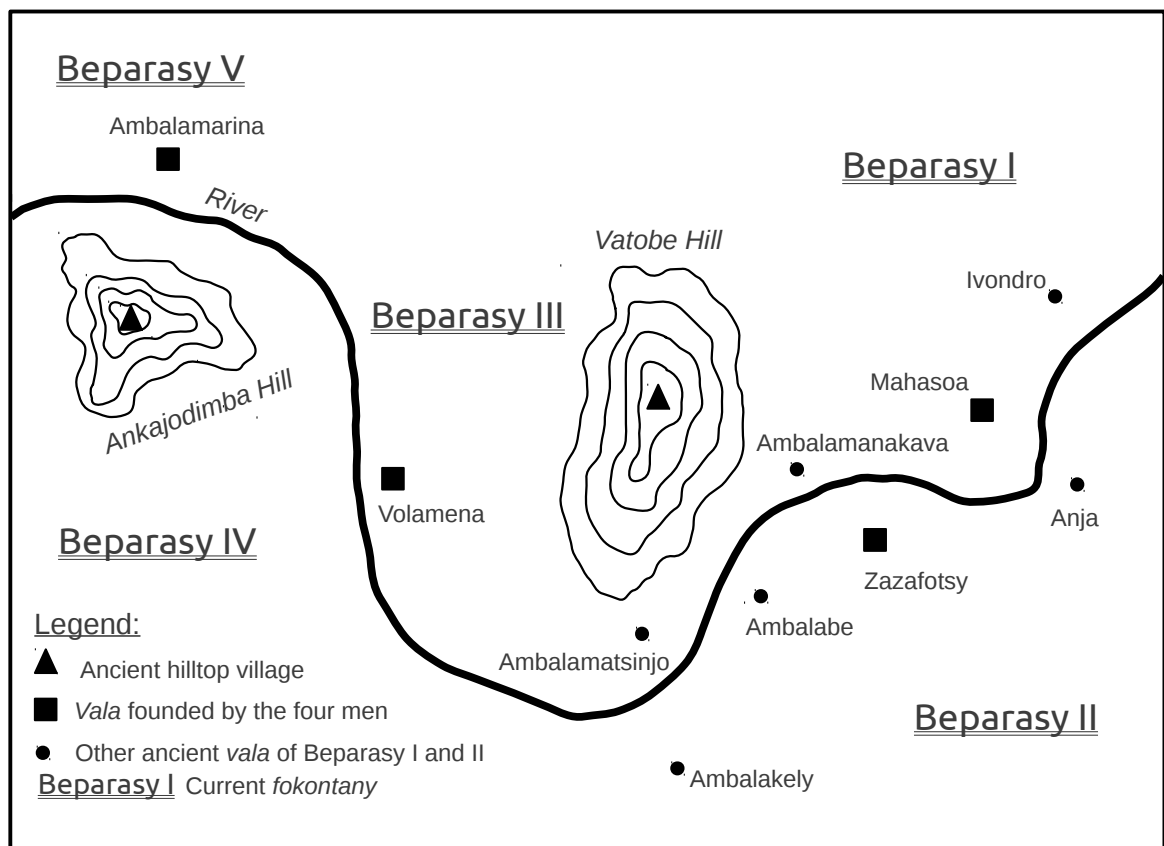


Figure 1: Schematic (and fictitious) map of Beparasy

According to oral histories, the first people to arrive were four men named Rainibao, Raikalatsara, Rakamisy and Rainidama. Three of these four men (Rainibao, Raikalatsara and Rakamisy) occupied the top of the Vatobe hill. From its summit, they had a very good overview of the whole area. Since Rainidama, the fourth man, was in charge of supervising a somewhat remote place he founded a village on the separate hilltop of Ankajodimba. With their kinsmen and affiliates, these men worked hard to lay out irrigated rice fields (*farihy*) on the river banks and in the valley bottoms. Since the land was at that time partly covered by a forest, the first settlers had to clear it in order to build their rice fields. Later, when population increased and the well-irrigated fields in the valley bottoms were not enough to feed everyone, Beparasy villagers had to carve out terraced rice fields (*kipaha*) on the hills' slopes, which required an elaborate hydraulic system of reservoirs and canals in order to make use of the water flowing from the mountains.

Insecurity prevented these new settlers to leave their hilltop villages during the last two decades of the 19th century. They always had to go back to the village in the evening after a day of labour in their rice fields and gardens. The village was fortified with stones and trenches, and was guarded at night. Elders told me that at that time it was not only cattle that needed protection – as is the case today, cattle rustling was a serious problem³⁷ – but people too, since ‘thieves of people’ (*mpangalatr’olo*), i.e. raiders who took captives for enslavement, were not uncommon in the region. Villages on hilltops such as these were called ‘fires’ (*afo*), because the fires lit up at night were visible from a long distance.

Soon after they arrived in Beparasy, the four men were joined by other migrants. Until the turn of the century the ancestors of most families of present day Beparasy lived together in the two ‘fires’, i.e. the two fortified villages at the top of Vatobe and Ankajodimba. All these people were allocated land upon their arrival by the four men, who had been charged by the ruler of Ambatofotsy of administering four separate areas. Rakamisy and Rainibao allocated land and oversaw people on one side of Vatobe, in the basin that provided the largest stretches of land suitable for rice

³⁷ See Rasamoelina (2007) for an extensive account on cattle rustling in the southern Betsileo highlands.

cultivation. Raikalatsara did the same for the people who started to grow rice on the other side of the hill, while Rainidama was responsible for the families farming land around Ankajodimba.

In the years 1900-1902, following the annexion of the island by the French in 1895-96, the so-called *campagne de pacification* (pacification campaign) in the south (see Lyautey 1903) significantly decreased the risk of raids in the southern highlands.³⁸ The fortified villages on Vatobe and Ankajodimba were progressively abandoned and families built independent *vala* close to their rice fields. Towards the turn of the century, eight families who were living on Vatobe founded the eight *vala* that are the most ancient villages of the *fokontany* of Beparasy-I and Beparasy-II: Ivondro, Mahasoia, Ambalamanakava, Zazafotsy, Ambalabe, Ambalamatsinjo, Ambalakely and Anja.³⁹

These villages increased in size after the implementation of the French *politique de villagisation* ('villagization' policy), which obliged people to move in together to form villages of at least *dimiambinifolo tafo* (fifteen roofs, i.e. fifteen houses). In Beparasy many families who lived in small *vala* had to form larger villages, although some apparently decided to ignore the law or perhaps had already fifteen houses in their *vala*. This explains the distribution of the population today. Some of the oldest villages are still inhabited by only one local descent group, while others are home to several descent groups. The highest number of inhabitants and descent groups is found in the 'big village' (*tanambe*) of Ambalamanakava, where I counted sixty-four houses accommodating the members of five descent groups and their affiliates. After the villagization policy lost its obligatory character, a large number of *vala* reappeared, as people tended to relocate, once again, closer to their rice fields. In consequence, the current population of the five *fokontany* of Beparasy – around 5,000

³⁸ The 'pacification campaign' was in fact a war to conquer the parts of the island which were not under Merina rule when the French annexed the island as a colony in 1896.

³⁹ *Fokontany* are the smallest administrative divisions of the Malagasy state. Other villages were, of course, founded on the other side of Vatobe and close to Ankajodimba. I only mention the ancient villages of the *fokontany* of Beparasy-I and Beparasy-II because they are the most densely populated and because I carried out most of my field work on this side of Vatobe.

people, according to my estimate⁴⁰ – lives scattered in more than one hundred villages and hamlets.

As we will see in Chapter 3, not everyone in Beparasy tells the settlement history I have just sketched in exactly the same manner. Crucially, differences emerge depending on whether the historian (*mpitantara*) is a free or a slave descendant. In the next chapter, I introduce the group of slave descendants living in Beparasy.

⁴⁰ My estimate is partly based on figures provided by *Monsieur le maire* at his office in Vohimarina.

CHAPTER 2: STORIES OF THE BEROSAIÑA

When my wife Anjasoa and I first arrived in Beparasy after a long journey from Ambalavao in an old Peugeot 504, the vehicle's driver led us to a small set of houses. I had told him that we wanted to visit my friend Redison. He knew very well where to find him. I was surprised, however, when we arrived at our destination. It seemed that many things had changed since my first visit three years earlier, the most obvious being that Redison had built his own house. A fairly nice one by local standards, Redison had chosen a place some distance away from the already existing hamlets and villages. Two other houses had also been built to the north of Redison's. Clearly, a new hamlet had been founded in Beparasy. Redison later told me that he had named it Soatana.

During my 2005 visit, Redison was living in a two-room house in the 'big village' (*tanambe*) of Ambalamanakava, less than one kilometre south of Soatana. Now he had a nice two-storey house on a relatively large piece of land, and I could see that it was being gardened. Upon arrival we were given a separate room on the ground floor of Redison's new house.

We soon realized that Soatana, in spite of its limited size, was a lively hamlet. Many people were passing by and there was always something going on. A significant part of this regular movement was due to the teaching positions at the local Catholic school of two of the hamlet's inhabitants: Raely and Vaofara. After her arrival in Soatana as Naina's wife, Vaofara had been recruited by Redison's wife Raely, who was already heading the school. As a consequence, groups of school children were often hanging around in Soatana, doing whatever they had been told to do by Raely or Vaofara, while the two teachers were busy with other tasks. Raely and Vaofara's colleagues, as well as the pupils' parents, were often seen in Soatana too. In many

respects, the hamlet was a sort of extension of the Catholic school, which was located besides the Catholic church, not far from Ambalamanakava.

Many of the frequent visitors to Soatana's also came to see Redison, either to ask him for advice or help on a particular issue, to inform him about a forthcoming event or, more simply, to pay him a visit of courtesy. I had not realized it during my first visit but now I could see that Redison was an important figure in Beparasy, and there seemed to be several reasons for this. First of all, although he was only in his early forties, he was the main leader of the local Catholic community. His position was not due so much to his wife's leadership of the Catholic school as to his own education. After his *baccalauréat* (i.e. his school leaving certificate), Redison had studied in Antsirabe and Fianarantsoa at the Catholic seminary with the aim of becoming a priest. His career as a Catholic priest was shortlived, however, since while he was doing an internship in the region of Betroka (see map on page 12) Redison fell in love with Raely, at that time a young teacher at the Catholic school under Redison's supervision. When Raely fell pregnant, Redison decided to give up priesthood because he realized he wanted to marry and have children.¹ Given their background and their numerous commitments in Catholic activities, which include schools and youth associations, Redison and Raely are unanimously recognized as the leading figures of the Catholic community of Beparasy.

Redison has imposed himself as a locally influential man also because of his political activities and ambitions. Since his arrival in Beparasy, he has been tirelessly involved in local politics, taking up multiple responsibilities and positions such as *conseiller* (advisor) at the *mairie* of Vohimarina, vice-president of the *fokontany* of Beparasy-I and president, secretary or treasury of various other associations, especially those devoted to environmental protection and health promotion. The year before my stay in Beparasy, he had even run to become mayor of Vohimarina, only to be beaten by *Monsieur le maire*, who had then offered him an office as advisor at the *mairie* immediately after the elections. Redison was also a privileged contact person for all

¹ Redison told me that many of his friends from the seminary who are now priests have partners and children, so he could have dealt with Raely's pregnancy without giving up priesthood altogether, but he took his decision because, unlike his former colleagues, he was not happy with the idea of having to hide his family life.

the NGO workers who came to Beparasy with the goal of developing a region they often considered “a bit backwards,” (*un peu arriérée*) as one of them once put it to me.

The presumed backwardness of the region did not prevent Redison and Raely from moving to Beparasy when they were in their mid-twenties. After their marriage, they had tried for a while to make a living in Ambalavao but, as Redison recalled, these were very difficult times as they were poor and life in town was expensive. They then decided to move to Ambalabe, Redison’s mother’s village in Beparasy. The initial plan was that Redison would cultivate rice and open a small grocery (there were none at that time in Beparasy),² while Raely would teach at the Catholic school. Since Redison’s older brother was already living on their mother’s land, Redison used the money that the Catholic Church had given him when he gave up the priesthood to buy a plot of rice field from one of his uncles. The uncle had left Beparasy a long time before and had no interest in keeping his share of the land.

While they were living in Ambalabe, Redison and Raely got into trouble with some members of Redison’s family. While the reasons for the disputes were never clearly explained to me, indirect suggestions were made that the problem was that Redison and Raely maintained good relationships with the slave descendants from Mahasoa, the hamlet I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1, and this strongly displeased his kinsmen in Ambalabe. Following the disputes, Raely and Redison decided to move from Ambalabe and to rent the small house in Ambalamanakava, where I visited them in 2005.

² When we arrived in Beparasy in 2008 a handful of villagers had their own small ‘grocery’. Given the scarcity of transport opportunities and their cost, only a limited range of commodities could be found at these shops (salt, sugar, oil, petrol, flour, beer, rum, soda, etc.) and they often ran out of stock. Goods were brought from Vohimarina on the head (women) or on shoulder or bike (men). Towards the middle of my fieldwork, the Malagasy-Chinese mestizo owning the main grocery in Vohimarina opened an extension in Beparasy. The small shop was kept by his eldest son who then became a semi-permanent resident of Beparasy. They brought the goods to Beparasy in an old Peugeot that they used to do business on local markets. Most of the small ‘groceries’ of Beparasy could not compete and stopped their activity.

In Soatana Redison and Raely did not live with their children since their three boys studied at a private primary school in Ambalavao, where they lived with their grandmother, Ramarcelline (Redison's mother). To compensate for the absence of children in their household, Redison and Raely fostered two teenagers, Kalamainty and Andry. Kalamainty, in her early teens, was one of Redison's cousins from Ambalabe. Redison told me that when he asked her parents whether he could take her with him to Soatana, they quickly accepted because they were too old and too poor to take good care of her. The other child in Redison's house was Andry, a boy slightly older than Kalamainty, whose parents had both died and who had lived with one of his relatives in Ivondro until Redison and Raely moved to their new house in Soatana. From that moment on, Andry was often in Soatana to help in the garden or in building works. At some point, he had asked Redison whether he could stay and live with them. As in Kalamainty's case, Andry's relatives readily accepted this arrangement, mainly because Redison had offered to take charge of everything, from Andry's school fees to his clothes and food.³

To the north of Redison's house in Soatana is another two-storey but slightly smaller house which is home to Naina and his wife Vaofara. It struck me immediately upon arrival that their house was oriented east-west, whereas all the houses in the region were oriented north-south. Naina later told me that he had to build it like this because the piece of land he had acquired was not large enough for a house the size he would have built had he followed the traditional orientation.⁴

At the time of our arrival, in addition to that of Redison and Naina, the small hamlet of Soatana was comprised of a third house which looked like hardly more than a tiny hut. A second hut was in construction, with assembled wooden sticks partly covered by a roof of dried grass. The hut was Raboba's house, where he lived with his wife Ravao and three of their children and grand-children.

³ Fostering is a very common practice among the southern Betsileo (see Kottak 1986).

⁴ The unusual orientation of Naina's house was to have consequences which could have been dramatic. Since our room in Redison's house was also the access to the rice granary, mice and rats were jumping around our bed every night. We thus readily accepted Naina's offer to move to his house in the hope of a better sleep. But one night, during a cyclone, the eastern wall of the house collapsed, washed out by the rainy winds. A large part of the bricks fell only a few meters from the bed we were sleeping in.

Finding out about slave descendants

I came to the southern highlands of Madagascar with the idea of studying a community of slave descendants who were independent land-owning peasants, unlike the migrants of unknown origins described by Evers (2002) or the share-croppers described by Kottak (1980) and Freeman (2001). My original plan was to visit my friend Redison in Beparasy, spend a bit of time with him and his family, and then ask him whether there were such slave descendants in his region. I thought that if this was the case Redison might be able to help me to get in touch with them and settle down in their village. Before asking Redison such a question, however, I first had to make sure that my friend was not himself of slave descent, since somehow I had formed the idea that he might be so. But how was I going to find out, if this was precisely the kind of question that one cannot ask directly? Moreover, since I was rapidly identified in Beparasy as Redison's host and relative (*hava*), it was out of question to start asking around about Redison's descent status. In any case, in the beginning I had no clue about how to ask these kinds of questions in an appropriate way, and nor did I know who I could turn to discuss these issues without acquiring a reputation for being a 'white foreigner' (*vazaha*) who asks rude, inappropriate or even insulting questions.

Given these initial difficulties, acquiring consistent and reliable knowledge of the stories of (and about) the slave descendants of Beparasy took a very long time. In fact, this process lasted for the two years I stayed and even in the last few months of my fieldwork I was still learning important fragments of information about them. At first, because of my reluctance to ask direct questions that could have put people off and endangered my research, the answers I received to my prudent questions did not get me very far. When talking about local history and past slavery, for example, people would sometimes acknowledge the existence of slave descendants in Beparasy without telling me who they were or where they lived, and I would not dare to push them further. My inquiry at the beginning was like trying to assemble a jigsaw puzzle without knowing where to find the pieces. In spite of being Malagasy, my wife Anjasoa was no better equipped than me, since she did not know how to ask these questions without being rude either. And being Malagasy, she was even more concerned than I was about not offending people. As a result, during the first four or

five months of our stay in Soatana, we did not even know that our neighbour Raboba was considered to be of slave descent. It was only after we had learned how to ask the right questions – as well as how to understand the most euphemistic answers – and only after we established more trusting friendships with people, that we were able to establish with some certainty that while our host Redison was not considered to be of slave descent, our neighbour Raboba was. We were told that Raboba was a Berosaiña and that the Berosaiña were ‘slaves’ (*andevo*).

When I learned that Raboba was considered a slave descendant, I immediately thought that this explained Raboba’s living conditions in Soatana. Recalling Kottak’s, Evers’ and Freeman’s accounts, I inferred that Raboba, Ravao and their children were a poor slave descent family. I then hypothesized that it was because of Redison’s and Raely’s Catholic background that they had allowed Raboba and his family to live with them in Soatana, in spite of their slave, ‘unclean’ ancestry. As documented by the confident tone of my field notes, this explanation seemed to me obvious at that time. But it was deeply wrong. The story of the foundation of Soatana and of Raboba’s position in it turned out to be completely different to what I had imagined. Of course, it took me a significant amount of time to figure this out.

Little by little, I learned that the land where Redison had built his house and founded Soatana was actually part of a relatively large estate of hilly plains (*tanety*) and rice fields (*tanimbary*) which belonged to one of the three branches of the Berosaiña in Beparasy. First Redison, and then his brother-in-law Naina, had bought small plots of this land from Raboba, who had acted as the landowner (*tompon-tany*) for these transactions, which were officialized at the *fokontany*.⁵ Redison’s stepfather Rasamuel had once suggested that he build his house on this land, saying “You see, Redison, all this land belongs to us. If you want, you can build your house here.” Rasamuel had been married to Redison’s mother for several decades and he had raised Redison, whom he considered as his son. He was a Berosaiña and one of Raboba’s kinsmen in

⁵ The president of the *fokontany* testified with his signature that the seller and the buyer agreed on the transaction. Land buying or leasing traditionally relied on verbal agreements but since land disputes are very frequent people increasingly seek to secure their contract with an officialization by the *fokontany*. Written contracts are likely to become even more common in a near future since the Malagasy state has launched an ambitious programme of land registration. In Beparasy land had not yet been officially registered.

Beparasy, and therefore also a slave descendant. Since Rasamuel was Raboba's father in the classificatory sense, he had some authority over him and could have 'asked' him to give a plot of this land to Redison.

Unfortunately, shortly after he had made this offer to Redison, Rasamuel passed away. In the following year, Redison went to see Raboba, his neighbour in Ambalamanakava at that time, to explain what Rasamuel had suggested to him. Redison asked Raboba whether he would give him the permission to build his house on the piece of land identified by Rasamuel. To increase his chances, he proposed that Raboba should move as well, pointing out that his rice fields were located right below the piece of land, which would make it a very convenient place to live. Raboba was seduced by the proposition and accepted, on condition that Redison buy him the piece of land where he wanted to build his house. Redison did so, and shortly after he started the construction of his house. A few months later, Raboba also started to build the first of his two tiny huts.

Thus, by settling down in Soatana, we unwittingly found ourselves living on land that belonged to the slave descendants of Beparasy. We also found ourselves in the middle of stories involving free descent families and the Berosaiña. As I gradually discovered these stories, I decided to stay in Soatana and abandoned my initial plan of finding a slave descent village to live in. In any case, it appeared that there was no village inhabited only by slave descendants in Beparasy. But since I had kinship connections with the Berosaiña through Redison and Raboba, and since I ended up building my own house on a land that formerly belonged to the Berosaiña, Soatana was a good place to stay and to conduct my research.

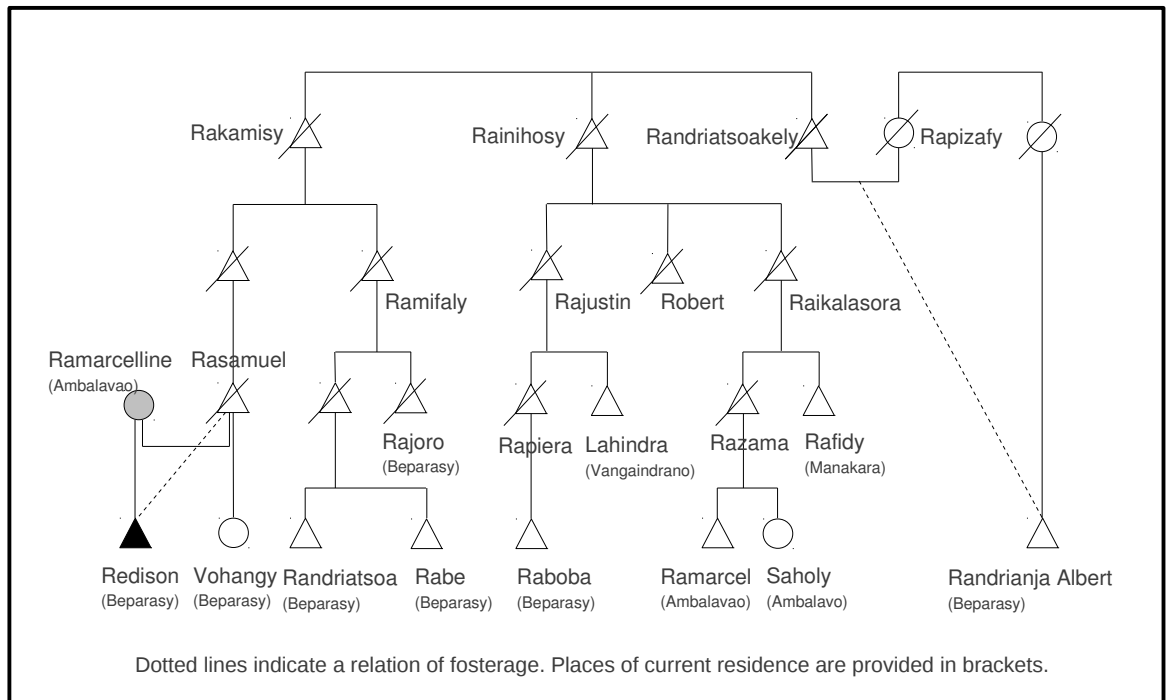


Figure 2: Kinship links between Redison and the Berosaiña mentioned in this chapter

The indebted peasant (Raboba)

Raboba was the first Berosaiña I met since he was my most immediate neighbour in Soatana. Soon after our arrival, the second hut had become the household’s kitchen and the first one the sleeping room. The two buildings were sufficiently close to each other to allow people to easily circulate between them. The house was peculiarly small by local standards. The huts had only one storey and their roof was low. The two doors were so small and so narrow that I felt ridiculously tall each time I entered Raboba’s home. The reason for such an unusually tiny dwelling was that it was supposed to be temporary. Raboba had built the first hut seven months before we arrived in Beparasy, having followed Redison’s suggestion to move out from his house in Ambalamanakava and live with him in the newly-founded hamlet of Soatana, conveniently located close to Raboba’s rice fields. The building of a new house was decided from the start but Raboba lacked funds to buy the materials and start the process, so he first built a temporary hut, which later became the sleeping

room, and then a second one which became the kitchen around the time we arrived in Soatana. By the end of our stay, Raboba was at last building his new house and the family was preparing to move in. The temporary hut had lasted for almost three years, and in the meantime Raboba's tiny house had become the subject of many jokes.

Raboba had three children from a previous marriage.⁶ Lalalo, who died shortly after giving birth to Raboba's first grandchild Zafimamy, Nory and Fidy, who were respectively 20 and 14 years old at the time we arrived in Soatana. In her late forties, Ravao, Raboba's wife, also had two children from previous unions. Her daughter, Pelatsara, was already married with a young man from Beparasy. She lived close to Ambalamatsinjo, in her husband's paternal hamlet, and had two children, Baholo and Zana. Rakady was Ravao's second child. Ravao, Raboba, Fily, Rakidy and Zana lived together for most of the year, although Zana sporadically spent weeks with her mother in Ambalamatsinjo. When we arrived the household was also hosting Rapela, Ravao's mother, who had come to visit from Ambalavao, where she lived with one of her sons. She stayed a few months in Soatana, then walked back to Ambalavao, in spite of being more than 70 years old. Figure 3 shows Raboba and Ravao's respective offspring and, shaded in black, the members of their household:

⁶ I found evidence that Raboba's former wife was also of slave descent, since she was kin to the slave descendants of Ivory, a village that I will introduce in Chapter 4.

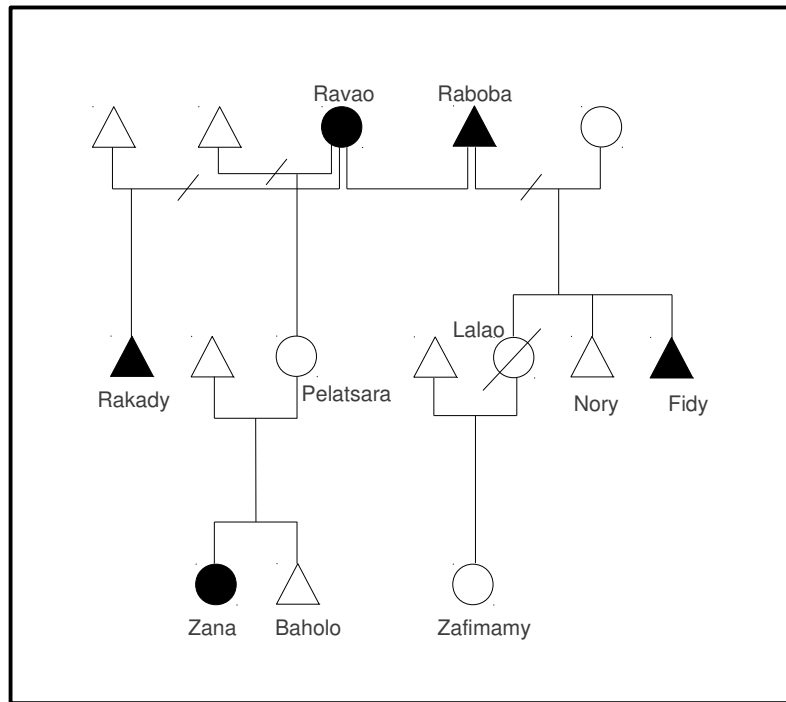


Figure 3: Raboba's and Ravao's offspring

Before building the little hut in Soatana, Raboba and Ravao had been living in a larger house in Ambalamanakava. Raboba's great grandfather, Rainihosy (see Figure 2), arrived in Beparasy towards the turn of the 20th century. When the 'big village' Ambalamanakava, was created during the French *politique de villagisation*, Rainihosy chose to join the families who accepted to live in an unusually large and 'mixed' settlement.⁷ For reasons which will become clear in the next chapter, upon arrival Rainihosy was given a good and large estate of land where he could cultivate rice. His son Rajustin, Raboba's grandfather, accompanied his brother Raikalasora to fight with the French in World War I. Raboba often expressed regret that, having lost it, he could not show me a picture of his grandfather in uniform and in the charming company of a *vazaha* woman. When Rajustin and his brother Raikalasora returned from the war, they were granted a pension by the French, which provided them with a regular amount of cash, something which was rare at that time and still is for most people of

⁷ By 'mixed' settlement here I mean that several descent groups lived together. Later in the thesis I will use the term 'mixed village', meaning that this village is inhabited by free and slave descendants.

Beparasy today.⁸ With this money, Rajustin was able to pay labourers to work in his field and his life became easier than that of ordinary poor peasants. His two sons, Lahindra and Rapiera, were reportedly spoiled and did not learn to work hard in the fields as other young men had to. Lahindra left Beparasy a long time ago. Now an old man, he lives in Vangaindrano, on the East Coast (see map on page 12), and has kept very little contact with the family. I was told that Rapiera, Raboba's father, was particularly 'stubborn' (*maditra*). He led an itinerant life and made a living as a tomb builder. At his death, which occurred early, he was not buried in his father's tomb in Beparasy. Because he had not fulfilled his family duties and had many debts with local people, his relatives found it more appropriate to let his maternal side bury him in one of their tombs. He was buried with his mother in a village near Vohitsaoka.

While his father was away and after his early death, Raboba was raised by his mother in Beparasy under the authority of his grandfather Rajustin. Like his father, he did not have to learn to work hard in the fields as a young man. People say he was spoiled too. But when Rajustin died, the money from the French pension stopped flowing. Raboba inherited good land but, of course, he had to work on it to make it worth anything. Up to this date, however, Raboba's efforts in managing his estate had not been very successful. In Beparasy he was often described as someone who could be rich, because he owned wide and well-irrigated rice fields (*farihy*), but who always ran out of rice and money only a few months after the harvest. Raboba's problem was two sided. The first problem was that he had been stuck for years in a cycle of debts. When he runs out of rice, he borrows a few *vata* (a measure for rice, equivalent to eight buckets) from whoever agrees to lend to him, at the normal local rate of 200 percent. At the next harvest, the following year, his lenders come to ask for the 'green rice' (*vary maintso*), i.e. the payment of a debt of rice at harvest time, leaving Raboba once again with little rice. To reimburse his debts, Raboba was increasingly forced, year after year, to lease parts of the valuable rice fields to his creditors for a derisory rent and renewable three-year contracts. At the time I was in Beparasy, Raboba was

⁸ Rajustin and Raikalasora were not the only inhabitants of Beparasy to have been to France to fight in the French army. On the issue of Malagasy soldiers enrolled in the French army see Valensky (2003).

cultivating less than one quarter of the almost two hectares of rice land he ‘owns’⁹ and was leasing the rest. More recently, he even decided to sell plots of land. Not only did he sell land to Redison and then to Naina, but he also sold a rice field to Ramose Martin, with whom Raboba and Ravao have good relationships, not least because Rakidy, Fily and Zana are schooled at the school of Ambalamanakava where Ramose Martin is a teacher. These sales of ancestral land, as well as the leasing of land for money, intensely irritates Raboba’s Berosaiña kinsmen. They argue that Raboba’s great grandfather Rainihosy issued a *fady* (taboo) for his descendants: they should never sell their land and, if they lease it, they should never receive money, only rice.¹⁰ Raboba did not seem to be afraid of breaching this ancestral taboo.

Raboba’s second difficulty in managing his estate was a crucial lack of labour force. Rice growing can be labour-intensive at times and requires steady supervision. Raboba usually worked alone in his rice fields, although his son Fidy and Ravao’s son Rakady, both in their early teens, helped him when they were not at school. He could not count on his eldest son Nory anymore since a bitter dispute had started between them. Nory, as a child and then as a teenager, always had problems living with Ravao, Raboba’s second wife. Some time before our stay in Beparasy, he wanted to leave the household and live on his own. He therefore asked his father to let him cultivate for his own benefit a part of the family estate. Raboba, because he was heavily indebted and had little land left, refused categorically. The son got very upset and left the house. The dispute was still going on at the date of our departure, with Nory appealing to family authorities on his father and mother’s sides in order to try collect money that could pay back part of Raboba’s debt, cancel the leasing agreements he had contracted and convince him to give him a plot of land.

In addition to the recent loss of his eldest son’s labour, a few years earlier Raboba’s two zebus were stolen by cattle rustlers (*dahalo*). Since then, he has only his spade left to plough his rice paddies, although he usually manages to borrow a few zebus for a day from a friend or a neighbour when he needs to do the trampling.

⁹ It is a bit misleading to say that Raboba is the owner of this land since in one sense it belongs to the corporate group of Rainihosy’s descendants. But since very few of them live in Beparasy Raboba often acts as the owner, and this upsets his relatives (see below).

¹⁰ In other words, they should give it for share-cropping.

For southern Betsileo peasants, the set of relatives from whom one can usually ask for help, particularly in agricultural work, is the kindred (loosely called *fianakavia*, i.e. family). Raboba, however, cannot ask for help from his mother's side since they are not from Beparasy and live far away. He cannot count much on his patrilineal relatives either. Although his great grandfather Rainihosy had many descendants, only two men live with their household in Beparasy and these men are much younger than Raboba. Raboba's FFBS Andry was in his early twenties. Two years before our stay in Beparasy he had been sent by his mother to Beparasy, where he had never lived before, to work on the estate of his recently deceased father Rakoto. Before that he had lived with his parents in Antananarivo and then in Fianarantsoa. He had left school and stayed unemployed for a while, and was often found in bad company, preferring to learn kung fu instead of working or studying. Out of fear that he would soon become a job, her mother decided to send him to his paternal village Ambalamanakava to work on his father's rice fields.

The second of Rainihosy's descendants, Tema (Raboba's FFZDS), was in his thirties. He was married and had two young children. Tema and his wife foster Ramena, Tema's sister's daughter. Both Andry and Tema were, like Raboba, working on their own land without asking help from their relatives. I rarely saw them helping each other.

If there is little help available from his kindred, a southern Betsileo man can also turn to his in-laws if they live close enough. But on Ravao's side, the prospect of getting help was even worse than on Raboba's. Her siblings did not live in Beparasy, since Beparasy was the 'ancestral land' (*tanindrazana*) of their mother. Her brothers have followed the traditional patri-virilocal pattern of postmarital residence, staying in their father's village, while her sisters married out in distant villages. Ravao chose to go to Beparasy from Ivohibe, where she had grown up, after a few failed marriages and her father's death. She accompanied her mother Rapela who, being a widow, wanted to go back to her paternal village of Mahasoa.¹¹ Both planned to cultivate the small estate of

¹¹ Mahasoa is the village which was mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1, as the slave descendants' village of Beparasy. In the next chapter it will become clear why Mahasoa is identified as 'the' village with slave descendants even though the Berosaiña live in different villages in Beparasy and some free descent families also live in Mahasoa.

land they were offered by their relatives. While living in Mahasoa Ravao started an affair with Raboba and then a bit later moved to live with him in Ambalamanakava.

Ravao is not in good terms with most members of her maternal family. After having learned that Raboba was a Berosaiña and found out that Ravao was of free descent, I assumed for a while that Ravao's problems with her family were caused by her relationship with a 'slave' (*andevo*). However, I subsequently learnt that there were serious disputes about inheritance within the family and that Ravao's choice to live with a Berosaiña was only part of the story. It seems nonetheless that this choice partly prevented the couple from being close to the friendliest of Ravao's relatives – those who, in spite of the problems, continued to pay visits to Ravao and Raboba in Soatana – and from being engaged in mutual aid practices with them.

Raboba and Ravao are, by local standards, fairly isolated and live much on their own. Twice I observed them harvesting their rice fields with the help of only their children. They did not invite anybody to the harvest because, given their indebtedness, they did not want to give a share of the harvest to each of the participants as is customary.¹² Raboba and Ravao's rather individualistic mode of harvesting contrasts starkly with the traditional way common in Beparasy, which is based on mutual help (*haoña*). It is normally a happy event to which many relatives and friends are invited to participate, and the success in mobilizing people to help at harvest is a good indicator of a family's network of allies.

Because of his poor ways of dealing with land and family issues, Raboba is not a well-respected man in Beparasy. He is also often criticized among the Berosaiña, his own kinsmen. To make things worse, Raboba has a tendency to drink a good deal of local rum (*galeoka* or *toaka gasy*). At the weekly market, whenever he has a bit of money, it is common to find him under the eucalyptus trees, where men and women alike spend the day sitting and sipping until they get heavily inebriated. It is mainly because of Raboba's lack of credibility as a *ray aman-dreny* (notable, respected

¹² At the very least, according to the customs they should have invited their co-villagers in Soatana, i.e. Redison and Raely, Naina and Vaofara, and Anjasoa and me. During the first rice harvest we witnessed that they invited none of us. One year later, they invited only Anjasoa and me, feeling forced to do so because we had been joking for a long time that I would harvest with them.

person) that Ramarcel, to whom I turn next, is considered as the head (*tale*) of the Berosaïña branch of Rainihosy's descendants, in spite of being younger than Raboba and not residing in Beparasy.

The careful *bizinesy* man (Ramarcel)

In contrast to Raboba, Ramarcel is an experienced businessman and a much better manager of his rice fields. He has also a better sense of his duties towards his family and his kinsmen. His grandfather Raikalasora, Raboba's grandfather's brother (see Figure 2), decided after his return from France to go into the business (*bizinesy*) of transporting rice and other local goods from Beparasy to Ambalavao. Most of his descendants have followed in his footsteps. Rafidy, Ramarcel's remaining uncle, is doing transport business in Manakara, on the east coast of Madagascar. Razama, Ramarcel's father, was instrumental in establishing and organizing Beparasy's weekly market. He traded and transported rice, cassava, potatoes, wood and all sorts of goods produced locally. In the second half of his life, Razama moved to Ambalavao but continued to do business with people in Beparasy. Although the house he built in Ambalamanakava is now unoccupied and in a state of decay, it is still remarkable for its size, its blue-painted balcony (*lavaranga*) and its centrality in the village. Ramarcel and his siblings partly grew up in Ambalavao, where they still live and work in the business of trading local goods, except the youngest, who in 2009-10 was studying for his *baccalauréat* at a high school in Ambalavao.

When he was around thirty, Ramarcel decided to leave Ambalavao for Ambalamanakava to cultivate rice on the land he had inherited from his father. This lasted for a few years, but in the end he decided to go back to Ambalavao, partly because, as he confessed to me, his first wife cheated on him with one of the best friends he had in Beparasy. He separated from his wife and married another woman. Now his Beparasy rice fields are cultivated by a free descendant from Ambalamanakava on a share-cropping basis, whereby Ramarcel gets 50% of the harvest. Ramarcel says that, unlike Raboba, he will never lease the fields in exchange of money because he wants to observe the taboo (*fady*) issued by Rainihosy. His siblings do not claim a share of the harvest since they rarely come to Beparasy and

have left Ramarcel to take care of the ancestral estate. The only exception to the relative disinterest by Ramarcel's siblings for their estate in Beparasy is Ramarcel's sister, Saholy, who sometimes shows up at the market to sell goods bought in Ambalavao and to buy Beparasy products to sell in town. Ramarcel, on the contrary, is often in Beparasy because of his transport business. These frequent visits allow him to keep an eye on the ancestral estate.

In this case too, I had known Ramarcel for a long time before I learned that he was a Berosaiña. He was the fares collector and often the organiser of one of the two or three bush taxis (*taxibrosy*) bringing passengers and goods to the weekly market of Beparasy. I had travelled many times in vans under his management but had no particular contact with him other than for travelling purposes, until we finally met at a *vadipaisa* (a ceremony held for the transport of the bones of the ancestors into a new tomb) in Ivory.¹³ Ramarcel's occupation makes him an important person to know because of the relative remoteness of Beparasy and the scarcity of transport opportunities – motorized transport is normally available only one day per week, and much less during the rainy season, when the track is often wet and difficult. Ramarcel always knows whether someone in Ambalavao is planning to bring a four-wheel drive, a van or a truck to Beparasy, because he is often the middle man in these ventures and must therefore find enough passengers and goods to fill the vehicle up to the load limit (and often much beyond it).

It is well-known that the Malagasy devote much care to the placement of their dead in ancestral tombs (*fasan-drazana*). The Berosaiña are no exception and they have built several tombs in Beparasy. Raboba's and Ramarcel's great grandfather Rainihosy prepared his tomb before his death and built a 'bottom-of-a-stone' tomb (*fasa vodivato*). These tombs are placed in or under a rock, sometimes in a natural, cave-like hole, sometimes under a massive piece of rock under which a hole in the soil is dug, so that the rock forms the roof of the tomb. In the smallest of these tombs, there is space for only two 'beds' (*farafara*) consisting of two large flat stones, one for each sex. The tomb is then closed by a wall of piled stones. I was told that in the past the stones were sometimes sealed with mud or lime. Throughout the 20th century interior

¹³ I shall come back to this *vadipaisa* in Chapter 4.

beds and walls have increasingly been built with cement. While to enter ancient *vodivato* tombs people had to remove the wall's stones, contemporary cemented tombs have doors. The tomb built by Rainihosy was of the simplest kind and until 1966 it was used to bury his descendants. During the years 1964-66, Rainihosy's son Raikalasora (Ramarcel's grandfather) used cement to build a new, larger *vodivato* tomb which contains four beds.

Some of Rainihosy's descendants have yet another tomb in Beparasy. The reason for its existence is that Rajustin, Raboba's grandfather, was on such bad terms with his brother Raikalasora (Ramarcel's grandfather) that he decided to be buried with his wife in a separate tomb. He therefore looked for a hole in the rocks on the hills surrounding Beparasy, found a suitable one and started to fit it out. Unfortunately, he died before he had found the time and money to finish the tomb. His relatives nevertheless followed his will and buried him in the hole he had chosen, although it had only elementary fittings and no proper entrance wall. He was later joined in the tomb by his wife, his brother Robert, Robert's wife and their daughter Rapisendry.

When a new tomb is built, the general rule for southern Betsileo is that only the descendants of the most remote ancestor in the tomb can be buried in it. Thus, since none of Rajustin's ancestors were placed in his tomb, only his descendants and his siblings – as well as their spouses – have right to this tomb. However, when his brother Raikalasora had built the 1966 tomb he had done the *vadipaisa*, the ceremony in which the bones of the dead/ancestors (*raza*) were transported from the old tomb to the new one. The bones of Raikalasora's and Rajustin's father Rainihosy were placed in the tomb and the old tomb was emptied and abandoned. As a result, all the descendants of Rainihosy were allowed to be buried in this tomb but only Rajustin's descendants can be buried with him.

Apart from the few individuals mentioned above, the descendants of Rajustin who were buried in Beparasy have been placed in Rainihosy's tomb. Prestige was probably a decisive factor here, since a well-fitted, cemented and large tomb is a greater source of pride at funerals than a simple hole in the rocks. It is remarkable that none of Rajustin's sons has been buried in his tomb. It should be kept in mind however that

people have further options than being buried in Rainihosy's or Rajustin's tombs: they can be buried in tombs on the sides of forebears who do not belong to the Berosaiña group of Beparasy.

The wealthy fosterchild (Randrianja Albert)

Randrianja Albert is the head of another branch of the Berosaiña who live in Beparasy. Although I never managed to talk to him I often heard people mentioning his name because he is a wealthy man by local standards. Until recently, he owned more than thirty zebus. He had inherited the land of his father Randriatsoakely and had lived in Randriatsoakely's house in Ivondro until he had built a larger house beyond his rice fields, close the Catholic Church. Randrianja Albert's new house is remarkable for the fact that it is the only one with a tiled roof in Beparasy. Tin and tiled roofs are visible signs of wealth in the region given that the vast majority of houses have thatched roofs.¹⁴

Although he was always referred to as Randriatsoakely's son, Ramarcel explained to me that Randrianja Albert was actually not Randriatsoakely's biological son. This fact was later confirmed to me by my friend, the primary school teacher Ramose Martin. Being from the village where Randriatsoakely and Randrianja Albert had lived (Ivondro), he knew the stories well. After the death of his first wife, who had given him five children, Randriatsoakely married Rapizafy. Since Rapizafy never got pregnant, she decided to foster one of her sister's sons, who was sent to Beparasy from Iarintsena, a village southwest of Ambalavao. This child was little Randrianja Albert (see Figure 2). At some point Randriatsoakely's sons moved away from Beparasy. This happened because they were seasonally looking for wage labour (*karama*) and selling tobacco (*paraky*) in the region of Ivohibe (see map on page 12). One of them decided to stay there and found land to cultivate, and he was soon emulated by his brothers. After the death of Randriatsoakely, his Beparasy estate was

¹⁴ It must be noted, however, that the two wealthiest men of Beparasy, who owned about one hundred zebus and several hectares of rice land, have a poorly maintained house with thatched roof. I was explained that they deliberately avoid conspicuous signs of wealth, out of fear that they attract cattle rustlers (*dahalo*). For the same reason, their large cattle herd is usually not visible, since it is left in the forest or in the mountains under the protection of charms.

left in the hands of his wife Rapizafy and her sister's son, Randrianja Albert. After the death of Rapizafy, Randrianja Albert inherited the whole estate for him alone.

Randriatsoakely's children did not wish to cultivate their share of land in Beparasy because they said they had enough in Ivohibe. Yet they are still attached to Beparasy as their *tanindrazana*. In August 2008 I attended a *kiridy* (a festive family gathering and ancestors-thanking ceremony) at Randrianja Albert's house. Randrianja Albert held the *kiridy* to thank his ancestors because one of his daughters had recovered from a grave illness. Randriatsoakely's sons had come from Ivohibe for the occasion. However they usually do not come to funerals in Beparasy because they are too far away – it would take too long to send them the invitation and for them to arrive, since they would have to walk through the Andringitra mountains and the journey would take a few days. Despite this fact, their ancestral tomb in Beparasy is still very important for them because it is where their father and two of their siblings are buried. Randrianja Albert also buried one of his daughters who died very young in this tomb. Then, in 1988 – he must have been around forty at that time – Randrianja Albert built a new *vodivato* tomb.

Unlike the case of Raboba's grandfather Rajustin, however, the rationale for building a new tomb was not dispute or rivalry. It was essentially about securing Randrianja Albert's claims to land ownership. When Randrianja Albert held the *vadipaisa*, he did not only transport the bones of his daughter but emptied out Randriatsoakely's tomb and brought all the bones into his new cemented tomb. By doing so, Ramarcel explained, he strategically prevented the descendants of Randriatsoakely from coming back from Ivohibe one day to reclaim their part of their heritage and, above all, to question Randrianja Albert's rights to monopolize Randriatsoakely's land. Since he is now the 'owner of the tomb' (*tompom-pasa*) where Randriatsoakely and two of his children are buried, Randriatsoakely's descendants cannot do much in the future to contest his right to cultivate their ancestor's land.

The brave cook (Vohangy)

Vohangy is Redison's sister and, like him, she has spent many years away from Beparasy, even though she was born there. Their parents, Rasamuel and Ramarcelline, have migrated to the south and lived in Ambovombe and Betroka as petty merchants. Vohangy was married in Betroka and gave birth to her first two children. In 1994, Rasamuel and Ramarcelline decided to go back to Beparasy and live in Rasamuel's house in Mahasoa. Three years later, in 1997, Vohangy, who had separated from her Tandroy husband, also returned to her *tanindrazana* in Beparasy and occupied one of the two rooms on the ground floor of Rasamuel's house, while her parents lived upstairs. Since then, she has given birth four times but never married again. In 2003, her father Rasamuel died. Her mother Ramarcelline moved out to live in a tiny house in Ambalavao, on the insistence of Redison, who wanted to school his three sons in town and asked his mother to take care of them.

Although I introduced Vohangy in the previous paragraph as Redison's sister and Ramarcelline's daughter – this is how all three describe their relationships – it is important to explain that Vohangy is not Ramarcelline's biological daughter. Before getting married to Ramarcelline, Rasamuel had been married to another woman and had three children with her before she died. As I have already explained, Redison is not Rasamuel's biological son either. Ramarcelline had already two children, Hery and Redison, when she married Rasamuel. Redison, Vohangy and Voary had been raised together by Rasamuel and Ramarcelline while they were in the south.

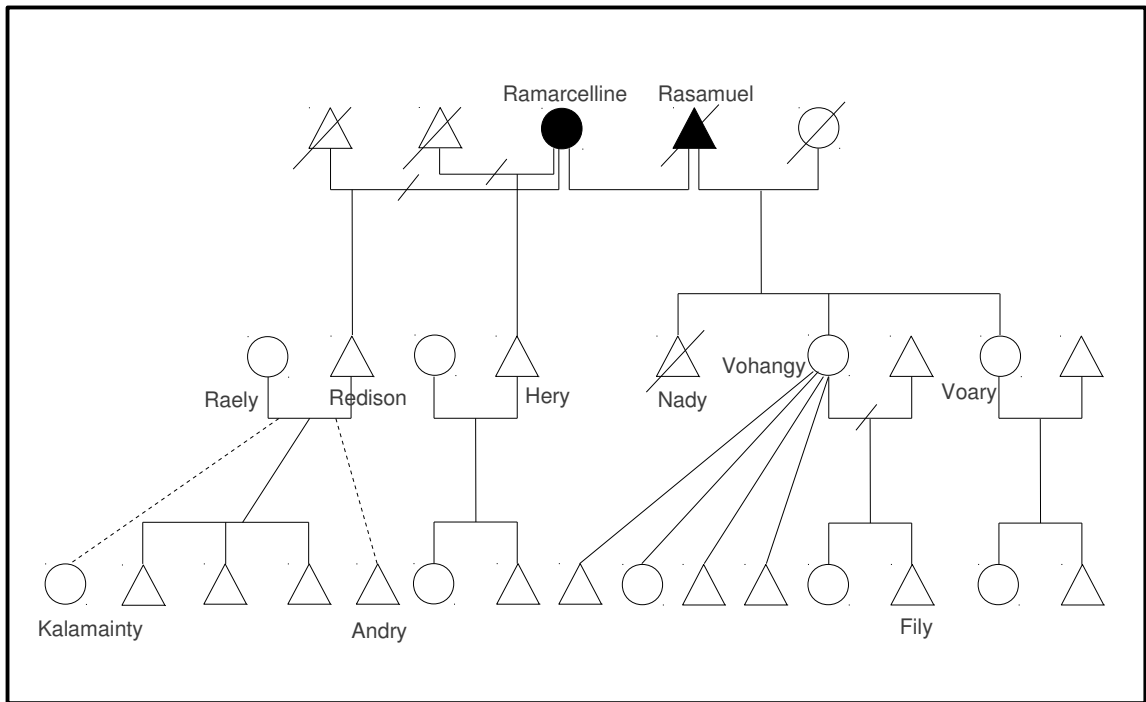


Figure 4: Ramarcelline’s and Rasamuel’s offspring

Vohangy is an energetic and positively minded woman. Since her father’s death, she has been cultivating his rice fields. She is the only one left among Rasamuel’s children, since her brother Nady had been found dead in a field – Ramarcel told me that he was a real cattle rustler (*dahalo*) and was probably murdered – and her sister Voary had led an itinerant life with her husband until they recently settled in the region of Sakalalina, to the east of the Route Nationale 7 between Ankaramena and Ihosy (see map on page 12). Redison once described Voary and her husband as cattle rustlers (*dahalo*) who had made a lot of money with their illegal activities. In addition to her agricultural work in the rice fields, Vohangy cooks and sells meals (*sakafo*) at the weekly market. In a flimsy shelter made of wooden sticks and rice bags, she prepares rice with chicken, beans, fresh water fish or greens – depending on what is available – as well as take-away food such as banana fritters, boiled fresh water crabs or crayfish or *mofo gasy* (‘Malagasy bread’, a sort of crumpet made with rice flour). In the catering business at the market of Beparasy, Vohangy only competes with Ramartine, a free descent old woman whose daily activities involve selling cups of

heavily sugared tea and coffee to her regular clients. At the market, she too sells large plates of boiled rice with a tiny side dish.

Vohangy's business ventures at the market have been quite successful but they also brought her some problems. In 2009, she planned to replace her small wood-and-rice-bags shelter with a more ambitious *hotely* ('restaurant'). The plan was to erect a mud brick building with a thatched roof, wooden doors and windows, a 'kitchen' and a 'dining room' for the customers. She hired local people to make the bricks, build the walls, fetch the wood and grass, thatch the roof and fit together doors and windows. The building was almost finished when it was burned down during one night in September. The news spread in Beparasy and people wondered who could have done that. "Surely it was jealousy," many thought.

I heard suggestions that maybe Vohangy's competitor at the market, Ramartine, had paid someone to set fire to the flammable grass roof. Given my keen interest in prejudice and discrimination against slave descendants, I hypothesized that some people in Beparasy did not like the idea of a slave descent woman selling meals at the market, maybe because of issues of uncleanliness and contamination. Ramarcel, for his part, explained to me that it was taboo (*fady*) for the Berosaiña to sell cooked meals (*sakafo masaka*) on their ancestral land and suggested that upset Berosaiña ancestors were somehow behind the fire. Rakoto Jeannot, a free descent elder of Ambalamanakava who knew Vohangy very well, suspected that the culprit was one of her kinsmen in Mahasoà. As for Vohangy herself, she rejected the possibility that it could be someone from outside Mahasoà because, she said, she never quarrels with 'other people' (*olo hafa*, meaning here people who are not relatives). She explained to me that two of her pigs had already been stolen recently and that someone had recently defecated in front of her door during the night. She asked the president of the *fokontany* to investigate the case and, a few weeks after the fire, a meeting with the household heads of Mahasoà took place in the *fokontany* office. After long hours of discussion, the principal suspect, one of Vohangy's brothers (*anadahy*),¹⁵ agreed to rebuild the *hotely*, even though he refused to acknowledge that he had started the fire.

¹⁵ In the classificatory sense. It was one of Vohangy's first cousins.

The gifted orator (Randriatsoa)

Randriatsoa, Vohangy's classificatory brother and co-resident in Mahasoa, is renowned as one of the most knowledgeable 'historians' (*mpitantara*) and one of the best 'orators' (*mpikabary*) in Beparasy.¹⁶ His grandfather Ramijery had chosen him for his intellectual capacities when he was a young boy, and charged him with the honour of passing on knowledge within the family about local history, customs, family histories and land ownership. Free descendants in Beparasy often recommended him to me when they heard that I was interested in history (*tantara*) and customs (*fomba*): "You should go to see him, he is very clever and knows a lot about history." Because of his oratory skills, Randriatsoa was often sent to represent Beparasy at official meetings – I saw him a few times at official events of the *mairie* of Vohimarina – and had served for a few years as president of the *fokontany* of Beparasy-I, an office which involves dealing with land disputes, organising protection against cattle rustlers (*dahalo*) and a few other administrative responsibilities.

Randriatsoa is now the head (*tale*) of the Berosaiña of Mahasoa, despite the fact that his brother Rabe is slightly older. Ramarcel explained to me that, although he is himself the *tale* of Rainihosy's descendants and at the same generational level as Randriatsoa, he considers him superior in the family hierarchy because he had been named *mpikabary* and *mpitantara* by his forebears. Randriatsoa was also in the military for a few years and is viewed as someone who likes commanding people. This led to rivalry between him and his uncle (*dadatoa*, in the classificatory sense – in fact his FFBS) Rajoro when he was still alive. Being one generation above Randriatsoa, according to custom Rajoro should have had authority over him, but Randriatsoa tended to exert and emphasize his privilege as the historian and public voice of the family. As in the case of Rainihosy's children, Rajustin and Raikalasora, the regular disputes with Randriatsoa led Rajoro to build a new tomb. He did so with the financial backing of some of his children, in particular of one of his daughters who had gained some wealth in the rice business in Ambalavao. The construction of the

¹⁶ See Rasoamampionona (2004) on the social status and activities of *mpitantara* (historians) among the southern Betsileo; Lambek (2002) on the particular significance of history in Madagascar; Keenan (1973; 1974a) and Bloch (1973) on the importance of oratory in the highlands, especially (but not only) for political purposes.

tomb was finished in 2002 and the *vadipaisa* was performed to move the bones of Rajoro's father into the new tomb.

The old tomb of Rakamisy and his descendants, from which Rajoro's bones were removed, was not actually the first family tomb. He had first been buried on the Vatobe hill in an 'earth tomb' (*fasan-tany*). *Fasan-tany* are another kind of Betsileo tombs where the dead are placed in a cavity a few meters under the ground.¹⁷ This is achieved by digging a trench steadily downwards until an adequate depth is achieved. Then a cavity of a few cubic metres is carved out and, inside, two beds are made with flat stones. When the dead has been placed on a bed, the cavity is closed by a door consisting of a large flat stone and the trench is refilled with earth. The location of the tomb is indicated by a coarse construction called *aloalo*, which is made of stones piled on the ground above the underground cavity. Other stones are placed on the ground to indicate where the trench was dug and where the entrance to the cavity can be found. The tombs of the first settlers in Beparasy are *fasan-tany*. Thus although most of them have been emptied, their *aloalo* are still important for local families since they provide support for their historical claims on land in the region. Rakamisy's descendants, like all the 'old' families of Beparasy, followed the local trends in tomb building. In 1967-69 a new *vodivato* tomb with cement was built, the bones of Rakamisy and his already deceased descendants transported and the *fasan-tany*

¹⁷ For a more extensive discussion of the various sorts of Betsileo tombs, see Décarry (1962), Rajaonarimanana (1979) and Gueunier (1974). In Beparasy the tombs present in the landscape belong to one of the two categories I have described. According to my informants the tombs built by the first generation of settlers at the end of the 19th century were all *fasan-tany*. Later in the 20th century people preferred to build tombs in a cave or under a rock (*fasa vodivato*). When I asked for the reasons of this change, some replied that it was because the tombs in the rocks were located far from the villages in the mountains and therefore thieves could not find them easily (in the past people feared *lamba* (the cloth used to wrap the dead) thieves, whereas today they fear 'bones thieves'). Others said that people preferred the *vodivato* option because the ancestors' bones were drier and cleaner in *vodivato* than in earth tombs. Finally some people explained that *vodivato* tombs were easier to build, because in the rocky landscape of Beparasy good spots with holes and caves were easy to find while it was not always easy to dig the earth at some depth. Although there were not directly mentioned to me, I think there are two further reasons why people changed their burial practices soon after they arrived in Beparasy. It seems that in pre-colonial times the local rulers (*mpanjaka*) imposed *fasan-tany* to commoners (*olompotsy*), while people of noble (*hova*) status had their dead buried in caves often located in difficultly accessible cliffs. I found it likely that, when status differences were officially abolished, commoners started to build tombs which looked like the noble tombs in the rocks. Noble descendants too have increasingly built *vodivato* tombs – they now find burials in cliffs too difficult and too costly. The other reason for the change to *vodivato* tombs is that Beparasy is very close to Bara country, where the dead are buried in caves (see Huntington 1973; 1988).

emptied of all its occupiers. The *aloalo* on hill of Vatobe was left as a memorial to the family history.

The Berosaiña as a local descent group

My free descent informants explained to me that ‘Berosaiña’ was the *anaran-draza* (‘ancestors’ name’), i.e. the name of the descent group of the people I have introduced above. I was also told – and later I could see that it was the case – that the Berosaiña themselves, like any other descent group in Beparasy, used this name to refer to their group at ritual occasions, for example during funerals or ancestor-thanking ceremonies (*kiridy*). These explanations puzzled me, since at the same time I was clearly recalling that according to Kottak slave descendants among the Betsileo belonged to no descent groups (Kottak 1986: 279). How did it happen, I wondered, that slave descendants in Beparasy belonged to tomb-centered groups and had a descent group name, just like any other villagers?

As far as I could understand, it seems that the name Berosaiña was used in the past to refer to a group of slaves who were owned by a ruler – or, possibly, by a noble family who did not rule – and that after abolition this name became viewed as a descent group name for the descendants of these slaves. The practice of naming slave groups was confirmed to me by Rathéophile, a local historian of noble descent I interviewed in Ambalavao. He explained that, in pre-colonial times in the southern Betsileo region, the owners of slaves named their slaves by a collective name.¹⁸ This is different from the usual naming of descent groups, which normally occurs when a head of family states, at an important occasion, that from now on all his descendants will bear a new name. My understanding is that slaves, since they all lived together in small hamlets or parts of villages around their owners’ house, were treated by their masters as if they were a group of kinsmen. Slaves were allowed to marry other slaves and have children, and thus they may have formed, generation after generation, quasi-kin groups into which newcomers (i.e. new slaves acquired through wars and raiding or, during the 19th century, bought at the slave market) were incorporated.

¹⁸ These owners were for the most part rulers (*mpanjaka*), nobles (*hova*) and wealthy commoners.

That slaves were given group names is also confirmed by pastor Rainihifina, who writes:

The word *andevo* was not used very often, since those who had one master all had a 'group name' (*anaram-poko*). As for example: Berovazaha, Beanala, Soairano, Tsiambala, and so on. They were not called *andevo* but called by these names. That is why there are not many proverbs about the slaves in the Betsileo language. The discrimination is visible not so much in the language but in the fact that people do not intermarry with them" (Rainihifina, quoted in Rasoamampionona 2000: 371, my translation).

As Rainihifina's quotation makes clear, there are many different group names (*anaram-poko*) for slave descendants in the whole Betsileo region.¹⁹ Some of my informants were aware of other names used in the areas neighbouring Beparasy. The words *be* (much/many) and *maro* (numerous) seem to have been often used to name slave groups, perhaps to stress the wealth of their owners. Yet it would be wrong to infer from this observation that all descent group names with *be* or *maro* indicate slave status. The Bedia and the Maroafo, for example, are large Betsileo groups of free descent and some of their branches are also found in Beparasy. Although for the Betsileo the names of all descent groups have a meaning – and people often know a story about why a particular name was given by one of the group's ancestors – it is actually not possible to guess by the name whether a descent group is of slave status. It is only through *lovan-tsofina* ('inheritance of the ears'), i.e. local knowledge transmitted orally through generations, that southern Betsileo will come to know that people with a particular group name are of slave descent. The inhabitants of Beparasy identify descent groups not only by way of their name, but also by way of their zebus, which bear the marks of the local descent groups to which they belong carved on their ears. As my friend Ramose Martin told me, "The earmark of the Berosaiña's cattle is very famous in the region. It has the form of a knife."²⁰

¹⁹ Elsewhere Rainihifina shows that, like the other categories of people who lived around the *lapa* (royal residence) the slaves of the different rulers of the southern Betsileo polities were called by a specific name (Rainihifina 1956: 143-144). It seems to me plausible that before Merina annexion *all* slaves owned by southern Betsileo nobles (and not only those of the rulers) were given an *anaram-poko* (group name). This situation may have changed during the 19th century when slaves became commoditized and when Betsileo rulers lost part of their power and privileges under Merina rule. Wealthy commoners could then also acquire slaves but unlike the slaves of the *hova* those of commoners were probably not named by an *anaram-poko*.

²⁰ On cattle ear marking in Madagascar, see Hurvitz (1979). Rajaonarimanana, writing about the northern Betsileo region of Manandriana, explains that earmarks (*fofo*) are one of the criteria that shows the existence of a local descent group, called *akitsanjy* in Manandriana (Rajaonarimanana

Even though it is used in present-day Beparasy as a descent group name like any other, there is little doubt that the name Berosaiña cannot be casually uttered. I recall a discussion with a man in his thirties at the beginning of my fieldwork, at a time when I still had only a vague idea of who was said to be of slave descent in Beparasy and when I assumed that the name Berosaiña, which I had recorded in my field notes, was a descent group name like any other. Since I had seen him a few times in the company of a man who, I had been told, was a Berosaiña, I asked him whether he was a Berosaiña too. His face froze and he laughed with unease, denying vehemently that he had anything to do with the Berosaiña. This young man had often hung around my place, out of curiosity, apparently because he wanted to make friends with me. He never came back to my house after that day, and clearly avoided crossing my path at the market. I had obviously made a mistake. From that day on, I became more careful in handling the name Berosaiña.

Conclusion

A Betsileo scholar I had met in Fianarantsoa once told me that in his *tanindrazana* the slave descendants live in the lowest part of the village and that he has known from a very early age that there is an ‘invisible line’ beyond which could not marry. Such a geography of power and status in ancient Malagasy villages is often stressed in the ethnographic literature. In Beparasy, however, I could not find any trace of a clear separation of the Berosaiña from the others. Nor could I find evidence that the Berosaiña had their houses in an unfavourable location following the Malagasy astrological system – aside from the fact that, in a landscape where hamlets and villages are scattered around rice fields, some are always to the west or to the south of others. At first I was concerned that perhaps I was unable to see what my fellow anthropologists working on the Betsileo had seen. I later understood that this absence

1986: 248-250). According to this author the other criteria are the group name (*anaran’akitsanjy*), the corporate ownership of immovable property, the existence of taboos (*fady*) transmitted by ancestors of the group and the existence of a tomb. We have seen in this chapter that the Berosaiña meet all these criteria, thus we should acknowledge that they form a local descent group. Indeed, my informants explained that the Berosaiña were a *fañahia* among the other *fañahia* of the region. In Beparasy local descent groups were often referred to as *fañahia*, while *foko* was used to mean the large, supralocal named descent group. The word *fañahia* in this case seems to refer also to the lands allocated to different families during the period of the early settlement of Beparasy (see Rainihifina 1975: 10).

of an ancient geography of power and status was due to the recent history of the region and to the fact that the Berosaiña were not the descendants of local slaves. I was told by elders that in the region only nobles and wealthy commoners owned slaves in the past and that no nobles ever lived in Beparasy. Only commoners had been among the first settlers and these had not been rich enough to own slaves. Thus I came to believe that the Berosaiña were former slaves who had arrived in the region shortly after the abolition in order to find free land and start a new life from afresh – the ‘third option’ in Bloch’s comparative framework (Bloch 1979; 1980). In the next chapter, I will show that the history of the Berosaiña is in fact a little more complicated than I first thought.

The ethnographic vignettes I provided about the Berosaiña in this chapter make a number of important points: first, the Berosaiña are land owners (*tompon-tany*) whose first presence in the region dates back to several generations and, in terms of their socioeconomic situation, they are rather favoured by owning good land, some of them being considered rich by local standards. Second, the Berosaiña have well-established ancestral tombs and belong to tomb-centered descent groups. This point is significant, of course, because in Madagascar ancestral tombs are essential for a descent group’s social status and for the role the group can play in local politics, since they testify the historical presence of the group on a land. In addition, this is significant because the slave descendants described by Kottak and Freeman do not seem to have built ancestral tombs that are commensurable, in their use and importance, to those of their former masters, while the slave descendants described by Evers seem to have no ancestral tombs at all. On this important issue too, the slave descendants of Beparasy are in a favourable situation. As explained at the end of Chapter 1, the ancestors of the largest families of Beparasy arrived towards 1880. Because of the great distance between Beparasy and northern Betsileo (the region of origin of many of them), these land-poor settlers all built ancestral tombs and firmly established themselves in Beparasy. As a result, the ‘genealogical depth’ in the tombs of all Beparasy villagers, whether of free or slave descent, is relatively shallow – it does not exceed five generations of ancestors. Thus it is not only in their outward characteristics that the Berosaiña’s tombs look like those of free descendants: they also have a similar

number of generations of ancestors in the tomb. On this matter too, the Berosaiña seem on equal footing with free descendants.

Slave descendants among the Betsileo have so far been described in the ethnographic literature in rather monolithic terms, either as the land-poor clients or share-croppers of their former masters who exploit them while at the same time offering paternalistic support (Kottak 1980; Freeman 2001), or as landless migrants who provide exploitative land owners (*tompon-tany*) with an easily disposable labour force (Evers 2002a). What is lacking in these otherwise important accounts is a close attention to the details of their genealogies, kinship practices and various trajectories in life, and to the differences that may exist within (and between) slave descent families in terms of success, social status and attitudes towards their ancestral land. In this chapter, I have sought to depart from a monolithic description by portraying a variety of characters who embody some of the differences that I observed among the Berosaiña. While Raboba's indebtedness, laziness and tiny house are a source of collective amusement in Beparasy, many villagers are keen to keep good relationships with Ramarcel because of his key role in the local transport business. Randrianja Albert is respected as an important notable above all because of his wealth and his authoritarian personality. Vohangy's friendly character and hard-working ethos, well appreciated by her customers, boosted her small business so much that in the course of the two years of my stay it had become more popular than that of free descendant Ramartine, her main competitor in the catering business at the market. Randriatsoa's historical knowledge and rhetorical skills have earned him a solid reputation as an orator and his voice is often heard during speeches (*kabary*) at various occasions. What all this shows is that members of the Berosaiña group have achieved a variety of social statuses and occupy different key roles in the little society of Beparasy. Yet there is one important aspect that the Berosaiña seemed unable to change by their own efforts: the conviction of the other families of Beparasy that they are 'descendants of slaves' (*dorian'andevo; taranak'andevo*). This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: PEOPLE WITH A HISTORY

It was only after I had already learned a good deal about the Berosaiña and become very close to Redison that I dared to ask him direct questions about his mother's marriage with the Berosaiña Rasamuel and the consequences that this relationship had on her life. The opportunity came when we found ourselves walking back together from Ambalavao and had several hours of conversation in front of us. Although Redison was well disposed to tell me what he knew of the story, in truth he knew little, he said, because he was very young when his mother and Rasamuel married one another. He told me that his maternal relatives in Ambalabe opposed their marriage because people say that the Berosaiña are descendants of slaves. When I asked him why the Berosaiña were considered as slave descendants and why his relatives did not want that his mother marry one of them, he replied that he did not really know. He then suggested:

Redison: One of my uncles from Mahasoa, Randriatsoa, is an historian. He knows the history of his family very well. Maybe he could tell you what you want to know.

Denis: But do you think he would tell me that? I know it's very difficult and I don't think he would easily talk to me about that.

Redison: I don't know. Maybe I could introduce you by saying that there was slavery in your country too, that some of your ancestors were slaves and it's the reason why you are interested in these questions. (Fieldnotes, 8.02.2009)

He added that we should bring his uncle a bit of money and a bottle of rum, as is the custom when one wants to hear about family history from an elder. I was only able to reply a vague "yes, maybe we could do that," because I did not know what to make of Redison's suggestion. After that moment, we never talked again about the possibility of going together to see Randriatsoa. I preferred to ignore the strategy proposed by my friend, which seemed unethical from my point of view.

At the time of our conversation, Redison was not aware – and I did not tell him – that I had already interviewed Randriatsoa once. The circumstances surrounding this interview had been fairly awkward, however. Prior to this interview I had talked to Rapanjato, an elder of Ivondro, who unlike many people seemed largely comfortable discussing issues of slavery and slave descendants in Beparasy – indeed, he even seemed to take pleasure in it. He laughed and replied wittily to some of my questions about the Berosaiña. At the end of our meeting, Rapanjato suggested that I talk to Randriatsoa. I replied that I would be happy to do so and said I would try to contact him soon. A few days later, to my surprise, Rapanjato knocked on our door accompanied by Randriatsoa. They were both wearing a *lamba*, a hat and a walking stick – the local men’s dress for formal occasions. It turned out that on the same morning Rapanjato had asked a young relative of his to go to Mahasoà to inform Randriatsoa that the ‘white foreigner’ (*vazaha*) of Soatana wanted to ask questions about local history (*tantara*) and customs (*fomba*).

I invited them to enter our house, offered a round of rum and set up my recorder. Before we started the interview, Randriatsoa informed me that he needed to invoke his ancestors before he could talk, and requested a *zinga* (large cup) with a small amount of water. Turning to the eastern wall of the room, he asked his ancestors for blessing and sprinkled water towards the four corners of our house.¹ The interview could now start. We talked about various topics of local history and customs. Randriatsoa answered my questions and Rapanjato intervened only occasionally while sipping his rum. But the presence of Rapanjato was preventing me from asking any sensitive questions, since I was concerned that he might intervene and say something controversial. I nonetheless asked a few ‘historical’ questions about slavery, but I did not insist on the topic and the conversation quickly moved on to other issues. After my guests had bidden their farewell, I spent the rest of the day wondering whether Rapanjato’s unexpected manoeuvre might have been motivated by anything other than the round of rum.

¹ Although I have interviewed many elders in Beparasy, Randriatsoa was the only one who did this before speaking.

A funeral in Mahasoa

I met Randriatsoa again at various occasions after this interview because he was often attending the funerals in Beparasy. We also paid him a visit of courtesy at his house in Mahasoa. In 2009 a son of Randriatsoa's sister Soa died from an unidentified sickness in Mahasoa and I attended the funerals. Randriatsoa, as head of the Berosaiña of Mahasoa, was the *tompom-paty* ('owner of the corpse', i.e. head of the funeral). He was happy to see me at the funeral, to which I had come from Soatana with Raely and Vaofara as representatives of Redison's family.² I expressed my condolences as best as I could and gave 2,000 Ariary as *ranomaso*.³ My name and the nature of my gift were written in the family notebook⁴ and Randriatsoa asked the young men to bring me a good share of *hena ratsy* ('bad meat', i.e. the meat from the zebu killed at funerals).⁵ This exchange was a sort of institutionalization of our being some kind of *hava* (kinsmen).

Since the deceased was only in his teens, the funeral in Mahasoa was not a large event in size or length. Only one zebu was killed⁶ and the funeral lasted for only two days. I could see, however, that many free descendants helped with the organization of the ceremony and the hosting of the guests in the 'mixed' village of Mahasoa. My free descent friend Samuel, for example, recalled afterwards that his father's house in Mahasoa had hosted more than fifteen guests of the funerals – most of them would presumably have been slave descendants since they were the Berosaiña's close kinsmen. Many free descent villagers attended the funerals too. I was a bit surprised

² Redison was not present since he was not in Beparasy at that time.

³ The *ranomaso* ('tears') are the gifts in cloth, mats or money that attendees bring to the family organizing the funeral and to its head, the *tompom-paty*. The gifts of zebu at funerals are called *lofo*.

⁴ The reason why families write down the gifts they receive at funerals is that they have to reciprocate these gifts as soon as they have the opportunity (for example when they are invited to a tomb ceremony or to another funeral). I was told that a family should never give back the exact amount of money they received, otherwise it would be interpreted as a their intention to end the relationship. Thus a family has only two options: to give a bit less or to give a bit more than they have received.

⁵ The meat of slaughtered cattle is used to feed the guests, as it is customary to have a meal of rice and boiled meat at funerals. The remainder of the meat is then distributed to the guests before they leave.

⁶ Killing one zebu is the minimum for a funeral in the southern Betsileo highlands. If for some reason a family has no cattle to kill or cannot get one easily from relatives or friends (that they reimburse later), the deceased is buried very quickly and without ceremony. When the family has saved enough to buy a zebu, an event called *vokapaty* is organized. I shall come back to the topic of *vokapaty* in Chapter 8.

to see that my friend Tsoja and his siblings from Ivondro were among the *lahy mahery* ('strong men') who fetched firewood, cleared the tomb's entrance from the vegetation, carried the stretcher with the corpse and helped to bring the corpse into the tomb. When I later asked him why he was so actively involved at the funeral in Mahasoà, Tsoja told me that the deceased was *hava* (kinsman) for him. It turned out that Tsoja had a *vakirà* (blood bond) with Soa, Randriatsoa's sister and the mother's sister of the deceased.⁷

Given the young age of the deceased, everyone expected the *kabary* (speeches) at the end of the funeral to be short. This is because, according to custom, long *tetiahara* (genealogical speeches) are held only for *olon-dehibe* i.e. for people who are married, have children and have reached a certain age (about 40 years old, I was told). There was indeed no *tetiahara* for the boy, but Randriatsoa nonetheless gave a long *kabary* in which he recalled stories and anecdotes from the past, including from the pre-colonial era. In his speech, he stressed that all Beপরস্য villagers were 'from the same village' (*tanana raiky*) because they were the descendants of the people who, in the past, lived on the hilltop of Vatobe. People in Beপরস্য, he insisted, were all kinsmen (*hava*). While speaking, Randriatsoa often pointed at the summit of the Vatobe hill, which was close and visible from Mahasoà, and made a lot of expressive gestures. I realized during this event that he definitely deserved his reputation for being a good *mpikabary* (orator).

Randriatsoa's behaviour during the funeral was also striking as a demonstrative form of grieving. Following a custom (*fomba*) which was described as an old way of expressing grief, he had put on his oldest clothes during the days of the funerals, wearing a torn tee-shirt and trousers. He also walked barefoot.⁸ When we arrived at the entrance of the tomb, he started crying loudly, kneeled and then walked on all four towards the stretcher, which was placed on the ground and had the corpse still attached to it. People around retained him: "Calm down, Randriatsoa, calm down!"

⁷ I will have more to say on blood bonds (*vakirà*) with the Berosaiña in the next chapter.

⁸ Randriatsoa's way of expressing grief contrasted with that of most villagers of Beপরস্য. Many attend funerals with their daily clothes, only adding a *lamba* and hat, while others dress up following *vazaha*/Christian influences. Randriatsoa was the only one I could observe grieving in this fashion during the many funerals I attended.

(*mangina, Randriatsoa, mangina!*). After the funeral, he also observed a period of traditional mourning, during which he did not shave. I could see on subsequent occasions that Randriatsoa was not only very knowledgeable about *fomban-draza* (ancestral customs), he was also very careful in following them.

Talking to the Berosaiña

Some time after my conversation with Redison, I had another chance to talk to Berosaiña elders. This time it was Ramarcel who offered to facilitate the meetings. He had gradually become one of our best friends and informants, partly because, like many people in Beparasy, we often needed his services to find a lift to or from Ambalavao. During our stays in Ambalavao we were constantly in touch with him via mobile phone,⁹ and since we were sometimes stuck for several days in town waiting for a lift, we slowly built up a close rapport. He invited us to his place and to his mother's in Ambalavao and we came to know his wife, his children and some of his siblings. In return we invited him to visit us whenever he was in Beparasy, and he did not miss an opportunity to do so. During our meetings in Ambalavao or at our house in Beparasy we held long conversations – he was talkative and liked our company – that were sometimes about his family and the people of Beparasy.

At some point, after we had become very close, I felt that it might be possible to have an open discussion with him about the rumoured slave descent of the Berosaiña and the fact that the other families of Beparasy did not want to marry them. Such a conversation took place one afternoon in Ambalavao. The difficulty was finding a quiet place where we could discuss the potentially sensitive issues with Ramarcel. Meeting at our friends' or Redison's relatives was out of the question, since there were too many people passing by, and it was also impossible to have such an interview at the *hotely* (cheap restaurant) where my wife Anjasoa and I used to stop to eat or drink when we were in town. In agreement with Ramarcel, we therefore decided to set up a

⁹ Unlike our friends from Beparasy who sometimes had a phone but no money to buy call credit, Ramarcel was always able to call us when transport opportunities seemed to materialize.

meeting in a hotel run by a Chinese family. Because of the political situation in Madagascar, the hotel dining room was empty most of the time.¹⁰

During the conversation, we talked about Redison's mother's marriage to Rasamuel. We asked Ramarcel why Redison's relatives in Ambalabe did not want to let Ramarcelline marry Rasamuel:

The reason why the family of Redison's mother did not like Rasamuel is because he was a man who dared to say things clearly. If, for example, Redison's mother's brother borrowed something from him and was arrogant, he would not let it be. He would say, "You are haughty with me whereas you are sewing with my needle." That's why Redison's family did not like him. They put pressure on their sister and told her: "You shouldn't marry this guy."

[Transcript 3.1]¹¹

It was apparently true that Rasamuel had a strong character and some people did not appreciate him for that reason. Redison was also very direct and capable of speaking harshly to people, a rather unusual trait among the southern Betsileo, who prefer not to raise their voice or say things directly. I had sometimes wondered why Redison had this character because I knew his mother and she was very different – easy-going, very polite and patient. Listening to Ramarcel, I thought that Redison had probably inherited his foster-father's strength of character. Yet it was nonetheless clear that Ramarcel had not really answered our question and that there was more to say about this marriage refusal. We insisted:

D & A: We have heard that when Rasamuel died the people from Ambalabe did not give any zebu or *lamba*. What's the truth?

Ramarcel: This story of Rasamuel and Redison's mother is already 20 years old at the time we're speaking, and it was an issue that was very taboo, because it was an 'issue of cutting' (*resaka fanapahana*). And if there is a 'cutting' [of social relations] in Beparasy people do not have any relation any more.

D & A: What was the reason of this rupture?

Ramarcel: Because there were some strong words (*vava*) that Redison's mother's family should not have said but that they did say.

D & A: What were these strong words (*vava*)?

¹⁰ It was soon after the political crisis of 2009 and very few tourists were travelling to Madagascar during that year.

¹¹ See the appendix for the transcript in original language.

Ramarcel: They gave us dirty things (*maloto*) to eat. To speak the truth, it was really an insult. And when there is an insult like that, giving dirty things for a family to eat, things cannot be arranged easily like that, there must be a zebu killed to cleanse the strong words (*vava*) that had been said.

D & A: And is the problem between the two families over now or is it still going on?

Ramarcel: It has not been resolved since Rasamuel is dead now, and Redison's mother's family is very arrogant so we cannot forgive them and they cannot forgive us. And Ramarcelline's family abandoned her and said "if there is something that happens to your husband you will have to sort things out by yourself." And that's why Ramarcelline 'walks alone' (*mandeha irery*) and all her family abandoned her and it's only his children (Redison, Vohangy, etc.) who help her. That's also why she does her duties on the side of her husband.

[Transcript 3.2]

By "the duties" done by Ramarcelline "on the side of her husband", Ramarcel meant that Ramarcelline was more often seen at the ceremonies and gatherings of the Berosaiña or on the maternal side of her husband than among her kinsmen in Beparasy.

D & A: Redison explained to us that the reason there were problems with the marriage between his mother and Rasamuel was that the people of Ambalabe said that they did not have the same ancestry.

Ramarcel: This is so that in the years 1800s, people say, there were rulers (*mpanjaka*), at the times of the lords, Andrianampoinimerina, Radama and the others. And those from our side lived to the east of the *fivondronana* [i.e. the former name of the district] of Ambalavao, in a village called Mahasoabe. That's where there was the father of our grandfather. He and his wife lived there and they gave birth to 7 brothers, it was a long time ago (in the 19th century). And there were wars between the lords and their allies. Some of them were defeated and were enslaved. People said: "they are inferior to us in grade these people." And there were people who were neither victorious nor defeated, and they were in the middle.

[Transcript 3.3]

Immediately after Ramarcel had pronounced these words, there was a long silence. I did not know whether I should push him further on the topic or leave it at that, since it had clearly been difficult for him to mention slavery. The conversation took another direction but some time later, when it came back to the history of Ramarcel's forebears who had come to Beparasy, we dared to ask:

D & A: But why did people think that they were slaves?

Ramarcel: There are some ‘little stories’ saying that it’s our grandfather who first entered in Beparasy and he acquired a really large piece of land. Then other people came and our grandfather’s side gave them a place where to live: “You will live on this place, here.” He [i.e. the grandfather] gave land to other families coming from the region of Isandra, from the region of Fianarantsoa. These people walked and walked and arrived in Beparasy. And at the time we’re speaking there are lands that our grandfather lent (*nampidramina*) to people. And there are people today who say to us: “This land belongs to your grandfather.” It’s not a land that he sold but that he lent: “Eat some rice here because this place is quite clean. You’re not lost now.” But now they don’t give it back. And we do not dare to take it back otherwise there would be a big war (*gera be*). And you see even today on the side of our grandfather we still have a large free land. For example from the south of Redison’s house going back to the river and up to the bridge and the road, and all the western side. And to the east of the bridge, where there is a sort of little island and where people cultivate maize and beans, that’s also our grandfather’s land. And in Volasoa, close to Randriafotsy’s house, there is still free open land there that belonged to our grandfather. Our possession of these three large open lands created jealousy in the population. And: “These people there have large lands because they are descendants of people [i.e. implied: of slaves].” And that’s how it happened that people in Beparasy did not want to marry our family. There are some parents (*ray aman-dreny*) who say weird things and people do not marry us. But nowadays it is not at all allowed to say things like that. And people told us that these kinds of things did not occur in the past. But there is one of our uncles who can really tell the history of all that. He’s in Beparasy, not in Ambalavao. Because here in Ambalavao we do not dare to talk about that, since our grandfather left for Beparasy. If we go to ask them “we will come to you to ask the history of our family”, it’s possible that they will think, “These guys want to steal land here.” We are careful about this stealing of the land. And our uncle in Beparasy... if there is someone who says “you are descendants of slaves” he makes a big speech in front of all the *fokon’olona*. People should not talk like that because we all live there, we were all exiled from here and our home is in Beparasy.

[Transcript 3.4]

The story reported by Ramarcel explains the allegations of slave ancestry against the Berosaiña in terms of jealousy because the Berosaiña’s ancestors who arrived in the region received a good share of land. After this conversation, however, Ramarcel admitted that he did not know the history of his family particularly well and remained unclear as to why exactly people thought they were slave descendants. The elders among his kinsmen, he said, would know the answer to that. Thus some days later he proposed a meeting with one of his ‘uncles’ in Ambalavao, Rageorges, who, he said, could tell us more about the family history and the reasons that people in Beparasy speak ill about them.

The interview went well but Rageorges was unwilling to tell us about what we were interested in. Ramarcel attempted to steer the conversation in the right direction on our behalf, and on several occasions he commented on Rageorges' reticence: "Here, you see, there is something that he should tell you but he does not dare." Rageorges never told us what Ramarcel expected he would and neither did Ramarcel himself. It was quite clear, however, that this unknown piece of the story was closely linked to the reputation of the Berosaiña as slave descendants.

After this relatively disappointing interview with Rageorges, Ramarcel insisted that we see the family historian Randriatsoa in order to ask him our questions. I presumed he was doing this in order to help us, but also wondered whether he too wanted to better understand why his family was considered by Beparasy villagers to be of slave descent. I had the impression that he was curious to hear more about these stories and that perhaps our meeting with Randriatsoa would be a good opportunity to learn about things that would otherwise be unlikely to be discussed among the Berosaiña.

When I told him that I had already interviewed Randriatsoa once, Ramarcel replied that it might yield a different outcome if he were to be present at the next interview since, as I have explained, in the family hierarchy he is at the same level as Randriatsoa (although he would still have to acknowledge Randriatsoa's authority as the 'official' *mpitantara* and *mpikabary* of the Berosaiña). Were he to attend the interview, he told us, we could ask our difficult questions without problems and Randriatsoa would feel obliged to answer them.

A meeting with the historian

The meeting with Ramarcel and Randriatsoa did not take place straight away. Ramarcel lived in Ambalavao and did not know in advance when he would be again in Beparasy – his transport business was an unpredictable affair and he spent a good deal of time moving around Ambalavao. Moreover, since it was difficult to communicate with us and Randriatsoa in order to set up a meeting, we saw Ramarcel doing *bizinesy* a few times at the market of Beparasy before we finally managed to fix a date for the meeting. Ramarcel went to see Randriatsoa in Mahasoà to ask whether

he would be willing to talk to us again. Randriatsoa accepted, but said that if this was to be the serious event of telling the history of the family he would like us to follow the customs. Tradition has it that when one asks an elder to tell a detailed account of the history of the family, one should offer him a *lamba arindrano*.¹² Randriatsoa did not ask for an expensive *lamba arindrano* but for an ordinary *lamba* in addition to the usual bottle of rum.¹³ Since we did not know what kind of *lamba* would be appropriate, we commissioned Ramarcel to buy one in Ambalavao.

As it was the case with Rageorges in Ambalavao, the meeting with Ramarcel and Randriatsoa had to be carefully prepared in order that nothing would interfere with it. While it had been demanded by Ramarcel, I was nonetheless worried that people in Beparasy would think that I was investigating the stories of the Berosaiña too specifically. During his visits to our house, Ramarcel was always cautious to avoid going directly to our place. He always paid short visits to Raboba's, Redison's and Naina's before coming to see us – to make sure, he once explained, that nobody would think that he came to Soatana with the unique purpose of visiting us (although he clearly did so after we became good friends). Indeed, Ramarcel always seemed to be very careful in what he did, either in Beparasy or in Ambalavao, and this was particularly true on the day of the interview. Since he had not enough time to pay his usual visits to the other inhabitants of Soatana before coming to our house, he came from below the hamlet, through the rice fields and then up on the *tanety*, to avoid meeting people on the dirt road. It was particularly important to do it like this, he told us, because he was carrying the brand new *lamba* and the bottle of industrial rum for Randriatsoa, and he did not want people to speculate about why he was bringing such items. To make sure that we would not be disturbed during the interview, we asked Lalao, the young girl from Ivondro who helped Anjasoa looking after our daughter Camille, to stay outside the house so that she could tell people that we were busy and ask them to come back another day.

¹² *Lamba arindrano* are coloured piece of cloth made of raw silk for which the region of Arindrano was famous in the past. Important people wore these prestigious pieces of precious cloth on their shoulders at important occasions..

¹³ Randriatsoa asked for a bottle of *toaka vazaha* (industrial rum) rather than *toaka gasy*.

Like Ramarcel, Randriatsoa had come from below our house through the rice fields, but unlike Ramarcel it was not out of discretion but only because it was the shortest way coming from Mahasoa. Randriatsoa wrapped himself in the new *lamba* and, like the first time, asked for a *zinga* with water. He told us to turn to the eastern side of the house and then started a *saotse* (or *saotra*, ‘thanking’) to the ancestors, after first having sprinkled water towards the four sides of the house. While the *saotse* at the beginning of the first interview was short, this one lasted for a few minutes. He explained to the ancestors that, unlike the *vazaha* who came in the past, I was not there to take the land.¹⁴ He told them that I had a Malagasy wife and child, and that if I was going to ask questions it was only for the purpose of my studies, not to steal their land. Randriatsoa ended his *saotse* to his ancestors by saying: “Give him the degree he is looking for” (*Mba omeo ny diploma tadiaviny*).

I recorded more than four hours of interview on that day, excluding the long break we took for lunch, during which Ramarcel, Randriatsoa, Anjasoa and I kept on talking off the record about various issues. It was a rich moment but for reasons of space I shall limit my account to the answers that Randriatsoa gave to the question that, encouraged by the presence of Ramarcel, we managed to ask: Why do people in Beparasy refuse to marry the Berosaiña? Why did the people of Ambalabe refuse to accept the marriage with Rasamuel?

Randriatsoa: The issue of marriage is this: the people of Ambalabe were soldiers and on our side there were soldiers too.¹⁵ Our grandfathers were retired soldiers [i.e. Rajustin and Raikalasora]. These people had a dispute and that’s why all this happened. But the origins... Each side has its own origins, but the reputation (*zo*) is the same, there is no superior and no inferior. Nobody was enslaved. The name that was attributed to us was *andevohova* not *andevo*, it’s something different from the *andevo* that existed a long time ago. But when people quarrelled in the past they would ‘curse’ each other (*mibodro*): “My descendants will not marry the descendants of So-and-so.” (...) So the reason is that there was a dispute because they were both soldiers, and their grandfather and our grandmother quarrelled with each other, and they said: “My descendants will not marry their descendants.” But there are no tabooed people meaning that people cannot marry their

¹⁴ These words had a strong resonance since the house we were in was on the land that belonged to one branch of the Berosaiña before Redison bought it off Raboba. During the interview, Randriatsoa kept talking about it as the Berosaiña's land. As I mentioned earlier, the Berosaiña thought that Raboba should never have sold this land, although the fact that he sold it to Redison and that Redison was a relative made Raboba’s mistake less difficult to accept.

¹⁵ Redison later confirmed me that his maternal grandfather had also fought with the French in Europe.

descendants, it's only that people quarrelled. The people who do not quarrel today can marry each other. But we are not of an ancestry that is inferior to these people and these people are not of an ancestry that is inferior to us. In the past they cursed (*mibodro*) each other.

D & A: So why do the people from Ambalabe say these things?

Randriatsoa: It's because their grandfather quarrelled with our grandmother, and they 'shot' each other. But we came here first. If we talk about slavery, then we are the ones who have enslaved other people. But we do not say that. People joined us here. We were not enslaved by others but we came here first. Ha! We are the ones who arrived first.

D & A: And in the past, before people arrived there was no history of... [Implied: slavery]?

Randriatsoa: There was no place where we could have seen each other since everyone has his own origins. A half comes from here, a half comes from there, where could we have seen each other?

D & A: It's like a rumour that people circulated... perhaps because you came from afar?

Randriatsoa: Nobody knew each other's land of origin because it's here that we came to know each other's land of origin and each of us explained where we came from: "We came from there", "we came from there," but it is here that we came together and we were the first. How could they have seen us? And if we talk about slavery it's us who should have enslaved people but we did not enslave people and nobody enslaved us. But the land of origin... No! Each has his own origins but people quarrelled, they quarrelled with us. And when people curse each other it's not that they curse themselves but they curse their grandchildren. That's our story, we quarrelled because we were soldiers. And the people who quarrel do not like each other at all. And "my descendants will not marry these, my descendants will not marry those." But we marry whoever we want to.

D & A: So it is your grandparents who cursed each other?

Randriatsoa: Yes. But it's not with all people but only with one [family] that we quarrelled. Did someone else give you strange words like that?

D & A: Nobody did, it came only from our observations of what was happening.

Randriatsoa: If people say that they came first here they lie. The *vazimba* came first, but there are no *vazimba* any more. And then the cattle herders came but there are no cattle herders any more. Then the migrants came. Among the migrants we were the first and we brought people here. The people who came here were not kinsmen, and they had different lands of origin. So I don't know the origin of So-and-so, because it's here that we learned to know each other. Then people make speeches: "We came from there, we came from there," and so do I: "We came from there." Nobody knows each other's land of origin...whether someone was in prison, or whether people were already there or whether...

Ramarcel: And when people came we gave them land...

Randriatsoa: It's to us that others asked for land: "where is the land that will feed us?" and [we said]: "that's here." "Where is the land that will feed us?" and [we said]: "that's there".

[Transcript 3.5]

The ambivalent status of the Berosaiña

Randriatsoa explained that the ‘founding’ ancestor of the Berosaiña in Beparasy was one of the four men that I mentioned at the end of Chapter 1, named Rakamisy, and that he was an *andevohova*. I had already noticed that during the funerals, when he stood up to give one of the closing speeches, Randriatsoa always stressed that he was ‘bringing the words’ of the *andevohova*, but I could not understand what it really meant. I had also heard Rakamisy being described as one of the *andevohova* in the various oral histories that I had collected among free descendants. This was puzzling. How could it be that Rakamisy had been an *andevohova*, with an important role in the settlement history of Beparasy, and that his descendants were today considered to be *slave* descendants? At that time of my fieldwork I did not understand fully that, in spite of what their name suggests,¹⁶ the *andevohova* were, in ancient Betsileo society, high status commoners (*olompotsy*) who held significant political power because they were the local representatives of the ruler (*mpanjaka*), mainly in charge of dividing land and solving conflicts.¹⁷ I wondered whether Randriatsoa might be correct and that some free descent people confused words that many do not understand any more. It was indeed the case that in casual conversations some people seemed to have only a vague knowledge of the structure of ancient Betsileo society and sometimes confused the word *andevohova* with *andevo* or *hovavao*.¹⁸ Redison, for example, clearly mistook *andevohova* for *andevo* in some of the discussions we had had. That he could make this mistake was not entirely surprising, since he had lived for a long time out of Beparasy and away from Betsileo country. But what made the hypothesis of confusion

¹⁶ *Andevohova* literally means ‘slave of the *hova*’, but in this case ‘slave’ should be understood in the sense of ‘servant’. The *andevohova* were *not* a kind of ‘royal’ slaves: they were high-status commoners (*olompotsy*). In the hierarchy of southern Betsileo polities they constituted the level immediately above the heads of local descent groups.

¹⁷ On *andevohova* see Rainihifina (1975: 95-99), Raheisoanjato (1984b: 225), Ralaikoa (1981: 34) and Solondraibe (1994: 30). According to Raheisoanjato, the *hova* was assisted by a number of *andevohova* he had chosen to maintain the contact between him and its subjects. “In general, he writes, an *andevohova* was a man of high influence. He administered people from one or two *foko* [descent groups], depending on the size of these families” (Raheisoanjato 1984b: 225, my translation). I was told by elders that there were twelve *andevohova* in the small polity of Ambatofotsy (including the four of Beparasy).

¹⁸ *Hovavao* is yet another term which is used to refer to slave descendants. It seems that it first designated the slaves liberated and who had become new (*vao*) commoners (*hova* – but in the Merina sense, recall that for the Betsileo *hova* means noble). Given the different meaning of *hova* for the Betsileo, my informants explained the term *hovavao* by saying that former slaves were called like this because they became rapidly wealthy and behaved as if they were the ‘new nobles’ (*hova vao*).

rather implausible was that the descendants of the other *andevohova* – the descendants of Rainibao, Raikalatsara and Rainidama (see Chapter 1) – were *not* considered to be ‘descendants of slaves’ (*taranak’andevo*).

It was some time after Randriatsoa’s interview that I eventually found an explanation for this puzzle. It came out during a conversation with Rakoto Jeannot, an elder from Ambalamanakava. Rakoto Jeannot and I had become good friends after I had helped him plant beans and potatoes in one of his fields. I had also participated in his rice harvests and attended the funerals of his sister Ramarianne which were held in the village of Zazafotsy, where she had married. At this occasion Rakoto Jeannot had invited me to sit next to him in the ‘men’s house’ (*tranon-dahy*, where male guests gather during funerals). After that event, he would always stop by our house on his way to his fields, his spade (*angady*) on his shoulder, to greet us and see whether I would like to work with him. An open and humorous person, he was one of the most respected *ray aman-dreny* (fathers and mothers, i.e. notables) of Beparasy. Redison had told me that Rakoto Jeannot had a blood bond (*vakirà*) with his stepfather Rasamuel so that, when he was working as a driver and transporting goods to the south of Madagascar, he would often stop his truck in Betroka to spend the night at Ramarcelline and Rasamuel’s house. Because of his job, he could understand some French and was happy to practice it with me, as much as I was to practice my Malagasy with him while we worked together in the field.

When I learned that Rakoto Jeannot had a *vakirà* with Rasamuel I thought he might be the right person to ask about the apparent contradiction that puzzled me so much. I asked him whether we could interview him a bit more formally than usual and record the conversation. He accepted and said that we could come to his house any day around 8am. The following week, we went to Ambalamanakava. We found Rakoto Jeannot and his wife in the northern room on the ground floor of the house. We offered him a ¼ litre bottle of rum and the interview started after he had drunk a bit and rubbed his forehead and the back of his neck with some drops of rum. I soon realized that my sensitive questions would have to wait for another occasion, since the room quickly filled up with adults and children who had heard that *papan’i Camille* and *maman’i Camille* were there. At the back of the room, a granddaughter of Rakoto

Jeannot was also lying on a bed, wrapped in thick blankets, with a newborn baby in her arms. We were told that she was staying there for the post-partum period called *mifana*, during which a woman must stay in bed with her baby, keep warm and eat as much as she can. After ten minutes of interview, Rakoto Jeannot said that we could not go on like this because he was being distracted all the time. He then proposed that we continue another day in the quieter setting of our house in Soatana. Since I had my questions about the Berosaiña in mind, I was glad that he took this decision and invited him to come to our place as soon as he could. He said he would come soon, probably the following week.

Two months later, the interview resumed where we had left it. I asked Rakoto what he knew of the settlement of Beparasy. When he mentioned Rakamisy, Randriatsoa's great grandfather, as one of the first men who came to Beparasy and one of those in charge of distributing the land to new comers, I interrupted him:

Denis: But here, you see, there is something that I don't understand. Why is Rakamisy always presented as an *andevohova* in local history when everyone says that the Berosaiña are *hovavao*?

Rakoto Jeannot: (laughing) I don't dare talking about that! It's very difficult.

Denis: I don't understand why Randriatsoa says during his speeches (*kabary*) that he is *andevohova*.

Rakoto Jeannot: Because he was close to the *hova* [i.e. here, the ruler].

Denis: Was Rakamisy a slave of the *andevohova*?

Rakoto Jeannot: No. He was *andevohova* for himself but not for the others.

Denis: Why only for himself? I don't understand.

Anjasoa: Why are people afraid of talking about that?

Rakoto Jeannot: People do not dare to talk clearly about that since they are afraid that the persons they mention will hear it. Then these persons will go to the 'state' (*fanjaka*) and will accuse people: "How come we are slaves?"

Denis: People know that Rakamisy was an *andevo* (slave) even though they say he was an *andevohova*?

Rakoto: Yes. That's why he gave land only to his relatives and not to everybody.

Denis: But did Rakamisy also arrived towards 1870 or later?

Rakoto Jeannot: Later.

Denis: After colonization?

Rakoto Jeannot: No, before.

Denis: Was he a slave before he arrived?

Rakoto Jeannot: (Laughing) Yes!

Denis: Who was he the slave of?

Rakoto Jeannot: (Laughing) It's difficult [to talk about that]. (Lowering his voice) To the east of Ambalavao, on the road going to Anjoma, if you go to Anjoma, on the side of Anjoma, that's where the lord (*andriana*) whom he served lived.

Denis: How is this place called?

Rakoto Jeannot: Vinany.

Denis: Why did slaves from Vinany come here?

Rakoto Jeannot: Because even though they lived at the *hova*'s, they could work for themselves and for the *hova*, and make money. And when they managed to get enough money they could buy themselves back. He had bought himself during the times of slavery. He was already free before 1896.

Denis: Why did he get the power of dividing land here [i.e. the power of an *andevohova*]? Who gave him this power?

Rakoto Jeannot: There were two men here [Rainibao and Raikalatsara]. Then there was an order of the *hova* in Ambatofotsy. "Here is Rakamisy, he will come with you, give him land so that he can give some to his family."

Denis: But how come he was good friends with Rainibao [i.e. one of the four men]?

Rakoto Jeannot: They were very good friends!

Denis: Did they make a blood bond (*vakirà*)?

Rakoto Jeannot: No, they didn't. They were friends.

Denis: But why did the *hova* (ruler) give him power if he was a former slave?

Rakoto Jeannot: Because he was free. He had bought himself back, so he did not count as a slave anymore.

Denis: He got very good land...

Rakoto Jeannot: Oh yes!

Denis: Because he was among the first to arrive in Beparasy?

Rakoto Jeannot: Yes, after Rainibao and Raikalatsara.

[Transcript 3.6]

At this moment I thought that I had finally discovered the reason for the Berosaiña's questionable reputation. They had one ancestor who had been a slave in the past and who could not, in spite of having bought his freedom, rid himself of the stigma of slave status. But it remained strange, nonetheless, that he had been accepted as an *andevohova* in such circumstances. In fact the story of the Berosaiña's reputation as slaves was somewhat different:

Denis: But then I wonder why people say that the Berosaiña, for example Raboba here but also the other Berosaiña, are *hovavao*...

Rakoto Jeannot: Wait! About Raboba... They were three brothers who arrived in Beparasy, but two of them had not managed to buy themselves back. Only Rakamisy had. And so in his case one should not say this [i.e. that he is *andevo*] but *olompotsy*. But he could not abandon his relatives, and he always did things for them. If someone died he was involved, because it was his family. So people said: “Ha, he still belongs to them, they are his friends.”

Denis: And so his two relatives were freed only at the time of colonization?

Rakoto Jeannot: Yes. These are the grandfathers (*bababe*) of Raboba and Randrianja Albert [i.e. Rainihosy and Randriatsoakely].

Denis: What I still don't really understand is why Randriatsoa introduces himself as an *andevohova*, for example when he speaks at funerals.

Rakoto Jeannot: If there is some conflict (*fanolana*) arising in the *fokonolo*, Randriatsoa, Randriatsimbazafy from Zazafotsy, Ralay from Ivondro and Rasabotsy Daniel from the west [i.e. from the other side of the Vatobe hill], they are all the children of *andevohova* and they are those who mediate conflicts. If people cannot solve the conflict by themselves they are called and they decide.

[Transcript 3.7]

In other words, the function of an *andevohova* was (and still is) passed from father to son, and today men who are good at giving speeches (*kabary*) are chosen among their descendants to continue to exert their limited power. Randriatsoa was one of them.

Denis: What exactly is the function of these *andevohova*? Do they do something else?

Rakoto Jeannot: They have no other function than helping out if people have disputes and cannot solve their problems. Then the *andevohova* are called. But it only concerns disputes about land (*ady tany*). They are called because people's estates are written in their books.

Denis: They still have these books?

Rakoto Jeannot: Yes, they still have these ancient books. The *andevohova* have them. In these books, there is for example “The land from there to there belongs to So-and-so.” But they give the *fañahia* [i.e. here, the descent group name] not the name of individuals. For example: “the land from there to there belongs to the Berosaiña” or “the land from there to there belongs to the Tsiataha.” This is said at large meetings with everyone. But they don't say “from there to there it belongs to Koto” or to a household but they say that 'in bulk' (*en gros*).¹⁹ (...) What we see now is that people want to have more land than they possess so they take someone who is in collusion with them and this person says “Yes, it's here the limit”. If they ask the *andevohova*, these will say the truth. Conflicts about land happen because, for example, there are two different *foko* [descent groups] and this mat is to one of them and the other mat is to the other. That is, when different people have different parts of the same land. And then the *foko* who had the smallest part thinks “We all

¹⁹ Later in the interview Rakoto Jeannot made a distinction between *ady tany*, the land disputes occurring between local descent groups and for which the *andevohova* are called, and *ady an-trano*, family disputes where the conciliation role belongs to the family elders. Disputes in villages involving different families are settled by the *ray aman-dreny to teny* of the village, usually the eldest members of these families.

received land, why don't we have the same surface?" The other *foko* does not agree and the dispute starts. Or the other *foko* had lots of children and therefore its land has become small and then it tries to cheat to make its share larger. (...) What Randriatsoa does at funerals is called *mamaly resaka* [i.e. answering to the speech given by the family of the deceased]. The persons who do the *mamaly resaka* are chosen by the *fokonolo*: "it's your turn to speak." That is, it can be someone else, sometimes it's him and sometimes it's someone else. But the true responsibility he cannot escape is at the *hova*'s. If there is a dead among the *hova*, he has to be totally involved.²⁰ They [the *andevohova*] make the arrangements. The *hova* do not decide their programme before all the *andevohova* have arrived. And the *andevohova* decide who does what. For example: "We have already given a speech there, now it's the turn of..." They have to discuss like that because there are always dead people. They sort things out together. And then maybe it's Randriatsoa's turn and he gives the speech, but if it's not his turn he does not speak.

[Transcript 3.8]

This discussion with Rakoto Jeannot was one of the tipping points of my fieldwork since it eventually gave me the key to the Berosaiña's ambivalent status in Beparasy. Without contradiction, free descendants viewed them as *both* slave descendants and descendants of an *andevohova*. Even though Rakamisy had been among the first to arrive in Beparasy at the end of the 19th century and had the function of an *andevohova*, he was also a former slave and some of his kinsmen joined him after being freed at the abolition of slavery. Yet nobody had been able – or, rather, willing – to explain this story to me until I heard it from Rakoto Jeannot.

Putting together Ramarcel's, Randriatsoa's and Rakoto Jeannot's versions of the story with other pieces of local history that I gathered elsewhere, a plausible history of the Berosaiña of Beparasy emerged. Rakamisy and his siblings were the slaves (*andevo*) of a noble (*hova*) living in Vinany. As explained by Rakoto Jeannot, Rakamisy managed to buy his freedom before the abolition of slavery in 1896. Since he had become a free man again he could take the lead in going to the uncultivated lands of the polity and he was asked by the *hova* of Ambatofotsy²¹ to administer, as *andevohova*, a part of the *hova*'s fief which was not yet – or only sparsely – inhabited

²⁰ Here Rakoto Jeannot means that if there is funeral among the *hova* of Vohimarina, who are the descendants of the former ruler of Ambatofotsy, Randriatsoa has to be present, since he is the descendant of one of the *andevohova* of the polity and has been designated by his family as their 'public voice'.

²¹ When I asked Randriatsoa why the *hova* of Ambatofotsy had chosen Rakamisy as *andevohova*, he said it was because Rakamisy was a good *mpikabary*. At that time, he explained, oratory skills were more important than writing skills to work for the *fanjaka* (government).

and cultivated.²² Later, when the Berosaiña were freed by the French *décret d'abolition de l'esclavage* of 1896, Rakamisy's siblings Randriatsoakely and Rainihosy²³ joined Rakamisy in Beparasy, possibly under the instructions of the *hova* of Ambatofotsy.²⁴

There remain, of course, important gaps in this story. The exact nature, for example, of the relationship between Rakamisy and Rainibao, the two *andevohova* who shared the responsibility for the territory to the east of the Vatobe hill, remains unclear to me. Randriatsoa told me that they had become kinsmen through a blood bond (*vakirà*) but Rakoto Jeannot denied it, saying that they were only good friends (*mpinamana*). Rafranklin, a free descendant from Ambalamanakava who is reputed for having a good knowledge of local history and customs, claimed that the reason Rakamisy and Rainibao became very close was that in the 1880s the Merina queen requested Betsileo soldiers for her military campaigns and Rainibao was asked to send one of his children. Since Rainibao was unhappy with the idea of sending his only son to war, Rakamisy proposed to replace him. He went on the expedition and came back alive. According to Rafranklin, it was because of this episode that Rakamisy and Rainibao became very close friends, and this explains why Rainibao and Rakamisy shared the administration of the land on the eastern side of Vatobe .

D & A: Is it the reason why they say they are *andevohova*, because there is something that Rainibao gave them, because he promised them land?

Rafranklin: Yes, he really gave them part of the power he had because he [Rakamisy] replaced his child.

D & A: Is it only on this that Randritsoa helped him [Rainibao], or did he also work for him?

²² Writing about the region of Manandriana (north of Fianarantsoa), Rajaonarimanana (1996: 25-27) provides an interesting account on how commoners could become *andevohova*. If a man desired to become an *andevohova* he had to see the ruler and offer him an ox. Then the ruler would indicate him a region where he could go to try to form a village. Provided he could find other migrants to follow him to this place, the man would then become the *andevohova* for these groups. His functions included taking care of the land (which belonged to the ruler), collecting taxes and solving the conflicts that could not be solved by heads of families).

²³ Ramose Martin did not believe that Rakamisy, Rainihosy and Randriatsoakely were 'true' siblings. He thought that they were probably cousins, i.e. siblings in the classificatory sense.

²⁴ As explained by my informants and the local historian in Ambalavao, the custom of asking the *hova* when one was in search of land to cultivate subsisted long after 1895. The (former) *hova* would then send these people to the *andevohova* of his (former) fief, who would give them land to cultivate like in the past.

Rafranklin: No, it's only that. He replaced his son for the military, for the government (*fanjaka*). He [Rainibao] had only one son. At that moment each one had to give his eldest son for the government.

D & A: Was it at the times of the *vazaha*?

Rafranklin: Yes, it was during colonization [he means the period of conflicts with France that led to colonization rather than the colonial period itself].

D & A: Did everything go well for Rakamisy there?

Rafranklin: Yes, he finished his service and he came back. And then Rainibao gave him power.

D & A: That's why Rakamisy's brothers came too?

Rafranklin: Randriatsoakely settled down here in Ivondro. His descendants now live to the east of the church.

D & A: That's why his 'companions' came, since he [Rakamisy] had power?

Rafranklin: For example, you come alone here. You settle down. Then your crops and your settling down are going well. Then people hear the story: "Ha, I got a good land, I'm very well here." And the others follow. Rainihosy was also his brother.

D & A: Where did they come from, Rakamisy, Rainihosy...?

Rafranklin: They all came from the north, they first went to Ambalamasina, close to Vohimarina, and then they came here. Rapitsarandro was their mother but she did not have a husband. Thus they did not have a father. And this woman was someone very rich, she had a lot.

D & A: Is it because of what Rakamisy received that she was rich or was she rich before?

Rafranklin: She was already rich. She had left, things were over, there was no slavery any more. But these people are *hovavao*. That is, there were brigands (*dahalo*) who attacked and when they attacked they took the zebus and they also took the people who were not fast enough [to flee]. And the descendants of the people that the *dahalo* took away – they came back afterwards.

D & A: They were rich then?

Rafranklin: They were rich because they helped the ruler (*mpanjaka*). They were the slaves of the rulers, and when colonization was over the French announced that there were no slaves any more, and so they left.

[Transcript 3.9]

Rafranklin's account is interesting for a number of reasons, but especially for what it says about the wealth of the Berosaiña before their arrival in Beparasy and the mention of Rakamisy and his siblings' mother. It seems indeed right that on occasions the slaves of nobles were richer than the poor *olomposty* who were peasants. Slaves could work in addition to the labour they owed to their owners, and they could accumulate wealth.

There are, however, enough discrepancies between Randriatsoa's account and the stories told by free descendants to provoke suspicions about the versions of both sides. My impression is that while free descendants acknowledge the importance of Rakamisy as a 'founding figure' of Beparasy, they tend to downplay it by stressing that he had come *after* the other *andevohova*, that he was *andevohova* only for his kinsmen (see Rakoto Jeannot's quote above) and that he had obtained his land and power because he had offered Rainibao a kind of sacrifice.²⁵ By contrast, during his interview Randriatsoa stressed that Rakamisy had arrived first (together with Rainibao and Raikalatsara) and had allocated land to many people (not only to his kinsmen), that the four *andevohova* had equal status and that the Berosaiña today have the same status as the other inhabitants of Beparasy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the history of the Berosaiña as I came to discover it through conversations with Ramarcel, Randriatsoa, Rakoto Jeannot, Rafranklin and a few others. The picture that has emerged suggests a highly ambivalent status: on the one hand, the Berosaiña's ancestral figure, Rakamisy, was one of the four first settlers and *andevohova* of the region, and therefore the Berosaiña group enjoys some prestige and respect from that history; on the other hand, the Berosaiña are considered as people with slave ancestry, and for this reason Beparasy villagers do not want to marry them, as shown by the case of Redison's mother Ramarcelline and Rasamuel.

²⁵ The story of Rakamisy's 'sacrifice' to replace Rainibao's son, as told by Rafranklin, evokes an unequal relationship between a superior and a subordinate or, perhaps more pertinently here, between an elder and a junior. It seems that this story might be true. The Merina did recruit southern Betsileo soldiers in 1882, 1888 and 1891 as *fanompoana* (corvée labour; royal service). Ralaikoa (1981: 15) gives the following figures: 3,000 soldiers in 1882 (1,000 from Arindrano), 4,081 in 1888 (1,081 from Arindrano) and 600 (162 from Arindrano) in 1891. Some of these soldiers, Ralaikoa explains, were sent to Merina garrisons in the west and others participated in campaigns launched by the Merina in the south, notably in Toalañaro (Fort dauphin) and Toliara. Ralaikoa (ibid.: 15-16) also stresses that the southern Betsileo were very reluctant and that many of these soldiers fled. The royal instructions, moreover, specified that Betsileo "princes and chiefs" should show an example and send one of their sons (Raveloson 1956: 108). Thus it seems the case that Rainibao was required, as one of the *andevohova* of Beparasy, to send one of his sons and it seems plausible that Rakamisy replaced Rainibao's unique son. If true, this story would mean that at that time Rakamisy was not yet an *andevohova*. It would also indicate a particular complicity between Rainibao and Rakamisy in disobeying Merina orders, since these made clear that the free Betsileo concerned by the *fanompoana* could not be replaced by someone else (ibid.).

The Berosaiña, however, denied that they were slave descendants. They attributed the ‘strong words’ against them and the ban on marrying them to people’s jealousy and to disputes between former soldiers in the French army. This jealousy, they explained, started because they were the first to arrive in Beparasy and were able to obtain the nicest and largest lands.

It was not easy to find out whether the Berosaiña were really people with a slave ancestry, but these conversations and the piecemeal information I gathered throughout fieldwork led me to think that they were. Their origin in Vinany before their move to Ambalamasina and then to Beparasy, evoked by Rakoto Jeannot, was confirmed to me by Randriatsoa and Ramarcel themselves. Vinany, also called Vinanimalaza, was not just any other village in southern Betsileo: it was the ‘capital’ founded by the Betsileo ruler Rarivoarindrano when Radama I tried to unify the Arindrano after his conquests. Being such a centre of power in the early 19th century, it is certain that a large number of slaves lived there. I know from sources in Ambalavao that the descendants of these slaves inhabit villages around the now abandoned ‘capital’. One of them is precisely Mahasoabe, the village mentioned by the Bersoiña as their place of origins.

I started this chapter with my questions to Redison about his mother’s marriage with a Berosaiña, most notably: Why was it not possible for Ramarcelline to marry Rasamuel? In the next chapter I start addressing this issue.

CHAPTER 4: MARRIAGE

In August 2009, I went to Ivory to attend a *vadipaisa*. I had walked for a day through the mountains from Beparasy with a small group of teenagers and with Naina, who had to go to the *vadipaisa* because he had been asked to be the evening DJ for the three-day event. Andry, the boy fostered by Redison in Soatana, and three Berosaiña young men carried the Catholic community's audio material on their shoulders, as well as Redison's generator. Redison sent Naina because Vohangy had invited him and all the inhabitants of Soatana to the ceremony. Redison himself could not go since he was busy in Ambalavao, but it was important that representatives of his family would attend the event in his name. Andry and Naina, as well as Redison's eldest son and I, were representing the household.

Vohangy was taking part in the event because her mother, Rasamuel's previous wife, was from Ivory and had been buried in one of the two family tombs which were going to be opened in order to transfer corpses into the newly built tomb. Even though Vohangy had contributed to the construction of the new tomb, it turned out that her mother's bones could not be moved. The construction of the new tomb had been decided after a bitter dispute within the local descent group, meaning that not everyone wanted their dead to be transported. Such was the opinion of the relatives of the dead who were lying in the same bed as Vohangy's mother; since her remains could not be separated from those of the others, her transfer was deemed impossible.

The building of the new tomb had been decided by Vohangy's cousin Norbert, the eldest son of the richest member of the local family. Norbert's father had acquired his wealth as a cattle trader at the zebu market of Ambalavao and at the time of his death he reportedly owned more than 100 zebus. His son paid for the largest part of the expenses involved in the construction of the tomb and the organization of the *vadipaisa*. Five heads of his cattle were slaughtered for the occasion and he also

completely refurbished the paternal house, placing new mats in each room and painting the pillars, walls and balconies with bright colours.

The *vadipaisa* in Ivory was a large gathering of several hundred people that lasted for three days. Upon arrival, guests coming from remote places were allocated to the houses in the village where they would sleep and take their meals. In addition, a 'green house' (*trano maintso*)¹ had been built where meals were served to the local guests, who would not spend the night in the village. Because of my special status we were hosted in a room on the ground floor of Norbert's nicely decorated and centrally located house.

My young companion Andry and his friends spent most of their time at the *vadipaisa* in search of a girlfriend. Large gatherings of this kind provide opportunities for youth to find an occasional sexual partner who might, someday, if the relation is maintained, become a spouse. After much effort and a few unsuccessful attempts, all the boys had found a girl willing to have a relationship with them in exchange for a small sum of money.² Andry's find was a girl named Nivo, who was from the village of Ivory itself. As I observed this affair taking off, I noted to myself that the relationship between Andry and Nivo was very unlikely to lead to a marriage. This was because all people living in Ivory were the descendants of one couple of ancestors who were known in the area as *hovavao*. Ivory was therefore a village inhabited by slave descendants only.³ This meant that both Vohangy's mother and Andry's girlfriend Nivo were of slave descent. Even if they wanted to pursue their relationship, Andry's free descent relatives in Beparasy would never accept his marriage with Nivo.

¹ A 'green house' is a temporary shelter for the guests. It is built a few days before the event and is usually made of freshly cut wood with green leaves and sisal.

² It seems to be a traditional practice that during funerary events women ask for money when they have affairs with men. In a more ordinary context they also expect something from their lover but it does not have to be money and often consists in small gift of food, clothing, and so on.

³ With the possible exception of some spouses who might be of free descent. The existence of 'slave' villages in the southern highlands has been reported by Kottak, who estimated as varying between 5 and 15 percent the proportion of people called 'slaves' (*andevo*) in the southern Betsileo population (1980: 105). Kottak's survey data seemed to indicate that slave descent villages were not very common and that usually slave descent people lived in mixed villages, as is the case in Beparasy today. Nonetheless, the reliability of these data is questionable given the sensitivity of the issue. I was often told that in the region of Ambalavao a number of hamlets and villages are exclusively populated by slave descent groups.

This chapter deals with marriage practices in Beparasy, since it is necessary to have a good idea of what a customary marriage consists of in order to take real measure of the avoidance of marriage with slave descendants and to understand the options open to free descent parents who wish to prevent a ‘mixed marriage’ for their children.⁴

Customary marriage in Beparasy

The first steps of a customary marriage can start as soon as teenagers become sexually active.⁵ Young men and women in Beparasy enjoy relative sexual freedom. When girls reach puberty, their parents offer them the option of moving to a separate room in the house where they will be able to host their lovers (*sipa*) for the night. The room is usually not large and often there is no furniture other than mats laid on the ground, but in some families there might be one or two small beds consisting of *raphia* mattresses placed on wood sticks or roughly assembled planks. The room can be shared by other sexually active female relatives (often sisters), but it is forbidden for male relatives, even for the girls' young brothers, to sleep there. The room is always located on the ground floor, whereas the first floor is occupied by the parents.⁶

The location of the girls' room on the ground floor makes it easily accessible to their lovers, who must come after dusk and leave before dawn so they are not seen by the girls' father, brothers or other male relatives. The furtive nature of these nocturnal visits does not mean that parents are unaware that their daughters see lovers at night. On the contrary, the girls are given the option of a separate room precisely to allow them to see their lovers without having to leave the house at night, which is considered a dangerous thing to do. It also prevents them from being forced to engage in more serious relationships, which would be the case if they were to introduce their lovers to their parents. For these affairs, it is always the boy who comes to the girl's place, and never the reverse. Yet sexual encounters are not limited to nocturnal visits

⁴ By ‘mixed marriage’ I mean here the union of a free descendant with a slave descendant.

⁵ My description in this chapter of the various stages of the marriage process is based on people's accounts rather than on direct observation. My account thus provides some kind of ‘ideal type’ of a marriage process.

⁶ The most common house in Beparasy has four rooms, two on the ground floor and two on the first floor. The kitchen is on the first floor (in the southern room), so that the fumes of the open fire can go out through the thatched roof. The kitchen's fire also provides heat for the parents' room, a much appreciated feature during the dry and cold season (from May to September).

or the confined space of the girls' rooms. They also happen during the day, often in the late afternoon, on a discreet river bank or in some nearby undergrowth. Market days offer particularly good opportunities to meet up with lovers, as do all sorts of large gatherings or ceremonies, including funerals.

If a boy is accidentally seen by a male relative of the girl, or if he wants to be able to come to see his girlfriend without hiding himself, he has to give the 'closing of the eyes' (*tapi-maso*), which is the first formal relationship of exchange between a potential husband and his potential in-laws. The boy pays a small sum of money, which will be divided between the males of the girl's family, including her brothers. The boy, however, does not give the money directly to the father – this is taboo (*fady*) – but to the girl, who will then pass it on to her mother, who in turn will talk to the father and give him the money. The father will then explain to the male family members who reside locally that the girl is officially 'seeing' someone, and he will give each of them a share of the money. When they receive the *tapi-maso*, if they do not know the boy, parents will ask the girl about his identity, questioning her about his village and his family. At this stage, however, there is no formal relationship between the two families and parents rarely take such unions too seriously, since they are very unstable and frequently break up.⁷

From this moment onwards, the boy can come at any time of the day to see his girlfriend in her village, since they are accepted as a couple by the girl's family. Half-jokingly, people already start using the term *vady* (spouse) alongside *sipa* (boyfriend/girlfriend). The boy may further show respect to his girlfriend's parents in

⁷ Parents in Beparasy seemed very pragmatic on such matters. For example, I observed unmarried girls having affairs with married itinerant workers. Provided they paid the *tapi-maso*, the men were accepted as the girls' boyfriends (*sipa*) in the family, where they lived for a while before finding another girl and moving on to her village. It did not seem to matter much that the men were already married elsewhere, that they were not seriously interested in marrying the girls or that they would soon leave the village to look for wage labour (*mitady karama*) in other places. During their stay – which lasted sometimes for months – these men brought resources into the household (money, labour force, specialized skills, i.e. carpentry or masonry, and food). Apart from these benefits, a possible explanation for this general tolerance and for why parents give young girls a separate room to receive their boyfriends is that it is relatively difficult for girls to get married and therefore parents maximize the girls' chance to meet potential marriage partners. The trade-off, however, is that many girls get pregnant before being married, making the prospect of finding a spouse even more difficult, because these children are often (but not always) perceived as a burden by men looking for a wife.

various ways, for example by bringing small gifts and taking part in the household's activities, especially in agricultural work. He does not reside permanently in his girlfriend's village, however, because he has to fulfil various duties in his own village. The young couple enjoy a relationship which is, to a certain extent, already marriage-like, and indeed people refer to the situation of a young girl living by herself and having a lover by saying that the girl *manao kitokantrano*, an expression which comes from *mitokantrano* ('having one's hearth') and can be translated as 'she pretends to have a hearth'.

The next step takes place when the boy informs his girlfriend's parents that members of his family will come to do the 'removal of the taboo' (*ala-fady*). On a previously agreed date, a small party called the *mpangala-vady* (literally 'spouse thieves') consisting of a few men from the boy's local descent group (sometimes accompanied by women)⁸ arrive at the girl's parents' house. They explain to the head of the family that the boy and the girl like each other, and that they would like the girl to come to live with the boy in their village. They then give a sum of money⁹ to the girl's father, who accepts it and gives his blessing.¹⁰ A meal is served, usually chicken¹¹ and rice, and local rum (*galeoaka*) is offered. If the night is about to fall or the journey back takes a long time, the guests are invited to stay for the night. When they return to the boy's village, they take the girl with them. She brings only a small amount of luggage: people in her village and family say, euphemistically, that she has gone "for a walk" (*mitsangatsanga*). At the boy's village, if possible the young couple will occupy a room in the parents' house, usually a room on the ground floor. If there is no room available at the parents', the couple will temporarily dwell in a relative's house.¹² The girl lives with her partner's patrilineal kin and works with the women for a period that

⁸ Sending male representatives is seen as a sign of respect for the other family. Women can accompany but normally they do not intervene in the discussion.

⁹ Ar 10,000 was enough in 2008-10. With this sum one could buy two or three chickens.

¹⁰ Like for the *tapi-maso*, the *ala-fady* money should be divided and distributed among the girl's male relatives living together locally.

¹¹ Meat is highly valued but not easily available in Beparasy, where the ordinary diet is vegetarian, sometimes supplemented by small quantities of fish, crayfish, sweet water crabs, insects or larvae. Beef and pork meat are consumed only at special occasions, such as funerals (beef) or national independence day (pork). It is therefore common practice to kill a chicken to honour special guests or the ancestors in domestic rituals.

¹² It sometimes happens that at the time of his marriage the boy has already built a small house for himself with the help of his relatives. It is often the case when a man marries rather late, but rare if the boy is still young. Men usually start building their own house when they are in their twenties.

can range from a few weeks to several months. This time is clearly thought of by everyone as being a kind of probation, to see whether she can get along well and work with people. The girl who is in this situation is called *fairindahy*.

After some time, the boy's father calls his son and tells him that the girl has been among them for long enough. In case there have been serious issues during her stay and the parents are concerned that the girl will not make a good wife, they may tell him that she should be brought back to her village. If, on the contrary, the parents and the family members in the village are satisfied with her, the father says that the *tandra vady* ('spouse's gift', often simply called *tandra*)¹³ should now be given to her family. Father and son discuss the possibility of paying for the *tandra*. Ideally, it should be the father who offers it, but in poor families it is common for the sons to work and save enough to pay for it, although it will always be presented as coming from their father.

The girl is then sent off to her family to announce that the boy's parents will come to do the 'tying of kinship' (*fehim-poñena*)¹⁴ on a date they have chosen with the help of a traditional astrologer (*mpanandro*) that will bring good luck to the couple. The *fehim-poñena* is a meeting at the girl's parents' house where the value of the *tandra* will be discussed and part of it will be given, and where the union of the girl with the boy will be blessed by her family. The girl's relatives prepare for the event. Parents buy chickens and rum. Women start weaving mats and collecting items for the girl's trousseau. Male heads of the local descent group's families are invited to attend the meeting. They will bring a 'blessing' (*tsodrano*) for the boy's parents consisting of 'white rice' (*fotsim-bary*, i.e. hulled rice) and money.

¹³ In the past southern Betsileo commoners gave a *tandra hova* ('hova's gift') each time they killed an ox (i.e. they would give the ox's hindquarters to the *hova*), for example at funerals, or when they harvested rice (i.e. they would give a share of the harvest). These 'gifts' testified their allegiance to the local rulers. The *tandra vady* must be understood in this context, since through this gift the family of the boy shows its willingness to strengthen the new kinship link with the girl's family.

¹⁴ *Fehim-poñena* is made of the words *fehy* and *foñena*. *Fehy* means 'tying' and Michel-Andrianarahinjaka translates *foñenana* as the "ensemble of relations born from from the fact of cohabitation and sociability; kinship and its obligations" (Michel-Andrianarahinjaka 1986: 978, my translation). Thus it seems that *fehim-poneña* could also be glossed by 'alliance'.

The representatives of the boy's family who attend the *fehim-poñena* meeting consist once again of a few men, sometimes accompanied by women. This time, the party is called the *mpanandra-vady* ('spouse givers'). The boy's parents are usually not among the *mpanandra-vady*, and nor is the boy. The boy will wait for his wife in his village. He prepares the room where they will live and is expected to cook something to welcome his wife. When the *mpanandra-vady* arrive at the girl's village, they do not enter the house straight away but instead stay on the threshold. The girl's relatives insist that they should go further into the house to find a better place, but they refuse. One of the male *mpanandra-vady* gives a speech explaining that they come in the name of the *ray aman-dreny* of the boy's local descent group and that they are there to ask permission for the girl to become the boy's wife. Then he puts a small amount of money (usually Ar 100 or 200) into his hat and puts it down on the floor, asking for the permission to open the door and enter the house, which is a metaphorical way of asking for the opening of the discussion on the value of the *tandra vady*. The money given in the hat is called 'the opening of the door' (*voha-varavara*). The girl's relatives respond: "But you already entered. Please come in, sit in the room." The *mpanandra-vady* come in a bit further but still stay close to the door, as if they were ready to leave. They then explain that the boy and the girl would like to live together and the girl's family replies to explain how they value their daughter. The discussion on the value of the *tandra* starts. At this point, I was told that there are two different proceedings depending on whether the *tandra* is given in cattle or cash. Traditionally, the *tandra* should be given in cattle, but nowadays it has become more common for people to only bring money.¹⁵

If the *mpanandra-vady* have come with a zebu, people go out of the house to examine the animal and to judge whether it is of good value. The bench-mark for the discussion of the *tandra* is the value of a *sakan'aombe* (also called *sakan-dahiny*), i.e. an ox. When I was in Beparasy the price for such an ox at the zebu market of Ambalavao ranged between Ar 400,000 and 500,000. In most cases, one zebu is

¹⁵ The reason for this change has to do with the general impoverishment of peasants in the region of Beparasy over the last decades. Zebras have become too expensive and unaffordable for many families. By using a *tandra* in cash, people not only have the opportunity of paying in instalments but also to bargain the value of the *tandra* to levels that are much lower than that of the traditional zebu (see next footnote). It is still much more prestigious however to offer cattle.

enough, but sometimes the girl's relatives would ask for more.¹⁶ Wealthy families sometimes ask for a *tandra* higher than average for their daughters. Some families may ask for more because the girl is young, strong and particularly good-looking. The distance between the villages of the boy and the girl can also be used as an argument. The longer the distance, people say, the higher the *tandra*, since the girl will see her family less often. If the ox offered by the *mpanandra-vady* is deemed enough, men will then discuss the value of the *rambon'aombe* ('tail of the ox'), which is a supplementary sum to be given in cash, typically ranging between Ar 20,000 to 60,000. The amount of *rambon'aombe* is bargained over and, like the *tapi-maso* and the *ala-fady*, it is money that will be divided among the male relatives of the girl. The zebu of the *tandra* itself is usually for the parents, but sometimes it is passed on by the parents to the head of the local descent group as a sign of respect.

If the *tandra* consists of money, the *mpanandra-vady* first proposes a low price. The other party responds by detailing the qualities of the girl and asks for a higher price. The bargaining lasts for a while and the discussion progressively arrives at a price that both parties find acceptable, usually close to the market value of a *sakan'aombe*. The final price often has a few '6' in it (for example Ar 466,000) because this number is believed to bring good luck.¹⁷ I was told that the reason the *mpanandra-vady* stay close to the door and refuse to enter the room is that they want to show their readiness to step out and leave, either if the *tandra* asked for by the girl's family remains too high or if the family is not ready to let the girl go. This rarely happens nowadays, but according to my informants it was more frequent in the past.¹⁸ If the *tandra* is in cash, it is now common to give it in instalments. This usually means that the families agree that the *tandra* will be given 'when possible' but that a substantial part (for example

¹⁶ In which cases the remaining zebus will be brought to the girl's family at a later stage. Sometimes, however, the *tandra* can also be significantly less than a zebu. Some parents of Beপরাস্য received a *tandra* as low as Ar 50,000 and two chickens. The girls in question were particularly difficult to marry because they already had several children. If the family is poor, these girls and their children are a burden for their parents who are happy to let them go to another village with a man, even if the man can only give a 'symbolic' *tandra*.

¹⁷ According to Dubois, the importance of the number 6 in similar circumstances is that the word for 6, *enina*, means 'which is provided with', 'which receives its share' (Dubois 1938: 177).

¹⁸ It is one of the reasons why the boy's parents are not present during the discussions. Were they to be part of the *mpanandra-vady*, it would be much more difficult to step out and leave without being rude and losing face; this is much easier to do if the *mpanandra-vady* party has only a limited autonomy in deciding the amount of money which can be paid (the limits being set by the absent father of the boy).

¼) is given immediately. After an agreement on the *tandra* is reached, the *mpanandra-vady* are again invited to enter the room to sit at a better place. This time they accept and sit on a chair or mat on the eastern side of the house (up to this point, they have stayed on the western side, where the door is located in all southern Betsileo houses).

Rum is then passed around. The women of the girl's family who were busy cooking the meal are now told to prepare the girl because she will leave the house. During the talks, the girl waits in another room of the house, getting dressed and doing her hair with the help of other women. A meal of chicken and rice is served to the guests and the men of the family, while the women and the girl eat with the children in the kitchen. The 'bottom of the chicken' (*vodi-akoho*, i.e. the rump), which is normally given to the eldest male of the family, is given instead to the man who talked in the name of the *mpanandra-vady*, even if he is still very young and there are elders in the room. This is a sign of respect towards the 'parents' (*ray aman-dreny*, i.e. here all the parents in the classificatory sense) of the boy, who have now to be honoured as *hava* (relatives). When the meal is over, the head of the family calls the girl. She appears in her nicest clothes¹⁹ with her hair newly plaited. People bring her luggage, which consists of her personal belongings but also of various household items bought for the occasion or given by relatives: suitcases, mats, baskets, clothes, cooking pots, buckets, spoons, a mattress, a bed and so on. The girl's family makes the inventory, calling out each item and writing down a list on a small notebook or a sheet of paper. This list is for the boy and is given to his representatives. The couple must keep it, because these items belong to the girl and if the couple separate she will come back to her village and take these items with her.

¹⁹ In the past she would have worn a *lamba landy*, one of the precious silk clothes for which the region was famous. They are still made in some villages around Ambalavao, but are now unaffordable for most families.

The head of the girl's family proceeds to the *tsodrano* (blessing). Everyone stands up and turns his body and face towards the eastern wall of the room.²⁰ The girl stands between the wall and the group of people. The head of the family, holding a *zinga* with water, asks for god's and the ancestors' blessings, and then blesses the girl. He sprinkles her and the audience six times with water from the cup. Everyone congratulates the girl and her relatives give a small *tsodrano* (rice and money) for the boy's parents as well as some money (Ar 5,000 – 6,000) called *angady* (spade) for the boy, so that he can buy a new spade to work efficiently for the new household – in the past, a new spade was given in kind. After the *tsodrano*, the two parties talk about the ancestral *fady* (taboos) on each side and stress that they will have to be respected in the new hearth, especially those that concern food. The *fady* of the girl's family are also written down on the notebook or the paper used for the inventory to be given to the boy.

The *mpanandra-vady* now set off with the girl and her luggage.²¹ In the past, it was customary for a young female relative to accompany the girl; she would live for a while with the couple to help them with the running of their household. This is less common today. On her way to her new village, the girl is not allowed to greet people. When they arrive at the village, the *mpanandra-vady* are welcomed and the new couple are congratulated. The leader of the party reports the outcome of the meeting to the boy's parents and to the head of the family. The girl presents her parents-in-law with a particular kind of basket with a lid and two plates in it, which is called *lihilo* or *vahin-dovia* ('guest's plate') and was traditionally used by the head of family, as

²⁰ The house in Madagascar is always oriented according to astrology and its divisions are very meaningful. The northeastern corner is the place of the ancestors/dead and it is always there that a deceased should be placed. The eastern side of the house is the side of authority (it is where the male elders would sit) and the side of the ancestors.

²¹ When walking in the southern Betsileo countryside one sometimes meets such a group of people transporting personal items with a girl nicely dressed up among them. This is referred to as people *mampody vady vao* ('bringing the spouse home again'). Richardson (1885) translates the expression *mampody vady* by "to marry a wife, but not to make it a time of feasting or rejoicing; to bring home again, or to try to do so, a wife who has been separated from her husband." Three expressions (*tandra vady*, *fehim-poñena* and *mampody vady vao*) were used almost interchangeably by my informants to refer to the central stages in the process of a customary marriage. These expressions stress different aspects: *tandra vady* refers to the gift which is discussed and offered (either completely or in part) at that moment; *fehim-poñena* refers to the 'tying together' of the two local descent groups and therefore of the two 'residences' (*foñena*) which takes place when the two families agree on the union; *mampody vady vao* refers to the journey of the *mpanandra-vady* bringing the girl back to the boy's village with all her personal items.

well as two *fitoeram-bositra* (small weaved poufs on which important guests are often invited to sit when they enter a house). The girl's relatives' *tsodrano* (the blessings, which consist here of gifts of rice and money) are also passed to the boy's parents, who thank the girl. The head of the family asks *zanahary* (god) and the ancestors to bless the new couple, and gives his own blessing.²²

After the *fehim-poñena*, the couple should customarily live for some time in the boy's parents' house, even if a separate house has already been built (ideally, the boy should build the new house in the period between the *ala-fady* and the *fehim-poñena*). After a month or two, the couple ask the permission of the boy's father to set up their own hearth (*tokantrano*). If the father agrees, this is announced to the boy's whole family, whose members are invited to eat the morning meal (*sakafo maraina*) the day after the couple have moved to their house or to a separate room where they will have their own hearth. This morning meal must be very simple and it usually consists of rice broth (*vary sosoa*), or cassava (*kaza*), or sweet potatoes (*bageda*), sometimes with honey (*tantely*). All members of the local descent group as well as friends and neighbours are invited to eat a small portion of the meal, after which they congratulate the couple, wishing them "let your house be hot" (*mafanà trano*).²³ They then depart to leave room for other visitors. With the *sakafo maraina* completed, it becomes obvious to many that a new hearth now exists in the village.

In spite of the wishes for the couple's stability, customary marriages in Beparasy are unstable and separations happen frequently.²⁴ A woman will leave the village of her husband's family either because her husband repudiates her or because, for various

²² It should be noted that during the meetings the parents of the couple are not expected to meet each other. Indeed, nowadays the process of a customary marriage can take place without the parents knowing each other, until they meet at a particular occasion, for example when the girl's parents pay a visit to their daughter, or when the girl's or the boy's parents are invited to a ceremony in their counterparts' village. In the past, such a situation was not uncommon but quite rare in Beparasy, because most marriages were initiated and partly arranged by parents, who in consequence knew the family of the potential candidates they selected for their children.

²³ According to Michel-Andrianarahinjaka, this expression is a wish for the stability of the couple since it means that the hearth is kept warm by the fidelity of the spouses (Michel-Andrianarahinjaka 1986: 979).

²⁴ Similar observations about the instability of customary marriages have been made in other Malagasy societies (e.g. Sharp 1993: 107; Astuti 1995b: 65-70)

reasons, she wants to go back to her village.²⁵ When a separation is about to happen or has already happened, husband and wife should talk separately to the man's parents, who will then attempt to find a route to reconciliation. If their son offended his spouse, they will go to see the woman's parents to ask them and their daughter for forgiveness. Conversely, if a fault is on the woman's side, her parents will go to see the husband's parents and ask them and their son to accept her back. In case the attempt at reconciliation is unsuccessful, the *tandra* is usually not given back if the girl has given birth to at least one child; even so, the girl has the right to take back the items she brought into the household.²⁶ I was told that when the union has lasted only for a very short time after the *fehim-poñena* and no child has been born, the girl's family feels ashamed and, out of fear of being accused of dishonesty, send representatives to the boy's village to return the zebu or the money they had received as *tandra*. In such instances it is possible that the boy's family will not take the *tandra* back, out of honour and pride. In any case, it is considered very shameful if the boy's relatives go to the girl's village to reclaim the *tandra* after a separation, even if the couple has remained childless.

Separations also occur when women go back to their parental village to give birth and to spend their *mifana*, the post-partum period that normally lasts a few months. I was told that traditionally it is not considered an offence for a man to sleep with another woman while his wife is away for the post-partum period. But when the *mifana* is over, a man should go to his wife's village to take her back with the newly born child. Yet, it is not uncommon for the husband to fail to return, either because he had found another partner in the meantime or for a range of other reasons. The woman has therefore no other option than to stay in her village with her kinsmen, since it is clear to everyone that her husband does not want her anymore. Such a sad story happened twice to Soa, Redison's 24-year old cousin from Ambalabe. Each time she had been married according to *fomba* and had lived in her husband's village until she fell

²⁵ Although I witnessed several cases of separation in Beparasy, I did not observe a single case of a woman leaving her husband's village to go to live with another man without first going back to her village. Both men and women often have extramarital affairs, but in case a woman wants to abandon her husband and live with another man, she should first go back to her village, and the new man should ask for her in the customary way.

²⁶ I will explain below what happens to children in case of separation.

pregnant. She then went back to Ambalabe to give birth and to spend the *mifana*. Time went by but her husband never came to bring her and the baby back to his village.²⁷ During our stay in Beপরাস্য, Soa and her parents were struggling to raise the two small children, receiving no support from the children's fathers. We heard that Soa had various affairs with married men, but was never asked to marry again during our time in the community.

If a separating couple has children and the *tandra* has been given, it is considered that the man's family can keep them. Very young children go back with their mother to her village, but when they are older the father can take them back to his village. If the *tandra* had been agreed upon but only the first instalment has been paid, the father will keep rights over the child providing he gives the remainder of the *tandra*.²⁸

Customary marriage as process

Marriage in Beপরাস্য is best understood as a process punctuated by a few events where two local descent groups strengthen their relationships as *hava* (relatives) and where a couple receives blessings from elders of both sides.²⁹ Bloch viewed this kind of marriage as a 'double filiation' and stressed that it is not a transfer of a woman towards the man's descent group (Bloch 1971: 194; 1978; see also Dubois 1938: 897).³⁰ Because of the processual nature of such a marriage, for the ethnographer it is not easy to judge whether someone is married or not, since the word *manambady*,

²⁷ Soa's parents are poor and they thus accepted a very low *tandra* in both cases. This arguably made it easier for the men to decide to abandon Soa. However, since they have both paid the *tandra* in full, they will have the right to claim their respective children when these are older.

²⁸ The rights over children here mean essentially the right to keep them in the local descent's group village, where they will contribute to the economic activities from an early age (herding cattle, fetching water or firewood, pounding rice, etc.). The rights that are acquired after the payment of the *tandra* also involve the right, for the father's group, to bury the children in their ancestral tomb whenever they die, although it does not have to be so because, as we will see in a subsequent chapter, burial place is always negotiated between families. However the delayed gift of the *tandra* precludes the negotiation since in such case the father's group is not in good position to claim the corpse of a dead child.

²⁹ The processual character of southern Betsileo marriage has been stressed by Kottak (1980: 200-210).

³⁰ For this reason, following Bloch (1971: 194) I avoided the terms 'bridewealth' or 'bride price' to translate *tandra vady* because, even though it is sometimes presented as such, the *tandra* does not represent a compensation for the loss of a woman in the local descent group – a married woman retains all her rights and her affiliations with the groups of her parents. The *tandra gift* should be seen, rather, as evidence of the willingness of the boy's family to start 'bilateral' relationships with the girl's family.

usually translated as ‘to marry’, is a verb that literally means ‘to have a spouse’. In practice, it is used in Beparasy to distinguish between people who share a household with a partner and those who do not. Accordingly, Raboba and Ravao, for example, are said to be ‘spouses’ (*vady*), because they live together even though, as we shall see in the next chapter, they have not been through the process of customary marriage. To ask whether a couple has been through the process, one would have to ask, “Have you already performed the customs?” (*Efa nanao ny fomba nareo?*) or something along these lines, but it would be a rude question to ask.³¹ The absence of a clear linguistic distinction between people living together and people who have been through the customs must be understood as a consequence of the processual nature of traditional marriage. There is no sudden, clear-cut change of status after any one particular stage, and none of the meetings where the *tandra* is discussed or given should be seen as a discrete wedding ceremony.³² For the southern Betsileo, one is said to ‘have a spouse’ (*manambady*) as soon as one lives permanently with a partner and has a ‘hearth in the house’ (*tokantrano*). But to establish an alliance between families, with all its implications in terms of rights and duties, one has to go through several ancestral customs (*fomban-draza*).

Another point to note is that customary marriage procedures in Beparasy have undergone significant changes over the last decades. One of the most important of these changes concerns the choice of the spouse. I was told that before the 1960s or 70s most marriage discussions were initiated and arranged by parents, who selected potential partners for their children, even though the youngsters also had their say in the final choice. Nowadays, although there remain cases where parents play a major

³¹ According to Bloch, to enquire whether someone is married among the Merina one should ask, “Is the *vody-ondry* already gone?” (*Efa lasa ve ny vody-ondry?*) (Bloch 1971: 182) and for the Zafimaniry “Have you already got a hearth-in-a-house?” (*Efa nahazo tokantrano ve?*) (Bloch 1993: 120). The Zafimaniry case seems closer to the southern Betsileo case than the Merina, since to be considered married a man and a woman must only share a hearth.

³² I will therefore avoid using the terms ‘groom’ and ‘bride’ since these terms seem to imply the idea of a discrete wedding ceremony with a speech act (of the kind “you are now husband and wife”) which would mean a sudden change of status. Among the Merina and some Betsileo, the giving of the *vodiondry* (i.e. a rough equivalent of the southern Betsileo *tandra*) is often marked by a small feast and this step is often said to be the ceremony that renders a customary marriage effective (Westernised urban Malagasy tend now to consider this event as an equivalent of Western betrothal, before contracting a civil and/or religious marriage). The need to find a discrete moment of change of status in Malagasy marriage came from the influence of Western ideas about marriage and from state organization (Kottak 1980: 223).

role in selecting their children's partners, the marriage process is most often initiated by the children themselves, who express their wish to their parents. In the above account I described what my informants referred to as traditional practices, although in various ways these 'ancestral customs' (*fomban-draza*) might now differ significantly from what they were only a few decades ago. My account also slightly differs from Dubois' and Rainihifina's (Dubois 1938: 395-410; Rainihifina 1975: 28-38). This is not too surprising, since Dubois' and Rainihifina's inquiries were conducted more than half a century ago. Moreover, their work attempted to describe in a unified way customs which were collected at different places in the Betsileo region. Even if they are not very different, these customs in my experience show significant local variation, so speaking of 'Betsileo marriage' can be somewhat misleading.

The entire process of customary marriage among the southern Betsileo can be viewed as a gradual process by which the information that one has found a partner to live with is diffused among one's network of kin; the relationship between local descent groups is built up through the exchange of gifts; and the couple receives the blessing of the members of their respective local descent groups. It is thus necessary to analyse southern Betsileo traditional marriage as an alliance between descent groups rather than as an agreement between two individuals, two sets of parents or two extended families. The parents' authority in the process is always subordinated to that of the senior relatives of their local descent groups who, although not normally involved in directly choosing the spouse or in deciding the amount of the *tandra* that should be offered or accepted, will nonetheless have their say if they disapprove of the marriage. Their say is of course backed up by the fact that they can refuse to bless the couple.

Civil and Christian marriages

Against the background of traditional marriages, the respective places of civil and Christian marriages in Beparasy can be seen as further steps in the overall process of marriage, even if they are much less important and even unnecessary steps in local society. My impression was that many people were not interested in them and married according to custom only. They viewed civil marriage in particular as something

superfluous.³³ Members of the various religious communities of Beপরাস্য were encouraged to marry in church, but often this occurred fairly late in life, and long after they had taken a spouse according to the customs. In any case, before being allowed to marry in church, by law they needed to marry at the *mairie*, i.e. to contract a civil marriage. In Beপরাস্য, I sometimes met old couples who had married in church only very recently, even though they had been married according to custom in their twenties and had been Christians for most of their adult lives.

It seems that religious marriages in Beপরাস্য are often carried out in order to gain prestige. Local big men told me how many zebus they had given for their wife, adding proudly that they also married at the *mairie* and in church, as if these two steps added further value to their marriage because they had meant more expenses. People refer to both kinds of wedding ceremony with the word *mariazy* (from the French *mariage*), a word that they do not use for traditional marriage. Since these two ceremonies usually involve a feast with relatives, most people cannot afford a *mariazy* without making substantial savings. The Catholic father in charge of the area of Beপরাস্য was very active in promoting church marriages, and when I visited him he boasted that since he arrived in Beপরাস্য the region had reached one of the highest rates of marriage in all of the Catholic districts around Ambalavo. However important these religious marriages may be for Christians, even for them the primacy of traditional marriages cannot be underestimated. In Beপরাস্য I did not hear of cases where people married at the *mairie* and in church without having first married traditionally.

The only exception I knew of was the marriage between Ramarcelline and Rasamuel. They were married at the *mairie* and the church, but never went through the customs because of the refusal of Ramarcelline's kinsmen. The difference between these forms of marriage and a customary marriage is clear: two individuals can contract a civil and a religious marriage without needing the blessing of their parents or of the senior members of their descent group. This is not possible in the case of a customary marriage, because as I have explained it is above all an alliance between local descent groups. It is the parents and the group's senior members who decide whether or not

³³ This is partly because traditional marriages are recognized by the Malagasy state, which calls them since the colonial era *mariages coutumiers*.

they will give their blessing to a couple and, by doing so, engage in kinship relations with the other group.

Unilateral and bilateral marriages

Because of the processual character of customary marriage, it is difficult to judge whether unions have been blessed by both sides. Yet getting this kind of information is very important in order to discuss ‘mixed unions’ between free and slave descendants because it is crucial to discriminate between those mixed marriages that may have been accepted by the descent groups involved and those that have not. For the sake of clarity, I shall call ‘bilateral marriage’ a union which has been blessed by elders *on both sides*, whereas I shall call ‘unilateral marriage’ a marriage which has only been blessed by elders *on only one side*. Unless distinctions such as these are used, talking about ‘mixed marriages’ of free descendants with slave descendants can be very confusing since nothing indicates whether the local descent groups have given their agreement to the union and, thereby, to the relation of alliance between the two groups.³⁴

The cases of the two ‘mixed couples’ I have mentioned so far will illustrate the difficulties. First, everyone considered Raboba and Ravao as married (*manambady*). Nobody ever told me that Raboba and Ravao were not ‘appropriately’ married, even though some people clearly disapproved Ravao’s decision to take Raboba as a spouse (*vady*). Many of the people I asked were not even able to tell me with certainty whether or not Raboba and Ravao had gone through the customs or not, although they said that they had probably not. The truth is that they had not and thus Ravao’s kinsmen did not behave towards Raboba and the Berosaiña group as their relatives. This ‘non-behaviour’ is not obvious though since Ravao’s kinsmen live together with a Berosaiña branch in the village of Mahasoa and cooperate with them on a daily basis. But it becomes clear in situations where a particular gathering takes place among Ravao’s kinsmen: Raboba is never invited to attend. The opposite, however, is not true: I could see that Ravao was always invited to the Berosaiña’s gatherings and,

³⁴ The discussion of ‘mixed marriages’ by Evers (2002: 54-71) suffers from this ambiguity, since it is never clearly explained whether the marriages with migrants of alleged slave descent were ‘blessed’ by the elders from the free descent side.

for example, she attended the funeral of Randriatsoa's sister's son I mentioned in the previous chapter. I would therefore say that Raboba and Ravao were 'unilaterally married' because Raboba's family treated Ravao as a relative whereas Ravao's family did not treat Raboba in the same way. The same can be said about Ramarcelline and Rasamuel: they were unilaterally married, because the Berosaiña behaved towards Ramarcelline as a relative whereas her kinsmen did not do the same for Rasamuel. As a general point, it is important to note that, as far as I could see, slave descendants always accepted their members' spouse (*vady*) as a relative even if the couple had not been through the customs because the free descent side had not accepted the union.

A mixed couple can thus be viewed as 'appropriately' married by some and not by others, since such a couple will receive blessings from the senior members on the slave descent side but not from those on the free descent side. Whereas for the slave descent group the couple is considered to be 'in the process' of customary marriage, it is not really considered as such from the point of view of the free descent family, and they do not think they are bound by the customary duties towards relatives. In the case of mixed couples, free and slave descent families may have (and do in fact have) opposite views on how they should act towards each other. The fact that no (or little) exchange 'according to customs' has taken place does not prevent the slave descent elders from giving their blessings to the couple or even from continuing try and engage in formal kin relations with the free descent family through invitations, the sending of gifts and so on. Members of the free descent group, on the contrary, systematically refuse these attempts at 'normalizing' the situation. In other words, even though there is no 'tying of residence' (*fehim-poñena*), i.e. no binding alliance between the two groups, the slave descent group recognizes the marriage of the couple and tries to act in consequence in spite of the reluctance of the other side, whereas the free descent group does not. An important point needs to be made here: it would be a mistake, in my opinion, to say that mixed couples are not 'appropriately' or 'really' married, since that would mean privileging free descendants' perspective at the expense of that of the slave descendants, for no good reason.

Blood bond as wedding

Although free descendants in Beparasy avoided marriages with the Berosaiña they could nonetheless make kinship links with them through the blood bond (*vakirà*) ritual. People explicitly compared this ritual to civil or religious weddings, stressing the sort of reciprocal vows of fidelity which are uttered by the two spouses in these circumstances (by contrast, it is interesting to note that such formal vows or promises are absent from the process of customary marriage). Ramartine explained to us the kind of relationship that is engendered by the *vakirà* and its importance in making durable relations with the Berosaiña. This discussion followed a conversation with Ramartine's father where they had both told us that it was "really forbidden" (*tena tsa azo atao mihitsy*) for free descendants to marry slave descendants (here called *hovavao*):

D & A: But is it possible to do a *vakirà* with the *hovavao*?

Ramartine: Yes, it's really possible. It's that way that we can have *relations* [she used the French word] with them. We can receive them.

D & A: Then they are like family?

Ramartine: Yes, they are. Ha! This thing is really a strong link, for example one does not lose sight of each other. 'Doing' *vakirà* is like 'doing' a wedding (*ohatran'ny manao mariazy ny manao vakirà*).

D & A: What has to be done to become *vakirà*?

Ramartine: If, for example, *maman'i* Camille and I we want to become *vakirà* we go to the old man (*kaky*) and we have really the blood 'broken' (*vaky*), we really throw with a razor blade here [she indicates a place on her upper chest] and we let the blood flow. Then we add ginger to it and you eat my blood and I eat your blood. After that we talk about the things we must do and those we cannot do, then we agree like in a wedding (*mariazy*): for better or for worse, whatever happens. Then you cannot get rid of it. 'Doing' a *vakirà* is really like 'doing' a wedding.

[Transcript 5.1]

A committed Catholic, Ramartine referred to the practice of doing *vakirà* on the Bible (in church) if one does not want to do the "more serious" traditional custom. Although this is an option in Beparasy, at least for Catholics, I was told that most *vakirà* are still contracted in the traditional manner, by drinking each other's blood.

To understand the situation of the Berosaiña within the community of Beparasy it is very important to take into account the role of the *vakirà* ritual, used as it is by people of free descent to make alliances with slave descendants, despite the avoidance of customary marriages. As Ramartine and her father stressed, in the absence of possibilities of marriage with the Berosaiña it is essentially through *vakirà* that free descendants can have very strong kinship relations with them. Indeed, many free descent people had *vakirà* with the Berosaiña, and so did their forebears in previous generations. Randriatsoa, for example, had a *vakirà* with five free descendants of Beparasy. When I interviewed him, I asked questions about his *vakirà* and he explained that these relations were even more important than ‘true’ family relations. There is little doubt that *vakirà* relations greatly facilitated the integration of the Berosaiña into the community of Beparasy even though, as we shall see in the next chapter, these relations were sometimes proposed to the Berosaiña with ulterior motives.

CHAPTER 5: MARRIAGE AVOIDANCE AND UNILATERAL MARRIAGES

One of the problems I encountered when I tried to investigate the avoidance of marriage with slave descendants in Beপরাস্য was the difficulty of assessing its reality. Was it really the case that free descendants refrained from marrying the Berosaiña? Did they really avoid slave descendants in general? Or was the stated avoidance only wishful thinking? I had listened many times to free descendants saying that people in Beপরাস্য do not marry the Berosaiña because of their slave ancestry and that ‘mixed’ marriages with slave descendants were rare (*vitsivitsy*). At the same time, I knew of the mixed unilateral marriages of Ramarcelline and Rasamuel as well as that of Ravao and Raboba. I therefore wondered whether breaches of the rule might get dissimulated because of the embarrassment they caused for free descent families. Had there been any bilateral marriage in Beপরাস্য? Was it possible that a free descent group had, in the past, contracted an alliance through marriage with the Berosaiña but that people were hiding such an alliance – at least to me?

From the numerous conversations I had on this topic it became evident that, in general, free descent families among the southern Betsileo probably never engage in bilateral marriages with slave descendants if they are fully aware of their slave ancestry. If a free descent family suspects that the potential partner of their child might be of slave descent, it is very unlikely that the meetings and exchanges between the two families will reach the *fehim-poñena* and the *tandra vady* stages of the marriage process. Sometimes, however, the families have already been through the previous stages of the process, such as the *tapi-maso* and even the *ala-fady*, before learning that their child’s potential partner is of slave descent. This can occur because in the initial stages of the process a free descent family may still have to carry out an intensive investigation on the ‘origins’ of the potential spouse or because, if they have

started the investigation, they have not been careful enough.¹ However, during the latter stages of the process the members of the local descent groups become progressively more involved, increasing the likelihood that a senior member of the group will raise suspicions and oppose such an alliance.

The limited number of mixed bilateral marriages I was told about during my fieldwork appeared to be marriages where the free descent family were not aware of the slave origins of the other side until a very advanced stage in the process.² In such instances, the marriages went ahead because it became too late to back away – for example, because the *tandra* had already been given or the couple already had children. I never heard of a single case where a free local descent group had accepted, in full awareness from the start, a slave descent spouse for one of their members.³

Somewhat naïvely, I had assumed that from time to time impoverished families of free descent would probably accept the marriage of one of their daughters with a wealthy slave descendant who owned good lands and many zebus, and was ready to give a high *tandra*. This, I was repeatedly told in Beparasy, never happens, because it would be deeply wrong (*tena diso*) and too shameful. Several times I heard that people would rather stay poor than allow their children to marry slave descendants.

After I became good friends with Ramarcel at the *vadipaisa* in Ivory, I eventually had the opportunity to enquire about the Berosaiña's genealogies and marriages. Ramarcel kindly accepted to help me to map out genealogies and to give me the names of the villages where his kinsmen had found their spouses. I thus have a list of villages located in regions around Beparasy and Ambalavao, as well as much more remote places in Betsileo country. When I compare these data with similar genealogical and marriage data I had obtained from Ramose Martin and other free descendants, it is

¹ I will have more to say about these pre-marital investigations in the next chapter.

² None of these stories happened in Beparasy and therefore I will not mention them here, because I was not able to further investigate on them. These stories concerned people's relatives who lived far away and thus, unlike the stories that concerned people in Beparasy, they were easily reported to me.

³ Evers reports a case where a free descent family has actively promoted the marriage of one of its members with a slave descent girl from their village because the family was desperate as the man could not find a spouse in the village (Evers 2002a: 61-62). It remains unclear, however, why this man had to find a spouse *necessarily* in his village, since most southern Bestileo marry outside their village.

clear that the Berosaiña do not marry close by, whereas many free descendants marry very locally. The majority of free descendants have married within Beparasy or its immediate surroundings, although it is now becoming increasingly difficult to find a suitable spouse due to the local taboo on marrying close kin, a point to which I will come back later in this chapter.

Table 1 shows the number of marriages I recorded in the genealogies of the Berosaiña, the number of marriages for which I obtained the village of origin of the spouse, and a breakdown of these figures between the number of spouses found in the five *fokontany* of Beparasy and the number of spouses found outside Beparasy.⁴

	Marriages for which I have data out of the total number of marriages recorded on genealogical diagrams (shown in brackets)	Number of spouses from Beparasy	Number of spouses from OUTSIDE Beparasy
Descendants of Rakamisy	37 (49)	2	35
Descendants of Rainihosy	51 (81)	2	49
Descendants of Randriatsoakely	09 (11)	1	8
Total	97 (141)	5	92

Table 1: Spouses of the Berosaiña

Among the five spouses (*vady*) of the Berosaiña who are from Beparasy, one was confirmed to have come from a slave descent family dwelling in the village of Andrarezo. This family came to Beparasy recently from Ambalamasina, where some

⁴ Ramarcel was unable to provide any kind of information about the marriages of Randriatsoakely's children because the sons had moved to Ivohibe a long time ago (see Chapter 2) and the daughters had married away, meaning that he hardly knew them. For this branch of the Berosaiña I only found information about the marriages of Randrianja Albert's children and grandchildren.

relatives of the Berosaiña of Beparasy have their residence. It is notorious in the region that a relatively large number of slave descendants live in Ambalamasina, since in pre-abolition times there was a *hova* and a number of this *hova*'s slaves remained on this land after the abolition.

Another spouse from Beparasy is the wife of Rakoto, a descendant of Rainihosy. According to Ramarcel she is from the village of Tanambao in Beparasy. I had already heard that there was one house inhabited by a slave descent family in Tanambao, but I was never able to learn where they were from or whether they had any connection other than through this marriage with the Berosaiña. My understanding of Ramarcel's explanations is that Rakoto's wife comes from that slave descent household. Of the three remaining spouses of the Berosaiña who are from Beparasy two are the free descent women I have already mentioned: Raboba's wife Ravao and Redison's mother Ramarcelline. I will introduce the third case of mixed union with a Berosaiña later in this chapter.

When drawing the genealogies and writing down the spouses' villages of origin, I refrained from asking Ramarcel whether the customs (*fomba*) had been carried out for each marriage because I was aware that it was a very sensitive issue. The loose meaning of the words *vady* and *manambady* appeared to be convenient for Ramarcel in this case since he did not have to explain the unilaterality of the possible mixed marriages that were in this list, i.e. the fact that some of these marriages had not been accepted and blessed by the free descent families.

If the spouses found by the Berosaiña in Beparasy were slave descendants (apart from the three cases to which I will come back to later on), what about the spouses found outside Beparasy? My free descent informants tended to assume that "the Berosaiña marry other Berosaiña," as I was once told. That is, free descendants firmly believe that the Berosaiña, on the whole, marry other slave descendants.

Trying to find out whether this was really the case was no easy task, but one method I used went as follows. I picked up a few names of villages where the Berosaiña had found spouses according to the genealogies provided by Ramarcel and asked

Monsieur le maire in Ambalavao to do his best to gather some information about whether these villages were inhabited by slave descendants or not.⁵ This was an easy thing to do, he boasted, since he was well-connected in the region because of his political activities and his kinship network. I had given him, among others, the name of Ivory, the small slave descent village mentioned at the beginning of the preceding chapter. *Monsieur le maire* came back to me a few weeks later, with the information that Ivory was entirely inhabited by slave descendants, whereas the other villages I had enquired about were ‘mixed’. *Monsieur le maire* had obtained the information about Ivory from his wife’s cousin, who had relatives in a village nearby, and he said that it had been further confirmed by some of his acquaintances in Ambalavao. I did similar triangulations on various occasions and with different people. In these other checks I found that they were usually consistent with the information obtained from Ramarcel: the villages where the Berosaiña found their spouses were always villages with slave descendants. Of course, this does not prove that the Berosaiña’s spouses are all slave descendants, but my regular triangulations, though admittedly patchy and of limited value, were consistent with the free descendants’ view that the Berosaiña’s spouses are, for the most part, other slave descendants.

There are certainly many exceptions to this general trend and I would suspect that some of the male Berosaiña of Beparasy have managed to bring free descent women from outside who agreed to marry them unilaterally. For example, Ramose Martin told me that he had heard that Randriatsoa’s wife was of free descent. Randriatsoa had already been married four times before he found this new wife a few years ago. As he once explained to us during one of our visits to his house in Mahasoa, Randriatsoa had separated from his former wives because they had not given him children, which he finally achieved with his fifth wife. Ramose Martin, whose own wife came from the same region, had heard stories about her when visiting his in-laws: the woman was of a free descent family and had decided to follow Randriatsoa and set up a hearth with him in Mahasoa. Apparently this was yet another case of unilateral marriage, but given the distance between Beparasy and the woman’s region of origin

⁵ I did not explain why I wanted to find out about this.

(about 25 kilometers through the mountains) it was not possible for me to investigate this case.

Learning who not to marry

Although it is difficult to have a precise idea of how this process takes place, it seems that free descent children in Beparasy learn at an early age that they are ‘clean people’ (*olo madio*) and that the Berosaiña are not. My friend and primary school teacher Ramose Martin told me that very young children already knew that their Berosaiña contemporaries were ‘unclean people’ (*olo tsa madio*) and that they should not marry them. Yet children seem not to be told why the Berosaiña are ‘unclean’ until they are much older, probably because parents are afraid that young children will tell their Berosaiña friends, who may in turn tell their families.⁶

But in learning who not to marry, children have to identify many more people than just the Berosaiña. Redison told me how, when he lived in Beparasy as a very young boy, he was told that they should not look for girls (*mitady ampela*) in particular places. This is because, with the exception of the Berosaiña, the handful of families who arrived in Beparasy at the end of the 19th century have intermarried during several generations and, as a consequence, there are many houses or entire hamlets where children should not look for a spouse because they are too closely related.

I was told that, ideally, people should not marry if they have common ancestors in their genealogy. People are aware, however, that such a rule is difficult to observe in practice and that in the end “Tsiataha marry Tsiataha,”⁷ as the local saying goes. The degree of closeness that was acceptable varied across my informants, but all agreed that second cousins should not marry, as this would mean breaching a serious taboo (*fady*). Third cousins were also regarded by many of my informants as too closely related, but I was told that families could make this marriage acceptable by the ritual killing of an ox on both sides in order to ‘cut’ the kinship links existing between the two individuals, thus allowing them to marry. My informants stressed that different

⁶ Another possible explanation for this ‘non-teaching’ is that parents think that young children are not yet mature to learn about this issue. The Vezo, for example, say that children cannot understand what happens after death before a certain age and therefore do not try to teach them (Astuti 2011).

⁷ Tsiataha is the name of a descent group that is widespread in the region.

families often have different views on the distance necessary for an acceptable marriage. Some of my friends in Beparasy had married a third cousin and were always a bit embarrassed when someone mentioned this fact in jest.⁸

I had the impression, however, that most parents turned a blind eye to their children's affairs, including those with prohibited partners such as their second cousins. Similarly, free descent parents also seemed to turn a blind eye to affairs that their teenagers or adult relatives had with the Berosaiña. This applies not only to single people, since in Beparasy everyone was aware that married free descendants, both men and women, sometimes had extramarital affairs with the Berosaiña. This suggests that what matters most is parental or descent group control over the process of marriage rather than over sexuality per se. Indeed, the allocation of an individual room to teenage girls mentioned in the preceding chapter shows that parental vigilance directed towards their children's sexuality is voluntarily limited. The only exception pertains to relations between siblings: it is strictly taboo (*fady*) for teenage boys to sleep in the same room as their sisters.

Parents of marriageable children too have to be careful when they explain to their offspring why they cannot marry a Berosaiña, out of fear that they will repeat the explanation to their boy- or girlfriend. This is what happened to *Monsieur le maire's* paternal grandfather, who founded the small village of Mahasoa on the *Route Nationale 7* between Ankaramena and Ihosy. When he learnt that one of his daughters was engaged in a long-term affair with a slave descendant and wanted to marry him, he explained to her in direct terms why she could not go on with such a relationship: "This boy is a 'slave' (*andevo*)." The girl told her boyfriend, who in turn told his parents and soon enough the local descent group asked for public reparation for the insult. *Monsieur le maire's* grandfather had to pay the customary fine of one zebu, which was publicly slaughtered to wash out the insult with its blood. The meat was distributed to the two families involved in the dispute and to the *fokonolo*. The

⁸ In Beparasy I did not hear of *lova tsy mifindra* marriages, i.e. marriages between cousins to keep the land within the group (see Bloch 1971: 175).

possibility of being fined in this way was commonly mentioned to me in Beparasy to explain people's unwillingness to talk about slavery and slave descendants.⁹

In the preceding chapter I have described the process of customary marriage, which people in Beparasy have to go through in order to produce an alliance – the ‘tying of residences’ (*fehim-poñena*) – between two local descent groups. I have stressed that, given its nature, this process cannot take place without the consent of one's parents and family elders. However, given the relative sexual freedom that youth enjoy in Beparasy, one might expect that, from time to time, some long-lasting affairs will take place between free and slave descendants and that these could potentially disrupt the ban on mixed marriages that free descendants seek to maintain. I came across a few such cases in contemporary Beparasy, but I was told about similar stories that had occurred in other regions or in the past. The three cases I will now discuss were the only instances of mixed unilateral marriages that I could observe more-or-less directly during my fieldwork. Although limited in number and unevenly documented, a close analysis of these cases offers some insights into the consequences faced by those who choose to ignore the free descendants' ban on mixed marriages and engage in socially disapproved relations.

As I have already emphasized, these issues were extremely sensitive. I was able to talk almost openly about the prohibited character of the marriage with only one of the free descendants involved in these stories. The closest I came to a conversation about the decision to go against the family's will was during an interview of Ramarcelline (Redison's mother), whose case I will now discuss.

Ramarcelline and Rasamuel

Ramarcelline currently lives in Ambalavao, but she is from the village of Ambalabe, which was founded in Beparasy by her patrilineal grandfather about a century ago. As a young woman, Ramarcelline was bilaterally married to a man named Rafredy in Miarinarivo and gave birth to a son, Hery. The marriage did not go well and soon after the birth she came back to her village with her baby. A few years later, she married

⁹ Rakoto Jeannot explained that it was the reason why people in Beparasy did not dare to talk about the slave origins of the Berosaiña (see Chapter 3).

Rapetera from Mahazony. She moved to her husband's village and later gave birth to a second child, Redison. Once again, the marriage did not last for long and Ramarcelline came back to her village in Beparasy, where she raised her two sons, until Hery's father took his son back to his village. Ramarcelline remained single until she met Rasamuel, a Berosaiña from the village of Mahasoia. They got along well with one other and Rasamuel wanted to marry Ramarcelline. His request was met with a strong refusal on the part of Ramarcelline's parents and the elders in Ambalabe. Facing a stubborn opposition from Ramarcelline's descent group, Rasamuel and Ramarcelline decided to leave Beparasy to seek fortune elsewhere.

They worked as petty traders, first in the south of Madagascar (Ambovombe and Betroka) and then in Amabalavao, for more than twenty-five years. During all this time, Ramarcelline had few contacts with her patrilineal kinsmen in Beparasy. A devout Catholic, she married Rasamuel at the church in Ambovombe, having previously contracted a civil marriage. In their old days, the couple decided to go back to Beparasy. They settled in Rasamuel's paternal house among the Berosaiña of Mahasoia and lived there until the death of Rasamuel. When they returned to Beparasy, Ramarcelline's family in Ambalabe had to a certain extent buried the hatchet and accepted the status quo. It seems that the unilateral marriage between Ramarcelline and Rasamuel was by now considered more 'tolerable' by Ramarcelline's kinsmen mainly because, by the time they returned, Rasamuel and Ramarcelline were elders and thus deserved respect from the young generation of Ramarcelline's kinsmen (many of the groups' elders who had opposed the marriage, including Ramarcelline's parents, having passed away). Moreover, the couple had not had children together. Rasamuel, like Ramarcelline, had children from a previous marriage and together they had raised some of their respective offspring.¹⁰

One day, before going to Amabalavao, I went to see Redison to ask his permission to interview his mother. I also enquired whether he thought we could ask her questions about the difficulties she faced when she chose to marry Rasamuel. Redison gave me his permission and once again, as with Ramarcel, we set up an afternoon meeting in the empty dining room of a Chinese-run hotel in Amabalavo to make sure that

¹⁰ This is a very important point to note for reasons that will appear more clearly in the next chapter.

Ramarcelline could talk freely about difficult issues. While she had been very talkative during the first part of the interview and had told us stories about her childhood in Beparasy or her love of the place, when we broach the subject of her marriage it became obvious that it was very difficult for her to answer our questions. Feeling a bit uncomfortable ourselves, we did not prolong her uneasiness and returned to more benign questions after just a few minutes. I quote this short moment extensively because, despite their brevity, Ramarcelline's responses are extremely interesting:

D & A: It's possible, *maman'i* Redison, that we're now going to ask you some weird questions, but it is for a study that we're going to ask them. Is it a problem for you?

Ramarcelline: No, go on.

D & A: We have already talked to Redison and asked him some questions. He told us that the reason why his mother's family didn't like her husband was because he did not have the same ancestry. That is, you didn't have the same ancestry as he and they weren't happy that you married him.

Ramarcelline: Yes, may be it was so.

D & A: What did they mean by "not the same ancestry"? Apologies *maman'i* Redison but this is for a study.

Ramarcelline: Because they didn't know his roots (*reo moa zany tsy nahalala ny fotorany*). Because they were strangers (*vahiny*) when they arrived and they didn't know his descent group (*firazana*).

D & A: Whose descent group?

Ramarcelline: The descent group of my husband.

D & A: Were they strangers (*vahiny*) when they arrived in Beparasy?

Ramarcelline: They were in the East and they came up here. It's his grandmother who came here in the past.

D & A: Your husband's grandmother?

Ramarcelline: Yes. She lived here, to the east [of Ambalavao], in Mahasoabe [name of the village after the fortified village of Vinany had been abandoned] and she went there [to Beparasy] to marry. In the past, there were *mpandia tany*.

D & A: *Mpandia tany*?

Ramarcelline: That is, people who divide land (*mpizara tany*). Their grandmother was someone who divides land.

D & A: Before that they were only in Mahasoabe or were they in other places too?

Ramarcelline: No, they were only there. And they [Ramarcelline's family] didn't know his origin [Rasamuel's origin]. And they made out as if he had not the same ancestry. But much later we did the history (*natao ny tantara*) and he wasn't [of slave descent].

D & A: But what did they mean when they said that he was not of the same ancestry?

Ramarcelline: In the past, there was something which was not very different from the helpers (*mpanampy*) today. [They said] there were helpers like that.

D & A: What they meant was, like, in the days of the kings, there were nobles, slaves and the rest...?

Ramarcelline: Yes, like that. But we did the history after we arrived in Betroka and everything was clear (*mazava*).

D & A: Where were they from? Apologies for asking these questions, it's for a study.

Ramarcelline: According to what they said of the history, they came from the east and went to the west.

D & A: From where in the east?

Ramarcelline: From the east of the Tanala, maybe, I don't know. I don't know the place where they were. They went to the west and arrived in Betroka. And in Betroka there is a place where they are, where their relatives are. We arrived there, we 'did the history' and we saw their origin.

D & A: Didn't he [Rasamuel] cry and say, "So these people are like that," because these were strong words from your family? Didn't it make him sad?

Ramarcelline: It didn't make him sad since he knew his origins. When we arrived in Betroka where his family were, we did the history and it was clear, the history was the same [the same history as that told by Rasamuel to Ramarcelline]. It was as if we [i.e. Ramarcelline, Anjasoa and Denis] are relatives (*mpihava*) but we don't know the place of origin (*toera fiavina*) [of each other]. Then I come to you and you don't know my ancestry (*firazanako*) and then you suspect (*mihahihay*) "Is she not a slave (*andevo*)?" because you don't know my origin (*niandohako*). That's why this story started but when we went to the place where the family is from (*am-potorany*) we did the history and he wasn't... he was clear (*mazava*)... clean (*madio*).

D & A: Is that the grandmother of your husband who arrived first in Beparasy?

Ramarcelline: Yes, his grandmother. The mother of his grandmother.

D & A: And do you know the name of this grandmother?

Ramarcelline: Rapitsarandro gave birth to Ravolamana. Ravolamana gave birth to my husband's mother.

D & A: When she arrived there [in Beparasy], did she come alone or did she come with someone else?

Ramarcelline: She came there and got married. She married the lord who measures land (*nanambady ny andriana mpandia tany*).

D & A: Was it his grandmother who came from Betroka?

Ramarcelline: His grandmother came from Betroka when her ruler friend (*ny mpanjaka namany*) brought her here [to Vinany, now called Mahasoabe, close to Ambalavao]. She was brought to Ambalavao [i.e. Vinany] because the ruler there had a relationship (*nisy fihavana*) with the ruler here. The ruler in Betroka and the one here had established a relation like family (*nifampihavana*) and he brought her here. And when she arrived here she married another ruler, a ruler who divides land.

D & A: And do you know the name of her husband? The name of the husband of your husband's grandmother?

Ramarcelline: No, this I don't know, I don't remember.

[Transcript 5.1]

Ramarcelline attributes the reason for her family's opposition to her marriage with Rasamuel to the slave origins of her husband's great grandmother. The great grandmother she refers to, Rapitsarandro, was the mother of Rakamisy who, as explained in Chapter 3, is remembered as one of the founders in Beparasy. My understanding of the story is that the elders in Ramarcelline's family in Ambalabe opposed her marriage with Rasamuel not by questioning the status of Rakamisy – who had been a slave before being freed and becoming one of the *andevohova* in Beparasy – but by questioning the status of his mother, Rapitsarandro who, as explained by Rafranklin in Chapter 3, had been a slave in Vinany (now called Mahasoabe) until she joined Rakamisy with some of her 'children' after the abolition.

Some details of the story told by Ramarcelline appear to be incorrect. First, according to my other sources (mainly Randriatsoa, Ramarcel, Rakoto Jeannot and Rafranklin – see Chapter 2), Rasamuel's great grandmother Rapitsarandro was not married when she arrived in Beparasy and never married there. Randriatsoa had explained to me that Rakamisy had no father in Beparasy and that his mother had lived with him in Mahasoabe. Moreover, Ramarcelline gives a genealogy for Rasamuel that is not correct: she indicates descent from Rapitsarandro through women, whereas it is in fact through his father and then his grandfather Rakamisy that Rasamuel is related to Rapitsarandro. Finally, Ramarcelline seems also to have somewhat mixed up the stories about the 'ruler who divides land', i.e. the *andevohova*. There is no doubt that Rakamisy was the *andevohova* – it was not Rapitsarandro's husband, as implied in Ramarcelline's story. The facts that Ramarcelline did not remember the name of this husband and that nobody told me about this man are also evidence that she is mistaken, since had this man existed he would have been the apical ancestor of the Berosaiña in Beparasy and would have been remembered as such.¹¹

¹¹ Randriatsoa also told me that when the three 'brothers' (*mprahalahy*) Rakamisy, Rainihosy and Randriatsoakely had come to Beparasy they were "without father."

These discrepancies aside, the story of Rapitsarandro is interesting because, in spite of Ramarcelline's explanations, it does suggest that Rapitsarandro may have been a slave who was originally kidnapped in an eastern region by a Bara ruler (Betroka is in the Bara area) during the 19th century (or even before), and that at some point she was offered to the ruler of Vinany because he had an alliance with the Bara ruler.¹²

It was rather moving to hear Ramarcelline explaining that Rasamuel had taken her to an historian (*mipantara*) among his great grandmother's relatives when they left Beparasy and arrived in Betroka. He had done so in order to convince her that his version of the story was true and that his great grandmother was not an 'unclean person'. While Ramarcelline certainly did try to make the story she told us sound unproblematic, I believe she spoke the truth when she said that at that time she became convinced that her family had been wrong and that her husband was not of slave descent. But if this is true, it would also mean that before that moment she too had wondered whether Rasamuel could be of slave descent. And yet she had decided to flee with him, against the will of her kinsmen.

Ramarcelline clearly did not want to speak ill of her family in Ambalabe during the interview. She is a sweet, very polite elderly woman and since Rasamuel's death these stories had probably lost much of the importance that they once had. She insisted several times during our conversation that everything became clear for everyone, including for her relatives in Ambalabe, implying that in the end they had even accepted her choice to marry Rasamuel and were not upset with her anymore. Yet this nice version does not correspond to what I was told by Beparasy villagers or by Redison himself. Although it does indeed seem that some of Ramarcelline's relatives never completely cut relations with her in spite of disapproving her unilateral marriage, none of her kinsmen from Ambalabe ever recognized Rasamuel as her husband. This means that Rasamuel never accompanied Ramarcelline when she visited her relatives and that the people of Ambalabe never adopted the kind behaviour towards Rasamuel and his descent group in Mahasoia, which is customary when descent groups are tied together through a marriage. In other words, because

¹² Slaves, like cattle, were commonly exchanged as gifts by rulers and nobles, for example at the occasion of marriages (see Michel-Andrianarajaka 1986: 631).

Ramarcelline and Rasamuel never married bilaterally, Ramarcelline's kinsmen never acknowledged a marital alliance with the Berosaiña of Mahasoia and never felt bound by the duties that such an alliance entails. This was particularly obvious at Rasamuel's funerals, held in Mahasoia, which nobody from Ambalabe attended even though they had all been invited. None of them offered the kind of support – i.e. help with the organization of the funerals and/or gifts of money, cloth or zebu – that they should have provided in these circumstances had they truly accepted Ramarcelline's marriage. Rasamuel, for his part, had tried to establish such relationships. At Ramarcelline's father's death, for example, he sent a zebu as *lofo* for the funerals, as is customary for men when their father-in-law dies, but the elders in Ambalabe refused the gift and sent it back to Mahasoia.¹³

During the interview, Ramarcelline explained that her family did not try to directly take her out of her marriage, but again the truth seems to be a bit different, since her relatives threatened her with exclusion from her paternal tomb in Ambalabe if she persisted in her decision. Redison mentioned these threats to me as the reason why, in a near future, he would like to build a tomb to bury his mother on a plot of land that he would like to buy from Raboba below Soatana. If this project materializes, the tomb would then be situated, somewhat ironically, on the Berosaiña's land.¹⁴

Raboba and Ravao

The second case of mixed unilateral marriage that I want to discuss is that of my neighbours in Soatana, Raboba and Ravao. It is interesting to compare it with the case of Rasamuel and Ramarcelline.

¹³ *Lofo* is how cattle offered for slaughtering at funerals are called. A gift of *lofo* is expected from the deceased's spouse's family and the deceased's sons-in-law.

¹⁴ Redison told me that because of the story of her unilateral marriage, his mother's preference was to be buried with her mother in a tomb that her maternal local descent group has recently built in Tanambao, since apparently they had not been so harsh with Ramarcelline after her marriage and, on the whole, this group had kept good relations with her. He added that he had personally contributed to the tomb's construction and to the *vadipaisa* that had followed, stressing that he too would prefer to be buried in this tomb rather than in his maternal grandfather's tomb in Ambalabe because of the intolerant attitude his relatives in Ambalabe have shown towards Rasamuel.

Before marrying Ravao unilaterally, Raboba was bilaterally married to a slave descent woman – one of her forebears, Raboba told me, is from Ivory, the slave descent village where I attended the *vadipaisa* – and had three children with her. Ravao, for her part, had married several times in the region of Ivohibe and had two children with two different free descent husbands. When they decided to live together, Ravao and Raboba were already in their mid-forties. Unlike Ramarcelline, Ravao was neither born nor raised in Beparasy but in the South, outside Betsileo country, in a village close to Ivohibe. She came to Beparasy because she followed her mother, who was from Mahasoa. Ravao’s mother had left Beparasy when she was married to a Betsileo migrant living in Bara country. When her husband died, she came back to her paternal village, Mahasoa, to cultivate a small plot of her family’s land. She was later joined by Ravao after she separated from her last husband, at which point she did not want to go back to her paternal village because she was not on good terms with her brothers and therefore had few prospects there. Shortly after Ravao came to live with her mother in Mahasoa, she started a relationship with Raboba. The relationship was not accepted by Ravao’s maternal descent group, even though the family lived in the same village as the Berosaiña (in Mahasoa, the village founded by Rakamisy) and had good relationships with them. Ravao, who has a strong, often rebellious character, apparently did not care about the ban on marrying the Berosaiña and went to live with Raboba in Ambalamanakava.

The fact that Ravao had spent more than thirty years outside Beparasy and outside Betsileo country certainly made it easier for her to ignore the free descendants’ ban on marriage with the Berosaiña and her own maternal family’s dislike of her relationship with Raboba. In my experience, people like Ravao who have lived outside their Betsileo homeland in an ethnically diverse community of migrants do not care so much about the issue of slave descent.¹⁵ In any case, Raboba never tried to ask Ravao’s family for permission to ‘do the customs’ (*manao ny fomba*), in all likelihood because he knew all too well that they would never allow it. Since Raboba and Ravao were my closest neighbours, I could see that Ravao had very few interactions with her

¹⁵ This was also true, for example, of Redison’ wife Raely and his brother Naina, who were born and have lived among Betsileo settlers in the region of Betroka. Naina told me that before coming to Beparasy he had never heard that one was not allowed to marry slave descendants.

maternal relatives, and that she seldom participated in ceremonies, gatherings or agricultural work in her mother's village. Someone once described her relations with her maternal kinsmen as "They don't bury each other's dead" (*tsa mifandevy maty*), meaning that they do not organize or attend each others' funerals – probably the gravest level reached by any family dispute. Ravao does not participate in the family gatherings on the side of Raboba either. She was not present, for example, at the *vadipaisa* in Ivory, whereas Raboba was there with his son Fidy because, like Ramarcel and Vohangy, he had relatives in Ivory on his mother's side. Ravao's behaviour in this matter contrasts with Ramarcelline's, who was present at the *vadipaisa* in Ivory even though her only connection to the local family was through her stepdaughter Vohangy (Ivory is home to Vohangy's maternal family). Unlike Ravao, Ramarcelline maintains very good relationships with the Berosaiña and, even after Rasamuel's death, continues to attend family gatherings among them whenever she can.

A further difference is that, unlike Rasamuel and Ramarcelline, Raboba and Ravao have not moved out of Beপরাস্য in the hope of finding a better place to live and have not contracted a civil or a religious marriage.¹⁶ Nonetheless, a feature common to both couples is that, like Ramarcelline and Rasamuel, Raboba and Ravao did not have any children together. Again, this certainly makes their marriage more acceptable to Ravao's free descent family, for reasons that I will explain in the next chapter. The price they pay for their relationship is that, as I have illustrated in Chapter 2, they live more or less on their own, having little contact with each other's families and therefore little support from them.¹⁷ It must be clear, however, that Ravao does not refuse to have contact with Raboba's Berosaiña kinsmen. She was present, for example, at the funerals of Randriatsoa's sister's child described in Chapter 3. She also goes once a year to plant rice seedlings (*manetsa*) in the fields of one of Raboba's kinsmen in Ankarinarivo, where rice can be harvested twice a year. Thus for a few

¹⁶ Although many Berosaiña are Catholics and Ravao's family is mostly affiliated with a Lutheran church (FLM), neither Raboba nor Ravao go to church celebrations.

¹⁷ But it seems also true that they were able to carry on with their relationship precisely because both of them were already living much on their own before they met, so they had little to lose on this matter.

weeks each year, Raboba and Ravao leave their house in Soatana and stay at Raboba's relatives in Ankarinarivo, where they are paid for their work.

Fara and Mamy

How do people in Beparasy refuse to engage in the marriage process with the Berosaiña if, on the other hand, they can be their neighbours, friends or their allies for various reasons?¹⁸ It is in fact less easy than it may seem. It is out of the question that people would refuse to engage in the process of customary marriage with the Berosaiña by saying (or even implying) that it is because they do not have the same ancestry. First, this would be interpreted as implying that they have slave ancestry and, as I was endlessly reminded, it is forbidden by law and custom to say that someone is of slave descent. Second, this would spark the kind of dispute that would threaten the social cohesion of the small community. Free descendants are well aware that any word in this sense would be considered as highly insulting by the Berosaiña, and that they would seek compensation at the *fokonolo*. The third case that I would like to discuss shows how a marriage offer can be declined even when the circumstances make it difficult to refuse.

This case concerns a much younger couple, whose difficulties were still ongoing when I left Beparasy. Mamy is the son of Randrianja Albert, the head of the Berosaiña branch I introduced in Chapter 2. Fara is the daughter of Volala, a free descent teacher at the primary school of Volamena. Mamy and Fara are both in their early twenties and studied together at a junior high school in Ambalavao, where they had a relationship. Fara fell pregnant while in Ambalavao and had to leave school and come back to her village to give birth to her daughter. When Mamy finished school in Ambalavao, he too went back to his paternal village in Beparasy to work on his father's estate. As soon as Mamy had returned, Fara abandoned her village without authorization, leaving her daughter with her parents. She established a 'hearth in the house' (*tokantrano*) with Mamy in a groundfloor room of Randriaaja Albert's spacious house in Ivondro.

¹⁸ In the next chapter I will explain in more detail what these relationships consist of.

As explained in Chapter 2, Mamy's father, Randrianja Albert, is the wealthiest Berosaiña of Beparasy and is a rather powerful man because of his wealth but also because of his strong character and outspoken demeanour. A few months after Fara had arrived at his house, Randrianja Albert felt confident enough to make contacts with Volala, Fara's young father – he was in his forties – to propose a marriage between Fara and his son Mamy. I was told by Ramose Martin, Volala's work colleague and good friend, that in response to this demand Volala had gone to Andrarasy to discuss the issue personally with Randrianja Albert. Before going to Randrianja Albert, however, he had sought the advice of Redison, whom he had asked for help to solve the problem he had with his daughter. Redison repeated Volala's words to me: "Can you help me Redison? I don't know what to do. I cannot let this situation go on because it is very shameful for me and my family. You know why. You have good relations with the Berosaiña, can you come with me and explain that it cannot carry on like this?" Redison, however, categorically refused to be involved in the affair. He told me, with his characteristically impatient attitude towards what he once called "Betsileo hypocrisy", "I don't know why they do not want to let their daughter marry Mamy. If they have problems with that, well, too bad, they will sort out this situation themselves."

Volala went alone to Randrianja Albert's and tried to convince him that it was not appropriate for their children to go through the customs (*fomba*) because Randrianja Albert's father Randriatsoakely had a blood bond (*vakirà*) with one of Volala's forebears. Thus, Volala said, his family was too closely related to Randrianja Albert's to accept the alliance. Such a marriage, he insisted, would be shameful for both parties. Volala later reported to Ramose Martin that Randrianja Albert became very upset when he heard these arguments. He said that he knew the true reason why Volala's family did not want to let Fara marry his son. Volala denied that there was any other hidden reason and stuck to the argument that his family's refusal was only motivated by the fear of breaching the taboo of marrying close kin. Randrianja Albert

did not believe him for a second. He nonetheless called Fara and, in a rage, told her to go back to her village with her father.¹⁹

This story provides a striking answer to the question I asked above: how do free descent families refuse marriage with slave descendants? There are of course many excuses that could be invoked to refuse a marriage, but in some situations it can become very difficult. Since, according to custom, it is always the boy's family who approach the girl's, parents of free descent girls are the most likely to face the problem. I was told that parents in this case would say that their daughter is too young to marry or that they still need her at home. They would ask for a high *tandra*, hoping that the cost would deter the suitor, or they would say that they are waiting for the opinion of a *ray aman-dreny* who lives far away, thereby delaying the decision-making process ad infinitum in the hope that the suitor's family would take the hint and give up. In the case of Volala and his daughter, however, the situation was not so easy to handle for three reasons: because Randrianja Albert was a powerful man in Beparasy, because Fara was extremely determined to marry Mamy, and because there was already a child.²⁰ Volala's family's strategy consisted of manipulating the *vakirà* practice to avoid marrying the Berosaiña. We can see here that the 'fictive kinship' created by the ritual of *vakirà* is not only used to integrate some Berosaiña in one's network of kin (as I explained in the preceding Chapter), but it is also used to exclude them from the wider kinship network that relates all the descent groups of Beparasy through bilateral marriages. I once asked an elder why the first inhabitants of Beparasy had done *vakirà* with the Berosaiña, and I received the following answer: the first reason is that the first settlers were strangers to each other and so they had to 'make' kinship ties, even with the Berosaiña, to strengthen mutual support in difficult material conditions; the second reason, the elder told me, was that by so doing they would be able to refuse the marriage of their children with the Berosaiña's children,

¹⁹ Even though people in Beparasy stress that the children of two *vakirà* cannot marry because they are really kin (*tena hava*), the argument put forward by Volala's family was of course not convincing at all. Even if there had indeed been a *vakirà* between Ramasy and one of Volala's forebears, Volala also knew that Randrianja Albert was only Randriatsoakely's *adopted* son and therefore was not much concerned by the taboo. Moreover, as I have explained, the taboo on marrying close kin can be lifted by a ritual and the sacrifice of an ox.

²⁰ The question of the status of children in such cases is an important point to which I will return in the next chapter.

on the pretext that they were already ‘one family’ (*fianakavia raiky*) and that it would be wrong to marry one’s kinsmen. In the case of Fara and Mamy, we see that this old strategy is still very much in use in Beparasy. My guess is that it has been the most commonly used ‘official’ reason for refusing to marry the Berosaiña since the end of the 19th century. What is now left to explore are the ‘hidden’ reasons: how do free descendants in Beparasy explain their reluctance to marry the Berosaiña? I tackle this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: MARRYING EQUALS AND KEEPING ‘CLEAN’

Denis: Are there differences here between the descendants of slaves and the others, like those that existed in the past?

Raflorine: Yes, such differences still exist.

Denis: How does one see these differences? How do they matter in daily life?

Raflorine: One can have relations with slave descendants but one should never marry them. Because history goes on, goes on, goes on... Up to this date people know who is of slave descent. Because grandparents tell children: “these people, there, they are slave descendants... watch out!” And these people also know that they are descendants of slaves, so they do not seek spouses among the others.

Denis: They marry other slave descendants?

Raflorine: Yes, that’s it.

Denis: Are there other problems with them?

Raflorine: No, that’s only the problem of marriage. We can work together, eat together... only marriage is forbidden.

Denis: People can live with them, invite them to their house... all this is allowed?

Raflorine: Yes, we can do all this. We can eat with them from the same plate. It’s not a problem. Only marriage is forbidden. It’s surprising, isn’t it?¹

[Transcript 6.1]

The genealogies I collected seemed to indicate that the Berosaiña did not have alliances through bilateral marriage with the free descent groups of Beparasy over the four or five generations since the settlement of the region towards 1880. Accordingly, my free descent informants denied that there had ever been any marriage with the Berosaiña.² The absence of such alliances between the Berosaiña and everyone else in Beparasy was particularly noteworthy in a context where all the families of free descent are related to each other through intermarriage. These repeated alliances have resulted in the view, widely shared among free descendants, that all people in Beparasy are kinsmen – all people, that is, except the Berosaiña.³ Thus the actual

¹ Raflorine was an elderly woman from Ivondro and one of the very few persons in Beparasy who could speak French fluently. She had first learned it at school and had continued to improve her language skills at various occasions in her life. Originally from a village east of Ambalavao, she had come to Beparasy with her husband some thirty years ago.

² By which they meant that there were no bilateral marriages with the Berosaiña.

³ Recall the remark made by the musician Rajaona at the very beginning of Chapter 1.

marriage practices of the free descendants seem to be, in this aspect at least, strikingly consistent with the rule that they so often stressed to me: we cannot marry the Berosaiña because they are slave descendants and it is forbidden for ordinary people to marry people like them.⁴ But why exactly is such a marriage forbidden? And since marriage rules may exist without being strictly followed, why is the prohibition against marriage with slave descendants so strictly observed in Beparasy?

The fear of an ancestral wrath that could result from disobeying the prohibition certainly explains why some individuals choose to stick to the rule.⁵ Yet it does not seem sufficient to account for complete avoidance. It does not suffice because attitudes towards the risk of upsetting the ancestors vary greatly, with many people adopting ‘consequentialist’ attitudes, for example, when they choose to breach some of their ancestral taboos that they find difficult to observe and see whether something bad happens. Thus, if the risk attached to infringing the rule was ‘only’ the risk of ancestral wrath, it is likely that, over the course of the four or five generations since the settlement of Beparasy and the abolition of slavery, some people would have taken the risk of marrying the Berosaiña.

Another candidate to explain the strong pattern of marriage avoidance is the threat of social sanctions from the living, that is, from the descent group one belongs to.⁶ Unlike ancestral wrath, these sanctions can less easily be dealt with by a consequentialist attitude since they are very likely to occur and their outcome is fairly predictable, although they can vary in strength. But why do free descendants feel the need to punish those who do not stick to the rule so harshly? Why do they so strongly

⁴ It must be clear that the marriage avoidance is not the outcome of the Berosaiña’s choices: they are by no means avoiding marriage with free descendants. My free descent informants told me that, on the contrary, they often try to marry their children into free descent families. My conversations with Ramarcel and Randriatsoa (see Chapter 3) also confirmed their aspiration to being considered as suitable marriage partners by Beparasy villagers.

⁵ Some people explained to me that if a free descendant marries a Berosaiña the couple’s children will die early or will be sick, as a consequence of the free descendant’s ancestors’ anger at the marriage.

⁶ The social sanctions that are most commonly used by free descent families in case of unilateral marriage of one of their members with a slave descendant are the ‘cutting’ of all relationships with him/her and the exclusion from the ancestral tomb, as illustrated by the case of Ramarcelline in the previous chapter. The exclusion from the ancestral tomb is arguably the most serious social sanction among the southern Betsileo.

oppose the marriage of one of their kinsmen with a slave descendant, whereas they often turn a blind eye to their affairs with the Berosaiña?

A straightforward answer to these questions would be to say that the ban on marriage with slave descendants and the social sanctions that enforce the rule are cultural practices inherited from the pre-abolition social order, where a powerful ideology structured Betsileo society into three endogamous status groups ('nobles', 'commoners' and 'slaves'). Such an answer would assume that the hierarchical ideology has gone largely unchanged throughout the last century, as have the marriage practices that are grounded in this ideology. I shall call this view the 'persistence of ideology' thesis. It is an implicit and common view in contemporary discussions about slavery in Madagascar. Scholars seem to agree on the idea that the abolition of slavery did not significantly change social relationships and marriage practices. That is, they tend to consider that after abolition people continued to marry as if nothing had happened, so that free descent people kept avoiding marriage with former slaves and their descendants simply because their ancestors were not allowed, by law, to marry slaves in the past.⁷ From this point of view, the awkwardness of the situation for the Berosaiña in Beparasy would be due to a disconnection between a hierarchical ideology inherited from the pre-abolition past that considers former slaves and their descendants as inferior people and the rather good relationships that they have established with local families in Beparasy over the last few generations.

However plausible and attractive the idea of the persistence of an unchanged ideology may seem to explain the condition of present-day slave descendants in the southern highlands, it presents several difficulties, both on theoretical and empirical grounds. On theoretical grounds, it seems unlikely that the deep transformations of Malagasy society that occurred during the 20th century, which saw more than six decades of French colonial rule, the consolidation of Christian influence and a socialist government, had no impact at all on the local ideology of hierarchy and its related marriage practices. The exact nature and extent of their impact is difficult to evaluate, but certainly these changes have been important. For example, I believe that the fact that Redison and his mother are committed Catholics partly explains their attitude

⁷ See for example Ratoandro (1997: 283) for such a view.

towards the Berosaiña. It is not only Redison's personal relation to his fosterfather Rasamuel, but also his Christian ethos that leads him to think of the Berosaiña as people of equal value. Unlike his mother, Redison says that it is probably true that the Berosaiña have slave ancestry, but he adds that, unlike his kinsmen from Ambalabe, he would not oppose the marriage of his children to a slave descendant. Due to insufficient data, however, it is difficult for me to generalize about the effects of Christianity on the attitude towards slave descendants. Many committed Christians of Beparasy – such as Ramartine for example – seemed not at all ready to accept such a marriage for their own children.⁸

Empirical difficulties with the 'persistence of ideology' thesis appear when we consider the specific case of the Berosaiña. The first problem comes from the very simple fact to which I have already alluded: in daily life, the relationships between the Berosaiña and the other families are in general cordial, even sometimes close and intimate. I mentioned in Chapter 4 that many Berosaiña establish 'fictive kinship' relations with free descendants through rituals of *vakirà*. Although they were sometimes initially contracted by free descendants with the purpose of keeping a barrier between them and the Berosaiña, these bonds nevertheless imply strong mutual obligations and the offspring of two individuals tied by *vakirà* continue to have kinship relations over several generations. This means, in particular, that they pay frequent visits to each other, participate in each other's family gatherings, and so on. Links of enduring friendship, neighbourliness and mutual help in agriculture between the Berosaiña and free descent families are also common outside *vakirà* links. As we have seen in the case of the young couple, Andry and Nivo, who met at the *vadipaisa* of Ivory, because of these participations in family gatherings free

⁸ A Western missionary in southern Betsileo country told me that the topic of slave descent is a taboo for Malagasy priests too. Although they are trained to address a variety of social and moral issues within the Catholic community, Catholic priests never discuss the prejudice against slave descendants in their parish. My informant had lived for a long time among the Betsileo and had a very good knowledge of Betsileo language, history and culture. He said that he thought that some of his Malagasy colleagues were of slave descent but added that they could never have a conversation with him about it, suggesting that even for the most committed of Betsileo Catholics slave descent is too shameful to be acknowledged. At a more general level, it should be pointed out that Christian churches in Madagascar have often had an ambiguous position about slavery. In pre-abolition times, only a few missionaries spoke publicly against it, while many simply put up with it (see the studies in Aubert & Ratongavao 1996). After abolition, a prejudice against slave descent priests existed within the Malagasy Catholic clergy (Ratongavao 2002).

descendants can easily engage in affairs with slave descendants in spite of the strong prohibition on marriage. Most Berosaiña households collaborate with free descent families through their membership in associations (*fikambana*) that collectively manage the irrigation canals for rice cultivation, as well as helping each other with the organisation of large events such as funerals and ancestor-thanking ceremonies (*kiridy*). As far as I could judge, in these relationships the Berosaiña were not considered by their partners as junior, minor or low-level members of society, and nor were they regarded as their clients. These exchanges, on the contrary, took place on a largely equal footing.⁹ If strong, honest and lasting ‘egalitarian’ relationships of friendship or partnership really exist in Beparasy between some free descent families and the Berosaiña – as I think they do – it is not easy to understand why the ban on marriage has not eased over the course of more than a century and why there are not more exceptions to the rule in Beparasy than the few cases of unilateral marriages I have examined.

The second empirical problem is that, as we have seen, the Berosaiña of Beparasy own good land and even enjoy a sort of political prestige, even though it is tainted by a history of slavery. Given their economic and political role in Beparasy, one would expect that those among free descendants who have the most liberal (and daring) take on ancestral customs could have ‘crossed the lines’ and bilaterally married someone from the Berosaiña group. It seems that for these people it would not be too difficult to question the truthfulness of the historical account that points to the slave origins of the Berosaiña, asking themselves: “After all, what do we know, maybe they are not what people say they are?” Thus, the ambivalence of the Berosaiña’s origins and status revealed in Chapter 3 could leave open the possibility of a shift in the free descendants’ attitude towards them. Or to put it differently: why is it that people in

⁹ The fact that most households in Beparasy are currently members of *fikambana* and that the Berosaiña participate in them on an egalitarian basis is another example of important social transformations, since it owes more to the colonial and socialist governments of 20th century Madagascar (and perhaps to Christian influences) than to pre-colonial practices of social organization, where status differences were more important. The participation of the Berosaiña in these associations does not mean, however, that all members of free descent families find it right to have equal relationships with the Berosaiña. I could see that some people were more inclined to consider them as equals than others. But since associative links exist on a voluntary basis, it is easy for the Berosaiña to put them to an end and change their local alliances if they feel that they are not treated on an equal footing. I was told that it is usual for all families, not only the Berosaiña, to change their partnerships if they feel that the relation is not one of equality.

Beparasy do not easily follow Ramarcelline's attitude, who married Rasamuel in spite of everything and chose to stick to the Berosaiña's version of their history? Why are there not more people who choose to stress the fact that the Berosaiña were *andevohova* rather than the fact that they were slaves? The possibility of such a major 'attitude shift' in Beparasy was always open and, indeed, among my free descent informants some people refused to talk about the slave origins of the Berosaiña and talked instead about the role of the *andevohova* Rakamisy. It is important to recall, moreover, that the Berosaiña lease land to free descendants, either for share-cropping (Ramarcel) or for money (Raboba). By doing so, they invert the more 'usual' unequal relations of dependency and power between free and slave descendants. As my informant Raflorine commented: "They [the Berosaiña] are less numerous than the commoners (*olompotsy*) but they have more land and more zebus [i.e. on average]. They are lucky in everything, in cattle rearing and in agriculture. Today, it is the commoners who buy food from the slaves. This is not a problem... But marrying them is forbidden."

In short, the Berosaiña's relative wealth in land as well as their actual role in the history and political economy of Beparasy make it difficult to understand why, exactly, free descendants have refused to marry and integrate them 'fully' into their community of kinsmen up to this date. When I asked them why they would not let their daughter to marry a wealthy Berosaiña, free descendants replied that it would be deeply wrong (*tena diso*) to do that.¹⁰ When asked why it would be wrong, they replied that people should always marry people having the same ancestry (*olo mitovy raza*). But what does this mean, exactly?

¹⁰ There is an asymmetry in terms of gender and mixed marriages, for two main reasons. First, because postmarital residence is viri-patrilocal it is much easier for a free descent girl to marry a slave descent man unilaterally (i.e. she leaves her village and goes to live in her boyfriend's village) than for a free descent boy to marry a slave descent girl unilaterally because in that case the couple would have to reside neolocal. They could of course live in the girl's village but it is considered very shameful for a man to live with his in-laws and so it happens rarely. Second, for the free descent girl who marries unilaterally the slave descent family will not have to bring a *tandra* (since the free descent family refuses it), whereas if a free descent man marries a slave descent girl unilaterally he will have to find to means for the *tandra* by himself, without the support of his family. For these reasons it seems easier and more likely for a free descent girl to marry a slave descent man than the opposite. The three cases of mixed unions I observed in Beparasy seemed to confirm this pattern, but of course more data is needed to show that it is the case across the board.

The third empirical difficulty with the persistence ideology thesis is that, in contemporary southern Betsileo society, it is in fact not the case that pre-colonial marriage practices have persisted because today the descendants of commoners (*olompotsy*) and the descendants of nobles (*hova*) intermarry. This is a significant change compared with practices in 19th century southern Betsileo society where such marriages were also forbidden by law.¹¹ Nowadays, ‘mixed’ marriages between descendants of nobles and descendants of commoners have become fairly common even though, as we shall see, descendants of commoners prefer to avoid them. Given that an easing of intermarriage occurred between these two status groups, why did it not occur in the case of slave descendants? Why did the descendants of commoners in Beparasy keep an impassable marriage barrier between them and the Berosaiña, their land-rich neighbours and sometimes best friends?

To answer these questions, in this chapter I shall explore southern Betsileo’s conception of ‘mixed’ marriages across status groups, starting with the account on marriage by pastor Rainihifina’s book on Betsileo customs.¹²

Why marry people with the same ancestry?

According to pastor Rainihifina (1975: 29-30), parents need to examine five criteria when they conduct an inquiry (*manao famotorana*) on a potential partner for their child. These criteria are the ancestry or descent group (*ny firazanana*), the health (*ny fahasalamana*), the character (*ny toe-panahy ifandovana*), the possible existence of an ancestral curse¹³ (*olon-drazana*) and the means of subsistence (*ny fivelomana*). In Beparasy, my free descent informants stressed that ancestry and wealth were by far the two most important criteria that today’s parents take into account when they

¹¹ From Radama’s conquests onwards it seems that the law which applied to the southern Betsileo was a mix between the law enforced by Merina rulers and the local, traditional rules. To my knowledge there is no compelling historical evidence that laws forbidding marriages across status groups existed in the region before Merina rule, although we may assume that they were socially disapproved of.

¹² Rainihifina’s work is, with Dubois’ (1938) and Kottak’s (1980) monographs, the most comprehensive account of Betsileo history and customs. As rich as it is, Rainihifina’s work as a traditionalist is difficult to use because he does not meet the requirements of modern scholarship. It nonetheless remains of crucial importance for the study of the Betsileo.

¹³ What this means is that people who have been cursed by their ancestors should be avoided as marriage partners. In Beparasy, this criterion was never mentioned to me as a reason for refusing marriage.

consider their children's potential marriage partner. Conversations on these issues often provoked the complaint, especially among my older informants, that in the past (*taloha*) the spouse's character was a more important criterion than it is today. Parents would examine carefully whether their child's potential partner was a person with good character (*tsara fanahy*). Now that the children choose their partners, my informants continued, what really matters for parents is to make sure that the prospective partner's family has enough means of subsistence (*fivelomana*), i.e. wealth, and especially rice land to 'fill the belly'. But these statements always implied that a *sine qua non* condition first needed to be met: having the same ancestry. Pastor Rainihifina explains:

The spouses must have the same ancestry (*mba ho mitovy razana ny mpivady*)
(...) The main reason for the equality of ancestry (*fitovian-drazana*) is to
make sure that people do not speak ill about the parents and, if the spouses
have a dispute, that none of the two families can speak ill about the other.
(Rainihifina 1975: 29, my translation)

When Rainihifina writes that, according to Betsileo customs, one should marry someone who has the same ancestry, he means that people should marry within their own status groups (nobles, commoners or slaves). This is also what my informants in Beparasy meant when they mentioned this rule to me.¹⁴ Yet Rainihifina also explains that nobles can marry slaves. Characteristically, he does not use only the word *andevo* to refer to slaves but rather the euphemisms 'the low' (*ny iva*) and 'servants' (*mpanompo*):

The high and the low (nobles and servants) could more easily get close to each other and it was easier for them to marry each other. If a noble marries his/her slave there is no blame and people say "nobles are not taboo" or "nobles have no taboos". But if ordinary people or commoners do so people say that things are 'inverted' (*mifotitsa*).¹⁵ So commoners are more demanding than nobles on the descent group (*firazanana*). (Rainihifina 1975: 28-29, my translation)

¹⁴ In the next chapter I shall argue that the meaning of the rule "the spouses must have the same ancestry" (*mba ho mitovy razana ny mpivady*) might have been slightly different in the past.

¹⁵ In his dictionary, Richardson (1885) translates the adjective *mifotitra* (official form of the dialectal *mifotitsa*) by "inverted; incestuous; turning round as an enraged animal."

My free descent informants in Beparasy also told me that nobles could marry slaves and that commoners were more ‘choosy’ than nobles and slaves when it comes to marriage. Ramartine and her father, to whom we had asked why they could not marry slave descendants, explained:

Martine: Commoners (*vohitse*)¹⁶ and *hovavao* cannot marry each other. We cannot marry nobles either, since if we marry nobles we become their slaves and we lose our reputation (*zo*). We become their slaves because we prepare their meals and it is very difficult for us Malagasy.

Father: The nobles too, they lose their ‘grade’.

Martine: The nobles are ‘destroyed’ too.

Father: The nobles do not rule (*manjaka*) anymore if they marry people who are not nobles.

Martine: If they marry ordinary people (*olon-tsotra*) [i.e. commoners].

Father: Nobles marry nobles. But if nobles marry people who are not nobles, ‘what makes them *hova*’ (*ny maha hova*) falls and their reputation (*zo*) is lost.

Martine: Commoners marry commoners. And if ordinary people (*olon-tsotra*) marry slaves, then they become slaves too.

Father: If nobles marry *hovavao* they do not ‘fall’ because they [the *hovavao*] are still their slaves (*andevo*).

Martine: *Hovavao* can marry *hova*. Because they are still their *andevo* and therefore it’s not a problem. Because they will still be under their command, they will go to work, they will give them food.

Denis: Does it occur that nobles marry *hovavao*?

Martine: It happens, because they are still really their slaves and they are still made to work, they go back (*miody*) to what they were in the past. (...) They are still enslaved (*vo handevozony ihany*).

Father: It’s like going back to their former work.

Martine: They marry them and at the same time they make them work. But with ordinary people (*olon-tsotra*) it doesn’t work at all.

Father: Ordinary people cannot do that.

Martine: If ordinary people marry nobles, they become their slaves. If ordinary people marry *hovavao* they become very bad (*lasa ratsy be*). People won’t let them enter the ancestral tomb when they die if they marry them.

[Transcript 6.2]

¹⁶ *Vohitse* is a word that my informants sometimes used together with *olomposty* to refer to ‘commoners’, i.e. people who were neither noble nor slave. Synonyms also include *olon-tsotra* (‘ordinary people’).

In spite of what Ramartine and her father say here, it must be stressed that nowadays, among the southern Betsileo, marriages between descendants of commoners and descendants of nobles *do* occur, even though they are disapproved by both noble and commoner descent groups.¹⁷ If a couple insists, in spite of their respective family's attempts at discouraging them, the partners will be allowed to go through the process of customary marriage and will receive the family blessings on both sides. Thus what I called a 'bilateral' marriage can (and does) take place among these two status groups. In such cases there are no social sanctions for the couple, in spite of the strong disapproval from both sides.¹⁸

In the quotation above, Ramartine and her father think about marriages across status groups and talk about what happens to the reputation (*zo*) of 'nobles' and 'commoners' in cases of intermarriage, and in instances of their marriage with 'slaves'. The 'nobles' lose their ability to rule (*manjaka*) and 'what-makes-them-hova' (*ny maha hova*) if they marry 'commoners'. They are destroyed (*potiky*) and lose their grade (*girady*).¹⁹ 'Commoners' are said to lose their rights too and to become the 'slaves' of the 'nobles', being obliged to cook for them. It is not too difficult to imagine that this refers to real-life situations where, for example, two such families jointly organize a funeral for the descendants they have in common. The family of commoner descent may feel obliged or could even be asked to do the low-status tasks whereas the side of noble descent will take the leadership of the funerals. Descendants of commoners seem to dislike marriage with people of noble descent precisely because they fear that the alliance will not be egalitarian and they end up in an inferior position to the other family.

¹⁷ Although no family of noble (*hova*) descent lived in Beparasy, I was able to collect a limited amount of data during my frequent trips to Vohimarina (where I attended the funerals of a *hova* elder who was a descendant from the former ruler of Ambatofotsy), Ambalavao and Fianarantsoa. In these three places I had contact with descendants of nobles and I had several opportunities to discuss issues of marriage with them.

¹⁸ Cases of *hova-olompotsy* marriages seemed to have been rare in Beparasy and I could not find many in the genealogies I collected. As explained in Chapter 1, local *hova* families never resided in Beparasy but in Ambalamasina and in Ambatofotsy. I nonetheless met a few Beparasy villagers who had *hova* among their forebears. Rabe Alarobia's grandmother, for example, had married a descendant of the *hova* of Ambalamasina. It was in no way a shameful marriage and Rabe Alarobia was rather proud of telling me about the noble origins of his grandmother. In spite of this ancestry Rabe Alarobia was not considered as a *hova* by Beparasy villagers but as an *olompotsy*.

¹⁹ The word *girady* ('grade') refers to military hierarchy.

It is of great interest that this line of reasoning is not applied by Ramartine and her father to a marriage with ‘slaves’: it is not that in such a marriage ‘commoners’ will be the ‘superior’ and will have ‘inferior’ relatives that they will dominate. On the contrary, ‘commoners’ who marry ‘slaves’ are said to become ‘slaves’. I interpret what she says at the end of the quote – that commoners who marry ‘slaves’ “become very bad” (*lasa ratsy be*) – as meaning that the person who enters into such a marriage will be in serious difficulties with her kinsmen, and that among these difficulties will be the sanction of being excluded from the family tomb.

As the conversation above shows, descendants of commoners think that any kind of marriage outside the ‘commoner’ status group will result in them becoming ‘slaves’. Slavery, for contemporary southern Betsileo – or, to be more precise, for descendants of commoners in southern Betsileo – seems to be a major idiom to talk about marriages and the ensuing relations between families.²⁰ But this once again raises the same crucial question: if these two kinds of out-marriage for descendants of commoners have the same consequence (‘commoners’ become ‘slaves’) why do they not lead *both* to similar patterns of avoidance of marriage? As explained, bilateral marriages between nobles and commoners do take place today, whereas bilateral marriages between commoners and slaves seem extremely rare, if they happen at all.²¹ We are back to the question that I raised at the beginning of the chapter: what makes a marriage with a slave descendant so difficult to accept for free descendants?

***Tetihara* and the memory of ancestry, origins and alliance**

Since questions about slave descent and slave descendants are particularly difficult to ask in Beparasy, many people I conducted interviews with avoided answering my questions too directly whilst some simply refused to talk about the topic. Those who did address it remained very cautious, limiting their answers to very short sentences,

²⁰ The use of the idiom of slavery to mean unequal exchanges or relationships seems to be widespread in Madagascar. Rafidinarivo (2000) underlines the constant use of the idiom of slavery in economic transactions; Graeber (2007: 49) stresses that slavery is an idiom used to talk about all kinds of power relations.

²¹ I have to confess that I have no idea of how frequent marriages noble-slave are in southern Betsileo. I was often told by many descendants of commoners and by a few descendants of nobles (see the interview of Rathéophile below) that the latter really have no problem in marrying slave descendants, but I do not know whether these kinds of ‘bilateral’ marriages are really frequent.

presumably because they feared the customary fine of one zebu for saying or implying that someone was of slave descent. Trying to overcome this difficulty, I sometimes tried to provoke some of my informants who were parents or grandparents with the idea that maybe everyone would be better off if people in Beparasy would stop preventing their children from marrying the Berosaiña. In other words, I tried to suggest that allowing the Berosaiña to be tied into the community of Beparasy through intermarriage would be a better way forward than keeping them out. My suggestion was taken seriously and people really tried to engage with the idea, because most tended to acknowledge that the actual situation faced by the Berosaiña was unfair. After some moments of reflection, however, the same concerns were always raised: the ‘mixed’ couple would have children, these children would die someday, and then the families would really be in trouble because of the funerals. In response to my suggestion, Raflorine asked me, “but where would we bury the children then?”

Most anthropological studies on Madagascar stress that the Malagasy devote a great deal of attention to where their bodies will be placed when they die. Yet what was surprising in my informants’ reactions was that issues of funerals and burials always came up in discussions that, on the face of it, were about marriage. It took me a while to understand the connection, which seemed to come so immediately to the mind of my informants, between the idea of marrying someone of slave descent and the troubles caused by the burial of the children born from such a marriage. These reactions seemed to imply that the most important obstacle to a mixed marriage was not the fear of its immediate consequences – for example, the predictable disputes with disapproving family members and the threat of being excluded from the ancestral tomb – but the anxieties about a set of problems which, although very remote at the time of marriage, would have to be confronted when the mixed couple’s child died.²²

It is this set of problems linking marriage and funerals that I will now discuss, in order to explain why a marriage between descendants of commoners and descendants of slaves has many more problematic consequences than a marriage with descendants of

²² See Raharijaona & Kus (2001) on the particular intertwining of ‘matters of life and death’ among the Betsileo.

nobles. I shall start with the southern Betsileo practice of giving a particular kind of genealogical speech at funerals.

Tetihara are speeches which are pronounced on the *kianja ratsy* ('bad court', i.e. the open space or clearing close to the village which is used for funerals) where all the deceased's relatives and their guests gather after the burial, in order to do what is called the *fiefafa* ('completion'), which marks the end of the several day-long funerals. During the *fiefafa*, people sit on the ground and listen to the various speeches done by family representatives, who recall the circumstances of the death and explain how the funeral was accomplished, stressing that everything was done according to traditional customs, and notably that relatives and the 'gouvernement' (*fanjaka*, i.e. the state) were informed of the death and the taxes were paid.²³ They also thank all the guests and families involved, citing the names of those who have brought substantial gifts to the organiser of the funeral. If the deceased was a Christian, religious songs are sung and a catechist may also read passages of the Bible. Then come the *tetihara* speeches, which are often the most eagerly-awaited moment of the concluding stage of the funerals.²⁴

During the days preceding the burial, *tetihara* speakers will have memorized the accounts about family history which are written in the notebooks kept by the heads of the local descent groups. If they have found gaps in these accounts, they would have questioned their family elders. The *tetihara* starts with how the first male ancestor of the deceased's patrilineal group is said to have arrived in Beparasy, after having alluded to previous ancestors and their regions of origin. The name of this first local ancestor is mentioned, and so is his descent group name. Then his wife is named, as well as her descent group and her village of origin. The name of the village they founded, or where they originally settled, is recalled, followed by the names of their children. The speech goes on with the offspring of the couple's children over

²³ A tax must be paid to the commune for each ox killed at funerals. This practice dates back to the pre-colonial era where the *hova* received a part (the hindquarters) of each ox killed in his fief. This tax was maintained by the colonial authorities but replaced with a sum of money.

²⁴ Rajaonarimanana (1996: 38-39) translates *tetiharana* as *parcours-de-rocher*, i.e. "going through the rocks" or "wandering through the rocks" (*mitety*: going through; *harana*: rocky mountain) and suggests that the word refers to the tombs which are often located in the mountains in Betsileo country (as indeed they are in Beparasy). Thus giving a genealogical speech is like 'wandering through the rocks'.

generations, always providing the same information until it reaches the deceased. Once the *tetihara* of the patrilineal founding ancestor is over, another one on the side of the deceased's mother should follow. At least two *tetihara* speeches should be given – one on the paternal side and another on the maternal side – but sometimes other *tetihara* are added, for example those of the deceased's FM's or MM's groups.

The structure of the *tetihara* speech is of particular interest because its narrative not only recalls the names of the descendants of an ancestral couple, but also their geographical dispersion, mentioning migration and post-marital residence. Importantly, it also gives information about the marriages of the apical ancestor's descendants, since it names their spouses, their descent group and the villages they come from. The *tetihara* is therefore much more than a recounting of the members of a local descent group to which the dead belongs: it offers a mapping of the marital alliances that this local descent group has contracted with other groups in the past four or five generations.²⁵

Since *tetihara* speeches should be given by both parental sides of the deceased, when a marriage between free and slave descendants has taken place,²⁶ it is deemed extremely shameful (*hafa-baraka*) to have the marriage spoken about in a *tetihara*. In such cases, the families agree to skip the *tetihara* speeches, at the demand of the free descent side. This dissimulation, I was told, is not necessary when a 'mixed' marriage with a descendant of noble has occurred in the family, since even though they are disapproved of for the reasons explained above, there is nothing intrinsically shameful in being allied with a family of noble descent and the *tetihara* can be given.

The importance of *tetihara* at funerals is crucial for southern Betsileo local descent groups, since it is a way of demonstrating their 'clean' origins and the cleanliness of their marital alliances. In consequence, skipping *tetihara* because of an inappropriate marriage in the family is not an easy decision: the guests may speculate that the family has something to hide. I was told, however, that it is sometimes better than

²⁵ The *tetihara* can thus be seen as both a genealogy and, borrowing from James Fox, a 'topogeny' (Fox 2006).

²⁶ For example because the free descent parents and group have learned that the marriage partner was of slave descent only when the marriage had already reached a very late stage of the process.

taking the risk of being publicly seen to be allied with a family considered of slave descent, since the status of being unclean (*tsa madio*) could be ascribed to the whole family that has allowed one of its members to marry a slave descendant. This is my interpretation of Martine's statement "if commoners marry slaves they become slaves too": what the members of a local descent group of free descent fear above all is that the group as a whole will be considered as 'unclean' (*tsa madio*). Expressions such as 'lowering the ancestry' (*manambany ny raza*) are used to say that the person who marries a slave descendant will lower the status of the dead/ancestors but also the status of the group as a whole and, consequently, the status of all its members. We have here, I think, an explanation of why the members of southern Betsileo descent groups are so adamant about not letting one of theirs marry inappropriately. This is true for the senior members heading the group, but junior members too need to worry: if their family starts being suspected of being of slave descent or of marrying slave descendants, they will increasingly have difficulties finding a spouse with 'clean' origins for themselves or for their children. Free descent families who might see their reputations damaged in this way could end up in the position of the Berosaiña, who marry predominantly slave descendants because, in spite of the ambivalent status they have in Beparasy, their reputation as 'unclean people' (*olo tsa madio*) is well-known in the whole area.

In sum, free descendants strictly prohibit members of their descent group from marrying slave descendants because it would damage the reputation and prestige of their group, and thereby hinder their capacity to engage in marital alliances with other free descent families and to have egalitarian relations with them.

Vigilance about ancestry, origins and alliances

When people first explained to me that they would never accept the marriage of one of their children to someone of slave ancestry, I wondered how it was possible, in practice, to enquire about a potential partner's ancestry and to obtain reliable information. Villagers in Beparasy know that the Berosaiña are slave descendants, but what do they know of a person's origins if she is not from Beparasy? During the 20th century, many people of both free and slave descent moved continuously within

southern Betsileo country in search of land or labour (Deschamps 1959; Freeman 2001: Chapter 3). A dramatic increase in population also took place during this period. I therefore assumed that it would be much more difficult today than in the past to check whether someone is of free descent or not. My informants, on the contrary, told me that it was still relatively easy. “But how come it is so easy?” I asked. “It’s easy because we all know each other.”

The reason southern Betsileo feel they all know each other, in spite of incessant migrations and population growth, is because of *tetihara* speeches given at funerals. They keep alive the memories of origins, alliances and migrations – memories which are distributed across all people who live and regularly attend funerals in a particular region. I was often told that *tetihara* speeches provide the best opportunities to learn about someone’s slave descent or at least to have suspicions about the possible slave origins of some families. It is noteworthy that southern Betsileo’s memories of alliances and ancestry are, like the *tetihara*, essentially topogenic. It is the names of villages, particularly those of incoming spouses, that may provoke suspicions that some of the descendants recounted in the *tetihara* have slave origins. If I, for example, hear in a *tetihara* that a spouse came from Ivory – the village where I attended the ceremony mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 4 – I would think that a branch of descendants recounted in the *tetihara* has slave ancestry, because I know from other sources that Ivory is inhabited only by slave descendants.

This particular sensitivity to places of origins is not only important when one listens to *tetihara* speeches at funerals; it also pervades many situations of communication in daily life. My informant Ramose Martin told me how, when he introduces himself to people who live outside of Beparasy and says that he comes from Mahasoia, he is frequently asked about the exact part of the village he is from. In such cases, his interlocutors clearly know that in the small village of Mahasoia in Beparasy there is a slave descent group and they want to check whether he is one of them. Ramose Martin, on the other hand, knows perfectly well why his interlocutors are asking the question and makes sure to convince them that he has nothing to do with the Berosaiña, for example by mentioning the names of the descent groups he belongs to. In any case he would not stress too openly that he has nothing to do with the

Berosaiña if he does not know for sure that his interlocutors are not slave descendants themselves. In conversations of this kind, people show a high level of vigilance about places of origins in order to find out about each other's descent status.

Vigilance about places of origins reaches its highest level among free descendants when parents are informed by their children that they would like to marry. When the potential partner is from a family or a village about which little is known, it is expected that the free descent parents will check the family's ancestry by undertaking the extensive investigation (*enquête; famotorana*) to which I have already referred. Parents therefore set off, often on foot and sometimes over 100 km, to visit their relatives in the region where their child's lover is from. I was told that this inquiry may last for weeks, as parents gather information about the potential partner's family and 'the kind of ancestry' these people have. My informants stressed that, when performing such an inquiry, it is important to ask only one's relatives, even remote ones, because other people could be friends or, worse, relatives of the family in question, in which case there would be a risk of being told lies. Relatives are said to be the only trustworthy informants for this kind of inquiry. It is assumed that they will not lie and will take the gathering of information very seriously, because they all have an interest in not having a slave descendant marrying into the family.

Relatives living close to the village of the family under investigation will often have an idea about whether these people have slave ancestry or not. If they don't, they will know how to get more information. Members of their own kinship networks may have relationships with this family and may go to their funerals. At these funerals, they may have listened to the *tetihara* and noticed marriages with people from suspicious villages. The final outcome of the parents' inquiry will be that the family is either judged 'clean' (*madio*), 'unclean' (*tsa madio*), or 'not clear' (*tsa mazava*). The family's status is considered 'not clear' when, for some reason, the inquiry did not allow the parents to ascertain 'clean' origins. In that case, parents would usually not run the risk of discovering that their counterparts are of slave descent in the future and would therefore refuse the marriage, just as if they had found out that the family was 'unclean'.

Sharing the dead

I have just explained that the institution of *tetihara* at funerals helps maintain a social memory of origins and alliances, thereby making it particularly difficult to hide shameful alliances with people of slave ancestry and allowing parents to exert control over their children's choice of spouses. I now want to turn back to Raflorine's question: "but where would we bury the children then?"

Southern Betsileo kinship is bilateral, and one of the problems generated by such a kinship system is what I shall call here the 'ownership of the dead': which side will take the corpse – that of the deceased's father or mother? Who will become the *tompom-paty* (literally, 'master' or 'owner' of the corpse) – the head of the paternal or maternal descent line? In some Malagasy groups, there are rules prescribing which side will receive the dead. Among the Vezo of Betania studied by Astuti, for example, if the father has performed the ritual of *oron'anake* (an offering to the ancestors of the mother), the child will be buried in his tomb. In this case, it is the father's patrilineal family elder which will become the 'owner of the corpse' (*tompom-paty*) and he will organise the funeral. By contrast, a child whose father has not performed the ritual of *oron'anake* will be buried in the mother's father's tomb. Astuti points out that, in spite of this rule, there are often disputes over the dead and the place of burial (Astuti 1995: 92-98).

Disputes over the dead are not unique to Madagascar.²⁷ Among the Sa'dan Toraja of south Sulawesi, Roxana Waterson reports cases where paternal and maternal sides attacked each other during funerals in order to take possession of the corpse (Waterson 1995: 210-211). And, according to James Fox, the most serious disputes on the island of Roti, in Eastern Indonesia, are the fights over the dead (Fox 1987: 175). It seems that such conflicts are likely to arise in societies like the Sa'dan Toraja, the Rotinese, the Vezo, the Tanala or the Betsileo precisely because all attach a great emotional importance to both the flexibility of bilateral kinship during life and the placement in an ancestral tomb after death.

²⁷ Beaujard (1983: 446-456) also describes 'fights over the dead' (*ady faty*) among the Tanala of Ikongo (see map on page 12).

In Beparasy, there is no ritual such as among the Vezo to determine which side has the right to claim the deceased. And although a patrilineal bias exists, it is not as strong as among the Bara, the southern neighbours of the Betsileo, where, according to Huntington, adults are always buried in their father's tombs, even though deceased young children are sometimes given by the father's to the mother's family (Huntington 1973: 72-73). Therefore, Bara adults know in which tomb they are going to be buried. Beparasy villagers, by contrast, are always aware of a relatively large number of tombs in which they might be buried, without knowing with certainty which one it will be. My informant and friend Ramose Franklin, for example, has 'close links' with nine tombs, which are the eight tombs where his eight great grandparents were buried plus a new tomb which has been built by his maternal grandfather. Of these nine tombs, seven are located in Beparasy. When I asked him where he thought he would be buried, he said that only five of the nine tombs were plausible destinations. He then gave me his order of preference, but stressed that he could not know in advance where his corpse would be placed. Although the relative indeterminacy of people's place of burial can potentially lead to serious disputes when someone dies, I was told that they are not very frequent. How do people, then, decide which local descent group will 'own' the dead?

Concerns about practicality, financial costs and the preferences of the deceased may influence the negotiation, but above all the family elders will try to keep good relations with the other families involved. This means that after the paternal and maternal sides of the deceased have expressed their wish to bury the corpse in their tombs and to organise the funerals, one of them will eventually agree to give up and leave the other side be the 'owners of the corpse'. Note that when this negotiation is over, another similar negotiation can also take place 'a level up' in the genealogy, between the local descent groups of FF and FM, or between those of MF and MM. I refer to this practice as 'sharing the dead' because people consider it important that a kind of balance should be maintained and that each group should have a share of the dead children of a married couple, as the following case will make clear.²⁸

²⁸ Beaujard reports a similar practice of 'sharing the dead' among the Tanala (Beaujard 1983: 440-441). In the past, each of the eight tombs of someone's eight great grandparents would receive the dead offspring of this person in alternance. Beaujard notes that today the alternance takes place mostly between the paternal and maternal sides.

In January 2009, a man in his twenties named Rakoto died in Beparasy. He drowned in the river while cleaning the zebus which he and his friends had used to trample rice fields. Since he died very close to the village of Tanambao, his mother's village, his corpse was immediately brought there and his maternal relatives quickly started the usual proceedings: they washed the corpse, wrapped it in a white cloth and placed it on a mat, head to the south, in the northeast corner of the oldest of the family houses. The room with the deceased became the 'women's house' (*tranom-bavy*), where women started mourning, and a 'men's house' (*tranon-dahy*) was arranged upstairs, where men gathered to offer their condolences to the heads of the family. At this point, everything looked as if the funerals were already being organised in the village. However, when Rakoto's father arrived from his village accompanied by elders of his descent group, they asked the elders on Rakoto's maternal side whether they could take the corpse, bring it back to their village, hold the funerals and bury it in their tomb. The elders on Rakoto's mother's side protested, saying that he was with his family here, he had already been washed and placed in the dead's corner of the house, and women had already started mourning in the women's house. But the other party insisted that they wanted to bury him, arguing that those of Tanambao had already got Soa, Rakoto's older sister, who had died one year earlier. After a long discussion, the people of Tanambao eventually agreed to allow the group of Rakoto's father take the body back to their village.

When Raflorine asked "but where would we bury the children then?" she was implicitly referring to this practice of negotiating the ownership of the dead. For free descendants, the fact that the deceased is the child of a mixed couple poses a serious problem because the free descent side cannot claim the corpse. This is because, as my free descent informants put it, the corpse of someone with slave ancestry cannot be buried in the tomb of 'clean people' since it is 'unclean' and will pollute the 'clean' tomb. This prohibition is taken very seriously by free descendants. I once heard a story about a powerful free descendant who had managed to force his relatives to bury a child he had fathered with a slave descent woman in the ancestral tomb. The night after the burial, members of the man's family came back to the tomb, removed the corpse and buried it in the ground somewhere else.

As a result of this strict prohibition, if a free descendant marries a Berosaiña it will be impossible for the free descent family to enter into negotiations and to ‘share’ the dead children with the Berosaiña family. One simple way of solving the problem would be for free descendants to give up their claim during the negotiation process and leave the ownership of the deceased to the Berosaiña, for burial in one of their tombs. But this idea is very difficult to accept, not only because it goes against the moral duty that families should always try to get their members into their tombs, but also because relinquishing the children means that “the descendants are lost” (*very ny taranake*), that is, none of the descendants of the mixed couple will ever be buried in a free descent tomb and therefore the contact with their free ancestors will be lost for ever. The future generations of the mixed couple will never receive the blessings of their free descent ancestors. And this is a price too high to pay.

Another possible option open to the free descent side would be to claim the corpses of the mixed couple’s children and bury them in the ground, close to, but outside of the ancestral tomb. Indeed, I was told that some free descent families do precisely that when they are confronted with the problem. But this is only a compromise which is considered highly unsatisfactory by free descendants, because for them there is a huge difference between being buried with one's ancestors in the tomb and being buried outside of the tomb, no matter how close it is.²⁹

The uncleanness of the ‘split wild boar’

What all this means is that free descendants in Beparasy ‘ultimately’ justify the prohibition of marriage with slave descendants by referring to the ‘uncleanliness’ of the children that would be produced by such a marriage and the consequence of this uncleanliness: that these children will never be allowed to have a chance to be buried in the free descent ancestral tomb.

²⁹ This point will be further illustrated in the next chapter.

While in his book on Betsileo customs Pastor Rainihifina does not discuss this point,³⁰ he nonetheless writes that the second main reason why people should always marry people with the same ancestry is that the ‘mixing of blood’ should be avoided:

And the other reason is to make sure that the descendants will not have a mixed blood and that their name will not be weakened, since people give the names of “split wild boar” (*lambo-tapaka*) or “split noble” (*hova-tapaka*) to children born from people who do not have the same ancestry. Children born from people who have a nice ancestral land (*soa tanindrazana*) are called “children with roots” (*zana-potots’olo*). (Rainihifina 1975: 29-30, my translation)

In Beparasy free descendants did use the term ‘split wild boar’ (*lambo-tapaka*) to refer to the children of a mixed couple of commoner and slave descent. When I asked why they were named in this way, someone told me that it was because these children were half zebu, half wild boar, meaning that they had both a ‘clean’ origin (the zebu being the most valued animal for southern Betsileo) and ‘unclean’ origin (the wild boar being assimilated to the pig, the animal often considered impure and tabooed in the southern highlands, probably because of the influence of Islamized people from the east coast). Rainihifina insists on the shame of being called by these names. But what really matters is that, in spite of what the name suggests, the status of the *lambo-tapaka* children is not a ‘mixed’ status at all. For my free descent informants the *lambo-tapaka* children were 100 percent ‘slaves’ and 100 percent ‘unclean’, and this is why they could not be buried into a free descent tomb in spite of being of half free descent.

The rule that descendants of commoners apply here to ascribe the status of the children of a mixed couple *olompotsy-andevo* is therefore a rule of hypodescent: the children are ascribed the status of the ‘inferior’ parent.³¹ It is important to note that this rule of hypodescent does not apply systematically in the southern Betsileo context. In the case of descendants of nobles who have children with slave descendants or commoner descendants (i.e. children who are then called *hova-*

³⁰ Nor does he explain that slave descendants are considered ‘unclean’ (*tsy madio*) or ‘dirty’ (*maloto*), even though to my knowledge it is the most common way of referring to them in the southern Betsileo region.

³¹ The term ‘hypodescent’ was coined by Harris & Kottak (1963).

tapaka), the ascription of status follows other rules, as I was told by a local historian of noble descent in Ambalavao:

Denis: Why do people refuse to marry slave descendants?

Rathéophile: (Laughing). Listen, here is what happened in the past. For the *olompotsy*, it was forbidden to marry with a slave, but for the *hova* it wasn't, because the children that the *hova* had with slaves were not considered slaves but *hova*. The *hova* man could take the child and raise her as his child.

Denis: Did it not pose any problem?

Rathéophile: No, there was no problem. For us [i.e. the *hova*], even today it is not a problem to marry slaves.

Denis: But why is it a problem for the *olompotsy* then?

Rathéophile: (Laughing) I don't know why, but it's really humiliating for the *olompotsy* because of the customs. Because their children will be children of slaves. If an *olompotsy* marries a slave, the children will be slaves. But for the *hova*, it's not the case, it's the contrary.

Denis: Was a marriage of a *hova* with an *olompotsy* possible in the past?

Rathéophile: Yes, it was possible. A *hova* man can marry whoever he wants, and the child will be *hova*. But a *hova* woman cannot marry a commoner.

Denis: Why is this case not possible?

Rathéophile: Because it's the father who transmits the status.

[Transcript 6.3]

The rules of status ascription proposed by Rathéophile are summarized in the following table:

	Noble ♀	Commoner ♀	Slave ♀
Noble ♂	<i>Noble</i>	<i>Noble</i>	<i>Noble</i>
Commoner ♂	<i>Commoner</i>	<i>Commoner</i>	<i>Slave</i>
Slave ♂	<i>Noble?</i>	<i>Slave</i>	<i>Slave</i>

Table 2: Status of 'mixed' children according to a noble descendant

The rules given by Rathéophile do not exactly correspond to what descendants of commoners told me in Beparasy. They differ on one important point: people in Beparasy explained that when nobles marry commoners their children are *always* commoners, not nobles, and unlike what Rathéophile said it is irrespective of the parent’s gender.

'Mixed' marriage	Status of children
Noble – commoner	Commoner
Commoner – slave	Slave
Noble – slave	Noble

Table 3: Status of ‘mixed’ children according to commoner descendants

Compared to descendants of nobles, descendants of commoners thus have a simplified view of the rules of status ascription: hypodescent prevails, except for the case of the children of nobles and slaves, where the rule of hyperdescent applies.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained that free descendants in Beparasy, because they are descendants of commoners, are very cautious of not marrying ‘people who do not have the same ancestry’ (*olo tsa mitovy raza*). They say that if they marry descendants of nobles or descendants of slaves they will become ‘slaves’ in both cases. They do not like marrying people of noble descent (*hova tena hova*) because they feel that in such cases they will not have equal relationships with them due to the ‘superiority’ of noble descent; this, they fear, can potentially lead to conflicts and disputes between families which they prefer to avoid. On the other hand, descendants of commoners do not want to marry slave descendants because, if they make alliances through marriage

with them, their descent group will risk becoming progressively identified as a slave descent group too by other free descendants. Were they to be considered so, it would become increasingly difficult for them to marry people other than slave descendants. Moreover, the offspring of the mixed couple will be ascribed the status of 'slave' by the application of a rule of hypodescent. The offspring of this couple will therefore be considered 'unclean' (*tsa madio*) as well as 'lost' (*very*) for the group of commoner descent, none of the mixed couple's descendants being allowed to be buried in the free descent ancestral tombs. This too goes against another 'egalitarian' principle: that families should share the dead children of a couple to receive at least some of them in their ancestral tombs.

Accepting a bilateral marriage with slave descendants would be therefore very costly for a group of commoner descent. The gathering of information about one's origins and alliances is thus a crucial issue when a marriage is at stake. Investigations are made possible by the social memory of origins and alliances, which is kept alive by the practice of giving *tetihara* speeches at funerals.

I have suggested that descendants of commoners in Beparasy do not like marrying people who do not belong to the same status group because they are very sensitive to the idea of equality between allied families or, to put it differently, because they have egalitarian views on marriage: they do not like to marry people of 'superior' (*ambony*) or 'inferior' (*ambany*) status. This may sound like something of a paradox. The apparent paradox lies in the fact that, by refusing marriage with other status groups and especially the slave descendants, descendants of commoners perpetuate the existence of the hierarchy and the inequalities that they seek to avoid.

In spite of their dislike of marriages with descendants of nobles, bilateral marriages between descendants of commoner and descendants of nobles do occur and they do not pose intractable problems unlike those with slave descendants. Families of commoner descent can cope with these unequal marriages even though they are not their preferred choice. A marriage with a slave descendant is, on the contrary, unacceptable.

CHAPTER 7: ESSENTIALIZING ‘SLAVES’

Denis: Why is it that one can do many things together with a slave descendant but cannot be buried in the same tomb?

Raflorine: Because, for example, you are an *olompotsy* and I am a slave. I work hard, I clean the *maloto* (dirt) everywhere...

Denis: But this was in the past. Their descendants don't do that anymore.

Raflorine: Yes, but it's the spirit (*c'est l'esprit*), they are the descendants of the person who took the *maloto* (dirt).

Denis: Are they still considered dirty?

Raflorine: Yes, they are dirty.

Denis: Even though they don't do dirty things?

Raflorine: Yes, that's it.

[Transcript 7.1]

In the preceding chapter, I have discussed the reasons why commoner descendants refused to marry ‘slaves’.¹ I have explained why it is not in the collective interest of free descent groups to let their members marry a slave descendant, since the cultural practice of *tetihara* speeches keeps alive the social memory of individuals' origins and descent, as well as that of alliances between groups. The existence of such a social memory renders pre-marital investigations about people's ancestry very effective and ensures that any breach of the rule prohibiting marriages with slave descendants will result in the loss of reputation as ‘clean people’, with all the important consequences that this implies.

What we still need to understand, however, is why slave descendants are considered as irredeemably ‘unclean’ by commoner descendants. How can we explain that they are ‘locked’ into such a status? In this chapter, I will borrow the concept of psychological essentialism from cognitive psychology to try to shed some light on this

¹ From now on, I will refer more specifically to ‘commoner descendants’ rather than to ‘free descendants’ because, as explained in the previous chapter, descendants of nobles and descendants of commoners do not have necessarily the same views on mixed marriages and the ascription of status to children born from such marriages. Moreover, I will keep using ‘slaves’, in inverted commas, to refer to the category used by my informants in Beparasy, which includes both slaves in the past and their descendants in the present.

ethnographic question. To anticipate my argument, I will suggest that commoner descendants essentialize the category 'slaves'.

The terms 'essentialize' and 'essentialism' are employed somewhat differently across different disciplines and it is thus useful to explain what I mean by them. In anthropology and other social sciences, essentialist views are often opposed to constructionist (or constructivist) approaches. Scholars having 'essentialist positions' on gender, sexuality, race or ethnicity, for example, are those who consider some traits to be fixed and invariable as opposed to being culturally, socially or historically constructed (Sikora 2006). This is not the way I use 'essentialism' in this chapter. I am using this term in the specific sense of *psychological essentialism* as it has been discussed in cognitive, developmental and social psychology in the last two decades (Gelman 2003; 2004; Gelman & Legare 2011; Gelman & Wellman 1991; Medin & Ortony 1989). *Psychological essentialism* is a claim about people's mental representations, i.e. the ways things are represented in people's minds, not a theoretical position in social science debates. The problem under discussion is whether or not descendants of commoners in Beparasy essentialize the category 'slaves'. I will argue that they do and that this has wide-ranging implications.

As a first approach, saying that commoner descendants in Beparasy essentialize the category 'slave' means (1) that they construe this category as if it were a natural kind (that is, as a category which exists 'in nature', so to speak, as opposed to being a socio-historical construct) and (2) that they believe that there is a property (an essence) which cannot be observed but causes 'slaves' to be what they are. Thus, saying that descendants of commoners essentialize the category 'slaves' means that they think that 'slaves' have an essence that cannot be easily changed.

Even if we accept that commoner descendants essentialize this category today, we may ask: didn't free people already essentialize the category 'slaves' before abolition? Historical evidence is scarce, but I will suggest that in the past it was essentialized in a much weaker sense than it is today. This may sound counterintuitive, since one might expect that, more than a century after abolition, people would categorize slave descendants in a more flexible fashion than they categorized slaves during times of

slavery. Yet it seems that the reverse is the case. Descendants of commoners today appear to construe the category ‘slaves’ in a less flexible way than free people construed the category before abolition, since today the ‘uncleanliness’ of ‘slaves’ is conceived as irreversible and passed on to children, even in case of mixed marriages. From the viewpoint of descendants of commoners today, there is no way out of the slave descendants’ ‘unclean’ and inferior status.

One may wonder why such a shift might have occurred. I will argue that the cognitive bias towards essentialism, the marriage practices of the southern Betsileo and the major political changes that took place in Madagascar at the end of the 19th century are all factors that need to be taken into account to explain the particular historical path taken by the ideological shift considered in this chapter. Furthermore, I will also attempt to explain why essentialism about ‘slaves’ has persisted until today even though slavery was abolished more than a century ago.²

Psychological essentialism

In the last two decades, cognitive-developmental psychologists have provided evidence for a disposition towards essentialism which emerges in young children with very little input or encouragement.³ This disposition means that even young children are not swayed by the appearance of the entities that exist in the world, but are able to appreciate their deeper and hidden properties (Medin & Ortony 1989: 179-180). For example, even though a seagull looks more like a bat than a flamingo, even young children are able to predict that the seagull will share more novel properties with the flamingo than with the bat. Similarly, very young children appreciate that radical outward transformations – such as that between a caterpillar and a butterfly – do not entail a change in identity: deep down, caterpillar and butterfly are one and the same entity.

² This chapter should be seen as a speculative endeavour. Although I substantiate my claims with evidence from fieldwork, historical documents and cognitive psychology, I am prompt to acknowledge that more research is necessary to either confirm or infirm them.

³ See Gelman (2003) for the most extensive discussion of psychological essentialism.

The claim of psychological essentialism is not about the existence of essences,⁴ nor is it a claim about people necessarily *knowing* what these essences are. In their seminal article, Medin & Ortony stressed that one can believe that a category has an essence without knowing *what* the essence is (Medin & Ortony 1989: 184-185). For example, “a child might believe that there exist deep, non-visible differences between males and females, but have no idea just what these differences are” (Gelman 2003: 404).

A growing body of research has shown that psychological essentialism is pervasive over time and across cultures (e.g. Atran 1998; Mahalingam 1998; Diesendruck 2001; Astuti et al. 2004). Yet not all categories are essentialized and scholars are still debating why some are more easily essentialized than others. While natural kinds are the most likely categories to be essentialized, artefacts are less often essentialized and categories such as ‘white things’ are not conceived as having an essence except in the most trivial sense:

A natural kind is a category that is treated by those who use it as being based in nature, discovered rather than invented, and capturing many deep regularities. In contrast, a category such as ‘white things’ is treated as arbitrary, invented rather than discovered, and capturing little information beyond the basis of the original grouping. ‘Tigers’ is a natural kind; the set of ‘striped things’ (including tigers, striped shirts and barbershop poles) is not, because it captures only a single, superficial property (stripedness); it does not capture nonobvious similarities, nor does it serve as a basis of induction. (Gelman 2003: 12)

Where would *social* categories fit in this picture? In yet another seminal article of the literature on psychological essentialism, Rothbart and Taylor (1992) suggested that

whereas social categories are in reality more like human artifacts than natural kinds, they are often perceived as more like natural kinds than human artifacts. The implicit assumption that social categories, like natural kind categories, possess an underlying essence has a number of important implications. These include a tendency to infer deep essential qualities on the basis of surface appearance, a tendency to treat even independent categories as if they were mutually exclusive, and a tendency to imbue even arbitrary categorizations with deep meaning. (Rothbart & Taylor 1992: 12)⁵

⁴ This would be a claim about *metaphysical* essentialism.

⁵ On psychological essentialism of social categories see, among others: Bastian & Haslam (2005); Birnbaum et al. (2010); Gil-White (2001); Haslam (1998); Haslam, Rotschild & Ernst (2000; 2002); Hirschfeld (1996; 1998); Mahalingam (1998; 2003; 2007); Prentice & Miller (2007). See

If it is the case that people essentialize a category without necessarily knowing what the essence of this category is, it is unlikely that we will know that a particular category is essentialized by trying to find out what people believe the essence to be. Rather, psychologists have identified different aspects of categorization which, taken together, provide evidence for the essentialization of the category under scrutiny. Following Gelman (2003: 22), I have retained six of these aspects.

A first aspect is the *inductive potential* of the category, i.e the fact that essentialized categories have a richer potential for induction than non-essentialized categories. That is, essentialized categories serve as a frequent basis for inductive inferences while non-essentialized categories do not. For example, learning that a previously unknown animal, say the Red-faced Malkoha, is a bird will generate the inference that it flies, that it lays eggs, that it has hollow bones, etc., while learning that a previously unknown animal is red will generate hardly any inference at all. A second aspect is the *incorporation of nonobvious properties* in the category. That is to say, membership of an essentialized category is decided on the basis of hidden, nonobvious properties rather than superficial ones. For example, young children are convinced that a dog will no longer be a dog if all its insides (blood and bones) are removed while they think that it will still be a dog if its outside (fur) is removed (Gelman 2003: 79-81). A third aspect is the incorporation of *causal features* into the category, i.e. the belief in an underlying feature which causes all the entities belonging to the category to be alike. A fourth aspect concerns the *beliefs about the relative role of nature versus nurture*. That is, in the case of essentialized categories innate potential and inheritance are believed to be more important than the environment in explaining why individuals become what they are. For example, young children say that a baby kangaroo raised among goats will grow up to hop and have a pouch (Gelman 2003: 91). A fifth aspect is the *sharp boundaries* between categories. It means that it is not possible to belong ‘only partly’ to an essentialized category: either an entity belongs to it or it does not. For example, because we tend to essentialize natural kinds and not artefacts, we tend to assume that an animal is either a bird or is not a bird, and that it cannot be half a

Stoler (1997) for an example of engagement with these issues from the point of view of a cultural anthropologist who has worked on issues of race.

bird, whereas we are quite happy to grant that an object is half belt and half wallet (Gelman 2003: 69). Finally, a sixth aspect of categorization providing evidence for essentialism is the *stability over transformations*. This means that someone essentializing a category will think that the entities belonging to this category cannot be turned into something else. For example, very young children think that a tiger remains a tiger even if, in the story they are told, scientists make a tiger look like another animal (by removing its stripes, etc.). By contrast, they have no problems in accepting that an artefact such as a coffeepot can be transformed into a bird feeder.

Evidence for an essentialist construal of the category ‘slaves’

If these are the evidential signatures of psychological essentialism, what evidence do I have that commoner descendants in Beparasy today essentialize the category ‘slaves’? For the sake of clarity, I will answer this question by addressing in turn the six aspects listed above.

Inductive potential. The rich inductive potential of the category ‘slaves’ became obvious to me after I had overcome the initial difficulties and was able to discuss issues related to slave ancestry with descendants of commoners. On learning that someone was a ‘slave’ (*andevo*), people made many inferences about this person. For example, as we were once discussing local politics, a friend of mine heard that one of the candidates to the position of *maire* at the next municipal elections in Vohimarina was a man from Fianarantsoa who had one of his *tanindrazana* in a village close to Vohimarina and had ‘slave origins’. My informant immediately expressed the view that this man could not occupy such a position because slave descendants were “of inferior ancestry” (*ambany raza*) and thus that the man’s right place was at an ‘inferior’ place in society.⁶

Nonobvious properties. As explained in Chapter 2, ‘on the surface’ the Berosaiña look just like any ordinary Betsileo peasants: there is no outward sign that marks them off as slave descendants. Yet people think that they are different ‘in the inside’. When asked about the reasons why the Berosaiña are ‘unclean people’ (*olo tsa madio*),

⁶ In the next chapter I will have more to say about the inductive potential of the category ‘slaves’ and its immediate consequences for the Berosaiña in Beparasy.

descendants of commoners explained to me that slaves in the past had to do dirty things because they were servants (*mpanompo*). When asked what kind of dirty things, they almost unanimously stressed the daily handling of excrements (*tay*) and other soiling tasks such as cleaning the cattle pen. Some explained that their blood (*ra*) had become dirty through their frequent contact with dirt.⁷ This is the reason why, they added, when ordinary people (*olon-tsotra*, i.e. descendants of commoners) in Beparasy create fictive kinship with the Berosaiña through a blood bond (*vakirà*), they do not drink their blood – as it normally should be for this ritual, as explained in Chapter 4 – but replace it with rum. My informants thus seemed to consider that the Berosaiña have something that cannot be observed directly which makes them intrinsically ‘dirty’ and which permanently bestows on them the identity of ‘unclean people’. Slave descendants are conceived to be ‘dirty’ and their ‘dirtiness’ – conceptualized either vaguely or somewhat more precisely in terms of a ‘dirty’ blood – is lodged ‘deep inside’ them.⁸

Causal features. Descendants of commoners in Beparasy hold that people who have a slave among their ancestors all belong to the same category, the category of ‘unclean people’. Thus to the mind of descendants of commoners the fact of having slave ancestry (i.e. the fact of having at least one slave among one’s ancestors) is the underlying feature that causes the Berosaiña and all ‘unclean people’ to be alike.

Relative role of nature and nurture. Further evidence for essentialism comes from the case of two persons who arrived in Beparasy in the 60s when they were babies. I was told that a man from the eastern coast had brought a number of babies and had proposed to give them away to those who wanted them. The babies were twins. Twins are thought to bring bad luck among populations on the east coast of Madagascar, most famously the Antambahoaka, and as a result they are often abandoned by their

⁷ Evers also reports that her informants viewed the ‘uncleanliness’ of slave descendants as an ‘uncleanliness’ of blood (Evers 2002a: 70).

⁸ Blood as a bodily substance is, just like bones, semen or milk, particularly ‘good to think’, to use Levi-Strauss’ famous phrase (Levi-Strauss 1962). Thus it should not be too surprising that some people among the southern Betsileo conceptualize the inner dirtiness of slave descendants in terms of ‘dirty blood’, even though in Madagascar there is no ‘ideology of blood’ similar to what exists in other parts of the world. See Carsten (2011) for a recent review of the many “symbolic capacities of blood” and their significance in kinship studies.

parents.⁹ A childless couple of Beparasy took two of these babies from the man to raise them as their children. At the time of my fieldwork, the twins were about 50 years old. I was told by my friend Ramose Martin, a member of the local descent group of the twins' adoptive father, that there had been ongoing discussions within families about whether the twins could be buried in their ancestral tomb. When I first heard the story, I thought that these difficulties had to do with the reputation of bad luck attached to twins, but I was told that the Betsileo do not believe that twins bring bad luck. The problem was of a different nature: at stake was the fact that nobody knew 'what kind of ancestry' the twins might have. The fear was that they might have slave ancestors and therefore might be 'unclean' persons. The matter was not definitely settled,¹⁰ but at the time I left Beparasy the opinion prevailed in the family that the twins, as well as their children, should be buried outside of the ancestral tomb as a precaution. Interestingly, the story of the twins is a natural experiment that bears much resemblance with the 'switched-at-birth' or 'adoption' tasks used by cognitive scientists to study people's reasoning about innate potential and biological inheritance, and their views about the relative influence nature *versus* nurture.¹¹ Accordingly, this case indicates that in the minds of Beparasy villagers people of slave descent have something like an essence they have inherited from their slave ancestor(s) and that this essence is immune from the effects of the nurturing environment in which they are raised, for example that of a 'clean' family of commoner descent.

Sharp boundaries. The name *lambo-tapaka* given to children of a mixed couple may suggest that they are considered as persons of intermediary status (a kind of mestizo status). But as I have already mentioned, in the interviews I conducted it appeared clearly that descendants of commoners in Beparasy considered that the children of a mixed couple all belong *unambiguously* to the category of 'unclean people,' in spite of what the name *lambo-tapaka* suggests. Gelman calls this the "boundary intensification" of the category" (Gelman 2003: 67) and refers, as an example, to the

⁹ See Fernandes, Rabetokotany & Rakoto (2011) for a recent report on this practice.

¹⁰ And of course it will be only settled at the moment of the twins' death.

¹¹ Typically in these tasks people are told stories about babies who are switched at birth or adopted. Then they are asked whether these babies will resemble their adoptive parents or their biological parents on a number of traits (for an example in Madagascar see Astuti, Solomon & Carey 2004).

'one-drop' rule of racial classification in the United States, where "a 'fuzzy' situation in the world is decided in a nonfuzzy manner" (ibid.: 68).¹² This, again, is a clear signature of essentialism.

Stability over transformations. This aspect is particularly important to understand the essentialization of the category 'slaves' and therefore needs to be explained in some detail. My informants of commoner descent were unanimous in saying that there is no ritual means of cleansing the 'uncleanliness' of a slave descendant, even though they were aware that some kind of ritual cleansing (*fandiova*) was done in the past whenever a slave was freed. This is particularly remarkable since southern Betsileo make frequent use of rituals to remove various kinds of pollutions, insults and wrong doings. As I have already mentioned, people who have prolonged and intimate contact with a slave descendant – the most obvious case being a mixed couple who are unilaterally married – will need to be cleansed because they have become 'dirty' (*maloto*). But is it the same kind of 'uncleanliness' that the slave descendants are thought to have 'inside them'? I am inclined to say that it is not, because commoner descendants who have become 'unclean' always have the possibility of being cleansed by a ritual if they want to come back to their village and have a chance to be buried in an ancestral tomb. Here the cultural logic seems to be that commoner descendants who live with a slave descendant become 'guilty of wrongdoing' (*ota*) because they did not follow the ancestral way of behaving and that this guilt is the reason of the uncleanliness.¹³ Thus although it does look, to an external observer, as if there was some contamination going on, it seems on the contrary that most commoner descendants do not think that the 'uncleanliness' they will get if they set up a hearth with a slave descendant will come from the contagious nature of the 'uncleanliness' of the 'slave' person.¹⁴ Rather, they consider that they will become themselves 'unclean'

¹² See Hirschfeld (1996) for a more extensive discussion of how the 'one drop' rule can be partly explained by a human bias towards psychological essentialism.

¹³ The word *ota* was chosen by Christian missionaries to translate 'sin' in the Bible. According to Richardson the word, both a noun and an adjective, means "Guilt, sin; guilty, sinful, mistaken, in error" (Richardson 1885). The verb *manota* means "to err, to make a mistake, not to go in the right direction" (Ruud 1960: 265) or "to commit sin, to transgress, to violate" (Richardson 1885). *Ota* and *manota* have therefore a high moral meaning since they mean transgressing the rules of society.

¹⁴ Some scholars, on the contrary, have argued that the belief in contagion is the main reason that commoner descendants become 'unclean' when they have affairs with (or marry) slave descendants (e.g. Evers 2002a: 53, 70). I do not mean that ideas of contamination do not play any role in this story. It would be surprising, given the ubiquity of such ideas the world over. Moreover, ideas of

(*maloto*) because they will cause serious harm to ancestral customs (*fomban-draza*) and will become *ota* (guilty). To better understand the difference between the two kinds of ‘uncleanliness’, it is necessary to place the issue into the wider context of how people can become ‘dirty’ because of their actions and how this ‘uncleanliness’ can be removed.

In very general terms, I was told that one becomes *ota* (guilty) when one does something wrong with respect to ancestral customs (*fomban-draza*). Since there are many things that ancestral customs forbid, there are many occasions when one can behave badly and become *ota*. Breaching an ancestral taboo (*fady*) is a particular way of becoming *ota* and the person is then said to be *ota fady*.¹⁵ Being *ota* can have harmful consequences because ancestors are upset by the wrong doing or the breach of the taboo, and therefore they may bring bad luck to the guilty person and her close relatives. The only way to remedy this situation is to ask the ancestors for forgiveness and to remove the ‘uncleanliness’ (*ny maloto*) that resulted from the wrongdoing.¹⁶ This is usually done either by the elder heading the local descent group or, in cases where the consequences of the breach have been particularly serious and have affected people’s health, by an *ombiasa*.¹⁷ Rituals of purification (*fandiova*) always require *hazomanga*, a wood to which powerful virtues are attributed.¹⁸ *Hazomanga* is finely grated and mixed with water, silver and plants – all ingredients that are

contamination seem often linked to psychological essentialism (Gelman 2003: 306-307). Yet it does seem to me that by explaining the problem only in terms of contamination we would risk missing something of the cultural logic that seems more important here.

¹⁵ On the moral importance of observing taboos (*fady*) in Madagascar see in particular Astuti (2007b), Lambek (1992), Ruud (1960) and Walsh (2002).

¹⁶ The association of ideas of cleanliness/uncleanliness with those of morality/immorality is common to many societies – see Douglas (1966) for a classic account on these issues. For the Betsileo, Dubois (1938: 860-873) explains that moral wrong-doing is a sort of disorder which leads to “a kind of poisoning” (ibid.: 861) and will have to be cleansed.

¹⁷ Evers reports that she had to undergo such a cleansing ritual because she had become ‘dirty’ (*maloto*) after having shared her hut with two young girls of alleged slave descent (Evers 2002a: 234-235). It is somewhat surprising, however, that a ‘white foreigner’ (*vazaha*) may be considered *ota* for having daily contacts with slave descendants, to the point of being advised to seek ritual cleansing. In Beparasy, apart from sharing a hearth or entertaining sexual relations with them, having close contact with slave descendants was not considered a wrongdoing. Moreover as a *vazaha* I was not expected to follow local people’s ancestral customs (*fomban-draza*) and therefore I was not at risk of becoming *ota*.

¹⁸ The *hazomanga* was once the sacrificial post that was found in every Betsileo *vala* (‘hamlet’) but Christian missionaries succeeded in eradicating its presence because of ‘idolatry’. Today, *hazomanga* consists in a small piece a wood that family elders keep for all ritual occasions where its powerful powers are needed.

considered to be purifying and to be endowed with curing or protective power. Besides the mix of water, *hazomanga*, silver and plants the other powerful means to cleanse is the blood of cattle slaughtered for the occasion.

Usually only individuals become guilty (*ota*) – and thus ‘dirty’ (*maloto*) – because of their behaviour. But I was also told that, according to traditional customs, entire families could become guilty and ‘unclean’ as a consequence of a collective wrongdoing. In such cases, the group is said to be *hazo fotsy* (‘white wood’).¹⁹ Cases of families being considered *hazo fotsy* seem to be rare nowadays but people in Beparasy recalled one that occurred in the 60s-70s. This is the story I was told. One day, someone in Beparasy discovered human faeces in a water spring that nearby villagers used for cooking and drinking. Having heard about this, the *ray aman-dreny* of Beparasy decided to forbid the use of this water for cooking or drinking. A family living in a *vala* (hamlet) close to the spring did not observe the prohibition and kept on fetching water as usual. Their behaviour was exposed and discussed at a meeting of the *fokonolo*. The *ray aman-dreny* ruled that the family should be considered *hazo fotsy* from that moment onwards. The ruling implied that the people of Beparasy could not have close contact with them until they performed the necessary ritual to be cleansed from their guilt. According to my informants, the family was truly ostracised. They could not even visit their relatives or be visited by them. To get out of this situation, the family had to kill a zebu and share the meat with the *fokonolo*. All the people who had been considered *hazo fotsy* drank a bit of purifying water mixed with silver, *hazomanga* and plants. A *ray aman-dreny* pronounced an ancestral invocation and put a drop of the zebu’s blood on their foreheads. They were cleansed, and Beparasy villagers were allowed to resume normal relationships with them.

Given the power of rituals to cleanse individuals and entire families, I wondered why it was not possible to cleanse slave descendants and addressed the question to my friend Rakoto Jeannot, the old man I introduced in Chapter 3. He had some authority in Beparasy as a ritual specialist because he had been an *ombiasa* (a traditional healer and diviner) during half of his adult life until he converted to Catholicism. He first laughed when he heard me asking whether it was possible to ritually remove the

¹⁹ The reason for calling people in this way was unknown to my informants.

‘uncleanliness’ of the Berosaiña and of slave descendants in general. Then he paused, thought about it again for a moment and moved his head in sign of resignation – no, it was not possible. It seems, therefore, that an important distinction must be made between the kind of ‘uncleanliness’ that one can contract by becoming *ota* or *hazo fotsy*, and the kind of ‘uncleanliness’ that the descendants of slaves have ‘deep inside’ them. The first kind of ‘uncleanliness’ is perceived as contingent. It is unequivocally believed that cleansing rituals can remove it. The second kind of ‘uncleanliness’, to the contrary, is considered by all as impossible to cleanse.

The fact that, like Rakoto Jeannot, my informants of commoner descent thought there was no way of cleansing the ‘uncleanliness’ of people with slave ancestry suggests that they essentialize the category of ‘slaves’ because they think that the rituals that are usually used to cleanse ordinary people will have no effect on the people belonging to that category. In other words, my informants hold that slave descendants have retained their ‘unclean’ essence in spite of the abolition of slavery and that this essence is resistant to the most powerful of cleansing rituals. This shows a strong case of *stability over transformations*.

At the same time, however, my informants explained that in the pre-colonial past slaves could regain their free and ‘clean’ status by undergoing such cleansing rituals. This suggests that the essentialist construal of the category of ‘slaves’ that I have documented in contemporary Beparasy might be the outcome of an historical transformation. It is to this possibility that I now turn.

Was the category ‘slaves’ essentialized before abolition?

My argument in this section relies on the idea that before abolition slaves must have been differently conceptualized to how their descendants are today. I contend that a subtle but very important conceptual change occurred. This conceptual change can be explained in two slightly different ways. The first possibility is that the category ‘slaves’ was *not* essentialized in the pre-colonial past and it is only after abolition that it became essentialized. The second possibility is that the category was *already* essentialized before abolition in some but not all of the ways I have discussed above.

In the following I will discuss these two possibilities and explain why I think that the latter is more plausible than the former.

The view I propose is based on the observation that, from the end of the 18th century and during most of the 19th century, enslavement was so widespread in the Malagasy highlands that commoners and nobles alike were continuously at risk of being enslaved (as documented by Larson 2000 for the northern and central highlands). In consequence, everyone was at risk of someday becoming what the southern Betsileo considered 'unclean' persons.²⁰ Virtually every individual, noble or commoner, rich or poor, man or woman, adult or child, could be captured and sold, being the victim of a local war, of a raid operated by the bands of 'men's thieves' that plagued the region until the end of the 19th century, or of ill-intentioned neighbours who wanted to make some money. At the same time, in the pre-abolition era, slaves could be freed through a legal process and could rid themselves of the 'uncleanliness' associated with enslavement through ritual cleansing. As we shall see, it seems that freed slaves could fully resume the life of a free person provided they had been through these legal and ritual proceedings.²¹ The ubiquity, frequency and the very possibility of these changes of status make it very likely that free people must have regarded slave status as being a contingent rather than a fixed status. People must have conceived slave status as a certainly shameful yet reversible status, the 'uncleanliness' and shame of which could be removed if one could do the necessary ritual. In other words, *stability over transformations* as a defining feature of the concept was not present in the categorization at that time and the 'uncleanliness' of slaves was not viewed as immutable and irredeemable.

I find historical evidence supporting my views in a document that was only recently brought to the attention of scholars. Detailed life histories of people freed after enslavement or descriptions of the rituals that were used to cleanse them were almost

²⁰ After Merina conquest the wars between petty rulers that plagued the southern Betsileo region were put to an end. Yet the threat of enslavement remained high since raiders and brigands (*dahalo*) were still active in the region in spite of the Merina presence.

²¹ Thus my view goes against the idea that the stigma which is attached to slave descendants today was already attached to slaves who were freed by their masters in the pre-abolition past.

non-existent in the literature until this date.²² This important document was discovered in the archives of a Norwegian missionary (see Razafindralambo 2008) and translated and published by Gueunier, Noiret & Raharinjanahary (2005). The published material consists of three texts. In the first, a southern Betsileo man named Isambo of noble origin explains how he was kidnapped as a child in Betsileo country, brought to Antananarivo to be sold on the slave market and then finally bought by Lutheran missionaries who freed him. Isambo became a primary school teacher in Fianarantsoa.²³ In the second text, Isambo tells the story of how, after many difficulties, he managed to contact his relatives in the southern Betsileo region of Ikalamavony, ten years after having been kidnapped. The third part of the document is a manuscript entitled ‘The customs to accomplish to ‘wash the tongue’, or to give the blessing to a child who has been rejected but will become a child again’ (literal translation of *Ny fomba fanao raha manoza lela na hanao tsiodrano zaza nariana ka haverina ho zanaka indray*). According to the editors, although the manuscript is not signed it is very likely that Isambo wrote it, as indicated by the resemblance of the handwriting with Isambo’s autobiographical accounts mentioned earlier, and by the use of Betsileo dialect in parts of the description (Gueunier, Noiret & Raharinjanahary 2005: 72-73).

The ritual of ‘washing the tongue’²⁴ is presented by Isambo as a ritual that could be performed with two different aims: to reintegrate people who had been freed (after enslavement) into their family, or to reintegrate children who had been previously repudiated by their parents into their family. Thus in both cases the cleansing ritual serves the purpose of a reintegration into a local descent group and, consequently, into a wider local community of kinsmen because, as we have seen in the case of Beparasy, local groups of commoner descent who have resided in a region for a few generations are tied together by numerous marriage alliances.

²² But see Raharijaona (1982), Rasamuel (1982), Scrive & Gueunier (1992) and Ratsimandrava & Ramiandrasoa (1997) for (auto)biographical accounts of former slaves.

²³ When Isambo was baptised by the missionaries he took the name of Aogosta Herman Franke. To keep it simple however I will continue to refer to him as Isambo.

²⁴ Gueunier, Noiret & Raharinjanahary prefer to translate *laver la parole* ‘washing the words’, stressing that the word *lela* in Betsileo means not only ‘tongue’ but also ‘words’, so that the name of the ritual can be understood as meaning ‘cleansing the reputation’ (Gueunier, Noiret & Raharinjanahary 2005: 80). This interpretation makes much sense in the light of what I have explained about the social memory of ‘origins’ in the previous chapter.

It seems that Isambo wrote his account shortly before the abolition of slavery. As indicated at the beginning of the text, the purpose of the ritual is to replace by a “good blessing” (*tsiodrano tsara*) the blessing that the person has lost by becoming a ‘servant’ (*mpanompo*), that is, a slave:

The ancients (*ntaolo*) considered as dirty (*maloto*) their companions (*namany*) who had become the servants (*mpanompo*) of other people. Their idea was the following: they [i.e. the slaves] were people to whom the blessing (*fitahiana*) or good unction (*hosotra tsara*) that they previously possessed had been removed, they were people who had become tasteless (*matsantso*), like the wine that has become insipid and cannot be used any more.²⁵

Those who have served other people, like those who have been rejected by their parents, do not count as ‘complete persons’ any more in spite of having the same face as anyone else. They are people who have lost their good luck²⁶ (that is, the blessing (*fitahiana*) is not in them any more) and so they cannot be buried in the ancestral tomb those who got lost serving people (*ilay olona very nanompo olona*), unless their tongue has been washed. (Gueunier, Noiret & Raharinjanahary 2005: 144-145, my translation)

The moment for the ritual must be a favourable day and time according to astrology. Then the family, the descent group and the friends of the former slave gather and a person of high status (*olona ambony toetra*) who possesses *hazomanga* (i.e. the sacred wood of the Betsileo) is chosen to perform the ritual. The man selects the ox to be slaughtered (it should be of a particular kind) and then “the ceremony is not different from what is done during the offering [to the ancestors]” (ibid.:150): the ox is placed on the ground with the head at the north and turned to the east. The former slave is placed at the east of the animal and turns his face to the east. People in the assembly also turn and present their open hands to the east.²⁷ The man chosen to perform the ritual starts the *saotse* by calling ancestors and divinities, then he explains:

‘Mister So-and-so’ (*Ranona*) was lost, he served other people and did not follow what his ancestors did, because he followed the customs of a slave-by-father (*andevo-ray*) and a slave-by-mother (*andevo-reny*). (...) He did what neither his father nor his mother did and stayed under a curse. He carried what should not be carried, ate what should not be eaten and received in his

²⁵ In the conversation reported in Chapter 5, Ramartine also said that ‘slaves’ are people who have become *matsatso* (tasteless). I shall come back to this point later.

²⁶ I translate *olona mati-vorona* (literally: people whose bird is dead) by ‘people who have lost their good luck’ following Lolona Razafindralambo’s suggestion that the expression refers to the context of ordeals (Razafindralambo, personal communication).

²⁷ Recall that the east is the direction associated with the ancestors.

hands what the others did not want any more. He ate the dogs' excrements and suffered night and day. He endured bitterness and drunk the water of endurance, which should not have been his part. He carried ashes and was always cold on his head (that is, he carried water on his head). He stood, pathetic, besides the fire of someone like him and received the splatting of rice water.²⁸

Mister So-and-so here lost his good luck, he does not count as a complete person any more, he does not have his dignity any more, he is not someone behaving according to his ancestors any more.

And that is why, oh god, we are going to cleanse him with a perfectly-horned ox and with a highly-humped heifer, with the water-that-no-danger-can-defeat and the water-of-silver-money, and with the water-of-do-not-touch-me and the water-of-one-thousand-lives.²⁹ (...) And we call you, you the ancestors we are stemming from, because one does not call other people's ancestors, one needs to call his own ancestors. So come, you the ancestors of So-and-so, from whom he descended. Come from the west, come from the south, come from the east, come from north. Let those from beyond go down and those from below go up to attend a prayer and a sacrifice. So-and-so was noble on his father side and noble on his mother side (...) but his nobility, his descent had left him and he had been reduced to be the ashes' friend. And yet he belongs to your members, to your feet, to your arms, and he has now come back to raise again the paternal name that you left him, in spite of having been lowered to the rank of slave and having born the name of slave. But this name he did not receive if from you. A man can die seven times and be born again seven times (it is the condition of slave that they call here death, and it is the freeing that they consider like a rebirth).³⁰ It is not because he has done something stupid that he has become a slave, it is not as a relative that he has served someone like him, but it is because he went through 'the chopping that outsizes the block', 'the oppression that assaults' and 'the water that goes beyond the dykes'.³¹ It is the reasons why he was affected by slavery. And it is why we offer, for So-and-so, a perfectly-horned ox in compensation. He will not have to seek to recognize you and you will not have to seek to recognize him, since he is not 'other' (*hafa*) but your offspring (*taranakareo*). And even if he was married to a slave and shared the pillow of a slave-by-father or a slave-by-mother, there is nothing dirty that water cannot remove (*tsy misy maloto tsy ho afaky ny rano*). And whatever the actions forbidden to the ancestors he may have accomplished, nothing of this will lower him any more, because we turn it upside down with the *vadibona* and the *fotsiavadika*, and we clear it with the *vahi-fisoroka*,³² and we throw it at the foot of the *hazomanga*. The tarnished honour, the head numb with cold, the ashes' friend, the blows, the poker, the imprecations over the head all day, the destiny which was his, the days he endured bitterness, all this we throw it at the foot of the *hazomanga*. (Ibid.: 153-161, my translation)

²⁸ In a Betsileo house the place assigned to the slaves was close to the fire.

²⁹ These kinds of 'water' differ according to the ingredients that are used. Here the ingredients consist of beads, silver and plants.

³⁰ The sentence between brackets is a comment by Isambo.

³¹ These expressions seem to be proverbial and to refer to violent events.

³² These are three plant names.

Having said that the man performing the ritual makes further references to astrological beliefs and then puts some water on the former slave who needs to be cleansed. The ox is slaughtered. With the blood that is left on the knife's blade, a mark is made on the forehead of the former slave. The ritual performer once again puts some water (of another kind, from a white horn) on his head and says:

Although you served others who were people like you, although you did what your ancestors did not, although you were subject everyday to the imprecations of your master, we cleanse you with this water. However you were soiled, may the misfortune not follow you, may the fault not follow you. We pray for you with this water from the white horn, this 'accomplished water' (*rano vita*), so that you become 'nicely accomplished' (*vita soa*), so that you become 'well accomplished' (*vita tsara*). (Ibid.: 167-169, my translation)

The ritual performer pours water on the former slave a second time, repeating "Nicely accomplished, well accomplished" (*vita soa, vita tsara*) and adding "May you have seven sons and seven daughters." For the third and last time the whole assembly repeats the words "Nicely accomplished, well accomplished." At the end of this account, Isambo comments:

It is when all this has been accomplished that his family can count him again as one of its members, and that it is allowed to bury him in the ancestral tomb. Because as long as this ceremony of 'washing the tongue' has not been performed he is not allowed to be buried in the ancestral tomb and he cannot marry someone in 'his kind of group' (*fokon'olona iray karazany aminy*). (Ibid.: 168-169, my translation)

This account shows beyond doubt that it was possible to ritually remove the 'uncleanliness' associated with enslavement before the abolition. Indeed, it seems to indicate that at that time people thought that cleansing rituals were all-powerful and that "there is nothing dirty that water cannot remove." However, the description of the ritual also provides evidence that slaves were indeed considered as 'dirty', diminished and incomplete persons, because of the 'inferior' tasks they had to perform for their owners and because they had to forgo their own ancestral taboos. We may then ask: does this mean that the category 'slaves' was already essentialized?

In the light of Isambo's description, my opinion is that it seems that it was. In all probability the category had several of the elements mentioned above, though not all of them. (1) Although it is somewhat difficult to have any certainty on this matter, it seems very likely that at that time the category of 'slaves' had a rich inductive potential and that free people inferred many characteristic features associated with slavery when they learnt that someone was a slave. (2) Representing slaves as 'unclean people' or 'tasteless people' clearly meant incorporating nonobvious properties into that category. (3) Serving someone who owned them (but was not a relative, as explained in Isambo's account) was the main feature that caused all slaves to be what they were. (4) As for the relative role of nature versus nurture, it is not easy to be certain either but I would say that ideas of innate potential and of inheritance of a slave 'essence' may well have been present because of the insistence, in the ritual, on being a slave 'by mother' and 'by father'. This insistence seems to indicate that slaves who had been born into slavery (i.e. from slave parents) were considered as particularly 'unclean', 'weak', 'tasteless' and so on, because of their descent. (5) The category had certainly sharp boundaries since it was not possible to be 'half a slave' – one was either a slave or a free person. (6) The ritual of *manozala lela*, however, shows that free southern Betsileo did not think of slaves as a 'different kind of people' who could not 'fully' regain their free status once they had lost it. To my knowledge, there is no historical evidence that a strong stigma comparable to that observed today for slave descendants was attached to having been a slave during part of one's life or having slave ancestors. I would therefore assume that formerly enslaved persons, provided they went through the appropriate ritual, were *completely* redeemed and did not suffer from any prejudice and discrimination because of their personal history.³³ If so, this means that one crucial aspect of psychological essentialism was absent, namely what I referred to earlier as *stability over transformations*. Moreover, the mention of marriage at the end of Isambo's account indicates that freed slaves might be considered as suitable marriage partners by the local community (*fokonolona*) as soon as they had performed the cleansing ritual and reintegrated their descent group.

³³ The kind of stigma that remains attached to former slaves is sometimes called a 'servile stain' in the literature on slavery and post-slavery issues. My claim here is that the idea of an indelible 'servile stain' seems to have been foreign to pre-colonial Betsileo society. Undergoing the cleansing ritual of *manozala lela* was enough to get rid of the stigma attached to enslavement.

Thus it would probably be wrong to assume that there was no essentialization at all going on before abolition. Enslaved persons were definitely perceived as people who had become ‘different’ persons in an important sense. This is because slave status seems to have been conceived as the inversion of noble status. It looks as if a slave was a kind of inverted image of a noble (*hova*) (or a ruler [*mpanjaka*]), and that the two statuses of noble (*hova*) and slave (*andevo*) were essentialized in the past. While the *hova* was said to be *masina* (‘sacred’) and people had to observe many ritual precautions when they approached him, something similar seemed to have been going on, albeit for different reasons, in the case of slaves. Slaves were deemed to be *olo matsatso* (tasteless people), this quality being the opposite of *masina* – the term is usually translated by ‘sacred’, but it also means ‘powerful’ and ‘salty’.³⁴ The ‘uncleanliness’ associated with the weak status of southern Betsileo slaves had its counterpart in all the ritual precautions that surrounded the nobles because of their sacred power. Southern Betsileo *andevo* and *hova* were both kinds of ‘untouchable’ persons, but of course for different reasons and with different consequences. Yet, the essentialization of *andevo* and *hova* statuses differed in one important respect, for one could not become a *hova* as easily as one could become an *andevo* and, conversely, one could not stop being a *hova* as easily as one could stop being an *andevo*. It is likely that the category of *andevo* was construed as less stable than the category of *hova* because, to put it simply, virtually everyone had an interest in keeping open the possibility of ‘coming back’ from a possible enslavement.

³⁴ It is tempting, here, to write that slaves were thought of having lost their *hasina* (‘sacred potency’) because they lost their freedom, became the private subject of someone else and were forced to forego their ancestral taboos. I refrain from doing so, however, because in the field nobody ever told me about ‘slaves’ lacking *hasina*. *Hasina* has been a much discussed issue in Malagasy scholarship and is often considered as a central concept of Malagasy thought. Evers argued that slave descendants are considered lacking *hasina* and possessing *hery*, i.e. according to her the negative “energy” which causes “infertility, illness and death” (Evers 2006: 424). My fieldwork did not support these claims. When I asked questions aimed at prompting these issues in Beparasy I found that nobody really understood what I meant by these words or ideas. Rathéophile, the local historian of noble descent mentioned in Chapter 6, told me that *hasina* was a Merina concept rather than a southern Betsileo one, and that for the southern Betsileo “things are much simpler” since only people of high status (e.g. *hova*, *ombiasa* and *andevohova*) were considered *masina*. This seems to be confirmed by Rainihifina (1975: 88-97). A Betsileo scholar in Fianarantsoa later told me that, apart from the case of the *ombiasa* who is sometimes said to possess much *hasina*, contemporary Betsileo do not seem to apply this concept to other people.

Reasons for an ideological shift

If I am right, the essentialization of the category ‘slaves’ became entrenched only after the abolition of slavery. An important ideological shift seems to have taken place – but why? I will argue that the explanation for such a shift is to be found in the particular circumstances surrounding the abolition of slavery as well as in the pre-abolition marriage practices of the southern Betsileo and in the human mind’s disposition towards essentialism. To understand why the abolition of slavery might have significantly modified people’s thinking about slaves, former slaves and their descendants, it is necessary to go back to its circumstances and most immediate consequences.

On 30 September 1895, a French expeditionary force entered Antananarivo. The military takeover was soon followed by the annexation of Madagascar on 6 August 1896. On 27 September 1896, only one year after the French troops had reached Antananarivo, slavery was abolished and about 500,000 slaves were set free. The resident governor Laroche had decreed the abolition just before leaving his office to Gallieni, “in a fit of pique” (Randrianja & Ellis 2009: 157).

The question of whether the French administration should immediately emancipate the slaves or adopt a more careful approach, abolishing slavery step by step, had been discussed in the French parliament in June 1896. The context was particularly difficult, since the French occupiers faced the revolt of the *mena lamba*.³⁵ Opponents to an immediate abolition feared an increase in social disorder that could damage French interests in Madagascar (Jacob 1997: 262). In spite of these concerns, the parliament unanimously voted in favour of an immediate abolition. Up to this point, resident governor Laroche had worked on a plan to progressively abolish slavery in the course of ten years, but when the minister of the colonies asked him to examine how to execute the will of the parliament, he replied “I am ready to abolish slavery whenever you want” and added, a few days later, that “the best would be to rush the decision. We should not fear troubling what is already troubled. Abolition will pass unnoticed (or less noticed) during the insurrection” (quoted in Jacob 1997: 265, my

³⁵ The revolt of the ‘red shawls’ (*mena lamba*) was an anti-colonial uprising (see Ellis 1985).

translation). Laroche then convened a committee in Antananarivo to work on a draft of a decree. In this committee, anxious voices were again heard about the unpredictable consequences of an immediate abolition. Yet once again the vote decided on immediate abolition. On 26 September, Laroche received a message from the *Ministère des Colonies* requesting that he follow the decision of the committee and to abolish slavery immediately. He signed the decree on the same day and published it in the *Journal Officiel de Madagascar* the day after. On 28 September, Laroche handed over his power to Gallieni.

To the satisfaction of many, including that of Gallieni – who was opposed to the immediate abolition – the emancipation of slaves in 1896 did not lead to a social disorder prejudicial to French interests in Madagascar.³⁶ But what was the effect of the abolition on Malagasy society? Did it provoke a social change of great magnitude? Three years later, Jean Carol, a French official, wrote that it “hasn’t changed anything to the customs of the Malagasy so far” (Carol 1898: 30, my translation). Scholars have tended to endorse this view, stressing that traditional hierarchy and the rules governing relations between status groups, including those related to marriages, have continued to be observed as if nothing happened (e.g. Rantoandro 1997: 283). Unlike these authors, I want to argue on the contrary that, for the southern Betsileo at least, the abolition caused important changes in marriage practices and in the way people conceived of ‘slaves’.

The turn of the 20th century in Madagascar saw the French takeover of the island, the fall of the Merina empire, the uprising of the *mena lamba* and the liberation of some 500,000 slaves (Deschamps 1972: 221) in an island that counted about 2,600,000 inhabitants, and approximately 400,000 Betsileo (Kottak 1980: 54). It was a time of major political and ideological crisis for the country. The collapse of the monarchy and the abolition of slavery constituted the two major events which redefined in the highlands what Eric Wolf calls “structural power,” that is, the power that “shapes the

³⁶ Gallieni tried to slow down the emancipation process, but a few years after the abolition he judged that “It appeared that the liberation of the slaves, which was feared by some, has been an excellent political measure” (quoted in Jacob 1997: 270, my translation). Gallieni and the French administration after him used former slaves as low-level civil servants because they were considered to be loyal to their liberators.

social field of action in such a way as to render some kinds of behaviour possible, while making others less possible or impossible” (Wolf 2001: 385). Within the span of a few years, people were told by the new, foreign masters of the country that there were no kings, no nobles and no slaves anymore. The imposition of this new order was soon applied to the whole country since after 1895 the French quickly took control of the regions that had not been conquered by the Merina. Even though they continued to use the traditional power structures for administrative purposes, French colonizers nonetheless deeply modified structural power in Madagascar. This change in structural power was to have important consequences for the future of many of the slaves they liberated.

After abolition, those who had been recently enslaved went back to their region. They were welcomed by their kinsmen and ritually cleansed by their elders in the way described above. They could resume the life of a free man or woman, and most probably did not suffer from stigmatization because of their former enslavement. They were able to find a spouse of free descent and to have offspring who found their place in the ancestral tombs. However, a large number of slaves whose forebears had been born into slavery for several generations had been severed from the links with their descent groups and after their liberation they were unable to go back to a region where they could reintegrate a kin group. In the aftermath of the abolition there were a large number of such ‘lost people’ (*olo very*) moving around, especially in the highlands but not only. They could hardly identify with a *tanindrazana* (ancestral land) other than that of their former masters but if they did not want to stay with those on share-cropping arrangement they had no land where to establish and had to find ways of making a living. Some found free land to cultivate in remote places like Beparasy, others remained landless labourers who worked for wages, for example in the portage business or in colonial enterprises. Having to find out how to make a living from scratch, without the support of a well-established community of kinsmen, the ‘lost’ ones among former slaves probably remained the poorest segment of the population long after abolition.

Because their liberation was decided and imposed by the illegitimate power of French colonizers, the bulk of these ‘free-floating’ freed slaves were perceived by the southern Betsileo of free origins as people who had not been properly freed according to custom and had remained ‘unclean’. As explained above, before abolition it was possible to ritually cleanse former slaves so that they can reintegrate their kin group and, through it, local society as a whole. The 1896 French decree, by contrast, did not meet the minimal conditions to be considered by the southern Betsileo as a proper ‘cleansing’ speech act.

Slaves in 1896 were liberated by an authority which had nothing of the traditional powers that could have freed them through an appropriate administrative procedure and cleansed them through an appropriate blessing. For this reason, after abolition those among former slaves in southern Betsileo country who could not be reintegrated into one of their descent groups remained labelled ‘unclean’ because they had not lived ‘like their ancestors’ (i.e. according to their ancestors’ *fomba*, a word that not only means ‘customs’ but also ‘way of life’, ‘way of being’) and therefore they were considered as somewhat guilty (*ota*) for the kind of life they had. Furthermore, since the ‘flow of blessing’ from their elders and ancestors had been interrupted for them (Bloch 1994: 136), sometimes for a very long time, former slaves were considered by the Betsileo as *olo matsatso*, i.e. ‘insipid’, ‘weakened’ persons. It is in light of this particular context – the sudden liberation of thousands of slaves and the southern Betsileo conception of an enslaved person – that the entrenchment of the category ‘slaves’ must be understood.

A large number of the slaves who were freed in Imerina in 1896 were Betsileo (Rantoandro 1997: 279) and so many returned to the Betsileo region. This partly explains, it seems to me, why southern Betsileo commoners have become so ‘obsessive’ about the idea of (not) marrying former slaves and why this obsession might have changed their marriage practices. Dubois explains that in the past Betsileo named descent groups were ranked according to rules which he found “difficult” to understand “now that so many things have been changed and so many others were lost” (Dubois 1938: 578-579). Nonetheless, Dubois stresses that it was very important to marry people of the same rank (*mitovy saranga*). My understanding is that, because

of their exogamous preference and their preference for an ‘egalitarian’ marriage, commoners already conducted the intensive investigations I have described in the pre-colonial era, but at that time they conducted them to enquire about the *rank* of their potential spouses’ groups (*within* the commoner descent group). In the aftermath of the abolition and with the change in ‘structural power’, however, it seems that the positive rule of finding a spouse of the same rank within the commoner ‘status group’ changed into the negative rule of not marrying outside the commoner status group, i.e. of not marrying nobles and, much more importantly, former slaves. In consequence, after abolition former slaves were forced, by necessity, to find spouses within their ‘status group’ (i.e. they married other former slaves) and by doing so they gave further reasons to commoners and their descendants for considering them as another ‘kind of people’ with a different kind of ancestry (*raza*), an ‘unclean’ essence and a low status. Moreover, the southern Betsileo practice of giving *tetihara* speeches and the social memory about origins, ancestry and alliances made it very difficult for former slaves to escape the social status by marrying outside their status group.

Explaining why free people continued to call former slaves ‘unclean people’ and why the category ‘slaves’ became entrenched is not sufficient to explain why free descendants essentialize the category ‘slaves’ *today*, because the reasons I have just mentioned are not as valid today as they were in the past. As we have seen, the Berosaiña have owned their land since the end of the 19th century, have built tombs where they now have several generations of ancestors – thus they receive their blessings – and some of them have managed to become wealthier than the average free descendant. Moreover, some of them marry free descendants, albeit unilaterally. We need to explain why the essentialization of ‘slaves’ is so widespread among southern Betsileo commoners and why, after having become entrenched in the aftermath of the abolition it has stuck and persisted in spite of all the socio-economic and ideological transformations in Madagascar. In the next section of this chapter I will discuss one particular aspect of this question. Since the ‘cultural transmission’ of the essentialized category is a crucial point to account for its persistence in the population, I will explain how I think children in Beparasy come to essentialize slave descendants without much prodding and teaching. I will thereby stress the causal role

of the cognitive disposition towards essentialism in the way southern Betsileo thinking about ‘slaves’ is constructed today.

Learning to essentialize ‘slaves’

Given the difficulty of observing the process of learning about such a sensitive issue, I am not able to provide a precise account on how, in practice, children in Beparasy come to essentialize the category ‘slaves’. Yet in spite of this lack of detailed knowledge a few important points can be made.

Scholars working on psychological essentialism have insisted on the fact that little input is necessary to trigger essentialism because, it is argued, essentialism is an early bias of the human mind (Gelman 2003). This is particularly true of ‘natural kinds’ and of social categories, which are readily essentialized with very little cultural prodding. Thus it would seem that all that children need to learn is *which* categories are to be essentialized in their particular cultural context, rather than having to learn from scratch how to adopt an essentialist stance (see Hirschfeld 1996).

Following this model, one would expect that children of commoner descent in Beparasy will easily hone in on the category of ‘slaves’ and deploy their ‘essentializing mind’ to it. This is arguably because they are often around when adults converse. The best opportunity for children to listen to adults’ conversations is at the evening meal, when the night has already fallen and members of the household (as well as their eventual guests) are confined in the small space of the ‘kitchen’ (*lakozia*) around the fire.³⁷ Presumably, at these moments, adults sometimes talk about ‘slaves’ and children listen in. Yet I find it unlikely that the category ‘slaves’ is made available to children as simply as such an interpretation suggests. One of the problems is that, as I have already mentioned, adults are careful when they talk about ‘slaves’ and use many euphemisms to replace the word *andevo*. These euphemisms are unlikely to be transparent to children, which means that their essentialist bias could not be triggered until they understand what the adults really mean. Moreover, as I have already

³⁷ Since there is no electricity in Beparasy, and because candles, petrol and batteries are expensive for most families, the evening fire of the kitchen does not only provide a warmth that is very welcome in the cold season but also provides the main source of light in the house at night.

mentioned, it seems that children know very early on that the Berosaiña are ‘unclean people’ (*olo tsa madio*), even though teenagers and young adults are often not able to explain why this is so and do not understand what the terms *andevo* or *hovavao* really mean.³⁸

This suggests that children and young teenagers have not yet made *andevo* – that is, ‘slaves’ in general – the target of their psychological essentialism. By contrast, they very early essentialize the Berosaiña, probably because they hear the label ‘unclean people’ (*olo tsa madio*) that is the most commonly attached to them. This label presumably triggers essentialism in young children since it leads them to look for a hidden, nonobvious property. However, even though they essentialize the Berosaiña, children lack the knowledge of why they are ‘unclean’ and why people cannot marry them. It is only much later that they will build up this knowledge.

The following example of interaction between a mother (Pelatsara) and her son (Solo) provides some support for my claim that children first essentialize the Berosaiña long before learning why they are ‘unclean people’ and why people do not marry them. It took place when we were interviewing Pelatsara. Her son Solo, in his late teens, had listened to the discussion from the start and had remained silent throughout the interview. Yet when questions about slave descent and marriage were asked, he jumped into the conversation, showing an obvious interest in the topic:

D & A: According to the ancestral customs, what kind of people is it not possible to marry?

Pelatsara: (Hesitating) People who do not have the same ancestry.

Solo: [People with] other ancestry (*raza*).

³⁸ This was confirmed to me by the primary school teacher Ramose Martin. The existence of slavery in Madagascar before colonization should be explained by teachers – it figures in the curriculum – but history is taught only in the final years of primary school and slavery is only mentioned in passing (when it is mentioned at all). When I asked Ramose Martin whether primary school teachers used this opportunity to discuss this sensitive topic with their pupils, he replied that they did not, because it would be too complicated to do so. At that time most pupils of commoner descent know that the Berosaiña are considered ‘unclean people’ (*olo tsa madio*). I did not ask questions to primary school children about slave descendants but I did ask some questions to a few teenagers. They all knew about the uncleanness of the Berosaiña and they were also aware that, as clean people, they should not marry them, but they did not seem to have a precise idea of why it was so.

Pelatsara: In the past, there were people fleeing (*olo lefa*). And people took them. They made them slaves. That's how a custom like this arrived, and now all people look for the *raza*. And then [they ask]: "How is the ancestry (*raza*)?" And then [people reply]: "They do not have the same ancestry (*raza*) as we have." That's how it started in the past. (Whispering) We do not say it aloud but we talk about it and it's like a secret. It's like that. And only people like them can marry them.

Solo: Only people who have the same ancestry can marry each other.

D & A: What does it mean exactly that they do not have the same ancestry (*raza*)?

Pelatsara: That's how I said, they were people fleeing. And people sold them. And they made them slaves. That's how it became so. And then it continued, continued and people inherited all this.

Solo: (To his mother) As slaves, what did they do?

Pelatsara: I don't know what they did but they were slaves. If people are not like them they cannot marry them and have children [with them]. They can only marry each other. Even if it's on the side of the mother or on the side of the grandmother [that they have a slave ancestry] but the father is clean, we do not give [our child] at all, unless the child insists, insists.

D & A: And why are some people 'clean'?

Pelatsara: 'Clean people' are people to whom nobody did that [i.e. people who were not enslaved].

Solo: (To his mother) Are you not going to say that the name of the 'clean' is so-and-so and the name of the 'unclean' is so-and-so?

Pelatsara: I don't know what to say for the 'clean' but the 'unclean' are called *hovavao*.

Solo: [They are called] *Berosaiña*!

D & A: When someone wants to marry, how do people know that the person is *hovavao*?

Solo: When one goes to get a spouse it is necessary to examine people in detail.

Pelatsara: One needs to investigate.

Solo: "What kind of ancestry (*raza*) do you have?"

Pelatsara: "These people, how are they? Are they clean people?"

Solo: (To his mother) What is the exact wording?

Pelatsara: "Are these people clean?" That's the question. "How are the origins of these people?" In this case it is really necessary to go to their 'roots' (*tafotitri*). One must look into the father's side and into the mother's side if a child is going to have a spouse. "How is it for the father? How is it for the mother?" And the people who live close to them must tell us. "No, this cannot be done since it's a *lambo-tapaka*." They have to tell us. Because you cannot enter into something like this and give your child for marriage without thinking about it. People who live close by must investigate, maybe they know and then [they say]: "these people are 'clean'" and then we can receive/take them. Or [they say]: "these are people with whom it can't be done because they are like this" [implied: they are 'slaves'].

Solo: It's necessary to ask people who are their neighbours.

[Transcript 7.2]

During this interview Solo was obviously eager to answer our questions on the avoidance of marriage but he seemed also very curious about what his mother had to say on the issue of slavery and on the way parents investigate the status of their children's potential partners. Solo had some reason to be particularly interested in the discussion: some time after the interview we were told by one of his sisters that he had recently brought a girlfriend to his paternal village for the trial period of a customary marriage (after having given the *tapi-maso* and the *ala-fady* to the girl's parents – see Chapter 4). The girl was well (*tama*) in the young man's village but his relatives' investigations about her 'origins' led to the conclusion that she was from a slave descent family of the region of Ambalamasina. As soon as her slave ancestry was confirmed, Solo's parents told him that the girl should be sent back to her village.³⁹ Solo then followed his parents' instruction and sent his girlfriend home.

The above discussion was particularly interesting because Solo had probably known for a long time that one must marry 'people with the same ancestry' and that the Berosaiña are 'unclean people', but he did not seem to know much about the reason why it was so. He seemed to have only a vague idea of slavery. It looked as if Solo was still in the middle of the process of learning why he could not have married his former girlfriend. At the same time however he knew already why such a marriage would have caused problems: he knew that his children could not have been buried into his family's ancestral tomb. This was clear in the following passage of the same conversation, after the mother had just told us that the children of a mixed couple were called *lambo-tapaka*:

D & A: What makes them *lambo-tapaka*?

Pelatsara: Because one half is clean and the other half is *hovavao*. That's how they become so.

D & A: Are there bad things that befall to their life if people marry them?

³⁹ We were not told about the 'official' reason given to her for sending her back home, but since this stage in the marriage process is clearly conceived as a trial period, there was no need of elaborate explanations.

Pelatsara: Yes, there are. If children are stubborn [and want to marry a *lambo-tapaka*] then there they are [i.e. people let them go]. But if their children die the parents from here will not take them [to bury them in their ancestral tomb], they will let them be outside [the tomb] because they do not want to mix with them at all.

D & A: They cannot be with their parents?

Solo: They cannot be put into the ancestral tomb. People will break the earth (*hamakia tany*).

Pelatsara: They really cannot be put into the tomb but [have to stay] outside of it. There is no asking [for the corpse] from their side [i.e. from the free descent side].

D & A: Break the earth? What does it mean?

Solo: It means that there is no tomb [i.e. that they are buried in the earth].

Pelatsara: If they [the free descent side] do not want to break the earth they [the children] will be placed in the tomb where they are [i.e. in the slave descent tomb] because they [the free descent side] do not take them, not even on the side of the mother [of the free descent parent] or on another side. They do not take them in their tomb. They [i.e. the children] are buried at the place where they are [implied: in the slave descendants' tomb].

[Transcript 7.3]

Thus on the basis of this and similar anecdotal evidence gathered in interviews, I would argue that children of commoner descent learn from an early age that the Berosaiña are 'unclean people' and that they cannot marry them. Maybe they are told that the reason is that they are 'clean people' themselves, that the Berosaiña 'do not have the same ancestry' and that 'clean people' should only marry 'clean people' and 'people who have the same ancestry'. Beyond that, however, I doubt that they learn about the reasons why the Berosaiña are 'unclean' and what 'having the same ancestry' really means before they reach adulthood. Nonetheless, the fact that the Berosaiña are commonly referred to as 'unclean people' invites children to assume the existence of hidden, nonobvious properties that makes a group of people who, superficially, are just like them, so that they conceive of them as essentially different and unmarriageable because of their hidden essence.

I would therefore schematically (and tentatively) describe the learning process as follows: first young children learn about the 'uncleanliness' of a few persons in their neighbourhood (e.g. Raboba) because they have heard the label *tsa madio* commonly used to refer to them. At this point, because of their 'essentializing mind' children already 'look beyond the obvious' and attribute a hidden essence to these individuals

– an inner ‘uncleanliness’. Then they learn that it is not only these individuals who are ‘unclean’ but their entire group of kinsmen, like for example the Berosaiña in Beparasy. Thus they now essentialize the descent group, attributing an ‘unclean’ essence to all its members by inductive inferences (i.e. by learning that someone is a Berosaiña they will infer that he/she is an ‘unclean’ person, even if they have never heard such a statement about this person). Later on, when children reach puberty and start having *sipa* (boy- or girlfriends) they will catch more from adults’ conversations about ‘unclean people’ and they will, like Solo in the above conversation, be increasingly receptive to what is said about marrying them. When they reach marriage age they may even be taught about the issue by their parents or by elder members of their family, and be explained some of the reasons why they should be careful of not marrying a ‘slave’ (e.g. because their children will be sick and will not have the right to be buried in the ancestral tomb). As they grow up they will take an active part in various gatherings, ceremonies and rituals, where issues of ‘slaves’ and slave ‘origins’ may be evoked or discussed, adding more cultural content to the way they think about ‘slaves’. The point that I want to stress in this developmental story is that children, because of the essentialist bias of the human mind which makes them ‘natural’ essentializers, essentialize their slave descent neighbours and the category ‘slaves’ long before they are explicitly taught why they should do so.

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to come back briefly to the issue of *lambo-tapaka* children. As explained by Pelatsara in the above quotation the children of a mixed couple cannot be buried in the ancestral tomb of the free descent group. When I asked Ramose Martin to tell me why it was not possible to do so, he replied, “If you have a bucket of clean water and pour a cup of dirty water into it, what you get is a bucket of dirty water.” Psychological essentialism about ‘slaves’, it seems to me, is here a highly entrenched way of thinking that guides and constrains the way people think about what happens during the ‘mixing’ of the procreation process and the ‘mixing’ in ancestral tombs. In both cases, the outcome of mixing ‘unclean people’ with ‘clean people’ will be ‘unclean people’

Conclusion

At least since the work of Durkheim and Mauss (1903), anthropologists have been interested in the way people in different societies categorize the social world. In this chapter I have focused on the essentialized categorization of ‘slaves’ by descendants of commoners among the southern Betsileo and the transformation of this categorization in history. Having realized during fieldwork that the way Beparasy villagers essentialized ‘slaves’ was an important key to understanding the actual condition of the Berosaiña, I resorted to the ‘cognitive lens’ of my tool kit and sought to discuss the problem in light of recent developments in psychological essentialism in cognitive psychology and anthropology.

I started this chapter by asking why slave descendants are locked into the status of ‘unclean people’. My answer to this question is that the category ‘slaves’ is essentialized by commoner descendants, who think that there is no means to cleanse the ‘uncleanliness’ of people with slave ancestry. I have also asked whether the contemporary conception of ‘slaves’ as ‘unclean’ and inferior was the remnant of an unchanged pre-abolition ideology and why an essentialized construal of ‘slaves’ has persisted until today in spite of the transformations of Malagasy society. My answer to the first question is that a subtle yet important shift occurred in the way southern Betsileo commoners categorized former slaves immediately after the abolition: as the possibility of ritual cleansing was lost, ex-slaves found themselves ‘stuck’ in their predicament as ‘dirty people’. This means that one of today’s key aspects of the category of ‘slaves’ – its stability over transformations – is actually the result of what happened in the aftermath of abolition. Arguably and paradoxically, the softer essentialism of the past became entrenched as a result of the end of slavery.

My answer to the second question is that the essentialist construal of ‘slaves’ as ‘unclean people’ has persisted among the southern Betsileo because it is particularly ‘catchy’ and thus easy to learn (see Sperber 1996). Given the human cognitive bias towards essentialism, it is triggered very early in children, presumably because the label ‘unclean people’ invites children to assume the nonobvious property of an inner ‘uncleanliness’. How exactly essentialism develops over the developmental span is an

important question that I cannot answer with certainty. I would nonetheless suggest that children in Beparasy start by essentializing some individuals as ‘unclean’ persons, then the Berosaiña as an ‘unclean’ descent group. Later on, as they move to adulthood, they add cultural content to their essentialized category of ‘unclean people’ and extend it to all people who have slave ancestry, thereby coming up with an essentialized category ‘slaves’ and with a ‘culturally correct’ knowledge of the reasons why they should not marry them. Needless to say, this psychological essentialism and the concomitant avoidance of marriage have important consequences for the Berosaiña. I come back to their particular case in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER 8: THE PREDICAMENT OF THE BERSAIÑA

When Rakamisy, a Bersaiña, arrived in the uninhabited region of Beparasy towards 1880, he was a former slave who had bought his freedom and volunteered to be among the handful of men who worked hard to clear the land from trees, build rice fields and grow rice in this peripheral area of the small polity of Ambatofotsy. As Chapter 3 showed, it is not clear whether Rakamisy first went to Beparasy because he was sent there by the *hova* of Ambatofotsy as an *andevohova* (as Randriatsoa explained), or whether he only became one later, possibly because he had replaced Rainialihosy's son when Merina occupiers raised an army in the region (as Razama explained).

There is no doubt, however, that Rakamisy arrived in Beparasy as a free man and that he came before the abolition of slavery. Rakamisy had been a slave for part of his life but at some point he was able to buy his freedom and was legitimately freed by his master through legal and administrative proceedings. He had thus become a free man of commoner (*olompotsy*) status. Had he also been cleansed by a ritual? It is difficult to say. Apparently he had no free descent group into which he could have been reintegrated (according to what Randriatsoa told me, the Bersaiña have no contact with their relatives in 'places of origins' before they arrived in Vinany, even though they recall the names of some villages). Thus at first sight it may seem unlikely that Radriantsoa had undergone any ritual cleansing. But I was once told by Rapanjato, the elder briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, that in the pre-abolition past the slaves who were freed were sometimes cleansed by a ritual performed by their masters. If this were true, then Rakamisy might well have been ritually cleansed when he was freed by his master in Vinany.

Whatever happened, it seems to me that the issue of Rakamisy's 'uncleanliness' may have not been very important at that time, for two reasons. First, unlike Isambo's, Rakamisy's case was not that he came back to his region of origin and to his former free descent group. And as explained in the previous chapter, the purpose of the ritual of *manoza lela* was to reintegrate people who had been 'lost' for their kinsmen and had become 'unclean' because they had done things they should not have done according to their ancestors' customs (including enslaved people and children who had been repudiated by their parents). What this means, it seems, is that Isambo's 'uncleanliness' was a major problem above all for his kinsmen (those who had the same ancestors and were concerned about the reputation of the descent group) but a less important issue for people who were unrelated to him. Second, Rakamisy's freeing took place before the abolition of slavery. As I have explained, the category 'slaves' had not yet been entrenched, former slaves were not yet considered as 'irredeemably unclean' persons and the issue of the 'uncleanliness' of former slaves had not yet become an 'obsession' for southern Betsileo commoners looking for spouses. Therefore I would argue that Rakamisy's free companions – in Beparasy or elsewhere – were *at that time* (towards 1880) probably not sensitive (or, at least, not *that* sensitive) to the issue of his possible 'uncleanliness'. What mattered most for them, *at that time*, was that Rakamisy had been legally freed and had become an *olompotsy*. Only in this way can we understand that Rakamisy managed to become an *andevohova* in the short period between his manumission and the abolition of slavery.

We can imagine that, notwithstanding the status differences between the *andevohova* and the others, the relationships between these first settlers were rather egalitarian. When living together on the small fortified village on Vatobe, they must have relied heavily on mutual support, because of the harsh living conditions and the constant threat of being raided.¹ We can also imagine that, had things stayed as they were, Rakamisy's offspring would have married other commoners. Maybe some of them would have even married the other *andevohova*'s children. Because of the prestige attached to the function of *andevohova* and the chance offered to start a new life in an uninhabited place, it seems to me likely that the story of Rakamisy's former

¹ The strength of the links between the families living together on Vatobe was often mentioned to me in the oral histories I collected.

enslavement, had it been known by his companions, would have soon been forgotten: as time went by, local people would have retained the figure of a founder and of a kind of ‘ruler’ (*mpanjaka*) – as Ramarcelline put it (Chapter 5) – rather than that of a ‘slave’.

But things did not go that way and world history flipped the cards of Rakamisy’s destiny. In 1895, only one or two decades after his arrival in Beparasy, the French invaded Madagascar and soon liberated all the slaves. In the Arindrano region, freed slaves did what migrants looking for new lands always did according to the local customs: they asked the now former local rulers to give their blessing (that is, in this case, the permission) to settle down and cultivate a plot of land within their former fief. Thus most probably the freed slaves Rainihosy, Randriatsoakely and their ‘mother’ Rapitsarandro asked the former ruler of Ambatofotsy if they could join their ‘kinsmen’ Rakamisy in Beparasy.² This must have been a formality, since the former ruler had been left with very little power. Rakamisy welcomed them and as a local *andevohova* he allocated them lands where they could build rice fields.

Rakamisy’s local status must have started to change at that very moment of their arrival. While he had arrived as a free man and had imposed himself as an *andevohova*, his ‘brothers’ Rainihosy and Randriatsoakely and his ‘mother’ Rapitsarandro arrived as slaves who had just been liberated in a sudden and awkward fashion by the ‘white foreigners’ (*vazaha*) who had seized Madagascar. Needless to say, they had not been ritually cleansed. Thus when they arrived in Beparasy immediately after 1896 villagers must have already regarded them with suspicion, though presumably they did not essentialize them straightaway, because the entrenchment of the category ‘slaves’ and the new obsession with former slaves’ ‘uncleanliness’ explained in the previous chapter certainly took some time to take hold in people’s minds. Since Rakamisy and his relatives were identified as a kin group – the Berosaiña – other people gradually started to gossip about them being

² The terms ‘mother’ and ‘siblings’ in the story the Berosaiña’s arrival in Beparasy are perhaps best understood in the classificatory sense, or even as ‘fictive’ kinship terms. I find it possible that the first generation of Berosaiña who arrived in Beparasy were not close kinsmen (or, at least, that they were not as close as they say today) but behaved as if they were so, thereby starting the ‘reconstruction’ of a local descent group.

‘slaves’ and ‘unclean’, in spite of Rakamisy’s *andevohova* status. In other words, although when he arrived in Beparasy Rakamisy had the prospect of living the life of a free man and of a powerful *andevohova*, the arrival of his liberated kinsmen severely undermined his possibilities. From now on, it would become very difficult for Rakamisy and his descendants to not be considered as ‘unclean people’ in Beparasy. The local essentialization of the Berosaiña had begun.

Yet since Rakamisy was *andevohova* his two ‘brothers’ obtained particularly good and large lands. When shortly after their arrival the fortified village on Vatobe was abandoned, the three ‘brothers’ established separate *vala* close to their respective rice fields. Then during the French villagization policy the three ‘brothers’ lived with commoner descendants in larger villages: some families of commoner descent joined the *vala* founded by the *andevohova* Rakamisy, where his ‘mother’ Rapitsarandro also lived (Mahasoa). Rainihosy founded with other families the ‘big village’ (*tanambe*) of Ambalamanakava. Rakamisy’s young ‘brother’ Randriatsoakely lived with other families in Ivondro. I suspect that the ancestors of many of the families living in the *fokontany* of Beparasy-I, which includes these three villages, were actually given land by Rakamisy when they first arrived in Beparasy, because today’s *fokontany* of Beparasy seem to be roughly based on the territorial divisions that were administered by the four *andevohova*.³ But it is not surprising that these families prefer to keep silent about that aspect of their history.⁴ Ramarcel and some commoner descendants told me that, over the generations, the Berosaiña also gave parts of their land to people with whom they had good relations, especially to their *vakirà* kinsmen. This explains, once again, the ambivalent status of the Berosaiña that surprised me when I arrived in Beparasy: identified as ‘slaves’ they possessed good, centrally-located lands and were acknowledged as important political figures.

³ For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, however, there are now five *fokontany* in the area formerly administered by the four *andevohova*. The western part of the plateau under the responsibility of the fourth *andevohova* Raiboba was very large because it was less favourable for rice cultivation and thus was less populated than the eastern areas. My hunch is that this is the reason it was subsequently divided into two *fokontany* (Beparasy IV and V – see Figure 1).

⁴ I think this explains in part why so many elders were very reluctant to tell me the history of their family’s arrival and to discuss issues of land.

One might surmise that, because of their relative wealth and the prestige derived from being the kinsmen of a former *andevohova*, the Berosaiña are not bothered by what their neighbours think of them and by the fact that they do not want to marry them. It does indeed seem that, to a certain extent, the Berosaiña put up with this situation. Or, at least, this is the conviction of commoner descendants, who tend to think that the Berosaiña are in good economic situations and that this is why they are not much affected by the existing prejudice against them – as I have pointed out, commoner descendants are fully aware of this prejudice. Several times I heard the sentence, “They do not care that other people call them Berosaiña, because they are rich.”⁵ Yet on a number of occasions I strongly felt that, on the contrary, the Berosaiña resented their situation deeply.⁶ When I asked one day Ramarcel whether his ‘heart’ (*fo*) was not sad because of the way people behaved towards his family, he replied:

It’s really very sad. These people should be our very close kinsmen, we should see each other on a daily basis. When there is a funeral they should send us an invitation. And they should know: “Ah, Ramarcel, he is our relative...” But we are even afraid of trying to approach them.

[Transcript 8.1]

Ramarcel’s conviction, I assume, was that Beparasy villagers should be grateful because many of them received their land from the Berosaiña. This, for Ramarcel, implied that people should treat them like close kinsmen and pay them regular visits, as kinsmen do. Yet Ramarcel found too few people show this kind of gratitude or respect for him and his relatives. As we have seen (Chapter 3), he is well aware, on the contrary, that they speak ill of them and refuse to marry them. “They greet us at the market, Ramarcel said, because it’s an obligation for them, but they do not come to visit us and they do not invite us.” Although I do not know exactly what Ramarcel knows of what other people say about the Berosaiña – how would he know if people are so careful when they talk about these issues? – this remark shows that the

⁵ This remark shows that the descent group name Berosaiña is definitely not perceived as a name like any other and that in Beparasy saying that people are Berosaiña means that they are ‘slaves’. For me it is evidence that children first essentialize the Berosaiña before essentializing ‘slaves’.

⁶ For example during the long interview with Randriatsoa and Ramarcel described in Chapter 3. At the time of bidding his farewell, Randriatsoa repeated several times before leaving: “There are people who throw mud (*fotaka*) at us, but we are not *andevo*, we are *andevohova*!”

Berosaiña strongly feel and experience that they are discriminated because they are people ‘with a history’ of slavery.

The purpose of this last chapter is to bring together the results of my inquiry to reflect on the nature of the difficulties of integration faced by the Berosaiña, and to compare their condition with that of slave descendants described in previous ethnographic accounts. On the basis of what I have learned about the Berosaiña, I start with a short re-examination of some of the strongest claims made by Evers concerning the slave descendants in the southern highlands. I then ask whether the Berosaiña can be said to be marginal and, if so, how this marginality could be characterized. I proceed by looking at some of the most direct consequences of the essentialist construal of ‘slaves’ and of their avoidance: the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against them. Following this, I address ‘the Brown question’ that I introduced in Chapter 1: what factors would explain the stigmatization of slave descent among the southern Betsileo? In the next part of the chapter, I ask whether the Berosaiña have internalized the free descendants’ hierarchical ideology and whether they can be said to resist their discrimination. Then finally I come to what I have called ‘the Bloch question’ in Chapter 1: what happened to the slave descendants who decided to leave their former masters’ estates and found new lands in the southern highlands after the abolition of slavery? Did they fare any better than the free descendants?

A short re-examination of Evers

In this section I briefly re-examine some of the arguments that were put forward by Sandra Evers in a succession of publications (1995; 1996; 1997; 1999; 2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2006). Although my field site was very close to the village where she conducted her research, my account of the condition of slave descendants differs significantly from hers. Here I discuss some reasons for this difference and, since it is not the place for a lengthy discussion, I address only three of her main arguments.

In part, the difference may be due to the fact that Evers was in a village located on the main road (the Route Nationale 7) where many migrants of Betsileo and non-Betsileo origins have been attracted by the prospect of making money in the cassava business;

by contrast, I stayed in a poorer and more remote rural corner where the number of recent migrants was very limited indeed. Nonetheless, the two places are comparable because they are very close and connected to each other – as I discovered, many people from Beparasy have relatives in Evers’ region. In addition, villagers from Beparasy often go to the region of Vohitsaoka-Tanambao-Ankaramena to look for wage labour in the lean period or at times when the rice fields do not need much work. As I could judge from the discussion I had on the topic of migration, it is the region that many would privilege if they had to migrate.

The first of Evers’ claims that I want to discuss is the assertion that slave descendants *in general* are landless people. This is how Evers describes the migrants who arrive in her village and who are ascribed slave descent status by the existing villagers (2006: 415). Evers asserts that they are landless even though she does not know where these people are from and who exactly they are, because she decided not to investigate the places of origins and the histories of the migrants but to concentrate on how they were perceived by the villagers (Evers 2002a: 29-30, 52). On the basis of what I have learned about the Berosaiña, it seems that it is indeed plausible that *some* of the slave descent migrants observed by Evers were landless in their region of origin – for example if they were in the situation of the share-croppers described by Kottak (1980) and Freeman (2001) – but one should be careful not to assume that *all* slave descent migrants arriving in this region are necessarily landless. There are many cases of what Ramarcel called *mpandehandeha* (‘wanderers’, ‘people who go back and forth’) among the several generations of the Berosaiña of Beparasy. That is, people who have preferred to leave Beparasy to seek fortune and lead an itinerant life rather than staying on the ancestral land. Decisions to lead this kind of life, I insist, were taken in spite of the fact that the Berosaiña owned good lands that have been the envy of many free descent people in Beparasy. Leaving Beparasy for an itinerant life was probably chosen as a good option for a variety of reasons: maybe in the hope of escaping stigmatization, or for other motives, such as to avoid disputes within the Berosaiña descent group.

A good example of the latter motive is provided by the case of Ndama, one of the sons of Randrianja Albert. The story goes that, a few years before my arrival, Ndama had been cast out of his village by his father.⁷ This happened because Ndama, who was then a young man in his twenties, had been caught on several occasions stealing crops in the fields of neighbours. I was told that Randrianja Albert was very upset by his son's behaviour and, as the disputes between father and son heated, Randrianja Albert repudiated Ndama. The son was already married at that time and thus left Beparasy with his young wife. After moving around for some time, they finally resettled in the region where Evers did her research, in the village that *Monsieur le maire's* paternal grandfather had founded on the Route Nationale 7 close to Ankaramena.⁸ They asked the villagers whether they could cultivate a plot of land and were allowed to do so. They were still in this village during my time in Beparasy and, according to Ramarcel, they had two young children. Ndama apparently had no contacts with his father Randrianja Albert any more.

The point I want to make by telling this story is that, from the perspective taken by Evers – who concentrated on how migrants were perceived by villagers – the household of Ndama, his wife and her two young children, no doubt looked like a household of poor landless migrants. It is possible that their co-villagers may have heard that they are slave descendants from Beparasy and so, as in Beparasy, they may have faced some kind of discrimination. It is possible that in that case the discrimination against them was even harsher than in Beparasy since it was not balanced by the central role played by the Berosaiña in local history and by their (fictive) kinship links with local families. Yet, it would be a misrepresentation to say that they are landless and poor peasants, if this is taken to mean that their families have accumulated no capital since the abolition of slavery, and in particular no wealth in rice land and zebus. Ndama, on the contrary, is the son of the wealthiest Berosaiña in Beparasy. The main reason Ndama, his wife and children live in rather poor conditions in this village is Ndama's dispute with his father.⁹ In fact, I do not know with certainty whether the villagers have figured out that the couple is of slave

⁷ I was first told this story by field assistant Naina, who was good friends with Ndama, and then later on further details were provided to me by Ramarcel.

⁸ Presumably Randrianja Albert's son arrived in this village because he had some connections in the place, probably some friends.

descent. They might not have, since *Monsieur le maire*, who is very familiar with this village because it is one of his *tanindrazana*, was not aware of the presence of a couple of young people from Beparasy.¹⁰ This may well be because Ndama and his wife, just as the slave descent migrants described by Evers, have been vague about their region and village of origins, since they had an interest in not disclosing the place they are from. What they could gain from not being identified as Berosaiña is simply a ‘clean’ reputation, even though they must know that this is only a temporary situation, since they must be aware that local memory and social knowledge can easily catch up with them. The important point is that the fact that people join these villages as migrants does not necessarily mean that they are landless and poor, even if it is true that they are of slave descent. Some of the stories of the Berosaiña show that there are in fact various possible reasons why some of them would choose to go to places like Evers’ village and attempt to make a living in the cassava business, even though their family owns good rice lands elsewhere.

A similar criticism can be made about another of Evers’ main arguments, which is probably, anthropologically speaking, the most ‘spectacular’. Evers contends that the slave descent migrants she observed lacked proper tombs and burial practices, and therefore were “expropriated from the Hereafter” because, having no tombs and no ancestralization practices, they had no ancestors (Evers 2006). Here again, Evers’ decision not to investigate the migrants’ places of origins and their possible belonging to tomb-centered descent groups makes her argument problematic. The argument relies on the observation of only one instance in which a slave descent girl was not ‘properly’ buried and in which no funeral ceremony took place (Evers 2002a: 168-169; 2006: 441-444). Compared with the burial practices of the village *tompon-tany* (i.e. the local land owners) the disposal of the girl’s body offered indeed a shocking contrast. But does this case show that slave descent migrants have no tombs, no ancestral practices and therefore no ancestors? I am not convinced, since it is possible

⁹ After having been thrown out of his father’s house in Beparasy, Ndama could have gone to his wife’s village, but it is an option that most southern Betsileo men dislike.

¹⁰ I had a chance to visit this village with him and to ask questions about the presence of Ndama, without mentioning his name or that he was a Berosaiña but saying only that I had heard that a young man of Beparasy lived here. He replied that I must have confused village names, since nobody from Beparasy lived in the village. But Naina and Ramarcel confirmed that it was in this village that Ndama had settled for several years.

to give a more plausible explanation to the quick and discrete burial that Evers observed. Among the southern Betsileo, it is common practice – among slave and free descendants alike – to bury the dead immediately, without ceremony and proper funerals. This may happen for a variety of reasons but often it is because the family does not have the financial means to organize the funerals (e.g. no cattle to slaughter and no savings to buy one), because it is practically impossible to send the corpse back to the ancestral village for burial or because relatives live too far away to arrive on time for the funerals. In such cases, the deceased is immediately buried, without any ceremony, and the funerals are held much later in the ancestral village, leaving time for the family to organize themselves and for the relatives to arrive. Such a delayed funeral is called a *vokapaty* in the region and everything is performed as if it were a proper funeral, except that the corpse is not there and therefore there is no burial. Later on – often many years later – the bones of this person will be transferred to an ancestral tomb at a particular occasion. During these events the bones of a number of people who were buried far away are collected and brought back to be reunited in the ancestral tomb. Thus, the case observed by Evers could likely have been a case of temporary burial with the idea of organising a *vokapaty* (a delayed funeral) later on. This would be completely normal practice for the southern Betsileo.¹¹

Finally, the third of Evers' claims I want to address is her assumption that the village founders were probably themselves of slave descent. It is by establishing themselves as *tompon-tany* and by building a tomb, Evers contends, that they have constructed

¹¹ As for the argument that migrants of slave descent are tomb-less people, I also find that Evers does not provide evidence for her claim and I am not convinced. In Beparasy, Vohimarina and Ambalavao, I never heard about 'slaves' (*andevo*) being tomb-less people, and the slave descent families I met through the Berosaiña had all their tombs. It is actually difficult to imagine why former slaves and their descendants would have remained without tombs over a century if they are so important for local people. Even the poor and landless share-croppers observed by Kottak and Freeman have built tombs. Moreover, unlike in Imerina, building a tomb in the southern highlands does not necessarily cost much. There are several types of tombs and some of them can be built at very low cost. And unlike what Evers suggests, it is not necessary to be a local *tompon-tany* to build a tomb, even though in practice migrants would never build a tomb if they have not yet acquired land, because without land they would not form the project of establishing a new *tanindrazana* for them and their descendants. Given the mountainous and rocky landscape of the region, families can always (and most often do) build their tombs in places which belong to nobody – in fact these mountains belong to the Malagasy state but no official authorization is needed to bury the dead in such places.

“their own myth of themselves” (Evers 2002a: 2) and achieved free descent status (ibid.: 29-30).¹² I find this claim problematic for two reasons. First, the case of the Berosaiña clearly shows that being wealthy and possessing ancestral tombs is far from sufficient to achieve free descent status. Second, the practices that enhance and distribute social memory in this region – put simply, the practice of *tetihara* and the reference to ancestral villages therein – make it difficult to hide one’s origins. Evers herself notes that the village founders came from two other villages close by (ibid.: 33). This means that the presence of their family has been long enough for information about them to circulate, because the people these families have married have certainly made the type of long investigations that I described in Chapter 6 and thus their ‘clean’ origins must have been checked a number of times by various local families.¹³ Yet, the type of inquiry undertaken by free descendants to check the origins and ancestry of potential marriage partners for their children is not easily performed by an anthropologist, since people are very cautious about this kind of questions. As we have seen in Chapter 6, local families rely essentially on kinship networks to obtain this information – something that foreign anthropologists usually do not have. Evers explains that she abandoned her attempts at checking people’s origins and ancestry, including that of the alleged slave descendants, because “the project of determining actual origin turned out to be a hazardous adventure, with no guarantees of success” (ibid.: 30). This should come as no surprise.

To conclude my brief re-examination of Evers’ three arguments, I suggest that on these issues she might have somewhat over-interpreted her data. This too should come as no surprise. As I have explained, it is extremely difficult to conduct research on slave descendants and to acquire reliable knowledge about them. In consequence, it is

¹² Evers writes that her assumption is partly based on documents she found in the French colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence, which report that the area where she conducted research was inhabited by former slaves (ibid.: 19, 203), but she does not provide any reference for these documents. Moreover, she writes that the *tompon-tany* of her village “cannot trace their genealogy further back than one generation” and “are unable to identify their named descent group” (ibid.: 203). I find this very surprising given the importance of *tetihara* (‘genealogical speeches’) and named descent groups for the southern Betsileo.

¹³ *Monsieur le maire*, who has one of his *tanindrazana* in the region studied by Evers, seemed to have this kind of knowledge, since he told me that there were many wealthy families of slave descent established in this area. A prime example of such wealthy families of slave descendants is the group living in Ivory, the village I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 4 and where several Berosaiña have married. Ivory is located only a few kilometres away from Evers’ village.

almost unavoidable for scholars investigating these matters to go beyond the available evidence and to engage in speculation. By doing so, they run the risk of over-interpreting or misinterpreting their data. The divergence between Evers' and my account simply means that more ethnographic work is needed to disentangle these issues.

How marginal are the Berosaiña?

Evers also describes slave descendants among the Betsileo as people who are 'marginalised' (ibid.: 69). On this point, I agree with her since I also think that the Berosaiña suffer from some kind of marginalisation. But how marginal are they if, as I have insisted, they are in many aspects – in spite of Ramarcel's feeling that kinship relations are not close enough – rather well integrated into the community of Beparasy? How could we then qualify the marginality of the Berosaiña?

In their famous essay on African slavery, Kopytoff and Miers (1977) argued that the central problem in slavery is the reintegration of the slave or, as they put it, "the 'rehumanization' of the nonperson in a new social setting." The problem for the host society is what they called the "institution of marginality", i.e. that of including the stranger while continuing to treat him as a stranger. They suggested that the slave, as an acquired stranger, is in a situation of marginality within a host society, this marginality being a state analogous to the temporary limbo that Van Gennep called *marge* in his famous analysis of rites of passage (Van Gennep 1908). According to Kopytoff and Miers the outsider's marginality can be of different kinds because one can be marginal to various groups, positions and institutions. In their essay the authors take the examples of marginality-to-kinship and marginality-to-society to show that they are different, even though it is sometimes assumed, in accounts of African slavery, that the successful integration into a kin group also means integration into society as whole: "[T]he two marginalities are different and the marginality-to-society has its own distinct significance. It institutionalizes a generalized social identity of 'slave', which may continue even when, after abolition, there are no more specific masters left" (Kopytoff & Miers 1977: 16). At first sight, this kind of marginality seems to fit nicely with the case of slave descendants among

the southern Betsileo, who are still considered as ‘slaves’ more than a century after abolition. Would it be right to follow these authors and say, then, that the Berosaiña in Beparasy have remained marginal-to-society even though other forms of marginalities that affected their slave ancestors have lapsed?

To answer this question it is necessary to look more closely at what Kopytoff and Miers mean by integration. They see the process of “rehumanization” of acquired outsiders as a move from total marginality toward greater and greater incorporation into the institutions of the host society. They propose to distinguish between three forms of ‘mobility’ or ‘incorporation’ (which can occur in the lifetime of an individual or at the intergenerational level): (1) formal incorporation, meaning changes in statuses, rights and obligations; (2) affective incorporation, meaning changes in esteem and affection even if the formal rights do not change; (3) worldly success mobility, meaning changes toward a better way of life, more political influence and more control over wealth, all factors that reduce the marginality of everyday existence. Kopytoff and Miers stress that each of these incorporations operate independently of the others and that it is possible to observe any of them without the others (ibid.: 18-20).

Were we to examine the situation of the Berosaiña according to these three ways of incorporating slaves as outsiders (and, more pertinently here, their descendants), we would have to conclude that the Berosaiña have been rather successfully incorporated into society. Thus, the answer to the question above would be negative: the Berosaiña, we would have to say, are not marginal-to-society anymore. Consider the following.

Formal incorporation was achieved de facto by the abolition of slavery. It is important nonetheless to stress that this change of status, although initially imposed by French colonial power, was subsequently enforced by all political regimes in Madagascar and it had not remained ‘external’ to the way of thinking of Beparasy villagers. For example, the rule that one should not say that others are slave descendants is widely accepted as well as the sanctions imposed on those who breach it. “We are all equal now” (*Efa mitovy aby am’izao*) was a phrase that I heard many times when I asked people about slave descendants, and I think that my free descent

informants were sincere when they insisted on this point. I did not have the impression that it was a case of conscious ‘double language’ or that they were trying to present themselves in a good light by uttering politically correct phrases for my benefit. In our discussions, I felt that they sincerely believed that the Berosaiña have the same rights and obligations than any other inhabitants of Beপরাস্য. Indeed, nobody in Beপরাস্য could oblige the Berosaiña to do anything they did not want to do and the Berosaiña themselves did not behave as if they were the clients or the dependents of anyone. Thus, in this sense, the Berosaiña can be said to be well incorporated into Beপরাস্য society.

Affective incorporation is more difficult to assess. As I have explained, some of the villagers in Beপরাস্য (like Ramarcelline’s family in Ambalabe) do not hold the Berosaiña in high esteem and keep their distance from them. Yet, this kind of hostility, as far as I could judge, is not shared by the majority of villagers. Many people seem willing to have the kind of ‘normal’ relationships with the Berosaiña that they would have with people who are not their kinsmen – a distant but polite and respectful attitude. It is this distant attitude that provokes Ramarcel’s reaction above, because he thinks that, given the historical role of his family and the fact that all the descent groups in Beপরাস্য have intermarried with one other, the rapport should go beyond that kind of distant relationships. On the other hand, there are a number of free descendants who have good, sometimes very good relationships with the Berosaiña, for different reasons – e.g. they have been together at school, they are close neighbours in the village, they help each other in the fields, they have done a *vakirà*, and so on. In sum, it seems that the affective incorporation of the Berosaiña is successful too, since on the whole Berosaiña individuals can count on substantial networks of friends, partners and ‘fictive’ kinsmen in Beপরাস্য.

As for *wordly success mobility*, it is clearly something that the Berosaiña have been able to achieve. They are relatively important in Beপরাস্য both politically, because of the *andevohova*’s prestige and function that are passed on to the descendants of Rakamisy, and economically, because they own a large share of the good lands for rice cultivation.

And yet, although not *marginal-to-society*, the Berosaiña are nonetheless kept in a very particular kind of limbo and thus seem to have a kind of marginal status. Their marginality is obvious to all Beparasy villagers, including themselves. But in what sense are they marginal then? Or, following Miers and Kopytoff's phrasing, *to what* are they marginal? In the light of what I have explained in the preceding chapters, I propose to characterize their marginality by saying that the Berosaiña are marginal to the community of Beparasy because they are *marginal-to-marriage* with commoner descendants. Although Beparasy villagers are willing to accommodate with the Berosaiña's slave descent in a number of ways and in a variety of situations, so that from the outside the Berosaiña's condition seems almost identical to that of any other villager, it is not possible for the Berosaiña to become 'true kinsmen' (*hava tena hava*) to other groups and have some of their members buried in the other families' tombs because, unlike *unilateral* marriages, *bilateral* marriages with commoner descendants cannot take place. This kind of marginality, in the southern Betsileo context, is less benign than it might seem. It has important consequences on the Berosaiña's lives and, as we have seen, they seem to resent it. Thus my suggestion is that slave descendants' marginality among the southern Betsileo is better and more precisely explained by saying that they are *marginal-to-marriage-with-commoner-descendants* rather than by saying that they lack X – history, land, tombs, ancestors, descent groups and anything else.

From essentialism and avoidance to stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination

A major consequence of the essentialization of the category 'slaves' and of the avoidance of marriage with slave descendants is the number of stereotypes attached to people like the Berosaiña and the resulting prejudice that leads to their discrimination.¹⁴ Arguably, this is explicable in terms of the rich inductive potential of the essentialized category: people make numerous inferences about 'slaves' and reason that their hidden essence causes many superficial properties. Stereotyping is

¹⁴ The role of psychological essentialism in stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination is a topic of particular interest to social psychologists (see Bastian & Haslam 2005; Haslam, Rotschild & Ernst 2000; 2002).

then reinforced by confirmation biases.¹⁵ In the following I report a few examples of stereotypes about ‘slaves’ that were very salient in Beparasy.

Free descendants (including some of my informants of noble descent) often explain that slave descendants are easily recognizable by their manners, described as rude, vulgar and servile. Some people even seem to think that they are recognizable by physical traits.¹⁶ In practice, however, I never found anyone capable of telling me that a person we had just met might have been of slave descent only by looking at or talking to her.¹⁷

Commoner descendants explained to me that they can spot the slave ancestry of a person because of the way she behaves. For example, it was repeated to me several times that slave descendants always sit close to the door, on the southwestern side of the room. It was the place of slaves in the past and their descendants, it is assumed, still elect to sit there. The problem with this claim is that free descendants too sit in the same area on many occasions. When visiting unrelated people, for example, they sit on a chair or on a mat close to the entrance, unless they are invited to enter further into the room to sit in a better place.¹⁸ Such behaviour is considered to be polite and, in this context, not the behaviour of a ‘slave’. Thus, the stereotype seems to be the outcome of a confirmation bias, whereby people ‘see’ what they already believe. Knowing (or suspecting) that people are of slave descent, they read their polite behaviour as servile, the outcome of their ‘slave’ essence. Yet, this is just the polite way they should adopt, especially when visiting free descendants with whom they can be sure to have no kinship links because of the marriage avoidance.¹⁹ In ceremonies or

¹⁵ The term confirmation bias was first coined by Wason (1960). Confirmation bias refers to people’s tendency to favour information that confirms their beliefs or hypotheses (see Nickerson 1998 for a review). I am particularly sensitive to confirmation biases since, during my fieldwork, several times I drew inaccurate conclusions on the basis of what I already ‘knew’ about slave descendants from my readings. Recall for example my first ‘explanation’ for Raboba’s tiny house in Chapter 2.

¹⁶ But these alleged physical differences are not ‘racial’ and of the kind used in Imerina to distinguish between *mainty* and *fotsy* (see Chapter 1). Kottak reports the following sentence by free descendants: “It’s easy to identify an *andevo*. They lack a certain finesse; they don’t know how to behave properly. Besides, they have ugly feet.” (Kottak 1980: 105).

¹⁷ Unless, of course, names of ‘villages of origin’ were mentioned in the conversation, since as explained in Chapter 6, people are constantly vigilant on this issue.

¹⁸ In chapter 4, I stressed that in the marriage process when the boy’s party comes at the girl’s house they stay close to the door until the agreement on the *tandra* has been reached.

¹⁹ When they visit a free descent *vakirà*, slave descendants do not observe this kind of polite behaviour.

official meetings where Berosaiña and commoner descendant *ray aman-dreny* were present side by side, I could observe that there was no particular precedence given to commoner descendants and that the Berosaiña sat at the place corresponding to their *ray aman-dreny* status.²⁰

Another widespread stereotype worth commenting on is that slave descendants are bad-tempered people. People often say that the Berosaiña are rude, impolite and ‘direct’. My view is that this stereotype comes from the reactions of slave descendants to their discrimination. Though not very frequent, such reactions occur from time to time in particular circumstances. I was told, for example, that at the market in Beparasy, under the eucalyptus trees where people buy and drink the officially prohibited local rum, it can sometimes happen that a Berosaiña becomes involved in a dispute with someone, and this causes an outburst. It is well-known in Beparasy that when the Berosaiña are drunk they tend to say hard words (*miteny mafy*) and express their resentment about the way they are treated out loud, whereas when they are sober they would avoid expressing it, at least in public. Raboba was cited as a prime example of this kind of behaviour, even though in ordinary circumstances he is a well-tempered man. Similarly, when Randrianja Albert became upset at Volala’s attempt to get his daughter back (see Chapter 5), he also had strong words for Volala and his family, and my free descent friends commented that this anger was misplaced. As explained in Chapter 3, Redison’s foster-father Rasamuel was also considered a very direct person. Here again, I think the stereotype is best explained by a confirmation bias. While not very frequent, these outbursts by some Berosaiña are explained by referring to their ‘slave’ essence, since it is assumed that slaves in the past were bad-tempered because they were unhappy to have been enslaved. Moreover, showing bad-temper and speaking directly is a behaviour that is considered to be typical of children and women, but not appropriate to men of high status (Freeman n.d.).²¹ Since slaves were often considered as the children (*ankizy*) of their master, the rather direct verbal behaviour of some of them in particular circumstances ‘confirms’ their inferior

²⁰ Thus on that matter too the situation of the Berosaiña is very different from the case of the slave descendants who have stayed on their former masters’ estates. In the seating order the latter are still assigned the place of ‘minors’ (Kottak 1980: 104).

²¹ Thus according to this stereotype slave descendants are considered as typical ‘norm breakers’ in the sense of Keenan (1974a; 1974b).

essence. Needless to say, many Berosaiña I knew were not at all like that and were, like Ramarcel, patient, polite and sensitive people.

Besides negative stereotypes there are, however, also positive ones.²² As already mentioned, slave descendants are sometimes considered as more successful than others in what they do. Thus, for example, their success in agriculture and cattle raising is explained by their hard-working ethos. It is also assumed that this ethos comes from their essence as ‘slaves’. People explicitly told me that the reason why slave descendants are now as wealthy as many noble and commoner descendants is that slaves had to work harder than commoners and nobles in the past, and ‘therefore’ their descendants work harder too.²³ Another kind of popular explanation for the relative success of slave descendants is that they are luckier than other people. In the past, the ‘explanation’ goes, they suffered from bad luck since they were captured and enslaved, but now the tide has turned. The idea here is that there is a sort of justice in this change. Among the positive stereotypes is also the idea expressed by free descent men that slave descent women are particularly beautiful. This stereotype is arguably linked to the ban on marriage, which makes slave descent women out of reach and thus more attractive. These positive stereotypes too are explicable in terms of a confirmation bias.

Perhaps the most important prejudice against slave descendants in Beparasy is the belief that they should keep away from power positions because of their low ancestry. I have mentioned in Chapter 2 that Randriatsoa was once president of the *fokontany* of Beparasy-I. Surprised to learn that he had been elected by the *fokonolo* of Beparasy-I to that position, I asked people why and how this had happened. I thus learned that Randriatsoa was never *elected* president of the *fokontany*. Rather, free descendant Rajiro had been chosen, and since he was a good friend of Randriatsoa, he had

²² Some stereotypes are not clearly positive or negative. I was told for example that slave descendants have less taboos (*fady*) than ‘ordinary people’. This statement can be understood as a negative stereotype if we consider the importance of ancestral taboos as a ‘cultural practice’ (Lambek 1992). Yet my informants stressed that having less taboos was an advantage (see Astuti 2007b for similar comments by the Vezo), because slave descendants were less hindered than others in what they did and thus could be more successful in various domains.

²³ Descendants of nobles, the ‘explanation’ goes on, have impoverished mainly because they are not used to work and therefore after the abolition of slavery they could not work their own fields as well as their slaves did.

suggested that he became his vice-president. This position consists mainly in replacing the president of the *fokontany* when he happens to be away. However, Rajiro died some time after the elections, struck by lightning during a storm which caught him out working in his rice fields. As a result, his vice-president Randriatsoa became de facto the president of the *fokontany* of Beparasy-I. Ramose Martin told me that, at first, there was good deal of gossip about a Berosaiña occupying this position. In private, many *ray aman-dreny* said that they were not happy with the idea of a Berosaiña holding political power, however limited, because the Berosaiña are 'slaves'. The fact that Randriatsoa's great grandfather Rakamisy was an *andevohova* and a founding father of Beparasy did not seem sufficient to prevent this kind of general discontentment. But people soon realized that, thanks to his oratory talents and his knowledge of the history of land allocation, Randriatsoa was good at mediating conflicts, which is one of the most important duties of the president of the *fokontany*. Randriatsoa therefore continued to occupy the position until the following elections, but he was not re-elected.

Essentialism in comparative perspective (the Brown question)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Margaret Brown (2004) suggested that the social acceptability or stigmatization of slave descent in different Malagasy societies varies according to three factors: the kinship system, the history of ethnic mixing and the access to resources. In this section I would like to discuss how her analytical framework applies to the case of the Berosaiña and then propose a complementary framework for comparing the social acceptability of slave descent across Malagasy societies.

Brown is certainly right in stressing social structure and, more specifically, the presence of ranks and marriage practices as key factors for understanding the degree to which slave descent is accepted in different parts of Madagascar. As we have seen in Chapter 7, for the southern Betsileo marriage rules were different in the pre-colonial past when the ideal was an isogamous marriage between ranked descent groups. After the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of French colonial law, along with the idea that all people were equals, rankings lost their importance for

southern Betsileo families. Nonetheless, we have seen that a preference for the ancient isogamous marriages continued to exert a profound influence on marriage practices. Over the years, the goal of parental investigations shifted from the positive goal of marrying someone from a descent group of equal status to the negative rule of not marrying someone who was of low status, which meant people with slave ancestry.

There is no history of ethnic mixing in Beparasy: all the villagers claim Betsileo origins and I found no evidence that there were people from other Malagasy societies involved in local history.²⁴ I generally agree with Brown that ethnic homogeneity may be an important factor in partly explaining the existence of a stigma attached to slave descent, and that, conversely, ethnic mixing can lead to greater social acceptability. But I would like to state more precisely why this might be the case. Ethnic homogeneity is an important factor in maintaining the stigma against slave descendants because it creates the conditions in which people have the practical means to trace the origins and the ancestry of their potential marriage partners. In a community made up of people who come from various parts of Madagascar, with different practices and values, pre-marital investigations such as those carried out by parents in Beparasy would simply be impossible. This is so not only because of the geographical distance of people's places of origins, but also because parents would have no (or little) kinship connections on which to rely for gathering the information they seek. They would also lack the right 'cultural' clues to enable them to find out whether someone is of slave descent.

This is the reason why it seems relatively easy for the Berosaiña to marry people from other regions of Madagascar. Even though such people may not be happy with idea of marrying a slave descendant, it is likely that in many cases they are simply unable to find out that their Betsileo marriage partner has slave ancestry. Ramarcel's daughter Liva, for example, has married a Merina from Antananarivo and she lives with him in the capital. I only met her once, when she was doing her postpartum period (*mifana*)

²⁴ Of course this is not to say that there had been no marriages with non-Betsileo in Beparasy. It would be surprising if this did not happen from time to time. But people's perception is that there are only Betsileo in Beparasy, whereas they know that, by contrast, in neighbouring areas the population is mixed, for example Bara-Betsileo on the other side of a mountain. There was an old Taimoro man who has lived for more than two decades in Beparasy, but everyone seemed to regard him as something of an exception.

at Ramarcel's mother's house in Ambalavao after the birth of her first child.²⁵ Although I do not know the ancestry of her young husband, it is possible that he is a free descendant (a *fotsy*). Liva met him in Antananarivo and they started to live together there. When the man asked Ramarcel whether he could marry his daughter, Ramarcel accepted. They performed a simplified version of the local customs, Ramarcel told me, because the man was not Betsileo; nonetheless, he brought a zebu to Ramarcel as *tandra* and the couple went to get the blessings of the family elders. They did not go to Beparasy since there was nobody 'above' Ramarcel any more, but they went to Ivory, where the elders on the side of Ramarcel's paternal grandmother gave her their blessings.²⁶ Although I do not know the exact circumstances, it seems to me very unlikely that the young Merina man knew that he was marrying a Betsileo woman of slave descent.²⁷ This is because the man was a total 'stranger' (*vahiny*) to the region and, as I have explained, it is very difficult to find out about slave ancestry if one does not know how to look for the information and, more importantly, who to ask to get reliable information.²⁸

Brown's argument about the scarcity of resources and, more especially, the scarcity of land, as something that exacerbates the distinctions of status and the marginalization of low status people is also quite convincing because I find it plausible that the stigmatization of the Berosaiña has been accentuated by the shrinking of the availability of good lands for rice cultivation during the 20th century in Beparasy. As the Berosaiña themselves explained (see Chapter 3), it is probable that their current stigmatization owes much to the fact that local people became increasingly jealous of their ownership of good lands when the population of Beparasy increased.²⁹

²⁵ I did not meet her husband since he had remained in Antananarivo.

²⁶ Ramarcel told me that he had brought the zebu offered as *tandra* for his daughter to the eldest men in Ivory, in order to show him respect .

²⁷ Conversely, I think it is unlikely that Ramarcel knows whether his son-in-law is a Merina *mainty* or *fotsy*.

²⁸ One may wonder why, in these circumstances, Betsileo slave descendants like the Berosaiña do not marry non-Betsileo people. In fact, the Berosaiña do. Ramarcel told me about some such cases when together we compiled the genealogies of the Berosaiña, for example, that of Redison's sister Vohangy, who was married to a Tandroy. However, they do not seem to do so significantly more than the free descendants. The reason might be, quite simply, that it is not easy to look for a non-Betsileo spouse when one lives in a remote region of the Betsileo countryside.

²⁹ Recall that in Chapter 3 Ramarcel says that "these things did not happen in the past," suggesting that the Berosaiña were more discriminated today than in the past. This is plausible, not only because of the jealousies that the scarcity of land can generate but also because the souvenir of the

In short, Brown's three factors seem quite useful to explain, at least in part, the stigmatization of the Berosaiña in Beparasy. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest a complementary framework for comparing the social acceptability or the stigmatization of slave descent in Madagascar. This framework considers the essentialization of the category 'slaves'. I would argue that the absence of essentialization of slaves is associated with the social acceptability of slave descent, while stigmatization is associated with essentialization. Of course, this association, in itself, would not explain why stigmatization and essentialization occur, nor would it show that there is a causal link between stigmatization and essentialization. One would need to provide 'local' sociological and historical explanations for these phenomena – this is what I have attempted to do in the previous chapters.

Nonetheless, the complementary framework I suggest might be of interest because it could generate hypotheses which are (in theory) testable. It should be possible to design experimental tasks that tap into essentialist assumptions and reasoning about slave descendants. These tasks could be replicated in different Malagasy societies and researchers could try to establish whether the essentialization of the category 'slaves' correlates with harsh stigmatization of slave descendants or, conversely, whether non-essentialization correlates with social acceptability. My expectation is that such a study would show the following: in the context of the Masoala peninsula (described by Brown 2004 and Keller 2008) the category 'slaves' would appear as *not* essentialized. In the Merina context (described, among others, by Graeber 2007 and Razafindralambo 2003) as well as in the Tanosy (described by Somda 2009), I would expect that the category 'slaves' is essentialized, although in a less entrenched fashion than in the southern Betsileo case.

Internalization and resistance

Some scholars have proposed that slave descendants in the southern highlands have internalized the free descendants' hierarchical ideology and that this is the reason why they do not resist discrimination (Rasoamampionona 2000: 374; Evers 2002a: 2, 52-

andevohova Rakamisy is becoming less present, as time and generations go by, and because many Berosaiña have left Beparasy (see below).

53). Anecdotal observations of slave descendants ‘confessing’ their status to ethnographers seem to confirm this (e.g. Evers 2002a: 122). Moreover, as Kottak’s (1980) and Freeman’s ethnographies (2001) have shown, those slave descendants who have stayed on their former masters’ estates behave as junior and minor people. This also seems to be evidence of an internalization of hierarchical differences. This view, however, is at odds with the case of the Berosaiña. In Chapter 3, I provided evidence that shows that they do *not* internalize the inferior status ascribed to them by commoner descendants and that they *do* try to resist this ascription and the ensuing discrimination. In this section I have two goals in mind. The first is to suggest a way of addressing, in a more precise and systematic fashion than it has been the case so far, the question of whether slave descendants among the southern Betsileo internalize the inferior status that is ascribed to them. The second is to reflect on the possibilities that are open to the Berosaiña to resist, in practice, their discrimination.³⁰

A major problem with the claim about the internalization of ‘slave’ status is that there is simply not enough evidence to support it. The observation that some slave descendants sometimes say, “We are just the poor people... the *olona maloto*. (...) You know what we are, everybody can tell you that” (Evers 2002a: 122) is not sufficient to infer that they really think that they are ‘slaves’ in the way understood by people of free descent. The statement could refer to what others think of them, meaning “You know, others consider us *andevo*.” The observation, moreover, that in some situations slave descendants show an obsequious and inferior attitude is also insufficient evidence of internalization, because it could plausibly be explained by other reasons. Slave descendants may not, for example, have any other choice than to adopt such behaviour without the risk of being thrown out of the village (as in Evers’ case). A further risk is that free descent families might hire someone else to perform the various tasks for which slave descendants are paid (as in Kottak’s and Freeman’s

³⁰ Studies of ‘resistance’ have been popular in anthropology during the last three decades, especially after Scott’s 1985 seminal work, but they have also been criticized for seeing ‘power’ and ‘resistance’ everywhere (e.g. Brown 1996), and for being often ethnographically ‘thin’ rather than ‘thick’ (Ortner 1995). More recently, Seymour (2006) has suggested that a significant part of the problem of theorizing resistance resides in the anti-psychological position of many cultural anthropologists. This is because, she argues, if we want to understand why some people would resist systems of dominance we need to endow them with “the internalized cultural understandings that motivate such actions” (Seymour 2006: 303).

cases). To avoid these difficulties of interpretation, the question of internalization should be more precisely framed. What does it mean to internalize 'slave' status? Clearly this is a cognitive question, since it refers to how people think about themselves. But *what*, exactly, is internalized? And how could we go about the task of generating better evidence? I suggest that one possible way of looking at these issues is to frame the problem in terms of essentialism. As we have seen, descendants of commoners essentialize the category 'slaves'. Thus, if we were to show that slave descendants *do not* essentialize this category, this would provide evidence that they do not share a very important aspect of the hierarchical and 'dominant' ideology of commoner descendants.

An example of this kind of research was carried out in India to investigate whether psychological essentialism about castes depends on one's position in the caste system (Mahalingam 1998; 2003; 2007). Mahalingam tested low caste and high caste people and found that while people belonging to high castes essentialized castes, meaning that they construed them to be 'natural' and 'unchangeable', those who belonged to low castes conceived of castes as socio-historical constructs that could be changed. On this basis and in this particular case, then, it is possible to argue that the low caste people tested by Mahalingam had not internalized the dominant ideology that places them at the bottom of the social hierarchy. It would be interesting to conduct such experiments among southern Betsileo in order to know whether slave descendants have internalized the commoner descendants' ideology. In the light of Mahalingam's results, one might expect that they would not, and this is also the impression I had during my discussions with the Berosaiña.

Thus my suggestion is that the Berosaiña have not internalized the hierarchical ideology of commoner descendants and that in consequence it can be argued that, 'intellectually', they resist the dominant way of thinking. But can they resist their discrimination in a more practical way? The major problem with the kind of discrimination they face is that there is little they can do in 'legal' terms. Admittedly, they can ask for reparation at the *fokonolo* if they hear that they have been called 'slaves' (as we have seen, it seems that they are very prone to do this, which is why Beparasy villagers are very careful when they talk about these issues). But there is

little they can do against the fact that commoner descendants do not want to marry them or that the *fokonolo* decides not to elect them to the presidency of the *fokontany*. Indeed, the best the Berosaiña can do to resist discrimination is precisely what they have been doing: establishing (fictive) kinship links with free descent families, on an equal footing and through various means (*vakirà*, *fikambana*, *haoña* and residence in mixed villages), and keeping alive the history of the role of their family in the region and the memory of the *andevohova* status of Rakamisy, in particular through the *kabary*, the *tantara* and Randriatsoa's mediation in land conflicts.³¹ When they give *tetihara* speeches at their funerals or tell the history of their family (as Randriatsoa did for me), the Berosaiña most probably tell a history of their 'origins' and recite a genealogy which were 'rewritten' to make them sound similar to those of free descendants. These 'rewritings' or 'inventions' – I do not know how best to call them – should undoubtedly be considered as a means of resistance, the hard-won achievement of previous generations. Beparasy villagers consider that *tetihara* speeches should recount 4 or 5 generations above the deceased. Providing such a precise genealogy and topogeny must have been difficult for the former slaves when they first arrived. As time went by, however, the Berosaiña have been able to add depth to their histories and genealogies, thus actively creating for themselves a past that is just like that of any other resident of Beparasy.

In sum, I have suggested in this section that the Berosaiña have not internalized 'slave' status (in spite of what others think of them) and that they have been actively trying to resist the prejudice and discrimination towards them (despite the limited options open to them).

I now turn to what in Chapter 1 I have called 'the Bloch question'. My goal is to compare the case of the Berosaiña with the cases of Merina and Zafimaniry former slaves, and to ask what happened to those who, like the Berosaiña, went to new lands as former slaves in the southern highlands.

³¹ Recall Randriatsoa's *kabary* at his sister's son funerals, briefly described in Chapter 4, where he stressed that the ancestors of the villagers of the *fokontany* of Beparasy I, II and II were living all together in the village on the top of Vatobe, and so that all their descendants were kinsmen. At this occasion another *mpikabary*, descendant of the *andevohova* Raikalatsara of Volamena, thanked Randriatsoa for his speech and concurred with him.

The Berosaiña in comparative perspective (the Bloch question)

In the two essays briefly reviewed in Chapter 1, Bloch (1979; 1980) adopted a double comparative perspective to examine the “social implications of freedom” (Bloch 1979) for former slaves: on the one hand, he compared the case of the Merina with that of the Zafimaniry, and on the other, for each case, he compared the situation of former slaves with that of free men. In this section, I would like to take such a double perspective to compare the case of the Berosaiña with those of the Merina and the Zafimaniry, and to ask whether the Berosaiña can be said to be better off – or less well off – than commoner descendants in Beparasy.³²

In the Merina case, Bloch argued that former slaves who moved to new lands had an immediate advantage on free Merina who had also to look for new lands because of a land shortage in their region of origin.³³ This advantage consisted in the fact that former slaves had no positive rules of marriage and that therefore they were free to marry anyone in their vicinity. They were thus able to make alliances and form local networks, which provided political cooperation and collaborative support in agricultural work. By contrast, the free Merina, being endogamous, had to marry kinsmen who very often resided far away. As a consequence they remained isolated, since they lacked the kind of local networks developed by former slaves. However, in the long run, Bloch argues, the advantage of former slaves turned to a disadvantage. While free Merina kept kinship links with kinsmen who lived in towns and had high status jobs – teachers, administrators and businessmen - former slaves had little access to these new sources of power and wealth. As a result, they were left in a less favourable position than free Merina.

Bloch found the opposite situation among the Zafimaniry, where former slaves were better off than people of free descent. This is because free Zafimaniry, who also had positive marriage rules, had to marry within the ‘cramped’ Zafimaniry territory, while their former slaves could marry outside. This meant that the latter were able to take up

³² Although Bloch considers other aspects, I focus mainly on the implications of marriage.

³³ Bloch refers to ‘free Merina’ and ‘free Zafimaniry’ in his essays. I would rather say ‘free descent Merina’ and ‘free descent Zafimaniry’, but here I shall keep Bloch’s terms.

various opportunities (e.g. in tourism or in selling wood carvings) which were less easily available to the former.

The situation of the Berosaiña offers yet another case for comparison. Unlike Merina former slaves, the Berosaiña could *not* marry locally upon their arrival on the new lands. Because of the avoidance of marriage with ‘unclean’ former slaves, they had to find spouses – who were presumably former slaves themselves – outside of Beparasy. In consequence, unlike Merina former slaves, they did not have the advantage of rapidly forming a local network of kinsmen which could, among other things, provide support in agricultural work.³⁴ On the other hand, unlike free Merina, southern Betsileo commoners prefer to marry exogamously; therefore, on arriving in Beparasy, they were able to form a local network of kinsmen through intermarriage.

Even though the Berosaiña had to marry outside of Beparasy, this did not translate into the benefits that these out-marriages provided to free Merina in the long run and to Zafimaniry former slaves. This is because, given the strict ban on marrying ‘slaves’ in the region,³⁵ the Berosaiña could only marry with other former slaves – if they could marry at all.³⁶ In consequence, their kinship networks, in spite of being more extended (geographically) than those of commoners, remained limited to people who, like them, were discriminated, had little power, and were thus unlikely to have high status jobs in town.³⁷ Moreover, by contrast with the Zafimaniry case, there were little new economic opportunities for them to take up in the region, which has remained isolated until a recent date.

³⁴ As we have seen in some detail in previous chapters, however, this absence of local alliances through marriage was compensated for by means of fictive kinship.

³⁵ Unlike in the Merina case, where apparently mixed marriages occurred more easily.

³⁶ In the genealogies of the Berosaiña I have collected it appears that a number of daughters or granddaughters of Rakamisy and Rainihosy remained unmarried and had no children. This may be because the Berosaiña had at that time not yet developed their marriage networks with other families of slave descent in the region. By contrast, all men found a spouse, probably because of the relative wealth in land of the Berosaiña, since poor parents of slave descent must have easily welcomed the prospect of their daughters living on the Berosaiña’s estate.

³⁷ I was sometimes told however that an important number of slave descendants were in the civil service in the Ambalavao region (in particular as teachers) or in the military. Apparently in these positions too they suffer from discrimination and remain at a low ‘grade’ because when people find out about their slave ancestry they tend to feel that ‘it is not right’ (*tsy mety*) that they should occupy high functions where they would command people (recall the section on stereotypes above).

In the light of these difficulties facing the Berosaiña, I would now like to compare their attachment to their ancestral land with that of commoner descendants. Unlike Zafimaniry former slaves who, at the time of abolition, had access to only semi-exhausted lands (but were able to transform this into an advantage), we have seen that the Berosaiña received good lands in Beparasy, thanks to the *andevohova* position held by one of them. Yet, this good start does not seem, in the long run, to have 'rooted' them on their lands as durably as commoner descendants. It seems to me that the Berosaiña are more likely than other villagers to leave their land and seek fortune elsewhere. On this matter, however, there are differences within the Berosaiña according to the branch they belong to.

Unsurprisingly, the branch of the *andevohova* Rakamisy received the largest share of the best lands. Today, this branch has the highest number of Berosaiña still residing in Beparasy and they are all rice growing peasants. By contrast, the branch of Rainihosy received significantly less land. As I have explained, almost all of Rainihosy's descendants (who were in good numbers) have left Beparasy. Many made a living in the business of trading and transporting local goods, thereby relocating in town, in Ambalavao or on the east coast. From this branch, only Raboba and two other young Berosaiña still live in Beparasy today. As for the branch of Randriatsoakely, the youngest of the three brothers, we have seen that all his children left Beparasy: his daughters because they married far away, and his sons because they hived off to a region in Bara country, south of Beparasy. Only Randriatsoakely's foster-child Randrianja Albert remained in Beparasy to take care of his foster-father's land.

It seems, then, that many Berosaiña have left, whereas this has not been the case for groups of commoner descent, especially those who received lands that were as good as those of the Berosaiña. For such people, the problem is rather the opposite, namely that too many people have stayed and now live off rice paddies that shrink at each new generation. Contrary to many other villagers in Beparasy, who want to stay on their land as peasants, the Berosaiña seem more attracted by the prospect of an urban life. It struck me, for example, that Berosaiña teenagers wore clothes (e.g., jeans, t-shirts, sport shoes) and had haircuts (e.g., a kind of rasta dreadlocks) which were fashionable in the small town of Ambalavao, while most other commoner descendants

of similar age (except those who went to secondary school in Ambalavao) wore plastic sandals, coloured shorts, embroidered shirts and *lamba* that were typical of young southern Betsileo peasants. Indeed, I had the strong impression that the Berosaiña are prone to leave their land to find a better life elsewhere.³⁸ Unlike the case described by Freeman, however, it is not that for them “the break with the *tanindrazana* is easier when it has never meant much in the first place” (Freeman 2001: 122). I could see that, on the contrary, the Berosaiña I talked to seemed emotionally attached to their ancestral land in Beparasy, probably as much as the descendants of commoners. The truth might simply be that the Berosaiña, in spite of this emotional attachment, have less incentives to stay than the free descendants.

Rainihosy’s descendants are a prime example of Berosaiña who have taken up opportunities outside Beparasy, since two of his sons went to fight in France and then later on, with a few exceptions, many of his descendants all made a career in the transport and trade business. Some of them even chose to relocate on the east coast (in Manakara and Vangaindrano) to do their business there. As I have explained in Chapter 2, Ramarcel once returned to Beparasy with the idea of living on his ancestral land but after some time he came back to his hometown Ambalavao – he said it was because his wife had cheated on him with one of his friends, but it seems clear to me that there was more to it than that. Randriatsoakely’s sons also abandoned their good lands in Beparasy, though this time it was not out of a preference for doing business in town over being peasants: they left their lands in Beparasy for other lands in the south. My understanding of the situation is that the Berosaiña are not as strongly attached to their land as other Beparasy villagers because they constantly feel a diffuse, non-overt discrimination against them.

It is likely, however, that the Berosaiña’s desire to escape discrimination and find better opportunities elsewhere does not often materialize. After leaving Beparasy, some may have ended up in situations where, after perhaps spending some time incognito, were identified as slave descendants and faced discrimination that was

³⁸ This desire also exists among commoner descendants, but it seems to be more strongly marked (as far as I could tell from the life histories told by Ramarcel) among the Berosaiña than among the other villagers of Beparasy.

worse than in Beপরাস্য because it was not tempered by the relative integration they have achieved on their land. Indeed, it was easy for me to imagine the kind of stories that Ramarcel told me about the many members of his group who chose to *mandehandeha* ('wander', 'go back and forth', suggesting endless roaming) as a way of life. He explained that, instead of living on their land, these people had preferred to go from one place to another (often in Evers' region, or further west or south). There they stayed in villages where they were allowed to settle "until they got kicked out" (*mandrapaha voaroakandrareo*), as Ramarcel sarcastically put it – evoking the situation of slave descent migrants described by Evers.

So, have the Berosaiña fared better than free descent people since their simultaneous arrival on an (almost) equal footing in Beপরাস্য? I am tempted to answer this question by saying that they have, because the main consequence of their readiness to leave is that those who have stayed have more land, on average, than free descendants and thus have less suffered from the general impoverishment of peasants in the region. As for those who have left, the answer is much less clear. It largely depends on the decisions they made on an individual basis. These decisions were, of course, structurally constrained by their 'slave' status. If they went away from Beপরাস্য to make a living as peasants, for example, they probably had to hide their 'place of origins', with all this implies in rural southern Betsileo society. Depending on these decisions some achieved relative success (as in the case of Ramarcel and his siblings, after his father had moved to Ambalavao) while others certainly failed (as in the case of the stories of the *mpandehandeha* told by Ramarcel or, perhaps, in the case of the slave descent migrants described by Evers).

Before concluding this thesis, I would like to tell one last story about the Berosaiña which, in my opinion, illustrates particularly well the awkwardness of their situation. The story concerns Fily, Vohangy's eldest son. Fily was born in Betroka but when his (foster-)uncle Redison gave up priesthood and decided to come back to Beপরাস্য (his *tanindrazana* on his mother side, see Chapter 2), he and his wife Raely took the young Fily with them. They first fostered him in Ambalabe but given the hostility of Redison's kinsmen, who did not like the idea of having a Berosaiña among them, the small household soon moved to the mixed village Ambalamanakava. Later on, when

Fily went to secondary school in Ambalavao, Redison and Raely paid for his fees and his living expenses. Having passed his *baccalauréat* Fily then went to university. This was a real achievement since, unlike the situation in the more prosperous and better educated northern Betsileo region described by Freeman (2001), very few people from Beparasy form the desire or have the opportunity to do so. At the time of my stay, I was aware of only two cases: that of Fily, who was studying history in Toliara, and that of a girl from Ambalamarina who was studying law in Fianarantsoa. In the case of Fily, however, it had not been easy. Redison told me that Fily strongly desired to continue to study but that neither his mother nor Redison could bear the costs of his education in Toliara. In despair, Fily went on his own initiative to see Joseph, one of Redison's cousins from Ambalabe. Joseph's mother (Ramarcelline's sister) had married a policeman and had left Beparasy a long time ago. Her son Joseph had found a good job in a maritime company transporting goods between Toliara and Réunion. When Fily came to see Joseph, he asked him whether he could stay at his large and comfortable home in Toliara so that he could attend university at a lower cost to his mother Vohangy. Impressed by Fily's determination, Joseph accepted to allocate him a room in his house.

Fily, a Berosaiña, was thus generously hosted by a close relative of the very people who so strongly prevented Ramarcelline from marrying 'unclean' Rasamuel, who is no other than Fily's grandfather. The condition of the Berosaiña in Beparasy, it seems to me, is well captured by such ironic stories.

CONCLUSION

In an afterword to a recent volume in Bloch's honour (Astuti, Parry & Stafford 2007), Jonathan Parry has suggested that over the years Bloch's writings have shifted from an attention to history, political economy and 'differences' to an interest in cognition and the 'partial recurrences' observed across societies. Taking the full measure of Bloch's polemic lecture, 'Where did anthropology go?' (2005), which championed the view that the investigation of human nature should be brought back at the centre of the discipline of anthropology, Parry concluded his essay with a warning: it would be a mistake to let the enquiry into the general properties of human nature eclipse the enquiry into political economy or the structure of society (Parry 2007: 360).

While I fully agree with Parry that it would, indeed, be a mistake to do so, it seems to me that it is somewhat misleading to suggest, as he does, that this is where Bloch's reflections on the relation between anthropology and cognitive science have led him, or could lead those who follow his path. As they have recently made it very clear, Bloch's and Astuti's view on this matter is that it is only by continuing to do 'traditional' ethnographic fieldwork that anthropologists can make a significant contribution to cognitive science (Astuti & Bloch forthcoming). This means that anthropologists simply cannot contribute to cognitive science without *also* addressing sociological questions like those concerning political economy and the structure of society.

In keeping a balance between my use of three different 'photographic lenses' – as explained in the introduction – I have tried to follow Bloch's and Astuti's lead without falling into the pitfalls denounced by Parry: I have been careful not to let the cognitive element of my account eclipse its interpretative, comparative and historical parts. On

the contrary, I sought to integrate these different perspectives in what I hope has been a fruitful and insightful way.

On the basis of my ethnographic study of the Berosaiña, I have suggested that bilateral marriages with slave descendants in the Betsileo southern highlands are avoided because descendants of commoners, who form the majority of the southern Betsileo population, prefer to marry people of equal ancestry (*olo mitovy raza*), since they consider that entering hypergamous or hypogamous marriages will have the same outcome: the commoner descent side will become 'slaves'. This is because by marrying noble descendants they will be in an inferior position vis-à-vis the family of noble descent, while by marrying slave descendants they will have an 'unclean' reputation and the offspring born from such marriage will be ascribed 'slave' status.

Looking for an explanation as to why slave descendants seemed to be 'locked' into their inferior status of 'unclean people', I have argued that commoner descendants think of them as people with a hidden essence (an 'uncleanliness') that makes them different 'in nature'. In order to best characterize my ethnographic data, I have borrowed the concept of psychological essentialism from cognitive psychology and I have argued that commoner descendants essentialize the category 'slaves'. They think that this 'unclean' essence cannot be changed and that it is passed on from parents to children, even in the case of 'mixed' marriages, thus making it impossible to bury the children of such marriages in the ancestral tomb of free descendants.

Examining the idea that 'slaves' might have already been construed in this essentialist way in the pre-abolition era, I have suggested on the contrary that the entrenchment of the category is most probably a recent phenomenon. Colonization and the abolition of slavery were crucial events in the causal story leading to this entrenchment, but it occurred in this particular form and at this particular moment among the southern Betsileo because it grew out of a set of pre-existing cultural practices – such as the investigations before marriage, the genealogical speeches at funerals and the sharing of the dead in the ancestral tombs – that made it easy for free descent people to enquire about the ancestry of recently freed slaves and very difficult for former slaves

who had not been cleansed and reintegrated into a local descent group to be accepted as suitable marriage partners.

If it is the case, as I have argued, that psychological essentialism is a good lens through which to interpret the entrenchment of the category 'slaves' following abolition and that the human cognitive disposition towards essentialism plays a causal role in the process by which present-day southern Betsileo children learn to essentialize slave descendants, then these issues should be of particular interest for anthropologists addressing post-slavery issues in Madagascar. My intention is to further pursue my investigation into these topics as part of a longer-term research project.

Directions for further research

The data and arguments presented in the thesis should be considered as the initial steps towards a more extensive study of the present-day condition of slave descendants among the southern Betsileo. Building on this account, I would like to pursue my research in three main directions.

The first line of inquiry will consist in following the destinies of the Berosaiña and in extending my research to the regional networks that they have built through their marriages outside of Beparasy. As explained in the thesis, it took me a very long time to learn about the history of the Berosaiña and an equally long time to be able to ask sensitive questions to some of them. A significant part of the data I have presented was collected only at a late stage of my fieldwork. Thus, it can be said that my investigation of many sociological and historical aspects pertaining to the Berosaiña has only just started. Many questions remain that I would like to answer in the future. For example, I was unable to get a clear picture of their marriage networks. As an indirect way of addressing this issue, I would like to focus my enquiry on other named descent groups of slave descendants from the former polities of Arindrano, since it is presumably among them that the Berosaiña predominantly find their spouses. I expect that future research on the Berosaiña should be facilitated by the excellent rapport that I have built with some of the members of the group and by the kinship connection that

I have established with them through Redison. When I left the field, Ramarcel invited me to attend a number of upcoming and exceptionally large family gatherings. I shall endeavour to attend these events in order to broaden my knowledge of the Berosaiña beyond those who reside in Beparasy. In Beparasy itself, I would like to keep documenting the relationships between the Berosaiña and the commoner descent families as they develop through time.

The second direction will be to investigate the political-economic history of the region of Arindrano since the 19th century, with a special focus on the history of the settlement of the southern fringes of Betsileo country as well as on the history of forced labour, slavery and the consequences of abolition in the region. My wish is to do both archival and field research. I was advised by a number of historians of Madagascar that the national archives in Antananarivo, the archives of the Christian missions and the French colonial archives have a lot of understudied material that should yield interesting data on these topics. In parallel to this archival work, I would like to collect oral histories of the southern region of Arindrano, extending my knowledge of the history of the region beyond the history of the polity of Ambatofotsy. Despite the fact that, in my experience, southern Betsileo ‘historians’ (*mpitantara*) are wary of explicitly mentioning slaves and their descendants, I have now acquired a good knowledge of the many euphemisms that can be used to ask the right kinds of questions, thus overcoming this difficulty.

The third line of inquiry that I would like to follow involves undertaking experimental work on psychological essentialism. I plan to do so with four goals in mind. The first aim is to bring systematic data to test the claim I have advanced that commoner descendants in Beparasy essentialize the category ‘slaves’. Experimental tasks could be designed that pit the three social statuses (*raza*) of ‘nobles’, ‘commoners’ and ‘slaves’ against one another (and possibly against other social categories as well), to see whether they are essentialized. Researchers working on psychological essentialism have developed standard experimental tests (e.g. switched-at-birth and adoption tasks) that could be adapted for this purpose. My prediction is that the category ‘slaves’ will be essentialized, by which I mean that all the aspects of categorization taken by cognitive psychologists as evidence of essentialism (as

explained in Chapter 7) will apply to it. By contrast, I expect that the categories ‘nobles’ and ‘commoners’ will not be essentialized, or that at least they will be less essentialized (i.e., not all aspects of essentialism will apply to them). Provided that this preliminary investigation confirms my ethnographic observations, another goal will be to see whether some specific factors have an effect on the essentialization of the category ‘slaves’. It could be asked, for example, whether people’s religious affiliation, gender or alliances with slave descendants (through *vakirà*, mutual help or associations) make a measurable difference. On the basis of ethnographic evidence, my prediction is that there will be no (or only minimal) influence of these factors, and that practicing Christians, respondents of both sexes and the Berosaiña’s ‘closest friends’ will essentialize the category ‘slaves’ just like everyone else. Thirdly, it would be interesting to study the process of essentialization of slave descendants over the course of child development. As argued in Chapter 7, my hypothesis is that children in Beparasy begin by essentializing the Berosaiña, after which they extend the essentialized category ‘unclean people’ to slave descendants in general. While certainly not easy to carry out because of the sensitivity of the topic, such a developmental study would be useful to establish how early children think that people like the Berosaiña are essentially different and at what age they learn the reason for their essential difference. My prediction is that there is a considerable time lag between the two moments and that children in Beparasy essentialize the Berosaiña long before they understand why they (and all slave descendants) are different.

The fourth area of future enquiry relates to whether people’s own status influences their propensity towards essentialism. For this, I would design a task similar to that used by Mahalingam (mentioned in Chapter 8); this task, unlike those mentioned above, would involve not only respondents of commoner descent but also of noble and slave descent. Mahalingam found that people who belonged to the highest castes were essentialist about castes, while those who belonged to the lowest castes considered castes as changeable historical constructs. On the basis of my fieldwork, I predict that among the southern Betsileo a similar study will show that commoner descendants are essentialist about status groups (*raza*). Due to my lack of data on noble descendants, I do not have a precise idea of how they might respond; yet

following the logic of Mahalingam's finding, one might expect that they too will be essentialist. By contrast, I expect that slave descendants, like the low-caste people in Mahalingam's study, will think that the *raza* of 'nobles', 'commoners' and 'slaves', are the products of human history, and that therefore they are changeable. As explained in Chapter 8, this would be a strong piece of evidence that, contrary to what some scholars have argued, slave descendants have not internalized their inferior position.

Of course, the 'silence' about slavery is a serious obstacle to any experimental work on the topic. But I think that obstacle could be overcome in two ways: by the use of euphemisms or, perhaps more reliably, by presenting stories that are situated elsewhere (e.g. in another region of Madagascar or in another country) or in the pre-colonial past. Since I am not a cognitive psychologist and I have no training in experimental research, my plan is to pair up with a psychologist with experience in research on essentialism, who could help with the design of the experimental tasks and with the analysis and interpretation of the results. This collaborative model was pioneered by Bloch, Astuti and a few other anthropologists (e.g. Bloch, Carey & Solomon 2001; Astuti, Solomon & Carey 2004; Medin, Ross & Cox 2006). These collaborations have proved very fruitful, not only because of the actual results they have produced but also because of the discussions and exchanges across disciplines they have encouraged and the vast new fields of research they have opened up.

A final note on researching slave descendants in Madagascar

As ethnographers we produce accounts that are read for the most part by other scholars and only rarely beyond these narrow circles. But it does happen – and in the future, with the growth in the use of the internet, it is likely to happen much more often than in the past – that the outcome of our research is read by the very people we study. Whether we like it or not, our speculative or tentative accounts can quickly become reified as authoritative statements, in spite of all the precautions we take to stress that scientific research is always an unfinished business. In one way or another, someday our studies may end up affecting the way people think about themselves.

For a variety of reasons, anthropologists of Madagascar have tended to give voice to the views that free descendants hold about slave descendants rather than the other way round. By doing so, they may have given more ground for prejudice and discrimination against slave descendants than was already there. Depictions of slave descendants as land-less, tomb-less, ancestor-less, history-less and descent-group-less – that is, as people with little power due to their lack of participation in the ‘Malagasy complex’ of land-tomb-ancestors – have become prevalent, almost common-sense, in the anthropological literature of Madagascar. Through my encounters with the Berosaiña, I realized that these depictions were problematic and that I should question them rather than uncritically reproduce them, if only because they may have important consequences for the people concerned. As the case of the Berosaiña shows, people called ‘slaves’ among the southern Betsileo are caught up in more diverse histories than the existing literature suggests.

APPENDIX

A note on the language

During the interviews many of our interlocutors spoke the southern Betsileo dialect, although some also used the official Malagasy language to make sure that Anjasoa and I could follow what they were saying. As a result, some words were sometimes pronounced differently in the same conversation, as people shifted from dialect to official Malagasy and vice versa. In the following transcripts we have tried to stick as much as possible to the way people talked to us.

Chapter 3

Transcript 3.1

Ramarcel: Dadan'i Redison izany nahatong'azy halahalan'ny fiananakavian'ny maman'i Redison. Ity rangaha ity izany olona miavonavona resaka. Izany hoe izy izany efa miresaka dia miavonavona be izy amin'ny fianakaviany. Izany hoe mahasahasaha miteny ohatra fotsiny: ny anandahan'ny maman'i Redison mindrana zavatra amin'azy nde tsy mba mandao tsotsotra hoe avelao any. Fa tena alefany eo: "Anao rangaha ty miavonavona nefa anao tsy mananana fandraitra. Vo fandraitrany no andrairanao." Ohatra izany. Nde izany tsy hitiavan'ny fianakavian'ny maman'i Redison azy. Nde lasa ty anabavin'ity amin'izay no melondreo manontolo: "anao tsy tokony hanambady an'ity."

Transcript 3.2

Denis & Anjasoa: Tamin'ny fahafatesan'i Rasamuel hony nde tsy nanome omby ry zareo tao Ambalabe. Inona no marina?

Ramarcel: Io zany an taty afara izany hoe amin'izao resahatsika izao efa eo amin'ny 20 taona lasa eo no nisy fifamiliany Rasamuel dadan'i Redison io sy amin'ny misy ny maman'i Redison. Tena resaka tena mamoa fady be zany resaka sahalany hoe resaka fanapahana. Izay fanapahana izay amin'ny faritry Beparasy resaka tsy mifampikasika koa.

D & A: Inona ny anton'io fanapahana io?

Ramarcel: Misy vava tsy tokony havoakan'ny fianankavian'ny maman'i Redison nde navoakany.

D & A: Inona le vava?

Ramarcel: Io zany misy tena fampihinana zavatra maloto izany (fanopana izany izay no tena marina). Izany hoe ompa izay an tsy tokony atao satria io ompa io, reva

nanompa fianakaviana raika izany any tsy vitivita fotsiny amin'izao hoe mifona tsotra fa tsy maintsy mamono omby fandiovana an'iny vava navoaka iny.

D & A: Efa voavaha ve io olana eo anivon'io fianakaviana roa io saha mbola mitohy?

Ramarcel: Tsy vita koa satria maty ny raika. Nde ny fianakavian'i Ramarcelline olona tena miavonavona be koa nde nenay aty tsy afaka hifona aty nde ny aty tsy afaka hifona aty nde samy miziriziry amin'ny heviny eo. Nde safe izany ny aty amin'ny Ramarcelline ndefa mandao an'i Ramarcelline manontolo: "Efa misy ny zavatra mahazo ny vadinao any ndefa andana anao rery manao ze hahafaka any." Nde ary zay mahatonga an'i Ramarcelline mandeha irery fa ny fianankaviany manontolo tsy misy manampy an'i Ramarcelline. Nde Ramarcelline izany ampian'ny zanany amin'izay (ampian'i Redison, Voahangy), nde lasa manao ny adidy aty.

Transcript 3.3

D & A: Redison nanazava taminay fa ny antony nisian'ny problème teo amin'ny fanambadian'ny mamany sy Rasamuel dia hoe tsy mitovy razana hony zareo hozy ny tao Ambalavao. Inona no dikan'izany?

Ramarcel: Izy io zany an, misy tamin'ny 1800 tany hono misy an'ireto hoe mpanjaka, misy an'ny le hoe tamin'ny andron'ny andrina, Andrianampoinimerina, Radama sy ny namany reto. Misy an'ireny izany hono taloha nde reto tandrify anay ireto izany an nipetraka tato antsinanana tato izany hoe antsinanan'ity fivondronan'ny Ambalavao ity izany misy toerana atao hoe Mahasoabe (mety eo amin'ny 10 km mialan'ny Ambalavao). Io toerana io nisy an'i dadan'i dadabenay. Nipetraka teo izy mivady nde niteraka fito mirahalaha, tamin'izay taloha be izay tany (tamin'ny 1800 tany). Nde nisy an'ireto adin'ny andrianareto sy ny namany reto nde misy hoe resy izany ny sasany nde andevozina izany hoe ity efa ambany grady noho isika ty nde izay ataontsika an'ity nde mety. Nde misy ny olo sasany tsy resy nde lasa ankelakelany eo.

Transcript 3.4

D & A: Inona ny antony ninohan'ny olona fa hoe andevo zareo?

Ramarcel: Misy tantara mandeha madrinidrinika izany io satria misy ny dadabenay izany no tafiditra tany voalohany (tany Beparasy) nde nahazo toerana malalaka be. Nisy olo hafa tonga koa nde tandrify an'i dadabenay koa no nanome an'ireo an "Anareo mipetraka amin'ny toerana ty eto." Nanome an'ny fiankaviana hafa koa, izany hoe fianakaviana amin'ny faritra Fianarantsoa nandeha, nandeha, nde nisy tody any. Nde mandrak'izao tsika miresaka izao ara moa misy tanin'ny dadabenay an misy nampidramina olo. Nde misy olo amin'izao mitantara aminay hoe "Io tany io anie an'i dadabenareo." Io tsa namidy an fa nampidramina anazy hoe "Eo nareo mba mihinam-bary eo fa ity fa mba madiodio. Tsa haveriny amin'izao." Nde hanay izany tsa mahasaha maka an'io satria mandrany gera be koa. Nde hitanao zo amin'izao tsika miresaka zo moa ny tandrify an'i dadabenay

mbola manana toerana malalaka amin'izao. Io zo sahalan'io manoboka atsimon'ny tranon'i Redison an'nde midina jusqu'ary an'amin'ny renirano ambany ary an'nde mahazo iny an'nde miditra amin'ny tetezana iny. Nde mahazo an'ny arabe iny jusqu'ary Redison ary indray mandeha, nde iny andrefana manontolo iny zo an'i dadabenay. Nde io koa misy atsinanan'ny kodona io koa misy ohatran'ny nosy kely zay ao, ambolen'olo tsako, tsaramaso io zo mbola namany an'i dadabenay koa. Nde ary Volaso ary akaikin'ny tranon'Andrianafotsy ary mbola misy malalaka be an'i dadabenay ihany koa. Nde io fanananay tany malalaka anakitelo io zany mbola miteraka jalousie amin'ny le olo any. Nde “Matoa anie ireto bandy ireto manana tany malalaka vo taranak'olo.” Nde io zany ny mahatonga ny olo any Beparasy tsy mety manambady ny fianakavianay. Misy ny ray aman-drenin'ny sasany manao resaka hafahafa nde tsa misy manambady anay. Amin'izao fotoana izao nefany tsy azo atao mihitsy miresaka an'izay. Nefa zavatra zay tsa nisy an'izany hono taloha efa nisy nitatara taminay. Fa misy dadatoanay raika zay zo tena afaka mitatara be dia be an'izay mihitsy. Any Beparasy io dadatoako io fa tsy aty Ambalavao. Fa ny aty Ambalavao izany tsy mahasaha miresaka amin'azy izahy satria misy an'izao koa monko: anay izany an'dadabenay efa nandeha any Beparasy. Mihaha anay fa raha anay izany manontany an'ity olo ity “Fa anay ho any aminareo nde hanontany ny tantara fianankavianay,” nde mety anao na'izay zo ny aty hoe: “Reto bandy reto izany an te hangalaka tany aty.” Zay hangalaka tany izany mihitsy izany an mahakao dy hanay. Beparasy io izany amin'izao raha misy mamokan' izay feo: “Nareo taranak'andevon'ny” izay nde tena anaovana kabary be amin'ny fokon'olona mihitsy satria resaka tsy fanao izany fa matoa izany samy mipetraka any, samy olo voaroaka taty aby matoa mody any Beparasy.

Transcript 3.5

Randriatsoa: Ny resaka fanambadia monko nde zao ao! Ny olo Ambalabe ty miaramila izay ao miaramila, miaramila retirety ny babanay, olo niady io ndefa iny ihany ny mahatonga an'izay fa ny fiaviana samy mana ny azy. Fa ny zo mitovy, tsa misy ambony tsa misy ambany. Tsa misy olo nandevozina zany sady ny anara natao andevohovanay. Tsa andevo, hafa ny andevo tany am-patany. Fa ny olo miady taloha mibodro: “Le ny doriako tsa manambady ny dorian-drahano.” Misy ady nataondreo ao. Ka io sy io samy miaramila ny baban'io sy nenibenay nde nifampitifitry tamin'izay fotoan'izay, ka “Le doriako tsa manambady ny dorian'io.” Fa tsy misy olo voafady hoe tsa mahazo manambady ny dorian'olo hafatsin'ny olo miady. Fa ny ankehitriny tsy miady mifanambady io ro io fa tsa mba niady. Fa anay tsy ambanin'ny razan'olo io ary olo io tsy ambanin'ny razanay. Taloha nifampibodro.

D & A: Fa maninona zany ny olo ary Ambalabe mitaro an'izay zavatr'izay?

Randriatsoa: Ka io babanay sy renibenay niady io, olo niady nifampitifitry reo. Fa io nde mbola avy aminay ihany no fihavian'olo Ambalabe io. Non c'est [pas] possible fa tsy misy olo avy ato letsy hanay. Raha ohatra ny fandevozina no hatao, olo nandevozinay zany ny olo, fa hanay tsy nilaza an'izay fa olo nananto hanay fa

hanay tsy nandevozon'olona zany hanay avy ato taloha. Ha! Hanay no avy ato taloha.

D & A: Tamin'ny taloha tany, talohan'ny nahatongavan'olo taty ve tsy nisy tantara tany raha...?

Randriatsoa: Tsy nisy tany nifankahita fa samy mana ny tany fihaviny. Ny sasany avy hatary e, ny sasany avy hatary e. Aiza hifankahita amin'izany?

D & A: Satria ohatrany 'tsao' le izy ataon'ny le olo hoe nareo anie sahalan'izao... Satria le hanareo avy lavitra ve?

Randriatsoa: Tsy nisy nahalala ny tany fihaviny fa ato no nifankahita nde samy milaza ny tany fihaviany. Hanay niboaka tarihy e, hanay niboaka tarihy e, ty ko hanay niboaka tarihy... fa ato no nifakatrara nde hanay no avy ato taloha. Aiza no hahitany hanay? Raha ohatra fa any no hitondrana anazy hoe fandevozana hanay zany no tokony hanandevon'ny olo ato, fa hanay nde tsy hanandevon'ny olo ato ary tsy andevozin'ny olo ato fa ny tany fiavia... An an! Samy manana ny tany fihaviny fa olo miady, miady aminay. Nde raha vo mibodro an tsy mibodro ny tenany fa mibodro zafy aman-dranany. Zay ny tantaranay olo niady samy militera. Nde olo niady tsa mifankatia mihitsy. Nde "vo doriako tsa manambady anio, vo doriako tsa manambady anio." Fa hanay izay tianay vadiana nde vadinay.

D & A: Ny ray aman-dreny ben'ny zareo any zany no nifampibodro io?

Randriatsoa: E, e. Fa tsa olo manontolo ato fa olo raika miady. Misy manome feo hafahafa nareo tahakan'izany ve?

D & A: Tsy manome fa arakan'ny fandinihanay ny zavatra eo, mandinika moa zay.

Randriatsoa: Raha ohatra misy milaza avy ato talohanay nde mavandy fa ny vazimba no avy ato talohanay fa tsa misy ato koa ny vazimba. Mpandranto avy eo fa tsa misy avy ato ko ny mpandranto fa mpifindra monina ty dia hanay no avy ato taloha nahatomy olo ato taloha. Tsa mpihava aby ny olo ato fa samy mana ny tany fihaviny. Aho tsa mahalala ny fihavin-drahano fa ato no hifankahalala nde mikabary ny olo any nano no niavianay any nano no niavianay nde mikabary koa aho any nano no niavianay. Tsy misy mahalala ny tany fihaviny na olo... Na olo nigadra na olo efa tany na olo tahia io...

D & A: Sy avy aty nomena tany amin'izay.

Randriatsoa: Fa hanay aby no nangatahany tany ato. Hoe "Ahia ny tany hinananay" nde "Io e", hoe "Ahia ny tany hinananay" nde "Ahy e".

Transcript 3.6

Denis: Mais ici il y a quelque chose que je ne comprends pas. Pourquoi est-ce qu'on présente toujours Rakamisy dans l'histoire comme un andevohova alors que tout le monde dit que les Berosaiña sont des hovavao?

Rakoto Jeannot: (Laughing) Je n'ose pas parler de cela! C'est très difficile!

Denis: Je ne comprends pas pourquoi Randriatsoa dit dans ses kabary qu'il est andevohova...

Rakoto Jeannot: Parce qu'il était proche du hova.

Denis: Rakamisy était un esclave du *hova*?

Rakoto Jeannot: Non! Il était andevohova pour lui-même, pas pour les autres.

Denis: Pourquoi seulement pour lui même? Je ne comprends pas.

Anjasao: Inona no antony mahatonga ny olona matahoatra miresaka an'izany?

Rakoto Jeannot: Zany hoe tsy say tena hiteny mazava mikasika an'izay monko ny olo satria izao matahoatra any amin'ny hoe an mety henon'le tompony le zavatra ka avy eo toriny amin'ny fanjaka sy ny sisa ao ary lazainareo "Tahia naha andevo anay?"

Denis: Les gens savent que Rakamisy était un andevo même si ils disent qu'il était un andevohova?

Rakoto Jeannot: Izany no mahatonga anazy hoe "fianakaviany ihany no nizarany fa tsy nizara hoan'ny olo rehetra izy."

Denis: Est-ce qu'il est aussi arrivé vers 1870?

Rakoto Jeannot: Non, plus tard.

Denis: Après la colonisation?

Rakoto Jeannot: Non, avant.

Denis: Est-ce qu'il était un esclave avant qu'il arrive?

Rakoto Jeannot: Laughing) Oui.

Denis: Il était l'esclave de qui?

Rakoto Jeannot: (Laughing) Sarotra zay... (Lowering his voice) Eo atsinanan'ny Ambalavao akaikin'ny lala handeha Anjoma, raha handeha any Anjoma nde côté Anjoma eo misy ny toera nisy ny andriana nitompony.

Anjasao: Iza no anaran'ny tanana io?

Rakoto Jeannot: Vinany

Denis: Pourquoi est-ce que des esclaves de Vinany sont venus ici?

Rakoto Jeannot: Izany hoe na dia nipetraka teo amin'ny hova io hy an nde afaka niasa hoan'ny tenany, afaka niasa nanompo hoan'ny hova ka raha fa nahazohazo hery tato amin'ny filany amin'ny tenany manoka nde afaka nividy ny tenany. Raha ny marina aloha nde efa nahafaka ny tenany amin'ny fanandevozza hy! Izy no niavo tena fa tsy tratrany le hoe: amin'izao nde tsy misy azo atao andevo koa tamin'ny 1896 tsy tratran'hy io fa talohan'io ndefa nahafaka ny ho libre.

D. & A.: Naninona izy nana fahefana taty nizara tanin'olona? Iza no nanome fahefana anazy?

Rakoto Jeannot: Reo roa lahy teroa, satria baiko avy tany amin'ny andriana avy tany Ambatofotsy: "Iny Rakamisy ho any aminareo nde omeo tany hy, nde mba misy hanomezany ny havany."

Denis: Pourquoi est-il devenu un bon ami de Rainibao?

Rakoto Jeannot: Tena mpinamana be.

Denis: Vakirà?

Rakoto Jeannot: Non, tsy nivaky ra, mpinamana.

D & A: Fa naninona zany izy fa fantany hoe andevo avy tarihy nde fa maninona nomeny pouvoir?

Rakoto Jeannot: Satria izy efa afaka. Nividy tarihy nde comptina tsy ho andevo tsony.

Denis: Il a eu de très bonnes terres...

Rakoto Jeannot: Oh oui!

Denis: Parce qu'il était parmi les premiers à arriver à Beparasy?

Rakoto Jeannot: Oui, après Rainibao et Raikalatsara.

Transcript 3.7

Denis: Mais alors je me demande pourquoi les gens disent que les Berosaiña, par exemple Raboba ici, sont des andevo...

Rakoto Jeannot: Attends! Pour Raboba... Telo mirahalahy hy no tonga ato Beparasy fa ty anakiroa ty mbola tsy nahafaka ny tenany, tsy mba nahazo nividy ny tenany. Fa ty Rakamisy ty no nahafaka nividy ny tenany nde ary hy tsy, raha sahala aminy rery nde tsy azo tenenina na hoe zao tsony fa azo lazaha hoe olompotsy saingy tsy mahafoy ny havany hy fa mbola izy aby, raha misy ny maty nde mbola izy aby no mikarakara satria fianakaviany nde: “an hy mbola namany, namany aby reo.”

D & A: Nde le fianakaviany roa zany tamin'ny androny fanjanahatany no afaka?

Rakoto Jeannot: E, e. Zay zany bababen'i Raboba, bababen'ny Randrianja Albert.

Denis: Ce que je ne comprends toujours pas c'est pourquoi Randriatsoa dit qu'il est andevohova, par exemple quand il parle aux funérailles...

Rakoto Jeannot: Raha ohatra zany fa tahakan'ny hoe nisy zavatra fanolana amin'ity fokonolo ato anaty fokontany ray manontolo ty nde Randriatsoa, Ratsimbazafy aroa Zazafotsy dia i Ralay ato Ivondro nde Rasabotsy Daniel andrefa ho e! Reo zay no atao hoe zanakin'ny andevohova nde reo ny mpandamina ny fanolona raha ohatra misy zavatra mifanola ka tsy vitany samy fokon'olo nde reo no hanakara azy nde reo no mandidy.

Transcript 3.8

D & A: C'est quoi la fonction exacte de ces andevohova? Il ont d'autres fonctions?

Rakoto Jeannot: Tsy manana zavatra hafa ankoatrin'ny hoe misy zavatra hifanolana ny mpiara-mony ka tsy mahavita le mpiara-mony iny no hanantsoana ny andevohova fa indrindra indrindra ny mikasika ny tany, misy olo miady tany nde alaina ny andevohova satria voasoratra amin'ny bokin'io any le tanin'olo tsy irairay io hoe.

D & A: Mbola misy ny boky?

Rakoto Jeannot: E,e. Mbola manana ny bokiny taloha. Manana zareo andevohova reo. Tany teo hanano eo an ka hanano eo an dia tanin'dRanohano dia fañahia zany no tenenina amin'ny fa tsy mitono anaran'olo sahalan'ny hoe “Ny tany anihano tahakan'ny ny anonano dia an'ny Berosaiña”, “Ny tany ato ary e! Ary e! Dia anin'ny Tsiataha.” Nde lazany amin'ny fivoriana ankapobeny zany le fantany io

fa le partagin'io tsy kelikely ao hatreto hatreroy an'i Koto iny an'ny famille iny fa le en gros iny fantany iny.(...) Fa saika mazana ny mahatonga ny ankehitriny an tsy mangalaka ny andevohova koa hy fa te hihoatra ny tenany izy ohatra zany sahalan'ny ohatran'ny faritrana'ny tsihy zao zany no atako hoe hanazy kanefa hy nte hangalaka mikisaka kely ny azy aty amin'ny lanin'ny tokotany aty tsy mangalaka andevohova hy fa olo zay mifankahay resaka amin'azy, olo mifankatia amin'azy no alainy mora hanome ery azy nde avy eo nde e, ty eo tokoa hoe ny lanin'io hoy le olo mifankatia amin'le tompony ty fa raha ny tena andevohova zany no halay an tonga nde mitory ny marina io hoe hatreto io katretoy e, io hy no tanin'i Ranohano. Le foko anakiroa samy hafa mifanakila zany an, saika mazana mahatonga ny ady tany. Ny ady tany anie nde zao hein ny foko anakiroa samy hafa mifamifanila tany sahalan'ny hoe ny ilan'ny tsihy ty andrefa an'olo hafa ny hilan'ny tsihy atsinana an'ny foko hafa nefa ny anakiray ity nte hikitika na raiky ry zo kelikely anitito, nte hanitraty hy an, "An atao zara mitovy aba fa io samy nome." Ka nefa tsy ino fa ny fizarana nanaovandreo azy taloha dia sahalamin'iny. Nde hanitraty ny azy raiky ry nde hoe hangalaka hatraty he, nde tsa mety koa raika ty.(...) Mamaly resaka no ataon'i Randriatsoa amin'ny kabary rehefa misy maty. Ny olo mamaly resaka amin'ny kabary nde ze olo tendren'ny fokonolo "Raiso eny zao." Indraindray izy mamaly an'iny, indraindray olon'kafa. Fa ny tena andraikitry tsy azany hiala nde ny ary amin'ny hova ary. Raha ny hova misy maty nde tena milahatra an-tsehatra tanteraka izy mpandamina hy an fa tsy manao programany hy raha tsy tonga aby andevohova, zanaka'andevohova aby reo. Nde tonga eo hy, nde izy samy andevohova koa mifanendry anazy efa niteny tamin'ny tarihy hanay koa efa niteny tamin'ny tarihy anjaranareo any koa zao nde mety tandrifin'izay izy nde miteny mety tandrifin'ny hafa izy nde tsy miteny.

Transcript 3.9

D & A: Izany koa izany ny antony izy niteny hoe dorian'ny andevohova io satria nony le zavatra nomen'i Rainibao an'zareo satria moa zany napanantenainy tany be zareo?

Rafranklin: E, e. Nde tena nameny fahefany, amin'ny fahefana hoentiny, Rainibao zany, satria nahasolo ny fananan'ny zanany tarihy e.

D & A: Zay fotsiny nanampian'i Rakamisy azy sa resaka asa koa nanampiany an'i Rainibao?

Rafranklin: An, an. Zay fotsiny, nanampiany an'i Rainibao. Hoe izy nandeha nisolo ny zanany tamin'ny fanjaka tamin'ny miaramila fa ny zanany lahitoka mady, zokinjaza ray. Zokinjaza zany ro tadiavy, zay no tadiavin' ny fanjaka hoe tsy maintsy mamoky zokinjaza zany.

D & A: Tamin'ny andron'ny vazaha zany io?

Rafranklin: E, e. Tamin'ny andron'ny fanjanahatany.

D & A: Tsa nanaha foana zany Rakamisy nandeha tany iny?

Rafranklin: An, an, tsa nanaha izy. Nahavita ny service tany nde tafaverina nde nomeny aby amin'izay.

D & A: Satria moa nisy rahalahan'i Rakamisy io koa tonga taty tamin'izay, Randriatsoakely...

Rafranklin: Randriatsoakely, za nitoetry teto Ivondro teto zay. Dorian'i Randriatsoakely zay atsinanan'ny Eglise iny.

D & A: Zay namany tonga taty koa satria fa nanana pouvoir zareo (Rakamisy)?

Rafranklin: Hoe anao rery zany tonga atoy. Anao zany tonga aty mipetraka atoy. Nde efa mety zany ny fambolena, fipetrahanana, nde mandre ny tantaran'ny any zany hoe: "Ha, nde nahazo tany soa nde tsara ny fipetrahako any, tany soa tsara any." Nde manaraky atany ny sisa. Rainihosy rahalahany koa.

D & A: Avy aiza Rakamisy, Rainihosy?

Rafranklin: Io nde boka avaratry aby zany io. Ato Ambalamasina ato zany no vantany voalohany. Amabalamasina mariny Vohimarina nde eto zany nande nifindra atoy. Fa Rapitsarandro zay zay an, zay zay an no tena renin'ny zareo. K'io zany tsa mba nanambady Rapitsarandro io fa nde niteraka anazy. Izany hoe tsa mba nanan-dra zany Rakamisy sy ny namany. Io zany mpanandraha be zany io Rapitsarandro io, tena olo nanandraha be mihitsy.

D & A: Nony le raha azony Rakamisy io sa efa nanakarena izy taloha?

Rafranklin: Fa nanakare zany efa niala hoe vita, tsy misy koa ny fanandevozana. Fa olo reo zany an hovavao. Hovavao io zany avy zany le dahalo manafika ka lefa manafika zany le dahalo dia nde feriny ny henomby nde olo tsa malaky zany tonga nde feriny koa le olo. Nde ny dorian'olo ferin'ny dahalo iny zany nipody hy efa avy eo, satria nataon'ny olo andevo zany, takalon' aina. takalon'dravatra aby retraretra io nde na ino na ino na mamaky, manolotra, sy ny sisa, nde olo andevon'olo.

D & A: Nanakare zany zareo satria...?

Rafranklin: Nanakare satry nilampy ny mpanjaka, izy no andevon'ny mpanjaka ka raha fa vita ny colonie, vo nilaza ny Frantsay hoe tsy misy azo atao hoe andevo zany koa nde niala izy.

Chapter 4

Transcript 4.1

D & A: Nde amin'ny hovavao zany afaka manao vakirà?

Ramartine: Afaka, tena afaka. Zay zany ny afaka hanaovana relation amin'azy. Afaka handraisana an'azy.

D & A: Nde ohatrany hoe fianakaviana zany zareo avy eo ?

Ramartine: E, e. Ha ! Le raha tena misy fifatora mafimafy ohatrany tsa mifanary, ohatrany manao mariazny ny manao vakirà.

D & A: Nde inona aby hono fombafomba hatao manao vakirà io?

Ramartine: Ohatra zao hanay amin'i maman'i Camille zo vakirà nde mananto an'i kaky nde vay eo an tena vaky rà mihitsy, tena riata lamy anie eto e hasia rà, nde

hasia sakamalao nde hanao mihina ny ràko nde hana zany mihina ny rànao nde avy eo amin'izay manao ny fepetra amin'izay, fifaneke sahalan'ny mariazy hoe: na karatsia na hampifalia na hino kidona na hino kihatra. Nde tsa afaka mihitsy. Mitovy amin'ny manao mariazy mihitsy ny manao vakirà .

Chapter 5

Transcript 5.1

D & A: Mety hametraka fanontaniana somary hafahafa zay mamanan'i Redison fa le izy ty mo fianarana nde hapetrakanay ihany. Tsy maninona ve?

Ramarcelline: Alefa.

D & A: Tsy hoe moa fa izay moa efa arakan'ny teneninay efa niresaka tamin'i Redison, nde nametrametraka fanontaniana: tsy hoe izany hozy isy fa ny antony nahatongan'ny fianakavian'ny mamako tsy tia ny vadiny satria tsy mitovy raza zao. Hoe tsy mitovy razanareo nde tsy tiandreo hony hanao hanambady ny vadinao io.

Ramarcelline: Asa mety ho zay angamba.

D & A: Tsa mitovy raza sahalan'ny ahoana zany tian'ny zareo lazaina io? Miala tsiny mamanan'i Redison fa fianarana monko izy ty.

Ramarcelline: Reo moa zany tsy nahalala ny fotorany. Vahiny reo no tonga nde tsy fantatrandreo zany ny firazanany.

D & A: Firazanan'iza io?

Ramarcelline: Firazanan'ny le rangaha.

D & A: Vahiny zareo no tonga tao Beparasy?

Ramarcelline: Tany andrefana reo no niakatra taty nde bebeny no tonga taty taloha.

D & A: Beben'ny vadinao iny?

Ramarcelline: E, e. Nde nipetraka teto antsinana eto Mahasoabe, nde nandeha tany bebendreo nanambady tany. Nde izy zany, misy sahalan'izay moa taloha hoe misy mpandeha tany zany.

D & A: Mpandeha tany?

Ramarcelline: Mpizara tany zany. Nde ny bebendreo mpizara tany.

D & A: Mpizara tany tonga tany Beparasy io?

Ramarcelline: E, e.

D & A: Tany Mahasoabe zany reo taloha sa misy toera-kafa koa?

Ramarcelline: An, an. Tao ihany. Nde tsy fantatrandreo zany ny fiaviny. Nde nataony hoe tsy mitovy razana nde nony tato hafara zany natao ny tantara kay izy ity tsy izy ihany.

D & A: Fa tiany tenenina amin'ny tsy mitovy raza io, tsy mitovy raza sahalan'ny ahoana?

Ramarcelline: Sahalan'ny hoe, taloha nisy izany hoe tsisy hafan'ny ankehitriny, misy mpanampy. Nde hoe misy mpanampy sahalan'izany.

D & A: Ohatran'ny tamin'ny andron'ny andriana reny zany tiny tenenina: misy ny andriana, misy ny andevo sy ny tariny?

Ramarcelline: E, e. Sahalan'izany. Fa sy avy eo natao ny tantara anay avy nipetraka tany Betroka, nazava avy eo.

D & A: Olo avy tahia? Miala tsiny raha mametraka fanontaniana zao, fianara ty.

Ramarcelline: Filazandreo amin'ny tantara zany mboka antsinana hy vo nandeha any andrefa.

D & A: Atsinana ahia io?

Ramarcelline: Atsinanan'ny Tanala any angamba io, tsy haiko. Tsy haiko ny toera misy azy tany. Niakandrefa izy nde avy any Betroka. Nde ny any Betroka misy toera misy andreo ao, nde havandreo. Tonga any zany anay nde nalefa ny tantara zay vo hita ny fotitrandreo.

D & A: Arakan'ny eritreritranao ve nde tsy nampalahelo hanao ny zavatra sahalan'izay? Tsy nitomany izy hoe olo reto nde sahalan'izao satria moa mafy be le teny navoakan'ny havanao. Tsy nalahelo zany izy?

Ramarcelline: Tsy nampalahelo azy satria fantany ny niandohany. Nde no tonga tany Betroka anie zay nde nasin'ny havan'io nde natao ny tantara zay vo nazava, mitovy zany le tantara. Sahalany tsika ro zo mpiava nde tsy fantatra ny toera fiavina nde hoe avy aho zany avy aminareo nde tsy fantatranareo zany firazanako nde nareo zany mihahihay hoe saode andevo ty satria tsy fantatranareo ny niandohako. Zay zany nivoan'io nefa sy avy àry am-potorany an natao ny tantara tsy izy fa mazava... madio.

D & A: Ny beben'ny vadinao tonga tany Beparasy voalohany?

Ramarcelline: E, e. Renibeny. Reniben'ny mamanan'ny bebeny. Renibeny voalohany renibeny faharoa zay vao bebe niteraka andreniny.

D & A: Renibeny fahatelo zany no tonga tao Beparasy.

Ramarcelline: E, e.

D & A: Nde fantatranao ve ny anaran'ny renibeny io?

Ramarcelline: Rapitsarandro niteraka an'i Ravolamana. Ravolamana niteraka ny mamanan'ny vadiko.

D & A: Tamin'izy tonga tany, izy rery ve ny tonga tany io sa hoe misy namany?

Ramarcelline: Tonga tany izy nde nanambady. Nanambady ny andriana mpandia tany zany.

D & A: Renibeny io zany ny avy ta Betroka?

Ramarcelline: Renibeny avy ta Betroka nde netin'ny mpanjaka namany taty. Nentin'ny mpanjaka teto Ambalavao fa nisy fihavana nataon'ny andrina ny any sy ny aty zany.

D & A: Nde taloha anefa renibeny io tany avaratra tany? Satria moa hozy hanao tavaratra avy eo tany Betroka?

Ramarcelline: Tavaratra zany izy talohan'ny nandeha tany Betroka fa izy zany tsy tadidiko ny toerana niaviny tany avaratra. Satria zany nifampihavana ny

mpanjaka taty sy tany Betroka nde hy zany nientin'ny mpanjaka tany. Nde avy aty nanambady mpanjaka ko mpanjaka mpizara tany zay.

D & A: Nde fantatranao ve ny ny anaran'ny vadiny io? Ny anaran'ny vadin'ny reniben'ny vadinao io?

Ramarcelline: Zay tsy fantako, tsy tadidiko.

Chapter 6

Transcript 6.1

Denis : Est-ce qu'ici il y a encore des différences entre les descendants d'esclaves et les autres, comme celles qui existaient dans le passé?

Raflorine : Oui, il y en a encore.

Denis : Comment voit-on les différences, qu'est-ce que ça change au quotidien?

Raflorine : On peut faire des contacts avec les descendants d'esclaves, mais on ne doit jamais se marier avec eux. Parce que l'histoire continue, continue, continue, ... jusqu'à présent on connaît les gens qui sont descendants d'esclaves. Parce que les grand-parents racontent aux enfants: "Là ce sont les descendants d'esclaves, attention!" Et les descendants des esclaves savent aussi qu'ils sont descendants des esclaves, donc ils ne cherchent pas des maris ou des femmes chez les autres.

Denis : Ils se marient avec d'autres descendants d'esclaves?

Raflorine : Oui, c'est ça.

Denis : Ca pose d'autres problèmes ?

Raflorine : Non, c'est seulement le problème du mariage. On peut travailler ensemble, manger ensemble, mais c'est juste le mariage qui est interdit.

Denis : Mais on peut habiter à côté, les inviter dans la maison, tout ça on peut le faire?

Raflorine : Oui, on peut le faire. On peut manger avec une assiette ensemble. Ce n'est pas un problème ça. Mais c'est le mariage qu'on ne peut pas faire. C'est étonnant, hein!

Transcript 6.2

D & A: Inona ny antony tsy hafahan'ny olo manambady ny taranak'andevy io?

Ramartine: Ka tany tonga nde ota zany filazany.

Father: Ota.

D & A: Inona ny atonony maha izy ota io?

Ramartine: Amin'ny ankapobehiny zany sahalan'ny atao amin'ny eto zao zany nde hoe vohitsy nefa ny hatato-eto hovavao nde lasa tsa mety mihitsy, tsa mety hifanambady zany io nde anay koa tsa hafaka manambady hova satria raha manambady hova nde lasa andevony lasa andevo zany nde lasa very koa ny zonay

satria lasa mandrany andevony satry mikirakiran'ny sakafony sarotry be aminay Malagasy zany.

Father: Ny hova koa, lasa koa ny gradin'ny hova.

Ramartine: Ny hova koa potiky koa.

Father: Tsa manjaka koa ny hova azy raha manambady olo tsa hova izy.

Ramartine: Raha manambady olon-tsotra izy.

Father: Ny hova zo nde manambady hova. Fa ny hova manambady tsa hova nde latsaky ny maha hova anazy, very ny zony.

Ramartine: Ny vohitsy manambady vohitsy. Nde raha ohatra olon-tsotra manambady andevo nde lasa andevo koa.

Father: Le olo ty hova hanano ty hanambady hova tsa mba latsaky ny hova satry vo andevony ihany.

Ramartine: Ny hovavao mahazo manambady hova. Satry vo andevony ihany nde tsa manaha, satry vo hirakiny, mandeha miasa, mamaha anazy.

D & A: Misy ve izany, olo hova manambady hovavao?

Ramartine: Misy satry vo tena andevony io vo ampesany, vo azo ampesany vo andevoziny ihany, vo miody, amin'ny taloha ihany zany. Satry vo ampiasany amin'ny hatrizay amin'ny maha andevo anazy iny ihany. Nde vo handevozony ihany.

Father: Sahalany miody amin'ny asany fahizay.

Ramartine: Sady vadiny zay no ampiasany. Fa ny olon-tsotra zany tsa mety mihitsy.

Father: Ny olon-tsotra tsa mahazo an'izay.

Ramartine: Hanambady hova moa andevoziny hanambady ny aty e lasa ratsy be. Tena tsa ampidirin'ny olo amin'ny fasan-drazana mihitsy raha maty raha manambady anazy.

Transcript 6.3

Denis: Pourquoi est-ce que les gens refusent de se marier avec les descendants d'esclaves?

Rathéophile: (Laughing). Ecoutez, voici ce qui arrivait dans le passé. Pour les olompotsy, c'était interdit de se marier avec un esclave, mais pour les hova ça ne l'était pas, parce que les enfants que les hova avaient avec des esclaves n'étaient pas considérés comme des esclaves mais comme des hova. Un homme hova pouvait prendre l'enfant et l'élever comme son enfant.

Denis: Cela ne posait aucun problème?

Rathéophile: Non, il n'y avait aucun problème. Pour nous [les hova], même aujourd'hui ce n'est pas un problème de se marier avec les esclaves.

Denis: Mais pourquoi c'est un problème pour les olompotsy alors?

Rathéophile: (Laughing) Je ne sais pas pourquoi, mais c'est vraiment humiliant pour les olompotsy, à cause des coutumes. Parce que leurs enfant seront des enfants

d’esclaves. Si un olompotsy se marie avec un esclave, les enfants seront des esclaves. Mais pour les hova, ce n’est pas le cas, c’est le contraire.

Denis: Est-ce qu’un mariage d’un hova avec un olompotsy était possible dans le passé?

Rathéophile: Oui, c’était possible. Un homme hova peut se marier avec qui il veut, et l’enfant sera un hova. Mais une femme hova ne peut pas se marier avec un olompotsy.

Denis: Pourquoi ce n’est pas possible dans ce cas-là?

Rathéophile: Parce que c’est le père qui transmet le statut.

Chapter 7

Transcript 7.1

Denis: Pourquoi est-ce qu’on peut faire beaucoup de choses avec les descendants d’esclaves mais on ne peut pas être enterrés dans la même tombe?

Raflorine: Parce que, par exemple, vous êtes un olompotsy et moi je suis une esclave... Je travaille dur, je lave le maloto partout...

Denis: Oui mais ça c’était dans le passé. Leurs descendants ne font plus ça...

Raflorine: Oui, mais c’est l’esprit, ils sont les descendants de la personne qui a pris le maloto.

Denis: Ils sont encore considérés comme sales?

Raflorine: Oui, ils sont sales.

Denis: Même si ils ne font pas de choses sales?

Raflorine: Oui, c’est ça.

Transcript 7.2

D & A: Arakin’ny fomban-drazana olona sahalan’ny ahoana tsy azo alaina vady?

Pelatsara: Olo tsa mitovy razana izany.

Solo: Samy hafa raza zany.

Pelatsara: Tamy taloha zany misy olo lefa fa taloha zao. Nde nalan’olo. Nde nataon’olo andevo zao. Zay zany ny nahatonga ny fomba tahakan’ izay, any ny fomba olo rehetra hoe: tadiavy razan’olo io hoe: “Raza manao akory ?” Nde hoe: “Tsa mitovy amintsika.” Ka sahalan’izay zany ny fiandohany taloha. (Whispering) Tsa mivaovao fa zay moa raha resaky moa raha fa nde raha sahalan'ny *secret* moa zao. Eh, nde sahalan’izay zany. Nde ny tahakan’azy koa zany no mahazo mifanambady.

Solo: Reo aby samy mitovy raza koa zany no mahazo mifanambady.

D & A: Fa maninona hono zany reo olo reo tsy mitovy razana amin’ny olo hafa?

Pelatsara: Ka zay le nilazako zay fa olo lefa fa taloha fa derena zay. Nde namidin'olo any. Nde nataon'olo andevo zao. Zay zany, nahatonga anio. Nde nitohy hatrany hatrany nifandovanihia aby.

Solo: Andevo mpanino zany io ?

Pelatsara: An, an, nde tsa fantako andevo mpanino angaha fa dia ho andevo zao. Fa raha vao olo tsa tahakan'izay zany nde mahazo mifanambady na homena zaza. Nde izy samy hy no mahazo mifanambady. Fa raha vao miharaha hoe ilany amin'ny reniny any fa ny renibeny, fa ny ràny madio, nde tena tsa home mihitsy letsy nde zaza hano memakatsy memakatsy.

D & A: Nde olo madio io olo sahalany ahoana ?

Pelatsara: Ny olo madio zany nde olo amizao tsa nataon'ny olo an'izay zany.

Solo: Tsa homena moa ny anarany ny madio anara sahalan'izao ny tsa madio anara sahalan'izao ?

Pelatsara: Tsa fantako koa zany no hilazako ny hoe madio zay fa nde hoe le tsa madio zany nde hoe hovavao zay.

Solo: Berosaiña!

D & A: Raha ohatra zany hony misy zaza, kolonga haka vady any nde ahoana zany hafantarana an'le olo iny na hovavao iny na tsy hovavao? Fomba ahoana zany hofantarana azy raha ohatra olona lavitra na sahalan'izay?

Solo: Le hoe la mangalaky vady zany nde tsa maintsy hanadina olo iny.

Pelatsara: Manadinady.

Solo: "Hoe nareo razan'ino?"

Pelatsara: "Io ve olo manao akory? Olo madio ve?"

Solo: Ino ma zany fanononana an'azy?

Pelatsara: "Io ve olo madio?" Sady zay fanontania azy. "Manakory fotoran'olo io?" Tsa maintsy halany tafotitriny mihisty raha io. Ny hoe ny amin'ny ràny amin'ny reniny zany tena tadiavy mihitsy lefa angala-bady le zaza. "Manao akory ny amin'ny babany? Manao akory amin'ny reniny?" Nde le olo manakaikikaiky azy iny tsa maintsy hilaza. "An, an, tsa hay io, lambotapaky io." Tsa maintsy hilaza. Fa tsa avy hoe mitsarapaky anao tonga nde hapanambadia an'iny le zaza. Tsa maintsy manady olo akaikikaikiny fa mety mahalala nde hoe: "io olo madio, azo raisy" na hoe: "io olo tena tsa hay, fa sahala am'izao."

Solo: Tsa maintsy hanadina olo anilany eo zany.

Transcript 7.3

D & A: Ino zany maha lambotapaky azy zany?

Pelatsara: Satria maha lambotapaky azy zany ny ilany madio ny ilany hovavao. Zay zany mahatonga azy ho eo.

D & A: Misy zavatra manjo foana zany amin'ny fiainan'ny zareo raha mifanambady zareo?

Pelatsara: E, e. Ka leky ohatra zany manao ditry amin'iny le zaza dia any anie iny zay.
Ka ohatry misy zavatra mahazo, azy na simba amin'ny zanany tsa mba halan'ny
akilan'ny ray aman-dreniny aty ko tsy alany fa ndefa avelany any tsa harony
amin'azy mihitsy koa iny.

D & A: Tsy miaraky mipetraky amin'ny ray aman-dreniny koa zany?

Pelatsara: An, an.

Solo: Tsa hatrokin'ny fasany; hamakia tany raha...

Pelatsara: Tena tsa hatrokiny fasany koa iny fa nde avelany any. Tsa mba misy hoe
fangatahan'ny amkilany zao.

D & A: Hamakia tany? Hamakia tany sahalany ahoana io?

Solo: Tsa misy fasa zany izy.

Pelatsara: Leky tsa hamakia tany zany nde le fasan'ny any no hasia an'azy fa tsa
mangalaky koa ny ilany raiky iny izany hoe na ilany amin'ny renin'ny na ilany
amin'ny ràny. Tsa alany mitroky amin'azy koa iny. Nde milevina amin'ny tany
misy azy any.

Chapter 8

Transcript 8.1

Ramarcel: Tena malahelo be mihitsy. Ity olo ity izany, tokony ho fianankavianay
akaiky be an, tokony hifankahalala aminay isan-andro na misy faty izany ato nde
tokony mba hahazo ny filazana anay. Nde olona amin'ny ity izany tokony
hahalala: “Ry Marcel? Kaï... Mbola fianakaviansika!”, nefany an anay izany
matahotra ny ho amin'ity.

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GLOSSARY OF MALAGASY TERMS

<i>andevo</i>	slave
<i>andevohova</i>	‘slave of the <i>hova</i> ’, commoner who is chosen by the ruler as local governor and representative
<i>dahalo</i>	cattle rustlers, bandits
<i>fady</i>	taboo
<i>fañahia</i>	term used in Beparasy to refer to local descent groups
<i>fasa</i>	tomb
<i>fasan-tany</i>	tomb dug in the earth
<i>fasa vodivato</i>	tomb built under a rock or in a cave
<i>fehim-poñena</i>	‘tying of residences’, alliance through marriage
<i>fikambana</i>	association
<i>firazanana</i>	supralocal named descent group (synonym of <i>foko</i>)
<i>foko</i>	supralocal named descent group (synonym of <i>firazanana</i>)
<i>fokonolo</i>	council of villagers
<i>fokontany</i>	first-level administrative division of the Malagasy state
<i>fomban-draza</i>	ancestral customs
<i>fotsy</i>	‘white’, term used by Merina to refer to people of free descent
<i>hava</i>	kin
<i>hoaña</i>	mutual aid, especially in agriculture
<i>hova</i>	noble, ruler
<i>hovavao</i>	term used to refer to freed slaves (especially after 1896)
<i>kiridy</i>	large ancestors-thanking ceremony
<i>kabary</i>	speech
<i>lamba</i>	large piece of cloth
<i>lambo-tapaka</i>	‘split wild boar’, expression used by southern Betsileo to refer to children born from unions between commoner and slave descendants
<i>lapa</i>	residence of nobles and rulers
<i>lofo</i>	cattle offered at funerals
<i>madio</i>	clean
<i>mainty</i>	‘black’, term used by Merina to refer to people of slave descent

<i>maloto</i>	dirty
<i>manambady</i>	married
<i>mpanjaka</i>	ruler
<i>mpikabary</i>	orator
<i>mpitantara</i>	historian
<i>olo</i>	people
<i>olo madio</i>	‘clean people’, expression used by southern Betsileo to refer to people of free descent
<i>olo maloto</i>	‘dirty people’, expression used by southern Betsileo to refer to people of slave descent
<i>olo tsa madio</i>	‘unclean people’, euphemism for <i>olo maloto</i>
<i>olon-tsotra</i>	ordinary people, i.e. commoners
<i>ota</i>	guilty of wrong doing
<i>sipa</i>	Boyfriend, girlfriend
<i>tantara</i>	history
<i>tetihara</i>	genealogical speech at funerals
<i>tompo</i>	master, owner
<i>tompom-paty</i>	‘owner of the corpse’, head of the funeral
<i>tompon-tany</i>	land owner
<i>ray aman-dreny</i>	‘father and mother’, parents, notables
<i>raza</i>	polysemic term which can refer in particular to: (1) the dead, the ancestors; (2) the descent group; (3) the status group
<i>ranomaso</i>	‘tears’, gift of money, rice or <i>lamba</i> at funerals
<i>tandra (vady)</i>	marriage gift from the man’s family to the woman’s family
<i>tanindrazana</i>	ancestral land
<i>tsodrano</i>	blessing
<i>vadipaisa</i>	ceremony where the dead are transferred from an old tomb to a new one
<i>vady</i>	spouse
<i>vahiny</i>	guest, someone who is estranged to a place
<i>vokapaty</i>	funerals held in the absence of the corpse
<i>vakirà</i>	blood bond