

SOVEREIGNS OF GOLD SPIRITS OF SILVER

Ritual, History, and Hierarchy in Madagascar

Maurizio Esposito La Rossa

Foreword by **Michael Lambek**

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For my ancestors

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Foreword

Michael Lambek

In northwest Madagascar, the Loza River is known for its treacherous tides and whirlpools, as well as its twists and turns. It is also the scene of a historical tragedy in which a cohort of young princes drowned trying to escape an invading enemy. Subjected to the river's currents, the bodies washed up at various places, which have become underwater shrines. Boats passing along the surface must acknowledge the drowned princes if they are not to capsize. There are also shrines to the deceased princes on both banks, where people gather to ask for rain and prosperity.

Like many deceased monarchs in western Madagascar, these princes rise in the bodies of spirit mediums. They dress entirely in long white garments and wear their hair in braided locks hanging down their backs. Known as Antandrano, or Water-Dwellers, the princes also appear in mediums far from the river. In Mahajanga, I often saw them hanging out together, singing and drinking heavily. Most of the hosts were middle-aged or elderly women, but I had a particularly good rapport with one of the princes, Kot' Mena, who rose in the body of a male medium. A genial person, Kot' Mena liked to talk and to provide healing and consulting services for his host's urban neighbors.

The Water-Dwellers are striking because there are many of them and, aside from a grandfather, a father, and an aunt (the father's sister), they are a set of youthful and childless siblings. They thereby provide a kind of snapshot of a generation, and their presence is a poignant reminder of a traumatic event. Their death is presented as one of collective suicide,

chosen as an alternative to capture by the enemy. In Mahajanga, they evoke the precolonial Merina kingdom's ruthless attempt to conquer the Sakalava of northwest Madagascar. That evocation carries contemporary salience as the Merina heartland became the center of the nation-state, which is seen as continuing to dominate and exploit coastal people. And in Mahajanga, the Water-Dwellers also serve to offset the fact that the royal lineage in power in the region is itself part-Merina, insofar as members are descendants of a union between the Merina monarch and a local princess who had been carried off to the capital.

Who were these drowned princes and why is there a flourishing cult in their name along the banks of the Loza? These are the questions Maurizio Esposito La Rossa sets out to answer, and as he proceeds, they give way to ever larger ones. In particular, the Antandrano are said to be members of a royal clan known as the Descendants of Silver, whereas the reigning monarchs in the region are Descendants of Gold. The word for gold in Malagasy is *volamena*, or red precious metal, while that for silver is *volafotsy*, white precious metal. Gold and silver are symbolically both united and opposed, as are red and white. This is one reason why the Antandrano dress exclusively in white. They also wear silver jewelry, never gold. And the question is posed as to whether they reject gold because of its association with their rivals or whether their rivals forbid them from wearing it. Are they two branches of royal siblings or strangers to one another, comrades or competitors? Are they equals or is one subordinate to the other? What do domination and subordination actually look like?

What is so intriguing about these questions, and a host of others that Esposito La Rossa raises, is that they have no simple answers. It is not that they cannot be answered but that, as he shows, the relations they address are complex, ambiguous, and contextual. Thinking through them provides a road, as it were, a royal road, into the structure of the Sakalava sociopolitical world and the mutual embeddedness of politics, kinship, and religious practice.

A major challenge to understanding Malagasy society (at least in the northwest) is that it is not constructed on the basis of objectified and bounded groups and identities. Descent is important and it forms the basis of descent groups, but descent is cognatic and marriage among commoners exogamous, so people belong to multiple groups, through both parents and four sets of grandparents. Moreover, descent groups are not independent from one another but, as Esposito La Rossa shows, mutually constitutive: they bury each other's dead and intercede with each other's ancestors. In addition to descent, people are classed as

distinctive "kinds," a term that covers many kinds of kinds, including what we might distinguish as nationalities, ethnic groups, religious communities, and so forth. There are many additional kinds of people, some of which have specific and complementary functions in the service and reproduction of royalty, the latter itself a kind (or perhaps more than one kind). While one might inherit a specific "kinded" identity through kinship, again cognatically, two people of the same kind are not necessarily related to one another by kinship, just as two close kin may identify primarily as different kinds of people. There is also at times ambiguity as to whether a given named group constitutes a kind or a descent group, and how it might shift over time or between contexts from one into the other. A central point is that while kinds are identified as discrete and possibly mutually exclusive categories (e.g., Christian and Muslim), people themselves are multiply kinded and might shift between kinds, depending on which kinded identities are most relevant to them over a lifetime or in different contexts. The named entities are categorically distinct from one another, but the people identified with them are not, insofar as they possess multiple identifications.

All of this is complicated further by the fact that, while there is reciprocity between descent groups and complementarity of functions among some "kinds of people," relations are never fully egalitarian. Hierarchy, Esposito La Rossa argues, is always in play and yet hierarchy itself is never comprehensive or fixed, but relative and contextual and, for the people concerned, always in relation to their other descent group and kinded identifications and affiliations. Identifications are not essentialized and hierarchy is always context specific.

A central thread of this book concerns the significance of Water-Dwellers being identified as Descendants of Silver and why they are subjects of a cult within a realm belonging to the Descendants of Gold. Esposito La Rossa invites readers to accompany him as he unravels this puzzle over the course of what he compellingly calls a traveling ethnography. As he moves from place to place, he takes us from villages along the Loza to the Sakalava mortuary communities on the island of Nosy Lava, to the origins of the Antandrano on the distant Tsimihety plateau, then to Mahajanga on the west coast, then further to the kingdom of Menabe to the south, and finally back again to Nosy Lava and the Loza. At each place, he uncovers new facets of the subject. As the empirical facts accumulate, the picture becomes ever more complex, yet at the same time gradually reveals an underlying structure. The narrative is thus one of travel across much of Madagascar, in which the theory

emerges through cumulative ethnographic discovery and, in effect, by delving back in time to what may be the origins of the Descendants of Silver in Menabe.

On this journey, Esposito La Rossa comes to understand the limits of seeing the Descendants of Silver as a single line of descent, a royal clan, as previous researchers like myself had taken for granted. Instead, he argues they are additionally a "kind" of people, one necessary for supporting the rule of the Descendants of Gold, serving as their intercessors and supplementing the immediate power of the sovereign with the ritual authority to reign. He describes this as an instance of the more general phenomenon of diarchy identified by Dumézil, Needham, and Sahlins as necessarily constitutive of royal power.

One set of events where diarchy is evident concerns the death of a reigning sovereign and their transformation into a royal ancestor. Esposito La Rossa was fortunate to be able to observe stages of this process on the demise of Princess Soazara, who had reigned from childhood until well into her ninth decade. Indeed, it had been so long since a royal funeral had occurred that those responsible for carrying it out were unsure how to proceed and, while following many customary practices, also had to improvise at times. The bases on which they did so exposed underlying structural criteria. But in any case, given the import of royal funerals for Sakalava and the dearth of their description in the literature, Esposito La Rossa's careful documentation is priceless.

The contrast, tension, or ambiguity that Esposito La Rossa identifies between descent and function in the relationship between Gold and Silver is in fact found among other named groups or kinds of people and is intrinsic to Malagasy social organization in the west and northwest. Individuals are identified as being of a certain kind sometimes because of their descent and sometimes because of the activity they engage in. Thus Rita Astuti (1995) identified the primary distinction between the ostensibly "ethnic" groups of Vezo and Masikoro as being their mode of subsistence. The same ambiguity occurs in people's designation by religious affiliation, whether by inheritance or participation. That people are kinded is never essentializing because most kinds are not mutually exclusive and everyone is multiply kinded.

This radically nonessentialist mode of composing society has been difficult for outsiders to grasp and runs counter to the "will to classify" characteristic of kingdoms, nation states, and anthropology alike. Any approach to Malagasy society that begins with essentialized notions (even when these are applied by Malagasy themselves) is bound to

fail. Yet both Malagasy people and the foreign scholars who study them have been obsessed with reconstructing dynastic history and identifying discrete groups. This has involved lots of just-so stories about original founders—claimed to be Indonesian, Yemeni, Portuguese, etc.—and tracking the movements of their descendants across the island. Maurice Bloch (personal communication) once likened these dynastic movements to the trails of slime that snails leave in their wake. Esposito La Rossa's work is significant for definitively deconstructing these hegemonic models and replacing them with nonessentializing and possibly discontinuous ones.

In sum, *Sovereigns of Gold, Spirits of Silver* is an instance of ethnographic theory in the classic sense, a book in which grounded investigation of particulars leads to insights of ever-expanding scope and relevance. It is an exhilarating journey.

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Astuti, Rita. 1995. *People of the Sea: Identity and Descent among the Vezo of Madagascar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Note on Orthography

I have adopted the writing system of my Sakalava interlocutors. The Malagasy alphabet is similar to the English alphabet, with a few specific conventions. In Malagasy, the letter *k* represents velar stops, which in English are written as *k*, *c* (before the vowels *a*, *o*, *u*), or *q*. The vowel *o* is pronounced like the English *u*; therefore, a circumflex accent indicates the pronunciation of an open *o*, which can also be expressed by the diphthong *ao*.

The letter *j* represents the affricate [dz]. The consonant cluster *tr* (as in *trano*) is pronounced somewhat like *tree* in English. Similarly, the consonant cluster *dr* (as in *drakaka*) is pronounced roughly like *drive* in English.

The letter *ñ*, sometimes written by the Sakalava as *gn*, indicates a nasalized *n*. To simplify, before the vowels *a* and *o*, this nasal tends to be velar (similar to the sound represented by *ng* in English), whereas before *e* and *i*, it tends to be palatal. In some linguistic conventions, these sounds are represented distinctly: *ŋ* or *n* with a circumflex for the velar sound, and *gn* or *ñ* for the palatal sound. However, local usage does not graphically distinguish between these two sounds. I have therefore chosen to follow local practice.

Finally, regarding stress, words with more than two syllables have variable stress, but it is often placed on the penultimate syllable (e.g., *Manañadabo*), except for words ending in *ka*, *tra*, or *na*. In such cases, the stress shifts back one syllable (e.g., *ampangataka*), except for words whose root consists of two syllables (e.g., *zaka* → *ampanjaka*).

"No ideas but in things."
William Carlos Williams

"Let us not seek for something behind the phenomena—they themselves are the theory."
Johann Wolfgang Goethe

Introduction

Tantara: "The History"

One arm of the Loza River, just downriver from Antsohihy, turns north between two chains of hills, which constrict it in a series of twists and turns as they advance into the water and retreat again, until it quite suddenly grows much wider and takes on the appearance of a lake, known as the Great Lake. Finally, the river narrows again and, after a final bend, flows into the Mozambique Channel, breaking the concave continuity of the coastline. Mangroves, although cleared for timber and charcoal production, protect the coastline on both sides of the estuary. In some places, they give way to coastal ledges covered by forests, intact and untouchable, which menace travelers with the many prohibitions that surround them. These prohibitions, called *fady* in Malagasy, are the mnemonic traces of the tragic history of a suicide.

Known to many locals who regularly cross these coastal waters by boat or pirogue, this historical narrative is about a royal family belonging to a dynastic branch called the "Grandchildren" or "Descendants of Silver" (Zafinifotsy) and hailing from a village in the interior of Madagascar. Pursued by the enemies from the Highlands—the Merina, also known as the Hôva—these Descendants of Silver fled northward. Once they reached the Great Lake, hindered by the rough, deep waters, the members of this royal family decided to drown themselves rather than fall into enemy hands and be enslaved. Once carried out to sea, their lifeless bodies found refuge amidst the headlands of the estuary. From then on, these places became "sacred" and "forbidden lands" (*tany masiñy*, *tany fady*), where their spirits continue to dwell. Sailors and passengers remove

their hats when they pass by these places as a sign of respect, so that the spirits dwelling there will grant them safe passage through their watery domain without triggering storms, causing shipwrecks, or prompting engine failures. Breakdowns are quite common on these shores, where poorly maintained Chinese-made engines are widespread.[1] It is to these "spirits in the water"—these *tromba andrano* or *antandrano*, as they are called there—that the waters of the sea belong.

The shores of this estuary, since called Loza (Catastrophe), are marked by trees dedicated to the memory of these spirits. These trees are periodically visited by some of the region's inhabitants, who frequent them to ask for protection, rain, and prosperity. Surrounding these trees, called *toñy*, are villages inhabited by the servants of the drowned ancestors. In one of these villages there is a large mango tree dedicated to one of these spirits in particular, and around which, on certain days and sometimes far into the night, an emaciated figure might be seen prowling. Dressed in white like a Muslim or a spirit, wearing long braids that have earned him the nickname Rasta in the region, this figure is the priest or "intercessor" (*ampangataka*) of the spirits in the water, the tromba andrano.

The following pages present the history of the cult dedicated to the spirits of the drowned Descendants of Silver, as well as the past and present relationships that its officiants have woven and continue to weave with the representatives of the Bemihisatra monarchy of the "Grandchildren" or "Descendants of Gold" (Zafinimena) reigning in the region. More generally, starting from this cult, the book explores the ideology of Sakalava royal power and the ambivalent hierarchy this ideology underpins, between sovereigns of gold and princes of silver, and between foreign sovereigns and "masters of the land" (*tompon-tany*). As we shall see, it is these categories of gold and silver, or foreigner and master of the land, shaped and reshaped through rituals and narratives, that traditionally subaltern groups, as well as representatives of the republican

1. One of the latest news items concerning a shipwreck in this river mouth appeared in *Midi Madagasikara* on April 30, 2019, under the headline "Analalava: Three dead in a speedboat wreck." In the last paragraph of this national newspaper article, we read, "Indeed, the cause of this accident has nothing to do with meteorology or overloading. Local residents explain it as a supernatural phenomenon. The shipwreck occurred in the vicinity of sacred places or '*Doany*' where taboos must be observed. This leads them to believe that the tragedy occurred because taboos were not respected" (T. M. 2019, my translation).

state, use to legitimize or redefine their social position in postcolonial and republican Madagascar.

Lalaña: "The Path"

Describing the geographical setting at the start of a book of anthropology has long been a topos of the genre. We can think, for example, of the beginning of James G. Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890) or the opening chapter of Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts* (1922). But it is also a topos for literary fiction genres in search of verisimilitude, such as the realist or historical novels of nineteenth-century Europe. In both cases, the aim is to lend credibility to the narrative to be told, through a kind of metonymic relationship between the events recounted and the real places—known or unknown to the reader—in which these events take place. Beyond this rhetorical motivation and the desire to inscribe this text in the tradition of the ethnographic literary genre, the evocation of the spatial context at the opening of this narrative also has to do with elements intrinsic to the subject of this book. Rather than offering a snapshot of a geographical space, the purpose of this initial description is to reproduce a journey through that space. This journey through the Loza estuary is indeed representative of the way in which I gained access to knowledge concerning the spirits of the Descendants of Silver and, more broadly, to the practices and histories of the Sakalava kingship of northwestern Madagascar. There are several reasons for this.

The first reason is that the knowledge to which I have had access is deeply rooted in the places I have visited. In human societies where writing is not the main medium for preserving and transmitting knowledge, it is people who hold this knowledge. "Histories must remain in the body [*vataña*] and the mind [*jery*] of people, not in books," a spirit medium once told me. And the places and prohibitions surrounding these places often serve as the mnemonic supports for people. As Keith Basso (1996: 7) puts it in his book on the sense of places among the Western Apache, "places served humankind as durable symbols of distant events as indispensable aids for remembering and imagining them." At the same time, it is by learning the histories associated with these places that human beings appropriate them. Even when writing—which is present in Madagascar before the fifteenth century—is used as a means of preserving and transmitting historical and practical knowledge, this knowledge is not destined to circulate in space, but rather to be transmitted

over time, to future generations and between certain kinds of people. The books that exist in the various Sakalava kingdoms are kept more or less secretly on site, and only certain "classes" or "kinds of people" (*karazañ'olo*) have access to them. This is why, in order to know a history, people have to travel to the places where this history is preserved, if their status allows them to know it. Michael Lambek had already noted this spatial characteristic of Sakalava historical knowledge when he asserted that "when describing the growth of their own knowledge or comparing its breadth with that of others, adepts often say that if one wants to learn things, one must travel from sacred place to place" (2002: 136).

This itinerant learning primarily concerns those interested in the cult and history of the *ampanjaka*, the Sakalava "rulers" or "sovereigns," and in particular those who house the spirits of deceased sovereigns in their bodies. They are the repositories of the knowledge and "generative power" (*hasiñy*) of these royal ancestors. Although this type of relationship between knowledge and place is common to societies that have neither centralized nor disseminated this knowledge through a network of specialists, it takes on special significance in the case of Sakalava people. Besides being rooted in place, ancestral knowledge (in the double sense of knowledge about ancestors and transmitted by ancestors), which is made up of precepts (*didin-drazaña*), customs (*fomban-drazaña*), and historical narratives (*tantaran-drazaña*), also has borders. "We are afraid to cross boundaries," a member of Sakalava royalty once told me when I asked him about royal genealogies and he refused to talk about royal lineages from other regions. The histories belong to royal lineages or descent groups (*firazañana*) residing in specific kingdoms and places. It is to them, and especially to their ancestors, that permission to tell specific histories must be sought. Depending on their status, their descent group or "ancestry" (*karazaña*), people are authorized to tell certain narratives belonging to their places, their groups, and their ancestors. I often heard the polysemous adage *Samby amin'ny anjaranazy* from the Sakalava people in northwestern Madagascar; it means "to each his own," or "to each his own destiny," or "each in his own domain."[2] This social, political, and geographical fragmentation of knowledge, and particularly historical knowledge, is not only typical of nomadic peoples, as the Sakalava

2. *Anjara* is a word that indicates both the "share" of an inheritance or division, a "domain" (geographical or gnoseological), or one's "destiny" inherited at birth. It comes from the root *zara*, meaning "share, division, quotient."

traditionally were. According to James J. Fox (2006: 6–17), this spatialization of knowledge is peculiar to Austronesian peoples who, from Madagascar to Oceania, have elaborated different ways of incorporating ancestors and their narratives into the landscape. These ways range from the inscription of ancestral migrations and exploits in the landscape, to the generation of ancestors from landscape elements (Bonnemaison 1987: 95) or, conversely, to the generation of landscape elements by ancestors (Morphy 1995; for a comparative perspective see also Rumsey and Weiner 2001). This geographical fragmentation of historical knowledge is the first element that justifies, in my view, the presentation of the process of acquiring this knowledge as a journey, a path. It was indeed in this fragmentary way that I acquired it, just as it is in this same way that such knowledge is distributed among those who passed it on to me.

The second reason for using the image of the path to describe my fieldwork experience is more metaphorical and linked to the cosmological and ideological context in which the knowledge I sought to access is embedded. The image of the "path" (*lalaña* in Malagasy) is omnipresent in the language used by the Sakalava to speak of the ancestors and the quest for well-being, which ultimately depends on them. *Mangataka lalaña*, "to ask for the way" or access to the way, is the generic formula for requesting permission to cross over into someone else's "share" or "domain" (*anjara*) to achieve a goal outside of one's own domain. And this, whether it is to ask the way to a foreign place, to cross a river or path momentarily crowded with people, or to perform an action that requires the permission of a hierarchical superior. Indeed, while everyone must (normally) remain in his own domain, each domain is also hierarchically arranged. This is why, every time someone wants to cross into someone else's domain, they have to ask the way to do so. *Nahazo lalaña*, "you have obtained the way," is the positive response that grants access to the person requesting it.

My fieldwork was marked by this journey "from sacred place to place," as Lambek (2002: 136) puts it, and from one partial knowledge to another. To get there, I had to look for a gatekeeper, an intercessor, or a guardian to ask the way. This is why I have chosen to begin this account by recounting a journey I made in the Loza estuary. And it is for this same reason that I have chosen to present the knowledge I have gained about the drowned Descendants of Silver through the path I took in the different places that gave me access to a share of this knowledge. The structure of the book mainly follows this path, moving from place to place. Nevertheless, it is not the actual itinerary of my ethnographic

investigation, but rather an exemplary, indicative journey capable of guiding the reader not only through the subject treated, but also in the process through which this subject may have been constructed. This process is also the subject of the book.

The Places

Much as a person who hosts one or more royal spirits travels, during her or his initiatory apprenticeship, from one royal residence or cemetery to another in order to learn the histories of the royal ancestors who inhabit him or her, so was my fieldwork characterized by a path through several of these places of worship, located in different regions of Madagascar. I spent around twenty-two months in Madagascar between April 2015 and September 2019, and although my research began in and was mainly focused on the Loza estuary (fig. 16), I traveled and stayed, for varying lengths of time, in several villages hosting the sites of worship of the Sakalava monarchy. Traveling first to Analalava, a small coastal town on the outskirts of the estuary, and then to one of the main villages of the servants of the cult of drowned spirits, Ambendraña, I discovered the need to broaden my field of investigation in order to understand the sociology and the history of the relationships involved in this cult. I thus began to reconstruct the history of this cult, the members of the royal family to whom it is dedicated, and the groups of the servants who officiate at it. At first unconsciously, then quite intentionally, I did so through the "regressive method" theorized by the historian Marc Bloch (1931), and applied in anthropology by Nathan Wachtel (1990).

Contrary to the historian's obsession with origins, and in line, rather, with the epistemological necessity of moving from the best to the least known (Bloch 1931: xii), I started from the ethnography of the present, as "the last frame of a film," to then unfold it backward, "resigned to discovering more than one hole, but determined to respect its mobility" (1931: xiv, my translation). In order to realize this journey backward in Sakalava history, as Wachtel did to retrace the history of the Uru Indians of the Bolivian Andes, I had to add to this diachronic reconstruction the spatial dimension of a multi-sited ethnography (understood in a more literal sense than the one coined by George Marcus [1995]). It is therefore in keeping with this method that I engaged in a multi-sited inquiry into the cult of the spirits of the Descendants of Silver, which I sought to reconstruct based on the study of ritual practices, oral accounts, and

the political context in which these practices and historical narratives were produced.

When studying nomadic people, such as the Sakalava, whose "regime of historicity" (Hartog 2003) implies that traces of the past unfold in space, it was by moving through space that I was able to collect the fragments that compose Sakalava history. In this journey, punctuated by numerous gatekeepers and intercessors who granted—and sometimes refused—me access to these places, I was able to learn about the histories of the kings, queens, and servants of the Sakalava monarchy, as well as their way of creating and carrying on this still very contemporary history. Without this journey, the gate to the knowledge of the Sakalava royal ancestors and their blessings would have remained closed to me.

The Subject, the Fieldwork, and the Contradictions

"What has gotten into that foreigner to make him interested in the Zafinifotsy?" asked one of my first interlocutors in Analalava, when I questioned her about the royal family of drowned nobles. And indeed, I asked myself the same question on several occasions during my fieldwork or when, back home, I set about analyzing the information I had gathered on the subject. Certainly, one of the elements that piqued my interest is the contrast between the relative fame of these royal spirits and the simultaneous absence of information about them. The history of these drowned nobles and the cult dedicated to them are mentioned in several anthropological works concerning the Sakalava of northwestern Madagascar (Théodore 1987: 22; Feeley-Harnik 1989b: 89; Sharp 1993: 120; Lambek 2002: 67) and concerning the Antankaraña of the north (Walsh 1998: 212; Berger 2016: 4). However, we have very little information on this cult and on the origin of the nobles around which it was founded and is maintained, although their spirits are known in various regions of Madagascar. This is particularly true of the Antankaraña region in the far north of the island (see fig. 1), where today lies the only Zafinifotsy kingdom, whose sovereigns claim descent from these drowned nobles. I owe the discovery of this cult to Laurent Berger, one of my thesis supervisors, and his studies on the Antankaraña monarchy (Berger 2006, 2016). Although there is a kingdom of the Descendants of Silver in the north, the literature dedicated to the Sakalava monarchy attests that there is no trace of the Descendants of Silver living in the Sakalava region where the "royal residences" (*doany*) of their spirits are

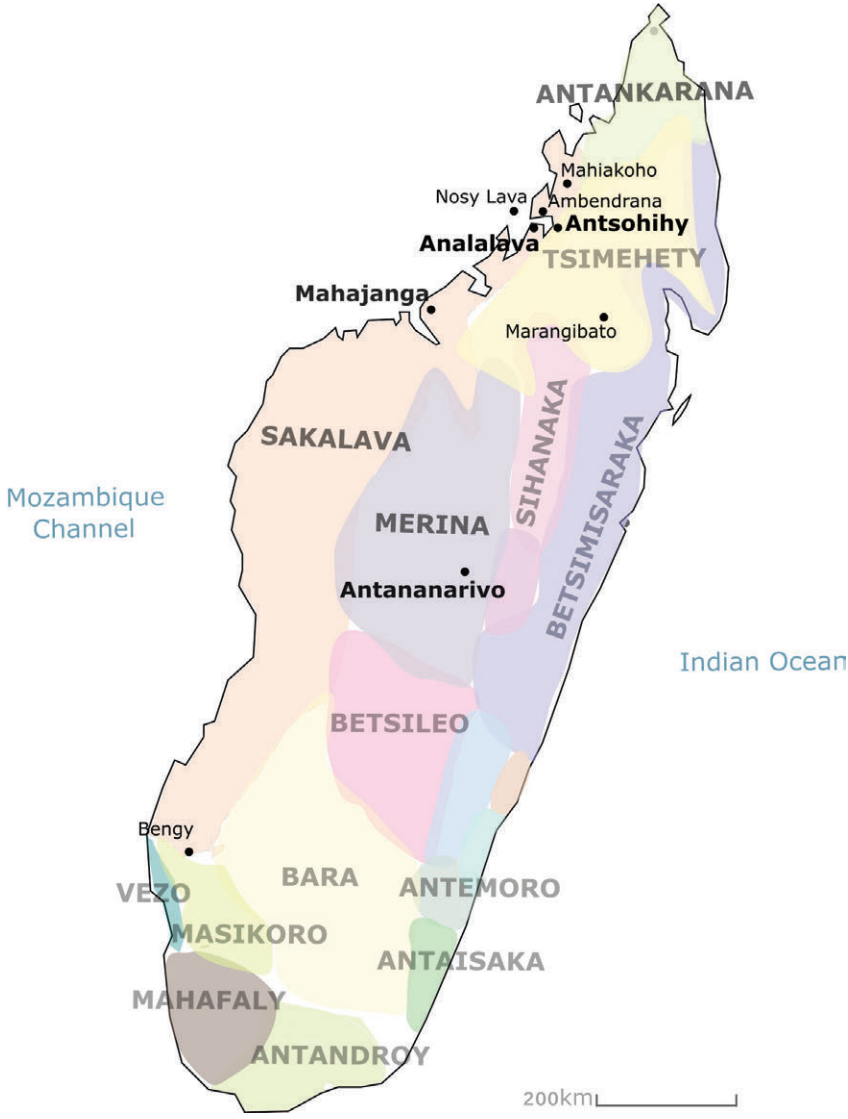


Figure 1. Map of Madagascar's sociopolitical groups (*foko*) with the principal sites where fieldwork was conducted

located, and where their mediums and the people who take care of these sites reside (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 26). What is more, this cult of the drowned nobles of silver is mainly practiced in a region ruled by a queen belonging to the dynastic branch of gold. Yet this branch is presented by certain oral traditions as the historical rival of the branch of the Descendants of Silver. Why is a cult of drowned nobles being practiced in a kingdom ruled by their historical rivals? And who are these nobles of silver from whom the rulers of the north descend and who have left no living descendants in the place where their cult is celebrated? It was these contradictions and questions, which emerged from my early readings, that piqued my interest.

To these initial contradictions were subsequently added others generated by information I learned in the field. As we shall see in the pages that follow, the study of this cult led me to investigate the identification of the dynastic branches involved in it. I was therefore interested in the historical identity of the Zafinifotsy (Descendants of Silver) branch, which on the one hand opposes the Zafinimena (Descendants of Gold) reigning in the region, and on the other includes not only the family of drowned nobles, but also the Antankaraña living nobles of the north. The identification of the Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena dynastic branches, as well as their historical relationships, is another recurring theme in the anthropology and historiography of Sakalava and Antankaraña monarchies (Rusillon 1922: 174; Mellis 1938; Deschamps 1961: 99–100; Kent 1968a: 162–63; Vérin 1972: 145; Feeley-Harnik 1988, 1991a: 26–27; Sharp 1993: 120; Gueunier 1998; Lambek 2002: 78; Berger 2006: 240; Sanchez 2013a: 117–29). In most studies on the subject, the formation of these two dynastic branches is presented as the result of a succession of conflicts within the Maroseràña dynasty, the founding dynasty of the first Sakalava kingdom in southwestern Madagascar in the seventeenth century. The history of the expansion of the Sakalava monarchy on the west coast is usually told as a consequence of the conflict between these two dynastic branches over territorial, political, and economic hegemony, linked in particular to the slave trade with foreign powers. According to this version of history, the end of this dynastic conflict coincided with the victory of the Descendants of Gold over the Descendants of Silver, and the foundation, on the part of the latter, of the Antankaraña kingdom in the far north of the island in the middle of the eighteenth century. However, the findings from my fieldwork contradict this version of history in several respects.

Such contradictions emerged from my comparison of historical narratives belonging to different groups and collected in the various regions that were the scene of this expansion, but also from an analysis of the ritual relationships and hierarchical positions that these relationships outline. Rather than reducing these contradictions to a general, decontextualized synthesis, my interpretative and narrative approach has been to accord them greater weight. By taking these contradictions seriously—in keeping with this expression somewhat overused in anthropology—I have thus brought them back to the contexts in which they are enunciated and that justify them. Hence the need to present a thick ethnography, attentive to detail, and to expose these contradictions through a journey to the different places where they appeared.

As I mentioned, knowledge sits in places (to rephrase a famous statement by Basso [1996]). Historical knowledge, in particular. And, since social identities are largely forged from historical narratives, these identities and the hierarchy that defines them also sit in places. For this reason, a study of the identity and history of a social group (such as that of the Zafinifotsy) from a general—decontextualized and delocalized—point of view can only lead to unresolvable contradictions. Through a traveling ethnography, this book deals more generally with the contextual and local value of social identity and hierarchy, and the role that the actualization of the past through narratives and rituals plays in their definition and redefinition.

Local Knowledge, Contextual Hierarchies, and Ambivalent Identities

Hierarchy, conceived of as an attribution of rank to the elements of a whole in relation to the whole itself (Dumont 1981: 91), is based on the essentialization of social positions crystallized in the form of identities. These social positions, which result from power relationships in a given political context, are institutionalized and perpetuated on the symbolic level of essences or substances, concealing their historical contingency. As I will illustrate, their institutionalization can be achieved through the establishment of a central power, the ritualization of exchange relationships, or, more generally, the structuring of opposition to an external entity (an exchange partner, an enemy, a conqueror). Hence the simultaneous link and difference between hierarchy and the inequality from which it emerges. Charles Stépanoff (2020) sums this up, drawing on Louis Dumont's theory of hierarchy and echoing Laurent Berger and Sophie Blanchy (2014: 35), when he writes:

> By classifying beings according to their degree of dignity, hierarchical ideology justifies differences in status and transforms relative socioeconomic inequalities into unalterable realities obeying a cosmic order. … [W]ealth inequality establishes quantitative differences between individuals through appropriation and deprivation, while hierarchy draws qualitative boundaries between categories of beings through affiliation and exclusion. (2020: 268, my translation)

Therefore, as David Graeber (2011: 111) emphasized, "the logic of identity is, always and everywhere, entangled in the logic of hierarchy."

In continuity with these reflections, the aim of this book is to show, through the ethnography of a Sakalava dynastic cult, the process and the logics that make possible the formation of hierarchies and identities from unstable social inequalities at a particular historical conjuncture. These hierarchies and identities are fixed, perpetuated, and transformed primarily through rituals and historical narratives. However, given its dual nature—at once historically determined and ahistorically essentialized—social identity maintains a certain ambivalence. This book examines the ambivalence of social identity, which is both essential and genealogical, as well as contextual, relational, and performative—a duality that Rita Astuti (1995a, 1995b) attributed to Madagascar's African and Austronesian cultural heritage. Therefore, to analyze this ambivalence, I investigate, on one hand, the historical contingency that produced these identities, and on the other hand, the logic that justifies their ambivalence in the present.

To reconstruct the historical contingency from which the Sakalava dynastic identities defined by gold and silver emerged and to trace their evolution over time, I rely not only on Bloch and Wachtel's regressive method but also on Marshall Sahlins's theory of the "structure of the conjuncture." By this formulation, Sahlins intends to overcome the opposition between cultural structures and historical conjunctures by analyzing the "practical realization of the cultural categories in a specific historical context" (1985: xiv). Taking inspiration from this approach, over the course of the chapters of this book I will analyze the historical and political conjunctures that enabled the relative and functional positions symbolized by gold and silver to crystallize into dynastic identities. But the ambivalence of these identities lies not only in the fact that, although crystallized and essentialized in the present, they are the product of a particular historical conjuncture. It is also because they are valid—thus essentialized—in specific contexts and places in the present. Although

the distinctive opposition between gold and silver remains fixed across contexts, it refers to different social groups depending on the place and context of reference.

The contextual and situational character of hierarchy—and thus identity—is already underlined in Dumont's theory ([1980] 2013: 298, 302), and reiterated by his followers (Valeri 1985: 13; Barnes, de Coppet, and Parkin 1985). As Dumont makes explicit (1981: 41–42), it is Edward Evans-Pritchard's theory of segmentary structure (1940) that he draws on to develop this relative and relational aspect of hierarchy and social identities. Indeed, Dumont takes up from Evans-Pritchard the idea that society is made up of different nested levels of social groups that are "significant as a segment in a system of groups" (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 195) and relevant according to the relational context. For Dumont, Evans-Pritchard thus has the merit of having shifted the focus of social analysis from the terms of the relationship (the social groups) to the relationship itself (Dumont [1971] 2018: 70). Moreover, Dumont also echoes Evans-Pritchard's idea that this system is characterized by the two complementary tendencies of fusion—in more encompassing groups—and fission—in smaller groups. Unlike Evans-Pritchard, who anchors these social tendencies to empirical conflict situations, Dumont detaches these dynamics of fusion and fission, or—in his translation—encompassment and opposition, to make them principles of hierarchical ideology itself (Dumont 1981: 41–42).

While other anthropologists have taken up this political anchoring of the segmentary dynamic (Favret-Saada 1966; Gellner 1969; Mahé 1998), in the wake of Dumont, Marilyn Strathern further generalizes and relativizes this segmentary and relational logic to point out more fluid dynamics of social life. Indeed, it is this relational and segmentary logic of social grouping and identification, which opposes and alternates with dynamics of division and *detachment*, that Strathern (1988) takes up and develops, almost in physical terms, to analyze gender categories in Melanesia.[3] In particular, she demonstrates that the gender categories of male/female in Melanesia are not fixed categories that define persons, but rather "holistic unitary states" that serve to organize dual relationships.

Inspired by the work of Dumont and Strathern, I found that, in Sakalava monarchies, the categories symbolized by gold and silver, which

3. On the direct or indirect relationship between Strathern's and Dumont's approaches, see André Iteanu and Ismaël Moya (2015: 121).

identify contemporary dynastic branches, are used as unifying and oppositional principles to organize power relations within situated monarchies and can refer to different groups depending on the context. At least that is what has been shown by the comparative analysis of these dynastic categories across time and space. Essentialized at particular historical moments and for specific political purposes, these categories still retain an essentializing value in their context of origin. That is why, to grasp the ambivalence of these identity categories and the historical conjunctures that produced and transformed their meaning, recourse to the regressive method was essential, necessitating a journey backward both in time and in the path of expansion of the Sakalava monarchies.

Outline of the Chapters

Before taking this path, I will briefly outline its main stages as they are organized in the chapters that follow. In the first chapter, I present how I first gained access to information on the cult of the tromba andrano (spirits in the water). This information, and above all an understanding of how to access this information, challenged certain ideas I had on the subject and enabled me to grasp some of the principles of the Sakalava hierarchy. The second chapter describes my settlement in Ambendraña, one of the main villages where the cult of the tromba andrano is practiced. It shows how the social hierarchy of the village is composed of dual oppositions: on the one hand, between the royal power and the power of the national state, and, within the royal power, between the power of the Descendants of Gold and that of the Descendants of Silver. From chapter 3 onward, I travel between the various villages of the estuary and discover that the ritual officials of the spirits of silver in Ambendraña are designated by the other groups of the region as former servants of the sovereigns of gold. Indeed, through the oral traditions of the inhabitants of the Loza estuary, it is revealed that the cult of the Descendants of Silver was integrated by the sovereigns of gold into their ritual system toward the end of the nineteenth century.

This is why, to shed light on the ritual relations between the two dynastic branches of gold and silver, I attempt in chapter 5 to reconstruct the genealogy of the drowned Descendants of Silver by visiting the region where they originated, Marangibato. An analysis of the various historical accounts collected here, which focuses on the individuals mentioned rather than the dynastic groups, reveals that the dynastic branch of the

Descendants of Silver appears less unified than historiographical reconstructions suggest. Moreover, the current sovereign of Marangibato, who claims to be descended from the same dynastic branch as the drowned nobles of silver, does not define himself as a Descendant of Silver, but as a Descendant of Gold. According to his explanation, as the current ruler, he is a Descendant of Gold, as Descendants of Silver do not have the right to rule. However, the latter do possess the ritual power, as intercessors of the royal ancestors, to bless the rulers of gold. Gold and silver are therefore titles indicating hierarchical positions and functions within the kingdom. It is at this point in the learning process that a new perspective on the question of dynastic identifications emerges. What if the history of these dynastic branches could be told differently? What if, instead of essentializing the opposition between dynastic branches, we saw it as a relative opposition between two terms structuring the organization of royal power?

The final chapters are devoted to answering these new questions. Indeed, during the royal rituals of the Analalava queen of gold analyzed in chapter 6, I was able to observe that the nobles who defined themselves as Descendants of Gold in the village of Ambendraña, where they reigned, assumed the position and ritual function of the Descendants of Silver vis-à-vis the queen of gold of Analalava. This is why, in chapter 7, I undertake a backward journey through the other main Sakalava royal capitals. This journey enabled me to observe that, in each capital, local sovereigns defined themselves as Descendants of Gold, as opposed to Descendants of Silver, who were their classificatory cadets who had left to found new kingdoms elsewhere. Rather than exercise ritual power and submit to the political power of the sovereigns of gold, these cadets of silver, excluded from the throne, preferred to migrate elsewhere and become new sovereigns of gold. Moreover, this conflicting relationship between ruling Descendants of Gold and intercessory Descendants of Silver is modeled on a "joking alliance" (*ziva*) that foreign kings formed with the masters of the land to put down roots in conquered territories. It was thanks to this alliance that stranger-kings were able to legitimize their power on the spot, while leaving to the masters of the land the power to intercede with the tutelary spirits of the place and with the royal ancestors in order to make the kingdom prosper. Hence the ambivalent hierarchy between these masters of the land and the stranger-kings, the latter's power being legitimized by the masters of the land's intercession with the royal ancestors. Hence also the ambiguous relationship between Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver, the

latter being assimilated to the masters of the land by sharing the same ritual prerogatives.

In the final chapter, I propose a historical hypothesis on how the relative and functional category of nobles of silver was consolidated into a dynastic appellation. This process of dynastization of the Descendants of Silver was made possible by particular historical conjunctures while still preserving relational and contextual value. The new representatives of national power in search of legitimacy today mobilize these dynastic categories, in a context where the political power of the Sakalava sovereigns since colonization has been relegated to pure ritual power. In other words, the power of the gold, following the arrival of French colonization, has been progressively reduced to the power of silver. As a result, these rank categories have become porous, allowing new men and women to claim a noble origin to legitimize or obtain a position in the central republican government.

The results of this journey not only contribute to an understanding of the role that the monarchy plays in Malagasy republican state, but also overturn the existing interpretative framework of the history of this monarchy. On a more general level, this study aims to contribute to showing the relational, historical, and contingent character of social identities and their contextual relevance. At a time in history when identities are increasingly essentialized and their differences exacerbated, it illustrates the importance of examining the power relations that these identities and their hierarchization crystallize and conceal in a given political context.

CHAPTER 1

Mangataka lalaña: "Asking the Path"

In his book on Sakalava historicity, Lambek states that Sakalava history "is constituted as a chronotopic maze of enclosures and disclosures" (2002: 29). If it is true that the path necessary to access Sakalava historical knowledge evokes an image of a labyrinth, it is also true that this labyrinth is highly hierarchical. The progressive enclosures and disclosures that punctuate this maze are protected by a series of gatekeepers, each more powerful than the last. A subject of Sakalava monarchy depends on them to obtain the generative power (hasiñy), of which the ancestors—and especially the royal ancestors—are the main vectors. The hasiñy in question, that is, the generative power that comes from God—or from the gods (*Zañahary*)[1]—and that is transmitted to the living through the ancestors, is indeed necessary for individual and collective fulfillment.[2]

1. Because Malagasy does not morphologically differentiate the singular and plural of nouns, the name *Zañahary* mentioned in invocations can often refer to one God or multiple gods.
2. *Hasiñy* is a central concept in Malagasy cosmology that can be translated, depending on the context in which it is used, as "reproductive" or "generative power," or "power of efficacy." Moreover, it has a double meaning due to the bidirectionality of its circulation. It designates both the generative power received from the ancestors, as well as the offering, in the form of silver coins or money given by the faithful to them. This ambivalence was highlighted by Delivré (1974), then taken up by Bloch (1977: 124–37) and finally by Lambek (2002).

Along this path, the ancestors and their living representatives are the gatekeepers and intermediaries who can open or close the doors—or gates—leading asymptotically to God. At least, this is the impression I got from the trajectory of my research on the narratives of the ancestors called "Descendants of Silver" (Zafinifotsy). This epistemological trajectory coincides in part with the journey that certain subjects of the Sakalava monarchy undertake to acquire the well-being, knowledge, and power that royal ancestors bestow.

On this path, gatekeepers are arranged in a progressive hierarchy. However, the general structure of this hierarchy is supposed to be unknown to the people within it, hence the phenomenological impression of a labyrinth. The domain (anjara) that opens up with each new threshold crossed is unknown to the gatekeeper who gives access to it, just as spirit mediums (*saha*) are not supposed to share the knowledge of the tromba (royal spirits) who inhabit them. Their task is limited to opening the gates or lips that give access. Each gatekeeper, each intermediary, knows only his role, and is expected to be completely ignorant of that of the gatekeeper behind him. *Samby amin'ny anjaranazy* ("each to his or her domain"): taken in this sense, more than an adage or proverb, this phrase constitutes one of the structuring principles of the ideology of the Sakalava hierarchy. This is why, in my fieldwork, one of the major challenges was to identify the intermediary capable of giving me access to a piece of this particular knowledge. In this first chapter, I will retrace the maze-like path that led me to the first *tantara* (history) of these drowned spirits and the cult dedicated to them. The description of this trajectory is intended to show, through ethnographic examples, the fragmented and mediatized way that the subjects of Sakalava monarchy distribute historical knowledge concerning their royal ancestors. Inherited and transformed over time by these same subjects, this way of distributing ancestral knowledge is indicative of the way power is shared among them. The first rituals I participated in, the first "sacred places" (*tany masiñy*) of the monarchy I visited, or the first narratives about the royal ancestors I listened to, revealed to me the existence of a hierarchy that, while presenting itself as a great chain of being, bifurcates into dualistic oppositions in which each side claims its own autonomy. As we shall see in the following pages, in this hierarchical maze the intermediaries—guardians of the different domains—play an essential role.

At the Mouth of Antsohihy: The Threshold

Things, like people, have many names in Madagascar. Often, the names shown on maps or identity cards are not the most familiar and widely used among locals. This makes it difficult for a newcomer to find his or her way around and to identify places or people. I began my ethnographic research in 2015 in Antsohihy, the capital of the Sofia region. It was the first town I could reach by one of the few well-tarmacked roads, the *Route Nationale 6* (RN6) (fig. 16). This town in the northwest of the island lies on the blurred border between the central highlands, inhabited mainly by the Tsimihety people, and the coastal region, occupied mainly by the Sakalava. It is crossed by one of the branches of the river referred to on Western maps and texts as the Loza. It was here that my only contact in Madagascar at the time lived. He would help me find an interpreter. It was also the place where I met my first informant on the history of drowned spirits, the tromba andrano. Berthine, or—as she is respectfully called by the people who go to consult her tromba spirit—Dady Berthine, was in her sixties. She was the widow of a policeman and lived on the outskirts of Antsohihy in a wood-and-palm house set among the various concrete and tin houses that make up this bustling commercial town.

When I asked Dady Berthine about the tromba andrano, she began to list the names of the royal residences (doany) of these spirits along the banks of the river mouth from Antsohihy to Nosy Lava, the island of royal tombs just across the mouth of the river. "Are these places on the Loza?" I asked her, with the help of my interpreter, calling the river by the name I had seen on my maps. "Loza? What's Loza?" she replied. "There's no Loza here!"[3] The waters of this estuary meet the town's port, the main departure point for Analalava, so everyone is familiar with this busy waterway. However, as I later learned, the arm of the estuary that reaches the town is known to the inhabitants of Antsohihy as *Ambavan'ny Antsohihy*, "At the Mouth of Antsohihy," and not "At the Mouth of the Catastrophe" as it is called in Analalava. Names and definitions change depending on where you stand, both geographically and metaphorically. As we shall see throughout this book, the relative, contextual pertinence of names and identifications is not limited to places, but also extends to

3. Given the common meaning of the word *loza* (catastrophe), Dady Berthine's answer may have another meaning in Malagasy: "Catastrophe? What catastrophe? There are no catastrophes here!"

people and social groups. As we will see below, it is from this particular point of observation at the Mouth of Antsohihy that my journey on the waters of this estuary began, just as it was from the partial perspective of Dady Berthine, my first intermediary, that my path to discovering the stories of the tromba andrano began to be traced.

"In Nosy Lava, they know all about the water, about the tromba that come from the water," Dady Berthine told me, after trying in vain to remember other names for the tromba spirits and the places dedicated to them. "But if you want, you can come by my house tomorrow morning and ask my tromba for more information," she added, ending our first meeting. The next day, a Monday, at 7 A.M., my interpreter Davy and I met up again at Dady Berthine's to meet our first tromba. Davy, who like most Antsohihy inhabitants belonged to the Tsimihety sociopolitical group, was Protestant and, like me, had never had—or sought out—the opportunity to see a tromba. Unlike me who, with a mixture of curiosity and skepticism, felt a certain excitement, Davy approached Dady Berthine's house in fearful silence. Following Dady Berthine's instructions, we had bought two small bottles of whisky, a bottle of perfume, and a pack of cigarettes to offer to the tromba. In addition, we purchased two Sakalava sarongs, or loincloths, called *lambahoany*, which are required for royal ceremonies and which, before French colonization, all men wore instead of pants.

Dady Berthine welcomed us into the cool darkness of her living room. We waited for her friend and occasional assistant to start the ceremony. "You always need an assistant or intermediary to call the tromba," explained Dady Berthine to justify our wait. When her friend arrived, they both disappeared into the next room which, separated by a curtain, had been prepared for the consultation. After five minutes during which Davy and I remained in apprehensive silence, Dady Berthine's assistant invited us to join them. Having tied our lambahoany loincloths around our waists, we entered the room.

Dady Berthine was seated in a wooden armchair along the eastern wall of the house. She smiled at us and followed our movements with a kind gaze. Her friend invited us to sit on the floor behind her. She herself was sitting on the floor facing Dady Berthine, next to a small raffia mat on which several objects had been placed. Among these objects were the tromba's clothes, called—as I would later learn—by the special name of *sarandra*. These clothes included a carefully folded lambahoany loincloth, a beige jacket, and a white European-style button-up shirt, on top of which rested a wide-brimmed beige hat, also in the European style.

In front of the clothes, a white ceramic plate was set with cuttings from different plants and silver-plated metal objects and shells, all doused with water. Called *sahany* ("plate" in Swahili), this plate is used to invoke the ancestors. A pitcher, containing reserve water, and an incense burner were placed next to the plate. Together, these objects formed something resembling a small altar. We sat cross-legged, carefully following the instructions given to us by Dady Berthine's assistant. Then Berthine's assistant invited us to give her the offerings we had bought earlier and to add a small "bill to honor" (*vola voninahitry*) the tromba. She arranged the perfume, alcohol, and cigarettes on the mat, and placed the bill in the white plate containing water and plant cuttings.

After some casual conversation between Davy, the assistant, and Dady Berthine, the latter took a piece of white earth in a handkerchief, put it in her mouth and started chewing. Her tongue turned a whitish color. Her braids, which were untied, began to swing back and forth with the slight swaying of her body. The room fell silent. Dady Berthine's assistant lit the charcoal on the incense burner and broke off one or two plant seeds to place them on the glowing embers, where they gradually released a fragrant, acrid smoke. With her back to us and her eyes on the eastern wall, the assistant took the white plate of water in her hands and began to murmur inaudible phrases. Then she fell silent, put the plate back on the mat, and waited. After a few minutes' silence, Dady Berthine took two or three deep, accelerated breaths. She suddenly interrupted her rocking motion to throw herself backward, legs outstretched, pulling the white sheet she had laid over her legs up to her head with both hands. Short grunts emerged from beneath the white sheet. Once calmed, she slowly returned to her sitting position. Her assistant helped her up and dressed her in the clothes on the mat, lifting the white sheet to protect her from our gaze. The tromba had arrived and was preparing to receive us.

Dressed as a man in the European style above the waist, and with the lambahoany sakalava below, Berthine, possessed by her tromba, sat down. She—or rather, he—drank a little water from the plate. He immediately spat it out into a container presented to him by his assistant. He was then offered some perfume. The tromba sprayed it around his neck and inside his hat before putting the latter on his head. The assistant offered him another glass of whisky, then a cigarette from the pack we had brought him. After a few unsmoked puffs (Dady Berthine didn't smoke in ordinary life), the assistant greeted the tromba by whispering, "Koezy!" The tromba shook her hand, then did the same with us, accompanying

the gesture with a "*Bonjour*" in French. The assistant asked for news in the habitual way: "*Akôry kabary?*" (What news is there?), "*Eh eh! Tsisy!*" (There's no news). She explained the reason for our visit, showing him my offerings. "Thank you!" commented the tromba, looking at me kindly. Then the assistant gave the floor to Davy so that he could introduce me to the tromba and better explain the reason for this invocation. After explaining that I was studying "Malagasy customs" (*fomba gasy*), Davy shyly confessed that I was interested in the tromba andrano, the tromba "in the water." The tromba didn't respond immediately, but calmly drank another glass of whisky, which the assistant also offered to us. He lit another cigarette, after which he offered us each one. Without objecting, we shared this healthy breakfast with him. "His tromba has to drink a little before he talks," the assistant commented on the silence.

> "What's your name?" I said to Davy to ask Dady Berthine's tromba.
> "My great-grandfather comes from Nosy Lava, his name is Ndramamitrañarivo, he begat my grandfather Ndramañetsy, who begat my father Ndramamahañarivo. My name is Ndrantahiry or Ombilahikely… I have many names! Do you want to go to Nosy Lava?" he added.
> "Yes, but the *vazaha* ["foreign European, Westerner" in Malagasy] would like to know something about the tromba andrano," Davy replied.
> "So you have to call me over there in Nosy Lava, you call me with my father, Ndramamahaña, and I'll 'give you the path' [*hanome lalaña anareo*]. Once you've called me, asked the way and given your 'respectful greetings' [*fikoziaña*] to the tromba there, your path will be 'clear' [*mazava*]. If you don't 'ask the path' [*mangataka lalaña*], you won't get in."

With these instructions from the tromba, more injunctive than explanatory, the next day Davy and I left for Analalava. There, Maman'i Safina, a local woman whom Dady Berthine had contacted for us, would be waiting to accompany us to the Long Island (Nosy Lava). "She knows all about Nosy Lava," Dady Berthine told us as a sort of business card. Even then, I suspected that Dady Berthine didn't know much about the drowned Descendants of Silver and their history. She was sending us there in the hope that we could glean more information on the subject. Nevertheless, she wanted to show that she had reliable knowledge. In any case, the trip to Analalava was already part of my initial program. I already knew that this small coastal town was an important center of the

local Bemihisatra monarchy,[4] and home to many royal mediums. However, the need to travel to the royal island of Nosy Lava for information was first presented to me by Berthine and her tromba. My successive meetings in Analalava would confirm this necessity. "If you want to do your research on the tromba andrano, you first have to go to Nosy Lava, ask for the blessing of the tromba there, and then you can start investigating," Papa Safina—Mama Safina's husband—told me one day. Papa and Mama Safina were Davy's and my hosts in Analalava during that first visit to the town.

Based on these statements, which echoed certain ideas I had formed during my reading on the subject, I began to assume that a hierarchical relationship existed between the tromba of the Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy*)* and those of the Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena), who inhabit the tomb of Nosy Lava. The latter are the ancestors of Soazara, who at the time of my arrival in Analalava had been queen of the town and the region where it was located for almost ninety years. If I had to go through these royal gold ancestors to ask their permission to investigate the silver ancestors, then surely the latter were subordinate to the former. It is with these assumptions in mind and a case of beers, a bottle of perfume, and a carton of cigarettes in hand that Davy and I embarked on the pirogue for Nosy Lava. We were accompanied by Safina, Mama and Papa Safina's daughter, who was familiar with the people—and the prohibitions—inhabiting the "royal cemetery" (*mahabo*).

Nosy Lava: "At the Gates" of the Royal Ancestors

"Sacred/generative land" (*tany masiñy*) is, for the Sakalava, synonymous with forbidden land (*tany fady*), or a place with many "taboos" or prohibitions (fady). Nosy Lava is often referred to in these terms. "What are

4. Sakalava and historians use the name Bemihisatra ("the many who go slowly") to designate a royal branch reigning in the Boina region and descended from the Maroseràñana dynasty, which founded the first Sakalava kingdoms in the southwest of the island (Menabe). The Bemihisatra are divided between those of the north (Analalava and Nosy Be) and those of the south (Mahajanga). They are opposed to the Bemazava, a younger branch with whom they are still in rivalry in certain regions. The name of this dynastic branch also refers to the whole population over which it reigns.

the taboos in Nosy Lava?" Davy had asked Berthine when we first met in Antsohihy. "Oh, there are so many! Over there it's complicated/delicate/dangerous (*sarotro*)!" she replied. This was why she had suggested that Mama Safina take us there. Mama Safina was a servant, one of the "people of the royal cemetery" (Antimahabo) of Nosy Lava, where she had lived her whole life. She had come to live temporarily in Analalava after a fire had destroyed her house. Her whole family was waiting to finish rebuilding the house, so they could return to live on the island. She and her daughter were therefore among the best people to tell us about the fady of Nosy Lava.

When the pirogue landed on the island's white sand, after having passed through a narrow corridor of mangroves, Safina ordered Davy and me to take off our flip-flops and, once we were on the beach, our pants and underwear. We replaced them with only the lambahoany loincloth. In Nosy Lava it is fady, "forbidden," to wear vazaha (foreign/European) clothes. This was our first encounter with the many taboos that exist on the island in general, and in the village of the royal cemetery, the mahabo, in particular. These taboos marked the invisible threshold of a "sacred/generative" (*masiñy*) place. Other thresholds followed, and new fady were added to the first. As we moved forward—or rather upward—into the village of the royal cemetery and approached the "dangerous/delicate things" (*raha sarotro*), consisting of the corpses and relics of the sovereigns, the prohibitions would increase, and actions become more and more prescribed. These fady build a concentrically hierarchical space (Lambek 2002: 34), progressively separating it from ordinary spaces. Thus, the differentiated distribution of these fady hierarchizes both the spaces between them, according to their degree of sacredness, and the spaces within the places of worship (2002: 34–36). The fady that prevail on the rest of the island are different from those that exist in the royal cemetery, and the fady on the beach are not the same as those inside the village directly surrounding the royal cemetery.

This cemetery lies in the south of Nosy Lava, one of the largest islands in the region, with several small fishing villages lining its coasts. In 1911, French colonists built Madagascar's largest penal colony in the northern part of the island, and the last former convicts were still residing there at the time of my first visit, despite its gradual closure in the 2000s. Despite this colonial attempt to degrade this place of worship of Sakalava monarchy to extract manpower from the rulers (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 147), the island is still home to two royal cemeteries, one in the north of the island and another in the south. Surrounding these

cemeteries are the huts made from wood and palm leaves inhabited by the royal cemetery people (Antimahabo), more numerous in the southern cemetery village. Until shortly before the French colonization of Madagascar, these servants were not allowed to leave the island. Conversely, during a certain period of French colonization, they were no longer allowed to go there (1991a: 147). The most important of these two cemeteries is the southern one (*mahabo ambalaka*), where Queen Soazara's brother Ndrantahiry (the tromba we met in Antsohihy), their father Ndramamahañarivo, their grandfather Ndramañetsiarivo, and their great-grandfather Ndramamitrañarivo are buried. The latter was the first "king" (ampanjaka) to found a royal residence (doany) here, with the support of his servants, in the second half of the nineteenth century after he escaped from Nosy Be (1991a: 134). Today, there is no longer a royal residence, and the living sovereigns can no longer visit the island. Only the royal cemeteries and the deceased sovereigns remain.

Mahabo means "which raises." Indeed, the royal cemetery of the south is perched on top of a hill that we reached from the small beach where the pirogue left us. Once Davy and I, escorted by Safina, got to the top, a village of some sixty palm and wood huts, huddled close together, opened up before us under a dazzling nine o'clock morning sun. Safina first accompanied us to the hut of a woman, where we left our belongings. This woman was one of the cemetery servants, a *talen'ny andevo kely*, "chief of the little slaves," or *talen'ny manangy*, "chief of the women." Before leaving the hut, Safina ordered me to take off my glasses and watch: they were forbidden inside the village of the royal tomb. This was a sign that we had crossed yet another threshold.

Following the narrow lanes winding between the huts, Safina led us to a slightly raised esplanade in the eastern part of the village. On this esplanade stand several buildings constituting the center of ceremonial life in the village. Coming from the south, we first came upon a small white house where the drum of Nosy Lava's great ancestor (*dadilahy*) is kept—as Safina explained to us in a low voice. Beyond this house, heading north on the east side, are two other drums called *mañandriana* (to exalt). Just behind the drums, a large wooden palisade made of pointed posts (called *fiaroaomby*, "the protection of the zebus") surrounds the royal tomb and the "house of destiny" (*zomba vinta*). Here the "relics" (*jiñy*) of former sovereigns are kept along with other ceremonial objects. In front of this palisade, a gate made of movable, pointed posts is raised and protected by large white flagstones. We were thus "in front of the gates" (*am-baravaraña*) of the royal tombs.

It was here that we gathered to make our first "greeting" (*mikoezy*) and to announce my request (*hataka*) to the royal ancestors. First, we joined a group of servants of the cemetery seated on the ground under the roof of a sort of "meeting shed" (*fantsina*). After the arrival of the last people, the whole assembly, with their hands joined and palms open to the sky, made the gesture of greeting the ancestors, bringing their hands above their heads as if to pour water over them. Then, after this preliminary greeting to the ancestors, everyone got up and arranged themselves in two lines, then sat back down in the center of the esplanade in front of the gates of the enclosure protecting the tombs and regalia. The cemetery officials invited Davy and me to sit in the front row, among the men, to the south of the main officials. These include the *manantany* (the one who owns the land), that is, the first person in charge of the place (or "prime minister," as the servants translated it for me); the ampangataka (the one who asks), the intercessor; and, finally, two *rangitrin'ny ampanjaka* (the sovereign's friends or companions), the sovereign's messengers. After asking Davy my name and place of origin, the four officials, each in turn, starting from the one seated farthest north, uttered an "invocation" (hataka) to God and the royal ancestors. At the end of the invocations, everyone responded in chorus: "*Koezy!*" accompanying the word with the same gesture of the hands above the head.

Two men stood up and began to sound the mañandriana drums, with alternating rhythms that grew faster and faster. One of the two chiefs of the women and the intercessor (ampangataka) entered the royal tomb enclosure. The chief of the women returned with a white plate filled with kaolin—the "white earth" (*tany fotsy*) or "medicine of the ancestors" (*fanafodin-drazaña*), kept inside the house of relics. Two other women brought water. The chief mixed a little water with the kaolin to obtain a white paste, which she put on our noses. Separating the members of the assembly between ordinary people and royal spirit mediums, she drew on each person either a straight line from the tip of the nose to the middle of the forehead (a sign called *tsintsôra*) or, in the case of the mediums, a point on the top of their head. Upon being painted, everyone in turn silently performed the gesture of greeting the royal ancestors, as if to salute this first contact with them.

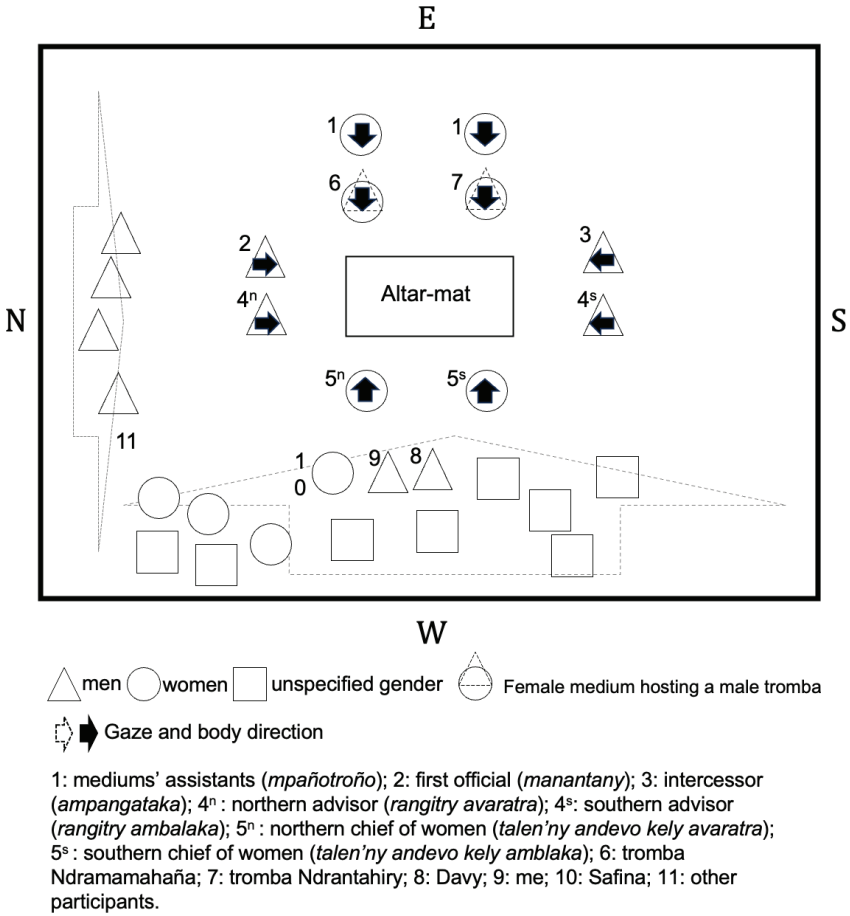
After this invocation before the gates, everyone got up and prepared to receive the royal tromba spirits inside one of the houses of the village. Before joining the other servants, Safina asked me to give her the money offering for the tromba and their intermediaries. Away from prying eyes, she split the money into four small lots to be given to the various

ceremony officials: the mediums, the intercessor, the first official, and the two messengers. *Samby anjaranazy*, "To each their lot."

Then, we reached the house where the ceremony was to be held. This was the home of the *sahabe*, the "royal medium" who hosted the more important of the two tromba spirits to be called upon during the ceremony. Inside, women were already sitting along the south wall, chatting among themselves. We sat down along the west wall. As the arrangement of people in the space is very scrupulously organized during ceremonies, we followed Safina's directions to the letter. Two women entered and prepared the same objects for the ceremony that I had already seen at Dady Berthine's (the white plate, the water, the silver coins, the incense burner, and the tromba's clothes). Next to the altar-mat where these objects were laid out stood bottles containing a mixture of water and honey (*ontsa veloño*). During these preparations, the atmosphere in the hut was relaxed and conversations seemingly trivial.

Two young girls entered and positioned themselves on the east wall, behind the seat reserved for the two mediums. They were the "assistants" or "protectors" (*mpañotroño*) of the mediums. The two mediums followed. These two women in their sixties sat on the east side of the house in front of their escorts and behind the small altar-mat. They stretched out their legs and covered them with a colorful sheet called a *sobahia*. Formerly made of silk and imported from India, the sobahia is reserved for the royal family. Finally, the four officials of the cemetery, all men, entered and stood around the two mediums in hierarchical order: on the northeast side of the house stood the manantany, the first official, and one of the sovereign's messengers of the north (i.e., the northern part of the cemetery). On the southeast side, symmetrically, stood the intercessor and the sovereign's messenger of the south. Opposite the mediums and with their backs to us were the two chiefs of the women, also divided between the one from the north and the one from the south. The space of the hut was thus divided symmetrically between north and south and polarized between east, occupied by the tromba and their assistants, and west, occupied by the other living people. In this arrangement, the group of servants surrounding the mediums constituted a human enclosure, comparable to the wood enclosure protecting the relics and bones of the royal ancestors (see fig. 2).

As the relaxed conversations in the hut continued, one of the two mediums fell backward, seized by mild convulsions. Her assistant, behind her, held her and, once the medium's body had calmed down and risen, helped the tromba to get dressed. Then it was the other medium



1: mediums' assistants (*mpañotroño*); 2: first official (*manantany*); 3: intercessor (*ampangataka*); 4^{n} : northern advisor (*rangitry avaratra*); 4^{s}: southern advisor (*rangitry ambalaka*); 5^{n} : northern chief of women (*talen'ny andevo kely avaratra*); 5^{s} : southern chief of women (*talen'ny andevo kely amblaka*); 6: tromba Ndramamahaña; 7: tromba Ndrantahiry; 8: Davy; 9: me; 10: Safina; 11: other participants.

Figure 2. Arrangement of people during the ceremony in the medium's house

who fell backward, leaving her body to another tromba. The two tromba sat in silence next to each other, hands resting on their legs, clutching a handkerchief and sprinkling perfume on it from time to time. Finally, they lit a cigarette and began to smoke (without inhaling).[5] The noisy chatter in the room ceased and a moderate silence settled over the hut. The two tromba were Queen Soazara's father, Ndramamahañarivo, and

5. As we have already seen with Dady Berthine, and as I have witnessed in the rural Sakalava villages where I lived, it is rare for women to smoke. According to comments I heard, it is frowned upon for a woman to smoke or drink alcohol, at least outside of possession ceremonies.

her brother, Ndrantahiry, whom I had already met at Antsohihy in Berthine's body. Ndramamahañarivo was dressed in a beige jacket, white shirt, and colonial helmet or salacot, reflecting his role as deputy governor (*sous-gouverneur*) under the French colony. This is why he is antonomastically referred to as "the Governor." He also wore sunglasses and a gold marquise ring. Ndrantahiry was dressed in the same way as when he appeared in Antsohihy but also wore a gold signet ring. It is small, distinctive details, like the shape of the ring, that identify a tromba. With these minor differences, both tromba displayed signs of their past power linked to the colonial government.

The intercessor rose and approached Ndramamahaña with the sahany plate containing my money and perfume offerings. They whispered to each other. The intercessor then moved on to the second tromba, doing the same. At the end of their discussions, the tromba greeted first the officials, and then the other participants, with a handshake. Each responded by saying "*Koezy, tompoko!*": "I greet you, my lord!" As the tromba began chatting with the intercessor, the atmosphere became relaxed again. The two chiefs of women further lightened the mood by handing out alcohol, sweets, and cigarettes taken from my offerings. One of them passed through the assembly, spraying everyone with perfume. In contrast to this relaxed, festive atmosphere, the two tromba remained in hieratic immobility. With their hands clasped over their legs, they confined themselves to chatting with each other in very low voices, smoking and periodically spraying their handkerchiefs with perfume. That is, at least, until the Ndrantahiry tromba called the intercessor, who then invited Davy and me to approach him. Every time we, like all the other participants, moved during the ceremony, we remained hunched over, in order not to exceed the height of the two seated tromba. The ritual space is hierarchical not only horizontally, but also vertically. So, to move toward the tromba, we were required to stand up only halfway, our torsos bent forward, with our arms stretched out toward the ground in front of us in a polite gesture used to clear the way. In this posture, we crossed the human enclosure formed by the servants to finally enter the space occupied by the royal ancestors. In order to speak with the tromba of Nosy Lava, we had to assume a particular position demonstrated to us by the intercessor: lying on one side, legs bent to the west and head to the east, slightly inclined to listen to the words of the ancestors. The whole weight of the body is supported by the elbow of the bent right arm resting on the ground. I forced myself to hold this posture for the duration of the discussion with the tromba. This experience of weight

was inevitably linked to the words of the ancestors. It is no coincidence that much of the activity associated with royal ancestors—and with ancestors and kingship more generally—is considered "heavy" (*mavesatra*), as Lambek points out in the title of his book *The Weight of the Past* (2002).

In a very low voice, the Ndrantahiry tromba greeted us in Malagasy. Then he added: "What does the vazaha [Western foreigner] want? Money, a car, a house?" he asked Davy, listing a series of typical material requests. While he spoke to us in a serious tone that seemed both paternalistic and authoritarian, he stroked our heads with his perfumed handkerchief. Indeed, the scent of perfume had wafted over us as soon as we approached him. In a slightly hesitant voice, Davy explained that I would simply like to have some information regarding the tromba andrano, the drowned royal spirits, and to ask permission to begin my research on the subject in Analalava. The request was formulated following Dady Berthine's indications almost to the letter.

The tromba was surprised by our unusual request. He told us he would first have to talk to his father, and then to the royal cemetery officials. But first, we had to pay homage to his father, Ndramamahaña, to respect the hierarchy that exists between the tromba. After we had paid tribute to the father as well, the tromba talked among themselves, then called the intercessor. The intercessor, after listening to the tromba's words, passed on the information to the other officials. The order in which the information circulated among the officials once again revealed the hierarchy between them. First, the intercessor informed the first official of the royal cemetery. Then, the latter called the two messengers, who joined the discussion. After a brief, whispered exchange, the intercessor returned to the tromba and informed them of the outcome of the consultation. Finally, he asked us to rejoin the tromba. Ready to receive precious information that could open the path to my research, I approached the younger of the two tromba with Davy. Ndrantahiry was my first intermediary among the royal ancestors. "Analalava is not linked to us here," he told us, adding that matters concerning this town were the domain (anjara) of Soazara, the "living sovereign" (*ampanjaka manôro*), his younger sister. As for stories about the tromba andrano, he continued, that was not their domain either. I would have to ask the "people who look after" (*mpikarakara*) the tromba andrano and their mediums. Here, they could only tell me stories concerning the Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) of Nosy Lava.

I returned to my seat, a little confused and disappointed, while the two chiefs of women continued to circulate sweets, cigarettes, and beers among the increasingly cheerful and inebriated participants. The midday heat penetrated the hut, now filled with village servants attracted by the tromba, the foreigner, and the alcohol. I had just realized that my "path" had not been "illuminated" (*mazava lalaña*), as Dady Berthine's tromba had promised me, and that in the end I had not "obtained the access" (*nahazo lalaña*) to my investigation. I had taken the wrong track. I had come here believing I would find the center of power and knowledge of the Bemihisatra Sakalava royal ancestors. Instead, I was confronted with localized and circumscribed responsibilities and knowledge. On the same assumption, I had thought I would have to obtain permission to work on the suicidal family of the Descendants of Silver by passing through the Descendants of Gold reigning in the region. Instead, my assumptions were belied by the claimed autonomy and independence of each of these two dynastic branches, and therefore their servants.

Postponing the analysis of these ritual actions to the end of the chapter, here is the first lesson I learned from the explanations given to me in this ceremony. A double separation of domains (anjara) was revealed in place of the hierarchy I had believed to be continuous and progressive: on the one hand, the separation between the Descendants of Gold and the Descendants of Silver; on the other, within the Descendants of Gold, the separation between the domain of the living sovereigns (*ampanjaka manôro*) of Analalava and that of the "sovereigns in heaven" (*ampanjaka an-dañitry*) of Nosy Lava.

The intercessor took the white plate filled with water, kaolin, silver coins, and the bills I had offered. He gave it to the younger of the two tromba, who, after murmuring invocations and throwing cigarette puffs onto the water on the plate, gave us two sips to drink and then poured it over our heads twice. We raised our hands above our heads to collect the water flowing in front of us in a gesture reminiscent of the greeting to the ancestors. With the same gestures, we received the "sprinkling" (*tsodrano*) or blessing of the oldest tromba. Finally, we returned to the festive exchanges, as the tromba and officials discussed village management issues. When the discussion was over, the two tromba left the bodies of the mediums, who fell backward and started shaking again. Discussions gradually died down as the assistants massaged the bodies of the two mediums, who were ostensibly showing the fatigue and pain from hosting the tromba within their bodies.

Analalava: "At the Lips" of Mediums

Arriving in Analalava from the sea, one notices a distinction between the scattered dwellings that occupy the northern part of the coast and those packed tightly together that populate the southern part, toward Narindra Bay. The white walls of the recently renovated soccer stadium mark the separation between these two coastal parts of the town, where the main infrastructure is in a state of disrepair. To the north of the stadium lies the Ampasikely neighborhood, where a few dilapidated hotels flank ruined colonial buildings, suggesting a bygone or vainly awaited tourist activity. To the south lies the popular Fongony neighborhood, where palm-branch huts alternate with the ever-increasing number of tin shacks. Both types of dwelling are surrounded by wooden or sheet-metal courtyards, further narrowing the alleyways. This neighborhood is mainly inhabited by Nosy Lava's servants, the Antimahabo, and, in general, descendants of "slaves" (*andevo*). Here we parted ways with some of the servants of Nosy Lava, who had benefited from the pirogue transport. Then, through the maze of narrow streets, we returned to Mama Safina's house located near the little market on the main street.

"Now I'm going to find you someone who knows the stories of the tromba andrano," Mama Safina told me, after learning of my disappointment upon meeting the royal ancestors of Nosy Lava. Indeed, it was through Mama Safina and her network of acquaintances that I would restart my research in Analalava. Once the path proposed by Dady Berthine had proven to be a dead end, it was to this second intermediary that I turned for help opening other gates. As an Antimahabo, or royal servant of Nosy Lava, Mama Safina was at the center of a network of mediums and royal servants who populated the town of Analalava, and the Fongony neighborhood in particular. This relatively central perspective was a great advantage for my research. But it also gave me a skewed view of the importance that the cults of royal spirits (tromba) and living rulers (ampanjaka) had in the lives of the town's inhabitants. What seemed like a center to me—as it probably did to Mama Safina and the servants of Nosy Lava—is marginal for a large proportion of Analalava's inhabitants. Indeed, even though the town was home to one of the west coast's most famous and longest-serving Sakalava queens, who was surrounded by many servants, the subjects or followers of the cult of the Sakalava rulers (ampanjaka) were becoming fewer and fewer.

In Analalava, as in other hotbeds of immigration, different ideologies and cults have long coexisted. In this royal capital, the ideology forged by

kingship is not—or is no longer—the most widespread. Having become one of the first administrative centers of French colonization around 1897, Analalava hosted numerous commercial activities and attracted migratory flows. But after independence in 1960, and especially before the fall of the first Malagasy president's government in 1972, Analalava was relegated to the margins of state administration (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 234–36).[6] This isolation, while underpinning the importance that Soazara's kingdom had acquired in the years following colonization, did not lead to the departure of the migrants from other parts of the island who had made their home there, especially from the Tsimihety and Merina countries. These immigrants still form the majority of the Analalava population and represent a variety of religions and origins: some are internal migrants, notably Tsimihety and Merina of the Christian faith, and others are descendants of foreigners, notably Comorians, or "Indians" (Karany), of the Muslim faith. The subjects of the Sakalava kingship and followers of the tromba cult remain confined to the southern part of the town, between the Fongony neighborhood to the west and Anjialava to the east.[7] However, while the cult of Sakalava rulers is marginal in the town of Analalava, it is hegemonic in the surrounding countryside, which is where the oldest inhabitants of the town, known as "masters of the land" (*tompon-tany*), are from.

Mama Safina's centrality, within her network of mediums and royal servants in Analalava, must therefore be situated within this type of relative marginality. It is therefore by playing between the two perspectives that animate the ethnographic approach that we must interpret the relationships and interactions I discuss in this book. The first of these perspectives is internal and contemporary to the situations experienced. It inevitably treats these situations as central. The other is external and

6. In 1972, the first president, Tsiranana, transferred the administrative center to Antsohihy, his hometown, which developed to the detriment of Analalava (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 235).

7. This spatial separation also corresponds to a distinction of domains and statuses within the royal organization. To the east is the queen's civil residence, with the houses of other members of the royal clan (ampanjaka) and the queen's servants (Antidoany or Sambarivo*);* to the west, as we have seen, are the servants of the royal cemetery (Antimahabo*)* of Nosy Lava. On one side are the living sovereign and his servants, on the other the servants of dead sovereigns.

posterior. It allows us to relativize and recontextualize these situations within a broader framework.

The day after I returned to Analalava, on a Saturday, an "auspicious day" (*andro tsara*) for talking to or about the royal ancestors, a lady in her seventies entered Mama Safina's tin house. "She knows the stories of the tromba andrano," Mama Safina said, introducing her to me. Mariety or, as everyone calls her, Dady Mariety sat on a chair in the large, dark room of the windowless house. Mama Safina reminded me of the preliminary "customs" (*fomba*) to follow to speak of the royal ancestors. So, I offered a small bottle of pastis accompanied by a small bill ("You always need alcohol and money to talk about the ancestors," the two women remarked). I served a glass of pastis to Dady Mariety, who poured a drop on the floor. "This is for you," she said addressing the ancestors, as she poured the alcohol onto the floor. Then she drank another drop and handed me back the glass with a grimace on her face suggesting that she wasn't used to drinking strong alcohol. Now, her "lips" (*vava*)—like those of a tromba, or like the gates guarding the royal ancestors—could open and let flow, like a blessing, the tale of the drowned royal ancestors:[8]

> They came from up there, fleeing the Borizany enemies [the Merina], which is why they arrived here.[9] [The Descendants of Silver] don't like them [the Merina]; their presence is forbidden [fady] here. They didn't agree [to submit to them], which is why they threw themselves into the water. Thus, each reached a place where they settled. Those who fled to the north plunged there, those who fled to here, plunged here. Those who are here are very numerous: Ndrandahy, Kotoandriana, Laisarotro, Fotsy… But the father of them all is Bevaoko. Their grandfather is Tontôña. Their paternal aunt is Ampelabe. Bevaoko is here at the "Great Royal Residence" [*Doany Be*]. Ampelabe, the woman, his sister, is in Andampy, at the "Woman's Royal Residence" [*Doany Manangy*], upstream [from the mouth of the

8. The association between the gates—or doors—of places of worship and the lips of mediums has already been proposed by Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 50): "Being 'at the door' (*ambaravara*) of the royal ancestors' house at the Doany [royal residence] or the burial compound at the Mahabo is like being at the mouth of a spirit medium."
9. The term Borizany means "packet carrier or rickshaw puller," and in the Imerina region was used to indicate civilians in general. The term is used derogatorily by the Sakalava to indicate, by antonomasia, the Merina, who made up most of the colonial administrators' carriers.

> river]. Ndrandahy went there alone, to Ambatobesohihy. Kotomena is on his way to Antsohihy, Ankarafisaka is the name of his residence [doany]…

The term *tantara* (history, narrative, tradition) is, according to Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1978), related to the older word *tantarana*, or "row, rank." The derived verb *manantarana,* therefore, means "to set things right," or "to return something to its proper place" (Feeley-Harnik 1978: 411).[10] Tantara concerning royal ancestors often begin with a series of names and genealogies, coupled with places, which situate the enunciator within these genealogical and geographical landmarks. Similarly, to identify a tromba spirit inhabiting the body of a living person for the first time, one first asks the spirit, "Where do you come from? What are your father's and mother's names?" The places and genealogical relationships evoked in these tantara thus serve to place the enunciator within them. This is true to such an extent that Alain Delivré, studying the stories of the Merina kingship of the Highlands, asserts that a tantara "is more particularly the history of a given group and place," and that its function is essentially "justificatory." "Indeed," he claims, "the role played by the group's ancestors helps to explain and maintain its privileged situation" (Delivré 1974: 163–64). This is why it is not surprising that Dady Berthine's tromba presented himself to us by enumerating a series of names of kings, aiming to place himself within the Sakalava history contained in these names. It is not surprising either that the first account I was able to gather on the tromba andrano took the form of a list of names and places. This list of names and places served to draw a constellation within which the enunciator placed himself or herself. The more details Dady Mariety, in this case, provided about these relationships and these places, the more firmly her position was established as stable and legitimate.

Thus, at the end of this narrative, she made her social position explicit by introducing herself as a member of the Bevôñy descent group. According to the rest of Dady Mariety's tale, the intercessor of Bevaoko's spirit, the father of the other tromba andrano, belongs to this group. Indeed, the Bevôñy are one of the few groups of living representatives of these drowned spirits. As a member of this group, she was one of the

10. Philippe Beaujard (1998) traces the word *tantara* back to the ancient Malay and Javanese, *tantra*, "legend," derived from the Sanskrit *tantra*, "chapter of a book of science, doctrine, theory."

"caretakers" (*mpikarakara*) of these tromba, as well as of the mediums and places that house them. Moreover, as she later admitted to me, she used to lend her body to one of the tromba andrano spirits. Dady Mariety thus presented herself as an ideal intermediary to introduce me to the histories of these tromba, confirming what the royal spirits of Nosy Lava had told me. As a member of the "people of the Descendants of Silver" (*olon'ny Zafinifotsy*)—as she defined the Bevôñy—she was the privileged interlocutor of these tromba and therefore knew their histories. As a medium, on the other hand, she embodied these histories and performed them in spirit possession rituals. The history of these drowned spirits is therefore linked to that of their living representatives, the Bevôñy, and the cult they officiate. Dady Mariety explained that the Bevôñy come from a village inside the Mouth of the Catastrophe, Ambendraña. They are the "masters of the village" (*tompon-tanàna*)—that is, they have the final say on decisions affecting it. When the family of the Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) committed suicide in the estuary, Bevaoko's spirit entrusted their allies, ancestors of the Bevôñy, with the task of perpetuating their memory by "taking care" (*mikarakara*) of their tromba spirits and places of worship. According to Dady Mariety's account, the Bevôñy ancestors are therefore the founders of the tromba andrano cult, which is practiced today in the estuary and on other parts of the island. However, Ambendraña remains the center of this cult: it is here that the intercessor of Bevaoko resides. It is also here that we find the toñy dedicated to this spirit, that is, the tree where one can address requests to him, offer him sacrifices and invoke his blessing.

In addition to the toñy of Bevaoko, there is a toñy dedicated to Ampelabe, Bevaoko's sister, in the village of Andampy. This village is located upstream from the estuary, next to her residence, known as the "Royal Residence of the Woman" (*Doany Manangy*). Here, there are other people of the Descendants of Silver, the Antifañaiñy (the Bonesetters). Known for their ability to heal broken bones, they look after Ampelabe's tromba and the places dedicated to her. "But if you want to call all the tromba andrano," Dady Mariety specified, "you have to go to Ambendraña." Finally, Dady Mariety explained to me that, in addition to the toñy dedicated to the Descendants of Silver, Ambendraña also houses the residence of a Descendant of Gold sovereign and the members of this royal family (ampanjaka). Faced with this bipartition of places of worship, Dady Mariety concluded, everyone in the village takes care of the ancestors of one of these dynastic branches. She thus corroborated what I had learned in Nosy Lava about the separation of

domains between the Descendants of Gold and the Descendants of Silver.

With this information I decided to go to Ambendraña, the village that seems to be the heart of the tromba andrano cult. So I "asked the way" (*mangataka lalaña*) of Dady Mariety. She replied that she would first have to ask permission from the Ambendraña intercessor, the village chief. But unfortunately, the position of the moon was not propitious for obtaining such a path, given that we were close to the new moon, or the "dead moon" (*fanjava maty*), as it is said in the special language of Sakalava kingship. This is a nefarious period during which the gates of places dedicated to royal ancestors, as well as the lips of their living representatives, remain closed. The ancestors rest behind the gates and beneath the earth. I would thus have to wait before I could ask the way of the right gatekeeper at Ambendraña.

To do this, as Dady Mariety had fallen ill, I turned to another woman from Ambendraña involved in the tromba andrano cult, again following the advice of Mama Safina. One afternoon at the end of June, in Papa Safina's company, I headed up the hill to the east of the Ampasikely neighborhood, in the area of the old colonial administrative buildings, toward what is called, with a French word, the *Résidence*. Since its construction, this dilapidated old colonial house had been the residence first of the provincial chief, then the prefect, and finally, on occasion, the district chief. In the half-light of the large, unfurnished main room, a lady sat on the floor ironing the absent owner's clothes on a mat. Faustine, a tall, thin woman in her sixties with a broad face punctuated by squinting eyes, occupied the empty house as the district chief's maid. Papa Safina introduced me to her. Before asking her to intercede on my behalf to go to Ambendraña, I took the opportunity to learn her version of the story of the Descendants of Silver. Thus, I handed her the offering required by custom. As she didn't drink alcohol, she was content with money.

While similar in structure to Dady Mariety's account, Faustine's telling provided a more detailed history of the drowned Descendants of Silver and the origin of their cult. Like Dady Mariety, she first presented the place of origin of these nobles, then cited the cause of their flight and suicide, and finally listed the names of these drowned nobles and the places where their spirits reside. I would synthesize her account as follows: the Descendants of Silver originally ruled in the Menabe, in the southwest of the island. Hunted by the army of the Merina from the central highlands of Madagascar, these nobles fled to the northern central part of the island, to the Marangibato plateau in the Mandritsara

region. Once again joined by their enemies, they fled in different directions. One family of this royal branch, led by their ancestor Tontôña and two children, Bevaoko and Ampelabe, chose to head northwest. When they found themselves facing the sea, pursued by the Merina, they decided to commit suicide rather than be enslaved by their enemies. Their bodies, delivered to the current of the sea, were scattered in various parts of the estuary, which from then on became their doany, or their residences, revered by the living.

Drawing on the capacity of these narratives to legitimize the social position of the enunciator, Faustine, like Dady Mariety, concluded the history of the drowned nobles by presenting their relationship with the Bevôñy group, to which she also belonged. According to the rest of her account, the Bevôñy's ancestors were the "companions on the journey" (*namana dia raiky*) of the fleeing Descendants of Silver. Instead of drowning with the latter, the Bevôñy reached the banks of the river mouth and survived. They then "placed" (*napetraka*) the spirits of the Descendants of Silver in the village of Ambendraña. With this expression, Faustine was probably referring to the foundation of the toñy, the tree where these ancestors could be invoked. It was here that Bevaoko, in the form of a tromba spirit, said to the Bevôñy: "You are here, my cadets (*zandriko*), to look after us who have drowned." Thus, they became the servants or, more precisely, caretakers of Bevaoko and the other tromba andrano. Faustine was the classificatory paternal aunt of Ambendraña's intercessor and played the same role in the town of Analalava. Originally from Ambendraña, having grown up in Analalava, Faustine had the privilege of invoking these drowned ancestors in front of another altar tree (toñy) dedicated to Bevaoko in the far north of Analalava: the *Madiro Masiñy* (the Sacred/Generative Tamarind Tree). She was the intercessor of Bevaoko's spirit and the rest of the tromba andrano here in Analalava. It is possible that she emphasized the relationship at the origin of this privilege to legitimize her ritual role—a role that conferred prestige on her among the subjects of the local kingship.

After justifying her role in the tromba andrano cult, Faustine went on to detail its geographical and social configuration. According to this complex configuration, Ambendraña and Analalava are not the only places where altar trees (toñy) dedicated to these spirits stand. Opposite Bevaoko's "Great Royal Residence" (*Doany Be*) lies the village of Anjango. In this village stands another toñy dedicated to Bevaoko. This is the "Great Tamarind Tree" (*Madiro Be*). In the past, a large ceremony was held here every year in honor of Bevaoko. The ceremony was attended

by many inhabitants of the region, including the royal servants of Nosy Lava. As Dady Mariety had mentioned, in addition to Bevaoko and his toñy, the spirit of Ampelabe, his sister, is also worshipped by another group that looks after her toñy. This toñy is in the village of Andampy, home to the Antifañaiñy, the group to which Ampelabe's intercessor belongs. Whereas the intercessor of Man, Bevaoko, resides in Ambendraña, downstream of the estuary, the intercessor of Woman, Ampelabe, is located upstream in Andampy. In this dualistic opposition, the intercessor of Man wears braids, like a woman; the other, being the intercessor of Woman, has no braids. Thus, borrowing the terms used to designate cross-cousins, Faustine defined the Bevôñy of Ambendraña as the "children of the man," or "of a brother" (*zanakan'ny lahy*), and the Antifañaiñy as the "children of the woman," or "of a sister" (*zanakan'ny vavy*). As if to underline both a relationship and a distinction between these two groups, Faustine concluded: "Each group is with its person" (*Samby amin'olonazy*), that is, "with the person it serves." This is another variation on the adage: "Each to his or her domain."

Thus Faustine's account confirmed my intention to go to Ambendraña. I asked her if she could help me get there:

> "I'll have to ask the intercessor of Ambendraña first," Faustine replied. "*Mangataka lalaña* ["ask the way"]: one must ask permission to go there," Papa Safina explained, translating the Malagasy expression. "It's the 'great ancestor' [*dadilahibe*], Bevaoko, who is the master of the village. Even if the intercessor tells us something, he must first discuss it with the great ancestor and tell him: 'There's a vazaha [Western foreigner] here who wants to visit your village!' If he replies: 'Grant him the way!' you can go."

Then she thought for a moment and told us that there was a woman possessed by Bevaoko in Analalava whom she was to meet in a few days to call her tromba. She could ask Bevaoko directly. Normally, there should be no problem, she added. "Only Hôva [Merina] can't go there," she concluded.

Several days passed before I received Faustine's reply. Meanwhile, Mama Safina tried everything to dissuade me from going to the village. She said Ambendraña was a "dangerous/complicated" (sarotro) place. It is a village where many nobles (ampanjaka) reside; therefore, there are many taboos to be respected. Naturally, she did so partly to keep me with her and her family, but I soon realized that many people in Analalava

shared this fear of Ambendraña. In particular, the nobles there had a reputation for being "very sacred/powerful" (*teña masiñy*). Some specified that their mouth—their speech—was sacred/powerful. They had the power to affect people simply by uttering words. Others added that even Soazara, the Analalava queen, was afraid of Ambendraña, without specifying the reason. During this period of waiting, I had thus collected various anecdotes and statements of the same kind, which—instead of discouraging me—of course further sharpened my curiosity and desire to go there.

One morning, Mama Safina told me that Bevaoko had been summoned. He did not want me to go to Ambendraña. "He's afraid of Europeans," she added. Slightly discouraged by this news, and by the colonial past that undoubtedly weighed on his mistrust of me, I decided, in reaction, to pay Dady Mariety a visit in her hut. On entering the courtyard, I came upon two men and asked them about her. Without saying a word, they gestured with their chins in the direction of the hut. Lying on the bed, Dady Mariety told me that her nephews, whom I had just met in the courtyard, were going to Ambendraña the next day. Amazed by this coincidence, I asked them if they would take me with them. With another silent nod of the head, one of them agreed. So, after several weeks of trying to find the right intermediary to ask the way to the main village of the tromba andrano cult, I finally, somewhat by chance, "got a way" (*nahazo lalaña*). And this despite the refusal of Bevaoko's tromba.

I hope that readers will not consider my choice disrespectful! A Sakalava royal ancestor has many voices, as well as many bodies. If indeed it is the royal spirit, the tromba, who is the true master of his decisions, the communication system through which his word is created, manipulated, and circulated is as complex as his multiple voices. In short, the tromba's word is not held by a single person, for a single tromba can possess several people. Even when an official medium is appointed, his or her word is first approved by the intercessor, responsible for his or her appointment, who acts as judge of the veracity of his or her word. The intercessor then has the task of interpreting, discussing, and disseminating the word of the tromba, expressed through the medium, to others. Hence the dual authority of the tromba's word and the importance of the intercessor in this dynamic. Indeed, the medium who had expressed Bevaoko's refusal was not an official medium accredited by the Bevaoko intercessor living in Ambendraña. She was just one of Bevaoko's voices, neither the only one nor the most influential. That is why, when I went to Ambendraña for the first time, the intercessor was not even aware that Bevaoko, his

master, had refused my visit: indeed, he was delighted to welcome me. All the more so as, in his opinion, there had been no official Bevaoko medium for years. But more on that in the next chapter.

The day after the refusal of my visit to Ambendraña and my subsequent visit to Dady Mariety, I went to the meeting point at the port of the ferry that used to link the two coasts of the river mouth. Alone, equipped with a small rucksack and a few rudiments of Malagasy, I sat on a tree trunk under the sun awaiting my future traveling companions. After about thirty minutes, I saw Dady Mariety's two nephews arrive. Without a glance at me, they put down two oars and, after scooping the stagnant water from a pirogue, pushed it out to sea. After depositing their belongings in the skiff, they looked at me and, with a simple "*Alô vazaha*!" ("Let's go, foreigner/European!"), one of them invited me aboard. Obeying these first curt words addressed to me, I finally set off for Ambendraña in the company of these unknown carriers—I myself, of course, being equally unknown to them.

Conclusion

If, as James Clifford puts it, "ethnographic texts are inescapably allegorical" (1986: 99), this first chapter is no exception. The preceding pages are the account of an individual experience that is intended to be exemplary and therefore, in a way, allegorical. But, contrary to the meaning that the American anthropologist attributes to this ethnographic allegorism, the point of these pages is not so much to evoke an alternative social reality to the social context from which the ethnographer originates through the description of a foreigner's life. Rather, these pages aim to show, through the description of my experience of a foreign context, the experience that an individual belonging to this sociocultural context might have—at least as far as the kinetic experience of a hierarchical structure is concerned. Indeed, if we understand allegory, with Clifford, as the implicit evocation of "another" (*allos*) transcendent reality through the description of a particular reality, this idealistic comparison can be of two types. The first type occurs when the sociocultural context described is presented as an alternative social model (positive or negative) to that to which the ethnographer—and generally their readers—belong. The second type is when the case described is seen as exemplary of its broader sociocultural context. This latter synecdochic operation (whereby the part is thought of as representative of the whole) is ubiquitous in

ethnography, to the point of being an inseparable and—in Clifford's words—ineluctable part of it. It is perhaps the elementary operation that justifies any ethnographic description. The allegorical intention of this first chapter is, so to speak, a variation on this principle. This variation consists of the fact that it is not one of the members of the described society that is the example or allegory of this society, but the ethnographer's experience that is an allegory of the possible experience of some members of the described society.

As pointed out in the introduction and at the beginning of this chapter, the "path" (*lalaña*) I took to access the historical narratives (tantara) about the royal ancestors is seen as exemplary, allegorical, of the path that subjects of Sakalava kingship follow throughout their existence to attain "generative and efficacious power": hasiñy. This power is channeled and distributed mainly by the royal ancestors, present in various forms: bones, relics, tromba, places (doany and mahabo). The path to the ancestors' knowledge, contained in their histories (tantara), thus coincides with the path to their generative power (hasiñy). Consequently, the gatekeepers of the hasiñy are also the gatekeepers of the tantara.

The path to power and knowledge

"Telling" (*mitantara*) implies naming ancestors. As we saw in the histories about the tromba andrano or in the discussion with Dady Berthine's tromba, the histories I heard began with a series of names tracing genealogies. But for the Sakalava, naming the dead is fady, forbidden. That is why the royal ancestors have a name, or rather several names, differing from the one they had in life. "I have many names," Dady Berthine's tromba told me in Antsohihy. These names are said to be "[of] blessing" (*fitahiaña*). By naming the royal ancestors with their *fitahiaña*, the living bless them. Consequently, "to tell is to pray," as one of Feeley-Harnik's interlocutors explained (1991a: 67). According to Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 67), "in pronouncing praise names, royal followers invoke the ancestors' presence among the living." For this reason, naming royal ancestors is only permitted in ritual contexts, such as in prayer or invocation (hataka or *jôro*). It is on these occasions that the intercessor—whether of the sovereign (called ampangataka) or of his lineage (called *ampijôro*)—invokes the names of the ancestors of a given lineage, from the oldest to the youngest. Outside of this context, invoking the presence of ancestors is forbidden. To pray, in concrete terms, is therefore to name ancestors, and to name ancestors is, in a way, to evoke their histories. In exchange

for this prayer, the ancestors give their blessing in the form of sprinkled water (tsodrano). The intercessor is the intermediary in this exchange: it is he who prays to the ancestors, and it is he who, in return, sprinkles the living with water. He is both the guardian of the ancestors' memory, contained in their posthumous names (*fitahiaña*), and the vector of their hasiñy, their generative power for the living. In the case of the intercessor of the royal spirits (ampangataka), he is also called the "responsible" or the "guardian of the gates" (*ben'ny varavaraña*, *mpiambin'ny varavaraña*), or, more familiarly, the "master of the key" (*tompon'ny lakile*). He holds the power to open and close the gates on the path leading to the royal ancestors, whether they are real gates—those of the royal residence or cemetery—or the lips of the mediums who embody the tromba. It is he who pronounces the invocation that allows the gates or lips of the royal ancestors to open, and their generative power (hasiñy) to spread, like a stream or rain, among the living.[11]

Access conditions: a) Removing witchcraft and taboos

As Mama Safina had told me several times, talking about ancestors is "difficult, delicate, dangerous": sarotro. To utter the name of one of them outside of invocations can be seen as an act of "witchcraft" (*voriky*) and could attract their "anger" (*heloko*) (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 44–45). This is why certain prerequisites are necessary to name ancestors and tell their histories outside the ritual context. Some "customs" (*fomba*) must be respected, most often involving offerings of alcohol and money. While money, as we saw with Dady Berthine, is sometimes called "money for respect" (*vola voninahitry*) or, as Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 47) reports, a "remover of the lock" (*fangala gadra*), alcohol is indeed defined by the euphemistic expression *fangala voriky*, "remover of witchcraft" (1991a: 45). More rarely, it is also called *fangala fady*, "remover of the taboos." A royal servant once explained to me that this alcohol was used by speakers to preemptively attribute to drunkenness, rather than to their "intentionality" (*saiñy*), the possible infraction of a taboo. The transgression of a fady is indeed a serious matter, as it can be attributed to the intention of committing witchcraft against the ancestors. Drunkenness is an

11. The association between ancestral blessings and rain is frequent. In the village of Ambendraña, after a rain shower preceding the rainy season (*asara*), I often heard villagers exclaim: "*Nahazo tsodrano zahay!*" or "*Nahazo jôro zahay!*" (We have obtained the blessing [the sprinkling of water]!).

alternative explanation for this bad intention, as a condition that weakens consciousness and consequently all intentionality. In the case of histories about ancestors, the alcohol shifts the responsibility of the enunciator onto his statement, a shift that can be summed up by the following implicit premise: "It is not I who speak of you, but the alcohol in me." This premise is a sort of variation on the formula that concludes every Sakalava "tale" (*angano*): "It is not me who lies, but the elders of yesteryear" (*Tsy zaho mavandy fa olobe taloha*).[12] For different reasons, whether it is a fabulous tale (*angano*) or a true story (tantara), the storyteller keeps his distance from the narrative: in the first case, as a simple reporter; in the second, as a good-faith drunkard. For this reason, whenever I asked someone about histories concerning the royal ancestors, the essential kit of these encounters included at least a small bottle of whisky, rum, or pastis, depending on the tastes and the taboos of the interlocutors, the ancestors invoked, and the places we were in.[13]

Beyond this protective and preventive function, alcohol and money are also used as offerings to the spirits of the ancestors, so that they may grant permission to "open the gates" (*mibiaña varavaraña*) that protect them. These offerings are to be given to the gatekeepers—that is, the intercessors—whether invested or occasional. They are the intermediaries between the ancestors and the living. When I first met the tromba of Dady Berthine, it was her friend who took on the occasional role of ampangataka, the intercessor between us and the tromba. She was the one who asked us to give her the offerings, which she added to the ritual objects already prepared: the white plate, water, kaolin, silver coins, vegetable branches—all arranged in the northeast corner of the house. The northeast is indeed the cardinal point most propitious for encounters between ancestors and the living (Hébert 1965: 163–69). These ritual objects, supplemented by alcohol and money, are the basic elements for any invocation to the royal ancestors.

12. Angano are opposed to tantara in that they are explicitly fabulous and "false" (*vandy*) accounts of the past, whereas tantara concern the "true" (*mariny*) history of the ancestors of a descent group or royal family.
13. These different taboos (fady) are called respectively *fadin'olo* (individual taboos, sometimes indicating allergies), *fadin-drazaña* (taboos inherited from ancestors), *fadin-tany* (taboos valid in a given place to protect and preserve its power of growth, hasiñy).

b) Respecting the time

But the intercessor, offerings, and ritual objects are not the only elements needed to open the gates to the ancestors. You also need the "propitious" (*tsara*) moment of the year, month, and day. This is why, in the previous pages, I indicated the date and times of day at which my meetings with these various guardians of ancestral histories took place. Indeed, there are three "auspicious days" (*andro tsara*) for calling or naming the royal Sakalava ancestors. These days are Monday, Friday, and Saturday. On the other days of the week, the gates remain closed. They are "bad days" (*andro ratsy*) and therefore "forbidden days" (*andro fady*), as they evoke bad memories in the history of Sakalava kingship. These are days on which certain sovereigns died. In addition to the bad days common to all royal ancestors, there are also specific fady days for each royal ancestor (corresponding to the day of his or her death) and for each royal branch. Thursday, for example, is a fady day for all Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy), as their collective suicide in the sea took place on a Thursday. However, royal ancestors in the form of tromba may be called into private homes on days that are not fady for them, even if they are for others. Similarly, there are also months of the year that are designated as fady.[14] This is particularly true of the last month of the year (corresponding to the period between May and June), the "forbidden month" (*fanjava faly*), during which all ceremonial activities are forbidden. The only activity permitted is the fermentation of honey harvested and stored for "the relic washing ceremony" (*fitampoha*), which takes place in the first month of the year (called *fanjava mitsaka*). This annual ceremony marks the opening of the gates that inaugurate the "invocations" (hataka) and "salutations" (*fikoziaña*) of the royal ancestors, which will be performed at propitious moments throughout the following year.

During these auspicious months and days, the best time of day to open these gates, talk to the ancestors or perform "ritual work" (*asa*) is from morning to noon, beginning at sunrise. Afternoons, during these rituals, are devoted to dancing and singing (*soma*). Similarly, the most auspicious time of the month is when the moon is waxing, generally while it is still "alive" (*fanjava veloño*). In the days before and after the

14. The month is called *volana* in Malagasy, or *fanjava* in the royal language. In both cases, these terms can also indicate "moon," "money," or "words." The ceremonial months are in fact calculated based on the moon: each new moon corresponds to the end of a month.

new moon, when it is "dead" (*fanjava maty*), the gates to the path linking the ancestors to the living remain closed. This was the main reason that my request to be granted the way to Ambendraña had been delayed.

c) Recreating the chronotope

The taboos mark not only the time to reach the ancestors, but also the path leading to them. As we saw at Nosy Lava, in a sacred or forbidden land, these prohibitions concern all human behavior, from the way we dress to the way we move or speak. To borrow a concept from Mikhail Bakhtin (1981: 84–85), also already used by Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 328) and Lambek (2002: 27), these fady serve to construct a chronotope, a particular time-space, reproducing the world in which these ancestors lived. To take an example from European pop culture, this is a bit like the film *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Becker 2003), in which the sons attempt to recreate the minutiae of Communist life in the Berlin bedroom of their ailing mother, who went into a coma before the fall of the Berlin Wall and woke up afterward. The sons' efforts are meant to protect their mother from a potentially fatal shock. Thus, to recreate the chronotope of the royal ancestors in the royal cemetery of Nosy Lava, I had to take off my flip-flops, my pants, my underwear, and finally my glasses.

But taboos, and especially the "taboos related to place" (*fadin'ny tany*), also serve to hierarchize space and the people who pass through it. The differentiation of fady within the Nosy Lava royal cemetery creates thresholds that arrange the space into a concentric hierarchy. The closer we come to the dangerous things of the cemetery (i.e., the bones and relics of the ancestors), the stricter the fady become. As a result, actions in turn become more ritualized, since taboos are negative ritual prescriptions that accompany and condition positive prescriptions (Valeri 1999: 366). These prohibitions also differentiate "kinds of people" (*karazañ'olo*) (Lambek 2002: 34). The first distinction concerns the tromba, the sovereigns, and the Sakalava subjects. "The point of these prohibitions was to distinguish Malagasy from Europeans and rulers from the followers," writes Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 329) describing the system of prohibitions in the Nosy Lava royal cemetery. While the subjects, pilgrims, and servants are deprived of European objects that evoke the colonial period, the tromba, on the contrary, display them (sunglasses, European-style clothing, perfume, industrial alcohol, and cigarettes). In this way, the royal ancestors of Nosy Lava situate themselves on the side of the foreign power, assimilated with Europeans, while the others, the subjects, are relegated

to a Malagasy context that is expressly anti-European and traditional, that is, governed by "customs of yesteryear" (*fomba taloha*).[15]

As well as separating rulers from their subjects, the taboos of the place—in negative—and ritual actions—in positive—progressively rank the subjects among themselves. As Lambek attests, "shrine personnel and visitors are distinguished according to how far and along which paths of entry they can penetrate" (2002: 34). In the invocation before the gates of the tombs I described, for example, an initial polarization of space, opposing north and south as well as east and west, hierarchized participants according to their disposition. To the east, closer to the gates, were the men responsible for the cemetery, arranged in order of importance from north to south: the manantany (first official), the ampangataka (intercessor), and the two *rangitry* (ruler's messengers). Behind them, to the west, were mostly women and other cemetery servants (Antimahabo). Once the invocation was over, each person took up his or her task in the ritual work. While two men sounded the drums, the intercessor accompanied by the chief of the women was the only one to enter the fiaroaomby courtyard protecting the royal ancestors. As I would later learn, any action for royalty must be carried out in pairs. At these ceremonies, I repeatedly heard, "You have to make couples" ("*Mila mivady*," or "*Minamana*"). This is also why certain officials have their own double—in particular, the two messengers and the two chiefs of the women. Consequently, in the house where the ceremony with the tromba took place, the intercessor and the chief of the women who had entered the enclosure of the royal tombs were also the main intermediaries between the royal ancestors and the rest of the participants. The intercessor first spoke to the spirits and then reported back to the others what the spirits had said. Similarly, the chief of the women took the tromba's offerings and redistributed them among the participants. The former redistributed the word of the royal ancestors, the latter their goods.

By contrast, the other officials, much like the outer fiaroaomby courtyard, formed an enclosure protecting and encircling the tromba: the men arranged on the north and south sides, the two chiefs of the women on

15. As we will see, Sakalava rulers are defined as having originally been foreigners, *vahiny* (from Arabia, according to their tantara), who, during the precolonial and colonial periods, held a monopoly on luxury goods brought in by other foreigners (Portuguese, French, Americans, etc.) (Raison-Jourde 1983: 37).

the west side, and finally the assistants behind the tromba. This enclosure design provides an image of the symbolic function that royal servants occupy with sovereigns—living or dead—and, more generally, that the living occupy with ancestors. The royal servants (called Sambarivo, "each is a thousand") of the royal residence and the cemetery are grouped into "enclosures" (*vala*), and their dwellings surround the royal residences like a human palisade encircling the wooden one. At the relic-washing ritual in Mahajanga that I attended in July 2016, subjects, mediums, and pilgrims, all holding hands, formed an enclosure outside the courtyard surrounding the relic house. One of the servants of this royal residence explained the significance of this arrangement to me using an expression that resembled a general maxim: "We, the living, are the enclosure of the ancestors."

While this series of enclosures protects and encircles the royal ancestors, the intercessor (ampangataka) enables subjects and visitors to enter into contact with the hasiñy, with the generative power transmitted by these ancestors. In the Nosy Lava ritual, initial contact with this power of the ancestors took place first in the form of kaolin, in front of the gates, and then, in a more direct way, with the tromba, inside the medium's house. But this direct encounter is complex. Approaching the ancestors is indeed "dangerous" and "complicated" (sarotro), and this difficulty is often expressed verbally, as well as experientially, in terms of "weight" or "heaviness" (*vesatra*). This is what I felt, in part, when I assumed the position of deference in front of the tromba. The weight of the past is indeed heavy to bear.

In short, through fady and spatial disposition, an initial separation opposed the royal ancestors and their subjects. This separation was first visible in front of the gates of the fiaroaomby enclosure, then reproduced by the officials inside the medium's house. Ritual actions were thus intended to bring the subjects progressively closer to the royal ancestors. This gradual increase in proximity also gave rise to a hierarchy among the subjects and the servants, separating the officials from all others. Between the royal ancestors, the enclosure of officials, and the others, the intercessor played the fundamental role of granting the way.

"Each in his or her domain": Continuities and ruptures

This kind of mediated, hierarchical communication with the royal ancestors, which we have seen most clearly implemented at Nosy Lava, is indicative of the morphology of the path leading to the generative

power of ancestors.[16] This path is marked by different gates (*varavaraña*), protecting different domains (anjara), watched over by different gatekeepers (*mpiamby*). Each gatekeeper is the intermediary of another more powerful guardian in a potentially infinite chain of beings reaching up to the "gods above" (*zañahary añabo*). Tromba, sovereigns, mediums, intercessors, and servants occupy the role of intermediaries and guardians at different levels of this progressive hierarchy. This principle of a chain of mediations is inscribed in the very dynamics of the invocation to the royal ancestors, known as hataka. In front of the tromba of Nosy Lava, for instance, the intercessor accepted my request and formulated it for the tromba. The tromba, unable to grant my request themselves, also formulated a request to their ancestors so that they, in turn, would ask first their ancestors and then God—or the gods—above to come to my aid and give me their blessing. This blessing conveys the hasiñy, the generative and efficacious power of which the tromba are but the vessels. Indeed, the tromba, or living rulers, are the recipients of their subjects' requests, but more as God's privileged intercessors than as direct executors of those requests. Their power, that is, their hasiñy, is transmitted to them by their ancestors. The mediatized, descending path of the hasiñy thus corresponds to the opposite path of the hataka (invocation, request), with both paths respecting and legitimizing the hierarchy governing their intermediaries. By asking the way to access the histories of the Descendants of Silver, I found myself walking this path of the request.

However, this hierarchy based on the path of generative power is marked by fractures and discontinuities. We have already seen, in the case of Nosy Lava, that the hierarchical path leading to the histories of royal ancestors ran into separations of domains, notably between Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver, as well as between the living and the dead sovereigns. The tromba Descendants of Gold could not tell me the histories of the tromba Descendants of Silver, because

16. We saw this kind of communication, for example, in the way words were delivered between the tromba and the various people in charge of the Nosy Lava cemetery, following the request I had made to the tromba. First the youngest tromba spoke to his father, his father called the intercessor (ampangataka), the latter called the first official (manantany), then the first official called the two messengers (*rangitry*). The officials then discussed the matter together, and the intercessor would report the result of the consultation to the older tromba, who discussed it with his son.

these histories were the domain of the latter tromba, their mediums and their servants. For similar reasons, they could not permit me to conduct my research in Analalava either, as official business related to this town belonged to the living queen, their descendant. Even though the tromba of Nosy Lava were the living queen's ancestors and, as such, legitimized her by giving her their hasiñy, her domain was not subject to their power. On the other hand, although the mediums and servants of the tromba of silver lived in the region ruled by the sovereigns of gold, the latter's ancestors had no power over the domain of the Descendants of Silver and their representatives.

Maurice Bloch, in an article devoted to the separation of rank and power in Merina kingship, already noted that, although the representation of rank constitutes a "gently graded hierarchy," we can nonetheless find a "sharp break" within it, especially between the ruler and the rest of the population (Bloch 1977: 140). From another perspective, Lambek (2002: 74) analyzes this coexistence of breaks and hierarchical interrelations, typical of Sakalava kingship, in Durkheimian terms of the mechanical and the organic division of labor. While he identifies a mechanical division between the various places of the Sakalava kingship, he notes that these different centers of power and worship are organized, within themselves, according to an organic division of labor (2002: 74). Despite the separation between the various kingdoms and places of worship scattered along the northwest coast, which are organized within themselves in similar ways, there is a hierarchy that encompasses them. These different sites of Sakalava kingship are indeed united by a common ancestor to whom other members of the different kingdoms pay homage during the annual ritual at Mahajanga (2002: 74). For Lambek, this structural coexistence between centralized hierarchy and local segmentation is the historical legacy of the Sakalava political system, which he defines as a "segmentary state" (2002: 79). According to this definition, taken up by Aidan Southall, a segmentary state corresponds to a state "*in which the spheres of ritual suzerainty and political sovereignty do not coincide. The former extends widely towards a flexible, changing periphery. The latter is confined to the central, core domain*" (1988: 52, emphasis in original).

Now, although the division between Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver, or between royal ancestors and the living queen, may fit into this mechanical solidarity presented by Lambek, it is nevertheless inscribed at a more intimate level of royal organization. If we consider that this mechanical division can exist at different scales and

levels of the royal hierarchy, then it does not only concern the distinct localities of the Sakalava kingship (Lambek 2002: 74). Rather, this division presents itself as a structural separation internal to local segments. The Descendants of Gold and the Descendants of Silver are indeed, according to the first accounts I collected in Analalava, two different dynastic branches. However, the Descendants of Silver possess neither an independent kingdom nor a living sovereign. Their places of worship are located within the same places as the Descendants of Gold. This is emphatically demonstrated by the case of Ambendraña, where the toñy dedicated to the Descendants of Silver tromba rubs shoulders with the Descendants of Gold royal residence. On the other hand, in the case of the Descendants of Gold, the tromba of Nosy Lava and the queen of Analalava effectively rule over two distinct places (the cemetery, mahabo, and the royal residence, doany). As Jean-François Baré (1980) and Feeley-Harnik (1991a) have clearly shown, the two places are each the reproduction of the other. Nevertheless, the relationship that exists between the Analalava queen and her ancestors buried at Nosy Lava, as well as between the people of the royal residence (Antidoany) and the people of the royal cemetery (Antimahabo), is not of the same type as that existing between the different independent kingdoms of living sovereigns or between the different residences (doany) dedicated to different ancestors. A similar division and hierarchical connection exist between the royal residence at Analalava and the cemetery at Nosy Lava as generally exists between the living and the dead. As we shall see in the following chapters, it is this same kind of ambivalent relationship that exists between the living sovereigns of the Descendants of Gold and the drowned spirits of the Descendants of Silver. Beyond the historical legacy of the segmented political structure of Sakalava kingships, this copresence of hierarchical allegiance and segmented autonomy is an essential morphological feature of the progressive path linking the living to the ancestors. It runs through the various levels of Sakalava social organization. Its explanation must therefore be found at a deeper level. The chapters that follow will be devoted, more or less directly, to the search for this explanation.

For now, let us conclude by noting that, first, this structural separation between the power of the living and the power of the dead, underlying that between the living queen and the royal ancestors, is analogous to that between the Descendants of Gold and the Descendants of Silver. Second, within this separation, the intercessor occupies a crucial position. Finally, this position of intercessor, gatekeeper, or intermediary can,

as a functional role, be occupied by different people or groups depending on the level of social organization and the contexts in which we are situated. As we shall see, the tromba andrano of the Descendants of Silver, as well as their living representatives, occupy this role within the Sakalava monarchy.

CHAPTER 2

Ambendraña: Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver

Fanjakana: Local "Governments" and Access Paths

On my first visit to Ambendraña in August 2016, the people that my traveling companions and I first met were a man and a woman dressed entirely in white. With their long hair in loose braids, they both wore long Muslim-style shirts and lambahoany loincloths around their waists. The woman also held a long black wooden cane in her hand.

To reach Ambendraña from Analalava, we took the pirogue up the branch of the estuary that opens to the north after passing the "Great Royal Residence" (*Doany Be*). Crossing this waterway, bordered on both sides by mangrove swamps, we stopped at a pirogue mooring area that testified to a human presence. We hit the shore and trudged our way to firm ground with our feet sinking into the mud. A path traced by habitual footsteps led to the village surrounded by mango trees (fig. 3). As we emerged from the mango grove and the first houses made from wood and palm leaves took shape before us, we came across the two people dressed identically. They were the ampangataka (intercessors) of the spirits of the Descendants of Silver, or "of White" (Zafinifotsy), accompanied by one of these spirits called Fotsy (White). So explained Edmond, one of Dady Mariety's nephews who had accompanied me. It was a Friday, an "auspicious day" (*andro tsara*) for calling the royal spirits. In one of the village's huts, several of them had been summoned by the intercessor to give them the opportunity to enjoy drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes thanks to the bodies lent to them by the living. In



Figure 3. "A path traced by habitual footsteps led to the village surrounded by mango trees."

return, the latter enjoyed the generative power (hasiñy) and alcohol that these spirits distributed.

In the previous chapter, I described the path that led me to meet the first two intermediaries through whom I accessed the first pieces of information I gathered about the tromba andrano. Describing the search for this path provided a first impression of the hierarchy that governs the circulation of stories about royal ancestors and the power that this knowledge can confer. It was by following those first stories I collected that I arrived in Ambendraña, the village of origin of my informants' group, but also one of the main centers of the cult of these drowned spirits. By describing my arrival in this village, this chapter aims to show the various intermediaries of whom I had to ask directions to be able to stay in the village to continue my research. Through the description of my itinerary, I will sketch out the organization of local power through the main figures and places that embody the different forms of this power. This will offer a glimpse of the political system that the cult of the Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) fits into. We will start by following the ampangataka (intercessor, fig. 4) and the tromba named Fotsy.



Figure 4. The ampangataka of the drowned royal spirits

The *tromba* Descendants of Gold and the Intercessor of the *tromba* Descendants of Silver

After buying warm beers and cigarettes in one of the village's boutique huts, with our lambahoany loincloths around our waists, we entered the house where the tromba ceremony was taking place. We were greeted with a cloud of smoke and heat. The ampangataka was kneeling before two tromba spirits. One was Fotsy. Crouching with his feet flat on the ground, clutching his cane, he was chatting animatedly with some of the people present. The other tromba wore a red fez (a headdress of Middle Eastern and Muslim origin) and a European-style white button-up shirt. Immobile and silent, with his legs stretched out in front of him, he sat hieratically, like the tromba of Nosy Lava. He was in fact a Zafinimena tromba, a royal spirit of the Descendants of Gold, who came from Ambendraña and was related to those of Nosy Lava. The ampangataka was pouring rum into a glass. He took a sip, then poured another for one of the two tromba. When they saw us enter the house, they invited us to join them. The little hut was full of people sitting, smoking, and joking loudly. Under the curious gazes of the other people gathered and seated on the ground, we found a small space on the raffia floor to sit next to the tromba. Edmond presented the intercessor with my offerings for the tromba. The ampangataka presented them to the tromba, who responded by greeting me with a handshake. The Zafinimena tromba gave me two sips of water mixed with kaolin from a white plate like the one I had seen in Nosy Lava before pouring it over my head in two parts. Finally, he took a little kaolin paste from the plate with the tip of his index finger and drew the same straight line down my face, known as *tsintsôra*, that I had already received in Nosy Lava. With these gestures, I received the blessing of one of the local Zafinimena (Descendants of Gold) ancestors, while simultaneously being introduced for the first time to a gathering of the village's inhabitants.

Back at the intercessor's house, Edmond—who would become my new intermediary for my investigative itinerary—explained to him the reasons for my visit and my desire to settle in the village to carry out my research. After listening to him, the ampangataka turned to me and said: "*Zaho lalaña*" (I am the way). Using very basic Malagasy mixed with a few words of French, Edmond paraphrased the ampangataka's statement, explaining that the latter was indeed the intermediary of the village's tutelary tromba. "*Premier responsable*" (First in charge), he summarized in French. It was he who had the responsibility and the power to call the Zafinifotsy tromba, the spirits of the Descendants of Silver,

who were the "masters of the village" (*tompon-tanàna*). To settle in the village, therefore, I first had to go through him, as my two Analalava interlocutors had predicted. Accustomed to receiving "foreigners" (vahiny) who regularly passed through the village to present their requests to the tromba andrano or to thank them for a granted wish, he agreed to put me up. By the end of my first day in Ambendraña, I had thus received, more or less tacitly, the *way* from the intercessor of the Descendants of Silver tromba and from a Descendant of Gold tromba. The first two local authorities on my itinerary had opened their gates to me.

The Village Community President and the "Government of the Pale-Eyed People"

The next morning, a meeting of the village's notables, or *olobe* (great people), was scheduled with the *prezida fokontany*, the "president" or head of the "village community." In light of this opportunity, Edmond suggested I follow the intercessor to introduce myself to the official authority before paying "homage" (*mikoezy*) to those representatives of the local royalty whom I had not yet met. Leaving the village to the north, following a path through the mango trees, the ampangataka, Edmond, and I came to a crossroads in front of the stone house of the village community chief. Along with the semiabandoned school nearby, this house was one of the only structures around built in stone, like the first colonial buildings introduced in the region (see fig. 5). Sheltered in the shade of a large mango tree, we found the fokontany president seated on a large, uprooted tree trunk resting on the ground. To his left sat his wife and the "sovereign" (*ampanjakabe*) of Ambendraña. Facing them and seated on the ground was a group of about ten elderly men and women from the village. Already made aware of my presence by the villagers, the fokontany president invited me to sit on his right. Edmond and the ampangataka joined the group of villagers seated on the ground. "My name is André Masiro," the fokontany president told me, introducing himself in French. With reverence, the ampangataka approached the fokontany president to explain my situation. After listening to him, the fokontany president addressed the villagers and in a strong, slightly authoritarian tone enjoined them—this time in Malagasy—to help me in my research and to welcome me among them. Then, switching back to French, he asked me to send him my book when it was finished and added, in a slightly joking tone, to bring him a present the next time I came to visit.



Figure 5. Map of Ambendraña village

On the way back to the village, Edmond explained in a tone of contempt and resentment that the fokontany president was not from the region. He was Tsimihety, so he was a vahiny (foreigner), even though

he had grown up in Analalava. His family tomb—an indication of his ancestors' place of origin—was in Befandriana, on the Tsimihety plateau of the interior.[1] He was the son of a former mayor of Analalava who had held office during the French colonial period, which began in 1896. When the country achieved independence (1960), André Masiro's father had bought back a lot of land from the former colonists, including several hectares of rice fields in Ambendraña. According to what Edmond told me, Masiro's father had also taken the opportunity to increase his holdings by confiscating land from the nobles (ampanjaka) of Ambendraña. The villagers subsequently obtained the exclusive right to farm the land in exchange for a share of their harvest. Struck by the powerful "curse" (*tiñy*) of the nobles, the father of the current fokontany president died shortly afterward. The current president was also often ill, Edmond added, because of his father's misdeeds. The same went for his wife, who was of Merina origin, as she belonged to an ancestral group (karazaña) whose presence is forbidden in Ambendraña. It was for all these reasons, Edmond concluded, that they lived outside the village.

From his father, André Masiro inherited the position of local representative of the postcolonial state and former colonial domains. He was therefore perceived as an outside authority—as the location of his residence suggested—and somebody to be feared, as the ampangataka's deference to him indicated. He was in fact the delegate of the *fanjakanan'ny garamaso*, the "government of the pale-eyed people," as state institutions are sometimes called by the servants of the Sakalava kingship, in reference to the former French colonists. According to one of the royal servants I met in Analalava, this government of pale-eyed people is opposed to the "government of the one who reigns" (*fanjakanan'ny manjaka*)—that is, local kingship. This opposition, inherited from the colonial period, was still significant for the subjects of Sakalava kingship. This was especially true in rural contexts, where the Malagasy republican state was perceived as a foreign and coercive institution, in continuity with the French colonial administration and, before that, with the occupation from 1824 to 1896 by the Merina, the rival monarchy from the central highlands. The continuity between local administrative power and that of the colonial state was also marked, from the point of view of

1. As we shall see, an individual's place of origin is where his or her ancestors are buried, and where he or she will be buried. By burying one's ancestors on the land one cultivates, an individual becomes "master of the land" (*tompon-tany*). On this subject, see Maurice Bloch (1971).

the inhabitants of Ambendraña, by the sociopolitical or ancestral groups to which its representatives, André Masiro and his wife, belonged.

During the colonial period, in fact, the Tsimihety and especially the Merina were employed in this region by the colonial administration as foreign intermediaries between the vazaha (Europeans) and the Sakalava population. As Feeley-Harnik notes, the strategy of using foreign intermediaries with the local population had already been employed by kingship "to estrange Malagasy from one another" (1991a: 6). The spatial configuration of the participants in the meeting with the fokontany president therefore suggested an image of power as it was constructed during French colonization, and one in which I too was most likely an unwitting participant. On one side, seated on a tree trunk, were the two principal authorities: one representing the government of the pale-eyed people, the other embodying local royalty.[2] Both were seated next to a European, most often considered locally as a tourist or businessman, in both cases heir to the former colonists.[3] On the other side, however, the village "notables" (*olobe*), including the ampangataka, the intercessor of the drowned Zafinifotsy nobles, were seated on the ground. According to this configuration, the ampangataka of the silver spirits, although indicated to me as the first official from whom to request access to the village, did not represent a political authority recognized by the national government, unlike the ruler of gold, who sat next to the head of the village community.

Thus, as I sought these access routes to begin my research in Ambendraña, a double division of local power presented itself before me: one opposing state government and local monarchy, the other, within the latter, opposing the power of the living Zafinimena (Descendant of Gold) ruler and that of the drowned noble Zafinifotsy (Descendant of Silver) (see fig. 6).

At the first level of this separation, the two forms of government (*fanjakana*) have in common the fact that they have foreign origins. As was demonstrated by the Nosy Lava tromba's display of Western

2. With the exception of the Merina kingship (abolished in 1896), during French colonization the other representatives of the Malagasy kingships were kept in place by the colonial administration to administer and govern locally, as shown by the case of Queen Soazara's father, known as "le Gouverneur."
3. Despite my Italian origins (karazaña), which are distinct from those of the colonists.

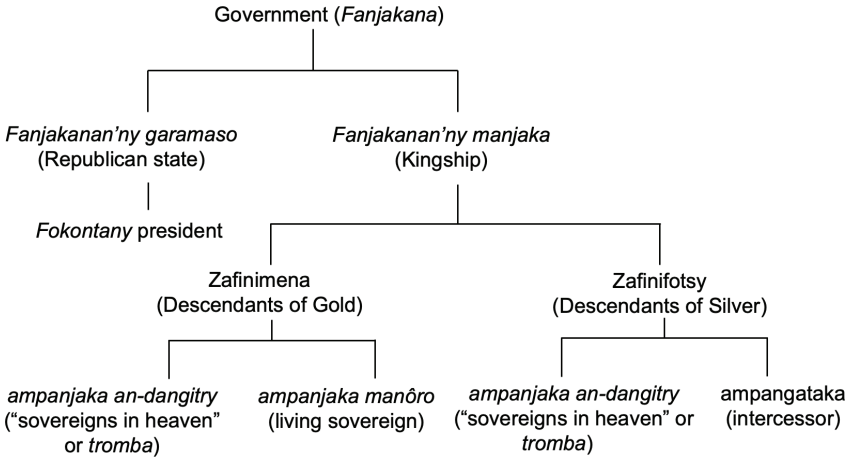


Figure 6. Division of local governments (*fanjakana*)

accessories, foreign status and the possession of the power to govern are intimately linked in Madagascar. Nevertheless, between these two foreign governments there is a difference in degree, as the sovereigns (*ampanjakabe*) are foreigners from within. Some governments are more foreign than others. In the rural context of Ambendraña, the Malagasy state, as the most recently established government, is in fact more foreign than other, older forms of power. These include, of course, Sakalava kingship, two of whose representatives I had yet to meet: the living ruler of gold and the drowned Descendants of Silver. First, I will describe the meeting ceremony with the tromba of the drowned Descendants of Silver.

The *tromba* Descendants of Silver

The ampangataka sat cross-legged in his house facing east—the direction of the ancestors. He arranged the objects for the ceremony on a small mat, in one corner of which meticulously folded white garments waited to be worn by the royal spirits. He took the white sahany plate in which were arranged silver coins depicting Hercules flanked by two allegorical figures: together, this trio was known as the "standing people" (*tsangan'olo*), as the Sakalava synecdochically call these ritual coins.[4]

4. Based on original five- or ten-franc coins produced between the end of the eighteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century, copies of these coins are made today by jewelers of Indian origin and sold in

Having doused the coins with water, the ampangataka then mixed them with kaolin, the white earth that materializes the beneficial forces of the royal ancestors. He added fresh water and gently shook the plate to dissolve some of the kaolin. Next, he placed some embers on an earthenware bowl, on top of which he added fragrant *mandrofo* (*Hymenaea verrucosa*) seeds as incense (*emboko*). As soon as the smoke rose, he crouched down and, joining his hands in front of him with his palms open toward the sky, pronounced the invocation. He first addressed the "God above" (*Zañahary añabo*), then the "ancestors of the kingdom" (*razañ'ny fanjakana*), and finally the "sacred/generative places" (*tany masiñy*). The invocation was then drowned out by the singing of the women behind him and the accompanying "clapping of hands" (*rombo*). Several long black wooden canes (called *mampingo* or *kobay*) leaned, inert, against the eastern facade of the house to the left of the altar-mat.[5] Suddenly a hand grasped one of them: the first tromba had arrived.

This tromba andrano ceremony had been organized in the intercessor's "big house" (*tranobe*) on the Sunday evening after my arrival. On his instructions, I had bought two liters of rum for the occasion. Having seized the body of a middle-aged woman, the first tromba to arrive dressed in white and, grabbing his cane, took a bowl filled with water and drank two gulps, which he immediately spat out on the floor. He poured the remaining water over his head and face, producing a small waterfall that fell over his shoulders and onto the matting on the floor. Finally, he washed his cane and, dripping wet as if he had just emerged from the sea in which he had drowned, sat down again facing east. The woman who had helped him dress gave him some tobacco to chew. The tromba put it in his mouth and then turned to us and offered his hand to everyone in greeting. He exchanged the first words with the ampangataka and the two of them continued to converse in hushed voices. Meanwhile, another tromba andrano arrived in the body of another woman. Seated next to each other, the two tromba in white discussed with the ampangataka who, once the discussion was over, called me over to them. He asked for some money, which he placed on the white plate. He presented the plate and the two bottles of rum to the two tromba. One of the Zafinifotsy tromba took the plate and, facing east, uttered his invocation in a low

various Malagasy towns. It is from them that mediums and others obtain their supplies.

5. *Mampingo* is from the Swahili *mpingo*, "ebony wood" (Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 92).

voice. Finally, he gave me two sips of water from the plate and poured a little water over my head twice. He drew a straight tsintsôra line on my face with the kaolin and gave me a piece of it. I could dissolve it in water myself and drink it on good days to ask the royal ancestors for good things, the ampangataka explained. When I returned to my seat, the tromba and the ampangataka split the money I had brought among themselves, while the assistants around them distributed the rum to the other members of the ceremony. The singing, accompanied by the clapping of hands, began again. With this exchange, I received permission to stay from the tromba andrano, the masters of the village. All that remained was to obtain the approval of the *ampanjakabe Zafinimena*, the "great prince Descendant of Gold" who ruled the village.

The Sovereign Descendant of Gold

I met the ruler of Ambendraña several weeks after my arrival in the village. During this meeting, the ruler admitted to Edmond that he had been waiting for me for a long time. He had even sent for me once, without receiving a reply. I, meanwhile, had been waiting for my intermediaries, in particular the ampangataka, to give me permission to meet him. "Sabotage," Edmond commented in French as we left the house where we had met the sovereign. He explained that the ampangataka had not informed the sovereign of my intention to meet him and, on the contrary, when he had received the news that the sovereign was looking for me, he had not informed me. "Jealous!" my traveling companion added, using one of the few French words he knew. According to Edmond's interpretation and based on the tensions I later discovered in the village, the ampangataka of the Zafinifotsy spirits, out of rivalry with and jealousy of the Zafinimena sovereign, would have preferred that I not meet the latter, lest I leave the ampangataka's house to go and live with the sovereign. Indeed, it was at my own expense that I came to understand the extent to which my presence in a place could be a source of tension and jealousy, particularly between those who could have benefited economically from my presence and those who, on the contrary, felt deprived of it. In a postcolonial context of highly unequal wealth distribution, "obtaining" (*mahazo*) a vazaha—as boss, visitor, or lover—offered a real possibility of gain. As such possibilities were rare, this search for opportunity exacerbated an attitude of distrust and jealousy that is also at the root of most acts and accusations of "witchcraft" (*voriky*). My presence

in Ambendraña had therefore brought to the surface latent tensions and rivalries between these two village authorities.

Lying on his bed, the sovereign received us with a smug air. As keeping someone waiting is one way of demonstrating hierarchical superiority, he welcomed us into his ordinary residence only after making us wait outside for ten minutes. Another member of the royal family invited us in and seated us on plastic chairs set up next to the bed in the little one-room hut. Sitting on one of these chairs facing us, this nobleman asked me to remove my glasses (as I had been requested to do when I had been in front of the tromba). Finally, he introduced us to the sovereign. As the royal word is always mediated, in this new communicative context, he acted as intercessor between us and the sovereign. Following this introduction, the sovereign raised himself on one elbow and, without looking at me, began to chat with Edmond. At the end of their conversation, which cleared up any misunderstanding about the delay in our meeting, the sovereign informed him that I was welcome in the village and invited me to join him the next morning in the "royal house" (zomba) where the ceremonies were held. Here I could "pay homage" (*mikoezy*) to the living sovereign and his ancestors and receive his blessing in return.

The royal house was located to the northeast of the village, at one of its highest points.[6] It stood in an open space amidst houses inhabited by other nobles and in front of the Zafinimena toñy, the altar-enclosure dedicated to the ancestor of the Descendants of Gold. When we arrived at the appointed time, the sovereign was absent, having left the village on an errand. If keeping someone waiting, especially a European, is a sign of authority, so too is the possibility of missing or refusing an appointment. Sitting at the front door, the same nobleman who had acted as intercessor the day before informed us of the sovereign's setback and welcomed us into the royal house. Indeed, among Ambendraña's nobles, anyone can take the sovereign's place to celebrate the *koezy*, the ritual greeting to the sovereign and his ancestors. "*Reo jiaby tompony*" (They are all masters [of the invocation]), the ampangataka would concisely explain to us afterward. Access to the royal house, as well as to other *masiñy* (sacred, charged with generative power) places, also requires the

6. In the spatial configuration of the village, the farther north you go, the higher up the hill you climb; this is why north also coincides with high and south with low. This geographical coincidence is in line with the Sakalava hierarchy of positional values, according to which north and up are more noble than south and down.

observance of several prohibitions (fady). Since the royal house, as well as the royal tomb on Nosy Lava, is the center of a sacred space conceived as concentric, the number of fady to be respected is greater here and implies that they must be observed with greater rigor. Before heading to the royal house, we took off our underwear under the lambahoany loincloth we were wearing. I took off my glasses again. Furthermore, to cross the threshold of the house, we had to put our right foot down first, "right" (*ankahery*) being the appropriate direction for any movement connected with royalty.[7] The sovereign's substitute preceded us and sat down in front of the house's eastern facade. Cross-legged, we sat behind him. We greeted him ("*Koezy!*") and Edmond handed him my money offering. The noble placed it next to the offering plate, lit incense, and finally uttered the invocation (hataka). After invoking the ancient rulers of Ambendraña, listed in genealogical order, he took the sahany plate, drank two sips of water, and then gave us some to drink. Finally, using the kaolin contained in the plate, he made the vertical sign on our faces. We thus received the blessing and the path of the Zafinimena ancestors through this nobleman.

Emerging from this first ceremonial greeting of a living Sakalava sovereign (although in this case it was his substitute), what surprised me most was the affinity between the ritual role of the sovereign and that of the intercessor (ampangataka) or of a tromba. In chapter 1, I talked about the fact that, in the hierarchical path leading to ancestral blessing and generative power (hasiñy), there are many thresholds to cross, with as many intermediaries, living or dead. The ceremony of greeting the Zafinimena ruler of Ambendraña showed me concretely that even the person at the top of the social hierarchy of the living is only one of these intermediaries, an intercessor between the living and the royal ancestors, in the same way as the ampangataka. This intuition is also corroborated by the fact that the Zafinimena ruler of Ambendraña is called the "master of the [joined] palms" (*tompon'ny lamban-tanana*, see fig. 8), a metonymic expression referring to the master of invocation (hataka). The same periphrasis also defines the ampangataka. What is more, this role of intercessor with the royal ancestors in Ambendraña can be assumed by any other Zafinimena nobleman in the village, which

7. *Ankahery,* "right," is a term composed of the adverb of place *any,* "toward," and the noun *hahery* or *hery*, "strength." This translates, literally, as "toward strength." It is opposed to the left, *ankavia*, formed by *any* (toward) and *havia,* also meaning "which is inferior."

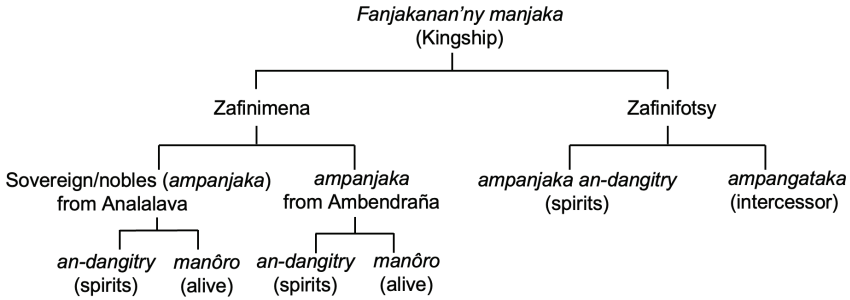


Figure 7. Divisions within the royal power

partly contradicts the uniqueness that the Sakalava normally attribute to their sovereign. As we shall see in the following chapters, this relative interchangeability is nevertheless a prerogative of the Ambendraña, and not of the Analalava, dynastic branch. Among the nobles (ampanjaka) of the Analalava branch, the queen or—as she is more often called in French—the "*princesse*" Soazara is the only person authorized to exercise her functions during her lifetime. Indeed, her uniqueness is constantly evoked in different ways. Although Soazara is also an intermediary between the living and her ancestors, unlike the ruler of Ambendraña she cannot intercede directly with them. Her master of invocation is in fact the ruler of Ambendraña. Later we will see the reasons for and implications of these prerogatives, which distinguish these two dynastic branches (fig. 7).

For the moment we will return to the local authorities of Ambendraña and the itinerary that gave me my first impression of their relations. To recapitulate, on my way to request permission to stay in the village, I was confronted with five figures, each embodying an aspect of local power—or, to use a physical metaphor, each constituting a component of a local diffraction of "power" (*fahefaña*): (1) the fokontany president, embodying the administrative authority of the central state; (2) the intercessor (ampangataka) of the spirits of the Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy); (3) the spirits of the Descendants of Silver incarnated in the bodies of their mediums; (4) the sovereign Descendant of Gold (Zafinimena) ruling the village, with his relatives acting as potential substitutes; and (5) finally, the spirits of the Descendants of Gold, former rulers of Ambendraña. Apart from the fokontany president, who was an external authority and only intervened in exceptional cases of local order or in tax collection, ordinary power in the village was essentially shared between representatives of the two royal groups of Descendants of Gold and Silver, whether



Figure 8. *Lamban-tanana* ([joined] palms of hands)

nobles or their servants. The various spirits of these two royal groups and their mediums are gathered around the two intercessors, or "masters of the [joined] palms" (*tompon'ny lamban-tanana*): the intercessor of the drowned Descendants of Silver, on the one hand, and the sovereign of the Descendants of Gold, on the other. The question that arises from this first impression of the configuration of local royal power is: What are the relationships between these two royal branches that structure not only the social organization of the village, but also its spatial distribution and ritual activity? This question is indeed at the heart of my investigation into the cult of the tromba andrano. The answer to this question will give meaning to this cult dedicated to the spirits of the Descendants of Silver—the Zafinifotsy tromba—practiced in the heart of the Analalava kingdom of the Descendants of Gold. To begin answering this question, let us start with the last part of it, that is, how this relationship structures the spatial configuration and ceremonial life of the village.

Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy

On one of the first days after my arrival, the ampangataka offered to show me around the village (see fig. 9) and tell me about the prohibitions that had to be respected. According to the reputation the village had among my Analalava interlocutors, a reputation that aroused their fear,

Ambendraña indeed had "many prohibitions" (fady *be*). As we saw with the royal cemetery at Nosy Lava and the royal house at Ambendraña, the "sacredness," or "generative power" (hasiñy) of the site is proportional to the number of prohibitions to be respected—and vice versa. To be more precise, the power of these sites is constituted by the prohibitions associated with them. We will come back to this at the end of the chapter.

First, on our way to wash up at the river south of the village, as we entered the corridor of mango trees that surround the path, the ampangataka pointed out a large mango tree surrounded by a fence made of wooden trunks and thin branches, taking great care not to point it out to me with his finger.[8] "This is Bevaoko's toñy," he said. It was the Zafinifotsy tromba tree that protected the village. It was therefore forbidden to carry out any polluting action around this place "charged with generative power" (*masiñy*). On the way back up to the north of the village, he showed me a similar fence surrounding a large stone. "This is the toñy of the Zafinimena," he explained, "you can't walk with shoes on the earth that surrounds it." He went on to tell me that the noble Descendants of Gold lived in this part of the village, which was therefore called doany, as it was the residence of the royal family and their servants. The "servants of the spirits of Descendants of Silver" (*olon'ny Zafinifotsy*) lived in the southern part of the village. These included members of the Bevôñy descent group, to which the ampangataka belonged, and their allies in the Sandrakôro group. However, he added, many Bevôñy married Zafinimena nobles, so that many members of this group lived in the north of the village. However, while alliance strategies attenuated the division between descent and status groups in the village, the configuration of the places of worship dedicated to the two royal groups with which they identified polarized this bipartition. The Zafinifotsy toñy is in the far south, outside the inhabited center, while the Zafinimena toñy is located, as we have just seen, in the very north, in front of the royal house, surrounded by the houses of the Zafinimena nobles. Only in time would I discover that, within this dualistic division based on these two royal ancestries of gold and silver, the composition of the descent groups was far more heterogeneous. Thus, a member of the Bevôñy group whom I met later would explain to me, drawing lines on the sand to give me a concrete image of the boundaries, that, according to a different criterion

8. It is fady (forbidden) to indicate a "sacred" (*masiñy*) place or person with the finger. Often, in such cases, if it is necessary to point, people do so with the index finger bent.



Figure 9. View of Ambendraña from the top of a hill to the west of the village

than that of royal groups, the village was divided mainly into three parts: the top, occupied by the noble Descendants of Gold; the middle, inhabited by members of the Sandrakôro group; and the bottom, by the Bevôñy. As we shall see, even this tripartition does not account for the heterogeneity of the descent groups present in the village and their intermingling in space. However, these three groups did play an important role in Ambendraña's history and social organization.

Tantara*: Histories*

The division of the village between the noble Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) and the servants of the drowned noble Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) is also presented by the history (tantara) of the village's formation that the intercessor told me one day. It was an auspicious day in August 2016. Out of sight of the other villagers, sitting in the shade of the mango trees that line the river where we had just washed, the ampangataka had agreed to tell me the story of the village's foundation. After accepting the money and drinking the rum I had offered him, he told me that Ambendraña was formed when the Zafinifotsy nobles committed suicide

at sea, and that the first inhabitants of the region, the masters of the land, had been the Bevôñy. Recounting the events Faustine and Dady Mariety had spoken to me about, he reported that the ancestors of his group, having outlived their fellow travelers, the Descendants of Silver, were the first to settle on the land where the village stands today. Once these Bevôñy ancestors had settled, Bevaoko, the father of the drowned Zafinifotsy, "inhabiting" (*mianjaka*) the body of a person, announced to them:

> You will "prepare/regenerate" [*manamboatra*] us [from death]. You didn't abandon us, so we won't abandon you. Only you can "surround/protect" [*mamalavala*] us. It is you who can erase our "grief/sadness" [*alahelo*], so you will be our intercessors [ampangataka].

"This is the origin of the office of ampangataka," concluded the intercessor, "an office entrusted by Bevaoko to the Bevôñy and handed down among them from generation to generation, right up to the present day." So, by recounting the drowning of the Zafinifotsy, the ampangataka legitimized his role to me just as Faustine had done before him.

According to the rest of the narrative, it was only later that the Zafinimena nobles arrived in the village. Crossing into the domain (anjara) of another group's traditions,[9] the ampangataka told me the history of the arrival of the noble Descendants of Gold. According to his narrative, twelve Zafinimena nobles from Toliameva, present-day Tulear and birthplace of the founders of the first Sakalava kingdoms, had left the south of the island to flee enemies following the advice of a "diviner-healer" (*moasy*). These enemies were also referred to by the ampangataka as *marofelaña*, a term often used to refer to the Merina in the region.[10] After many battles, only three of these nobles arrived in the Ambendraña region, the others having been captured by the enemies. They were an old lady accompanied by her two children, a little boy and a little girl. Still in the form of a tromba, Bevaoko warned the Bevôñy of the presence of these nobles and summoned them to him. The old woman told him of the misfortunes they had suffered during the long flight. "If I could find a little prosperity again, I'd be delighted," she concluded

9. Despite the prohibition on telling or sometimes even knowing the stories of other groups, during my fieldwork, people—depending on their status, the context or the moment—often circumvented this rule.
10. Lit. "[those] who have many shells (*felaña*)," shells worn by warriors as protective amulets (Renel 1919: 242).

to Bevaoko, who replied: "Prosper [*manjary*] here then!" According to the ampangataka's narrative, this was the origin of the "agreement" (*fankiaña*) between Bevaoko, the Zafinifotsy tromba, and the Zafinimena living nobles. "And they really prospered," concluded the ampangataka at last, his tone slightly resentful and fatalistic. "They almost wore us out/finished us off" (*Zahay lanin-dreo*), he added. Indeed, at the expense of the Bevôñy, the Zafinimena nobles had become very numerous, hence the name of their lineage, Marotsiraty, "The many who are not ugly/evil."

In the final chapter, we will return to this process of Bevôñy exhaustion and to the relationships between these Zafinifotsy servants and the Zafinimena nobles. What is important for the moment is the justification of the dualistic composition of the village. The Bevôñy were the first to settle in the region, under the aegis of Bevaoko, father of the drowned Zafinifotsy ancestors. Once again with Bevaoko's approval, the Zafinimena nobles were then allowed to settle and prosper alongside them. It was Bevaoko's tromba, the "master of the village" (*tompon-tanàna*), who guaranteed peaceful cohabitation between these two groups of refugees. Indeed, this cohabitation was guaranteed by an agreement, a pact, sealed through the evocation of an ancestral authority, between two descent groups—one already present on the land and the other newly arrived—giving the latter access to the land, the sea, and their fruits. As we shall see later, this kind of partnership between two groups through their ancestors represents a central institution in Sakalava social organization and transformation. Thus, it was through this partnership that Ambendraña's bipartite division was established. Moreover, according to the ampangataka, Bevaoko commanded the new arrivals to "go further up because down below, the Bevôñy are already well established." This dualistic division of the village and its current configuration would therefore reflect the order of arrival of the two main groups, the nonnoble masters of the land to the south, and the foreign (vahiny) nobles to the north (fig. 10). Consequently, the contrastive relationship between the "noble Descendants of Gold" (ampanjaka Zafinimena) and the "servants of the Descendants of Silver" (*olon'ny Zafinifotsy*) that structures the village encompasses and eclipses (Strathern 1988: 155) two other oppositions: that between foreigners and landowners, on the one hand, and between nobles and nonnobles, on the other.

This bipartite division is reflected in the two main places of worship around which the ritual life of the village is concentrated: the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy toñy. It is before these toñy that, during public ceremonies, the two intercessors (the Zafinifotsy ampangataka or

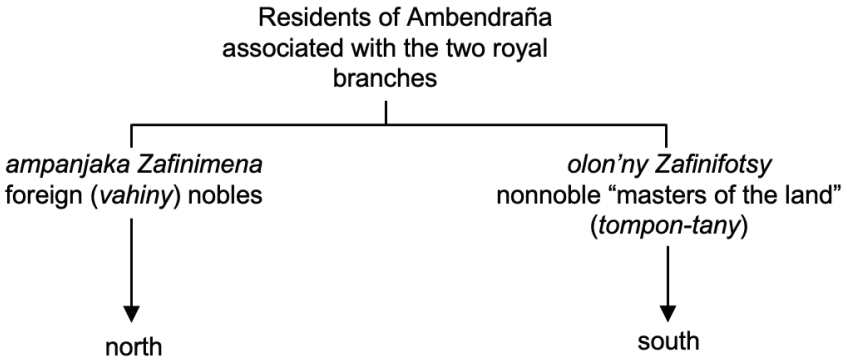


Figure 10. Spatial configuration of the Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy within the village of Ambendraña

the Zafinimena sovereign) invoke the royal ancestors, who come down to incarnate in the bodies of the mediums. And since the power of the sovereign and the ampangataka derives from the royal ancestors, it is important to take a moment to look at the two main entities that embody these royal ancestors in the village: the toñy and the "medium" (saha). Indeed, it is from the privilege of opening the gates of the toñy and parting the lips of the medium that the power of the sovereign and the ampangataka derives. To understand this power, let us start by describing the toñy.

Toñy: *"The place where invocations are made"*

Past the southern part of the village, along a corridor of mango trees leading down to the river, stands a large, isolated green mango tree surrounded by a palisade of shrubs, trunks, and thin branches. A few lemur calls and the bellowing of zebus replace human voices and the continuous sound of village radios. In this quiet, peaceful spot, not far from the estuary shore, stands the mango tree that constitutes Bevaoko's toñy. The word toñy, in Malagasy, can mean "calm, quiet," but it also indicates a type of "charm" or "remedy" (*ody*) made to protect a village, a territory, and herds of zebus. It is with this word that the Sakalava designate stones or trees dedicated to a village protector spirit, whether human (royal or commoner ancestor) or nonhuman (*tsiñy*, or "bush spirits").[11] In front

11. The word *tsiñy* probably derives from the Muslim term *djinn* (Alain 2015). These entities were defined by some of my interlocutors as *hianan-draha* or *bibin-draha anaty ala*: "kind of spirits or animals living in the forest."

of the royal house to the very north of the village, on a wide esplanade above the rise, another palisade also made of shrubs, trunks, and branches surrounds a large stone. This is the toñy of Ndramañotroñarivo, "The princess surrounded by a thousand [people]," which is the posthumous name (*fitahiaña*) of the old lady in the ampangataka's narrative, the ancestor of Ambendraña's Descendants of Gold.

In the case of a toñy dedicated to a commoner ancestor, the latter is often the founder of the village, the one who first "dug the earth" (*mamaky tany*) to cultivate it. As Feeley-Harnik attests (1991a: 160), after burying the ancestor's body outside the village, in the soil that from then on would be "ancestral land" (*tanin-drazaña*), their descendants, who had then become masters of the land, found their toñy in the inhabited area. In the case of a forest spirit or a royal ancestor, on the other hand, it is often the spirits themselves, inhabiting the bodies of the living (often women), who ask villagers to found their toñy (1991a: 160). In the specific case of royal ancestors, although their graves are located far from inhabited centers, it is their numerous mediums who multiply the toñy dedicated to them in the various villages. When I asked the intercessor who had "founded" (*manoriny*) Bevaoko's toñy in Ambendraña, he replied that it was Bevaoko himself. Later, as I learned to put the question more explicitly ("Bevaoko in his own lifetime, or Bevaoko in the form of a tromba?"), I discovered that he was referring to Bevaoko's tromba inhabiting the body of a living person. As for the Zafinimena toñy in Ambendraña, the ampangataka told me that it was founded by the will of the old Zafinimena noblewoman during her lifetime, but under the directives of Bevaoko's tromba, the master of the village. After the death of this princess, her toñy became one of the manifestations of her presence in the village.

As Feeley-Harnik notes, the toñy, like relics or tromba, are the mobile, visible form of the royal ancestors buried in their tomb (1991a: 95–96). Borrowing Carlo Severi's words, "more than merely represent[ing] spirits or supernatural beings … [the toñy] *replace* the entity they represent" (2018: 124). Thus, more than the iconic representation of the spirit, toñy are their indexical designation (2018: 124).[12] Given that a royal ancestor

12. In making this distinction between icon and index, following Severi (2018), I refer to Charles S. Peirce's definition of the index (1955: 107): "A sign, or representation, which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it, nor because it is associated with general characters which that object happens to possess, as because it is in

may possess several mediums, the toñy dedicated to him may be founded by their mediums in several places. This is why the toñy, as well as the mediums, allow the royal ancestor to proliferate and spread throughout the inhabited space. Their tomb, on the other hand, unique and nonreproducible, is located in distant heights, enclosing the ancestor's corpse forever.

For royal ancestors to return in these visible forms, whether as toñy or as tromba spirits, expert rituals are required. Whereas bringing the spirit of a royal ancestor down into the body of a medium requires an intercessor, an intermediary between the living and the dead, "raising" (*manangana*) the toñy requires a diviner-healer (moasy or *ombiasy*), a connoisseur of the stars and of earthly beings (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 160).[13] Building a toñy not only makes the ancestor visible, but also brings them to life and makes them "generative," or—to use an old-fashioned term—"sacred" (*masiñy*). In fact, an "upright position" (*tsangana*) is associated in general with being alive and effective (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 184), just as a "leaning position" (*ɦilana*) is associated with death. "*Niɦilana ny ampanjaka*" (The sovereign leaned) is the euphemistic expression used to announce the death of a sovereign or a member of their family. This association between the upright position, the condition of being "alive" (*veloño*), and generative power (hasiñy) can be seen in the three standing figures depicted on silver coins known as tsangan'olo: the standing people. As we have seen, these coins are used to invoke ancestors and their hasiñy. Moreover, the hasiñy of the royal ancestors is evoked not only by the image printed on the face of the tsangan'olo coin, but also by the silver of which it is made. As Lambek (2001: 742) suggests, this may be due in particular to the analogy between the material properties of the "white metal" (*volafotsy*) and those of the ancestors' bones in which this power is kept, such as "clarity" (*zava*), "endurance" (*teza*), "hardness"

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dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand."

13. Rabedimy (1983: 177–78), studying the Sakalava traditions of the Menabe, distinguishes two types of toñy: *toñy-tanà* (toñy of the village), and *toñy-tany* (toñy of the territory) or *toñin'ny ampanjaka* (toñy of the sovereign). He attributes the founding of both to an *ombiasa* (diviner-healer). The first type of toñy is created on the initiative of the village founder and is found in all villages. The second is founded under the authority of the sovereign and marks the territory, encompassing several villages, over which the latter exercises their authority.

(*mafy*), among other qualifiers. This is why, as the ampangataka explained to me, to build a toñy, among other ritual actions such as sacrificing a zebu, one or more silver coins are buried at its feet—as a replacement for the ancestors' bones.

It is through a whole series of ritual actions, prescribed or carried out by a diviner-healer, the core of which is the sacrifice of a zebu or a person, that the toñy is indeed founded and made effective, generative.[14] However, the prerequisite for its foundation is the selection of a good location, of, as the ampangataka explained, "clean land" (*tany madio*). This is why, in order to preserve this clean and pure place against any kind of moral or physical pollution, these places are often protected by a "fence" (*vala*, fig. 11). According to the ampangataka's testimony, the choice of tree species designating the ancestor is not important,[15] and a stone can just as well be used in the place of a tree. What counts for the toñy to become effective and generative are the species of shrubs and plants that are to be found around it. These are necessarily of the *matambeloño* and hasiñy species (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 184). *Matambeloño*—or *matambelona*—literally means "long-lived" or "able to come back to life" (in the variant *mahatambeloño*) and indicates, in the Sakalava dialect, a species of shrub (*Commiphora pervilleana*) found in the dry forests of western Madagascar and Mayotte. Unlike evergreen mango or tamarind trees, these shrubs remain leafless for most of the year—from March to November, which is essentially the dry season. During this period, photosynthesis is ensured by the green epidermis of their trunks, left naked of bark, which exfoliates in patches (Amann et al. 2011: 134). So, although these shrubs appear dead at first glance, the greenness of the visible parts of their trunks may reveal a still-active life. What is more, these shrubs, used to support the toñy's fence, reproduce from cuttings, meaning that new plants grow from isolated branches buried in the ground. All these characteristics may suggest that the matambeloño represents a plant metaphor for the paradoxical state of the royal ancestors: dead yet long-lived, able to come back to life, and capable of generating life from the

14. Concerning the royal toñy in the Menabe, Rabedimy (1983: 188) reports the sacrifice of two people, as well as a zebu and a goat.

15. Although mango and tamarind trees are favored in my survey area, other tree species are used in the composition of toñy, such as *tsitindry* (*Treculia africana*), which we will find in Andampy, or *mandresy* (*Ficus grevei*) and *ramy* (*Canarium madagascariense*), as reported by Charles Renel (1923: 121).

dry elements of their bodies. The hasiñy or *hasina*, on the other hand, is an evergreen plant of the *Dracaena angustifolia* species. As we have seen, its name refers to one of the fundamental concepts of Malagasy cosmology, linked to the force of production and reproduction of life, which justifies its semantic density. This is why it has been translated in different ways, such as sacred force, generative or growth power, efficiency, among other translations. As one medium explained to me, the leaves of this plant are used in possession rituals to make the water contained in the ceremonial plate effective and, in turn, to make the anger of the ancestors disappear. It is this "anger" or "sorrow" (*heloko*) that is at the root of many illnesses that afflict the living. In general, its leaves, like its bark, are used for a variety of therapeutic purposes linked to healing and prosperity.[16] So, if the matambeloño may represent an image of the material properties of the royal ancestors, we could say that the hasiñy plant is the vegetal manifestation of their generative power.

Through the curative and generative power of its components, as well as that conferred by the ancestors associated with it, the toñy is erected to protect the village and its inhabitants. This is why it is defined as a *fiaro-tanà*, a "protector of the village" (Rabedimy 1983: 177), or more generally as a "talisman" (Lombard 1988: 19). Like a relic, it is a type of *aody*, a "remedy" or "talisman" made by the diviner-healer. According to Sophie Goedefroit, the diviner-healers of the island's southwest insert a real aody into the tree chosen as a toñy (1998: 183). The toñy would therefore be both the metonymy of a talisman and one of its metaphorical variations. Drawing on Terence Turner's (1991) reflections on the play of tropes in ritual actions, and based on the examples I present in the following pages, I argue that this transformation of metonymic relations—based on contiguity—between the elements of reality reworked by ritual actions into metaphorical relations—grounded on their similarity—is indeed one of the essential effects sought by ritual actions and the artifacts they manipulate and produce[17]. It is through this process that the contingent relationships created by manipulation are transformed into necessary correspondences. Moreover, like any talisman, for the toñy to be effective, the associated prohibitions must be respected. According to Goedefroit's (1998: 185, my translation) account: "During the

16. On the different uses of this type of plant among the Tanala, see Beaujard (1988: 225).
17. I refer to the classic distinction between metonymy and metaphor made by Roman Jakobson (1956: 76).



Figure 11. A toñy dedicated to a royal ancestor in Mahajanga

foundation ceremony, the genies invoked give the nature of the acts and objects that will henceforth be forbidden on village territory." As we shall see, the toñy of Bevaoko and the other Zafinifotsy tromba performed this function not only in Ambendraña, but also in the surrounding villages: the Zafinifotsy "protect" (*mitramboño*)[18] the inhabitants of a village and institute the "local prohibitions" (*fadin-tany*) to be respected.

But the importance of the toñy is not limited to its protective function. "What does the name toñy mean? That which gives you joy, by asking for rain, good things, and which protects you from disease," was the definition given to me by one of the villagers. By synecdoche, the toñy is also called *kapilan-drazaña*, "plate of the ancestors," in reference to the white sahany plate used when calling the ancestors; or more generally *tany fangatahaña*, "the place where invocations are made." As defined by Jean-François Rabedimy (1983: 177) and Suzanne Chazan-Gillig (1991: 381), the toñy is an altar at which to invoke the ancestors to ask

18. In northwestern Madagascar, the term *trambo* or *tramboño* refers to the scolopendrium, a venomous insect. The term also refers to the locks of hair grown by children as an amulet to protect them from disease.

for their hasiñy, which brings fertility, prosperity, and protection. In Ambendraña, a wooden altar-table is located on the eastern side of Bevaoko's toñy fence. On the west side of the fence is a gate made of movable logs that can be raised or lowered to open or close the gate. This makes it so that the assembly of the living gathered to invoke the ancestors in front of this gate looks eastward, in the direction of the ancestors. Ultimately, the toñy represents the main gate used to communicate with the ancestors. Like the tromba, it is one of the channels through which the hasiñy of the royal ancestors is transmitted to the living. To open its gate—just as to part the lips of the tromba—the figure of the intercessor, the ampangataka, is indispensable. As master of invocation or "responsible" or "guardian of the gate" (*be* or *mpiambin'ny varavaraña*), the ampangataka is the intermediary in this fruitful exchange between the living and the royal ancestors. One of the particularities of Ambendraña was that, while for Zafinifotsy toñy and tromba it was the intercessor who played this role, for the Zafinimena toñy and tromba it was the sovereign Descendant of Gold who performed it, hence his epithet of master of invocation.

While opening and closing the gates is an individual prerogative, in order to preserve this communication between the living and the royal ancestors, it is necessary to collectively "take care" (*mikarakara*) of these places by cleaning them and periodically rebuilding the enclosures that surround them. The communication channel is therefore regularly restored. Throughout the dry season (from April or May to November), during which the villagers have finished their work in the rice fields and dedicate themselves to ritual or domestic tasks, this place becomes the center of ceremonies dedicated to the royal ancestors. Burying the ancestors, caring for the places that house them and the entities that represent them, cultivating the land in which they are buried, and raising the zebus that clear it were the main tasks of the inhabitants of Ambendraña and the surrounding rural area. Whether outside the villages (in the fields or around the graves) or in them (around the toñy and the tromba), during the rainy season or the dry season, the work would remain similar and complementary, which explains why both types of work are called by the same Malagasy term: *asa*. Their common goal is personal and collective prosperity and fulfillment. It is an analogy that Feeley-Harnik had in mind when she wrote:

> Royal tombs [and royal toñy], at least among the Southern Bemihisatra, are more like fenced gardens, in keeping with the image of royalty as a huge overarching mango tree. Burying in the tomb is

> like cultivating land from which ancestors will grow. The new goldsmiths of the "Grandchildren of Gold" [as well as silversmiths of the "Grandchildren of Silver"] are farmers. (1991a: 106)

To ensure that the "land of the ancestors" (*tanin-drazaña*) continues to bear fruit, it is necessary not only to cultivate this land, but also to take care of the royal ancestors who are buried there and who ensure its fertility. Whether buried underground or immersed in water, for the people of Ambendraña, caring for these royal ancestors, Descendants of Gold or Silver, means caring for the toñy and tromba that represent them. In conclusion, the toñy are both indexes of the presence of the royal ancestors and channels of communication with them. The same applies to the tromba and their mediums.

Having described this first type of communicative channel, let us move on to describe those other channels, those other intermediaries between the living and the ancestors: the mediums.

Saha*: "The mediums"*

The large stone to the north of the village dedicated to the noble Descendant of Gold and the mango tree to its south erected for the noble Descendant of Silver, Bevaoko, constitute the two poles around which the mediums or saha hosting the spirits of the members of the two royal branches gravitate. Surrounded by their descendants and servants, like the toñy by their enclosure, these tromba are periodically called upon to "descend" (*mijotso*) and inhabit the bodies of the saha in order to bless and grant the requests of the living. Although summoned daily (on good days) to villagers' homes, it is in fact before these toñy that the tromba and their followers gather collectively for the great ceremonies. These ceremonies are the *fanompoaña*, the "ritual services for the royal ancestors," or the *tsakafara*, the vows made by a person to the royal ancestors. Not only the spirits of the two ancestors the toñy represent, but also those of their descendants, are summoned before the gates of these two toñy. The tromba dressed in "white" (*fotsy*) gather in front of the mango tree to the south, those in "red" (*mena*) in front of the large stone to the north. The division of these places of worship thus reflects that of the royal spirits. Like the toñy in Ambendraña, the tromba are generally divided into Zafinimena, Descendants of Gold or Red, and Zafinifotsy, Descendants of Silver or White. This division has been emphasized by several anthropologists who have worked on the same royal spirits in

the northwestern regions of Boina or Ankaraña (Théodore 1987: 22; Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 89; Sharp 1993: 120; Walsh 1998: 212; Lambek 2002: 92; Berger 2016: 4). The dualistic opposition that can be found in the discourses of my interlocutors as well as in the spatial organization of Ambendraña is therefore not anecdotal, as the accounts of the village's foundation would like to present it. It reflects a structural opposition within Sakalava kingship that defines the different categories of royal spirits. The tromba express this opposition through their clothes, accessories, and gestures, as well as their tastes, prohibitions, and behaviors. It is these signs that define the tromba's character, in the theatrical sense of the term. Indeed, as Lambek (2002: 61) notes, "the central 'literary function' of Sakalava possession is character."

Wearing a long white Muslim-style shirt and a white lambahoany loincloth edged with colored stripes, tromba andrano, the Zafinifotsy drowned spirits, are aesthetically associated with Muslims (*silamo*) or with the dead. According to some of the people I spoke to, the white shirt evokes the *safo-drazaña*, the white sheet with which corpses are wrapped before burial. Their black cane made of "ebony wood" (*mampingo*), sometimes covered with silver at the top, is a symbol of power that harks back to the precolonial period (we also find them among the spirits of the first Zafinimena rulers).[19] At least for the Sakalava of the northwest, chewing tobacco and a predilection for local artisanal rum also associate the Zafinifotsy spirits with the precolonial chronotope. These accessories, dating back to ancient times, testify to their residential anteriority, as presented in accounts of the village's foundation. In contrast, the Zafinimena tromba of Ambendraña show Western elements in their clothing (the European-style button-up shirt), mixed with Arab elements (the red fez) typical of the Muslim nobles of the Mahajanga region, a region historically inhabited by Arab merchants.[20] It was in this region that the first Zafinimena rulers originated. However, they too, like all tromba,

19. The sovereigns Andriamisara (late seventeenth century), Andriamboeniarivo (before 1730), and Ndramarofaly (late eighteenth century), for example, wore a similar one. Other successive rulers either carried a staff made from *manjakabenitany* branches (*Baudouinia rouxevillei*), or wore or carried other signs of power (gold rings, for example) that sometimes replaced the cane.

20. The tromba called Ndraikindrazaña and Dadilahy Hosseny wear the red fez, for example. Both hail from the royal residence (doany) of Bezavo, in the Mahajanga region.

wear the lambahoany loincloth around their waist, preferably in red tones. They smoke industrial cigarettes and drink all kinds of alcohol and sweetened beverages. As we saw during my first encounter with these spirits in the village, while the Zafinifotsy tromba are usually mobile and often go to meet those present at ceremonies, the Zafinimena tromba remain still, seated with their legs stretched out looking authoritative. They may wear gold rings or bracelets, whereas for the Zafinifotsy all gold accessories are forbidden. The only jewelry some of them wear is silver bracelets.[21] Through these distinctive signs, these tromba refer to the name of the group to which they belong: "silver" (*volafotsy*) and "white" (*fotsy*) for the Zafinifotsy or Zafimbolafotsy, "gold" (*volamena*) and "red" (*mena)* for the Zafinimena or Zafimbolamena. Moreover, these ornamental elements also refer to different periods in the history of Sakalava kingship: those of the Zafinifotsy are situated in a precolonial historical context and are linked to Islamic groups, while those of the Zafinimena refer to a more recent royal power that is more open to foreign influences of various origins (Western and Arab, in particular). We shall see that these differences refer not only to different historical moments, but also to different status positions in the exercise of royal power.

Now, just as the toñy need to be cared for collectively, the tromba, on their arrival, need to be dressed by "assistants" (*mpañotroño*). The task of dressing the tromba is generally assigned to the Bevôñy, the people or servants of the Zafinifotsy. These royal ancestors are indeed collectively "prepared" or "restored" (*manamboatra*) by their servants. This is why the Bevôñy are generally defined as "those who prepare" (*ampanamboatra*) the Zafinifotsy tromba. Thus, caring for the ancestors involves not only cleaning and rebuilding the toñy, as well as the royal tomb, but also preparing the tromba by dressing and undressing them (Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 75). As Feeley-Harnik (1989a: 84) notes, "this process of wrapping and unwrapping the body are directly associated with speech and silence." It is by dressing up that these tromba resume speech, emerging from the silence imposed by death. Borrowing or channeling the speech of royal ancestors therefore implies borrowing or reproducing their clothes, accessories, and gestures. Nevertheless, this action of dressing the tromba is only the visible part of an initiatory, progressive, and cumulative process of preparation of the incarnated ancestor. This construction is achieved

21. Some tromba andrano wear bracelets called *tariky*, round and thin, with pendants (*felikin'ny tariky*). The term *tariky* refers to the lineage, but also to creeping plants that recall the shape of the bracelet.

through a complex combination of hidden narratives and dramatized stories, selective forgetting and creative memory, which begins with the death of the sovereign and culminates in his return in the form of tromba. To understand this link between dress and language, image and speech, we will briefly return to the ritual stages of the incarnation of the royal ancestor in the form of a tromba. This will enable us to better grasp, on the one hand, the entangled relationships that exist between servants, tromba, and medium and, on the other, the differences between Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena tromba.

As possession is an encounter between two beings—the spirit and its host—it is constituted by the convergence of two complementary chains of ritual operations. Since "death by itself does not confer ancestorhood" (Fortes 1976: 7), the first series of ritual actions is aimed at creating the royal ancestor. The second is designed to prepare the "medium" (saha) to establish a peaceful and fruitful relationship with the spirit. As well as marking the beginning of the first process, the death of the sovereign also represents the meeting point between the tromba and its living host, between the world of the ancestors and the world of the living. It is the staging of the sovereign's death that announces the arrival of their spirit in the medium's body. In the case of the Zafinimena tromba, mediums prepare to receive these spirits by applying kaolin to the parts of the body that, having been affected, led to the death of their tromba (Lambek 2002: 63). As several mediums explained to me, this white clay is used to protect the medium's body from the illness that affected their tromba. For this reason, it is also called *fangala be*, which could be translated as "that which removes all ills." Dady Berthine, for example, when preparing to be possessed by her tromba, put white clay in her mouth. According to the history, her tromba, Ndrantahiry, had died after eating a poisoned dish. Thus, the mouth was the sick part of the nobleman's body that the medium had to protect.

Zafinifotsy tromba, on the other hand, do not apply kaolin to their bodies. One reason for this is probably that, as these nobles drowned, their death was not caused by any injury to any part of their body.[22] However, when they descend into the bodies of their mediums, these tromba stage death by drowning by pouring water over themselves. When the Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy spirits arrive, a white sheet is shaken and, held up at all four corners, laid over the medium's convulsing body. This sheet

22. The only exception is the Zafinifotsy tromba known as Tontôñarivo. Before drowning, he was wounded in the arm by a rifle shot. However, his mediums don't apply *tany fotsy* (kaolin) to his arm but wrap it in a bandage.

probably refers to the shroud in which their corpse was wrapped before burial. The gesture of removing the sheet to reveal the medium's finally calm body thus heralds the return of the sovereign among the living in the form of a tromba, ready to dress and speak again. It is the traumatic event of the sovereign's death, performed as soon as he arrives, that constitutes the cornerstone on which the character and identity of the tromba performed in possession are built (Lambek 2002: 63). And it is with the death of the sovereign that the process of constructing the royal ancestor begins.

a) Manamboatra razañ'ny fanjakana*: "Preparing the royal ancestor"*

I will go into more detail about the royal funerals I attended during my fieldwork in chapter 6. Here I will only briefly outline the main stages in the treatment of the corpse, theoretically necessary for the return of the royal ancestors in the form of a tromba. I say theoretically because the speeches I have heard on this subject were often contradictory. Although there are currently popular versions of these possession cults in town, where the spirits of sailors, cab drivers, and prostitutes mingle, the Ambendraña and Analalava people I spoke to always affirmed that ampanjaka (nobles or sovereigns) are the only humans who, once dead, can return to inhabit the living.[23] But to do so, they must first be granted "the way" (*lalaña*) by God above and from the chosen person's ancestors. In Faustine's words, it is more "by their very strength (hery) that the nobles

23. Among nonhuman spirits, we have already seen the *tsiñy* or "forest spirits" who can indeed possess the living. There are other types of nonhuman spirits, dwelling between earth and sky, who can do that. These other beings are: *kalañoro* (forest gnomes), *zavavirano* ("water women," a kind of mermaid), *lehibe* or *dadibe* (other types of chthonian spirits, like *tsiñy* or *hianan-tany*), *hianan-tany*, *hazary* (comprising atmospheric phenomena or beings such as rainbows and lightning). According to one nobleman's account, these "invisible beings" (*tsy hita maso*) can be classified according to three criteria: (1) environment or habitat; (2) sacredness (*masiñy*); (3) "strength" (*mafy*), which manifests itself in the violence of the possession. According to the first criterion, there are three environments: the earth, home to the tromba, *kalañoro*, *tsiñy* and other chthonian spirits; the sea, with the *zavavirano*; and the sky, with the *hazary*. According to the second criterion, the tromba are the most *masiñy* (sacred) spirits and, according to the third criterion, the least *mafy*, "hard" to bear. They are the most *malemy* (gentle). Whereas, according to this last criterion, *hazary* are the most *mafy* (hard, violent), then there are the water spirits, and finally those of the earth.

possess the living," than it is based on whether their corpse received the necessary ritual treatment. The son of the Sakalava ruler of Marangibato, on the other hand, explained to me that only nobles who have received funeral "customs" (*fomba*) can return as tromba. "And if they haven't received the funeral, they can't become tromba?" I asked him. "Yes, they can," he replied, unconcerned by the contradiction his statements presented me with.

These apparent contradictions between official discourses and practices, as well as within the discourses themselves, are probably due to a double internal tension that has characterized the institution of the tromba cult from its very beginnings. As summarized by Françoise Raison-Jourde (1983: 29–30; also Lombard 1988: 23), this institution probably arose from the assimilation and appropriation of local ancestral cults by the conquering Maroseràña dynasty, which created the first Sakalava kingdoms in the southwest of the island. According to this historical reconstruction, contemporary contradictions between royal tromba discourse and peripheral practices of possession by nonnoble spirits could be the legacy of the effort by foreign rulers to monopolize local possession cults, with the help of ritual specialists (diviner-healers or royal servants). On the other hand, the contradiction concerning the possibility for all nobles to possess the living, independently of the treatment of their corpses, could be the manifestation of internal tensions within the nobility. This tension would exist between a part of the nobles who had the right and the historical possibility to have servants who could treat their corpses, and another part who did not, but nevertheless claimed the right to speak and worship after their death. We can already perceive that this is a tension that lies at the heart of the distinction between the Zafinimena tromba, whose corpses were treated according to custom, and the Zafinifotsy tromba, who could not have the same treatment because of their death in the water, but also—as we shall see—because of their status position.

In expressing this dominant view of royal ideology, a former Analalava notable with a passion for Sakalava history once admitted to me that the real power of Sakalava rulers lay in *jina*, "relics." It is through them that the hasiñy power of the rulers is transmitted to the living. This link between relics and possession has been attested to since the earliest European testimonies.[24] Furthermore, it was during royal funerals

24. See Father Luis Mariano's testimony from 1616–17, in Grandidier and Grandidier (1904: 253–54n); and an account by the Compagnie des Indes from 1719, in Grandidier and Grandidier (1907: 25–36).

that these relics were made. According to the customs of the Sakalava royal funerals in northwest Madagascar that I observed and that have been described in previous literature (Grandidier 1886; Dandouau 1911; Mellis 1938: 58–68; Poirier 1939: 67–76; Cagnat 1941; Gueunier 1998; Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 39-43, 367-375), when a Sakalava ruler dies, his corpse is washed and a silver coin is placed in his mouth by "special servants" called Razañ'olo (kind of people). It is thanks to this silver coin that the future tromba will be able to speak (Lambek 2001: 741). Lambek (2001: 741) notes that there is continuity between the decayed sovereign and his return in the form of a tromba, since when the latter arrives in the body of a medium, he or she spits out the silver coin with which the sovereign was buried (see also Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 94). This metonymic contiguity between the words of the deceased ruler and the silver coin is transformed into—or is reinforced by—a metaphorical relationship resulting from the fact that both are designated by the same name in the royal vocabulary: *fanjava*. Once the corpse has been washed and given the silver coin, it is then transferred to the "village of royal tombs" (mahabo) and separated from the living. Before being buried with their parents and relatives, the sovereign's corpse is left to dry for several months. Like the fence posts of the toñy or royal tomb, the corpse must be "dry" (*maiky*) before going underground. For the duration of the funeral, the sovereign's name cannot be uttered: it is abandoned in forced oblivion.[25] A new "name of blessing" (*fitahiaña*) will be given to him at the end of the funeral by a council of servants and members of the royal family. Since the narration of sovereigns' stories mainly consists of reciting names and genealogies, these stories are also considered forbidden and for this reason are also kept under wraps.

Once the sovereign's body is dry and has lost its putrescible components, relics are made by the "Special Servants" (Razañ'olo) from some of the imputrescible parts of the body (cf. Ballarin 2016: 68n2). It is indeed in the imputrescible parts that the sovereign's generative power persists. The body is then buried in the royal tomb, protected by a wooden enclosure called the *menaty* (red inside). This enclosure, which protects the royal tombs, is broken by the servants to allow the sovereign's body to enter. It remains in this state until the sovereign appears in the body of a medium (Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 101). A sacrificed zebu—or a human

25. These are negative mnemonic injunctions, not memory loss, as Anne-Christine Taylor (1993, 1997) has shown about the funeral practices of the Jivaro.

being, before French colonization—whose blood is poured into the pit, prepares the "bed" (*lafiky*) upon which the remains of the corpse will rest. Only once these ritual services have been completed can the sovereign's spirit return among the living, thanks to the generative power preserved in the relics. The objects and clothes that once belonged to the sovereign will also be preserved as "dangerous/delicate objects" (*raha sarotro*) or regalia. As the current queen of Analalava once explained to me, it is also the hasiñy power contained in these objects that can possess people, enabling the sovereign to reappear among the living in the body of another person. To sum up, once their words (*fanjava*) have been replaced by silver coins (*fanjava*), once their corpse has been separated from the living and lost its putrescible parts, the sovereign is finally ready to return in the form of a tromba. All that is left to do is to ask the way of both the gods above and the ancestors of the chosen person, and they will descend to inhabit the body of the chosen medium.

b) Manamboatra saha*: "Preparing the medium*"

The junction between the sovereign's death and his or her return as a tromba is also marked by the fact that the appearance of their tromba is described in the same terms as the action of digging their pit: "breaking the sky" (*mamaky langitry*) (cf. Dandouau 1911: 169; Mellis 1938: 97). With his or her old name forgotten and their stories hidden, the sovereign reappears with a new name and in the new form of a tromba. They are henceforth able to tell and stage their history themselves, using the mouths and gestures of their mediums. To do this, the stories of their life are interiorized and condensed in the form of prohibitions to be respected. As a medium once told me: "Histories have to stay in people's bodies and minds." It is through this forced oblivion that these histories are incorporated, then represented in the actions and character that the medium will perform. The presence of a tromba is thus heralded by pathological signs in the body. This is when the journey of possession begins. Converting these mute bodily symptoms into verbally explicit requests from the tromba haunting the patient is the aim of the first series of ritual actions. This ritual therapeutic process, articulated in several stages, aims to transform an anonymous and silent spirit, which affects the patient's body, into an identified spirit who, through the power of his word and his hasiñy, acts on the living through his medium. Accepting their presence, granting their requests, and recreating their character are the initiatory stages of this therapeutic and training process, which will

lead the neophyte-patient to become an initiate-healer. This process of collective, ritual construction of the tromba's character and identity coincides with a path of healing and fulfillment for the medium.[26] This process consists mainly in the individuation and proclamation of their name, then in the recognition and respect of their prohibitions, and finally in the acquisition and sacralization of their clothes. Let us take a closer look at the stages of this therapeutic journey.

When an unknown illness strikes,[27] if the remedies eventually prescribed by a town doctor or over-the-counter antibiotics purchased in bush village stores have had no effect, the inhabitants of the Analalava region generally go to a diviner-healer (moasy). The latter performs a *sikidy*, a divination technique using seeds (Rabedimy 1976), and interprets the possible causes of the illness. If the sikidy reveals the presence of a tromba, the patient must go and see a *fondy* (master of spirit possession) or an experienced medium.[28] The latter, with the help of an intercessor, will identify the tromba, "bring it out" (*mampiboaka*), and "prepare" (*manamboatra*) it. The identity of the tromba, defined by its geographical origin and genealogical ties, can already be guessed by the diviner-healer. He interprets the symptoms described by the patient and deduces possible causes. These causes are often attributed to the transgression of prohibitions specific to the tromba who is supposed to inhabit the consulter. It is on this initial basis of clues and interpretations that the diviner-healer refers the consulter to other mediums. If the first medium fails in this first task, other mediums may correct the diviner's diagnosis and refer the patient to other mediums or specialists. The patient is thus taken to other places, sometimes far from home, in the region of origin of the presumed tromba. In these places, there are more competent specialists and new narratives about the deceased sovereign who haunts their bodies. As such, the path to healing coincides with that

26. One of the people affected by a tromba whom I met in Analalava told me that if we follow these ritual steps our "reason/spirit increases" (*mitombo saiñy*). If, on the other hand, you don't follow the customs for bringing out the tromba, you can "lose your mind" (*very saiñy*).
27. The symptoms of which have often been described to me as pains in the joints or aches throughout the body.
28. *Fondy* is a Swahili word meaning "master," also used for Koranic masters (Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 109n14). This term indicates, at least in the Mahajanga region where I heard it pronounced, a medium specialized in healing and training new mediums.

of learning about royal history. In addition, throughout this journey, new relationships are forged.[29] This relational dimension of the ritual process is essential to its therapeutic efficacy. In today's postcolonial context, with migration from one region to another being so frequent, it is also functional to the integration of migrants into a new social context. It is no coincidence that most mediums are foreigners to the region where they reside. Thus, mediums, like the nobles whose spirits they host in their bodies, share the fact that they are considered "foreigners" (vahiny). Not only during physical displacement, but also as they pass through the various stages of the ritual process, mediums forge and rework different kinds of relationships. Aimed at establishing a stable relationship between the person affected by a tromba and the tromba itself, this process mobilizes a whole series of relationships. Firstly, between the patient and those close to them. Secondly, between their tromba and other tromba genealogically linked to it and incarnated in other mediums. Finally, between the healed patient, now a new healer, and their future patients.

In fact, when the presence of a tromba is diagnosed, the patient's relatives are summoned to take charge of the tromba invocation ceremony.[30] The mediums of the noble spirits genealogically linked to the one supposedly possessing the patient are brought together. A specialist intercessor is also called in to perform the invocation. In Analalava, in the domestic context, Faustine is the intercessor for all tromba, whether Descendants of Gold or of Silver. In Ambendraña, the intercessors are the ampangataka of the Zafinifotsy (Descendants of Silver) and the sovereign of the Zafinimena (Descendants of Gold), depending on which branch the spirit belongs to. This first ceremony, like all the others, is designated by its function.[31] It is generally referred to as *mampiboaka tromba*:

29. This is an integral part of tromba ownership in today's postcolonial context, as the mediums are often foreigners. It was in this context that Dady Berthine found herself in Analalava, hosted by Mama Safina. This dynamic is not too dissimilar to the therapeutic paths followed here in Europe, where patients affected by illnesses that are difficult to diagnose or that can be cured through different treatments, consult different specialists, sometimes in different places, even countries.
30. For an example of this ceremony, see the description by Lesley Sharp (1993: 125–34).
31. The naming of rituals or ceremonies is an obsession of anthropological studies which, in Madagascar, is showing its limits. As I have mentioned, there is no terminological distinction between "work" and "ritual" (called *asa*). These works are often indicated by the Sakalava according to their

"bringing out the tromba." It can be repeated several times, with all possible variations, in order to find the elements (songs, clothes, accessories, people) that might appeal to the tromba and thus encourage them to come. This is why Henry Rusillon (1912: 17, my translation) reports that this ceremony is referred to as *misafosafo* (to caress), during which "we caress the tromba, we entice him, we entice him to come." This process of conjuring the tromba can be gradual, taking several weeks or even months. In fact, the tromba does not necessarily reveal itself suddenly, but various cumulative signs can indicate its gradual manifestation. These signs are, for example, the oscillatory movement of the head announcing the coming of the spirit, then the calm after the convulsive movements, or the passive acceptance of a certain type of accessory characterizing a tromba, and so on.

However, the tromba's word is the first element enabling the negotiation of a stable relationship with their host. It is through speech that they are recognized, and it is always through speech that their requests can be known and answered by their host. The first words the spirit utters and is asked for are their name, place of origin, parents' names, and prohibitions (fady). This is the second stage in the preparation of the tromba. It is indicated by the action *mampiteny* or *mampivolañiny*, meaning "to make speak." The words used to designate this ritual action ("to make speak") and the previous one ("*to make* come out") suggest a solicitation of the tromba not only on the part of the host-patient,[32] who is often rather passive in these first stages, but above all on the part of the ritual specialists and the group of participants. These participants may be the other tromba but may also include musicians or members of the patient's family. In cases where the tromba is particularly reticent, this assistance in action (this "making do" expressed by the prefix *mampi-*) can go as far as one or more assistants themselves performing the action hoped for by the patient. As for the ceremony of soliciting the first words from the tromba, for example, these words may be lent to them by someone else. At one

function, according to what they are supposed to accomplish. Their definition can therefore vary according to the emphasis placed by interlocutors on one of the functional aspects of the ritual. While, for the sake of simplicity, I give a single definition or name to the rituals I'll be analyzing, it's important to keep these considerations in mind.

32. Here in the medical sense, but also in the relational sense outlined by Alfred Gell (1998: 22), who in the interactive agent-patient pair defines it as "the object which is causally affected by the agent's action."

such ceremony I attended in Analalava, a young woman, who had been ill for several months due to the presence of a tromba spirit, had been induced to oscillatory movements by the group of participants and tromba gathered around her, who loosened her braids and gently swayed her body. Once calmed, she was dressed in the accessories of one of the first Sakalava rulers, Ndramandisoarivo. It was he, in principle, who had long owned her, and his reluctance to reveal himself was attributed to the young woman's difficulty in housing such a "big" (*maventy*) tromba.[33] Even the tromba's prolonged silence can become a sign of identification. Faced with the young woman's months-long silence, it was the tromba possessing the medium who had been training her for months who, in front of the mute, tearful girl, announced his prohibitions for the first time. It was through the words lent to her by her "master" (*fondy*), therefore, that the patient subsequently learned to actively construct the word of her tromba.

According to the description of the ritual stages given to me by several mediums, once the tromba has been brought out and made to speak, the medium's training continues with the tromba's "gift of clothes" (*amezan-damba* or *amiaña lamba*). According to the mediums' speeches, it is the tromba themselves who demand that their host buy them clothes. Once the clothes have been obtained, the medium presents them to their tromba's ancestors, who "make them effective" (*mampamasiñy*). It is only when they acquire speech and clothing that the tromba completes their identification process. From then on, a peaceful relationship is established between the spirit and its medium, made up of requests from the tromba and negotiation between the spirit and its host, always through the intermediary of an intercessor. In the domestic and private context, it is often the husband who acts as intercessor for a female medium. As the medium fulfills the requests of their tromba, they may ask in return for the removal of prohibitions. But for the medium to move from being a healed patient to a healer, or, in Alfred Gell's terms (1998: 67–68), from being a patient of spirit agency to being an index of it, a final ritual step is necessary. This ritual action is described in the vernacular terms *amezan-kasiñy* or *amiaña* hasiñy, "to give the hasiñy," or "to give generative or efficacy power." From this point onward, the tromba acquires the power to "bless others" (*manome tsodrano*), "heal them" (*mitahy olo*), or grant

33. The tromba's power (hery) and sacredness are proportional to its genealogical position. The further back he is in the royal dynasty, the more sacred and effective he is. It is therefore "heavier" (*mavesatra*) for living mediums to carry his spirit and speak his words.

their requests. Many mediums stop at this point. However, the path to building or perfecting the tromba and their medium can continue until the latter is completely "autonomous." *Mahaleo tena*, "independence, autonomy," is in fact the term used to designate the last stage attainable by the medium and their tromba, according to the testimony of a *fondy* (master) from Mahajanga. According to another testimony, the last stage corresponds to "obtaining gold" (*fandraisana volamena*), while the penultimate stage consists of "obtaining silver" (*fandraisana volafotsy*). As gold is forbidden to Zafinifotsy tromba, this last stage theoretically concerns only Zafinimena tromba. These precious metals are symbols not only—as we have seen—of the identity of the two Sakalava dynastic categories, but also—as we shall see—of the hierarchy that distinguishes the status of members of the royal family (living or dead) and the sacred places dedicated to them.

Finally, for a medium's tromba to be officially recognized by the representatives of royalty, it must be tested by the officials and guardians of the spirit's residence (be it its tomb [mahabo] or the residence of its relics [doany]). This subsequent stage can be completed as soon as a tromba has been released and has obtained its clothes and accessories. This stage is essential to the medium's integration into the political and cultic system of kingship but is not obligatory for the exercise of their function in a private, domestic context. This stage is called *fitsaraña*, a term meaning "judgment, tribunal," which has often been translated for me into the word "test." It is thanks to this test that these officials "elevate the mediums" (*mampanonga saha*) to the status of official royal mediums. To mark this passage, in Ambendraña, the mediums possessed by Zafinimena tromba who are waiting to take the test are called *kinga,* "little stream," as opposed to saha, the term for "official mediums," which can also mean "field, valley." Here, these mediums wait in the house of the Zafinifotsy intercessor to go up to the royal residence further north, to the Zafinimena nobles, to take the test. This transition from the servants of the Descendants of Silver to the Descendants of Gold of Ambendraña is reminiscent of the last two stages in the construction of the tromba I just mentioned: obtaining silver, then gold. According to what my contacts in the village told me, this test consists of the tromba recognizing the members of their family. To do this, the spirits of their family are first summoned to possess the other village mediums. In this way, the tromba examined must recognize and declare their genealogical position in relation to them. Hence the secrecy surrounding these genealogies, or tantara (histories). For the Zafinifotsy tromba, on the other hand, it is the

ampangataka who tests the authenticity of a tromba andrano's possession, simply by asking the medium about their genealogical links, their residence (their doany), and the prohibitions that correspond to them.

For Zafinimena tromba from Nosy Lava, the test is a more complex process. After asking questions about the tromba's identity and origin, the royal tomb's senior officials present the tromba with objects that belonged to the sovereign during his lifetime. These "dangerous/delicate objects" (*raha sarotro*), which are kept in the relic house, include jewels such as rings, bracelets, and gold and silver coins. If the tromba recognizes these objects, they pass the test (Lambek 2002: 200–201). If, on the other hand, they fail, they are not declared a liar or to be possessed by a false tromba but are rather invited to take the test again. "*Mbola mila manamboatra tsara izy*" (It needs to be better prepared/built), is the phrase I have often heard to explain this perfectible process to which the tromba and their medium are subjected. "*Mbola tsy mazava izy*" ([Their word] is not yet clear), is another iteration of this explanation. The medium will therefore have to continue on their learning path, meeting other, more expert mediums, or other custodians of tromba stories, in order to prepare themselves as well as possible to pass their exam one day. This is why I often traveled part of my research itinerary alongside mediums looking for the same stories I was looking for, albeit for different reasons. In a regime of historicity where the past is anchored to places and is never complete or perfect (in the grammatical sense), but always continuous and imperfect (Lambek 2002: 12), historical knowledge is never acquired once and for all. In this ongoing learning process, which coincides with the medium's healing process, travel is an essential condition, not only to access localized knowledge, but also to weave and reconfigure social relationships.

Once their tromba has been "well-prepared" (*voamboatra tsara*) by the ritual specialists and the community of experts, the medium can try their luck at passing the test. They can then occupy a place in the royal organization, where their word will have a power of efficacy over others, not only therapeutically or magically, but also politically. It is from among these saha that the sahabe, the great royal mediums residing more or less permanently in the royal cemetery of Nosy Lava, are elected. Surrounded by an enclosure of servants like a sovereign or a toñy, the great royal mediums have the power to legitimize, advise, or contradict their living descendants. It is the word of the dead that legitimizes or, as the Sakalava say, "sharpens" (*mandrangitry*) the power of the living. But, like everything that concerns kingship, the word of the tromba is "complicated/dangerous" (sarotro), and therefore complex.

As we discussed in chapter 1, the word of the royal ancestors is always multiple, even when legitimized by being expressed by a medium who has passed the test. Just as a tromba can never be declared false or illegitimate, neither can it be univocally considered authentic and legitimate (Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 97). While the authority of the royal medium's word comes from a single, indisputable source (the royal ancestor they embody), the identity of this source is collectively constructed during ritual actions. This dual process of preparing the tromba—conceived as the result of the making of the royal ancestor, on the one hand, and the medium on the other—also implies a collective construction of its authority. This authority is made up of clothes, gestures, and words. This is why, when people say of dubious tromba that "only the clothes possess them" (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1989a: 96), it means that their word has not yet been properly prepared by royal servants and ritual specialists. And it is in this not yet, in this perfectibility, that the originality of this open process lies. Even when the word is finally achieved, it is mediated by the intercessor. It is the latter who is the indispensable intermediary for interpreting this word and transmitting it (or not) to others. As the guardian of the gates and invocation, it is he who has the power to open and close not only the gates of places of invocation, such as toñy or tombs, but also the mediums' mouths, so to speak.

In short, like the toñy, the tromba is a kind of "index"—in Gell's sense (1998: 67)—to which the authority of the royal ancestor is attributed, by virtue of the relationships that "prepare" (*manamboatra*) it and "make it effective" (*mampamasiñy*). Once constituted, this authority is periodically regenerated by the collective work of the royal servants. It is these royal servants who dress and undress the tromba and who take care of the toñy altars dedicated to them. They form the human enclosure that surrounds the tromba, and they build the wooden enclosure that protects the toñy. But it is the intercessors who hold the keys to the gates of these two kinds of enclosure, as intermediaries between the living and the royal ancestors.

Sakalava *mahampanjaka ampanjaka*: "The Sakalava Make the Sovereign Reign"

The concept of "power" can be translated in the Sakalava dialect by the word *fahefaña*, a term formed from the root *efa*, meaning "finished, achieved." *Mahefa* is the original verb form of this word, meaning "to be

able to finish, to achieve." Hence the meaning of *fahefaña* as the power to achieve something or, in other words, as the power of efficacy. The efficacy of an action comes from the power called hasiñy in Malagasy, which can be translated—as Delivré (1974: 141) suggests—by "power of efficacy." This hasiñy emanating from the God above is transmitted to the living through different channels, which can be humans, plants, trees, animals, stones, or places. Among humans, it is the ancestors—and especially the royal ancestors—who embody and transmit this power. Their power and authority are, in this sense, an emanation of the hasiñy. Nevertheless, hasiñy is a manipulable force, capable of being increased or withdrawn,[34] as well as prepared or restored. And it can be prepared in different ways. The main artisan of hasiñy is, of course, the diviner-healer (the moasy or ombiasy), who can channel this force into the talismans he makes, of which relics or toñy are examples. But it is thanks to the collective maintenance of these powerful and dangerous artifacts that this power can be preserved and regenerated. It is therefore the subjects and royal servants who preserve the power of efficacy of the sovereign and their ancestors, by periodically looking after the artifact-places (toñy), or artifact-persons (tromba), as well as the sovereign themself. This is the meaning of the saying often repeated to me by royal servants: "The Sakalava make the sovereign reign" (*Sakalava mahampanjaka ampanjaka*).

Summing up the itinerary so far, in chapter 1 I presented my investigation inside the Loza estuary to access the stories of the tromba andrano, which led me to Ambendraña. In this second chapter, through the description of the steps I took to obtain permission to settle in this village, I showed how I found myself before several local authorities, representing different ancestors (royal or not), and referring to various kinds of "government" (*fanjakana*). The first of these authorities encountered was the president of the "village community" (fokontany), the local representative of state power. This government of the pale-eyed people is the historical legacy of the power established by the French colonizers—that is, by these "foreign/European" (vazaha) ancestors. Like the pale-eyed colonizers, from whom he inherited his power, the fokontany president is also considered a "foreigner" (vahiny), albeit a foreigner from within. Similarly, sovereigns and nobles are also considered foreigners

34. I heard the phrase "I'm taking back my power of efficacy" (*Hasiñy nakay alaiko*!) uttered by a tromba who was threatening a person to whom he had granted a request, but who refused to return the offer promised in return.

from within. As we shall see, political power has historically been associated with different kinds of foreigners. Among the forms of government present in the village, the state power is perceived by the village community as ambivalent. Associated with its coercive function, it is feared by most peasants. But it is seen as an opportunity for profit by a small local elite dedicated to the international trade of natural resources (notably seafood).[35] This power is represented by places on the outskirts of the village: the stone house of the fokontany president and the stone school building. My interlocutors told me several times that the construction of the school was indeed forbidden within the village, and several inhabitants (nobles or Bevôñy) told me that they had been forbidden by the ancestors to attend it. However, despite the marginality of his residence, the fokontany president is one of the largest landowners in the region, and a large proportion of the village's inhabitants work on his rice fields. This is the case of the ampangataka and his family, as well as several nobles. What is more, although he is almost absent from daily village life, I noticed the presence of the fokontany president and his wife on several occasions at the various life cycle rituals of the villagers, where they were the guests of honor.

In addition to the fokontany president, the other authorities I had to ask for permission to reside in the village were the ampangataka of the Zafinifotsy tromba, the Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena tromba, and finally the Zafinimena sovereign. These three represent the government of the one who reigns in opposition to the government of the pale-eyed people and their Malagasy heirs. We have seen, and will see later, how these two forms of government are articulated at the village and regional level. In particular, we shall see that, although ideologically opposed, these two forms of power are deeply intertwined. However, in the structuring of village space, the centrality and visibility of royal power correspond to the marginalization of the places and figures of national state power. This power is manifested in several places, such as the royal house of the Zafinimena sovereign and the two toñy: that of the Zafinimena, and that of the Zafinifotsy. Like the royal tomb on Nosy Lava, these places are protected by numerous prohibitions that have the function of guarding their generative power, much like the servants around the sovereign and

35. Apart from fish, which are shared between the local and Chinese markets, mangrove crabs, shrimps, and sea cucumbers are the products of choice for Chinese collectors based in Antsohihy. Many Ambendraña villagers are dedicated to catching these animals to sell them in town.

the tromba. They thus have a dual protective function: they protect both this power and the potential victims of this power (see Barth 1975: 170). Thus, they are like the wooden enclosures that surround and protect the toñy or the royal tomb. It is these different types of enclosure that make the power of these places and people "effective/generative" (*masiñy*). Hence the importance of gates and intercessors in the organization of this progressive, concentric hierarchy.

However, the two toñy polarize the spatial configuration of the descent groups inhabiting the village and referring to these two royal groups: the noble Descendants of Gold (ampanjaka Zafinimena), and the nonnoble people of the Descendants of Silver (*olon'ny Zafinifotsy*). This dualistic spatial arrangement was justified to me by the accounts of the founding of Ambendraña. Moreover, according to these accounts, between the two descent groups—the first made up of nonnoble landowners, the second of noble foreigners—there was an agreement sealed by Bevaoko's intercession. However, the copresence of Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy in the village is not anecdotal, as these stories suggest. We find it in the dualistic organization of royal spirits that currently characterizes the possession rituals of most of the kingdoms in the northwest of the island.

Moreover, within this separation of royal power, we have taken note of an internal and transversal division that pits the power of the living against the power of the dead. More precisely, the power of the living depends on that of the royal ancestors. This is probably why the term *fanjakana,* meaning "government," is most often used to refer to the spirits of the royal ancestors. They *are* the government. And it is their role as intermediaries or representatives of ancestors that confers authority on the living. The power of the living is in fact linked to the power to invoke, channel, or distribute the power of efficacy (hasiñy) of the royal ancestors. Whether it is the living sovereign, the medium, or the intercessor, it is their ability to invoke hasiñy from the royal ancestors and redistribute it to others that justifies their power. This is what we saw in the ritual greetings to the Zafinimena ruler, and what we have already seen in the various encounters with the tromba. This ritual task characterizes the two living representatives of the Ambendraña kingdom: the intercessor, for the Zafinifotsy, and the sovereign, for the Zafinimena. Moreover, the latter can be replaced in this role by other nobles, which distinguishes him not only from the Zafinifotsy ampangataka, but also from the Zafinimena queen of Analalava, who is unique and irreplaceable. It is before the toñy that the power of efficacy or hasiñy is invoked by these

intermediaries, and it is through the tromba possessed by the mediums that it is distributed to other living beings.

Finally, the description of the construction and formation of these two channels of communication with the royal ancestors has enabled us to reveal two essential elements. The first concerns the differences between dynastic groups of tromba. Firstly, one of the differences between the Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy tromba lies in the fact that if the former have had the funeral treatment necessary for their return as tromba, the latter have not, due to their suicide by drowning. Another important difference concerns the Zafinimena tromba from Nosy Lava, on the one hand, and the Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy tromba from Ambendraña, on the other. As we saw in looking at their tests, this difference is that only the Nosy Lava tromba have relics. We will come back to the significance of these differences later.

The second essential element that this description has enabled us to highlight is the logic of circulation and manipulation of the hasiñy power of the royal ancestors. Thanks to ritual specialists (whether diviner-healers or Special Servants), the hasiñy of the ancestors is condensed into "talismans" (*aody*), whether relics or toñy. And it is thanks to the collective work of the royal servants and subjects, collectively known as Sakalava, that this power is regenerated and preserved. Finally, it is the mediums and intermediaries, the intercessors, who enable its circulation among the living. The hasiñy circulates between the living not only through the blessing and its material supports (silver coins, kaolin, plants), but also through the word of the tromba, also collectively constructed. This "path" (*lalaña*) of hasiñy, which underpins the Sakalava hierarchy, coincides not only with the path of the history of the ancestors (tantara), but also with that of the ancestors' word. This is why the theory of royal power that emerges from these ethnographic examples coincides not only with a theory of social hierarchy, but also with a theory of communication.

This royal power, emanating from the hasiñy, is in fact two-headed, divided on one side between the living sovereign (*ampanjaka manôro*) and the sovereigns in heaven (*ampanjaka an-dangitry*), and on the other between the Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) and the Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy). The vectors of this hasiñy are always surrounded by one or more enclosures of servants and prohibitions, and its transmission is always mediated by an intercessor. This is why the royal hierarchy is always relatively reversible, with servants being those who protect and constitute the royal power, and who at the same time build and hold

the word of the royal ancestors. It is often royal servants, most of them women and descendants of former slaves (*andevo*),[36] who in fact host the spirits of the royal ancestors, and it is other royal servants who prepare and legitimize them.

In conclusion, then, it is by burying sovereigns and fabricating their relics, or by sheltering their tromba and raising their toñy, that the hasiñy of said sovereigns is channeled and transmitted to the living. And it is by "taking care" (*mikarakara*) of these toñy and tromba that the hasiñy is periodically regenerated. Hence, the next chapter is dedicated to the ritual work of care that characterizes the cult of the tromba andrano (spirits in the water) as well as that of the Zafinimena tromba of Ambendraña.

36. As we shall see, the slave trade, first with Arab traders, then with Europeans and Westerners, was central to the expansion of Sakalava monarchy to the north in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Armstrong 1983: 221; Lombard 1988: 39–51).

CHAPTER 3

Mikarakara: "Taking Care" of the Ancestors (Part One: Ambendraña)

> "*Koezy*! We remember you, O royal ancestors. The reason we call you is that we need you for a consultation. Come quickly. *Koezy*!"

With these words, the ampangataka exhorted the spirits of the Zafinifotsy ancestors to come and "inhabit" (*mipetraka*) the bodies of the mediums present in his house. It was November 23, 2017, a Thursday evening, and the ceremony to clean up Bevaoko's toñy (fanompoaña toñy) was planned for the following morning. A night meeting with the spirits was held in the ampangataka's house to inform and consult them about the next day's ritual work. Unlike ordinary work, called *asa*, this type of work for the royal ancestors is called fanompoaña, which can be translated as "service" (Feeley-Harnik 1989b: 162). As Feeley-Harnik notes (1989b: 162), the term *fanompoaña* is used to designate any kind of work done to serve the sovereigns and their ancestors: from agricultural work in the rice fields belonging to the royal family, to enthronement rituals or the washing of royal relics. The term is derived from the verb *manompo*, "to serve," itself composed of the verbal prefix *man-* and the word *tompo*, "lord, master." Thus, it can be translated as "that which makes [someone] master." As we saw at the end of the previous chapter, it is indeed through the work of "servants" (*ampanompo*) that Sakalava rulers and their ancestors are made masters: "it is the Sakalava who make the sovereign reign." The only distinction within the various fanompoaña,

or royal services, concerns the "hot service" (*fanompoaña mafana*), which designates the royal funeral, and the "cold services" (*fanompoaña manintsy*),[1] which refer to all other work for royalty. In fact, hot and cold are associated respectively with the "delicate/dangerous" (sarotro) moment of putrefaction of the royal corpse after death and with the "generative" (*masiñy*) elements associated with sovereigns, living or dead (cf. 1989b: 163). These elements include, for example, the toñy representing them or the lands and residences belonging to them, but also their tombs or the incorruptible parts of their body contained in relics.

More generally, work for ancestors—whether royal or not—is also called *asa fahatsiarovana*, "work of memory." Indeed, the invocation of the ampangataka at the start of the ceremony opens with a show of remembrance. And it is with this that every dialogue between the living and the royal ancestors begins. Demonstrating that they are remembered is the first sign of "respect" (*haja*) for the ancestors, and the tension between the fault of forgetting and the obligation to remember is often at the heart of discussions between the living and the ancestors, particularly during possession rituals (*asan'ny tromba*). As Jennifer Cole (2001: 106) notes about the Betsimisaraka of the east coast, "to remember" (*mahatsiaro*) essentially means to remember the ancestors. This is why the recipients of this remembrance are often implicitly present in invocations, as shown by the one cited at the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, remembering an ancestor, as well as a parent or elder, implies, among other things, remembering to ask for their blessing. There is a kind of "equation … between remembering and the ritual act of begging blessing" (2001: 106). This association also applies to Sakalava rituals and royal services. Indeed, not only are the invocations uttered by the ampangataka at the beginning and end of these ritual requests for blessing, but the rituals themselves, conceived as works of memory for the ancestors, are as well. Remembering ancestors is "an active process, one that requires the descendants' work and money" (2001: 118). The same is true for the subjects of Sakalava kingship, for whom remembering royal ancestors is "a form of work, more exactly 'service'" (Feeley-Harnik 1991b: 138). It is by performing this service that the Sakalava cultivate the memory of the royal ancestors or, more exactly, show these ancestors that they have

1. Coolness or freshness (*manintsy*) as opposed to heat (*mafana*), especially in reference to water, is a central notion in the euphemistic language surrounding ancestors. "*Nahazo manintsy*" (You have received freshness) is one way of saying that someone has received the blessing of the ancestors.

not forgotten them. In return, they obtain the ancestors' blessing. At the same time, by embodying their tromba, they incorporate and performatively recreate the stories of these royal ancestors. The worship of the Sakalava royal ancestors, which includes the worship of the drowned spirits, consists mainly of these two types of work of memory: one is performed by the mediums who embody the royal ancestors and their stories, the other by the servants and subjects who show these ancestors that they remember them. The latter type of work involves preparing the tromba and their mediums, and periodically maintaining the toñy.

In this chapter, I will present the service around the toñy of Bevaoko in Ambendraña, the main service rendered to the drowned Zafinifotsy spirits. We will then turn to the north of the village where the ritual service of the Zafinimena toñy takes place, to begin to analyze the ritual relationships that exist between these two royal ancestries around which the village of Ambendraña is organized. Finally, to continue our analysis of the cult on a wider scale than that of a village, in the next chapter we will follow the other toñy reconstruction services dedicated to the tromba andrano in the other villages of Loza bay. First, we will visit the village of Andampy, home to the toñy of Bevaoko's sister, Ampelabe, before moving on to Anjango, where another toñy of Bevaoko is located (see map, fig. 16). This will enable us to analyze the relationships between the different groups of Zafinifotsy tromba servants, and to extend our study to include the network of ritual relationships between the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena nobles and their servants. First, we shall return to the house of the ampangataka to follow the ritual service for Bevaoko and the other Zafinifotsy ancestors.

Opening the Gate to the Zafinifotsy Ancestors, or the "Rain Service"

A week before the date of the ritual service, set for November 24, 2017, the ampangataka had organized a domestic meeting with the tromba andrano that I was unable to attend. As before every ceremony, the ampangataka had summoned the Zafinifotsy tromba to ask for their agreement (their way) and to consult them on the date to be set for the fanompoaña. This year's service involved cleaning the inside of the toñy enclosure, an action that in the royal language is euphemistically called *mangala kongo*, "tick removal." This euphemism takes on its full meaning if we recall that, in these societies, traditionally focused on cattle breeding, the sovereigns and royal ancestors to whom the toñy are dedicated

are often identified with zebu, as suggested by a royal song (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 362). Michèle Fiéloux and Jacques Lombard (2008: 56) apply this remark to ancestors in general. Consequently, by transitive relation, the toñy dedicated to the royal ancestor is also identified with a zebu. This association of the toñy with the zebu (through the royal ancestor) is further iterated by the protective enclosure around the former. This reproduces the cattle pen, which also contains a talisman to protect the cattle and encourage their prosperity. In this interplay of analogies, removing the dry leaves around the toñy is metaphorically associated with the action of removing ticks from the zebu-ancestor and, by extension, "taking care" (*mikarakara*) of the royal ancestor.

This ritual maintenance service of the toñy takes place every year and may include, in addition to cleaning, the rebuilding of the wooden enclosure if it is damaged. This maintenance to the wooden structure had been carried out the year before, at which point a zebu was also sacrificed to the ancestors. The service that I attended did not include a sacrifice. In general, this annual service coincides with the opening of the gate of the toñy, enabling renewed dialogue and exchange between the living and the royal ancestors. It is celebrated just before the rainy season (*asara*) and also serves the purpose of asking for rain. Since the Zafinifotsy tromba, by committing suicide in the sea, became masters of the water, they are also attributed with the power to bring rain. Furthermore, as already mentioned, rain is generally closely associated with the ancestral blessing (tsodrano or jôro). This ritual service is thus divided into two parts: the first is dedicated to the maintenance of the toñy; the second, which took place in my experience the day after this first service, consists of a fertility ritual, also known as the "seed service" (*fanompoañ'ny ambeo*), which explains why the service at Bevaoko's toñy is also called the "rain service," *fanompoaña mahaleny*.

A week before the ceremony, the ampangataka asked me to write letters informing the surrounding villages, including the town of Analalava, of the ceremony. Once the letters were written, he took out a wooden stamp engraved with his name and function and imprinted his seal on each of the five letters. In these letters, addressed to the intermediaries of the village mediums, the ampangataka invited the mediums to collect the offerings of the devotees to bring to the ceremony. As Lambek (2002: chap. 7) witnessed regarding the "Great Royal Service" (*Fanompoambe*) of Mahajanga, these moments in which money offerings were collected took the form of possession rituals that the "associations" (*fikambañana*) of mediums in the various regions organized during the good days

preceding the great ceremony. An intermediary, called a *bemanangy*, is responsible for collecting the money that will become an offering to the ancestors and bringing it to the person in charge of the ritual service. Thus, as Lambek (2002: 145) states, royal places of worship are "where the money ends up—after several phases of donation and reception along the way—and the source from which blessing (*hasing*) is distributed in return." Only when the offerings to the royal ancestors converge on this center can the ceremony begin. All royal ceremonies are preceded by a nocturnal vigil, known as *tsimandrimandry*, "to doze."

Tsimandrimandry*: "To doze"*

On Thursday afternoon, the day before the ritual service, a traditional wrestling match, called *morengy*, was organized in the still-dry rice fields to the east of the village. The form of wrestling performed here is one practiced by boys. I have attended many such matches on the occasion of major royal ceremonies in bush villages or during national republican festivals in the town of Analalava. On the Thursday in question, however, the wrestling that took place was between young girls. Forming different groups depending on the village they come from, several unmarried girls, aged between ten and sixteen, challenged each other in quick fights that lasted barely a few seconds. These confrontations were supervised by a boy acting as referee, who interrupted them as soon as the first violent blows had been thrown. Two other boys accompanied the fights with the accelerated, syncopated beating of two small drums. Although this was a women's event, the setting was governed by young men, who humorously mitigated the rivalries that sometimes went beyond the semiplayful tone of the competition. The audience was made up almost exclusively of young, unmarried people. Whether between men or between women, these morengy fights, which usually precede the royal ceremonies, seem to celebrate the often violent "strength" (hery) of young people, which will then be channeled by their elders during the ceremony to make it fertile and "generative" (*masiñy*).

The royal service began in the evening, after dinner, in the ampangataka's house. Since, according to the traditional Sakalava calendar, the day ends with sunset, Thursday evening is already considered the beginning of Friday, which is the most auspicious day for royal services. This part of the predawn ceremony consists of a festive nocturnal vigil in the company of the tromba. When I arrived at the ampangataka's house, the mediums were already arranged in front of an altar-mat facing east. Their

intercessor, dressed in the long white shirt worn by the tromba andrano, was seated to their right, and his eldest daughter, Florette, was arranging their clothes on the altar-mat. Spirals of incense smoke already permeated the air with their bittersweet scent, a sign that the ampangataka had already recited his invocation. In contrast to the silent and concentrated anticipation of the mediums, a rather relaxed and cheerful atmosphere reigned among the many people present, most of whom were women. Jokes and laughter alternated with "women's songs" (*antsa manangy*) and the rhythmic clapping of hands to call the tromba.[2] The ampangataka repeated his invocation in the middle of the songs, with the words quoted at the opening of this chapter: *"Koezy*! We remember you, O royal ancestors. The reason we call you is that we need you for a consultation. Come quickly. *Koezy*!" As the wait began to drag on, he recited it once more. The first medium with loose braids quickened her breathing, a sign that the tromba had arrived. Kotomena was the first tromba to arrive. He seized the body of Dery, a Zafinimena noblewoman. Other tromba andrano followed: Ambony, Ndrandahy, Fotsy, Tsirimasoandro, and finally Laisarotro. Most of the mediums possessed by these six Zafinifotsy spirits belonged to the royal Zafinimena group. This is partly because members of the Bevôñy group cannot be possessed by Zafinifotsy spirits, at least during services dedicated to the ancestors for whom they are responsible. They cannot be servants and mediums of their masters at the same time. All of the tromba were dressed in the same way, with a long white shirt, a white lambahoany loincloth, and a black staff. Only Kotomena and Fotsy wore a distinctive accessory: the *savôko*, a sort of white cloth harness crossed between the shoulders and tied around the waist. Worn by Kotomena and Fotsy for major ceremonies, the savôko marks both the importance of the occasion and these tromba's preeminent position as privileged advisors to the ampangataka. Fotsy is indeed the intercessor's main assistant. Kotomena, according to the testimony of the ampangataka and other local inhabitants, was the first Zafinifotsy tromba to inhabit a person's body.

Once the tromba were dressed and seated in front of the altar-mat with their black sticks in hand, the ampangataka asked them for news

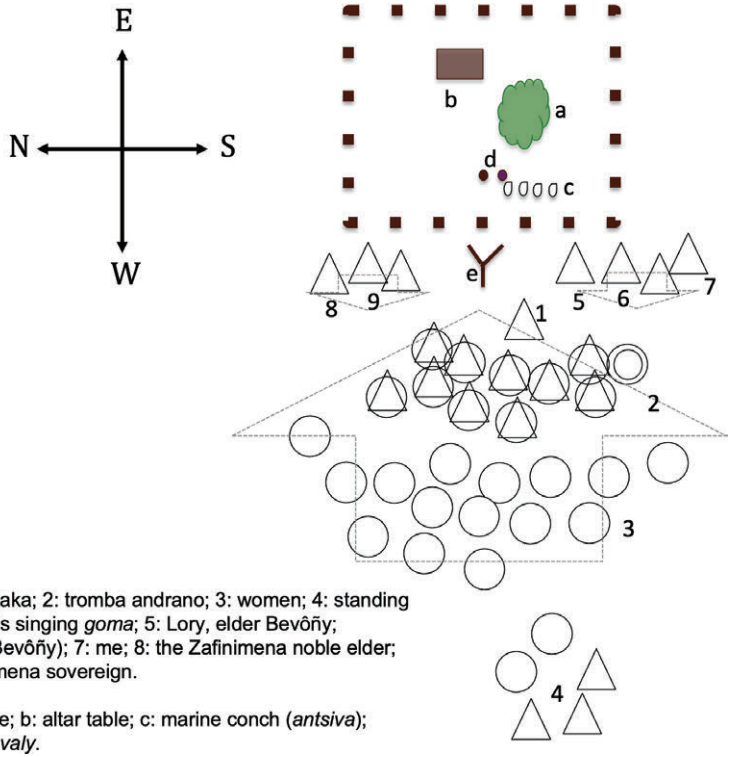
2. These are responsorial-type songs in which a soloist pronounces a refrain that the choir repeats indefinitely. They are accompanied by the *rombo*, a polyrhythmic clapping of the hands that creates a new rhythm encompassing the one produced by each participant (Live 2003). Unfortunately, due to a local ban on recording, I was unable to retain much of the lyrics.

with the ceremonial formula: "What do you want to discuss? Here, we remember [you]." Then, addressing the assembly: "Let us pay our respects [to the tromba]" (*Mikoezy atsika e!*). Everyone uttered the "*koezy*" to greet the tromba, holding their hands in the shape of a cup above their heads. Then the intercessor informed the tromba about the ceremony. He presented them with offerings of alcohol and money, and served drinks, first to the tromba, then to the other participants. Once the discussions were over and the libations begun, the singing resumed. This festive celebration with the tromba is also described as *milamalama*, or "polishing, soothing" the tromba.[3]

During this joyous celebration, everyone shared rum from the same glass, except for the ampangataka who, in keeping with the advice of Fotsy's tromba, did not drink for the duration of the ceremony. For fear of being poisoned, he later explained. Indeed, shortly after my arrival in the village, I learned of tensions between him and an old village woman possessed by Bevaoko's tromba. She was the *alokon'ny zañahary*, "the shadow of the God," as Bevaoko's medium is called. It had been several years since the ampangataka had decided to stop invoking Bevaoko's presence in the body of this woman, delegitimizing her position as an official medium. She was accused of witchcraft and rumors were circulating that she had killed one of the villagers. A rivalry had thus developed between the old woman and the ampangataka. This was one of the reasons that Bevaoko's tromba was not present at the ceremony or in the village in general. This absence had thus favored the displacement of this ancestor's authority from the lips of his medium to the gate of the toñy and, consequently, to the ampangataka and the mediums of the other Zafinifotsy tromba andrano.

After appeasing, or polishing, the tromba with song, the ampangataka invited everyone to leave their homes and go to the gate of the toñy to continue the night's vigil. He led the way, followed by the tromba and other participants. He sat down in front of the toñy gate, in the darkness of the night lit only by the full moon. The group of tromba placed themselves behind the ampangataka, their garments forming a white spot in

3. From *lama*, "polished, smooth," *milamalama* translates as "to make polished, smooth." This is a metaphor (*sarin-teny*) to describe the action of the living when they flatter, amuse, but also "calm" or "appease" the ancestors. This image of smoothing probably comes from the same semantic register as that of "sharpening" (*mandrangitry*), used to mean "blessing," "consecrating" or "purifying."



1: Ampangataka; 2: tromba andrano; 3: women; 4: standing boys and girls singing *goma*; 5: Lory, elder Bevôñy; 6: Laiboky (Bevôñy); 7: me; 8: the Zafinimena noble elder; 9: the Zafinimena sovereign.

a: mango tree; b: altar table; c: marine conch (*antsiva*); d: jugs; e: *sevaly*.

Figure 12. Arrangement during the ceremony in front of the toñy

the darkness. The women and other participants were seated behind the tromba. A man from the Bevôñy group lifted the movable poles forming the toñy gate and rested them on a kind of wooden fork planted in the ground, called *sevaly* (from the French "*chevalet*," "easel," see fig. 12). He then entered the toñy and lit incense, which he set on the small altar table behind the large mango tree dedicated to Bevaoko. The ampangataka then uttered another invocation, rendered inaudible by the chants of the women. I understood that the invocation was over when everyone raised their cupped hands above their heads and uttered the greeting ("*koezy*") to the ancestors.

The evening continued with the circulation of alcoholic beverages, accompanied by two forms of singing: that of the women (*antsa manangy*), seated behind the tromba; and the *goma*, or "boys' songs" (*antsa lelahy*), in which—despite the name—young girls also took part, all standing in a circle behind the seated assembly. *Trotrobe* dancers followed the two

groups of singers.[4] With arms held wide open, chest forward, legs slightly bent and buttocks back, this dance consists of a tapping of the feet on the floor in a binary rhythm that follows the beat of the singing and hand clapping. A second dancer accompanies the first, adding an offbeat rhythm (Live 2003: 59). In this way, through songs and dances, the living "appeased" (*milamalama*) the Zafinifotsy royal ancestors until dawn.

Fangala kôngo*: "To remove ticks"*

At dawn, on their way back from a bath in the river, the participants stopped in front of the ampangataka's house, where his youngest daughter, Mamie, used her fingertips to draw dots with mud on their brow. Mamie explained that these six small dots, which trace from the center of the forehead down the side of the face, serve as protection. They are called *tentini-mora* (light coloring). Most participants took advantage of this moment to eat some rice before joining the royal service. While the people returned to their seats, the ampangataka prepared to pronounce the invocation. Before he did, however, a woman from another village and her husband approached him. She explained that she was inhabited by one of the tromba andrano, named Mahitso, one of Bevaoko's descendants. She asked for permission from the ampangataka to join the other mediums in front of the toñy, so that her female tromba could reunite with her brothers. The ampangataka accepted her request and asked for an offering of money and rum to share with the other mediums. Meanwhile, other villagers joined the assembly. Among the latest arrivals were the most important representatives of the Zafinimena nobility, including the sovereign and one of his elders. They sat in the northeast corner of the assembly, the most prestigious area. In the southeast corner, on the other side of the toñy gate, sat the elders of the Bevôñy, the group "responsible for the work" (*tompon'ny asa*). Opposite them were the ampangataka, the mediums, and the rest of the women (fig. 12). Once everyone was assembled, Florette, the ampangataka's eldest daughter, entered the toñy enclosure and lit the incense. The ampangataka then pronounced the invocation.

The tromba andrano arrived again, one after the other, more numerous than the day before. There were nine in all, each incarnated in a female body. Most of the mediums were from Ambendraña and were

4. The name of this dance, *Trotrobe*, probably refers to a type of drum (Rajemisa-Raolison 1985).

Zafinimena nobles, but there were also mediums from nearby or more distant villages (like Mahitso's medium). Once all of the tromba had arrived, Lory, one of the elders of the Bevôñy clan, asked four boys and four girls to go and remove the dry leaves (ticks) from the toñy enclosure.[5] They were joined by four others: two girls and two boys. Each pair of boys and girls collected the dead leaves-ticks in a lambahoany loincloth and, on leaving the enclosure, threw them outside, to the south of the toñy. Then two other girls poured water inside. The ampangataka explained to me that both girls were childless (*mbola tsy niteraka*) and had to have both parents still alive (*olo misy niny sy babany mbola veloño*). "Why?" I asked. "Because if one of the two parents is dead there is already something 'damaged' [*simba*]," he replied. The two girls went inside the enclosure to fetch two earthenware jugs. As they left the toñy gate, they were accompanied by a procession of men and women, young and old, to the river south of the village, where they filled the jugs with water. Women's songs, reciting "Come serenely" (*Avy tsara e!*), welcomed the two girls as they entered the toñy, accompanied by the increasingly accelerated clapping of hands, and the goma, the men's songs. They slowly poured the contents into the earth surrounding the tree, turning counterclockwise to the right, the right being associated with actions for kingship. Finally, they exited the enclosure and returned to the river, accompanied by the same procession. They repeated this action four times. In all, eight jugs of water were poured into the toñy, the number eight also being associated with the kingship.[6] In the meantime, the tromba, the ampangataka, and the elders watched the young women at work, while the women around the tromba alternated between singing and engaging in more anodyne discussions. Once the toñy had been washed, the "polishing/amusement" (*lamalama*) with the tromba began, interrupted from time to time by the official speeches (*kabary*) of the Bevôñy notables. One of these speeches

5. Age is one of the main criteria for social hierarchization, sometimes exceeding that of status or function. In this case, even if the ampangataka was primarily responsible for the tromba andrano, it was the elders of his descent group who orchestrated the organization and distribution of tasks for the ceremony.
6. "The number eight can be likened to the eight ancestors that separate the first Maroserana king from God, or to the eight ancestors of the Andriambolamena [or Zafinimena] dynasty" (Lombard 1988: 119, my translation). It is also said that each person has "eight sides" (*valo ila*) or ancestralities, counting the eight great-grandparents.

was made by the ampangataka to introduce the new tromba who joined her brothers: Mahitso. He introduced her through her place of origin, her genealogical links, and the prohibitions that characterize her.

The lamalama in front of the toñy ended at noon, when the ampangataka performed the closing invocation, and then continued in the ampangataka's house, with the concluding "speeches in the house" (*kabary an-trano*). The ampangataka opened these speeches by announcing the completion of the ceremony and reintroducing the foreign medium and her tromba to the assembly: "We have a foreigner here, Mahitso. We are going to 'prepare' [*manamboatra*] her." As her husband later explained to me, in order to prepare his wife's tromba, they had first gone to Anjango, where Bevaoko's other toñy is located. It was the people of Anjango who sent them here to the Bevôñy, who are "those who prepare" (*ampanamboatra*) the tromba andrano. Kotomena approached Mahitso and, in an almost pedagogical tone, told her of their genealogical links: "We are the children of Safirona and Bevaoko. Mahitso is our sister…" Then the singing resumed, and their speech became inaudible. The lamalama party continued until sunset.

Fanompoaña ambeo*: "The seed service"*

Saturday's ritual service began, according to custom (*fomba*), with the "invocation in the house" of the ampangataka (*hataka an-trano*). Through this invocation the royal spirits are consulted and informed about the ritual actions to be performed. The participants then descended to the toñy. Most of the Zafinimena nobles were absent, as they were busy with agricultural work in the rice fields, a choice discreetly criticized by some Bevôñy. Mamie, the ampangataka's youngest daughter, and another young woman led the procession to the toñy, each carrying respectively the plate of invocations and the tromba's garments on their heads. They were followed by the ampangataka accompanied by the mediums and then, last to arrive, came the Bevôñy bearing four baskets of uncrushed rice. In the rush of preparations, a Zafinimena noble found himself with one of the baskets in his hands. "But I'm not a Bevôñy!" he complained, implicitly reaffirming that it is the Bevôñy who serve at this ceremony. The rest of the Bevôñy brought the pestle and mortar for pounding the rice. Once the tools had been deposited, the participants sat down in front of the gate, while two young men prepared a cooking fire in the southwest area of the toñy. The ampangataka pronounced the "invocation before the gate" (*hataka am-baravaraña*):

> *Koezy*! My praises to you, God, sacred places, royal ancestors who raised us. We have come here, this Saturday, for the seed service, we wish your blessing, ancestor/grandfather Bevaoko. For those who will be collecting crabs, we ask that they not be attacked by any beasts; for those who will be collecting honey, that they not return swollen; for those who will be collecting wood, that they not cut themselves; finally, for those who will be pounding rice, that they not injure themselves with the pestle. These are the things we ask so that this work at the toñy can be completed/increased [*tombo*],[7] so that we can still have rain. *Koezy*!

Then the women's "big songs" (*antsa maventy*)[8] began, accompanied by the clapping of hands. The tromba arrived, arranged in genealogical order from the eldest, Ndrandahy, to the youngest, Laisarotro. Seven tromba were present at the gate of the toñy. Among them, there were two Zafinimena tromba sitting behind the group of tromba andrano (fig. 13). When they arrived, the tromba andrano greeted them reverently, hinting at the hierarchical superiority of the ancient rulers. In the meantime, the men stood up and divided their tasks. Two work teams formed within the Bevôñy group. One of the groups was referred to as the Bevôñy *an-tany*, the Bevôñy "outside the house," an expression that refers to children out of wedlock or of secondary wives.[9] They were responsible for finding two crabs, one of each sex, in the mangroves. The second group was made up of Bevôñy "in the house" (*an-trano*), an expression

7. To finish something in everyday language, the terms *vita*, *efa* are used. To speak of royal ritual services (*fanompoaña*), however, Sakalava people don't use these terms, but rather *tombo*, which can be translated as "increased."
8. The "women's songs" are divided into "little songs" (*antsa madiniky*) and "big songs" (*antsa maventy*), or "ancient songs" (*antsa taloha*), the latter of which concern the stories of former rulers.
9. According to the rule of residence inherited from the precolonial past, in a context of polygamy practiced in particular by high-status groups, only the first wife and her children resided in the husband's house, while secondary wives lived around it, in new houses, with their children. Today, in the northwest, polygamy is still practiced exclusively by Muslims, but it is common for men to marry more than once. By separating from their wives, men can keep the children of their different wives with them. We shall see that these distinctions between children in the home and children outside the home are central to stories about the inheritance of certain rights.

that refers to descendants of the legitimate wife or first wife. When the first group returned with the crabs, the Bevôñy in the house went to the forest to collect honey. They were forbidden to bring fire, which is normally used to keep the bees away when collecting honey. Four boys, still belonging to the Bevôñy group, were busy pounding rice, while other men fetched branches to build a small wooden table to the north of the toñy. The table had four legs and two shelves, each constructed from four horizontal branches. Two bamboo trunks (*valiha*), each with a pointed end, were planted in the ground in front of the table.[10] When the men returned from the forest with four pieces of honeycomb, they poured it into the hollow bamboo trunks.

The women, for their part, took care of the rice. Two baskets of uncrushed rice were thrown at the foot of a tree to the north of the toñy, so that the seeds would sprout there with the first rains. Other women, including the ampangataka's wife and a Zafinimena noble, cooked the other two baskets of rice and the two crabs. When the meal was ready, the two Bevôñy elders arranged it on the two levels of the small table on banana leaves. The meal consisted of well-cooked rice covered in cooking water, called *sabeda*,[11] with half the male crab and half the female. Two pieces of honeycomb were added. The remaining *sabeda* (wet rice) was placed in six metal bowls arranged side by side, on the north side of the toñy enclosure (fig. 13). "There must be plenty of water," one of the women told the woman preparing the bowls.

Two tromba andrano, Fotsy and Kotolaivazaha, approached the table, followed by other Bevôñy. They were joined by a man and a woman belonging to the Antifañaiñy group, Bevaoko's sister's group of servants. They had come from the nearby village of Komaronga. These two Antifañaiñy stood before everyone, seated on the floor facing the table. With cupped hands, they uttered an invocation ending with a request for abundant rain and fish. The Fotsy tromba concluded with another invocation in much the same vein.

Eight people pounced on the food prepared on the table, eating voraciously with their hands. The Zafinimena nobles with the two tromba andrano ate on the small upper table, and the Bevôñy and other nonnobles,

10. The four-legged table with the bamboo canes in front reminded me of the image of a zebu with its pointed horns.
11. This meal is normally eaten for breakfast. It differs from *vary maiky* (dry rice), which is eaten during the meal accompanied by a broth or fish condiment (*kabaka*).

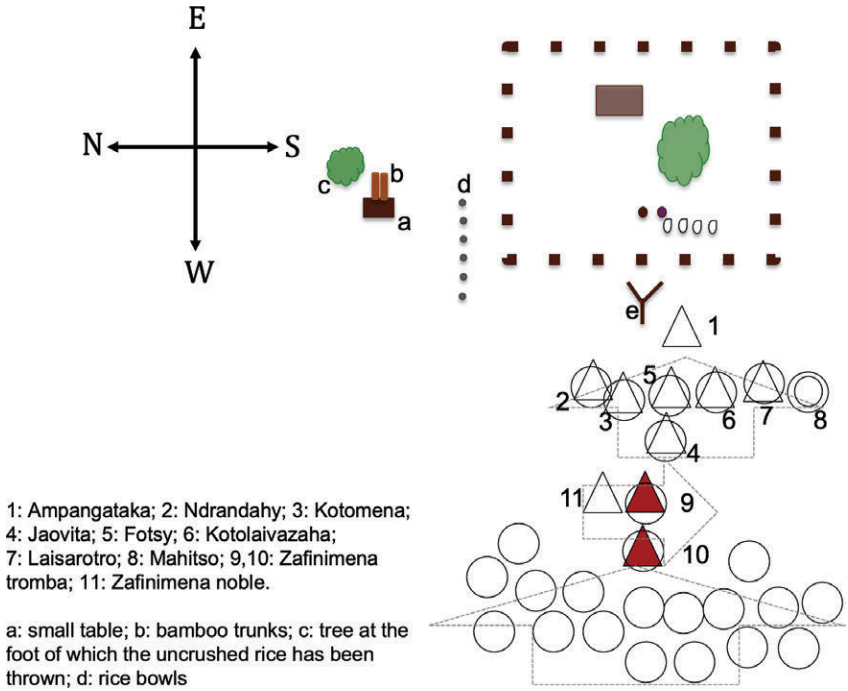


Figure 13. Layout of tromba and objects for the royal seed service (*fanompoañ'ny ambeo*)

collectively known as "Sakalava," ate on the lower shelf, thus indicating the hierarchy between status groups. After wolfing down a few handfuls of rice, crab, and honey, the elderly noblewoman who had been cooking threw a bucket of water on the table, while the guests spilled the rest of the rice on the floor. Then some of them turned to the bowls of rice on the floor and, joined by a few volunteers, ate the contents with the same greed. Again, the old lady threw a bucket of water over the rice, and the banquet guests overturned the bowls as they stood up. They were replaced by the younger Bevôñy, who helped themselves to a second round of rice, abruptly interrupted in the same way. When I asked the lady the meaning of her gesture, she replied: "It's so that the rain will again fall in abundance." Played by two Bevôñy men, the conch shells (*antsiva*) sounded to announce the completion of the service.[12]

12. These conch shells, along with the white plate, silver coins, jugs, and incense burner, are ceremonial objects that remain permanently within the toñy enclosure.

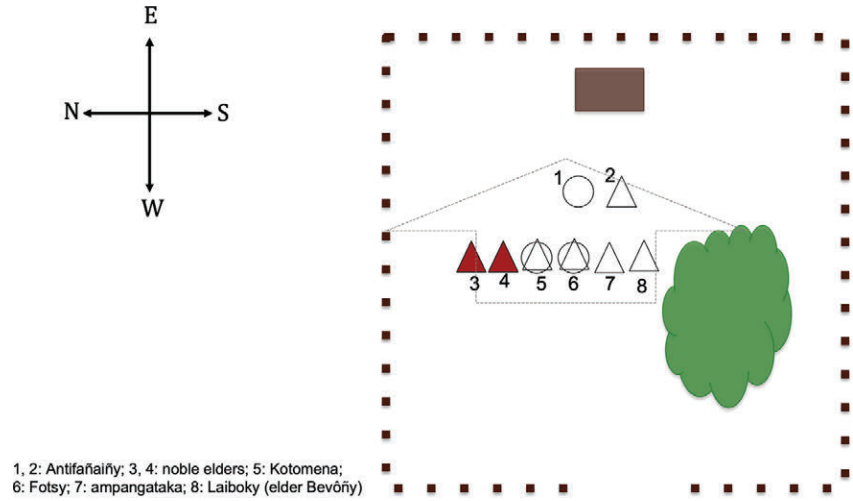


Figure 14. Arrangement inside the toñy enclosure for the final invocation

Once again, thanks to the service, dialogue with the Zafinifotsy royal ancestors was restored, and people flocked to the ampangataka and the gate one after the other, either to thank Bevaoko and his children for the wishes they had granted, or to make new ones. Next, a Bevôñy man entered the toñy enclosure and lit the incense: the two Antifañaiñy, the ampangataka, the tromba andrano, and two Zafinimena noblemen also entered to pronounce the concluding invocation. Their number was even—a necessary condition for any action within the royal service. The invocation was inaudible from outside the enclosure, where the congregation continued to sing, but their placement within the enclosure made explicit the hierarchy between the groups to which the various actors belonged (fig. 14).

According to the concentric structure of the sacred space and its correlation with the hierarchy of the people who access it, the interior of the toñy is the place where the hierarchy and its associated prohibitions are most strictly respected. Therefore, this image (fig. 14) suggests the hierarchical relationships that exist between status and descent groups, not only in the village, but also in the region. In this ceremonial moment, the Antifañaiñy were the first intercessors of the drowned spirits of the Zafinifotsy. They were the first to pronounce the invocations. It was only after them that the Bevôñy intercessor uttered his own. What is more, since the north is more sacred than the south, the Zafinimena noblemen sat farther north than the Zafinifotsy tromba and the Bevôñy, their ritual

assistants. In the remainder of this chapter and in the next, we will discover the reasons behind the hierarchy between these different groups revealed by ritual actions.

Once the invocations were over, Ndrandahy tromba, eldest of the siblings of the drowned spirits, stood up and presented himself in a loud voice: "My name is Ndrandahy, I come from Ambatobenisohihy, my father is Bevaoko, my grandfather Tontôña, my paternal aunt Mihamy. My taboos (fady) are Thursday and *alovo* fish…" He repeated it and then, one after the other, his younger brothers stood up and carried him on their backs, dancing and having fun: an affectionate demonstration of respect for their eldest before leaving. It was only after this greeting that the first tromba began to leave the bodies of their mediums.

The ceremony ended in the ampangataka's house, where a tromba andrano marked everyone's face with kaolin, again distinguishing the nobles from the other Sakalava. He marked the nobles' foreheads with a half-moon with a dot in the center (a sign called *fanjava veloño*, "the living moon"). Everyone else, including myself, was marked with the tsintsôra vertical line across the nose. Once this blessing from the royal ancestors had been received, confirming the hierarchy among the living, the singing and celebrations ensued, and would continue until nightfall.

Epilogue

During these nightly celebrations, a young Zafinimena noblewoman burst into the ampangataka's house. For several months, she had been affected by an illness attributed to the presence of a tromba, which she was unable to get out. A little drunk, she was taken by the waist by two women who put her arms around their shoulders and carried her rapidly back and forth across the room to the rhythm of other women's chants. These chants repeated "*Lelahy mahery!*" (The strong man), in reference to the Sakalava ruler who presumably inhabited her body. After several rounds, the young noblewoman fell to the ground, motionless. The ampangataka approached and questioned the tromba that supposedly inhabited her: "Where are you dead? Who surrounds and protects you? Who raised you? Where do you live? You're in my house, a Bevôñy member… come!" Other assistants' voices joined in to coax the tromba out of his silence, saying: "What can we do, our ancestor?" or, "Aren't we your descendants? Then why do you act like this?" and, "Is this how you behave with her? Come on!" But even on this day of celebration and despite the reopening

of the toñy's gate, the reluctance of the spirit—and of the woman—was not overcome.

Productive Couples

The royal service (fanompoaña) I have just described can be broadly divided into two main moments. The first, the *fanompoaña kôngo* (tick service), which took place on Friday, aims to remove the dry ticks-leaves from the toñy of the ancestor Bevaoko, associated here with a mango tree, but identified by allusion with a zebu. Through this service, the living "appease the wrath or sorrow" (*mangala heloko*) of Bevaoko and the other Zafinifotsy ancestors. They open the gates of these ancestors's toñy to obtain their fruitful blessing in return. The second moment, the *fanompoaña ambeo* (seed service), held on Saturday, aims to ask the ancestors for rain and a prosperous harvest in the coming year. Both cases taken together represent complementary ways of asking the Zafinifotsy ancestors for the same thing—their blessing—but with different degrees of specification. The first service is a generic request for ancestral blessing in exchange for the work of memory accomplished, while the second is an invocation of rain, the concrete form through which an ancestral blessing can manifest itself.

However, the two services, or rather the two moments of the rain service, differ not only in the degree of specificity of their request, but also in the way the request is made through ritual actions. The first request is formulated as a service performed to obtain a reward, in the form of an "exchange of care" (*valy mitarimy*): we take care of your body-places so that you bless us in return. The second is elaborated mimetically: we imitate the abundance of water that submerges food to evoke our seeded rice fields flooded by the rain we ask you for.[13] Of course, the exchange dimension is also present in this case: we offer you food (rice, crabs,

13. In his theory of magic, Frazer distinguishes "imitative magic" from "contagious magic" on the basis of two principles: similarity—the similar produces the similar—and contagion—two entities, once brought into contact, continue to act on each other from a distance ([1890] 1990: 11–45). Émile Durkheim takes up Frazer's concept of imitative magic, speaking of "mimetic rites" ([1912] 1960: 501–18). Like Frazer, he extends this mimetic concept to rites that imitate the hoped-for effect ([1912] 1960: 505). It is in this sense that Ambendraña's seed service is mimetic.

honey) that we will consume together with you in exchange for a new, more abundant harvest. In fact, the same offering of honey and wet rice is also made by villagers in their rice fields at the beginning of an agricultural season. In this case, however, the offering is made to the "earth spirits" (*tsiñy* or *hianan-tany*).

However, my intention here is not so much to analyze the symbolism produced by these ritual actions, but rather to highlight the complex relationships that underlie them. As Michael Houseman and Carlo Severi argue, the symbolism of ritual actions is in fact driven by the complexity of the relationships involved (1998: 255). I will therefore analyze this network of relationships in order to highlight the ritual relationships that exist between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy on the one hand, and between the two groups of Zafinifotsy servants on the other. The aim is to illustrate the relationships that make up the Zafinifotsy tromba cult in the region, and its links with the Zafinimena kingship of Analalava.

In fact, this request for blessing and rain is realized through a series of actions that establish particular relationships between different categories of participants. Although some of these categories are used to think about and organize everyday village life, some of them are particularly relevant in ritual contexts. One of the first categories, central to the organization of both service and daily life, is that of gender, which separates men from women. During royal services, for example, songs are distinguished by this criterion, depending on whether they are performed seated or standing, oriented toward the ancestors or not, in a relatively static or mobile attitude. Spatial arrangement also follows this distinction, particularly in front of the gate of the toñy. While men tend to sit closer to the north side, women are seated on the south side. In addition, certain actions must be performed by opposite-gender couples. Finally, the medium-spirit couple is in most cases a pairing of opposite genders, with a male spirit inhabiting the body of a woman and vice versa. Within this gendered distinction, we find a generational division that distinguishes the young from the old (*tanora/olobe*). This is also evident in the way participants are arranged in space, and in the distribution of speeches and tasks. The young men and women who sing stand in a circle at the southern end of the assembly, while the older women sit around the tromba. Older men are the only people authorized to speak in public and to direct the work carried out by young people. It is the latter who, in pairs of opposite genders, remove the dry leaves from the toñy enclosure. Likewise, it is young men who go into the forest to fetch wood to build the table while young women fetch water from the

river to wash the earth around the toñy. In general, movement is thus associated with the young, as opposed to the relative immobility of the elders—a difference that is also visible in the behavior of the tromba present at the ceremony. The tromba andrano, who are the spirits of the young dead, are more mobile than the Zafinimena tromba, the elderly rulers.

Sociological distinctions are also noted during the service, based on the difference in status between ampanjaka, members of the royal family or nobles, and Sakalava, nonnobles. Indeed, the term Sakalava, in addition to designating the sociopolitical group as a whole, indicates, in local usage, all nonnoble groups—commoners or descendants of slaves (*andevo*)—subjects of the monarchy. Once again, the spatial layout of the ritual is the first clue to this hierarchical status. On both days of the rain service, the living Zafinimena nobles were seated in the northeast corner in front of the toñy, while the Bevôñy and other Sakalava notables were in the southeast corner, on the other side of the gate of the toñy. The signs of blessing with the kaolin at the end of the ceremony visually distinguish these two categories of people, the nobles being marked by the living moon and the Sakalava by a straight line. But it is especially during the meal at the small table that this distinction was displayed. Living Zafinimena nobles and Zafinifotsy tromba ate on the upper shelf of the table, while Sakalava, including Bevôñy and Antifañaiñy, ate on the lower shelf. However, although in this ritual activity the Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, as nobles, were part of the same group in opposition to the Sakalava, they would also be, at other times in the ceremony, distinguished in ambivalent ways. For example, the Zafinimena tromba were absent from the Friday service, while the sovereign and other living Zafinimena nobles were present, seated opposite the Zafinifotsy tromba and to the north of the Sakalava notables. At the Saturday seed service, on the other hand, two Zafinimena tromba were present and seated behind the Zafinifotsy tromba, farther west of the toñy, in a hierarchically inferior position. Conversely, during the concluding invocation in the toñy, the living Zafinimena nobles were seated to the north of the Zafinifotsy tromba. In the space inside the toñy enclosure, the most sacred and binding, this position was a sign of hierarchical superiority.

But additional distinctions also emerge within the Sakalava community, notably among the servants of the Zafinifotsy spirits. During the seed service, we saw a distinction between the Bevôñy, "responsible for the ritual work" (*tompon'ny asa*) for Bevaoko, and the Antifañaiñy,

servants of the spirit of Bevaoko's sister. Although the Antifañaiñy were not responsible for the ceremony, it was they who first uttered the closing invocations to ask for rain. They performed them before the Bevôñy ampangataka, Bevaoko's intercessor. In the next chapter, I will explain the reasons for this priority, which testifies to a historical relationship between the two groups. A final distinction made by ritual, but no longer very relevant in everyday life, concerns members of the Bevôñy descent group, separated into descendants of children "in the house" (*an-trano*) and descendants of children "outside the house" (*an-tany*). When I asked the ampangataka about this distinction, he explained:

> People used to be polygamous [*mampirafy*]: they married one woman, who lived in their house, and then they married another woman, who lived in a house next door. One day it was the "big [or first] wife" [*vady be*] who did the cooking, the other day it was the "little [or secondary] wife" [*vady bitiky*] who did it. Today, this is no longer the case, but there are still descendants of the ancient big wives and little wives.

Even if absent from ordinary discourse, this distinction can be found in the organization of the village's cemeteries (*fasana*), at least as far as one of the village's nonnoble descent groups, the Sandrakôro, is concerned. The Sandrakôro constitute another group of Zafinifotsy servants (table 1). For this group, the cemetery of the first wife's descendants is located to the north of the village and is shared with the village's other nonnoble groups. The second cemetery, reserved for descendants outside the house, is located on another hill by the sea, a few kilometers west of the village. This distinction is especially important in accounts of dynastic divisions. Other villagers equated this obsolete distinction with the more current one between children of men, or of brothers (*zanakan'ny lahy*), and children of women, or of sisters (*zanakan'ny vavy*).[14]

Basically, the hierarchy between the different categories of ritual actors reflects, reinforces, or redefines the hierarchy that exists in everyday

14. This assimilation is also justified by current practices. Despite the principle of the "father as owner of the children" (*baba tompon'ny zanaka*), the children of secondary wives or—currently—out-of-wedlock women often remain with their mother, outside the home of their father. At the same time, from the point of view of the men in the mother's group, these children are the children of sisters or wives (see Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 172, 216).

Table 1. Ambendraña descent groups, servants of the two dynastic groups

People of the Descendants of Gold	**People of the Descendants of Silver**
Manañadabo (messengers)	Bevôñy (ampangataka)
Antankoala (Special Servants)	Sandrakôro
Jingô (Special Servants)	Antifañaiñy (ampangataka)

life in the rural villages of the region. For instance, regarding the gender hierarchy, men are considered superior to women in ordinary speech. Only they are allowed to speak in public; as a Sakalava saying goes: "Hens don't sing" (*Akôho vavy tsy mañeno*). Therefore, it is men who generally occupy positions of political and ritual power as intercessors of lineage or royal ancestors. Finally, in a virilocal context, where women traditionally accompany their husbands to their villages, relinquishing management of family land and herds to their brothers, men typically hold greater authority over children and land use. On the other hand, if we consider the hierarchy between generations and ages, the young (*tanora*) are subject to the orders of the elders or notables (*olobe*), just as the younger brothers (*zandry*) are subject to the older brothers (*zoky*), or as the living obey the ancestors. In this series of couples, it is always the latter who transmit the hasiñy (generative power) to the former through their blessing. Among status distinctions, the nobles are hierarchically superior to the Sakalava, the latter being traditionally defined by their submission to the former. The same asymmetry exists between the children of the principal wife (in the house) and those of secondary wives (outside the house), or between children of brothers and children of sisters. The situation is more complex for descent or dynastic groups: the hierarchy between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, or that between Bevôñy and Antifañaiñy, is indeed more ambivalent.

Nevertheless, in the ritual actions performed during the two royal services, these hierarchical couples (man/woman, elders/youth, father/mother, nobles/Sakalava, children of primary wife/children of secondary wives) are placed on the same level as productive couples necessary for the transmission of hasiñy and thus the reproduction of life. The living are placed on an equal level by the ritual actions, as they all cooperate for the service dedicated to the royal ancestors. Just like the different categories of the living implicated in the ritual actions, the ancestors and the living constitute the ultimate productive couple, since one cannot exist

and thrive without the other. Just as the living need the blessing of the ancestors, the ancestors need the work of memory or care of the living. This ontological distinction between living and ancestor, in the ritual context, is temporarily abolished by the figure of the tromba, who is both ancestor and living, but also man and woman and, in the case of a large proportion of Ambendraña's tromba andrano mediums, Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy.

Regarding the gender distinction, the hierarchical spatial arrangement between older men and women contrasts with the collaboration between young people in opposite-gender couples. The latter gather leaves together, sing goma songs, and, when tasks become gendered (when girls fetch water from the river and boys fetch wood from the forest), they are escorted by mixed-gender processions. However, such collaboration is not absent among older people. Bevôñy elders or notables and older women collaborate in the preparation of the final meal—an activity normally reserved exclusively for women. As for the hierarchy among the descendants, while the children of first wives are considered superior to the children of second wives, in the ritual seed service they are all called upon to produce the food offered to Bevaoko: some in the forest, others in the mangroves, all collaborating symmetrically toward this purpose. Moreover, despite the marked generational difference and the predominant affiliation with the paternal group, the requirement that the young girls who fetch water to wash the toñy be childless and still have both parents alive emphasizes a continuity between the younger and older generations on both sides of the lineage, paternal and maternal.

This insistence on the bilateral unity of individuals, already highlighted by Bloch (1986: 48, 57), is also reiterated in the ritual through the recurrence of the number eight, which refers, among other things, to ancestral affiliations inherited from "eight great-grandparents" (*valo razaña*). This is a cognatic principle that contrasts with the patrilineal principle of Sakalava kinship, which applies particularly to commoners. As Bloch (1986) pointed out regarding the Merina circumcision ritual, the pair of girls whose parents are both still alive make up a recurring figure in blessing rituals. According to Bloch's analysis (1986), these childless girls are in fact in an intermediate position between generations. However, unlike in the case of the Merina, this ambiguous position underlines not so much the unity of the endogamic group (1986: 57) as the more general need for individuals to remember both affiliations in order to obtain the generative power (hasiñy). The hasiñy transmitted by ancestors must flow from both sides of the family, maternal and paternal.

This bilateral unity of the ancestors' blessing is also reflected in the way notables are referred to: *raiamandreny*, which literally means "father and mother" (1986: 57). Ultimately, whether between genders, generations, or lineages, ritual service associates—in the same sequence of actions—modes of relationship that are ordinarily antithetical: at once hierarchical, "complementary," and "symmetrical" (Bateson 1958: 175–77). It is in these terms that Houseman and Severi (1998: xii) define "ritual condensation." Thus, the "relational form" (1998: xiv, 212) generated by these ritual services presents a condensation of hierarchical relationships and egalitarian cooperation. Or, in the words of Berger (2012: 359–60), they generate a condensation between generative elements (*masiñy*), linked to ancestral hierarchy, and powerful elements (*mahery*), linked to biological indistinction.

In this relational configuration, relations between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy on the one hand, and between Bevôñy and Antifañaiñy on the other, also take on a complex and ambivalent form. We have seen that, when they arrived for the Saturday seed service, the Zafinimena tromba arranged themselves to the west of the Zafinifotsy tromba, the west being a less noble direction. This preeminence of the Zafinifotsy is probably also motivated by the context, since this is the service dedicated to these spirits that takes place in front of their toñy. However, the reverential greetings offered by the Zafinifotsy tromba to the Zafinimena tromba indicate an inverted hierarchical relationship, probably because the latter rule the village. For the same reason, during the concluding invocation inside the toñy, the living Zafinimena nobles were seated to the north of the Zafinifotsy tromba. Concerning the relationship between the Bevôñy and the Antifañaiñy in their common task as intercessors of the tromba andrano, we have seen that while the Bevôñy ampangataka pronounced all the Friday invocations and the Saturday opening invocations, the Antifañaiñy appeared in the foreground during the two concluding invocations, at the climax of the rain service. This preeminent position of the Antifañaiñy seems to contradict the hierarchical superiority claimed by the Bevôñy in their accounts presented in chapter 1. According to the Bevôñy's accounts, they were the Zafinifotsy's traveling companions long before the arrival of the Antifañaiñy. By virtue of this privileged past relationship, they are in a position of superiority over the Antifañaiñy when it comes to caring for their ancestors, in the same way that—as the Bevôñy asserted—men's children are superior to women's children.

To shed light on these ambivalent relationships by restoring their historical and sociological depth, we will now turn to the opening service

Table 2. Summary of the kind of toñy in the villages and the groups of servants for each Toñy

Villages	Toñy (ancestors)	People in charge of the ritual work/service
Ambendraña	Zafinifotsy toñy (Bevaoko)	Bevôñy
	Zafinimena toñy (Ndramañotroñarivo)	Zafinimena's servants
Andampy	Zafinifotsy toñy (Ampelabe)	Antifañaiñy

of the Zafinimena toñy in the northern part of Ambendraña. This will enable us to understand the role of Zafinifotsy spirits and their Bevôñy assistants in Zafinimena rituals. We will then travel to the village of the Zafinifotsy female ancestor, Ampelabe, and her ritual assistants, the Antifañaiñy, in order to present the relationship between the Bevôñy and the Antifañaiñy from the latter's perspective.

Opening the Gate of the Zafinimena Ancestors

I attended the Zafinimena toñy service, also known as the "big stone service" (*fanompoaña am-batobe*), shortly after my arrival in the village of Ambendraña. It took place on Friday, September 9, 2016, when the moon had reached first quarter. This year's service involved changing the enclosure around the large stone associated with Ndramañotroñarivo, the ancestress of Ambendraña's Zafinimena nobles. This stone, according to the stories some nobles told me, came from the place of origin of Ndramañotroñarivo, the first noble to arrive in the village. The royal service for this great stone began, like the one we have just seen, with a night vigil on Thursday evening during which the boys and girls, mostly nobles, gathered standing in a circle outside the gate of the Zafinimena toñy to sing goma songs. Meanwhile, the older nobles sat motionless on a mat in front of the royal house observing the dancing. Inside the royal house, the sovereign had summoned the Zafinimena spirits, who then left the house to join the singers. These spirits were the tromba called Kôrò, from Ambendraña, in the body of a woman from Antsohihy, and Ndramañavakarivo, a former sovereign from Mahajanga, inhabiting the body

of a young nobleman (the only male medium I met in Ambendraña).[15] The first tromba, Kôrò, was dressed like those in Ambendraña, with a red fez and a Western-style white shirt. The second, Ndramañavakarivo, wore a long, white, ankle-length Muslim shirt, a sign of his conversion to Islam. The latter tromba stands out for his aggressive, almost animalistic attitude: he only expresses himself through guttural cries. Indeed, he has a reputation for being fierce (*masiaka*) (Baré 1980: 40), fierceness being a quality often attributed to the most ancient royal ancestors. The vigil continued with chants punctuated by the cries of this spirit until dawn.

In the morning, more people arrived from neighboring villages. In front of the toñy, the enclosure had been removed, leaving the large stone uncovered and the matambeloño shrubs as the only trace of the former enclosure. As was later explained to me, men belonging to two groups of descendants of the "Special Servants" (Razañ'olo) of the kingship, called Jingô and Antankoala, took care of dismantling it at dawn and depositing the wood in a "sacred place" (*tany masiñy*) to the north of the village. More precisely, the place from which the wood was taken had become sacred, generative, through contact with the materials that make up the sites dedicated to royal ancestors. Indeed, it is through a metonymical contiguity between the latter, the sites dedicated to them, the materials that make up these sites and the land that receives these materials, that the generative power of the ancestors is contagiously transmitted. After the invocation in the royal house, the Zafinimena tromba were called to the front of the house, to the space under a mango tree known as the meeting place. The tromba present were exclusively from Ambendraña.[16] Seated on a mat to the north of the toñy, they were all male spirits incarnated in women's bodies, most of whom came from other villages but had come to reside in Ambendraña. The great absentee among these tromba was the founding ancestress of the Ambendraña branch,

15. Ndramañavakarivo is the posthumous name of Andriantsoly, ruler of the Mahajanga region from 1822 until his death in 1844, converted to Islam in 1823 under the influence of the Arabized traders. When the Merina arrived on the west coast in 1824, he moved first to Marovoay, then in 1832 to Mayotte, where he became sultan. He died and was buried there in 1844 (his tomb is in today's Pointe Mahabou park in Mamoudzou). His departure created a split between the two dynastic branches of the Bemihisatra (see Noël 1843: 27–38; Guillain 1845: 74–139; Baré 1980: 38–42; Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 88–90).
16. The names of the tromba present were Kahola, Rozina, Mamodo, Morisette, and Perlin.

Ndramañotroñarivo, to whom the toñy was dedicated. According to the villagers, there had been no medium for this tromba for several years. This was a significant coincidence (or was it?) with the absence of the Bevaoko tromba among the Zafinifotsy. The men, nobles and Sakalava, were seated behind the tromba while the women, who were singing and clapping their hands, were seated facing the tromba. Next to the Zafinimena notables were representatives of the Manañadabo descent group. Some members of this group lived in the south of the village, while others had come from Komaronga. They were the *rangitrin'ny ampanjaka* (friends or messengers of the sovereign), the same role we encountered among the servants of the Nosy Lava royal cemetery.

During the ceremony, the Zafinimena sovereign interceded between the tromba and the other participants, although upon the tromba's arrival, the Zafinifotsy ampangataka had approached them to greet them. Meanwhile, the young men headed off into the forest to fetch thin branches (*faritsoko*) and dry trunks for the construction of the new enclosure. They returned in pairs, carrying the branches on their shoulders, and when they arrived, the young women sitting in front of the tromba stood up and walked toward them, singing the goma. After leaving their loads, the boys joined the girls in their singing and dancing, clapping their hands and feet. After a few minutes of jubilant singing, the young men returned to the forest to fetch wood, and the girls went back to singing with the other women. The same scene took place several times, until the branches and trunks that had been gathered sufficed to rebuild the enclosure.

As the boys worked in the forest, the Special Servants removed the dry leaves, or ticks, from around the stone-ancestor, while a Zafinimena notable gave them directions and the chief of the Jingô gave them rum to drink. As with Bevaoko's toñy service, it was opposite-gender couples who performed this work. Once the clean-up was complete, construction of the enclosure began. The youngest started by digging holes for vertical posts, while the chief of the Jingô cut and sharpened them. Once the vertical posts had been planted, they were fastened to horizontal trunks, which formed the structure of the enclosure. Finally, the slender branches were woven vertically. This work was carried out by pairs of men belonging to one of two groups of Special Servants, one working inside the enclosure, the other outside. Then, once the reconstruction of the gate had been completed, two childless young noblewomen, whose parents were both still alive, brought water in two metal teapots held on their heads and poured it four times into the toñy.

Finally, a zebu was brought by a nobleman to the toñy gate. This was a noble *silamo* (Muslim).[17] Young men tied up the zebu by the legs and laid it on the ground with its head pointing eastward toward the gates. A little girl poured a bucket of water over the zebu, starting with its head, then slapped it on the side, uttering the words: "*Maty niany misolo amaray*" (Dead today, replaced tomorrow). The Zafinimena ruler approached the zebu and—standing with the end of a stick on the animal's head—uttered an invocation rendered inaudible by the women's chants. Once the invocation was finished, the zebu was turned the other way, with its head now to the west, and the noble Muslim cut its throat with a large knife. A young man put a branch trimmed with green leaves on the zebu's neck, from which the blood gushed. From the opposite end of the animal, excrement flowed to the ground. The first streams of blood were collected in a white plate and poured inside the toñy, as an offering to the great Zafinimena ancestress. Finally, the young men cut up pieces of meat, which were then distributed to the villagers. The liver and heart were destined for the sovereign, while the buttocks went to the chief of the Jingô. As the saying goes, "to each his piece/task" (*samby amin'ny anjaranany*). Once the sacrifice was over, the assembly moved inside the royal house, where the women intoned the great songs. The lamalama party continued until late afternoon.

As we can see from this brief description, the ritual actions of the Zafinimena toñy service coincided, in their main sequences, with those performed for the Zafinifotsy ancestor service—with the addition, in this case, of the reconstruction of the toñy enclosure. This reconstruction probably justifies the presence of the zebu sacrifice. Naturally, the ritual actors of the two royal services were not the same. For the Zafinimena royal services, the "people in charge of the work" (*tompon'ny asa*) were the Razañ'olo, or Special Servants, divided between the Jingô and Antankoala descent groups, some of whom lived in the village, while others came from neighboring villages. These groups of Special Servants have a central task in the Hot Service, as the royal funeral is called. In particular, they are responsible for treating the sovereign's corpse and, at least for the ancient Analalava rulers, for periodically making and washing the royal relics. Since the toñy is also a substitute for the body of the deceased sovereign, these Razañ'olo are also responsible for its upkeep. In

17. As Lambek points out, the category of *silamo* is used among the Sakalava "to refer more to a descent-based category (*karazana*) than an exclusive religious faith" (2002: 195).

this ritual context, these servants played the same ritual role in relation to the Zafinimena ancestors as that played by the Bevôñy in relation to the Zafinifotsy ancestors. The Bevôñy played no particular role in the Zafinimena ceremony. Nor did the ampangataka, although he remained close to the Zafinimena tromba during the ceremony. This intercessory task was performed by the Zafinimena ruler and, as we saw in the previous chapter, can also be assumed by members of his family. It was always he who pronounced the final invocation before the sacrifice of the zebu. Unlike that of the Zafinifotsy presented above, the intercessor of the Zafinimena ancestors of Ambendraña is not from the same descent group as those responsible for the ritual work. On the contrary, he is a direct descendant of the ancestors with whom he intercedes. As a result, the Zafinimena nobles of Ambendraña do not need intermediaries from outside their group to communicate with their own ancestors. This is another feature that distinguishes the Zafinimena branch of Ambendraña from that of Analalava. The Ambendraña ruler and members of his group are in fact the intercessors, or ampangataka, of their own ancestors. From the point of view of ritual positions, then, if the Bevôñy are in a relationship analogous to the Special Servants vis-à-vis the royal ancestors, the Zafinimena ruler of Ambendraña occupies a role analogous to that of the Bevôñy ampangataka (Bevôñy : Special Servants = Bevôñy ampangataka : Zafinimena ruler). Finally, one difference between the two ritual services is the absence of the Zafinifotsy tromba in the Zafinimena service, whereas the Zafinimena tromba—as well as the living nobles—were present and relatively active in the Zafinifotsy service. Yet, despite this absence, the Zafinifotsy ancestors are said to play an essential role in the ritual life of the Zafinimena. We will now turn to how and why.

Relations between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy

The day after the ceremony of the opening of the gate of the Zafinimena toñy, I noticed that the ampangataka of the Zafinifotsy spirits was very upset. According to his explanations, the sovereign was supposed to come with the other Zafinimena notables to his house to meet the Zafinifotsy tromba. This was to inform them of the ceremony that had taken place. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the nobles informed the ampangataka that they would be unable to arrive on time. In response, the ampangataka canceled the meeting, interpreting their

delay as a sign of disrespect—not only toward ancestral custom, but also toward his ritual authority in the village. I have already alluded, in the previous chapter, to the lack of political recognition by the local administration of the position of the ampangataka. To this absence of political recognition was now added the loss of the ritual prestige conferred on him by his role as intercessor of Bevaoko, the master of the village. Hence the tensions between the Zafinimena ruler and the Zafinifotsy ampangataka, between the former's political power and the latter's ritual authority.

This obligation of the Zafinimena to inform the tromba andrano of their ceremonial activities was not only required by the ampangataka, but confirmed to me by the Zafinimena nobles. According to the accounts of both parties, the Zafinifotsy do not have the same obligation toward the Zafinimena. To understand the reasons for this asymmetrical relationship, which structures not only ritual actions but also the conformation of the village, it seems important to me to question the nature of this relationship between Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver. It is by reconstructing their history that we can understand the structural and structuring relationships between Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena.

Masters of the land and foreigners

Caught up in this questioning, I once asked the ampangataka if these two dynastic groups were "related" (*mpihavana*). "They're not related," he replied, "but they 'get along' [*fañarahaña*], they're 'on good terms' [*fankatia*] …. They have made a 'pact' [*teny ieraña*]. They can help each other and not do their activities alone… That's their agreement." As we saw in the account of the settlement of the two main Ambendraña groups, the Zafinimena nobles did indeed make a pact with the Bevaoko tromba, the master of the village, through the intermediary of the Bevôñy, his ritual assistants, in order to be able to settle on the territory. Bevaoko and the Bevôñy were already present when the Zafinimena arrived. Accounts of the Bevôñy's settlement, as well as those of the Zafinimena nobles and other inhabitants of the region, agree that the drowned Zafinifotsy ancestors were the masters of the land not only of Ambendraña, but of the entire region. According to Faustine, the Bevôñy intercessor from Analalava, the Zafinifotsy were the former rulers of the region. For this reason they remain the masters of the land of the region. The Zafinimena came to power only after the Merina defeated them.

In this regard, an elder of the Manañadabo group told me that the Zafinimena played an active role in the defeat of the Zafinifotsy by the Merina conquerors. "At that time, the Zafinimena wanted to rule and take [their] place," he told me, "so they hired people to do it, according to what is said. They employed people from Antananarivo [the capital of the Merina kingdom]." This conflict between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy is unmentioned in most of the accounts I heard in the region. But it is commemorated by a ceremonial dance called *rebiky* (Feeley-Harnik 1988), which is performed at the Great Royal Services in Nosy Lava and Mahajanga. The existence of this conflict does not rule out the possibility of a posthumous agreement between the victorious Zafinimena and the spirits of the defeated Zafinifotsy, which the ampangataka mentioned in his stories. In this case, it would be an agreement between foreign (vahiny) conquerors and the spirits of the defeated masters of the land (*tompon-tany*), through the living intermediaries who represent them. In any case, according to the ampangataka, it is by virtue of this residential anteriority that the Zafinifotsy must be consulted and informed by the foreign Zafinimena. Thus, as we will see in the following pages, the relationship between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy is often presented in terms of the contrastive and structuring relationship between foreign conquerors and subjugated local elites, between "people of the power" and "people of the land" (Izard 1985), which can be found in the history and the oral traditions of various African societies (Kopytoff 1987: 49–61; Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 388–89; Haour 2013: 33–38).

Grandparents and grandchildren

In addition to being the masters of the land, the Zafinifotsy are also referred to by people in the region as the "grandparents" or "ancestors" (*dadilahy*) of the Zafinimena. It was Dady Mariety, my first Bevôñy interlocutor from Analalava, who first explained the relationship between these two groups in these terms. "They are 'relatives' [*mpihavana*]," she said, "the Zafinimena are the grandchildren of the Zafinifotsy. The Zafinimena call the Zafinifotsy grandparents." This was why, she went on to explain, the Zafinimena must consult the Zafinifotsy for their ritual activities. This genealogical relationship between the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena was confirmed to me by several people belonging to different groups and villages. Given the discrepancy between these assertions and that of the ampangataka, who had denied

any kinship ties, I brought up this contradiction during a discussion with him:

> "Why are the Zafinifotsy defined as the grandparents of the Zafinimena? Are they then related?"
> "No, they're not related. They don't have a common ancestor, but it's a practice among the nobles. For example, if we're not related, but you come and ask me for favors and I perform them, we become related, we're like two kinsmen. We're on good terms: we're relatives/allies [*mpihavana*]."

Mpihavana—which can be translated as "relative," but also as "ally" or "friend"—is a key word in defining relationships between people in Madagascar, and its semantic complexity matches that of its sociological implications.[18] In his monograph on Malagasy kinship, Paul Ottino (1998: 11–12) defined *fihavanana* (kinship) less as a blood relationship than as an ethos, a way of acting. This ethos, in fact, "enables related or unrelated people to act as relatives act" (1998: 11). In this broad sense, rather than a genetic or relational inheritance, fihavanana is a network of relationships which, on the basis of a common ancestry or a relationship consolidated over time, is built and maintained through actions. This is why the mistrust with which a stranger (vahiny) is regarded, almost as an enemy, is compensated for by the multiplication of "fictitious forms of kinship" that make it possible to "remove human relations from the realm of the arbitrary" (1998: 11–12, my translation). On an island like Madagascar, at the confluence of various migratory flows from the Indian Ocean, the relationship between the latest arrivals and the former occupants is of a kind that is often repeated throughout history. In this dynamic, "each new arrival replays the conceptual opposition between foreigners and *tompontany* (master of the land), the latter not necessarily being the first occupant" (Raison-Jourde 1983: 21, my translation). This potentially conflictual relationship between foreigners and locals is generally resolved by forming a kinship relationship through pacts or agreements, which enables the moral order of fihavanana to be reestablished. It is in this cultural context that we must interpret the ampangataka's explanations of this kinship or alliance relationship established

18. Today, *fihavanana* ("the fact of being relatives, allies") is a value systematically evoked in the propaganda speeches of national political representatives, aiming to build a Malagasy identity (see Kneitz 2014).

between Zafinifotsy "masters of the land" and Zafinimena "foreigners." This relationship is based on a pact, an agreement. And, according to the ampangataka's explanations, this pact implies ritual relations:

> They're not related, but the Zafinimena need the Zafinifotsy. They depend on the Zafinifotsy, they need them. They have made a nonbetrayal agreement [*koraña tsy fivadihana*]. [The Zafinifotsy] are a kind of protector [*tramboño*]. The Zafinifotsy in fact protect the Zafinimena of Nosy Lava as well as those of Ambendraña.

On the basis of this nonbetrayal agreement, which suggests past tensions between the two groups, the Zafinifotsy now play a ritual role as protectors on whom the prosperity of the Zafinimena is supposed to depend. However, this agreement or pact is not the same as the one made between Bevaoko and the Zafinimena nobles on their arrival in the village of Ambendraña. The nature of this other pact and the justification for this ritual function are revealed in the stories about the village of Anjango and Bevaoko's other toñy. To learn more about this history, we will visit these two villages in the next chapter.

Conclusion: An Ambivalent Hierarchy

From the various explanations regarding the relationship between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, it becomes evident that this relationship is neither reciprocal nor symmetrical. As ancient rulers and masters of the land, as well as grandparents, ancestors, or protectors of the Zafinimena, the Zafinifotsy tromba possess a ritual authority over the Zafinimena, who rule the region. As we will see later, this ritual authority is conferred upon them mainly through their assimilation to the masters of the land, who, as in many African (Kopytoff 1987: 53; Cohen and Middleton 1970: 12) and non-African contexts (Sahlins 1981, 2008; Schefold 2002), exercise prerogatives over the land based on their precedence over new arrivals. It is this authority that justifies the Zafinimena's obligation to inform the Zafinifotsy ancestors of their ritual activities, and that motivates their presence at ritual services for Bevaoko. As a servant of the Zafinifotsy tromba confided to me, Bevaoko, as master of the village, "exercises his authority over [*mikomandy*] the nobles of Ambendraña." However, as we have seen in the interactions during the rain service, these hierarchical

positions are not univocal and fixed. As Dady Mariety explained to me during our first meeting:

> These Zafinifotsy are ampanjaka [nobles], but they are not of the same group; each ampanjaka group is distinct. They have their own ancestral groups [karazaña] that give them powers, and each one stays with its own people. The Zafinifotsy rule too, but they don't "overtake" [*mandilatra*] the Zafinimena. Nevertheless, the activities undertaken by the Zafinimena are not carried out if the Zafinifotsy don't want them to be.

In this explanation, we identify between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy the same copresence of relative autonomy (each with his own) and ambivalent hierarchy that I described in chapter 1. While the Zafinifotsy tromba thus have ritual authority as masters of the land, grandparents or protectors, it is the Zafinimena who rule Ambendraña, as well as Analalava and the surrounding region. However, the Zafinimena's power to act is said to depend on the approval of the Zafinifotsy ancestors. It is they who have the power to make the Zafinimena's activities effective. It is this authority, claimed by the ampangataka, that the negligent attitude of Ambendraña's Zafinimena nobles had called into question. By failing in their duty to inform the Zafinifotsy, the Zafinimena did not respect the masters of the village and their ritual power, which is necessary to carry out their activities. They thus violated the ancient agreement that underlies the relationship between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy.

It is this complex relationship between Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena, and consequently between the different kinds of people associated with these two royal ancestries, that has been explored in this chapter through the description of the ritual interactions around the two toñy in Ambendraña and the narratives that justify these interactions. Indeed, various status groups (nobles, commoners, descendants of slaves) and descent groups living in and around the village orbit around these two royal ancestries. The Zafinimena include the living nobles, as well as the tromba and their mediums, but also their "people" (*olo*). Among their people, there are the Special Servants (Razañ'olo), from the Antankoala and Jingô groups, and their "messengers" (*rangitry*), from the Manañadabo group. The Zafinifotsy bring together the tromba andrano and various groups of servants: the Bevôñy, from whom the intercessor comes, the Sandrakôro, their assistants who live in Ambendraña, and the

Antifañaiñy, most of whom come from Komaronga to help in the rain service (table 1).

Now, to explore more deeply the network of past and present relationships that underpins the cult of the tromba andrano, it is time to leave Ambendraña and move to the other two villages in the estuary where the other tree-altars dedicated to the two main Zafinifotsy ancestors reside.

CHAPTER 4

Mikarakara: "Taking Care" of the Ancestors (Part Two: Andampy and Anjango)

In chapter 3, I presented the relationships between the different descent groups involved in the cult of tromba andrano in the Ambendraña context. In this chapter we will broaden the geographical context to discover another order of relationships that this cult mobilizes on a regional scale. To do this, we will first consider a service in Andampy, a village in the interior of the estuary located next to Doany Manangy, the Royal Residence of the Woman—that is, Ampelabe, Bevaoko's sister. A toñy dedicated to this tromba stands next to the village, which is home not only to Ampelabe's ampangataka or intercessor from the Antifañaiñy group but also to other groups of servants of Zafinifotsy tromba. Like the Bevôñy, the Antifañaiñy and other descent groups are responsible for cleaning and rebuilding the enclosure around this altar-tree. Describing the service I attended here will allow for an analysis of the relationships between the different groups taking part in it and thus provide material to compare with Ambendraña ceremonies. Following this analysis, we will turn to Anjango, a village opposite Doany Be or Doany Lelahy, the Great Royal Residence or the Residence of the Man. Here resides the spirit of Bevaoko and another of his toñy, the center of a larger network of ritual services. Indeed, these rituals involve not only the servants of the Zafinifotsy spirits, but also the servants of the Zafinimena ancestors buried in Nosy Lava. This gradual broadening of geographical and social

contexts will allow us to adopt other perspectives on the relationships between different social groups and their reciprocal identifications.

I left for Andampy the day after the royal service at Bevaoko's toñy, in the company of Adama, my new traveling companion from Ambendraña. I had learned from some Zafinifotsy spirit mediums living in Analalava that the royal service at Ampelabe's toñy would take place on Monday, November 27, 2017. It was they whom I had asked the way to this new site; indeed, none of the inhabitants of Ambendraña planned to go there. As we have seen, there is a certain autonomy between the different royal sites. "Each with his own people," one of my interlocutors had told me, commenting on the division of ritual work between the Bevôñy of Ambendraña and the Antifañaiñy of Andampy. In this division of labor, people, and places, mediums are among the main actors who trace links between places. While the ritual assistants and servants remain on site to serve their masters, the mediums move from sacred place to sacred place to serve the various masters who inhabit their bodies. Among the mediums, however, the "official mediums" (sahabe) of royal spirits are required to stay in place to serve their principal master. It was for these reasons that I turned to the more mobile mediums of the town of Analalava in seeking to be granted the way to Andampy. Thus, after asking permission from the tromba andrano, who inhabited these mediums, and the ampangataka of Andampy, who happened to be the ex-husband of one of these mediums, the mediums, Adama, and I went together to the ceremony.

Andampy: The Village of the Servants of the Woman

Manompo*: "To serve"*

Upstream of the part of the estuary known as the Great Lake lies the royal residence (doany) of Ampelabe. Situated on a rocky end of the coast covered by thick forest, it marks the end of the Great Lake, just as, on the opposite side, downstream, the Bevaoko residence indicates its beginning. After a journey of around four hours from Analalava, our pirogue reached the sandy shore that closes the Great Lake, before the doany of Ampelabe. The village of Andampy rises on a coconut-covered hill overlooking the beach. We arrived there in the evening, on the eve of the royal service to rebuild the enclosure. This service was called the "*valamena* service" (fanompoaña valamena). The term *valamena* (red

enclosure), assonant with the word *volamena* (red metal, gold), normally refers to the enclosure surrounding the royal residence or relic residence of the Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena). In this case, however, it designated the enclosure surrounding the toñy tree of Ampelabe—something that I found striking, as gold is considered taboo for these spirits. Moreover, the contrast between gold and silver was further emphasized by the fact that, to designate this enclosure, the people of Andampy alternated the terms *valamena*, red enclosure, and *volamena*, gold. As we have seen and will continue to see, such wordplay was common among my interlocutors, and testifies to a shared and cultivated sensitivity to the sound affinities between words and the association of their meanings.

As we entered Andampy, a crowd of people from various surrounding villages—far larger than those present at the Ambendraña services—was scattered outside the palm houses, sitting on the ground. After a quick dinner, we joined in the night vigil that had begun, as in Ambendraña, with the calling of the tromba andrano in the ampangataka's crowded house, while outside, a group of young people standing in a circle sang the goma. Despite the sleep ban, Adama and I, tired from our journey, took a rest in a house reserved for us by the ampangataka of Andampy. This house was intended for the Antifañaiñy from Komaronga, with whom we would share it. The Antifañaiñy, while constituting a single descent group, were divided into different lineages scattered across various villages, sometimes far apart.[1] One of these lineages came from Komaronga. Indeed, during ceremonies, guests (vahiny) from afar were often accommodated in different houses according to their village of origin, their descent group, or their lineage. Once again, the arrangement of people in space constitutes a map of social hierarchy. During the night, we were suddenly awakened by a group of young people shouting, violently banging on the door, and laughing. As our guides would explain to us the next day, to enforce the no-sleeping rule, the group of boys and girls who sing goma all night go around the houses from time to time, knocking on doors. When they sense the presence of a disobedient sleeper, they ask for money to buy "soap" ("*Savôny*, *savôny!*" they would shout) to wash at dawn. In fact, as some young people confessed to me,

1. Such segmentation is a common feature of Sakalava groups, traditionally formed of seminomadic herders. It is often motivated by the search for new grazing lands, new land to cultivate, or, in the colonial and postcolonial period, by the search for salaried work.

most of the money collected that night was used to buy alcohol to stay awake all night.

Before dawn, before "the water was crossed by a bird" (*rano tsy dikam-pitily*), everyone went to bathe in the river.[2] Upon returning from the river, we visited the ampangataka in his house, where I was introduced by his ex-wife. She presented him with the offerings of alcohol, money, and perfume that I had brought for him and the "old woman," as Ampelabe was familiarly called. As in Ambendraña, the royal service started with the invocation to the tromba in the house of the ampangataka, and then continued outside the gate of the toñy. To the east of the village, surrounded by a wooden enclosure, including a hasiñy plant and a lombiro shrub (*Dialyceras parvifolium*), the toñy was a large one of a species called *tsitindry*.[3] The participants were seated in front of the gate that gives access to this tree-ancestress. Again, to get an idea of the hierarchy of the descent groups in the village, the arrangement of participants in the ceremonial space is a valuable clue. The Antifañaiñy notables, masters of the village and "responsible for ritual work" (*tompon'ny asa*), sat to the north of the gate. The other notables, belonging to the other three main groups and living in Andampy and the neighboring village of Ambarijeby, sat to their south.[4] Among them stood out an old man, the oldest of the villagers, belonging to the Antibohitry descent group. It was explained to me that, as the eldest of the men, he had the final say in decisions taken at village assemblies, and he also helped the ampangataka in directing the service. The other two groups to which the notables belonged were the Antifañivaña and Antifarimay. The members

2. The expression "before the water is crossed by a bird" is a figurative way (*sarin-teny*) of indicating when water is at its purest. Pure water is a central element of royal rituals. It is used to wash the participants, but also, as we have seen, to wash the various bodies of the sovereigns (their corpse, relics, or toñy).
3. According to botanical records, this vernacular name refers to two tree species in the *Moraceae family*: *Treculia perrieri* (Simmen et al. 2007) and *Streblus dimepate* (Volampeno et al. 2016). As I was unable to take photos due to the prohibition governing these locations, I was unable to verify the identity of this tree.
4. At the Zafinifotsy service in Ambendraña, it was the Zafinimena nobles who sat to the north. The latter are statutorily superior to other nonnoble groups, including the Bevôñy masters of the land, who are responsible for ritual work. In that context, at least, the status of noble is a criterion that prevails over others.

of these four groups were the main caretakers of Ampelabe and the other Zafinifotsy ancestors in Andampy. Finally, the mediums were seated in front of the gate and, behind them, the other participants divided between men, on the north side, and women, on the south.

As in the ceremonies described in Ambendraña, after the incense had been lit within the tree enclosure and the intercessor had recited the invocation, the tromba descended to inhabit the bodies of their mediums. Six Zafinifotsy tromba andrano, with the exception of Ampelabe, were present. As in the Ambendraña seed service, a Zafinimena tromba from Ambendraña, Kahola, also arrived. The main actions were the same as those described for the service at the Zafinimena toñy in Ambendraña: cleaning the ticks-leaves of the toñy and rebuilding the enclosure. While some of the notables took care of the first task, the young men fetched the wood from the forest. The ampangataka and the elder checked that the work was going smoothly and that the zebu to be sacrificed was in good condition: "It's fine, it has no fractures, it's not blind," they confirmed to the other notables. Any deformity is forbidden for a zebu offered to the royal ancestors.

Once enough branches had been gathered, the men, young and old, began to rebuild the enclosure, arranging the finest branches vertically and weaving them into the horizontal trunks. As we saw at Ambendraña, this work was carried out in pairs and, as I noted at that service, alternation was another formal element thematized by this ritual action. Not only are the branches woven through the three horizontal trunks in an alternating way, but the parts of the enclosure to be rebuilt were also organized alternately. Each side of the enclosure was divided into four parts by the four vertical posts. While one pair of men began braiding the branches of the first section, another pair took care of the second section. Once these sections had been completed, the first pair of men went to work on the third section, while the other continued by braiding the branches in the fourth section. It was only after the enclosure was completed that the notables built its gate made of posts.

Thus, as observed in Ambendraña and Andampy, the ritual service establishes a gendered division of labor between the men working on the enclosure and the women taking care of the tromba and of the tree inside the enclosure (as in Ambendraña, four young women poured water into the toñy). These are two complementary ways of "taking care" of the royal ancestors (Esposito La Rossa 2023).

Finally, the zebu was brought before the gate of the toñy to be killed. This zebu was "white or bright-headed," *mazava loha*, a name given to

black-coated zebus with a white spot on the forehead. With their rare colors, the mazava loha are the preferred zebu for Sakalava royal services (Lombard 1988: 75). It was at this moment that something different from the services seen in Ambendraña happened. The ampangataka entered the toñy enclosure with the village elder and, assisted by him, dressed himself as a tromba andrano: in the white Muslim-style shirt, the black staff with a silver tip, and with a silver necklace with tsangan'olo silver coins as pendants around his head. This is Ampelabe's distinctive dress. Thus, at this climax of the ritual, the ampangataka personified his mistress, *condensing* (Houseman and Severi 1998: xii) his subordinate relationship to Ampelabe—as her servant—with the symmetrical identification with her.

After a woman washed the zebu with a bucket of water, the ampangataka approached its head, while his son, as the owner of the zebu, held its tail with his hand. The son performed the first invocation in which he prayed for the zebu to lie down peacefully. A zebu offered to the ancestors cannot be forced to be sacrificed. It must be "willing" (*sitra-po*), as expressed by the idea of voluntary servitude that also applies to royal servants (Lambek 2002: 163ff.; Feeley-Harnik 1991b: 102). This Sakalava ideology of willing or "voluntary servitude" is reminiscent of the concept theorized by Étienne de La Boétie ([1576] 1997) in the sixteenth century and later taken up by Alain Testart (2004), according to which the domination of a sovereign is based not on force of arms but on the acceptance of servitude by his subjects. In this sense, voluntary servitude reveals the ability of power to make itself desirable to its subjects by concealing the trickery and injustice on which it is built. In the following chapters, we will see what types of trickery are used by Sakalava royal power to make servitude voluntary. After his son's invocation before the zebu that had accepted its fate, the ampangataka followed with his own invocation:

> *Koezy*! I praise you, O God, and you, O sacred land, and I do not forget you, ancestor/grandmother Mihamy [Ampelabe], and all the others I have not named. We have completed the red enclosure, and we are going to kill a zebu. I ask that whoever cuts its throat not injure himself with the knife. Nor do I forget you, ancestor/grandfather Ndramamitraña, who made this toñy, we must remember you, for it was you who founded the toñy with ancestress/grandmother Mihamy and ancestor/grandfather Bevaoko, that is why we remember you when completing the red enclosure.

As I pointed out in chapter 1, historical narratives are permitted in ritual contexts of invocation or possession. And indeed, a fragment of history resurfaced in this final invocation. According to the words of the invocation, Ndramamitraña,[5] Soazara's great-grandfather and founder of the Sakalava kingdom of Nosy Lava, also founded this toñy dedicated to Ampelabe/Mihamy. As I was told later, he donated a gold coin (*volamena*) to be buried in this toñy. It was this gift that promoted the toñy enclosure to the status of red enclosure (valamena), a title reserved for royal enclosures and linked to the presence of gold. We will return to this story in more detail later.

A Muslim cut the zebu's throat and the first jets of blood were collected in a white plate to then be poured into the waters of the river to the east of the toñy. Traveling with the river, the sacrificial offering would thus reach Ampelabe, whose body lies at the bottom of the sea. The ceremony ended in the village, where the participants made their offerings and requests to Ampelabe's tromba, inhabiting the body of an elderly medium who had first been possessed by Laisarotro's spirit. In the next chapter, we will look at the hidden reasons for the presence of Laisarotro's tromba, which also inhabits the bodies of Bevaoko's mediums. Having no residence (doany) of his own, this dangerous child alternates between the residences of Bevaoko and Ampelabe. Likewise, his spirit dwells in the bodies of their mediums, who constitute their human residences. To conclude these exchanges between the living and the royal ancestress, drinks offered to Ampelabe were redistributed among the participants, and the party (*lamalama*) continued until late afternoon.

Mitantara*: "To tell"*

In this service for Ampelabe, the Antifañaiñy performed the same function as the Bevôñy had in the services for Bevaoko. However, while the Antifañaiñy were present at the seed service in Ambendraña, the Bevôñy were not present here. And yet, in their oral accounts, the Bevôñy define themselves as those responsible for the Zafinifotsy tromba, as they are the descendants of those who drowned with them, while the Antifañaiñy are defined as the assistants of the Bevôñy, as they joined them later. The stories recounted by the Antifañaiñy, however, tell exactly the opposite story. According to their accounts, the Antifañaiñy are the descendants

5. Ndramamitrañarivo is the posthumous name of Añono or Rano (ca. 1843–65), son of the Sakalava queen Tsiomeko (1828–44).

of those who came from Marangibato with the Zafinifotsy nobles and committed suicide in the sea with them. It was the Bevôñy who joined the Antifañaiñy to help them with services for drowned spirits. We will now analyze this other tradition of stories, which offers us another perspective on the history of the tromba andrano.

According to the testimony of a woman belonging, on her father's side, to the Antifañivaña group (one of Ampelabe's servant groups), the Bevôñy are more precisely descendants of slaves (*andevo*) "offered" (*namiaña*) to the Zafinifotsy to help Ampelabe's servants take care of the spirits of the Zafinifotsy. It is the Antifañaiñy who are the traveling companions of the silver nobles, who came from Marangibato with them and never abandoned them, as another Ampelabe servant told me. This insistence on "not abandoning" (*tsy miala*) their masters echoes the insistence on not forgetting the ancestors we found in the invocations. As we shall see, the insistence on these two negative formulas could be indicative of a forgetfulness and abandonment found in past relations between servants and masters, or between descendants and ancestors. According to this interlocutor, when the Zafinifotsy tromba are called by the living, it is the Antifañaiñy descendants who manage the gate of the toñy and the invocations: it is the Antifañaiñy who are the intermediaries of the Zafinifotsy tromba.

During a discussion I witnessed in Ambendraña between an Antifañaiñy and the Bevôñy ampangataka, these two mirror versions of the respective positions of the Bevôñy and Antifañaiñy in relation to the Zafinifotsy found a point of balance. In the words of this Antifañaiñy, originally from Andampy but at the time living in Ambendraña, the two groups of ritual assistants were both chosen to serve the Zafinifotsy, hence their role as intercessors:

> I am certain that the Bevôñy, all the Bevôñy, those who have been "marked by the dot" [*voateboko*], are the masters of [invocation]: they are the intercessors. The Antifañaiñy, also marked by the dot, are [also] the masters of the joined palms.

Voateboko, literally "marked by the dot," refers to the people chosen to serve the sovereign and his ancestors, that is, their "royal servants" (*ampanompo*). In the Nosy Lava cemetery, for example, according to the accounts of various mediums, if a medium is marked by the kaolin dot (*teboko*) on his or her forehead during the invocation in front of the gates to the royal tombs, he or she is supposed to remain at the mahabo (royal

cemetery) and to serve the royal ancestors throughout his or her life. The medium thus becomes, practically speaking, an Antimahabo, a servant of the royal cemetery. During the invocation before the gates of the Nosy Lava tombs described in chapter 1, the royal mediums had indeed been marked by this dot. Thus, according to these details, the Antifañaiñy and Bevôñy are not so much people who do not abandon the Zafinifotsy, as their stories claim, but rather people who may not abandon these ancestors, like the Antimahabo of Nosy Lava vis-à-vis the Zafinimena ancestors. This tension between voluntary and forced servitude, to which we alluded during the zebu sacrifice, is indeed at the heart of royal ideology.

In sum, if in terms of their status the Antifañaiñy and the Bevôñy are equivalent, each group claims precedence and primacy in their relationship with the Zafinifotsy ancestors. The Antifañaiñy justify the anteriority of their link with the Zafinifotsy by the fact that the Bevôñy are only present in Ambendraña, while they and the other groups of Ampelabe servants live not only in Komaronga, but also in Anjango, the other village that hosts the toñy of Bevaoko. While the Ambendraña ampangataka is called upon to participate in the service of the toñy in Anjango by virtue of his role as intercessor of Bevaoko, Ampelabe's servants, according to their accounts, must be present at all services for the Zafinifotsy ancestors, whether at Bevaoko's or Ampelabe's toñy. This claim was confirmed by the presence of the Antifañaiñy during the invocation for rain in the service for Bevaoko in Ambendraña. Indeed, according to the Antifañaiñy of Andampy, there is a division of labor for Zafinifotsy ancestors, whereby they are supervisors (*ampitsikilo*) of the royal services, while the Bevôñy are said to be assistants who "look after" (*manajary*) and dress (*mampisikiny*) the Zafinifotsy tromba.

This division of labor for the ancestors also corresponds to a division of rights that the two groups of servants have over their Zafinifotsy masters and over people who host the latter's spirits in their body. According to another Ampelabe servant, the Bevôñy have the right to inherit the clothes and accessories of the tromba andrano mediums upon their death: this is their part (anjara), they are the "heirs" (*antidova*). At the same time, however, the Antifañaiñy and other Ampelabe servants have the right to buy back these goods from the Bevôñy. They can also ask living mediums, when incarnating Zafinifotsy spirits, to give them their accessories. In this exchange of services and goods between servants and ancestors, given the polysemy of the word anjara, the part or share to which each is entitled has the double meaning of the share one inherits and the share one must offer, or the task one must perform. This

ambivalence stems from the logic of exchange that governs the concept of jôro, which designates both prayer/sacrifice to and blessing of the ancestors. The same logic applies to the concept of hasiñy, designating both the generative force distributed by the ancestors and the honorary offering presented to them. So, if the anjara (share) owed to the Antifañaiñy and other groups of Ampelabe servants is to be able to seize any object carried by the Zafinifotsy tromba, the anjara (share/task) that these Andampy servants owe to the Zafinifotsy ancestors is to supervise their services. They also have to offer zebus each year for these services. Yet, as a servant from the Antifañivaña group explained to me, in the past it wasn't zebus that had to be sacrificed, but people:

> Our part [anjara] is to oversee the work; we don't move. But there's a story about our part. When we do a royal service, for example, if Soazara—praise be to her! [*koezy tompoko*]—does the service for the Great Tamarind Tree [of Anjango], our share [anjara] is to give zebus to kill. But we used to offer people from our descent group [*firazañana*] to slit their throats—my lords/ancestors be praised! I need to drink alcohol! [she drank a glass of the rum I had offered her]. That's the reason for our share/task. "Prepare yourself well, for we're going to slit your throat [*linteny*]," [we used to say] to a teenage girl who hadn't yet done certain things with men. A young girl. Then we'd also take a beardless boy, who hadn't yet known women. We'd take them, put their best clothes on them, and slit their throats—praise be to you, O lords/ancestors! We slit their throats to shed their blood! When we did the service of "difficult/delicate things" [*raha sarotro*] over there, we used not to kill zebus.[6] After the Europeans arrived, we replaced the people with zebus.

Before the arrival of French colonizers,[7] it was therefore human beings, not zebus, who had their throats slit during the Great Royal Services called for by the Zafinimena rulers. It was in this sacrifice that supposedly voluntary service to the sovereigns and their ancestors reached its climax. The weight that royal service imposed on its servants was later mitigated by the replacement of people with zebus. And, according to

6. *Raha sarotro*, "difficult things," is a euphemism often used to refer to relics.
7. French colonizers arrived in Nosy Be, north of Analalava, in 1839–40, after Andriantsoly, who had taken refuge in Mayotte, ceded the island. In 1897, they set up a control center in Analalava.

this Ampelabe servant's account, it was thanks to the sacrifice of several zebus that Ampelabe's toñy was founded:

> When we founded the toñy, we performed certain actions: we put a large stone in the toñy, then a gold coin, which came from the people of the west [the rulers of Nosy Lava]. [Also] two silver coins [that] belonged to us, along with a silver necklace. These objects [in silver] refer to our ancestors [the Descendants of Silver]. We buried them for the first time. With a group of people, we offered a *rafia nasampy* zebu, then a *manjiriky* zebu, another, [a] *bidahara*, and another, [a] *mazava loha* zebu.[8] In all, four zebus were killed. Other zebus were killed afterward. Finally, we shared them between us.

As the ampangataka explained regarding Bevaoko's toñy in Ambendraña, to establish the toñy dedicated to Ampelabe it was necessary not only to sacrifice zebus, but also to bury silver. Moreover, unlike Bevaoko's toñy in Ambendraña, in Ampelabe's toñy in Andampy a gold coin was also buried. While the silver had been provided by the servants of the Descendants of Silver, the gold was donated by the people of Nosy Lava—more specifically by the sovereign Descendant of Gold, Ndramamitraña, as the invocation carried out during the royal service recalled. It was thanks to this gift that the enclosure of Ampelabe's toñy became a valamena (red enclosure) or, as Andampy's servants call it by assonant metonymy, a *volamena* (gold). It is the presence of gold that differentiates this place from a simple toñy like the one in Ambendraña.

But, according to the testimony of an Antifañaiñy, the gold coin is not the only gift the Zafinimena sovereign, Ndramamitraña, made to the Zafinifotsy ancestors:

> Bevaoko had many children, while Ampelabe had none. But she raised her brother's children. That's why Bevaoko had no people [to look after him], whereas Ampelabe had many …. Ampelabe had the Antifañaiñy, but Bevaoko had no one. [The Bevôñy] are people who belonged to Ndramamitraña.

As asserted by the testimony quoted here, the Bevôñy are people given by King Ndramamitraña. According to the rest of this account, confirmed by other testimonies from people affiliated with various groups

8. The names of the zebu indicate the color of their coat.

in the region, the Bevôñy were offered to Bevaoko in exchange for a fulfilled vow (*tsakafara*), a "pact" (*fankiaña*) that Ndramamitraña had sealed with Bevaoko and to which the ampangataka of Ambendraña referred in his stories. This pact was revealed to me through historical accounts (tantara) concerning Anjango and the Great Tamarind Tree (*Madirobe*) dedicated to Bevaoko.

Anjango: The Pact and the Archaeology of Suspended Royal Service

> There was a sovereign who had made a vow. It was the ruler of Nosy Lava, of course. When the Hôva [Merina] armies had pursued them from [the south], [the ruler of Nosy Lava and his subjects] had fled north.[9] But the word was out: "They're coming!" (At that time, the vazaha [French] had not yet arrived in our country). "They're coming!" people would say. When he decided to make the vow, the sovereign gathered people to send to the ampangataka next to the sea [and told them]: "If the Hôva who want to destroy my kingdom don't reach the area where we've settled, tell him I'm going to send two slaves to [Bevaoko,] the ancestor who lives in the sea: a beardless boy and a teenage girl." This was the vow the sovereign had made. Then the king's messengers reported to the ampangataka what the sovereign had told them.
>
> "Ah, if this is the sovereign's will, then let us make the invocation," [replied] the ampangataka as he approached the sea. … He was at Ampandrakôfa, upstream from the Great Royal Residence [Doany Be]. … In those days, the spirits drowned in the water didn't yet inhabit any living! Only the ampangataka, from the Antifañaiñy descent group, made this invocation. [He announced:] "If the seven boats arriving to destroy their kingdom don't reach Nosy Lava, two slaves will be thrown into the sea: a beardless boy and a teenage girl." And he struck the sea [with a stick],[10] then they returned.

9. The ampanjaka Zafinimena are originally from Mahajanga, in the Boina region. Following the Merina invasion in the first half of the nineteenth century, they were forced to flee further north, first to Nosy Be, then to Nosy Lava (see Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 88–93).
10. The type of *vilirano* or *velirano* pact mentioned by the ampangataka of Ambendraña in his stories consists precisely of hitting the water with a stick.

> They already knew the date of Hôva's arrival. They were all already gathered to head north to watch. "Ah! They're coming!" they announced as they watched the sails flap in the wind …. The boats climbed a little further north in search of wind, then turned toward here. And then… bang! They missed their target. All seven boats were seized [by the waves] and disappeared, destroyed. They all died, people say.
> But once the wish had been granted, it was difficult to pay the debt. And indeed, it wasn't paid, because of the arrival of the French. It was really "complicated/difficult" [sarotro]. The French controlled everything, and nobody dared throw human beings into the sea.[11] The granted wish remained unfulfilled for a long time. Until zebus and silver coins were sent in place of what had been promised. A pair of young zebus like the other couple. A "white-headed" [*mazava loha*] female, with a white tail, and a black male with a white spot on his forehead [*bidahara*], with a white tail. It was they who were killed by people, and their blood was spilled at the Great Royal Residence. It was with this that the vow was honored.
> And here's the story of the Bevôñy: before he had paid for the granted wish, the sovereign said: "Before I even had time to honor my wish, things got complicated." So, he sent two people from [Nosy Lava]: a woman and a man. … This is the origin of the Bevôñy clan. After that, he sent the rest: the two zebus, plus silver coins… four, I think. This is the story of the Bevôñy. They are servants of Nosy Lava.

This tantara, recounted by Soandrazana, an elder of the Manañadabo group residing in Komaronga, was reported to me in different variations by several people from different groups inhabiting the villages around the estuary. Each version emphasizes certain aspects of the story, adding details and omitting others, but all agree on the pact linking the Zafinimena ruler of Nosy Lava and his descendants to the drowned Zafinifotsy ancestors. All the iterations of this account (excluding, of course, the version recounted by the Bevôñy themselves) also recognize the Bevôñy as descendants of the sovereign's slaves, offered to Bevaoko by the

11. In describing the funeral services for the Sakalava ruler of Nosy Be, Tsiomeko (posthumous name: Ndramamalikiarivo, 1828–44), mother of Ndramamitraña, held under the French protectorate, Baré reports details of the presence of French soldiers at the burial, "to ensure that a human sacrifice, required at the burials of supreme rulers, was not performed" (1980: 53, my translation).

sovereign to pay his debt. This account also confirms the Antifañaiñy version, according to which they, the Antifañaiñy, were the intermediaries of the Zafinifotsy ancestors long before the Bevôñy. According to this version of things, Bevaoko's first intercessor was indeed from the Antifañaiñy descent group. This was confirmed by other testimonies from people belonging to other descent groups. These accounts also suggest that it was only once the ruler of Nosy Lava had offered Bevaoko slaves, who became his caretakers, that the Antifañaiñy began to specialize in caring for Ampelabe, Bevaoko's sister.

Comparing these accounts with those of the Bevôñy, we can see that both perspectives converge on the existence of a pact between the Zafinimena living sovereign and the drowned Zafinifotsy ancestor. It is this pact that, for the ampangataka, justifies the relationship between the two dynastic groups. According to an account by the ampangataka of Ambendraña—which confirms a version of the account quoted above—this pact was formed following the disintegration of an earlier alliance that the Zafinimena had forged with the Merina against the Zafinifotsy. Betrayed and threatened by the Merina, they finally turned to their Zafinifotsy ancestors for help, thus forging a nonbetrayal pact. The accounts of several Bevôñy also concur on the details of this pact reported in Soandrazana's story: the promise of the sacrifice of a young couple, the breaking of the promise due to the arrival of the French, and the offering of zebus to replace the human sacrifice. What the ampangataka and other Bevôñy interlocutors failed to mention was that the Zafinimena ruler also offered slaves to the Zafinifotsy, and that these slaves are said to be the ancestors of the Bevôñy in Ambendraña.

But the Bevôñy ampangataka and other Bevôñy told me of other servants and other gifts. According to them, the Zafinimena sovereign promised Bevaoko and Ampelabe that every year he would honor the royal service of the Zafinifotsy in Anjango and Andampy by sending gifts (*takitaky*) and servants from Nosy Lava to help with the ritual work. These servants would perform, in particular, the *rebiky* dance in front of the toñy, a special dance commemorating the conflict between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy.[12] However, this offering, I was told, had not been made for several decades. As a result, the Anjango royal service

12. At Mahajanga's Ndramisara relic residence (doany) there are also "Special Servants" (Razañ'olo) sent by Soazara to serve her ancestors. They have stayed on since 1959 and, according to what they told me at the Grand Service in 2016, are in charge of organizing the *rebiky* dance performed

was no longer celebrated, and the Zafinifotsy ancestors had been waiting years for their due. Thus, the Zafinimena, former masters of the Bevôñy, had become their debtors, the Bevôñy being the living representatives of Bevaoko.

The Antifañaiñy of Andampy confirm the account of both this annual offering and its suspension. They also add that, in addition to the gift of zebus and this annual offering, the ruler of Nosy Lava also offered the spirits of the Descendants of Silver two gold coins. One gold coin was buried in the toñy dedicated to Bevaoko, in Anjango; another was buried in the toñy in Andampy. Thus, the two places became the red enclosures, or the gold, of the Descendants of Silver, placing them on par with the red enclosures present in the royal residences of the Descendants of Gold.

The suspended cycle of royal services

What, then, we might wonder, was this Anjango royal service all about? This ritual service for the Zafinifotsy ancestors was an important step in the cycle of royal ceremonies that began with the Great Service for washing the relics of Zafinimena ancestors from Nosy Lava. The cycle continued with the Anjango service for Bevaoko and ended with the service for Ampelabe in Andampy. According to Ambendraña's ampangataka, if they spent six months serving Bevaoko in Anjango, they also had to spend six months in Andampy, at his sister's toñy. As the account of the human sacrifice of Ampelabe's servants implied, it was the Zafinimena rulers and their servants in the Nosy Lava cemetery who decided when this cycle of services began. They were the "masters of decision" (*tompon'ny koraña*), and it was they who prepared the main offering for the Zafinifotsy royal service.

Indeed, it was probably the Zafinimena sovereign Ndramamitraña who founded (or helped found) not only the toñy in Andampy, but also the one in Anjango. This is evidenced by the fact that the invocation mentioned in the account was pronounced by the Antifañaiñy ampangataka directly facing the sea and not the gate of a toñy. This detail suggests that there were, as yet, no altar-trees dedicated to Zafinifotsy ancestors, just as there were, so far, no Zafinifotsy tromba inhabiting the living. It was as a result of this pact that the first two toñy were founded in the

at the end of the ceremony. This, however, could not be confirmed by Lambek, who carried out fieldwork at this site (personal communication).

region and their maintenance services instituted. On the basis of this pact and the payment of his debt, Ndramamitraña thus "reunited" (*mamitraña*) the reigning Zafinimena and the drowned Zafinifotsy. At least, this is suggested by an etymology of the name of the sovereign Ndramamitrañarivo that Faustine, my informant from Analalava, provided me with: "The name Ndramamitrañarivo, 'The Lord-who-has-gathered-a-thousand,'" she explained to me, "comes from the fact that the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena got together despite their disagreements, and they made the pact… They got together so that the Zafinimena would have power."

All that remained of the Anjango service at the time of my fieldwork were a few fragments of narrative. Moreover, the red enclosure of the Great Tamarind Tree, located on the edge of the estuary, had long since disappeared for lack of ritual maintenance work. This illustrates the link between the material fragility of these place-artifacts, the maintenance work they require, and the social memory embedded in them (Esposito La Rossa 2023). A new toñy had been rebuilt in another place, called Nosy Mazava, but its maintenance work now mainly concerns the inhabitants of Anjango, scattered between the various hamlets in the middle of the rice fields. However, these services still require the supervision of Bevaoko's ampangataka of Ambendraña. It was he who gave me a description of the service at the Great Tamarind Tree, which had not once been carried out since he had become ampangataka. He had taken part in it when he was still young, and his grandfather, the former ampangataka, had given him plenty of information about what to do should the service resume. Further details of the service were in fact reported to me by Zaman'i Lisa, an elder of the Antifarimay descent group, the first occupants of the village of Anjango who were also present at Andampy to serve Ampelabe. In what follows I will briefly summarize the ceremony's stages as described to me by these two witnesses.

When the Antifarimay, or masters of the village, receive the designated letter from the servants of Nosy Lava, they summon the ampangataka of Ambendraña. Before the ampangataka arrives, the Antifarimay and the three other main groups living in Anjango prepare the royal house (zomba) of the Bevaoko medium to the north of the toñy.[13] A large number of participants arrive from different parts of the region. In addition to the Antimahabo servants from Nosy Lava, the Bevôñy from

13. According to Zaman'i Lisa, the three principal groups living in Anjango besides the Antifarimay are the Antifañivaña, Firangiabe, and Jimamena.

Ambendraña, and the servants from Andampy, many mediums, servants, and devotees come from neighboring villages. These visitors are housed in purpose-built houses around the toñy, in the mangrove forest, far from the scattered village dwellings, with each one spatially placed according to his or her place of origin and group affiliation.[14] The Antifarimay, the first occupants of the village, are also responsible for the work that takes place around the service. For the duration of the service, those living in the northern part of the village are called Anti-avarabe or Avarabe (People from the far north), while those living in the southern part are called Tsimania. This classification echoes the arrangement of Zafinimena royal servants in the royal residences and cemetery (Baré 1980: 246; Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 345).[15] The Antiavarabe people take care of reconstruction on the right side of the enclosure, the Tsimania on the left.

The service lasts for months or even years, and the years or months dedicated to service must always be in even numbers.[16] This time is doubled by the service for Bevaoko's sister in Andampy that follows. Years of service could thus be dedicated to the Zafinifotsy ancestors. The work involved in the royal service consists in part in rebuilding the red enclosure around the toñy, as we have seen for the toñy in Andampy or the one in Ambendraña. According to the account of Bevaoko's ampangataka of Ambendraña, twelve vertical posts are to be planted in the ground (as in the cases of the other toñy), and in front of each post, inside the enclosure, a tsangan'olo silver coin is to be buried. According to him, one of the reasons for the length of the service is the time it takes to collect these silver coins for burial in the toñy enclosure. According to the notable Antifarimay from Anjango, the long duration of ritual work is also due to the fact that sweating is forbidden during the service. As we shall see at royal funerals, this prohibition also applies to the digging of the grave for the sovereign's corpse. This is why the actions are interspersed

14. As this former Antifarimay from Anjango described it to me, the groups originating from Anjango are lodged to the north with the servants from Nosy Lava, while the servants from Andampy and the Bevôñy from Ambendraña stay in the houses built to the south.
15. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 345) notes, "for these Zafinimena royal residences, the servants' houses constitute a second enclosure (*vala*) of humans around the toñy."
16. The same rule applies to major services, such as royal funerals (*fanompoaña mafana*) or the service to rebuild the Nosy Lava tomb enclosure (fanompoaña menaty).

with numerous pauses, and why many people are involved, taking turns carrying them out. Furthermore, ritual work is performed only on so-called good days and is suspended during the forbidden month of the year. When the work of building the enclosure and washing the toñy is complete, the rebiky dance is performed by Nosy Lava's royal servants in front of the gate of the toñy, under the gaze of both the tromba andrano and Ndramamitraña's tromba. Once the service at Bevaoko's red enclosure in Anjango is over, all of the participants make their way to Ampelabe's toñy in Andampy.

However, this ritual cycle, which brought together Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy servants—as well as, within the latter, Bevaoko's and Ampelabe's servants—has been suspended for the past twenty years. According to the testimonies of various Zafinifotsy servants, the rulers of Nosy Lava and Analalava were behind the institution of this cycle of collective services and were also responsible for its suspension in more recent times.[17] In particular, it was Soazara's daughter, Zalifa, who caused relations between the Zafinifotsy ancestors and the Zafinimena rulers to deteriorate. Her fault was to marry a Merina, a Hôva—that is, somebody belonging to the enemy group of both the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena. It was, if we recall, their shared hatred of the Merina that had reconciled these two groups. According to the stories told by Zafinifotsy servants, not only did Zalifa transgress the Zafinifotsy ban on marriage with the Merina, but she dared to bring her son, a Merina on his father's side, into the village of Bevaoko in Anjango. The Zafinifotsy ancestors, Ampelabe in particular, did not forgive her. It was because of this event that the Zafinifotsy ancestors became angry with the Zafinimena queen of Analalava and with the Zafinimena servants of Nosy Lava. The incident also caused trouble between the tromba of Bevaoko and his sister Ampelabe, the latter having reproached her brother for allowing a Merina to enter a place dedicated to the Zafinifotsy. This is why, according to the stories told to me by Zafinifotsy servants, the current ampangataka of Ambendraña had to bring a zebu offered by Bevaoko's medium

17. Regarding the rulers of Nosy Lava and Analalava, the first Southern Bemihisatra Kingdom was founded by Ndramamitraña (1843–65) at Nosy Lava, after 1849 (date of the abolition of slavery). His son Ndramañetsy (or Ndramañetry) transferred the royal residence to Analalava, where his granddaughter Soazara (see Feeley-Harnik 1991a) also settled, after various moves due to the conflicts of the colonial period (see Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 133–51).

to Andampy to appease Ampelabe's anger toward Bevaoko. This event illustrates not only that the Zafinifotsy's anger toward the Merina is still alive, but also that their history continues to be made through their living representatives: mediums and servants.

Finally, another problem hampers the resumption of the service: the absence of mediums of Bevaoko's tromba since the ampangataka disqualified the medium from Ambendraña. As the eldest Antifarimay pointed out to me, without the presence of his master, the service to him cannot be performed. However, during my last weeks in the field in 2018, after Soazara's death in February 2017, rumors were circulating in Analalava that discussions had resumed between the people of Nosy Lava and the daughter of the Analalava queen, Zalifa, about rebuilding the red enclosure at Anjango. But no date had been set for an eventual service. According to the people of Ambendraña, Zalifa would first have to ask the Zafinifotsy ancestors for forgiveness for the fault she had committed. Pending a new agreement, a new reconciliation between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy, and a new collaboration between Bevaoko's and Ampelabe's servants, each group would continue to serve its master in its place of residence: everyone [would stay] in his own domain.

Relationships of Relationships

In these two chapters, I have begun to analyze the royal services that represent the way the living take care of the royal ancestors. These practices of care form the core of the cult of tromba andrano, the drowned Zafinifotsy spirits. I have thus described the royal services of Bevaoko's toñy and of the Ndramañotroño toñy, both in the northern village of Ambendraña. This description has enabled us to contextualize the cult of Zafinifotsy spirits within the network of ritual relationships at the village level. As we have seen since chapter 2, these relations are constituted by an opposition between the Zafinifotsy ancestors and their ritual officers (notably the Bevôñy, see fig. 15) on the one hand, and, on the other, the Zafinimena, which include living and dead nobles, as well as their Special Servants (Razañ'olo) and their messengers (*rangitry*). We have also observed that while each noble group is autonomous, and each is served by its own servants, there are nevertheless relationships between these two dynastic groups. The comparison of the royal services for these two royal ancestries that structure the ceremonial life of Ambendraña reveals complex hierarchical relationships. Notably, an asymmetrical

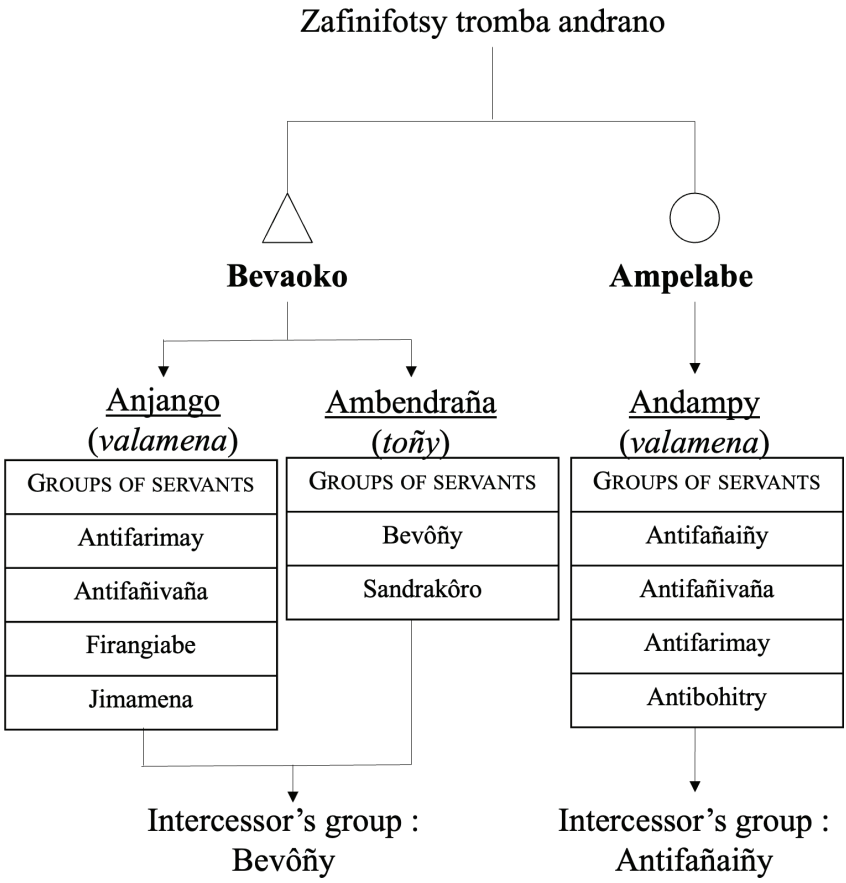


Figure 15. Distribution of tromba andrano's servant descent groups

ritual relationship exists between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy, according to which the Zafinimena not only assist the Zafinifotsy in their services, but also have an obligation to inform the latter of theirs. This ritual relationship is based on complex historical relationships between the two groups. According to the stories told by members of the various descent groups living in Ambendraña, the Zafinifotsy were the first to arrive in the region from Marangibato. The Zafinimena nobles of Ambendraña arrived later and requested permission from Bevaoko, eldest of the Zafinifotsy and master of the village, to settle with the Bevôñy, his ritual assistants. It is by virtue of this residential precedence of the Zafinifotsy and of their status as masters of the land that the Zafinimena were obliged to assist their Bevôñy servants in the services dedicated to

the Zafinifotsy ancestors, and to inform these same Zafinifotsy ancestors of their own ritual activities.

By broadening the context of these relationships and gathering stories from other groups inhabiting the region, new elements are added to this initial configuration of relationships. Long before the village of Ambendraña was founded but after the Zafinifotsy's suicide, another Zafinimena branch, led by Ndramamitraña, great-grandfather of the queen of Analalava at the time, arrived in and reigned over the region. Implicit clues (made explicit in some accounts) suggest that the Zafinimena did indeed contribute to the defeat of the Zafinifotsy by allying themselves with the Merina. However, once the Zafinimena had settled on Nosy Lava, they too found themselves threatened by the Merina. To prevent the boats of the Hôva/Merina armies from reaching them, they sought the help of the drowned Zafinifotsy ancestors, masters of the sea. They called on the Zafinifotsy intercessor from the Antifañaiñy group. He invoked Bevaoko on the seashore and presented him with Ndramamitraña's vow to sacrifice two teenagers in exchange for saving his kingdom. After the vow had been granted, the French arrived and banned human sacrifice. This explains why Ndramamitraña would have sent two young slaves to Bevaoko to take care of him, in addition to a gold coin to be buried in what would become his place of worship, the Great Tamarind Tree in Anjango. Another gold coin was sent for his sister in Andampy, where another toñy would be founded. From then on, the slaves sent by Ndramamitraña—slaves of whom the Bevôñy are descendants—would look after Bevaoko's toñy. The Antifañaiñy, probably Zafinifotsy servants who had arrived with them from Marangibato, would then go on to devote themselves to the care of Bevaoko's sister, Ampelabe, in the village of Andampy. In addition, Ndramamitraña also promised to continue serving the Zafinifotsy ancestors every year, sending offerings and additional servants to help the Zafinifotsy servants in the Anjango and Andampy ritual services, probably instituted to honor his vow. These services brought together the servants of the Zafinimena ancestors buried at Nosy Lava and the servants of the Zafinifotsy ancestors from Ambendraña, Andampy, and Anjango.

It is as protector of the Zafinimena against the Merina that Bevaoko and the Zafinifotsy ancestors are supposed to be served and consulted by the Zafinimena. As we shall see, this role of the Zafinifotsy, in addition to that of rainmakers and that of ancestors of Zafinimena, derives from their position as masters of the land. However, it is the Zafinimena who reign and maintain royal power in the region today. As summarized

by Dady Mariety, the Zafinifotsy do not surpass the Zafinimena, but without the will of the Zafinifotsy, the Zafinimena can achieve nothing. In this interdependence, reminiscent of that between Sakalava and sovereigns ("Sakalava make sovereigns rule"), lies the ambivalence of the hierarchical relationships described in the stories and revealed during royal services recounted here.

Ultimately, this complex, ambivalent relationship between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy is based on a double pact that corresponds to two levels of social relations. The first pact concerns Bevaoko, his Bevôñy intermediaries, and the nobles of Ambendraña. The other pact concerns the vow and debt binding the Zafinimena ruler of Nosy Lava, and his Analalava descendants, to Bevaoko and the Zafinifotsy ancestors. There are two levels of relationship here, corresponding to two different segments of the kingdom's political organization formed at two different historical periods. Whereas the pact between Bevaoko and the nobles of Ambendraña is situated at the local village level and involves only ritual assistance between the different groups of Ambendraña or, at most, Komaronga, the pact with the ruler of Nosy Lava mobilizes many people spread throughout the region. What is more, the arrival of the Zafinimena from Ambendraña in this village must have come after the sovereign of Nosy Lava's vow to Bevaoko. Indeed, when they arrived, Ambendraña's nobles already found the Bevôñy settled there. As we have just seen, according to the accounts of other groups in the region, the Bevôñy are in fact the descendants of the slaves given by the ruler of Nosy Lava in exchange for Bevaoko's granted vow. The pact between the ruler of Nosy Lava and Bevaoko, concluded through the Antifañaiñy, thus precedes the one between the nobles of Ambendraña and Bevaoko, sealed through the Bevôñy.

So, as we moved through the villages of the region and adopted different points of view, we not only broadened the context of social and ritual relations, but also found ourselves moving backward in time. Following a segmental logic of dynastic divisions, it is necessary to change location and perspective to access different levels of relations that, in this case, evoke and reelaborate another moment in the history of Sakalava Bemihisatra kingship. It is in this sense that Jean-François Baré writes: "The structure of the Bemihisatra is historical. The history of the Bemihisatra is structural" (1980: 1, my translation). These relational contexts, though independent of one another, are linked by historical and ritual relationships that remain anchored in places—sometimes forgotten—and that emerge only on certain occasions and for certain kinds of people. The

ruins of Bevaoko's toñy in Anjango are one such place. Mediums or anthropologists moving from place to place are among the kinds of people for whom these revealing occasions arise.

This is why, to understand more about this relationship between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy, and the role that the cult dedicated to the latter plays in today's Zafinimena kingdom, we need to leave the Mouth of the Catastrophe behind and go back in time to the geographical source of the Zafinifotsy's tragic history: Marangibato. To get there, we will trace the Zafinifotsy's history through the genealogical links that unite the two groups of nobles and the stories that anchor them to their places of worship.

CHAPTER 5

Tantara: Histories

We will come together later,
Like water momentarily separated by an island.
Like a suddenly shattered dish,
We will part without rancor,
Goodbye to everyone!

Aloha aloha miaro,
Rano isarahaña nosy.
Bakoly vaky manta,
Hisaraka tsy hasira.
Veloma samby tsara!

Song of the tromba andrano, heard in Marangibato in September 2017

Ambavan'ny Antambo: "At the Mouth of the Catastrophe"

Opening her philosophical inquiry into the dead, Vinciane Despret asserts that "the first question posed by the deceased is therefore not one of time, but of space" (2015: 21, my translation). "Where did you die?" or, "Where do you reside?" were indeed the first questions that the ampangataka from Ambendraña, on the evening of the great royal service, had asked the spirit of a still anonymous dead person coming to haunt the body of a young noblewoman. As we saw in chapter 1, most accounts

of the tromba andrano were related to me by a series of personal names and the names of places associated with them. These places correspond to the cited people's tombs or, in the absence of tombs, to the places of residence of their spirits. As Despret explains, in order to establish a relationship with the dead, they must first be located in space (2015: 21). Even when they have no graves, even when their bodies lie at the bottom of the sea, a place must be found for them on earth. This is why, in the words of a medium from Analalava, in the Mouth of the Catastrophe, "wherever there is a rock or a forest, there are the residences" of the drowned tromba. Such prominent places on the coast have become indexes of the presence of the drowned Zafinifotsy ancestors. They have lent the ancestors a little of their existence and material presence and, in return, they have been invested with the history and character of these ancestors.[1] The same applies to mediums.

Indeed, the Zafinifotsy ancestors inhabit these designated places just as they inhabit the bodies of their designated mediums. The same verb is used to indicate the action of inhabiting place and medium: *mipetraka*, "to sit, to inhabit." And like mediums, the doany serve the purpose of recalling the unfortunate history of the Zafinifotsy ancestors. They constitute material traces by which to remember and imagine the events of the past lives, or rather the deaths, of the Zafinifotsy ancestors. This is a process of place-making (Basso 1996) which enables humans not only to use the landscape as a material support for remembering the stories of ancestors and thus making places more familiar, but also to use ancestors and their stories to legitimize one's own presence in a place through one's belonging to a group constituted around the ancestor's cult. Indeed, installing the dead in a place, by burying them or making their spirits reside there, also implies installing groups of the living around the memory of these dead. This is what Faustine made clear in her account of the tromba andrano and the Bevôñy when she said: "We installed the Zafinifotsy in Ambendraña … and we settled here in Ambendraña."

While in chapter 4 we went into detailed analysis of this process of territorialization carried out by particular groups of servants through

1. Spirits continue to exist in and through these places, or residences (doany), so that the natural phenomena that occur there become indexes to the agency of the spirit of the dead. For example, the stirring of the waves around the promontory, which is not only the sea's point of entry into the mouth but also Bevaoko's residence, is often attributed to the power and potential cruelty of his spirit.

the tromba andrano, in this chapter we will focus on the way places represent material supports for the stories of royal ancestors. As we saw in the introduction and in chapter 2, it is in particular the prohibitions that protect these royal residences that attest to the presence of the royal ancestors and preserve their stories in condensed form. The history of the tromba andrano is effectively preserved in a fragmentary and implicit manner in the places that house their tromba, in the prohibitions that protect them, in the names given to both place and tromba, as well as in the great songs recited during royal services. Having discussed, in previous chapters, the stories of these drowned ancestors as sources of legitimization and identification for their servant groups, in this chapter I will be looking at the history of the tromba andrano and the genealogical and geographical relationships that bind them together. The story of these drowned spirits was presented to me in its fragmentary and implicit form, and it is in this form that the creative and manipulable potential of this narrative material lies. Open to different interpretations, it allows individuals or groups of individuals to reelaborate and reactualize its components according to the sociopolitical contexts within which they must negotiate a position. Hence one of the dynamic aspects of the relationship between the living, places, and ancestors.

After analyzing the historical traces of the Zafinifotsy ancestors present in the Loza estuary and their connection to specific places, we will continue our journey in space to go further back in the history of these tromba andrano and the Zafinifotsy dynasty to which they belong. Following the genealogical links of these tromba, we will first go to Andrampongy, the residence where the spirit of their common ancestor, Tontôña, resides. Finally, we will travel to the source region of the Zafinifotsy, Marangibato, to investigate the more distant roots of this dynasty and its separation from that of the Zafinimena. Here, I was confronted with two different versions of the story of the Zafinifotsy and their relationship to the Zafinimena, given respectively by two institutional figures. The first version, told by a representative of the national government, is intended to be general and presents these two dynasties as concrete, defined realities; the other, expounded by the ruler and nobles of the region, offers a perspective much more rooted in local context and, unlike the first, relativizes the dynastic distinction between Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena. As we shall see in the following chapters, the reality of this dynastic distinction is not to be found exclusively in a synthesis of the two versions of the history recounted here. Rather, it lies not only in both versions of

Table 3. Tromba andrano names associated with their doany (* = doany shown on map, fig. 16)

Tromba	**Doany**
Tontôña	Andrampongy
Bevaoko	Doany Be (also known as Doany Lelahy)*
Ampelabe	Doany Manangy*
Nôro	Andrampongy
Ndramamaliky	Manañaziry*
Ndrandahy	Ankarafisaka/Ambatobenisohihy*
Kotomena	Ankarafisaka*
Kotofanjava	Ambarotsikabariaña
Kotoandriana	Ambinanitelo
Kotoroboko	Amboaiñabe
Kotolaivazaha	Babaomby
Fotsy	Ankinganivalaka
Jaovita	Ambatosomondrara
Jaomola	Ampandrianitsirebiky
Tsirimasoandro	Ambalamariaka
Lavasadika	Ambatoniankoay*
Ambony	Ambatomenavava
Laisarotro	Doany Be/Doany Manangy*

history, but also in the historical, structural, and contextual reasons that justify each of these two versions.

So, let us start with the Loza estuary and the link presented in these stories between the spirits of drowned Zafinifotsy ancestors and their royal residences, their doany.

Doany

The stories recounted to me by members of various groups of tromba andrano servants broadly agree on the correspondence between royal spirits and respective residences presented in the table above. While the names and genealogical links of the first two generations of tromba are more

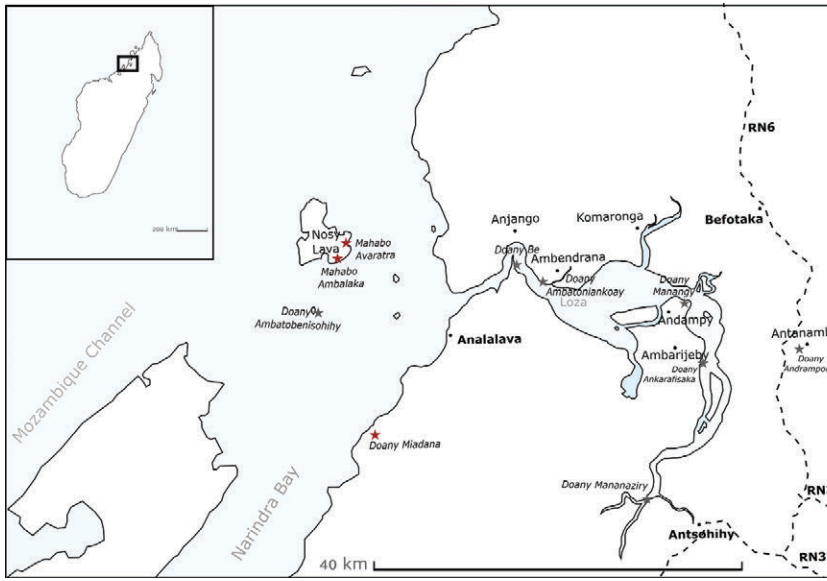


Figure 16. Map of the tromba andrano doany identified during my survey of the region (marked with gray stars), as well as the Zafinimena doany and mahabo (marked with red stars)

or less fixed by tradition, the number of descendants of Bevaoko varies from one narrative to another, as do the relationships between them. In general, each tromba has its own doany. The exception is Laisarotro who, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, resides in both Bevaoko's and Ampelabe's residences. Similarly, he is present in the bodies of mediums inhabited by the spirits of Bevaoko or of Ampelabe. As announced, in this chapter we will look at the stories that explain the exception of Laisarotro. Another singularity is presented by the tromba of Ndrandahy, the eldest of the siblings (according to some), who effectively changed doany, moving from the residence of Ankarafisaka, which he shared with his brother Kotomena, to that of Ambatobenisohihy, a solitary island off Analalava. While the narrators of these stories knew the names of the various doany in question here, the location of some of them remains unclear. In my investigations, of the sixteen royal residences listed by my interlocutors, I was only able to identify those most familiar to travelers on the waters around Analalava. This was only possible thanks to the marks of respect I witnessed travelers showing when they passed near one of these places.

But it is the number of residences that is already an important clue to the status of the Zafinifotsy drowned nobles and the history of the Sakalava monarchy. The fact that two or three generations of nobles could occupy such a large number of doany within a relatively small area is quite extraordinary given the politics of space practiced by the Zafinimena sovereigns. The number of Zafinimena doany generally corresponds to that of sovereigns. In contrast to Zafinifotsy doany, the number of Zafinimena doany is therefore proportional to the number of generations of their ruling members. In northwestern Madagascar, the term doany refers to the royal residences founded during the Sakalava expansion along the west coast of Boina—from the first capital, Trongay,[2] south of present-day Mahajanga, to the north, on the island of Nosy Be.[3] As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 95) states, this expansion and the resulting proliferation of doany was motivated not only by wars between relatives (*ady milôngo*) disputing power, or by the development of the slave trade with Western countries from the middle of the seventeenth century, but also by the custom of abandoning a doany upon the death of its corresponding sovereign. When a sovereign died, the doany became "hot land" (*tany mafana*), considered to be polluted by his corpse (Guillain 1845: 22; Poirier 1939: 78). Therefore, to preserve the purity and generative power (hasiñy) of the new sovereign, a new residence for the successor had to be built far from that of his or her predecessor. As traditionally recounted in historical accounts, it was the royal family's diviner-healer who was supposed to choose the new location. The generative power of the former ruler was thus transferred and cooled in relics made on the occasion by ritual specialists, be they Special Servants or the diviner-healer.[4] These relics were then kept in a house inside the new doany.

As the explorer Charles Guillain wrote (1845: 31n2), possession of these relics is, in the eyes of the Sakalava, comparable to the consecration

2. Trongay or Tongay is the royal capital founded by Ndramandisoarivo (who died around 1720) in the Bay of Boina south of Mahajanga (Guillain 1845: 19–20). According to Marie-Pierre Ballarin, this historic site coincides with the present-day doany Bezavo, where the sovereign Ndramandisoarivo is indeed buried (2000: 105).
3. Mention must also be made of the Sakalava kingdoms founded on the east coast and on the central Androna plateau of Boina, in present-day Tsimihety country, where the Marangibato region is located.
4. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 105) suggests, these Razañ'olo or Special Servants are an innovation of the northwestern Boina kingdoms.

of kingship, and the reigning ruler must be in possession of them in order to rally the entire population to him. It is as master of the relics, condensing the power of the ancestors, that the sovereign also comes to be called "master of the ancestors" (*tompon-drazaña*) (Baré 1980: 254–55). This is why, in the expansionist phase of Sakalava kingship, the mobility of the relics and generative power of the ancestors is strictly linked to that of the doany of the living sovereigns. The retired doany would then remain a place of worship for the memory of the former sovereign (Lambek 2002: 82), and the new residence became the new center of royal power. The doany thus constituted a territorialization device for Sakalava royal power, allowing royal history to reverberate in the countryside, and offering a genealogical map of the dynasty's rulers (2002: 82).

Nevertheless, this dynamic was disrupted in the first half of the nineteenth century by the Merina invasions, supported by the English.[5] When the Merina invaded the northwestern region of Boina in 1824 and the Sakalava ruler of the time, Andriantsoly, abandoned his doany, the relics were sequestered by the conquerors to gain control over the population (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 89). According to Feeley-Harnik's reconstruction, this theft of relics and the passage of royal Sakalava power into the hands of the sovereign's sister, who had stayed behind, led to a transformation in the strategy for legitimizing royal power. The power of the living was transferred from men to women. At the same time, the legitimizing power of the royal ancestors was transferred from relics to tombs (1991a: 95). It was at this point that the doany of the living sovereign, deprived of the presence of relics and increasingly ephemeral due to Merina incursions, gradually lost its importance vis-à-vis the royal tomb. The latter was built in places difficult to access, notably on hills, as its name suggests: mahabo, "that which rises." The generative power of former male sovereigns legitimizing the new living female sovereign thus shifted from mobile, graspable relics to fixed, hard-to-reach corpses. This is why, in response to Feeley-Harnik's question regarding the location of the first queen's doany after the Merina invasion, her informant had replied that "only the mahabo counts," because the doany moved, as

5. In 1817, after Radama I's Merina armies invaded the eastern port of Tamatave to seize one of the main trade routes with the Mascarenes, the Merina ruler signed a peace treaty with the British governor of Mauritius, Robert Farquhar, obliging Radama to ban the sale of slaves in exchange for British military support in conquering the island (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 123–24).

the Sakalava rulers and nobles "just fled, fled from the Hova!" (1991a: 95). Thus, with the proliferation of doany under pressure from the Hôva/Merina, we see a decrease in the value of these places in favor of royal tombs which, fixed in space, often house the corpses of several generations of sovereigns, as is the case of the southern royal cemetery in Nosy Lava. Even after the recovery of the relics sequestered by the Merina, the cemetery remained the center of the cult of the Zafinimena monarchy in the Analalava region. Consequently, the attention of the royal services gradually shifted from the washing of relics in the doany to the cleaning services of the royal tomb at Nosy Lava and the washing of the regalia kept there (1991a: 105–6).[6]

In this process of transformation of the places of power of the Sakalava monarchy, the Zafinifotsy doany in the Loza estuary are something halfway between the royal residences (doany) and the Zafinimena cemeteries (mahabo). As the Zafinifotsy never lived in the area, and their bodies were never buried there, the drowned Zafinifotsy inhabited these doany only in the form of tromba. There are no human constructions or signs of human presence in these places. These doany also differ from the memorial sites of the Zafinimena rulers in terms of their number. The large number of these Zafinifotsy doany contrasts with the small number of Zafinimena tombs on Nosy Lava. The most important cluster of Zafinimena tombs in a cemetery, or mahabo (the southern one), is a fixed geographical landmark that condenses the history of the sovereigns who have reigned in the region. Five members of the royal family from four generations of sovereigns are buried here.[7] On the other hand, eighteen members of the Zafinifotsy royal family, spread over three generations, occupy around fourteen doany in the region. And there are certainly more doany and spirits than I was able to ascertain from my contacts. However, if the large number of Zafinifotsy doany resonates with the

6. At the time of my fieldwork, the relic washing service at the Miadana doany had been suspended for several years, because Princess Soazara, due to her age, could no longer travel to attend the ceremony. The most important ritual moment of the year was therefore the Great Royal Service at the cemetery in Nosy Lava.

7. The sovereigns buried here are: Ndramamitraña, founder of the kingdom of Nosy Lava (1843–65); his son Ndramañetry (who died in 1892); his grandson Ndramamahaña (who died in 1925), Soazara's father; Ndrantahiry or Ombilahikely, Soazara's brother; and since May 2017, Soazara (1923/1925–2017).

proliferation of Zafinimena doany, it is because the historical cause behind this dispersal is the same: the Merina invasion. It was because of the Hôva/Merina attacks that the Zafinifotsy were forced to disperse into the sea, and that the Zafinimena sovereigns had to move their residences from place to place. The memory of these displacements is inscribed in the name of this dynastic branch: Bemihisatra, "The-many-who-moved-slowly." However, unlike the Zafinimena doany, which don't count, the doany of the drowned Zafinifotsy spirits are engraved in people's memories and in the region's landscape. The Southern Bemihisatra branch of the Zafinimena countered the unfortunate memory of their flight from the Merina with the memory of the unity and longevity of royal power embodied in the tomb of their sovereigns. The defeat of the Zafinifotsy, on the other hand, has been crystallized in the dispersal of its members and the places that commemorate them.

Yet, there is another reason behind the abundance of Zafinifotsy doany, which distinguishes them from Zafinimena places of worship and the idea of power they express. These doany dedicated to the children of Bevaoko attest to the prolific descent of this ancestor, or at least to his strategy of filiation. According to some accounts by servants of the tromba andrano, many of the children attributed to Bevaoko were in fact adopted. Either way, the abundance of Bevaoko's offspring runs counter to the conception of the uniqueness of Zafinimena Bemihisatra rulers, which implies that this dynasty has few descendants. As Baré (1973: 97) and Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 61–62) have noted, this idea of uniqueness is inscribed in the very name given to the "Long Knife" (*Vy Lava*) that constitutes the most important relic of the Southern Bemihisatra kingship: "the Long Iron [Knife] who reigns alone without equals" (*Vy Lava tsy aroe manjaka tôkana*). This relic is considered by the Bemihisatra to be "a remedy to prevent numerous descendants" (*aody tsy maro*), since conflict between relatives—and especially between the sovereign's children—is one of the main reasons for the division of royal power. This is why the filial relationship between Queen Soazara and her daughters is concealed by terms of address. The people of Analalava refer to Soazara's daughters as her little sisters (*zandry*). Consequently, Soazara's daughters refer to their mother as big sister (*zoky*). Whether between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy or within the Zafinimena—between the Bemihisatra and the Bemazava branch,[8] or between the Zafinimena of Analalava and

8. The Bemazava is the name of the dynastic branch that opposes the Bemihisatra. This dynastic division dates back to the mid-eighteenth century

the Zafinimena of Ambendraña—we will see that this contrast between restricting and multiplying descendants is at the heart of distinctions between ruling dynastic branches and those that have been excluded from the exercise of political power.

In short, the spatial distribution of these sites in itself reflects the history and ideology of royal power, as well as the strategies for its transmission and perpetuation, which characterize the different dynastic branches. While the ruling dynasty tended to concentrate power in the hands of a unique sovereign and anchor it in the royal residence—or tomb—at the expense of numerous descendants, so as not to disperse it, collateral branches, in order to thrive, encouraged the proliferation of both their offspring and commemorative sites. In the process of anchoring the history of royal ancestors to places, the names given to the latter may also carry the history of the drowned Zafinifotsy, as well as the ideas of transmission and perpetuation of life that concern the Sakalava aristocracy more generally.

Place-Names: Antambo

Basso (1988: 103) is credited with reviving interest in the study of toponyms, long neglected by some linguists and ethnologists as mere referential tools of language. Contrary to this epistemological prejudice, Basso (1988, 1996) has effectively demonstrated the expressive potential exploited by the Apache of western North America to communicate the moral lessons contained in the stories that are in turn condensed into toponyms. While certain Sakalava place-names, as well as certain names given posthumously to sovereigns, also retain this expressive power, the ideology of communication underlying the play on them is nevertheless different from that of the Apache. While the latter, in the examples proposed by Basso, use place-names to evoke a moral knowledge shared between interlocutors, for the Sakalava place-names and proper nouns more generally evoke forbidden stories belonging to certain "kinds of persons" (*karazañ'olo*) and, through that affiliation, denoting their social status. This is particularly true of names associated with royalty. The etymology of these names can be interpreted to reconstruct and update the

and stems from succession struggles between two children of the sovereign Andriamboniarivo (Guillain 1845: 26–28; Baré 1973: 101–6; 1980: 36–37).

history contained in their opaque semantic elements. However, in doing so, the narrator who tells their history does not position himself symmetrically in relation to their interlocutor in terms of a common knowledge that he makes explicit, but rather on a hierarchically superior level, as the repository of a particular knowledge that he communicates exceptionally. The exception lies in the fact that these narratives are told in ritual contexts. Outside of such contexts, the discreet disclosure of these narratives can be an indicator of the narrator's more general knowledge and therefore provide a clue to their social position. In a hierarchically distributed and locally shared knowledge system, to know—but above all to show that one knows—ancestral histories is to claim a position in this ancestor-based hierarchy. Hence one of the meanings of the word *tantara* (histories), which Delivré translates as "privileges" (1974: 164). Telling a story necessarily implies evoking a hierarchy. Now, while the names of the Zafinifotsy doany mostly refer to the morphological or ecological characteristics of the places,[9] or to the status of the spirit that inhabits them,[10] the name given to the estuary that hosts these doany is indeed the object of this hermeneutic game.

In the narratives about the tromba andrano, different interpretations have been given to me concerning the origin of the name *Ambavan'ny Antambo*, "At the Mouth of the Catastrophe." The word *antambo* has several layers of meaning attributed to it. While in general it indicates a "calamity" or a "catastrophe," due in particular to the reversal of ancestral customs (*fomban-drazaña*), the word can also assume the more specific meaning of "incest." Thus, the estuary's name can also mean "the Mouth of the Incest." The verbs *manantambo*, or *mandoza* (derived from the synonym *loza*), mean "to cause misfortune," but also "to commit incest" (Malzac and Abinal 1888). In the ideology of Sakalava kinship, incest—particularly among commoners—is considered an extremely serious transgression of the ancestral laws (*didin-drazaña*) and therefore a cause of misfortune. Indeed, one of the first times I heard this word, my host Papa Safina translated it as a union between brother and sister, accompanying this translation with an impish burst of laughter. A similar ambiguity of meaning can also be found in the etiological explanations

9. For example: *Am-bato-ni-ankoay*, "To the rock of the eagle"; *Am-bato-be-ni-sohihy*, "To the great rock of the *sohihy* trees."
10. This is particularly true of the names designating the residences of the two main spirits: *Doany Be*, the "Great Royal Residence," or *Doany Manangy*, the "Royal Residence of the Woman."

of the name given to the estuary. While some traditions explain the origin of this name by the catastrophe of the drowning of the Descendants of Silver, or by that of the sinking of the seven Merina boats, several accounts attribute this name to the inversion of a hierarchical order established by the ancestors.

According to the Ambendraña intercessor's account, which was also confirmed by others, the inversion associated with the name of the estuary is in fact due to the geographical position of the doany of Bevaoko and of Ampelabe. The gender hierarchy states that while the downstream part of a watercourse is reserved for women to bathe in, men go to wash upstream of the river, in the purest waters. In the Loza estuary, however, Ampelabe, a woman, lives upstream, while Bevaoko, a man, lives downstream.[11] It is this inversion of the hierarchical order inherited from the ancestors that would therefore be defined as antambo. However, other accounts explain the estuary's name by an incestuous union having taken place between a brother and sister. Even on this point, these versions diverge concerning the protagonists of this incest. The first story Dady Mariety told me about the tromba andrano was that, if there had indeed been an antambo in this estuary, it concerned the incest committed by Bevaoko and Ampelabe. The strange fruit of this incestuous union is Laisarotro: "The one who is dangerous/complicated." However, as in the case of the queen and her daughters, this relationship of filiation is obscured by the terms of address. Laisarotro is in fact called the "grandson" (*zafy*) of his parents. It is because of his complicated, dangerous position that he therefore resides in the residences of his parents or grandparents, and that mediums who are inhabited by the spirit of Bevaoko or Ampelabe are also inhabited by the spirit of Laisarotro.

As one Analalava medium confessed to me, talking about this story is complicated and heavy (*mavesatra*). It is the excessive weight of this version of the story that could explain its limited circulation and the more profuse dissemination of its lighter counterparts. During my

11. Beaujard testifies that among the Antemoro nobles of southeastern Madagascar, downstream is more important than upstream, with the elders living downstream from their younger siblings. This spatial hierarchy, in line with the genealogical position of the two tromba andrano (Bevaoko being the elder of the two), is, according to Berger and Blanchy, the legacy of the spatial occupation policy of the nobles of the ancient empire of Srivijaya (Sumatra), from which some of Madagascar's nobles would have descended (Berger and Blanchy 2014: 37; Beaujard 2019, 1: 622–23).

meeting with Dady Mariety, for example, after she had recounted the incestuous origin of Laisarotro, Mama Safina, who was present at the discussion, corrected her by specifying that Laisarotro's parents were not Bevaoko and Ampelabe, but two of Bevaoko's children: Ambony and Mahitso. This version, which transfers the incestuous act from one generation to the next, is also a demonstration of the fact that the elements that make up the histories of royal ancestors are not crystallized once and for all. These elements can be discussed and reconstructed collectively, not least by the mediums who embody the characters of the stories they constitute. Mama Safina and Dady Mariety were indeed both mediums of the tromba andrano. However, among these versions, the most convincing is the one that attributes the incestuous union to Ampelabe and Bevaoko, as it provides an explanation for the complicated and exceptional position of Laisarotro and his tromba. The version of incest between Bevaoko's children seems rather to be a screen-narrative elaborated from the euphemizing of terms of address between Laisarotro and his parents, called grandparents, and taken here in the literal sense. Moreover, this hypothesis could explain why Bevaoko is recognized in the region as being able to deflect the misfortunes associated with incest. Having been the protagonist of a case of incest during his lifetime, as an ancestor he would be able to remedy this transgression. Like a diviner-healer, the tromba of Bevaoko and his mediums are reputed to be able to make remedies to protect people who have committed an incestuous act from the wrath and punishment of the ancestors.

What is crystallized in these narratives is not only the lives of the nobles of the past, but also value judgments on their choices and strategies. Indeed, incest occupies a central and ambivalent place in the history of the Sakalava monarchy. Although considered a misfortune—a catastrophe—especially from the perspective of nonnoble people, historical data testify to an ambiguous attitude toward incest. During certain periods, endogamy was, in principle, the preferred strategy of nobles to maintain their distinctive status. According to Luc de Heusch (1987), endogamy—particularly brother-sister unions—is part of the symbolism of several East African monarchies in the Great Lakes region (cf. Chrétien 1974). Beyond East Africa, comparable practices have also been attributed—often through overinterpretation—to other dynasties, including Ptolemaic Egypt (Dodson and Hilton 2004: 16–17), the Inca Empire (D'Altroy 2002: 108, 236; Rostworowski de Diez Canesco and Murra 1960: 422), the Habsburgs of early modern Europe (Ceballos

and Álvarez 2013), and the aristocracy of Hawaii (Valeri 2009: 216–17; Kamakau 1961).[12] Regarding the Zafinimena dynasty, in their chronicles of the first half of the nineteenth century, Vincent Noël (1843: 46) and Charles Guillain (1845: 23) declare that, paternity being always considered doubtful, endogamy was the norm imposed on them by one of the first sovereigns, Andriandahifotsy. As we shall see, while exogamous alliances with local women were the strategy through which Sakalava rulers anchored their power in newly conquered territory, endogamy—even to the point of incest—was the preferred means of maintaining their distinctive status and legitimizing succession to the throne by transgressing ordinary marriage rules. However, the union of brother and sister, although permitted, remained an exception and required ritual intervention to seek permission from the ancestors and God. Such is the case with the marriage, recounted by Guillain (1845: 26n2), of two children of one of the first rulers of the Sakalava kingdom of northwestern Boina, Andriamboniarivo (ca. 1710–ca. 1730), classificatory grandson of the ruler Andriandahifotsy.

Apart from this case, the endogamy imposed by the sovereign of the Menabe kingdom, in the southwest of the island, was not observed for the Boina sovereigns, who favored exogamous alliances (Noël 1843: 46). As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 84) explains, the exogamy of the rulers is also emphasized in the narratives of the Zafinimena from Analalava, to such an extent that incest between brother and sister is considered to be the cause of the ruin of the Zafinimena kingdom of Boina. Incest is considered, in this oral tradition, to be the cause of successive dynastic divisions and the weakening of royal power in Boina. At least, this is the point of view of the subjects and servants, the anonymous cocreators of these narratives. And it is probably from the same point of view that the narratives about the tromba andrano and the incest/catastrophe of Ampelabe and Bevaoko are told.

However, beyond the borderline case of a union between brother and sister "from the same womb" (*kibo araiky*), endogamy practices are still quite common among nobles. While, as a general rule, people tend to marry neither too far away nor too close (Houseman and White 1996: 60), in the case of the Sakalava aristocracy, the tendency is to marry close, but not too close. One way to find this right distance—or rather, this right closeness—is, for example, to combine status endogamy with

12. For a critical discussion of these data, see also Ray H. Bixler (1982a, 1982b).

village exogamy. Indeed, numerous unions occur between the nobles of Ambendraña and those living in neighboring villages. However, since noble status is conferred by descent from the same ancestor who founded the dynasty, this statutory endogamy often overlaps with descent group endogamy. This endogamy based on the right closeness contrasts with the strict prohibition on Sakalava commoners entering into unions with descendants of the same ancestor. And since the commoner system of descent is cognatic, albeit with a strong patrilineal tendency, the prohibition of incest applies to relatives on each side over at least three generations. However, infringement of such a broad prohibition is more or less tolerated, depending on the genealogical distance from the common ancestor and on residential dynamics. I noticed this tolerance in Ambendraña when, during my genealogical research, I discovered that two members of the Bevôñy descent group were married to each other. When asked about this, the ampangataka replied that, although it is forbidden by the ancestors, "people who live in the same village sometimes 'commit incest' [*manantambo*]." He accompanied the sentence with a smile of understanding or resignation. In any case, when in doubt, or when incest in the broadest sense of the term has been committed, it is always possible to sacrifice a zebu to ask permission or forgiveness from the ancestors, or to have recourse to Bevaoko's powerful remedies.

Antsa: "Songs"

The brother-sister pairing of Bevaoko and Ampelabe is not only an example of the distinctive and dangerous history of incest between nobles. It is also a much more representative model of the brother-sister relationship for the Sakalava in general. Indeed, even their incestuous union shows in a paroxysmal manner that the brother-sister couple constitutes, alongside that of spouses, the other privileged nucleus for the perpetuation of descendants. In this perpetuation process, the division of tasks within this drowned brother and sister couple is also found in many families living in northwestern Madagascar. The complementary tasks distributed within the couple consist of begetting and raising. In a song dedicated to the tromba andrano, it is said that Bevaoko begat (*namaitry*) his children, but that it was his sister, Ampelabe, who raised (*nitarimy*) them. No mention is made of their mother, and there are few accounts in which Bevaoko's various wives are mentioned. The brother and sister are therefore responsible not only for the birth of Laisarotro,

but also for the upbringing of Bevaoko's many descendants. To understand the point of view and context from which this history is told, here is a stanza from a song dedicated to the tromba andrano:

Sôrono rano.	The tide is rising.
Akôry manangy?	What do you say, O women?
Mioriky amporiha.	Water flows upstream.
Mikoezy Bevaoko,	Greetings Bevaoko,
Bevaoko namaitry.	Bevaoko who begat.
Ampela nitarimy e!	Ampelabe raised!
Andeha amin'ny manangy.	We are going to the woman's residence.
Andesiny talio eeee!	The afternoon wind takes us away!

The point of view of the enunciators of this song, sung during royal services, is indeed that of the servants. More specifically, from these brief exchanges, we can deduce that they are servants who have just accomplished Bevaoko's royal service and are ready to leave to serve his sister Ampelabe further upstream on the estuary. This, at least, is what Anjango's accounts of the stages in the ritual cycle dedicated to these tromba suggest. Moreover, in this song, the succession between the two royal services seems to be in line with the complementarity of the two royal ancestors in the production of the Zafinifotsy siblings. And it is this same complementarity of tasks, accentuated by the fact that Ampelabe had no children, that is central to the conception of the relationship between brother and sister for the northwestern Sakalava people. Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 218) has already noted "[t]he importance of sisters in raising their brother's children," even among non-noble Sakalava families. In a virilocal kinship system, where children in principle belong to the father and marriages are often ephemeral, it is not uncommon for sisters to find themselves raising their brothers' children (1991a: 172).

In this context, several situations may arise. For example, if a man separates from his wife and keeps his children, the latter are often raised either by the man's mother or by his sister (who is single or separated from her husband). In this case, even if the brother remarries, these children from the previous wife will remain with the sister because, as one of Feeley-Harnik's interviewees puts it (1991a: 211), women "like their own children and their spouse, but not the [earlier] spouse's children,"

mainly because of inheritance disputes.[13] On the other hand, sisters who are not married, or who have separated from their husbands without having children, may ask their brothers for children in order to pass on their share of the inheritance (1991a: 218).[14] In both cases, we understand the importance of the paternal aunt (*angovavy*) in taking care of the brother's children, and the ambivalence that surrounds her figure in relation to these children. This ambivalence is celebrated in a song dedicated to Ampelabe:

Angovavy e e, Angovavy!	Paternal aunt, paternal aunt!
Angovavy masiaka eee, angovavy,	Fierce paternal aunt,
Angovavin'i Koto ee Angovavy,	Koto's paternal aunt,[15]
O tompon'ny Andampy eee,	Mistress of Andampy,
Angovavy tiakoo, angovavy.	Paternal aunt, I like you.
Angovavy masiaka eee, angovavy.	Fierce paternal aunt.
Angovavy tiakooo!	Paternal aunt, I like you.
O tiako tsy malaiñy zaho e.	I like that you are not indifferent to me.
Angovavy tiako eee.	Paternal aunt, I like you.
O manoriky Andampy eee,	We climb to Andampy,
O fañajaña zio eeee:	This is your name of honor:
O angovavin'ny Koto eee,	"Koto's paternal aunt,"
O angovavy masiaka aaa…	Fierce paternal aunt…

13. Inheritance (*lova*) is transmitted, at least today in the Analalava region, between male and female children. However, inheritance rights are activated by residence and by care of inherited land and livestock. This is why wives from a second marriage prefer to send their husband's children from the first marriage to his sister in her husband's village, to give their children the opportunity to look after their husband's property and thus have more rights to inheritance.
14. The case of Dady Mariety, the Analalava Bevôñy, is a good example of this practice. Unmarried, Dady Mariety raised one of her elder brother's daughters. Then, once the latter had a husband, she asked Edmond, her other brother's son, to raise her male child, Adama.
15. It may refer to Kotomena and other children whose names begin with Koto-. Tontôña, father of Bevaoko and Ampelabe, is also called *dadin'ny Koto*, "grandfather of Koto(s)."

This ambivalence of the paternal aunt, embodied by Ampelabe, fierce and beloved, is probably due to several reasons. First, it is often attributed to the "great royal ancestors" (*tromba maventy*), the most ancient ancestors. Praised and cajoled during possession rituals, these great tromba are feared for their irascibility and fierceness. But it may also be due to the ambiguous position women occupy within the sibling group, and the role they play in the prosperity of the group's offspring. As Berger (2006: 462–63) attests, between classificatory brothers and sisters there is indeed a very marked ambivalence regarding the possible fates of their respective offspring.[16] Brothers' offspring are distinguished from those of sisters by the sociologically significant categories of a man's children (*zanakan'ny lahy*) and a woman's children (*zanakan'ny vavy*). In noble groups, sisters have an ambivalent position, depending on the alliance strategies adopted in different political contexts. While in an endogamous context, sisters are possible, even ideal, wives for their brothers, in an exogamous context they and their children can compete with their brothers and the latter's children for succession to the throne and access to undivided property. In nonnoble groups, on the other hand, the fate of sisters is divided between their father's descent group and that of their husband. Either they abandon their father's village to go and live with their husband and help his descent group prosper through their work and that of the children born of their union; or, after an eventual separation, they leave the children with the husband and return to their brothers to look after the latter's children and thus be buried in the family tomb. As Bloch (1977) has shown for the Merina, membership of a descent group is in fact sealed only upon death, by the choice of tomb in which the person is buried. Thus, a sister either favors her offspring at the expense of her nephews (Berger 2006: 462) or takes care of her brothers' offspring at the expense of her husband's (and her own). This is why, from her nephews' point of view, she can be either a nasty rival or a benevolent mother.

As we can see from these song fragments, and as we have seen in the possession rituals, these kinship relationships, and the tensions they imply, are at the heart of narratives about royal ancestors. Even when

16. Regarding classificatory brothers and sisters, *anadahy* (for the female ego) or *rahalahy* (for the male ego), for "brother," and, for "sister," *anabavy* (for the male ego) or *rahavavy* (for the female ego), are terms that designate siblings from the same parent, but also parallel and cross-cousins, according to Iroquois-type terminology.

these histories are performed in possession rituals, it is the language of kinship that is mobilized, whether to describe the relationship between tromba, or that between the tromba and the servants or worshippers. The latter call the tromba grandparents, while the tromba call servants and worshippers grandchildren. Through these narratives, the living not only reelaborate the past of their sovereigns or ancestors, but also the categories of kinship that bind the living together. Mediums perform the kinship relations that bind their spirits together, and at the same time play the role of grandparents to unpossessed participants.[17] The latter, through the care they give to the incarnated spirits, or through the songs that praise them, incorporate and elaborate the hierarchical relationships that bind them not only to the ancient Sakalava rulers, but more generally to their ancestors. This is why, in telling the history of the tromba andrano, I have dwelt on the history of the Sakalava monarchy in relation to the contemporary kinship practices of nobles and nonnobles. In telling and retelling this story, the subjects of royalty are also implicitly telling their daily and present history. Conceived of as an exceptional and dangerous example from which to distance oneself, or as a paradoxical example of lived experience, the history of the tromba reflects—more like a crystal than a mirror—the contemporary history of Sakalava peasants.

Yet this experience, at once quotidian, realistic, and exemplary, is also made possible by the character (again, in the theatrical sense of the term) attributed to each of these royal spirits. In a song reported by Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 310–11), the main members of the drowned Zafinifotsy nobles are presented in roles or behaviors that stereotypically represent their distinctive character:

17. In an attempt to historicize these contemporary relational dynamics between masters and servants, Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 101) suggests that, with the abolition of slavery (1849) and the arrival of the French in the region (1897), there was a gradual transformation from bonds of domination to bonds of friendship or family between, on the one hand, sovereigns and, on the other, subjects and servants. The gradual loss of political power by living sovereigns thus coincided with a distribution of royal power to the servants—and thus to the deceased sovereigns they embodied. Hence, on the other hand, the shift from forced servitude to voluntary servitude, which is central to contemporary discourses and practices of royal subjects. Possession and the songs that accompany it, through their treatment of these types of relationships, have certainly played a key role in such euphemizing of power relations.

… Azôvy mandidy eeh aah?	Who commands eeh aah?
Ampelabe mandidy eeh aah!	Ampelabe commands eeh aah!
Azôvy manjaka iih aah?	Who rules iih aah?
[Bevaoko] manjaka aah!	[Bevaoko] rules!
Azôvy mangôty eeh aah?	Who is spoiled eeh aah?
Fotsy mangôty eeh!	Fotsy is spoiled eeh!
Azôvy ampimalo ooh aah?	Who talks things over ooh aah?
Kotomena ampimalo ooh!	Kotomena talks things over ooh!
… Azôvy sataiñy eeh aah?	… Who is cruelly violent?
Ndrandahy sataiñy eeh!	Ndrandahy is cruelly violent eeh!

This fragmentary way of telling the story of these characters shows just how complementary such songs are to the possession ceremonies they accompany, possession being a kind of staging that develops these snippets of a scenario. In this regard, it is interesting to read the commentary that one of Feeley-Harnik's interlocutors provided her with regarding this song:

> Fotsy is spoiled because he is the youngest. When he possesses people, they cry! Cry! Then Kotomena, his older brother, comes and takes him on his knee. Ndrandahy is cruel and violent because he has no use for a lot of people, just himself alone. His doany is Sohihy out there, the island, the rock known as Ambatosohy. He is angry, mean. All the others have doany in the mouth of the Loza; he is the only one by himself. Kotomena is a person who discusses things, not like a judge, but like a person who loves to talk and laugh. Not mean, he is a simple, direct person. Ampelabe commands because she is an elder, she is their father's sister. (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 311–12)

Apart from the attitudes that indicate the genealogical position of each ancestor and the role that follows (Bevaoko, the eldest male, reigns, while the sister commands her brother's children and Fotsy, the youngest, is spoiled), certain salient character elements presented in this song serve precisely to particularize these tromba, making them both typical and realistic. This is particularly true of Ndrandahy, who is mean-tempered and dislikes people, especially women. In the stories I heard, no precise explanation is given for this anger, but a song dedicated to him relates his bad temper and its influence on the place where he lives: the doany called Ambatobenisohihy.

O Ndrandahy tsy ratsy eeh	Ndrandahy is not bad/ugly
A Kotomena tsaraaa	Kotomena is good/beautiful
Ooh ninao eeh	Ooooh it is yours!
O Ndrandahy be eeh maah	Ndrandahy the great
Manôkana doany eeh	Who lives alone in the doany
Oooo ninao eeh	Ooooh it is yours!
O Ambatobenisohihy eeh	In Ambatobesohihy
Tsary maiky rano ooh oiaeeh	Water is never dry
Oooo ninao eh!	Ooooh it is yours!
O meriky aminazy eeh	It is drizzling at home
O misy manga bory eeh aah	There are round mangoes
Tsy mihinam-baiavy eeh	That women do not eat
Oooo ninao eh!	Ooooh it is yours!
O misy rano mamy	There is fresh water
O tsy alaiñ'ny vaiavy	That women cannot take
Oooo ninao eh!	Ooooh it is yours!

In this song, Ndrandahy, the eldest, is described as someone who does not like to share his possessions: the fresh water or the round mangoes that his isolated residence contains. Especially with women. The cross-reference with his brother Kotomena, praised like himself in the song, is not insignificant. It is a mark of respect for the two brothers, intended to mitigate their mutual disagreements and jealousies. According to a story I have heard several times, Ndrandahy's tromba used to share his residence with his brother Kotomena. But, as he did not get along with his brother, Ndrandahy decided to move alone to the island of Ambatobenisohihy. The reasons for the two brothers' disagreement are not revealed in the stories, but this anecdote proves, once again, not only that tensions between relatives are often a central aspect of narratives about royal ancestors, but also that the history of the latter continues even after their death, through their tromba and the mediums who embody them. These mediums are often descendants of slaves or commoner royal servants.[18] And it is always the servants who tell the ancestors' stories

18. In the precolonial period, there were two main ways for Sakalava rulers to procure servants: either by capturing people, or by taking in free people who had been struck down by the "sanction" (*tiñy)* of the ruler or royal

through song. This royal history is also their own history. From this perspective, Sakalava royal servants not only "make the sovereigns reign," as the Sakalava saying goes, they also make the sovereigns' history.

Fady: "Prohibitions"

Other memorial traces of the traumatic history of the tromba andrano are the fady, the prohibitions. Inherited from the misfortune of drowned ancestors, these fady are also indexes of these ancestors' presence in places that condition the behavior of the estuary's inhabitants and travelers. As I mentioned earlier, in the Loza estuary it is forbidden to transport certain products, such as ginger or pigs, or to wear black clothing. Like the fragments of history contained in songs and place-names, such prohibitions also constitute opaque narrative elements that challenge the hermeneutic game of reconstructing the past. To give an example of this process at work, let us look at one of the etiological accounts of these fady that Laimenaka, an Antifañaiñy from Andampy, once told me:

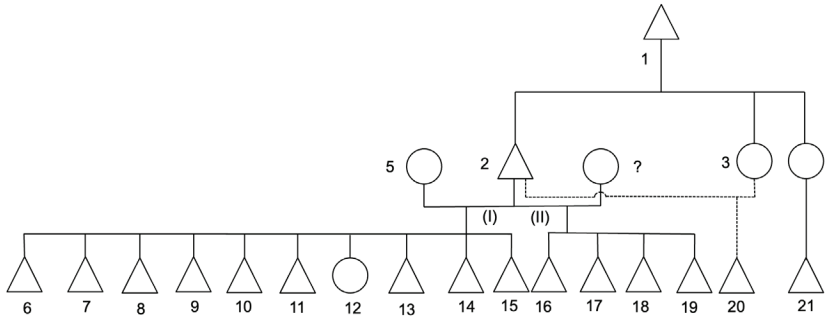
> Batry, the diviner-healer [of the Zafinifotsy], was also the diviner-healer of the invaders [the Merina]. It was he who led [the Zafinifotsy] to ruin in order to earn more money. [The leader of the Merina armies] had said to this diviner-healer: "If I manage to kill the nobles of Androna [the Zafinifotsy], I'll give you [a given amount of money]." Then, the nobles of Androna went to the same diviner-healer. "Thursday—the latter told them—take the ginger and put it on your faces and eyes, then cover them with a black cloth." Where could they have escaped, with ginger and a black blindfold wrapped over their eyes? This is how the Merina reached them. "Thursday—he said [to the Merina]—I've given them a remedy, you'll hit them then…" …. On Thursday, the Hôva [i.e., the Merina] arrived, [the Zafinifotsy's] faces were already wrapped in black cloth, they had already put ginger in their eyes. So, the Hôva hit them with one blow. [The Zafinifotsy] couldn't see them, because of the ginger and the black cloth… They

ancestors because of a fault committed against them. Since the abolition of slavery, the descendants of slaves, as well as the descendants of other common servants, have continued to serve the monarchy. Even today, people affected by royal tiñy, manifested in the form of illness, become servants, notably at the Nosy Lava royal cemetery, in order to heal and "prosper" (*manjary*).

> ended up in the sea. That's why it's forbidden to transport ginger and black things on the sea. … And it was from this event that the Batry descent group was born.

The fragmentary and implicit way in which the histories of royal ancestors are transmitted through the various traces—made up of songs, names, and prohibitions—shows how historical knowledge for the Sakalava is always the result of a combination of recollection and creative elaboration. These opaque traces of historical events not only allow the histories in question to be kept as privileges of certain individuals or groups of individuals (notably nobles and royal officials), but also leave the freedom for other individuals (mediums and servants) to reactualize these histories in the present. It is in this sense that Lambek (1998, 2002), in order to break out of the ethnocentric dichotomy between narrative fiction and historical truth, speaks of the poiesis of history, in relation to Sakalava historicity. Borrowing the term from Aristotle's *Poetics* and inspired by Sahlins's idea of the "structure of conjuncture" (1985), he defines this process of historical production as "the continuous, creative bringing into being and crafting of the past in the present and of the present in respect to the past" (2002: 17). Analyzed by Lambek through spirit possession, this form of historical elaboration is also expressed in songs, names, and the exegesis of both. At once memorial traces and narrative snippets, prohibitions call for the polyphonic reconstruction of histories, which is at the same time a work of appropriation and reappropriation of the power that derives from them.

Thus, Laimenaka's story is an example of how history justifies present prohibitions, but also of how these prohibitions provide mnemonic support to elaborate a narrative of the past. What is more, like the other tromba andrano narratives, it also aims to justify the origin of a descent group, the Batry. Although I have never met them personally, I have often heard the Batry referred to as a kind or a group of people descended from the traitors who revealed to the Merina the secrets of the Zafinifotsy nobles. For this reason, the Batry were banished not only by the Zafinifotsy and their living representatives, but also by the Zafinimena. This is illustrated, for example, by the case of the wife of the Nosy Lava intercessor, who belonged to this group and was forbidden access to the island of the Zafinimena royal tombs. This complicated the intercessor's position. The history of this group from its point of view is unknown to me, but the comparison of this case with other cases of pariahs in Malagasy monarchies suggests that etiological narratives, like the one told by



1) Tontôña; 2) Bevaoko; 3) Ampelabe; 4) Nôro; 5) Safirona; 6) Ndrandahy; 7) Ndramamaliky; 8) Kotomena; 9) Kotoandriana; 10) Kotofanjava; 11) Botofotsy; 12) Mahitso; 13) Jaovita; 14) Ndramahavita; 15) Fotsy; 16) Lavasadika; 17) Jaomola; 18) Kotolaivazaha; 19) Kotoroboko; 20) Laisarotro; 21) Tsirimasoandro.

Figure 17. Reconstruction of the tromba andrano family tree

Laimenaka, often serve to legitimize the stigmatization of former rivals of conquering nobles while concealing the historical causes of this hostility (see Beaujard 2020: 476–514).

Tety razaña: "Genealogies"

As we have seen, while the narratives of royal ancestors are preserved in these places of memory, once revealed, they consist of a list of names and genealogies. The lists of names of the nobles provided by the narratives are in fact accompanied not only by the names of their doany, but also by the kinship links that unite them and that are staged during possession rituals. Figure 17 provides a graphic reconstruction of the tromba andrano genealogy.

This graphic reconstruction represents an attempt to synthesize the various and sometimes discordant versions that my interlocutors delivered to me on the genealogical relationships between the tromba andrano. As I said at the beginning of the chapter, while these accounts generally agree on the first two generations of the members of this particular Zafinifotsy family, those concerning Bevaoko's children and their mothers diverge according to the enunciators. Safirona is the only one of Bevaoko's wives recognized by some tromba and their servants as the mother of some of his children. According to the ampangataka of Ambendraña, Bevaoko only has four direct children: Ndramamaliky,

Ndrandahy, Kotomena, and Mahitso. The others are children of his brother or cousin (*rahalahy*), whom he adopted. But there are also contradictions within the versions of the servants from Ambendraña. The tromba called Fotsy, through the voice of an Ambendraña noblewoman, had in fact indicated to me that the children attributed in Figure 17 to the union between Safirona and Bevaoko were in fact Fotsy's brothers. A similar discrepancy exists around the eldest sibling. While for some people it is Ndrandahy, according to the ampangataka from Ambendraña and others it is Ndramamaliky. These discrepancies, illusorily concealed in the graphic representation shown here, are nevertheless an essential feature of the performative and creative (or poietic) manner with which servants, nobles, and above all mediums continually construct the history of the Sakalava nobles. Hierarchically fragmented and therefore polyphonic, this history is in fact always unfinished—imperfect, in the grammatical sense of the term (Lambek 2002: 12).

In addition to being discordant, these genealogies are often truncated, due to the territorial anchoring of the histories they are embedded in and their hierarchical distribution between groups, and between individuals within groups. These "journeys of ancestors" (*tety razaña*)—as the genealogies are called in Malagasy—collected in the Loza estuary, stop at Tontôña, the ancestor of the tromba andrano. When I asked my interlocutors who Tontôña's father was, the answers were always elusive: "We only know the tromba andrano who arrived in the region," they usually replied. In another Austronesian context where ancestral stories are rooted in specific places and among the people who inhabit them, Roy Wagner received a similar response from his Daribi interlocutors of Papua New Guinea regarding the story of a wandering ancestor's adventures: "We know the story up to Sazabage [a local ridge], if you want to know what happened next, ask the [local] people" (1972: 20). That is why, to try and retrace the journey of ancestors of the Zafinifotsy and to reconstruct their history more generally, I once again had to move in space. In keeping with this geographic shift taken during my fieldwork, we will now leave the Mouth of the Incest and head further north toward Lake Andrampongy, where we find the royal residence of Tontôña, the last known ancestor of the tromba andrano.

Andrampongy: Grandfather's residence

After a trip by bush taxi from Antsohihy to Anjialava, on Route Nationale 6 (RN6), and a forty-minute motorcycle ride, my traveling

companion Adama and I arrived in Antanambao, the village closest to Lake Andrampongy. In one of the hard-built houses that distinguish the inland Tsimihety villages from those on the Analalava coast, we were greeted by Saibo. Saibo was a business colleague whom Adama had met when he was trading in semiprecious stones. He was a vahiny (foreigner), originally from the Mahajanga region, living in the village since his marriage to a local woman. It was he who introduced us to the *olobe*, the notables of the village, including Famelona, an elderly man from Befotaka and an official medium (sahabe) of the Tontôña tromba. According to Saibo, it was to this medium that I could turn to find out more about the history and genealogy of Tontôña, father to Bevaoko and Ampelabe. Indeed, after recommending that I return the recording I would make of his account to him so that his descendants would remember it, Famelona told me Tontôña's history. Following a narrative pattern we have already seen at work, the story about Tontôña took the form of an explanation of the lake's name, a configuration that reactivates the hermeneutic and memorial game. The origin of the lake's name is indeed linked to Tontôña's tragic death.

According to Famelona's account, Tontôña, fleeing from the Merina, decided to settle by the lake with his servants: ten "male servants" (*marolahy*) and ten "female servants" (*marovavy*), to be precise.[19] He went on to reign over the region's inhabitants and protect the lake, which, for them, represented "God's medicine" (*tsambon'I Zañahary*). But the Merina/Hôva spotted him and, seeing him, hit him on the arm with a rifle. Knowing he was lost, he decided to throw himself into the lake he had looked after for so long. His servants, hearing of his last wishes, decided to follow him to the bottom of the lake. "We will be your 'sacrificial mat' [*lafiky*]," they told him.[20] So, Tontôña made the lake his royal residence (doany) and gave it the name *Iandrampongo*: "He who looks up while lying covered [by the water]," because he looks at the surface

19. Marovavy literally means "many women," *marolahy*, "many men." Like the name of the Zafinimena's servants, Sambarivo (each is a thousand), these servants' names refer to their large number and reproducibility, as opposed to the sovereign's uniqueness.

20. The funeral attendants sacrificed on the death of the sovereign are called *lafikin'ny ampanjaka*, "the sovereign's mat." Goedefroit notes that in the Menabe, Marovavy is the name of a commoner clan of people who "had to provide the adolescents who, after their throats had been slit, served as the mat (*lafiky*) for the king's corpse" (1998: 109, my translation).

of the water from the bottom of the lake.[21] This is why the lake is now called Andrampongy.

After Famelona concluded his account, I asked him who Tontôña's father was and where Tontôña had come from. "Before arriving here, he was with his father in Ambalamazaotra, in the Ambanja region [further north]. His [classificatory] fathers were the two brothers, Baratovôko and Kozobe, but Kozobe was his real father." Thus, another branch of the Zafinifotsy family tree was added to the one elaborated by the servants of the Mouth of the Incest. Indeed, these historical narratives, rooted in the places that produce them, often stop at the name of the last known place where an ancestor was before migrating to the place of their doany and the last ancestor who lived or died in that doany. This explains why I had to go to Antanambao, near the lake, to find the ancestor who preceded Tontôña and the place from which he left before coming to Lake Andrampongy. Before examining this new genealogical information, however, we will take a moment's pause to consider the narrative about Tontôña and the sociological and historical elements it provides.

The account of Tontôña's life provided by Famelona has many points in common with those of the ancestor's descendants drowned in the Mouth of the Incest—fleeing from the Merina and dying in the water being a particularly salient one. However, there are also significant differences between those accounts and the one at hand. First, we can consider Tontôña's servants and their voluntary sacrifice. Tontôña's descendants, according to the narratives collected in the Mouth of the Incest, did not have servants, but rather traveling companions. It is these traveling companions who are claimed as ancestors by the Bevôñy and Antifañaiñy descent groups. In the first place, the presence of these servants may be justified by the ancestor's rank: as the ancestor of this family of Zafinifotsy nobles, Tontôña has a status more apt to own servants than his descendants do. Another reason for this difference between the two narrative traditions, however, may be due to the different function these narratives play in legitimizing present-day servants. Unlike the Bevôñy and the Antifañaiñy, the servants of Tontôña's tromba living in the Andrampongy region did not claim to be descendants of the people

21. The name is composed of *andra* (action of looking up) and *(f-)/-pôngo* (to lie down and cover up well). The play on words to explain the name Andrampongy is difficult to interpret. I assume here that the narrator is referring to Tontôña's servants, who serve as a funeral mat on which he lays his body, looking up, covered by the waters of the lake.

who arrived with him, who were probably slaves. If they had really been slaves, to conceal a rank origin still strongly stigmatized in Madagascar,[22] their descendants have the option of either upgrading the rank of their ancestors linked to royalty (by calling them companions instead of servants or slaves), or of neglecting to claim any genealogical link with the slaves cited in these stories. If the current servants of Tontôña's tromba were descendants of those mentioned in the narrative, it would seem that they had adopted this second strategy.

However, according to the various testimonies I was able to gather in this village, the people who today are servants of Tontôña's tromba, although probably descended from slaves, were not descendants of the slaves of Tontôña who came to the region with him. As I could witness in 2017, there were still *marovavy*, "servants," around Andrampongy. As in Ambendraña, these servants dress and take care of the tromba andrano. In addition, there is also the ampangataka, Tontôña's intercessor, who is responsible for organizing the royal service at Lake Andrampongy. As with the Bevôñy of Ambendraña, the members of the ampangataka's descent group claim to be the true "descendants of the land" (*zafin-tany*) of the region, as the original occupants of a place are called. While the ampangataka had vaguely introduced himself to me as Tsimihety, the other village notables had told me, in his absence, that he belonged to the Makoa group. This term is used to refer to various groups of former slaves or indentured laborers from the east coast of Africa, imported to Madagascar by the Sakalava or Merina rulers (see Schrive and Gueunier 1992; Gueunier 2007; Boyer-Rossol 2015). According to the accounts of the notables of Andrampongy, these Makoa, before arriving in the region, came from eastern Madagascar, from the Mandritsara region, on the Androna High Plateau, and from Mananara, on the East Coast.[23] They are said to have founded the first villages in the region. According to the testimony of the Andrampongy notables, these Makoa were already present when Tontôña arrived. Therefore, they were not the servants who

22. Many prohibitions surrounded slaves and still surround their descendants today, such as that of marrying free people. See for example, for the question in the Betsileo region, Regnier (2020).

23. According to Peter J. Wilson (1992: 43), the towns of Mananara or Maroantsetra on the east coast are indicated by most Tsimihety collectives as the place of origin of the Makoa "in much the same way that New Englanders cite their British ancestry or New Zealanders of Otago cite their Scottish origins."

had followed Tontôña. In any case, the history of settlement in this region was rather vague in the accounts of my interlocutors, as it had been subject, since ancient times, to incursions of zebu thieves (*dahalo*), which had provoked frequent migrations and ephemeral settlements.

Leaving the question of the servants' origin open, what can be said about the social position of these Makoa, descendants of the land, is that today they organize the royal service dedicated to Tontôña, on the shores of Lake Andrampongy, in front of the gate of his red enclosure (valamena), also called—once again—simply "gold" (*volamena*). As with the royal services at Ambendraña and Andampy, this ritual service was organized before the rainy season, bringing together people from different villages in the region. According to the brief description provided to me by the ampangataka, the ceremony consists, like the others we have seen, in the periodic maintenance of the valamena enclosure and the sacrifice of two zebus. This red enclosure is said to have been founded by Tontôña's diviner-healer, Jaomena, who arrived in the region with him. It contains a raised stone (*tsangam-bato*) and a *matambeloño* (long-lived) tree. The service, which used to be held every year, is now held every three years, due to the difficulty of finding zebus to sacrifice. The dwindling number of servants and worshippers able to provide the annual zebu and labor support for these services is a problem that, as we shall see, does not only affect the Zafinifotsy ancestors of Andrampongy. During these services, two zebus are killed in front of the red enclosure: one—offered by the mediums—is killed at the opening of the gates, the other—offered by the community of villagers—is slaughtered at the conclusion of the service. Specific pieces of these two sacrificed animals are brought into the lake on a pirogue and fed to the crocodiles that inhabit it. In this way, the share (anjara) intended for the drowned ancestor and his servants is returned to him via the crocodiles that inhabit his lake.[24]

To summarize, here too, as in Ambendraña and Andampy, the ampangataka of the protective noble spirit of the place comes from the group of the masters of the land. Similarly, as in Ambendraña, this is once again a group of descendants of slaves. But the ritual role of these descendants of slaves is not justified here by the narrative of Tontôña's

24. According to Guillain's testimony (1845: 158), the Antankaraña of northern Madagascar assert that Zafinifotsy chiefs are incarnated in crocodiles. This identification between rulers and crocodiles is also indicated by the manufacture of relics deposited in the tooth cavities of the animal (Grandidier 1886: 224).

arrival and death, as the role of the Bevôñy and the Antifañaiñy is justified by narratives of the suicide of the tromba andrano. Rather, it is justified by their position as masters of the land. It is the masters of the land who are the intermediaries and intercessors of the tutelary spirits of the place, whether the latter are royal or not, human or nonhuman. As we shall also see in the case of the Bevôñy, it was through this ritual role and relative position as masters of the land that the descendants of slaves, freed from their former masters, legitimized the occupation of new places in the region. To conclude our stopover in the Andrampongy region, and to follow our discussion of the history of Tontôña's current servants, we will return to the ancestor's genealogy.

According to the narrative told by Tontôña's medium, Tontôña's father was Kozobe, a nobleman buried in the Ambanja region. Kozobe is presented in the traditions of the Antankaraña kingdom, in the far north of Madagascar, as the first king of Nosy Be and founder of the kingdom's Zafinifotsy dynasty (Vial 1954; Deschamps 1961: 102; Gueunier 1998; Walsh 1998: 111; Berger 2006: 240). His paternal uncle was called Baratavôko, a name that harks back to Rabaratavokoka (Kent 1970: 164), or Rabaratavokoke (Lombard 1988: 18), the legendary first ruler of the Maroserañana dynasty, which is in turn the first dynasty of the Sakalava kingship. The use of founding sovereigns' names to designate the individuals who gave rise to the various successive dynastic branches is indeed a narrative and ideological expedient often used in lineage narratives. Through this device, each dynastic segment is positioned according to the beginning of the entire dynastic history. In this way, the general history of the dynasty is condensed into one of its segments.

Tontôña would therefore have abandoned his father in this region to find a new location further south. No mention is made of Tontôña's children or grandchildren in his journey. According to the history recounted to me by his medium, Tontôña, before arriving in Andrampongy, did not come from Marangibato, as the narratives heard in the Mouth of the Incest claim, but from the Ambanja region. However, when I asked Tontôña's medium whether Tontôña was originally from Marangibato, he replied that, even if he had been in the Ambanja region before arriving in Andrampongy, Marangibato was indeed the place of origin of all the Zafinifotsy tromba andrano, as witnessed by the invocations pronounced by the ampangataka of Andrampongy during royal services. As the accounts collected in the Mouth of the Incest confirm, it was indeed from Marangibato that the nobles fled the Merina incursions, and it is from there that the history of the dispersal of the Zafinifotsy in

the north of the island began, concluded, by some, with the founding of the kingdom of Ankaraña in the north by some Zafinifotsy, and with the suicide by drowning of the others. This is why, in my journey through the history of the tromba andrano ancestors, I went to the source of this dynastic branch, on the Androna High Plateau, in the Marangibato region.

Marangibato: The source

Marangibato ("Which has sharp rocks") is the name given to a mountainous region in the central Androna High Plateau, in the Tsimihety region.[25] The name of the sociopolitical collective, Tsimihety, means "Those who did not cut their hair," and refers to the refusal of the region's inhabitants to cut their hair as a sign of mourning following the death of a Sakalava king. The gesture suggested by this name symbolized the demand for political independence that has become the defining feature of the collective, which is often described as acephalous (Wilson 1992: 25, 31). However, this region is home to several villages where Sakalava nobles and rulers reside, including the villages of Ambohimariñy and Trabonjy (fig. 18). The ruler of Marangibato at the time of my fieldwork resided in Ambohimariñy. However, he was being challenged by the nobles of the neighboring village of Trabonjy and by the nobles "descendants of women" (*amben'ny vavy*) of Ambohimariñy. In response to the latter, the sovereign claimed his legitimacy to reign as a descendant of men, who according to the custom of the kingdom (*fomban'ny fanjakana*) are the only people entitled to the throne.[26] Vis-à-vis the nobles of Trabonjy, on the other hand, the ruler derived his legitimacy from the fact that it was his lineage that ruled the region before the Merina incursions of the first half of the nineteenth century (see Wilson 1992: 21). According to the sovereign's account, when these enemies arrived, his ancestors fled the region and settled in Ampomby, a village further north, while the inhabitants of Trabonjy stayed behind, allying themselves with the Merina.

25. According to one of my local contacts, the name Marangibato comes from the name of a river that flows through the region.
26. Attempts to determine fixed rules of succession are doomed to failure for Sakalava royalty, who have always chosen the strategies best suited to the historical and social contexts they faced. However, an ideology necessarily marked by the hierarchical superiority of men over women, and consequently affecting their respective children, has favored, at least in discourse, agnatic succession (Baré 1973).

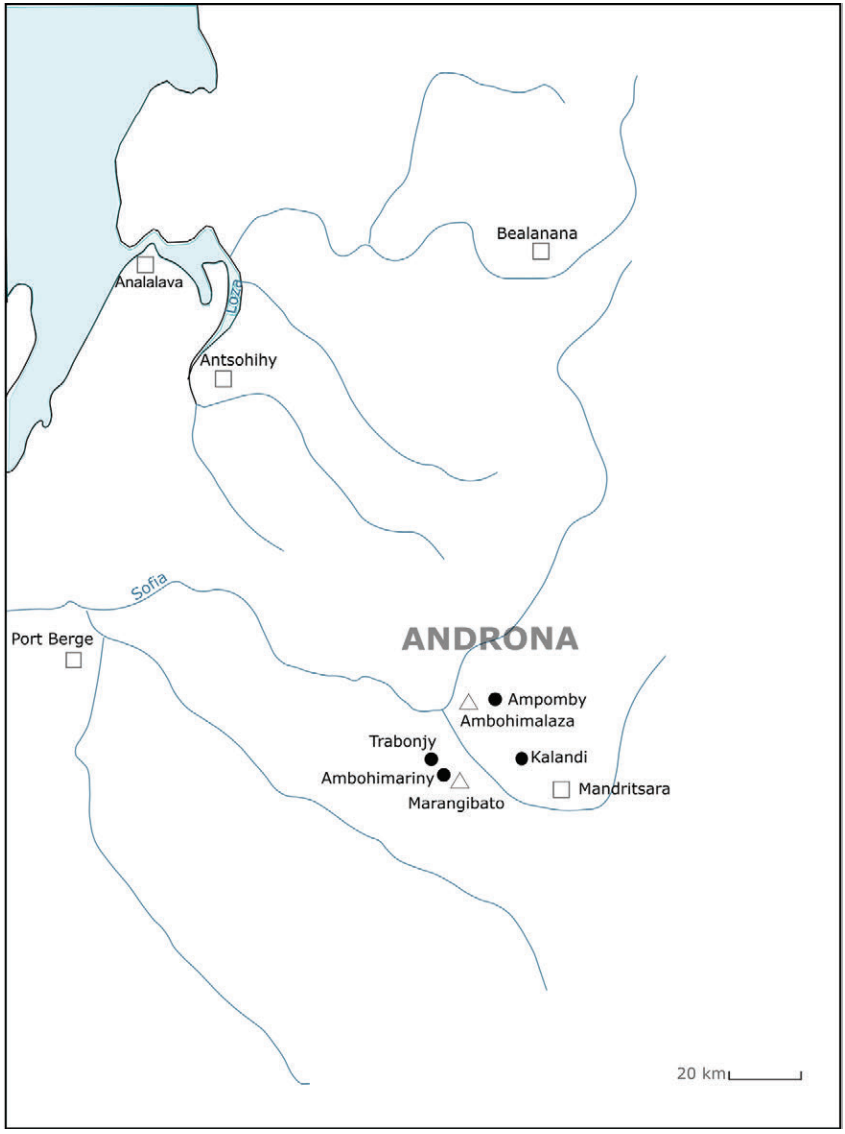


Figure 18. Map of the Androna region



Figure 19. *Fanompoambe* banner at the entrance to the village of Ambohimariñy, with "Welcome to the Great Royal Service, doany Manongarivo, Marangibato" written on it. On the left is the valamena (red enclosure) of the royal residence dedicated to Tontôña

Once the Merina had been driven out by the arrival of the French in the region (1896) and their military occupation, around 1914 the legitimate princes returned to Ambohimariñy to regain possession of their kingdom and lands. These nobles established a royal residence (doany) in 1934. Then, due to a succession quarrel between the female and male descendants, the latter moved to another part of the village and in 1984 founded a new concrete doany dedicated to Tontôña's tromba. This doany was founded by the former ruler, a paternal uncle of the current ruler at the time of my fieldwork. The ruler of the time inherited power from his uncle, who died in 1999 without leaving any male children. Hence the renewed tension between the new sovereign and the descendants of women of Ambohimariñy, who were allied with the collateral branch of Trabonjy. According to what the sovereign told me, it was he who once again instituted the Great Royal Service for Tontôña, celebrated here every September. It was for the Great Royal Service scheduled to take place on September 1, 2017, in the Manongarivo doany of Ambohimariñy (fig. 19) that I first visited Marangibato.

To gain access to this village "charged with generative power" (*masiñy*), I had to buy a zebu to sacrifice during the ceremony. Having paid my share, I arrived on Friday morning, the day the ceremony began. The sovereign, dressed in a white shirt similar to that of the tromba andrano but adorned with a small red trim (red and white being the colors of royalty), welcomed me into his concrete house. He was accompanied by a guest, who had arrived specifically for the ceremony. This was Analalava deputy Volamarina, from the town of Befotaka, northeast of Ambendraña. Dressed all in white, he had come to pay homage to his Marangibato ancestors. As his clothes suggested, he claimed to be a descendant of the Zafinifotsy (white is the color of this dynastic branch) through his grandfather, a former minister of the Republic. With his notebook of tantara (histories) in hand, he discussed the history of the Marangibato dynastic branch with the sovereign. As the deputy would explain to me, for several years he had been tracing the history of the Zafinifotsy throughout the island, from the Menabe to the Antankaraña country in the north, home to the only Zafinifotsy kingdom recognized as an autonomous political entity. I thus discovered that we shared one of the reasons for our visit to Marangibato. However, in addition to his historical research, he was also pursuing a political project to form an association of all the Zafinifotsy nobles of Madagascar. It was he, therefore, who was indicated to me by the sovereign as the person best qualified to tell me a general history of the Zafinifotsy. The sovereign himself only had a part (anjara) of this history.

A general history of the Zafinifotsy

After an invocation to the ancestors, Volamarina, with his notebook open in front of him, began his tale. The narrative Volamarina told me in Malagasy, punctuated by a few words of French, appeared to be comprehensive from the beginning. He started with the origins of the Sakalava dynasty and other Malagasy dynasties, which he traced back, like most accounts of Madagascar's ancient history, to the Zafindraminia dynasty, the Descendants of Raminia, who arrived from abroad in eastern Madagascar.[27] These Zafindraminia nobles arrived in Madagascar in the

27. Probably of Indonesian (Sumatran) origin, Islamized and Indianized, this group is thought to have arrived in northeastern Madagascar around the thirteenth century (Ottino 1973: 54; Beaujard 2019, 2: 404; Berger and Blanchy 2014: 19).

company of a group or a kind of people known as Anjoaty, renowned to this day for their religious knowledge. As a result of numerous disputes over succession to the throne, sometimes between younger and older children, sometimes between sons "inside the house" (*an-trano*) and those "outside" (*ivelany*), this dynasty split into several branches, which occupied various regions of the island, as far as the south and southwest. It was in the southwestern region, known as Menabe, that the Maroseràña dynasty was formed, founding the first Sakalava kingdom in Bengy. According to his account, this Maroseràña dynasty was also at the origin of the reigning dynasties that federated the Mahafaly, Antandroy, and Antaisaka sociopolitical groups established in the other regions of the southwest. It was within the Sakalava branch of the Menabe region that this process of dynastic segmentation gave rise to the two branches of the Zafimbolamena and Zafimbolafotsy, the Descendants of Gold and the Descendants of Silver.

According to Volamarina's account of the origin of this division, the two branches, the Descendants of Gold and of Silver, were descended from two children of Andriandahifotsy, "The White Lord," one of the first kings of the Menabe. European accounts indicate that he ruled from the mid- to late seventeenth century.[28] According to the deputy, Andriandahifotsy had many wives and therefore many children outside the house. But above all, he had two sons by his first wife (*vady be*). In principle, royal power was supposed to pass to the eldest male descendant of the king's principal wife. However, to prevent conflicts over succession from recurring between his sons, this sovereign had devised a stratagem. Before he died, he placed two coins, one gold and the other silver, in the dish he used for invocations. The silver coin was a tsangan'olo coin with which he invoked his ancestors. "A sovereign always needs silver," the deputy stressed. The king then called his two children and said, "Choose a coin." The eldest chose the first and took the silver coin: "I take the coin with which my father used to invoke the ancestors," he said. The youngest then got the gold coin. So, the father told his eldest son: "From now on, the descendants you sire will be called Descendants of Silver [Zafimbolafotsy]. If you or your descendants do something that ought

28. According to historiographical reconstructions, Andriandahifotsy is identifiable with Lahifouty or Lohafouty or Andian Lifouchy, mentioned in the first reports by European travelers to the Great Island from the mid-seventeenth century. He is thought to have died before 1700 (Kent 1970: 198–201; Sanchez 2013a: 115–16).

not to be done, I, your father, can take away the fault, I can wash it away. But from the moment I'm no longer here, it's you who can do it." Then he said to his youngest son: "From now on, your descendants will be called Descendants of Gold [Zafimbolamena]. If you or your descendants do something stupid, I, your father, can remove the blame. But when I'm gone, it's your eldest who can do it." This is why people who are "affected by the curse" (*voatiñy*) of the Zafinimena turn to the Zafinifotsy, so that the latter can wash away their fault. But people who are affected by the curse of the Zafinifotsy must turn to the Zafinifotsy to free themselves. The Zafinifotsy are in fact the spiritual leaders of the Zafinimena. They hold the hasiñy (generative power). But the Zafinimena have the throne.

Despite the peaceful division of powers intended by the king, his death was followed, according to the deputy's account, by a conflict between his children. The eldest, ancestor of the Zafinifotsy, did not accept being excluded from the throne and allied himself with his half-brothers from his father's secondary wives, battling his younger brother in an attempt to seize power. The new younger king, initially defeated by his elder brother, then called in reinforcements from the Merina, prompting the elder and his allies to flee northeast to Marangibato. One of the elder's descendants, a Descendant of Silver, thus settled in the northeastern region of Madagascar. His name was Bararativôko. Other Zafinifotsy went further east and founded a new dynasty, the Zafindrabay. "All the nobles of Madagascar," commented Volamarina, "are of Maroseràña origin." However, one of Bararativôko's children, Kozobe, moved further north and founded a new kingdom at Nosy Be. "He was the first king of Nosy Be, where he reigned from 1609 to 1639," explained Volamarina, following the genealogy in his notebook. It was a grandchild of Kozobe, Andriatsirotso, who left Nosy Be to found the Zafinifotsy kingdom of Ankaraña, in the far north of the island. Finally, among Kozobe's many descendants (whom the deputy listed for me from his notebook) was Victor Miadana, Minister of Finance in the First Malagasy Republic, "of whom I am the nephew," claimed Volamarina, concluding his account.

This tantara, studded with condensations from different eras and traditions, was the first synthetic and supposedly exhaustive reconstruction of the history of the Zafinifotsy I heard during my fieldwork. Contrary to the localized, fragmentary conception that characterizes the transmission of these oral traditions, the deputy seemed to assume the detached point of view of a historian. As Lambek has shown (2002: 49–70), this distance from the past—which allows for a synthetic, albeit critical, account of events and is inherited from modern Western

academic historicity—differs from the polyphonic and embodied historicity specific to the Sakalava world, of which spirit possession is the most striking example. Indeed, Volamarina studied law at the University of Fianarantsoa and showed that he was familiar with historiographical research. Through comparison with other partial accounts of the various dynastic branches, and through a study of the family archives left by his uncle (a former minister and Zafinifotsy nobleman), the deputy was piecing together the fragments of a general dynastic history, smoothing out the discrepancies. At the time, I had the impression of finding myself face to face with a historian who, in a pedagogical spirit, was sharing with me the fruit of his personal research. At the same time, I already felt suspicious of the political motivations behind his partial version of the general history of the Zafinifotsy.

Volamarina's narrative was not only intended to legitimize the enunciator's social position like the other narratives I encountered during my research, but also to promote his political project. If the list of names of dynasties, sovereigns, and even a minister enabled the deputy to situate himself in this multibranched family tree, the presumed unity of the tree corroborated his project to create a political association of all the Zafinifotsy nobles of Madagascar. Hence his travels throughout the island's various regions, motivated not only by the desire to reconstitute past links between Zafinifotsy nobles, but above all to forge new ones. As Volamarina pointed out, the history of the Zafinifotsy would indicate that all Malagasy nobles have the same origin. Based on this genealogical unity, a possible association of Zafinifotsy from all over the island would include a large proportion of Madagascar's nobles—including the Zafinimena nobles of Ambendraña.

This is indeed what Volamarina told me at the end of his account. According to him, the nobles of Ambendraña are also Descendants of Silver, Zafinifotsy, even if "they don't know it." They are the true "masters of the kingdom," which is why Zalifa, the daughter of the Analalava queen, was in conflict with them. "What is more," he explained, lowering his voice, "Zalifa is not the legitimate heir to the Analalava throne, because her mother, Soazara, is not the true daughter of the former king Ndramamahaña."[29] For him, the true legitimate heirs to the throne were

29. This hypothesis is also shared by Charles Poirier (1939: 77). According to this colonial administrator's chronicle, upon the death of the king Tondroko (Ndramamahaña's name during his lifetime), faced with the French colonial administration's refusal to recognize his aunt as his heir to the

the descendants of Kozobe, the Descendants of Silver. As it happens, Zalifa was deputy of Analalava before Volamarina's election, and therefore represented his main political adversary. By condensing the royal genealogy and concealing collateral links, Volamarina presented himself as a direct descendant of Kozobe. Moreover, as the nephew of a former minister of the First Republic, himself a descendant of Kozobe, Volamarina embodied the point of convergence between the history of the Malagasy republic and that of the Sakalava kingship. He was therefore the ideal candidate not only for the role of deputy he already occupied, but also for that of sovereign to which he aspired. This aspiration was confirmed to me by certain testimonies gathered in Analalava, according to which Volamarina sought the support of the Ambendraña nobles in pursuit of his goal. Hence the political significance, both locally and nationally, of creating an association of Zafinifotsy from all over the island, even if it meant convincing certain nobles to recognize themselves as Zafinifotsy.

The political motivations behind this alleged unity of the Malagasy dynasties also become apparent when we compare this account with ancient chronicles and more recent historiographical reconstructions. This comparison shows that both the Zafindraminia origin of Malagasy dynasties and the dynastic unity of the Zafinifotsy are indeed more ideological than genealogical.[30] Beaujard (1994) has already pointed out that the Zafindraminia origin claimed by the Malagasy dynasties is mainly based on the influence exerted by their diviners. It was they who imported and reelaborated the royal ideology, and it was their migration to the various regions of the island from the fifteenth century onward that enabled its spread to the other kingdoms.[31] As far as the Zafinifotsy are concerned, if we follow the protagonists of this history, leaving aside the group-based perspective that considers groups as the main actors of

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throne, Soazara was chosen by the royal notables as the former sovereign's heir, despite doubts about his paternity.

30. Unlike these ideological theories, Volamarina's account presenting the dynastic fragmentation of the Maroseràña as the origin of the ruling dynasties of the Sakalava, Antaisaka, Antandroy, and Mahafaly is consistent with European historiography (Grandidier and Grandidier 1914; Kent 1970: 25).
31. This dispersal of diviner-healers was probably caused by the arrival of new Islamized groups in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (Beaujard 1994; Berger and Blanchy 2014).

history, we find not only that certain branches called Zafinifotsy are independent of each other, but also that the identity of the founder of this dynastic branch is ambivalent. He is presented as both Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, depending on the oral traditions considered.

Let us start with Volamarina's narrative of the division between these two dynastic branches. This narrative is probably borrowed from accounts of the founding of the Zafinifotsy kingdom of Ankaraña (Walsh 1998: 106–7). According to these northern oral traditions, the inversion of the criteria for succession to the throne is justified by a random and free choice. Instead of ascending to the throne, the eldest inherits spiritual power, materialized in silver, while the youngest inherits political power, symbolized in gold. As the deputy's account suggests, these conflicts between relatives within the royal dynasty are often motivated by similar contradictions between the criteria for succession to the throne, which normally favor the king's eldest son born of the first wife. It is this conflict between principles of succession that "is resolved in favor of territorial segmentation" (Baré 1973: 95, my translation). In this process of segmentation, the division between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy in the version recounted by the deputy also makes explicit the dual nature of royal power. This duality of royal power corresponds to what Rodney Needham (1980) calls "dual sovereignty" or the diarchy which, according to Georges Dumézil (1940) and Sahlins (1981, 2008) among others, characterizes all sovereign power. It consists in the separation of political power and ritual authority, entrusted to two different groups or individuals. In this case, the Zafinimena, descendants of the younger brother, inherit the power to rule—the power of gold. The Zafinifotsy, descendants of the elder brother and of silver, inherit the ritual power to intercede with the royal ancestors, to transmit the hasiñy power to the descendants of the younger brother, and wash away their faults. In principle, in Malagasy monarchies, these complementary powers are shared between the king and his diviner-healer: two figures who, in the accounts of the founding of the first monarchies, are represented respectively by the Zafindraminia dynasty and by the kind of people grouped under the name of Anjoaty (see Hurvitz 1980, 1986). But here these powers are divided between two branches of the same dynasty. For now, let us just note that this functional division of royal power between the golden cadet and the silver elder, crystallized here in two dynastic branches, is structurally reproducible in each generation, where new elders oppose new cadets. Hence the ambivalence of this dynastic division between kings of gold and intercessors of silver. This ambivalence is reflected in the historical

identification of King Andriandahifotsy's son, founder of the Zafinifotsy branch, at least according to oral traditions of the Antankaraña kingdom.

The fact that following the death of the Menabe king, Andriandahifotsy, there was a conflict between the two sons borne by his first wife is also attested by oral traditions from the northwest (Firinga [1901] 1971: 97). According to these traditions, these two sons of the king are known by the posthumous names of Andriamanetriarivo and Andriamandisoarivo, and are identifiable with the two historical figures of Tsimanongarivo and Tsimanatona cited in European chronicles of the period (Firinga [1901] 1971: 97; Grandidier and Grandidier 1905: 616). The first is the elder of the two, the second the younger. These chronicles and the oral traditions of the northwest agree that it was the younger who tried to wrest power from the elder and, defeated, was forced to flee further north, contrary to the Antankaraña version reported by Volamarina (Grandidier and Grandidier 1905: 616). Once he had taken refuge in the north, the younger prince reached an agreement with two American slave ships to conquer the region and defeat the Arabized groups known collectively as the Antalaotra ("People of the Sea"), who held the trade hegemony on the northern coast (1905: 617–18). Now, whereas in the Antankaraña traditions of the far north of the island, this prince is presented as the founding ancestor of the Zafinifotsy, in those of the northwestern Boina region he is considered the founder of the Zafinimena branch (Guillain 1845: 17; Lombard 1988: 20–39). According to these latter traditions, he is the ancestor of the Descendants of Gold of the Boina region, a dynastic branch of the Maroseràña dynasty of the Menabe. For the moment, let us leave this contradiction open. In the pages that follow, we will look at the reasons behind it, which make these two divergent versions true.

Early accounts also suggest that the Merina intervention on behalf of the new king of the Menabe against his brother, cited by Volamarina and evoked in the accounts of the Mouth of the Incest, is entirely plausible, since the Merina were submissive to the younger brother at the time and could have been called upon for military assistance (Guillain 1845: 15). On the other hand, the same testimonies collected by Guillain in the nineteenth century seem to refute the fact that the kingdoms of Marangibato and Ankaraña were founded by descendants of the same Zafinifotsy dynastic branch, as claimed by Volamarina and Antankaraña oral traditions. According to these testimonies, it is more likely that these two kingdoms were founded by independent dynastic groups. Indeed, while the kingdom of Marangibato originated from a Maroseràña branch (whether Zafinimena or Zafinifotsy), it was the arrival of these

conquering nobles in the region that caused the former local chief of the Antandrona ("People of Androna"), Andriatsirotso, to flee to the far north of the island to found the Antankaraña kingdom (Guillain 1845: 26–28). Guillain (1845: 153) makes it clear that the rulers of the Ankaraña all came from the Antandrona tribe, and not from a branch of the Maroseràña dynasty, be it Zafinimena or Zafinifotsy. According to these northwestern traditions, the Marangibato and Ankaraña rulers shared a common geographical origin, but from different descent and dynastic groups. Their genealogical unification under the name Zafinifotsy would therefore be an *a posteriori* elaboration, probably by the northern Antankaraña nobles (see Sanchez 2013a: 156). Thus, in this reconstruction of the Zafinifotsy past, the oral traditions of the northwest tell us that the Antankaraña kingdom, despite being the only historically recognized Zafinifotsy kingdom, was founded by another sociopolitical group: the Antandrona. I will come back to this contradiction later. Now we will look at the account of Zafinifotsy history told by the king of Marangibato. His account, and that of his family members, will shed new light on these contradictions. But first, we bid farewell to deputy Volamarina and our first meeting in Marangibato.

Once our discussion was over, Volamarina joined the group of pilgrims gathered outside of the doany waiting for the ceremony to begin, to deliver an inaugural speech. After his speech on the importance of preserving ancestral traditions (*fomban-drazaña*) for the development (*fandrosoaña*) of Madagascar, he climbed into his four-wheel drive and left Marangibato before the Great Royal Service in honor of his ancestors had even begun. In 2018, Madagascar's High Constitutional Court disqualified his candidacy in a list for the 2019 legislative elections, for abuse of power. In May 2020, after supporting President Rajoelina's campaign, he was reelected deputy for Analalava.

Bokin-drazaña*: "The book of ancestors"*

I had the opportunity to speak with the king of Marangibato on two occasions, one year apart. The first time, we met in the nearby town of Mandritsara, in the company of an elder member of his family. The second time was in Marangibato, a week after the Great Royal Service I attended. During each meeting, I heard an account of the history of the founding of the kingdom. The first time, the king recited it to me from memory, the second time while reading his notebook, his book of ancestors (*bokin-drazaña*), which he had largely written—or at least

transcribed—himself, and which he updated regularly. The two versions were virtually identical, apart from a few details, one of which was particularly significant. This detail concerns the beginning of the narrative. Here are the two versions:

The ampanjaka [nobles] came from the southwest, from the Menabe. There were three of them: Ralambo, Rainimanana and Lehimasy.	The Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy ampanjaka came from the Menabe. Ndramboniarivo, Ndramandisoarivo, Ndranahiñina. There were three of them. The Zafinimena rule in Analalava, the Zafinifotsy rule here in Marangibato… There were three of them when they left Mahajanga. These three people were: Ralambo, Rainimanana, Lehimasy.

The first version the king told me in Mandritsara (on the left) lacks the almost elementary reference to the two Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy dynasties and the simplified opposition between the Analalava and Marangibato kingdoms. Finally, the names of the first Boina rulers are also missing: Ndramboniarivo, Ndramandisoarivo, Ndranahiñina. In this first version, the account's protagonists are simply called ampanjaka (nobles) with no distinction between the two dynastic branches. This triad of ancient Sakalava rulers, which is neither relevant to the narrative context nor motivated by other oral traditions,[32] seems to be a sort of copy of the more significant triad of two brothers and one sister at the origin of the founding of the kingdom of Marangibato. In the rest of the story, no other reference is made to these two dynastic branches or to the rulers of Boina. My hypothesis—justified by the preceding historical reconstruction and by the exchanges that follow—is that the reference to the dynastic division between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy constitutes a new narrative element, which the sovereign probably added after his exchanges with Deputy Volamarina and possibly with the mediums of the tromba drowned in the Analalava estuary who had flocked to the ceremony.

32. Even in the oral traditions of Boina, these rulers are presented rather as a group of "four men" (*efa-daby*), as crystallized in the relics contained in the Mahajanga relics residence, with the fourth being the prince and diviner-healer Andriamisara.

The rest of the story was told to me without any significant variations. Here is the version of the book of ancestors that he read to me after the ceremony:

> There were three of them who left Mahajanga. They were Ralambo, Rainimanana and Lehimasy. The latter had many names: in the south, in the Menabe, he was called Andriandahifotsy; in Mahajanga he was called Ndranahiñina; in the Mandritsara region he was called Lehimasy. … Rainimanana was a woman. When they left Mahajanga, they took twenty people with them: ten men and ten women each. Now, in the Port Berge area, there is a place called Ambodiadabon'ny Bevala ["Under the big-ink tree"]. Here they erected standing stones [*orim-bato*]. These are "dishes of the ancestors" [*kapiland-razaña*], what you in the north call toñy. They built three of them. The northern one belonged to Ralambo; the central one to Rainimanana; and the southern one to Lehimasy. [Starting with the northern one], these stones indicated the birth order of the three brothers. Then they went their separate ways. Ralambo went to Antangeny in Befandriana. Lehimasy and his sister Rainimanana went up to Marangibato. There, they asked Ramarohôsy for land. Ramarohôsy was the master of the land here at the time, a member of Antivohilava group. They obtained it. The price for the Marangibato lands included a teenage wife to give to Ramarohôsy, a jug filled with silver coins, and a double-woven chain. … The young woman was Lehimasy's sister, whom Ramarohôsy took as his wife …. From then on, Rainimanana left with Ramarohôsy, and Lehimasy reigned over his lands in Marangibato. He is the "source" [*sorisy*] of the nobles who come from Marangibato.

This local version of the kingdom's history differs from that recounted by Volamarina, starting with the founder's name: Lehimasy or Andriandahifotsy, and not Bararativôko. However, like Bararativôko, Andriandahifotsy is the name of one of the first legendary rulers of the Maroseràña dynasty. As we saw in the case of Andrampongy, the attribution of the name of one of the first kings of the dynasty to the founder of a more recent kingdom is above all a way for a dynastic segment to present itself as the starting point of the entire dynasty. It is difficult to determine who lies behind this name, but by cross-referencing the genealogy of the kingdom's rulers reported to me by the king of Marangibato and the ancient oral traditions collected by Guillain (1845: 24), it seems likely that he was one of the younger sons "from mothers outside the

royal race" (1845: 24, my translation) of Andriamboniarivo, son of Andriamandisoarivo, the founder of the Boina kingdom. The generations of rulers listed by the king of Marangibato in the rest of his account suggest that the kingdom was founded in the mid-eighteenth century, when Andriamboniarivo's sons entered into conflict with each other and dispersed to different parts of the north of the island.

In the king's account, there is no trace of the conflicts that characterized the first encounters between the royal Sakalava dynasty and these Androna groups (Guillain 1845: 18–19, 26–27). What the local historical tradition reveals is the contract drawn up between the foreign prince and the local chief, granting the former access to the land in exchange for a wife (see also Wilson 1992: 16). This is a narrative constant that Graeber and Sahlins (2017: 6) have noted in accounts of the founding of kingdoms, although the transfer of the wife is reversed:

> While there is frequently no tradition of conquest, there is invariably a tradition of contract: notably in the form of a marriage between the stranger-prince and a marked woman of the indigenous people—most often, a daughter of the native leader.

Indeed, as we will see in chapter 7, it is often this latter type of transfer that we will also find in the foundation accounts of other Sakalava kingdoms. Another difference with the founding dynamics of other Sakalava kingdoms is that, according to the king's account, the marriage between masters of the land and foreign nobles does not seal the master of the land's submission to the foreign king. Instead, it consecrates the political independence of the former. The local chief's refusal of allegiance to the foreign sovereign and the separation of territorial domains seem motivated in this case by the claim to independence that characterizes the formation narratives of this heterogeneous group known since the nineteenth century as the Tsimihety: those who did not submit to the Sakalava kings by cutting their hair (Wilson 1992: 15, 25).[33] However,

33. According to the accounts of a cousin of the current ruler of Marangibato, those known today as Tsimihety would have come from at least four different groups: (1) the Antivohilava, "masters of the land"; (2) the Sakalava, with their rulers, who founded their autonomous kingdoms; (3) the collective from "the thirty-eight" families (*Ny Valoambitelompolo*) originating from Mananara and having migrated to Androna; and (4) the Merina, mixed with the various groups of migrants brought with them as labor

in keeping with the dynamics of the formation of other Sakalava kingdoms, it is from this group of masters of the land, the Antivohilava, that the diviner-healers (moasy, or, in the local variant, *mpanazary*) of the Marangibato rulers originate. This is what the king at the time explained to me, thus confirming the diarchic structure underlying royal power, according to which political power is in the hands of foreign kings, while the ritual authority to legitimize the king's power is reserved for the masters of the land. In chapter 7, I will analyze this structural division between the political power of foreigners and the ritual authority of autochthonous people, an ideal pattern that can also be observed in other African societies (Turner 1969: 99) and other regions of the world (Sahlins 2008: 183–84; Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 6–7).

The history of the Marangibato kingdom can be linked to that of the tromba andrano at the time of King Radama I's Merina incursions, beginning in 1824 (Wilson 1992: 21). A cousin of the king of Marangibato, called Ndrozara, who had accompanied the latter when we first met in Mandritsara, told me about this invasion:

> When Radama arrived to take over the land, the masters of the land didn't fight against the Borizany [Merina]. Only those of Sakalava origin rebelled. Those who didn't rebel revealed the secret [of the Sakalava nobles to the Merina], according to local accounts. Because if these people hadn't revealed the secret, the guns couldn't have reached [the Sakalava nobles]. … When the Merina arrived, the Sakalava responded to the attacks. They responded up to a point, then fled to the west, to the seaside. When they got there, they split up: Tontôña went to Andrampongy, another to Ambatobesohihy, the other to the big rock… They chose to throw themselves into the sea.

This narrative of suicide in the Mouth of the Incest was probably integrated into local Marangibato traditions through the circulation of the many tromba andrano mediums present at the various royal services on the northwestern coast, and who for years had been arriving in large numbers at the Great Royal Service in Marangibato. Indeed, given the link between histories and places, the account of this noble family's

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during their occupation and remaining on site after the arrival of the French. On the origins of the Tsimihety, see also the chapter devoted to them by Frédéric Randriamamonjy (2001: 466–75), which the sovereign of Marangibato had in the form of photocopies.

suicide can only be foreign to Marangibato traditions. The traumatic event took place in the Loza estuary, not in Marangibato. If it is normal that the reference to the place of origin of these fleeing nobles, as well as that of betrayal through the unveiling of a secret, should have remained in the memory of the accounts transmitted in the villages of this estuary, it is equally sensible that the memory of this event should be absent from the oral traditions of Marangibato. It was probably only with the arrival of mediums possessed by the tromba andrano in the place of origin of their spirits that this account had become known in the region. It is equally likely that it was the recent institution of the royal service in Marangibato that prompted the new sovereign and members of his family to seek a correspondence between the different oral traditions converging in this place, whether that of the tromba andrano of the Loza, brought by the mediums, or that of the Zafinifotsy of the Ankaraña, recounted by Volamarina.

The two versions

It was the view from afar of the drowned Zafinifotsy history, held by the nobles of Marangibato, that enabled me to consider the history of the tromba andrano and the Zafinifotsy from a different perspective. Regarding the identification of these drowned nobles, at our first meeting in Mandritsara, the cousin of the king of Marangibato proposed two possible interpretations:

> It is because they committed suicide in the sea that they are called tromba antandrano [or andrano], because they come from the water: that is the origin of this concept. But there is an older origin, based on the idea of separating Malagasy people into two categories. There are people who live in the sea, and people who live on land. The former, those in the water, are called *zafindrahara*ha*rano* ["descendants of beings in the water"], or *zafindrahavoay* ["descendants of crocodiles"]. Whereas the people who live on land have taken on the different names of all the tribes. … When the vazaha, the foreigners, arrived, [some of the people who lived on land] chose to live in the water. These people are called in Malagasy *zavavirano* ["water women"], or *zalahindrano* ["water men"], they are fairies. They are normal men. They speak like Malagasy. … The origin of these people is the origin of the Malagasy. … There are two versions, the earlier version and the version from the time of kingship.

This dualistic opposition between "people of the water" (*antandrano*) and "people on land" (*antantety*) is also used today to distinguish different social groups, such as the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena, but also the Sakalava, who live on the coast, and the Tsimihety, who live in the interior of the island (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 32). Within this opposition, water people are associated with the half-human creatures that dwell in the water, the *zavavirano*, often translated by my interlocutors as "mermaids." The tromba andrano, the royal spirits in the water are, according to Ndrozara, a reactualization of these original figures during the period when kingship was instated. This is an example of the royal ideology's assimilation of preexisting local cults, as in the case of possession cults. As Raison-Jourde puts it, through this reappropriation of local cults by sovereigns, "any reference to the sacred is therefore a reference to monarchy as the source of the sacred" (1983: 30, my translation). It is probably also because of this mythical origin that the Zafinifotsy, identified with the tromba andrano, the water spirits, are defined by the inhabitants of the Analalava region as the first occupants, not only of the region, but of the whole of Madagascar. Moreover, in the interplay between cosmological elements and historical events, these aquatic beings, in Ndrozara's explanation, oppose the invading enemies, be they the Zafinimena, the Merina, or Europeans (vazaha). The latter are identified not only with the French colonizers, but also with the travelers and traders who have been present on the island since the sixteenth century. It is because of the arrival of these various invaders that the Sakalava would have preferred to live—or die—in the water of the sea. In both cases—in the case of mermaids or tromba—their residence in the water is the consequence of their refusal to submit to outside invaders on land.

At the time of my meeting with the cousin of the king of Marangibato in Mandritsara, driven as I was by the desire to understand the historical origin of these drowned nobles and the dynastic branch of the Zafinifotsy, I had asked Ndrozara and the sovereign where the division between the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena came from. Once again, Ndrozara replied that "there are two versions." The first version of the history is the one told by Volamarina concerning the choice between silver and gold made by the children of King Andriandahifotsy. Here is the second version that Ndrozara presented to me, using Catholic metaphors:

> This is the version of the children of man [*zanakan'ny lahy*] and children of woman [*zanakan'ny vavy*]. The children of woman are called

> Zafinimena, while the children of man are called Zafinifotsy, because they have the power to make sacrifices/invocations [*fisoronana*]. Traditional mass always requires the children of men. Whereas those who hold the kingdom, the "reds" [*mena*], are always children of women. Because the descendant of a man holds the hasiñy that makes him reign, he is not allowed to make mistakes. He cannot make mistakes, because he is the priest [*mônpera*] who guides the administration of the kingdom. Whereas the descendant of woman, not holding [the hasiñy], can rule the kingdom: he can declare wars, he can kill everyone, and then bend before the children of man [and say]: "Give me a blessing because I have sinned." That is the other version.

I heard this variant of the distinction between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, as descendants of woman and of man respectively, several times during my fieldwork, although often the other way around. Zafinifotsy were defined as the descendants of the king's sister who had married a commoner and were therefore considered not to be legitimate to reign, whereas Zafinimena were defined as the children of the king, and therefore as the latter's legitimate successors. Ndrozara's second version thus offers another transgression of the criteria of succession, which generally favor the children of men to accede to the throne. The reason for this deviation is not the preeminence of another criterion for succession, nor the random choice between gold and silver, but the claim to hierarchical superiority of "spiritual" power—in Ndrozara's words—over political power. Without the power to give hasiñy to the children of women in power, the kingdom cannot be ruled. It is thanks to the power of children of men that the rulers have the power to act. Hence the ambivalent hierarchical relationship between these two powers, and consequently between their holders. However, in the commoner context, this hierarchical ambivalence does not exist. It is the elders, descendants of men, who have the power to make invocations and sacrifices. By virtue of this power, they also make political and economic decisions, notably concerning the management of undivided patrimonial assets. Unlike sovereign power, commoners' power is not divided in two.

What makes the relationship between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy presented in this second version even more ambivalent is the fact that the distinction between children of men, or brothers, and children of women, or sisters, is repeated in every generation. But it can also refer to different levels of the family tree, depending on the context. The

versatility of this segmental logic had already astonished Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 86):

> It took me some time to grasp that while the terms "children of men" and "children of women" usually distinguish the children of brothers and sisters born of the same mother, they may also refer to positions of superiority and inferiority persisting for generations, reckoned back to whenever the parties choose.

Whether we are talking about the descendants of the man and the descendants of the woman, or about the eldest and the youngest, what nevertheless links these two versions of the dynastic split account is the complementary distribution of roles between the Descendants of Gold, or Red, and the Descendants of Silver, or White. These complementary functions result from the sharing of two aspects of royal power, which are symbolized in the two colors usually associated with the figure of the sovereign:

> There are two colors for the king: white and red. … White and red are the royal colors. White: Zafinifotsy; red: Zafinimena. The *mpanjaka* who rule are Zafinimena: the ones on the throne. And the ones called ampijôro ["intercessors"] are Zafinifotsy. Zafinifotsy make invocations/sacrifices. They are more esoteric. They give blessings [tsodrano]. Whereas the king in office is Zafinimena.

In his explanations, Ndrozara links the colors attributed to the two dynastic groups, as seen in their tromba clothing, to the two functions that make up royal power. In this distribution of rules, Zafinifotsy, the white ones, are defined as the ampijôro or the ampangataka, that is, the intercessors of the royal ancestors. It is they who intercede with the ancestors to give the Zafinimena their blessing, and thus transmit the hasiñy power coming from these ancestors.

The exegesis of the distinction between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy that Ndrozara presented to me before the ruler of Marangibato, alternating between French and Malagasy and mixing Christian terms with elements of royal ideology, emphasizes the functional and relational character of this distinction. Just as the version that distinguishes between children of men and children of women reveals, this distinction is indeed likely to be reproduced to separate the sovereign's progeny into two groups in each generation. But, as Feeley-Harnik has noted, it can

also be traced back to different levels of the royal genealogy. From a functional point of view, the Zafinifotsy are thus linked to the esoteric domain, to the ritual power that legitimizes political power. Based on their ritual role, the Zafinifotsy are associated not only with intercessors, but also with diviner-healers, manipulators of the generative power or power of efficacy (hasiñy). This is suggested by the description the king of Marangibato gave me of the role of the diviner in the kingdom and their position vis-à-vis the nobles:

> If a sovereign is elected, he must have a moasy, or *mpanazary* [diviner-healer]. The *mpanazary* knows how everything should be done and accomplished …. Before going to perform a ritual, we go to him and ask: "How do we proceed? Can we perform our actions or not?" …. If we receive his permission, then we can perform them. The sovereign and the *mpanazary* must always work together.

In this description of the role of the diviner-healer within the organization of the kingdom, there are several resonances with the role attributed to the Zafinifotsy. Just as during rituals at Ambendraña, where the Zafinimena must seek their advice regarding ritual actions, so too must sovereigns seek advice from the diviner-healers. What is more, as I mentioned earlier, this role of guidance and ritual legitimization is often attributed to the masters of the land, as shown by the fact that the diviner-healers of the kingdom of Marangibato were the masters of the land in the region. Hence the assimilation of the Zafinifotsy, not only to the diviner-healers, but also to the masters of the land. The Zafinifotsy would ultimately be identified with the elders, the children of men, the masters of the land, and the diviner-healers. These categories of people share the same ritual function of giving blessings (tsodrano), performing sacrifices (*misorona*), and generally interceding with the ancestors. They would thus be in a complementary position to the sovereigns holding political power, identified with foreigners, children of women, and cadets—all of whom are free to act and to commit mistakes.

Therefore, this complementary relationship between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy could be interpreted using Louis Dumont's hierarchical theory. According to his theory of the "encompassment of the opposite" ([1966] 1981: 240–41) the contradiction between the political preeminence of the cadets and the ritual superiority of the elders, who are excluded from the throne, is resolved at the encompassing level

of hierarchical ideology which, in Madagascar as in India, is based on an opposition between the "pure" (*madio*) and the "impure" (*maloto*) (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 41), as well as on the circulation and preservation of hasiñy (generative/efficacious power) (Bloch 1977). According to this hierarchical conception, the political power of the Zafinimena would therefore be encompassed by the ritual or spiritual power of the Zafinifotsy, just as the power of the living would be encompassed by the power of the ancestors, the true holders of generative and efficacious power. However, Dumont's elegant solution has some limitations and merits critique or, at the very least, revision. First, his theory of hierarchy is grounded on a holistic and totalizing view of society, which has been widely criticized (Appadurai 1988; Chatterjee 1993; Gupta 2000). This vision is even more problematic considering the Sakalava royal hierarchy, which, as we have seen on several occasions, is marked by ruptures determined by localized contexts and independent "domains" (anjara) of reference that cannot be reduced to the hierarchically nested levels of Dumont's theory. Second, Dumont's idealism underestimates the concrete power relations that underpin hierarchy and are mystified by it. As Bloch (1977) argued from a Marxist perspective, royal hierarchy and the "value-idea" of generative power (hasiñy) that sustains it conceal actual relations of power. This contradiction of the hierarchy by concrete power relations is illustrated, for example, by the case of Ambendraña and the Zafinimena nobles' disregard for the ritual authority of the Zafinifotsy ampangataka (see chapter 2). The ritual or religious power reserved for the Zafinifotsy and the masters of the land—as well as its encompassing of political power—seems to correspond more closely to what Ioan Lewis (1963) described as the "power of the weak." This power given to the weak serves more to make their submission to sovereign power more acceptable than to encompass or limit it. As I will show in chapter 7, the ambivalence that remains between ritual and political power reflects the unresolved tensions between foreign conquerors and subjugated local elites, as well as the kind of relationship that binds these groups together.

Now, although the relationship between the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena was described by the king as a functional division between holders of ritual and political power, respectively, there are nevertheless sovereigns who claim to be Zafinifotsy, such as the Antankaraña sovereigns in the north of the island. It was in an attempt to reckon with this ambivalence, which was difficult to grasp at the time, that I put the question to the king and his cousin:

> "And aren't the Antankaraña the Zafinifotsy who rule Ambilobe?" I asked them.
> "In Ambilobe, they're Zafinimena. … There are *mena* [red] and *fotsy* [white]. The former are Antankaraña Sakalava, the latter Antankaraña Anjoaty, descendants of Arabs …. But in general, it's always the Zafinimena who rule the kingdom," replied Ndrozara.
> "And in Marangibato, then, there are also Zafinimena?" I asked again.
> "Yes, the sovereign," replied Ndrozara.
> "'Zafinimena' and 'Zafinifotsy' are 'titles' [*titra*]!" the sovereign clarified.
> "[The sovereign] has both titles. He can lead the ceremony and he can lead his little kingdom," concluded Ndrozara.

"Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy are titles." This statement—which at the time struck me as surprisingly relativistic—enabled me to approach the question of the distinction between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy from a perspective other than that of the two conflicting dynastic branches. It is this version, specific to northern traditions, that is generally presented by foreign and local historiographical reconstructions. The relative and functional conception of these titles that had been presented to me also explained why King Andriamandisoarivo, who is designated as the first ancestor of the Zafinifotsy branch, is also considered the founder of the first Zafinimena kingdom of Boina. He was the intercessor of his brother in power in the Menabe and the founder of a new kingdom further north. He had both titles, but only one in each of two different kingdoms.

It is from this new angle that we will attempt to question the two contradictory versions of Zafinifotsy identification: the relative and functional version presented by the nobles of Marangibato, and the essential and dynastic one claimed by the tromba andrano and the Zafinifotsy kings of the Antankaraña kingdom. From the point of view of those at the source of this alleged dynastic branch, the title of Zafinifotsy king simply appears as a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron. "In general, it's always Zafinimena who rule the kingdom," Ndrozara asserted. It is therefore to the study of these contradictions that the next chapters will be dedicated.

CHAPTER 6

Fanompoaña: "Royal Services" and the Role of Silver in Building the Kingdom

Sitting cross-legged on the ground, facing east, in front of a multicolored fence made of rice sacks sewn together, we waited for the invocation to the royal ancestors to begin the day's ritual activities. Behind the enclosure lay the still-empty coffin of Soazara, the recently deceased Analalava queen. In the royal house (zomba), the enclosure where the queen's corpse was decomposing, the master of joined palms was preparing to pronounce his invocation. He was accompanied by Special Servants, the only ones authorized to approach the royal corpse, or the Royal Service. In fact, at funerals, the royal corpse was synecdochically referred to as the "Royal Service" (*Fanompoaña*) or, by anticipation, "Divinity" (*Zañahary*). A voice from inside the house announced that the invocation—inaudible to those waiting outside—had been pronounced. At this signal, everyone raised their hands together, cupping them, palms up, above their heads. The ritual officers then left the royal house. The first to leave was the Zafinimena ruler of Ambendraña: he was the master of joined palms, or the intercessor. He was followed by a member of the Andraramaeva descent group, then a Sakalava Manôroaomby, a Jingô, and finally an Antankoala. These four were representatives of the main descent groups of Special Servants who, guided by the ruler of Ambendraña, were responsible for royal funerals (*tompon'ny asa*). All five were dressed in the same way: a long white shirt, with a thick cloth shoulder strap, called savôko, passing

over both shoulders. This was the same ceremonial garb worn by the most important drowned Zafinifotsy tromba.

I witnessed this scene on Monday, April 17, 2017, on the island of Nosy Lava. More than two months had passed since the start of the hot service (*fanompoaña mafana*) for Soazara, as the royal funeral is called. At the time I had not yet met the Marangibato nobles, and my perspective on the distinction between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy had not yet been influenced by our exchanges. But contradictions concerning this distinction were beginning to accumulate in my research. Contradictions like that of seeing the Descendant of Gold ruler of Ambendraña appear dressed as a Descendant of Silver spirit during the funeral of Soazara, the Descendant of Gold queen of the Southern Bemihisatra Kingdom.

The previous chapter concluded with the Marangibato nobles declaring that the nature of this division between Zafinimena (Descendant of Gold) and Zafinifotsy (Descendant of Silver) was functional. According to their explanation, the Zafinifotsy had the power to invoke the royal ancestors to bless and render effective the actions of the ruling Zafinimena. As the ruler of Marangibato had asserted, Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy were therefore titles, designations of rank or function, which are consequently valid in specific residential and relational contexts. However, we have seen in previous chapters that these two titles crystallize the division of dynastic groups (whether living nobles or tromba), and that a Zafinifotsy kingdom is present in the north of the island, far from the areas where I carried out my fieldwork. It would seem, therefore, that there is certainly more to the distinction than a mere question of titles. Before analyzing the historical and structural elements justifying the ambivalence of these designations, which are both relative and essential, the aim of this chapter is to show the functional position occupied by the Descendants of Silver or White (Zafinifotsy) in the ritual services of construction of the royal power of the Descendants of Gold or Red (Zafinimena), from the funeral of the former sovereign to the consecration of the new one. This will enable us to understand the reasons for the presence of a cult dedicated to the Descendants of Silver in a kingdom of gold, but also to better understand the hierarchical organization of the kingdom and the ritual devices that allow this hierarchy to be established and renegotiated. Furthermore, we will see that, within this hierarchy, the ritual position attributed to the Zafinifotsy can be occupied not only by descent groups traditionally claiming to be affiliated with the Zafinifotsy, but also by those who, in their residential context, define themselves as Zafinimena. These groups, faced with Zafinimena

of higher status, functionally become their Zafinifotsy, that is to say, their intercessors or intermediaries with the ancestors.

Queen Soazara passed away in Analalava on February 3, 2017. In May of the same year, she was buried with her ancestors at Nosy Lava's southern royal cemetery. In September 2018, Zalifa, her youngest daughter, was enthroned, or "raised" (*manangana*), as the new queen of Analalava. In September of the following year, during my last fieldwork stay, the young queen Zalifa was "sharpened" (*mandrangitry*), or consecrated and legitimized by her ancestors from Nosy Lava. Let us look at these royal rituals, starting with Soazara's funeral.

Fanompoaña mafana: "Hot Royal Service"

Analalava: "The broken land"

"*Folaka ny tany!*" (The earth is broken), announced the metallic voice on the Analalava local radio on Friday evening, February 3, 2017. "*Folaka ny tany!*" proclaimed Soazara's granddaughter into a microphone in front of the local TV cameras a week later, during the official funeral ceremony organized for the arrival of the Prime Minister of the Malagasy Republic. It is with these words that the death of a sovereign is announced among the Sakalava, as the literature on the subject attests (Dandouau 1911; Poirier 1939; Cagnat 1941; Decary 1962). *Princesse* Soazara Augustine—as she was honorifically called by her servants—"leaned" (*nihilana*) at around 7 p.m. at the age of ninety-four. When the news spread in whispers through the sandy lanes of the small town of Analalava, few people went to the Anjialava district, in front of the queen's residence. "People were probably scared," said Honoré, Analalava's deputy mayor, as he told me about the events that had taken place during my absence. The villagers were afraid of the extraordinary event of a sovereign's death. This feeling was shared by the royal servants, who expressed it insistently in their speeches. "*Zahay mavozo!*" (We are afraid!), they repeated during the official speeches (*kabary*) of the Hot Service held on Nosy Lava. Phrases such as, "This Royal Service/corpse [fanompoaña] is complicated/dangerous!" or, "We have never witnessed an event like this," recurred often in these speeches. Indeed, none of the living servants had participated in or attended the last funeral of Soazara's father, Tondroko, better known posthumously as Ndramamahañarivo. His funeral was held in 1925, during the French colonial period. Hence the

royal servants' fear of making mistakes. As Charles Poirier (1939: 67), chief administrator of the colonies, testifies, Tondroko's funeral had lasted two months, under pressure from the colonial administration, then extended to three. Soazara's funeral also lasted three months, or—more exactly—four "moons" (*volana/fanjava*), as the number of lunar cycles during which royal funerals take place must always be even. But the cold services (*fanompoaña manintsy*) to finish the tomb were only completed after seven months. I was only able to attend the Hot Service directly for two months (April to May), as I had health problems during the first part, and, during the last part of the ceremony, I was forbidden to stay at the cemetery. However, I was able to obtain an account of the entire funeral from one of the Razañ'olo (Special Servants) who took part directly, as well as from other direct witnesses. It is on the basis of my participation and these direct testimonies that the following description, made up of these different points of view, is based.

As another member of the mayor's office told me, although few people gathered in front of the royal residence on the evening of Soazara's death, all the institutional representatives of Analalava visited the residence over the days that followed to offer their condolences to the royal family—including Deputy Volamarina. Volamarina, however, was refused access, declared to be a persona non grata. According to my interlocutor, this exclusion was due to the fact that, during his election as deputy for Analalava in 2013 for the Social Democratic Party, Volamarina had wanted to organize an investiture celebration in the town square. Having defeated the queen's daughter, Zalifa, in the election, he demanded that one of Queen Soazara's royal servants (Sambarivo) confer the parliamentary sash on him. His request had been refused for obvious reasons, and a noblewoman belonging to the Ambendraña branch assumed this role. By taking advantage of the ambivalent relations and latent rivalries between the Ambendraña nobles and the Analalava royal family, Volamarina had thus clearly challenged the local royal power, in particular Zalifa, the defeated candidate and successor to the throne. This is why he was not received, on the orders of the latter, who took charge of managing the deceased queen's funeral.

A different attitude was adopted to welcome another representative of the national government who came to pay homage to the Analalava queen: Prime Minister Olivier Mahafaly Solonandrasana. For the arrival from Antananarivo of this Sakalava politician, an official ceremony had been organized for the Friday of the following week, during which he was to present the deceased queen with a military decoration. A week

thus elapsed between Soazara's death and her transfer to the royal cemetery village of Nosy Lava. According to historical accounts (Poirier 1939: 103) and the rumors circulating in Analalava at the time, the corpses of the region's former sovereigns were transferred to Nosy Lava on the evening of the first auspicious day after their death. This custom could have authorized the transfer of Soazara's body to the royal cemetery on the day of her death itself or the following day. It was because of the wait for the military decoration ceremony that Zalifa requested, after consulting the Special Servants, that formalin be injected into the corpse to better preserve it until its departure from Analalava. This was considered a transgression of a prohibition (fady). As a sovereign's corpse had to be dry before burial, the injection of this preservative would have delayed the natural and voluntary decomposition of her flesh. As with the sacrifice of zebus or humans, no action should be forced in royal ceremonies. But let us take the story in chronological order.

When the queen died, the chief (*tale*) of the Jingô, one of the groups of Special Servants residing around the queen's residence, called the other Jingô living north of the town. Faced with the extraordinary situation, the Special Servants consulted among themselves before turning to the Ambendraña nobles occasionally residing in Analalava. These are the "masters of the ancestors" (*tompon-drazaña*), able to advise and guide them in delicate ritual operations. "Do as you have always done with the Ambendraña nobles," replied one of the Ambendraña nobles when they met, "over there [in Ambendraña] they are 'children of men,' here they are 'children of women,' so do the same things I saw you do in Ambendraña." As both branches of nobles come from the same family, the same Special Servants take care of the funerals of the Analalava nobles and of the Ambendraña nobles.

Fampilomoño*: "Washing the royal corpse"*

As a first ritual action, two Jingô and one or two Antankoala washed (*fampilomoño*)[1] the corpse with two buckets of pure water "not yet crossed by birds" (*tsy dikam-pitily*). Then they dressed the body of the deceased queen in white. Silver coins were inserted into the mouth of the corpse (cf. Dandouau 1911: 166). Finally, the body was placed on a

1. *Mampilomoño*, *fampilomoño,* which in ordinary language means "to make swim," is used in royal language to indicate the action of washing. In ordinary language, this action is indicated by the word *fampisehaña*.

sort of wooden stretcher (called *sevaly*) in a room at the Analalava royal residence. On Monday, Zalifa came to ask the Special Servants, who watched over the corpse, whether it was customary to inject formalin into the royal remains so that they would last until the Friday ceremony. The Special Servants explained that they did not know the answer for this specific case, but that they had already seen it done for the nobles of Ambendraña. The next day, two doctors arrived with the formalin. Fearful, they asked Zalifa once again if this was permitted by custom. Although Zalifa answered in the affirmative, they nevertheless asked the Special Servants to pronounce an invocation to the royal ancestors so that, should they unwittingly violate a fady, the ancestral wrath would not fall upon them. In particular, as a Special Servant told me, they feared that, once the needle and formalin were inserted into the queen's corpse, they might somehow interfere with the process of ancestralization and the metamorphosis of the queen's spirit into a tromba. After the Special Servants' invocation, the doctors injected the formalin into the queen's body. Once the corpse had been transported to Nosy Lava, rumors circulated among the servants at the royal cemetery that the formalin had had no effect on it.

Fomba vazaha*: "Foreign custom"*

On Thursday, the day before the ceremony with the Prime Minister, Zalifa instructed the Special Servants to build a temporary wooden coffin, so that the military decoration could be conferred according to military custom inherited from French colonists. This was carried out in spite of the stipulation of the customs of the hot services that the royal body only be placed in the coffin once its flesh has completely disappeared and only bones remain to be buried in the grave. The following day, a large ceremony was held inside the royal courtyard and attended by members of the royal family, local institutional representatives, the gendarmerie, servants, and villagers. The Prime Minister, who had arrived by plane, landing on an old airstrip that had been disused for years, was also in attendance. It was the Prime Minister who opened the official speeches, announcing the conferment of the decoration upon Queen Soazara. This was followed by speeches from the town's other notables and an emotional speech from the queen's granddaughter. A few trumpet notes from the traditional French military *Last Post* brought the ceremony to a close.

Once the "foreign/European customs" (*fomba vazaha*, as the Special Servant defined them when recounting the events to me) were

completed, the queen's corpse was removed from the coffin and placed back on its stretcher. The temporary coffin was destroyed and discarded. Zalifa then announced to the Special Servants that the following morning a motorboat would take the corpse to the island of Nosy Lava. By daybreak, many people had already gathered outside the enclosure, awaiting the departure of the late queen. Enclosed in a red sheet over its upper half, and with another white one enveloping its lower half, the corpse was carried out to sea, accompanied by the songs of the queen's servants (*marovavy*). Ambendraña's new sovereign, Andifera,[2] master of invocation, climbed aboard the motorboat with the two Jingô. No one else dared travel in the company of the Royal Service.

According to the hot service customs described to me by the Special Servants and echoed in the rumors circulating in the town, the royal corpse must be transported during the night, and a special pirogue, called a *laka-fiara* (outrigger pirogue), driven by members of the Antandrano descent group, People of the Sea, is meant to be used to transport it to Nosy Lava.[3] But Zalifa, as she herself confessed to me, was not yet familiar with the royal customs, having grown up according to the Muslim customs she had inherited from her father. The people of Analalava repeated this same justification to excuse the numerous transgressions of the customary prohibitions that caused quite a stir among the town's servants and subjects.

Nosy Lava

When the boat landed on the small beach below the royal cemetery in the south of Nosy Lava, the servants of the royal cemetery, the

2. As chance would have it, the former ruler of Ambendraña had died a week before Soazara.
3. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 419–20) attests, this particular pirogue is distinguished from others by its accentuated, sculpted bow. Another distinguishing feature from the pirogues of the northwest coast is the absence of a fixed mast and triangular sail. In this case, the sail is rectangular and attached between two movable vertical posts that work as masts. This is the type of sail used by the Vezo of the southwest, the region of origin of the Antandrano, the descent group responsible for sea transport during royal ceremonies. According to an informant from Analalava, another exceptional feature is the absence of iron nails in its structure.

Antimahabo, along with other groups of Special Servants who had arrived from villages in the region to help with the ritual work, descended to help the new arrivals. According to the testimony of one Special Servant, these groups of Special Servants also included Antifarimay and Antifañaiñy from the village of Anjango, the two groups of servants of the Zafinifotsy ancestors. Noting the reduced number of Special Servants from Analalava, the servants of the royal cemetery made no secret of their concerns. In particular, they complained that they did not know the operations to be carried out, and that it was up to the Special Servants, even if they were few in number (about ten when I arrived on the island), to carry out the Hot Service under the instruction of the Ambendraña nobles. At most, the royal cemetery servants could assist them, but they were not "responsible for the work" (*tompon'ny asa*). Indeed, very few Special Servants went to the queen's residence upon the news of her death, and even fewer dared go to Nosy Lava. They were afraid, as a Special Servant told me.[4] So it was the two Jingô who took charge of transporting the service to a palm house that the cemetery servants had previously built. They placed the corpse on a wooden stretcher, called *sevaly* or *kobany fanjava*, "silver bed" (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 369). It was there that the corpse would wait for two months to become "dry" (*maiky*) before being taken up to the cemetery (mahabo) and buried alongside the four ancestors (*efa-dahy*) of the Southern Bemihisatra Kingdom.[5] This liminal space where the drying would take place, represented by the beach at the foot of the cemetery village, is referred to throughout the period of the Hot Service as Antsandrarafa (cf. Dandouau 1911: 168).

4. In addition to the generalized fear of the death of an ampanjaka, the Special Servants were in this case also afraid, according to various hypotheses expounded by those present, of the consequences of violating the fady in such a complicated service; of the consequences of staying away from home for too long to complete the service; or simply of not being able to afford to leave their jobs at home to attend the Hot Service for an indefinite amount of time.
5. By analogy with Mahajanga's relic residence, the southern royal cemetery in Nosy Lava is also referred to metonymically as *efa-dahy*, "the four men"—a designation that, following Soazara's burial, is perhaps destined to change.

Tompon'ny asa*: "Responsible for the work"*

As we have seen, the *tompon'ny asa*, or those "responsible for the work," of the Hot Service are the Special Servants, the Razañ'olo. I once asked a Special Servant, "What does 'Razañ'olo' mean?" He answered that "They are the 'kinds of people' [*ka-razañ'olo*] who serve [royalty]."[6] The kinds or groups of people included under this definition can be numerous, and also include the Sambarivo Misohery group and, as we have seen, the Antifarimay and the Antifañaiñy, but also the Antifañivaña, whom we also found in Andampy and Anjango as servants of the drowned Zafinifotsy spirits. However, the main Razañ'olo groups are, in order of importance: the Andraramaeva, the Sakalava Mañoroaomby—also known as Tsiaràña (cf. Baré 1980: 148)—the Jingô, and the Antankoala. As a member of one of these groups explained to me, they are the most important of the Razañ'olo. These Special Servants are considered "sacred people" (*olo masiñy*) and are feared for their intimate contact with the royal dead and the dangerous substances released by these dangerous/delicate (sarotro) corpses (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 318). This is why the main groups of Special Servants have a status almost equivalent to that of the nobles, as is the case with the Sakalava Mañoroaomby (1991a: 317). From these first two groups of Razañ'olo come the ampangataka (intercessors) of the living queen.[7] It was also the Special Servants who,

6. The term Razañ'olo—which literally means "kind," "species," or "race" (karazaña) of "people" (*olo*)—in fact indicates different groups of servants (*ampanompo*) characterized by their delicate task in the royal services. Rather than adopting the translation of "Ancestor People" proposed by Feeley-Harnik (1991a) and adopted by Lambek (2002), I prefer to translate this expression as "Special Servants." While Feeley-Harnik's translation has the merit of conveying the idea of their ritual task, it betrays the literal meaning of the term. In order to convey the meaning of typicality and specialty, I preferred to translate it as "Special People" or "Servant." "*Olon'ny* X" ("people of X") is in fact a euphemism often used to indicate the servants of some nobleman or dynasty, like in *olon'I Soazara* or *olon'ny Zafinifotsy*.
7. The ruler of Analalava in fact has two ampangataka or intercessors to refer to. According to a royal servant, the first ampangataka comes from the Andraramaeva descent group and has the task of invoking the queen's lineage ancestors to resolve questions concerning her body, such as illnesses caused by the infraction of ancestral prohibitions. The other ampangataka is a Sakalava Mañoroaomby who invokes the blessings of God and the

at least in the past, made relics from the imputrescible remains of the royal corpse.

Nobles from Ambendraña, as masters of the ancestors and masters of invocation at royal hot services, oversee and guide the actions of the Razañ'olo.[8] Other servants of the royal residence (doany), the Anti-doany or Sambarivo, and their officials (manantany, the first official, and *fahatelo*, his assistant) join them to help with the ritual work. It is usually the servants of the living sovereigns, from the royal residence (doany) south of Analalava, who prepare their queen's corpse for burial. The Antimahabo, as servants of the dead sovereigns, or of the sovereigns in heaven (*ampanjaka an-dangitry*), are not expected to participate directly, at least until the corpse ascends to the cemetery for burial (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 443–44). The limited number of servants at the royal residence, and in particular of Special Servants who had arrived in Nosy Lava (just over a dozen in total), meant that the hundred or so servants at the royal cemetery had to help out with the Hot Service from its beginning. We will have the opportunity to go into more detail about the tasks of the other groups of royal servants when I describe what I saw upon my arrival in Nosy Lava, when the doany and mahabo people were dedicated to the construction of the coffin.

Up to this point, the first lunar cycle had passed without too much ritual activity, except for those carried out by the Special Servants, locked away in the royal house. The Jingô and the Antankoala each regularly poured perfume over their designated portion (anjara) of the decomposing corpse: from the head (*kabeso*)[9] to the belly for the former, and from the feet to the belly for the latter (Poirier 1939: 103). This is meant to prevent bad smells from escaping the royal house, since the royal corpse, the Divinity, cannot give off bad smells, as indicated by one of God's names: "The Perfumed Lord" (*Andriamañitry*).

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ancestors and transmits the hasiñy contained in the relics to the queen to help her kingdom prosper. We shall see that the ruler of Ambendraña constitutes, from the point of view of his ritual role, a third ampangataka or a kind of meta-ampangataka that encompasses the other two.

8. Feeley-Harnik, according to her interlocutors, refers to them in their role at Nosy Lava funeral rituals with the term *Jado ny ampanjaka*, "the sovereign's substitutes" (*royal substitute*) (1991a: 370). Baré translates *jado ny ampanjaka* as "germains and collaterals of the sovereign fit to receive his succession" (1980: 20).

9. In the euphemistic language of kingship, the sovereign's head is called *kabeso* rather than *loha*, from the Portuguese *cabeça* (Berger 2006: 162).

Fady, or negative ritual injunctions

If, during this first period, positive ritual injunctions (actions to be performed) concerned only Special Servants, as soon as the queen passed away, negative ritual injunctions—that is, prohibitions (actions not to be performed)—affected all royal servants and subjects, in particular those present at Nosy Lava. I have already mentioned the high number of prohibitions that normally prevail on this forbidden land (*tany fady*). During the Hot Service, other prohibitions were added to those already in existence. As a sign of mourning, men shaved their hair, while women kept their braids loose (normally always tied, except when the woman is inhabited by a spirit); men and women were not meant to wear anything under their loincloths, and men were not supposed to button up their shirts; none of the servants present at the royal cemetery could sleep on a mattress or with a pillow; it was also forbidden to wash in the river on inauspicious days. In addition to these prohibitions (fady), there were also certain dietary fady associated with the Hot Service, such as not eating hot foods like chili peppers or spicy leafy vegetables (the ritual service being already too hot). All these prohibitions were combined with those already imposed on the ordinary life of the cemetery, such as not being able to extend one's legs toward the east or the north, not lighting torches in the alleys of the cemetery village at night, not whistling, and not wearing shoes, pants, or briefs. Alongside these ordinary behavioral prohibitions, there were also linguistic prohibitions: one could not say the ordinary term *atsimo* for "south," but was supposed to use the term *ambalaka*; one should not say *vola* (money, words, month, moon), but *fanjava*; and if one was leaving the island to go elsewhere, he or she could not say they were leaving, but that they were going to pick leafy vegetables. In addition to these prohibitions in the ordinary language spoken on the island, throughout the funeral period expressions linked to the efforts involved in the service were euphemized: we could not say that we were tired (*gazo, kazo* or *reraka*), but that we were "sweet" (*mamy*); sweet would also refer to the "weight" (*vesatra*) of the things to be transported. In the latter examples, the intention to transform, through language, the heaviness of the work of serving the royal ancestors into a sweet duty to be carried out is evident. This is a process of euphemizing and alleviating servitude which, as we shall see, is also amplified by other types of ritual devices. It provides a concrete example of how the ideology of voluntary servitude, which we have found in the discourses of royal servants, is ritually constructed,

and gradually incorporated by servants and other participants in royal services.

Fanompoaña fandrama: *"The Honey Service"*

It is particularly from the "Honey Service," as the work of harvesting and building the wooden coffin is called, that the sweet weight of the Hot Service began to be experienced by all of the servants. By the time I arrived in Nosy Lava on Monday, April 3, 2017, the Honey Service had already been partly completed. A group of servants from the cemetery (Antimahabo) and servants from the royal residence (Antidoany) had gone to the coastal village of Marotaolana ("Many Bones"), renamed Toliamaeva ("Good Port"). In this village, inhabited by descendants of Antimahabo, the servants harvested the "honey," the wood needed to build the coffin. "Why is it called honey?" I had asked the fahatelo, the "third" official of the royal servants of the living rulers. "Because we are going to ask for good things, sweet things, not bitter things. We are going to ask for a blessing [tsodrano]," he explained. Like the other royal services that I analyzed in chapters 3 and 4, this one is also considered a request for a blessing. The sweet blessing of the ancestors is thus metaphorically evoked by the term "honey" (*fandrama*), which is metonymically given to the coffin and the service its production requires. This metonymic inversion of the desired effect (the sweet blessing) for the cause (the production of the coffin) is also part of the process of euphemizing ritual work, which contributes to the construction of voluntary servitude. Indeed, the metaphor of honey to refer to the service and the coffin, with its synthetic and allusive nature, encompasses and conceals the metonymic inversion—a cognitive trick—that underpins it, thereby rendering it logically irrefutable and therefore acceptable. As we shall see in this chapter, it is the actualization of this metaphor through the sensual experiences offered by the ritual (for instance, the abundant consumption of sweet drinks provided during the heaviest activities) that works to render the metaphor tangible and acceptable for the participants. Finally, as Bloch (1974) has argued, it is its peculiar mode of communication that makes the ritual language, with its symbols and tropes, logically irrefutable. The nonpropositional and highly formalized character of ritual communication drastically limits the possibilities for response or critique on the part of participants. "You cannot argue with a song," Bloch reminds us (1974*:* 71), nor—we might add—with a metaphor. "It is really a type of communication in which rebellion is impossible and only revolution

could be feasible" (1974: 64). Hence the importance of ritual in producing voluntary servitude.

Beyond the metaphor, the honey/coffin was materially constituted by a hollow trunk of *sohihy*, a tree of the Rubiaceae family used in house construction and known for its resistance (*fatatra*) (cf. Dandouau 1911: 168–69; Decary 1962: 237). Once the servants had returned to Nosy Lava after cutting down the sohihy tree trunk, those in charge of the work noticed that the piece of wood cut to build the upper part of the lid of the coffin did not exactly match the lower part. A further trip to Toliamaeva was therefore planned to recover another piece of honey. And it was on this occasion that I was able to witness a part of the service that I had missed the first time around.

Antsandrarafa beach

It was thanks to a chance meeting with Papa Safina, my host from Analalava, who was passing through the town on errands, that I had found the way to Nosy Lava. All access to the royal cemetery was strictly controlled during this delicate period. Mama Safina, herself a royal cemetery servant, had taken the whole family to Nosy Lava for the service. I would be staying with them, Papa Safina reassured me before setting off in the pirogue. "Shave your hair!" he recommended, bursting into laughter, probably at the unusual idea of a vazaha (European) performing this gesture of submission to a Sakalava queen.[10] A few days later, on the pirogue of a royal cemetery servant passing through Analalava, I crossed the mangrove channel leading to the beach of Antsandrarafa. A medium, who had left with us on the same pirogue, had debarked on a small beach just before the canal, as he was forbidden to go near Antsandrarafa where the queen's corpse lay. Like the nobles who inhabit them in the

10. A certain satisfaction at seeing a European show signs of submission, albeit occasional, to the royal Sakalava power was manifested to me several times during my investigation. As when, for example, a tromba from Ambendraña had offered me, during a ceremony, his hat to hold while he undressed, and had commented in front of the other attendants: "He serves" (*Izy manompo*), with an air both authoritative and ironic. In Nosy Lava, during my stay at the royal funerals, the manantany of the royal cemetery had proudly declared before the others that I too, like them, was an *andevon'I Zañahary*, "a servant or slave of the Divinity [i.e., the sovereign in heaven]."

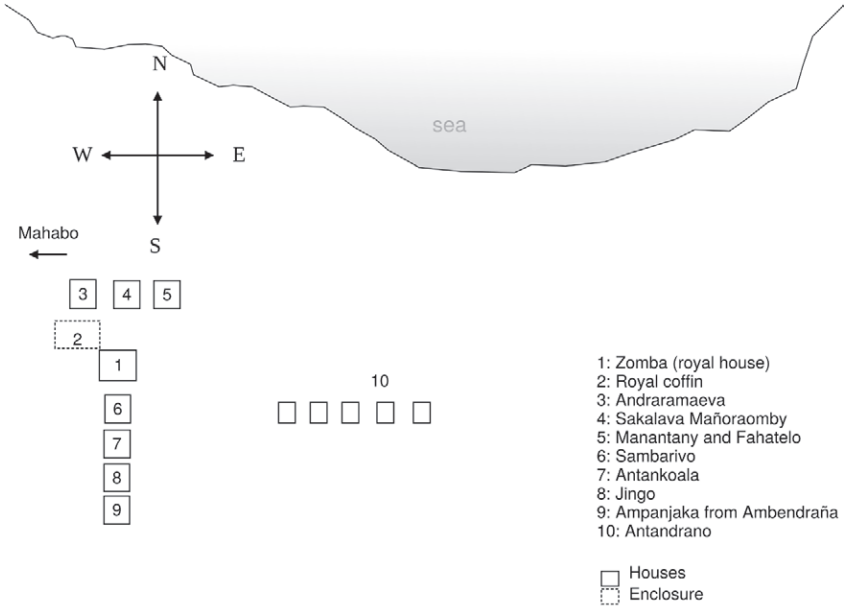


Figure 20. Sketch of the layout of houses and groups of servants in Antsandrarafa

form of spirits, mediums must keep their distance from the defilement caused by proximity to the dead. Apart from the nobles of Ambendraña, no member of the royal family is allowed to visit the cemetery of Nosy Lava. On this forbidden beach, located at the foot of the cemetery hill, several temporary palm houses had been built around the royal house holding the corpse. An enclosure, made of rice sacks supported by four wooden poles, protected from view the part of the coffin that had already been constructed. The various kinds or groups (karazaña) of servants who do not live in the royal cemetery, notably the nobles of Ambendraña, the Razañ'olo, the servants of the royal residence, and the Antandrano, the "People of the Sea," resided in the dozen or so houses on the beach throughout the Hot Service (fig. 20). Other pilgrims from elsewhere, mainly mediums, were accommodated in the houses of the cemetery servants, whose usual task is to look after the mediums and their tromba. These mediums, approximately twenty in number, were predominantly women who earned their livelihood through trade in the coastal towns and villages of the island's northwest. As any public tromba ceremony was forbidden until the end of the Hot Service, the only activity of these mediums was to wait in the royal cemetery for the service to be

completed. On the beach of Antsandrarafa, where most of the service work was concentrated, each group of servants occupied a precise place in the space, just as, in the service, they perform a specific role ("each to his own"). The organization of space and work thus updates the social hierarchy established by kingship.

We will take a moment here to consider this hierarchical distribution of ritual tasks (see also Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 402–4). We have already had the occasion to mention the ritual role of the Special Servants, responsible for the work, and of the two Ambendraña nobles, masters of the ancestors and of invocation. It remains for us to specify the role of the other groups of servants who went to Antsandrarafa after the first phase of the service. We will begin with the two people in charge of the royal residence: the manantany and the fahatelo. The manantany, first in charge, used to come from one of the most prestigious groups of commoner descent, the Zafindramahavita ("Descendants of the one who accomplishes things"). While he usually handles relations between subjects and the sovereign, during the Hot Service he is responsible for coordinating work and managing the material organization of Antsandrarafa. He accounts for and manages money offerings, allocates food and drink, and regulates the comings and goings of servants between Nosy Lava and Analalava. The fahatelo, his deputy, is also in charge of organizing the work, as well as coordinating any exchanges between Antsandrarafa and other villages outside the Nosy Lava cemetery. He was responsible, for example, for talking to Zalifa in Analalava, for buying food and alcohol supplies in town, and for accompanying the servants to the service in Toliamaeva. These two officials were each assisted by two *rangitrin'ny ampanjaka*, or friends of the sovereign who act as messengers. These four assistants let the two leaders know if there is anything the servants need. These officials, like the other servants of the queen, lived mainly from cultivating rice fields and raising zebu cattle, as well as from occasional trade in natural resources and, for some, wage labor. Finally, among the various groups of servants present at Antsandrarafa were the Antandrano, or People of the Sea. There were around ten of them, alternating their stays in Antsandrarafa. Most came from Antangerina, a small fishing village north of Nosy Lava, but some were from Ampasibe, a village on the coast of the Ambolobozo peninsula (cf. Baré 1980: 134). The names of descent groups are often linked to the role they play in the division of labor within the kingdom. Such is the case with the Antandrano: the task of these People of the Sea is linked to everything to do with maritime transport. It was they who were supposed to drive the special pirogue to



Figure 21. *Laka-jilo* (spiked pirogue) on Toliamaeva beach

fetch the royal corpse, and it was also they who drove two other special pirogues, of the *laka-jilo* ("spiked pirogue," see fig. 21) type,[11] to transport servants to Toliamaeva for the Honey Service. They also carried all kinds of provisions needed for funerals, also known as royal services (fanompoaña). As we shall see, it was also these People of the Sea who collected the small pebbles to sprinkle around the royal tomb. Finally, when the corpse was dry, they accompanied the Special Servants to pour the jugs that had collected the decomposing corpse's fluids into the islet of Ambariofaly, "At the Forbidden Island" (cf. Dandouau 1911: 167;

11. From *laka* (*-na*), "pirogue," and *jilo* or *tsilo* "points," this pirogue has the particularity of having two sculpted points on its front and back. As Feeley-Harnik reports, in the royal services, round things are forbidden, as they have no "head" (*loha*), identified by spikes (1991a: 350). Spikes and heads are in fact a sign of royal hierarchy, as opposed to round things (1991a: 350). As we shall see in the last royal ritual presented in this chapter, spikes and sharp things in general are indeed symbols of royal power (1991a: 350).

Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 370).[12] However, their name also indicates their main economic activity, as most of them are fishermen.

Toliamaeva: "The Good Port"

After asking permission from the leaders of the two groups of servants, four days after my arrival I set off to Toliamaeva to "pick honey" (*mangala fandrama*) with the servants of the royal residence, the cemetery servants, and some of the Special Servants guided by the "third" official (fahatelo). Our group of around twenty people who left Nosy Lava on this mission counted only two women (who would have the task of preparing meals). Upon our arrival, we were welcomed into the large house of the eldest of the village's masters of the land, where the long official speeches between the men took place. The fahatelo and the other notables explained to the villagers the reasons for this second trip, as well as the difficulty of not having enough people for the service, especially concerning the Special Servants. Finally, he introduced the new, unexpected guest to the village notables. "He is our friend, our child," declared the fahatelo as he introduced me to the assembly. We would spend the night in this master of the land's house.

In the morning, the group of servants from Nosy Lava, accompanied by a large number of descendants of the servants of the royal cemetery who lived in Toliamaeva, entered the forest barefoot (shoes were forbidden throughout the Hot Service). The men carried axes and machetes, while the women followed with pots, buckets, bowls, and rice to prepare the midday meal (fig. 22). Once they had arrived at the chosen tree, the younger men, guided by one of the Jingô, took turns in pairs, first cutting down the large sohihy tree, then digging out the trunk to extract a parallelepiped about two and a half meters long and one meter wide. The old notables sat and watched the work. Sweet drinks were distributed generously to the participants, particularly among those carrying out the

12. According to the existing literature, this practice is linked to the idea, present among several Malagasy societies, that from these decomposition fluids and in particular from the worms formed in the process of decomposition of the corpse, will be born a snake or another animal in which the spirit of the sovereign will continue to live (Grandidier 1886: 221; Kent 1970: 86). Among the Sakalava of the Menabe, the boas present on the tombs of the sovereigns are considered to be their reincarnations (Goedefroit and Lombard 2007: 17n8).



Figure 22. Women with their tools to go and serve in the forest, with the fahatelo among them

honey extraction work. As mentioned above, in addition to the linguistic euphemisms, this serves as another device to sweeten the service. After around six hours, the coffin lid was ready. Tied with ropes to two long tree trunks, it was lifted after several attempts. "It is really sweet!" commented some young men after the first failed attempts. Motivated by goma songs and the clapping of hands, the young men finally succeeded in lifting the honey. About twelve of them carried it, taking turns on the way back. Seeing us in the distance, some of the women waiting on the beach started singing great songs and clapping their hands.

Once on the beach before the village, the coffin lid was placed on a wooden stand and sheltered beneath a tent fashioned from a pirogue sail, as if it were the queen's very corpse. After the participants gathered in front of the coffin lid, the notables delivered their closing speeches, inaugurating the night-long celebrations. Beneath the tent, a Jingô—also known as the sovereign's mat—kept watch beside the coffin, as he had previously done with the queen's corpse. This metaphorical identification between the coffin and the queen's corpse, suggested by the participants' treatment of the coffin lid, is further reinforced by the fact that both the coffin and the corpse were often referred to as Service. Extending as well to other objects and artifacts employed in the ritual, this homonymy

also reveals that the metaphorical and metonymic relations among ritual elements are encompassed by what Turner (1991: 148) calls the "synecdochic structure of the ritual process," in which each part of the ritual service stands for the ritual service in its totality.

Back to Antsandrarafa

Back on Nosy Lava, the servants, incited by women's songs, deposited the coffin lid next to its lower half, kept behind the plastic fence of the royal house. A small hut made of six wooden poles and a palm tree roof protected the coffin. The lower half was a parallelepiped hollowed out inside like the hull of a pirogue. Having deposited their honey, the bearers then joined the assembly of servants seated in front of the coffin to hear the official speeches. As with every speech delivered during the service, all of the types of servants from the royal residence and cemetery involved in the service were listed in their hierarchical order, as if to set this hierarchy in the minds of the listeners and even of the enunciators themselves.[13] This hierarchy then dissolved into the collective, leveling definition of "slaves of the Divinity [i.e., the sovereign in heaven]" (*andevon'I Zañahary*), which recurred in the same speeches. To conclude, the sovereign of Ambendraña entered the royal house where the corpse rested, to pronounce the invocation. The Special Servants followed him. After the invocation, the day's new work began. Once the honey had been harvested, it was time to "break" or "beat" it (*mamiaka fandrama*).

This metaphor defines the wood-finishing work carried out inside the enclosure by the Special Servants and other servants of the royal residence, aided by the cemetery servants. While the latter carry out this work out of sight, those who remain outside, seated in front of the enclosure, encourage the work with great songs. Sweet drinks were once again circulated among the participants. With the blows of the axe, chips of wood flew over the fence. Several women carefully picked up piece by

13. According to this hierarchical order, in these speeches Special Servants were mentioned first, followed by the leaders of the servants of the royal residence (Antidoany), and then those of the servants of the royal cemetery (Antimahabo). For the Antidoany, the manantany (first official) was mentioned first, followed by the fahatelo (his deputy) and finally the messengers (*rangitrin'ny ampanjaka*). For the Antimahabo, the ampangataka (intercessor) was mentioned first, followed by the manantany and then the two messengers. Last came the Antandrano.

piece the wood that fell to the ground. "Why do they do this?" I asked the first official of the royal residence. "Because," he replied, "[these pieces] are sacred [*masiñy*]. They can make people sick if they sit on them." Like the imputrescible remains of the queen's corpse, or the corroded wood and dry leaves of the toñy enclosures dedicated to the sovereigns, the excess wood from the coffin is "sacred," "generative," and therefore "dangerous" (sarotro). Both the coffin and the toñy are bodies replacing the sovereign. These dry, dangerous remains, along with the decomposition fluids of the sovereign's corpse, were dumped into the forbidden islet of Ambariofaly.

As is often the case on a good day for service, for lunch the young Antandrano helped the servants of the royal residence to kill one of the many zebus donated to Zalifa by her subjects and which she regularly sent on by boat. After the collective meal at Antsandrarafa, the work continued until late afternoon. However, the Honey Service would not be completed on that same day. It would be a week before the coffin was ready. According to the account of a servant, once the coffin was finished, it was coated with zebu fat. The next service was announced by the servant leaders as even more complicated/dangerous, so they called for an even larger gathering of servants from Analalava. This was the "Sea Wave Service" (*fanompoaña riaka*) that would begin on Monday, April 17.

Fanompoaña riaka*: "The Royal Service of the Sea Waves"*

On the morning that the new service began, it was announced by the sound of mañandria drums in front of the gates of the royal cemetery. The ritual work, as always, was preceded by official speeches and the invocation performed by the ruler of Ambendraña. It is this invocation and the scene that followed it that is described at the beginning of the chapter. It was on this occasion that the Ambendraña sovereign and the four principal representatives of the Special Servants first donned the savôko, the white harness worn by the elders of the spirits of the Descendants of Silver.[14] This savôko signals the solemnity of the ceremonial moment, while also revealing an identification—hitherto latent to me—between the Zafinimena ruler of Ambendraña and the Special

14. Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 581n18) reports that, according to royal servants, the savôko (also called *sandôko*) was the uniform garment worn by Sakalava warriors in the precolonial period.

Servants in their role as those responsible for the funeral. As we will see in detail in the next chapter, this identification between the Special Servants and the ruler of Ambendraña, and between these two kinds of people and the Zafinifotsy spirits, stems from the shared ritual position of these different groups with regard to the holders of royal power in Analalava.

After the invocation, I joined the procession of servants led by a young nobleman from Ambendraña—also dressed in white with the savôko—and the Special Servants as it made its way to a rocky esplanade north of the mahabo village. It was here that the "black waves" (*riaka mainty*), also known as "long waves" (*riaka lava*), would be gathered. Once on the esplanade, the young nobleman from Ambendraña pronounced the invocation, asking for the blessing of the royal ancestors to ensure that the service go smoothly. According to the hierarchic order and the rule that each action must be performed in even numbers, the representative of the Andraramaeva, then the representative of the Sakalava Mañoroaomby, and finally the intercessor of the royal cemetery also pronounced the same invocation. Then, following the indications of the Special Servants, the servants of the royal residence, aided by the servants of the cemetery, began to extract large rectangular stone slabs from the soil, using several large stone chisels. These slabs are called black or long waves. Sweet drinks, this time accompanied by alcoholic (or "strong," *mahery*) beverages, circulated to support the men's work, which was also encouraged by the women's singing. Once six stone slabs had been cut, they were tied with ropes to tree trunks for transport to the royal cemetery. A new series of invocations, recited by the same participants in the same order as the previous ones, were uttered before the group's departure. Spurred on once again by the women's chants, a dozen people lifted each slab with great effort. The young nobleman from Ambendraña and the Special Servants again led the bearers of the stone waves and the rest of the procession. Because of the excessively sweet weight, not only did the bearers have to rotate frequently, but they also had to take several breaks by laying the slabs on the ground and invigorating themselves with sweet or alcoholic beverages. The women poured fresh water over the bearers, weary from the effort and the midday sun. During the transport, one of the servants fell to the ground, exhausted. This was taken as a sign of the dangerousness of the slab (also called service) as a substitute for the royal corpse/Service, as had been the case with the coffin lid before it. Moreover, the slab's oscillatory movements, caused by the combination of its weight,

the play of the ropes to which it was attached and the occasionally uncoordinated movements of the bearers, generated an uncontrolled tensile force on the latter. The deceased queen's agency is attributed to this "resultant" force (Severi 2018: 120), enabling the "transfer of the effect of authority onto an artifact, to which a principle of autonomy is attributed by imputing subjectivity to it" (2018: 111). Prefigured by the often-repeated accounts of the agency of deceased nobles directing the course of their coffin on its way to the tomb, these autonomous movements are interpreted as expressions of the deceased queen's will (cf. Decary 1962: 16).

Finally, as with the coffin lid, the identification of the slabs with the queen's dangerous corpse was heightened by the welcome they received upon arrival at the royal cemetery. When we arrived at the fork in the road between the cemetery village and the road leading to Antsandrarafa, the members of the procession split: the servants of the royal residence descended toward the beach of Antsandrarafa and the servants of the royal cemetery, guided by the five officials in white, led the slabs into the mahabo. The people of the dead sovereign and those of the living sovereign must reside in separate places until the burial. Emerging from the cemetery still bearing the slabs, the servants of the royal cemetery were greeted by a crowd of people waiting outside the gates of the tombs. When they caught sight of the servants bearing the slabs, the people in the crowd began to sing great songs. At the front of this crowd were the numerous mediums. As the slabs/waves passed in front of the crowd, the singing and applause intensified. People sitting on the ground suddenly stood up. Moved by an exaltation at once joyful and fearful, they began to sway their hips slightly with their torsos leaning forward toward the slabs. They repeatedly raised their cupped hands above their heads in a gesture of respectful greeting (*koezy*) toward the slabs, as if the latter were the queen herself. The procession of bearers was followed by the men's songs, which resonated with the women's songs. Amid the chanting, the large black waves were placed on the ground on the south side of the external tomb enclosure.

After arranging the rest of the slabs in their places, everyone sat facing them, toward the east. The nobleman of Ambendraña and the Special Servants sat between the slabs, the other servants behind them, and raised their cupped hands to their heads in greeting, followed by the others. Finally, the participants in the service also descended to Antsandrarafa for the collective meal: another zebu had been killed for the occasion.

Tensions between "people of the living" and "people of the dead"

During the official speeches that followed the lunch, the manantany of the royal cemetery complained, in an agitated voice, about the way the day's work had unfolded. "We are afraid of this kind of behavior!" he exclaimed. "We run away," he added, implying, "if things don't go as they should." He concluded, referring to the late queen, by exclaiming: "This Royal Service is complicated/dangerous!" As one of the Special Servants explained to me later, the manantany referred to several mistakes that had been made during the funeral. Firstly, the ceremonial garb of the harness should already have been worn during the Honey Service, not just during the Wave Service. Secondly, the manantany deplored the fact that the ruler of Ambendraña had not accompanied the Special Servants for the slab extraction work, having preferred to send a young, inexperienced replacement despite the fact that the hot service phase was particularly delicate.

Moreover, this anger also stemmed from accumulated tensions between different groups of servants implicated in the Hot Service, notably between the servants of the royal cemetery on the one hand, and, on the other, the servants of the royal residence and the nobles of Ambendraña. As I have mentioned, the servants of the royal cemetery were not responsible for the work involved in the Hot Service. Their participation was mainly due to the insufficient number of Special Servants and servants of the royal residence. In fact, since the last royal funeral, held for Soazara's father, the organization of work on which local kingship and its system of royal services were based had been disrupted by French colonization. With the introduction of wage labor and the resulting migrations, the gathering of servants on behalf of the sovereigns became more complicated. Hence, the dissatisfaction of the royal cemetery servants, which arose from their having to take on a task that was initially not their responsibility, was compounded by fear of the potential adverse consequences of mistakes that might have been made by those responsible for the ritual work.

However, the tensions between these groups of servants were also based on structural reasons stemming from other, more ancient, historical conjunctures. While the duality of Sakalava royal power between the living sovereigns and the dead sovereigns embodied in the mediums had been present since its foundation in the Menabe, in northwest Madagascar it developed into a spatial and administrative opposition. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a) has shown, and as we saw in the previous chapter, with the Merina invasions and the consequent transfer of legitimizing

power to the royal tombs, Bemihisatra kingship was based on an opposition between these tombs (mahabo) and the royal residence (doany). The mahabo is home to permanent groups of servants and mediums, mainly slaves. The doany are occupied by the sovereigns, their advisors (from commoner groups) and their servants (Antidoany or Sambarivo)—who were also mostly slaves.[15] This division was further deepened by colonial relocation policies, to the point of creating a divide between the two places of power. By setting up their administrative center in the royal capital at Analalava and the main prison on the island of Nosy Lava, French administrators transformed the spatial relationships between the two centers of royal power (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 150). Since around 1917, the colonial administration, in an attempt to draw manpower away from the local kingship, had also prohibited the Antimahabo from residing permanently at the royal cemetery (Poirier 1939: 100–101), relocating them to the north coast of the Loza River (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 150). It is in this region that the main Antimahabo villages are located, as well as those of the servants of the tromba andrano.[16] By contrast, the servants of the living sovereigns were scattered over the lands south of the Loza. Thus, as Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 150–51) notes, "the doany had become associated primarily with the southern part of the region and the expression of support for the living ruler, while the mahabo had become associated primarily with the north and potential dissent—support of the royal ancestors, but not necessarily their currently living descendant."[17] As we shall see, this division, at the root of the tensions emerging

15. Before the Merina invasion and the development of this new Bemihisatra organization, there were certainly guards in the royal tombs or mahabo, but not an organization of servants replicating that of the royal residence. This was of course also made possible by the greater number of servants available to the Boina rulers who, through their alliance with Arab traders (Antalaotra), had intensified the slave trade from the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. This trade reached its peak in the nineteenth century, notably with expeditions to the Comoros and East Africa (see Guillain 1845: 33), just before the arrival of the Merina.
16. Andampy's relocation to the south bank of the Loza is relatively recent. Previously, the Antifañaiñy village was also located on the north side of the estuary.
17. These spatial divisions are not clear-cut, as demonstrated by the case of the village of Toliamaeva, located south of the Loza and inhabited by royal cemetery servants (Antimahabo).

in the Hot Service, would also be evoked by the new queen in a speech to her servants at the time of her consecration ceremony. It is this same division that Deputy Volamarina tried to take advantage of to challenge the position of Soazara's daughter. Tensions that emerged at the Hot Service were rooted in the monarchy's past and the colonial and postcolonial transformations of its hierarchy. The division of labor in the royal services reactivated not only this hierarchy, but also the tensions underlying it.

My departure and the tensions among the "people of the dead"

The Black Wave Service continued for another week, but my stay in Nosy Lava would end before the completion of the service. One morning before the last day of the slab/wave service, my host Mama Safina announced that the first official (manantany) of the cemetery wanted to speak to me. Sitting in the semidarkness of his house, the manantany told me that Zalifa did not want me to stay any longer in Nosy Lava. "She is the one who commands," he concluded, without further explanation. As Mama Safina went on to explain, rumors were circulating in the village that I had taken photos of "forbidden things" (*raha fady*), including the queen's corpse. No matter how many times I repeated that the only photos I had taken, after receiving prior authorization from the officials, were those of Toliamaeva's service, I had to collect my things and return to Analalava. Reproducing images of places, people, and things considered "sacred" (*masiñy*) and forbidden was indeed prohibited, especially in particularly conservative places like Nosy Lava and Ambendraña. But this was not the only reason for my exclusion from the island.

As I would later learn from consulting the various people from Nosy Lava who were passing through Analalava, under the pretext of having taken photos, I myself had been the victim of jealousies and tensions present at the mahabo. If there were obvious tensions during the Hot Service between servants from Antsandrarafa beach and those from the mahabo village, there was also friction within the latter. As a medium explained to me, it was not Zalifa's intention to forbid me to stay in Nosy Lava, but that of the mahabo officials. They had called Zalifa to tell her that I had transgressed certain rules while on duty, by taking photos. According to my informant, behind the pretext of the photos, one of the main reasons for my removal was that I had gone to stay at Mama Safina's house on Nosy Lava and not at the home of one of the mahabo officials. This was what they would have expected from a guest

or foreigner (vahiny), especially a vazaha (European). Most of the vahiny, particularly the mediums from different parts of the island, stayed with the officials. My choice to stay with a simple servant, in the southernmost and least prestigious part of the mahabo, was seen by them as a lack of respect for the local social hierarchy and a lack of recognition of their position within it. They thus preferred to keep me away from the island, consequently depriving my hosts of my presence, which they considered economically and socially advantageous. What is more, in the days that followed, the medium who explained all of this to me, highly respected by Zalifa herself and followed by other members of the mahabo, insisted that I be allowed to return to the island, but to no avail. The positions taken by the various mahabo servants on this seemingly marginal event testified to other structural tensions between them. In these positions, two factions emerged: on the one hand, the officials, who also held economic power and social prestige in the village of the royal cemetery (mahabo); and on the other, the mediums and servants. As the main offices were reserved for men, and the mediums were mainly women, these factions also reflected the rivalry between men's power and women's power. Within these gendered factions, certain male servants who could aspire to these offices sided with the mediums, and especially with this medium who exerted a certain influence over Zalifa, the future queen.[18] Zalifa's trust, potentially gained by these male servants' allying themselves with this particular medium, could thus prove useful to them during the new elections of officials following the burial of a sovereign.

Two levels of rivalry had thus become apparent to me during my stay on the island of Nosy Lava and during my exclusion: on the one hand, that between the people of the living and the people of the dead; on the other, within the latter, that between the masculine power of the leaders

18. Offices of responsibility in the royal cemetery, unlike those in the royal residence, are transmitted by election to servants residing in the same "enclosure" (*vala*), as the different parts of the village are called, and not necessarily hereditarily. This mode of transmission is the legacy of the fact that mahabo servants, like the doany servants, were in precolonial times slaves without ancestors, and therefore did not belong to any descent group (Feeley-Harnik 1982: 37). Since precolonial times, on the other hand, the officials of the royal residence have been elected from among the most prestigious commoner groups, as well as the two main Razañolo groups (a definition that may also mean "people with ancestry").

and the feminine power of the mediums and servants. And it was at my own expense that I came to realize the importance of the mahabo's internal tensions, more latent than the former. This is why the rest of the funeral was recounted to me by one of the Special Servants present there and by other witnesses I met a few months later in Analalava.

The Royal Service of the Waves (reprise and ending)

According to these accounts, the Black Wave Service had ended as planned on the Friday following my exclusion from the island. The next day, on the beach in front of the Analalava stadium, I noticed many servants from the royal residence boarding a boat for the Nosy Lava royal cemetery. News had arrived that the time for burial was approaching. Meanwhile, on the same day at Nosy Lava, the nobleman of Ambendraña and the Special Servants led the Antandrano to collect the "white waves" (*riaka malandy*) or "round waves" (*riaka bory*), as the pebbles collected along a beach northeast of Antsandrarafa were called. Three auspicious days of service would be required to collect the necessary quantity.

Fanompoaña fanjava*: "The Light or Moon Service"*

The evening before the Antandrano people finished collecting the white waves, the Light Service took place in Antsandrarafa. As was made explicit in the speeches preceding the ceremony, this service was intended to manufacture the torches that would be used to illuminate the work of digging the sky. "Sky/heaven" (*lañitry*) is the word used to designate a pit in the euphemistic royal language. Once the invocation had been recited by the ruler of Ambendraña, young men carried two zebus onto the beach and placed them on the ground. The ruler of Ambendraña, dressed in white and wearing a ceremonial harness, pronounced another invocation while holding the horn of one of the zebus. Then a Sakalava Mañoroaomby, also dressed in white like the other Special Servants, cut the throats of the two animals. Other servants removed the skin, took the fat from the zebu's hump and, once it had been cooked in pots, put it around a small wooden trunk. Finally, they inserted a wick inside the fat. Four candles or torches were thus made and kept for burial (cf. Dandouau 1911: 167). Singing and libations were held throughout the night. The following day, the Antandrano completed the White Wave Service. Preparations for the funeral were thus completed.

Lafikin'ny ampanjaka*: The queen's sacrificial mat*

On the morning of the funeral, Friday, May 12, an unexpected event shook the servants of the royal cemetery. The first official of the royal cemetery was found dead in his hut. "The deified queen claimed her 'sacrificial mat,'" was one of the most frequent comments among Analalava residents when the news circulated. Since—according to historical accounts—human sacrifices on the death of a Sakalava king or queen had been banned by French colonization, deaths that occurred in the vicinity of the sovereign's burial were interpreted as the sovereign's desire to claim his or her due (cf. Lambek 2002: 118). However, among the servants of the royal cemetery, another rumor was circulating about this death. These accounts suggested that the manantany's death was rather due to a form of revenge for his disrespect carried out by the Special Servants working the ceremony. These Special Servants were considered dangerous and sacred on par with the ruler whose funeral rites they were preparing: "Sakalava [Mañoroaomby] are dangerous/complicated," commented several of my interlocutors. Whatever the cause of his death, the manantany's corpse was deposited in the mangroves at the bottom of the royal cemetery hill.

Mampanonga Zañahary*: Bringing up the Divinity*

On Friday evening, at around 7 P.M., those who had been residing on Antsandrarafa beach for the duration of the funeral began collecting their belongings and taking them uphill. The time had come to leave the liminal space of Antsandrarafa beach. An hour later, a large crowd of servants gathered in front of the fence around the coffin on the beach. After the initial speeches and the invocation made by the sovereign of Ambendraña, accompanied by the great songs, the Special Servants opened the fence to remove the coffin, covered with a red silk sheet (sobahia), inside which the corpse/Service had already been placed.

A second washing of the corpse had been carried out, this time not with water, but with "black alcohol" (*toa-mainty*), as the fermented honey also used to wash royal relics is called (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 488n44). Finally, gold coins were placed between the corpse's jaws. Whereas in Analalava, when the royal corpse was still fresh and "wet" (*leny*), it had been washed with water and silver coins had been placed in its mouth, now that it had become "dry" (*maiky*), mead and gold replaced water

and silver.[19] Gold and silver, symbols of two constitutive aspects of royal power, in the treatment of royal corpse mark two moments in the process of the sovereign's ancestralization. More on this later.

After this second and final washing, the "eight bones" (*taolam-balo*) were wrapped in cloth and placed in the coffin.[20] Once the fence had been opened, the coffin was tied with ropes to long tree trunks. After another invocation, a dozen people lifted the very sweet/heavy honey/coffin with difficulty. The ruler of Ambendraña and the Special Servants led the way for the bearers, followed by a large crowd of chanting participants.[21]

Mamaky langitry*: "Breaking the sky"*

Once they reached the gates of the tomb's outer enclosure, the bearers suddenly deviated from the path traced by the Special Servants. Faced with this unexpected movement, which was taken as an expression of the queen's agency, the crowd exclaimed "*Koezy!*" bringing their hands clasped above their heads. The coffin/Service thus chose, after a few seconds of hesitation, to enter through the main gates of the fiaroaomby enclosure (cf. Mellis 1938: 67). Only the Special Servants and the royal

19. These contrasting associations are present in the ritual practices of the various Sakalava kingdoms. Analyzing an ordeal ritual, Lombard (1988: 102) notes, for example, that gold is used in association with the blood of an ox while, in contrast, silver is used in association with water. As Feeley-Harnik attests, sacrificial blood is itself associated with honey, as a purifying substance (1991a: 452). Gold, blood, and honey are associated with each other and opposed to silver and water. Moreover, while water refers to the sea and rivers (the domains of Zafinifotsy tromba), blood and honey evoke the earth (the domain of Zafinimena rulers). Moreover, bovine blood refers to the control that Sakalava rulers exercised over cattle breeding through ceremonial exchanges (Lombard 1988: 13; Beaujard 1983: 311). For an interpretation of honey in other regions of Madagascar, see Berger (2006: 517–20) and Beaujard (2014).
20. *Taolam-balo*, or "eight bones," is a formula evoking the whole human skeleton, also found in Imerina, and recalls the eight ancestral sides (Molet 1979: 280). For the use of this formula with regard to Sakalava sovereigns, see Decary (1959: 106–7).
21. Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 373) points out that the transport of the coffin is described with the verb *milay*, "to sail," in reference to the power of action of the service that guides the bearers much like wind does a sailboat.

cemetery servants were allowed to enter this first enclosure. As the coffin entered this first enclosure, two servants of the royal cemetery played the mañandria drums. The rest of the participants sat in front of the gates and—the mediums in particular—chanted, "We have arrived to serve the ancestors, the royal spirits who dwell within us."

Once the coffin/Service had been deposited between the outer enclosure and the enclosure surrounding the tombs (known as the menaty) (cf. Dandouau 1911: 170–71), the servants entered the menaty enclosure with the tools to "dig the sky" (*mangady lañitry*, cf. 1911: 169). They began by clearing the space reserved for the queen's tomb. Before digging, they grabbed two bottles of mead and, in pairs, a member of one of the four groups of Special Servants gave a drink to a member of another group. An Andraramaeva then poured the mead onto the earth, marking a line from what would be the head to what would be the center of the pit (sky), while the Sakalava Mañoroaomby performed the same action from the feet of what would become the pit to its center. Each of the four took a shovel and began to dig the sky. According to Poirier's account (1939: 104) of Soazara's father's funeral, the Special Servants who dig the pit are not allowed to sweat, so they often rest. As we have seen, the same prohibition applied to the Great Service for the tromba andrano in Anjango. Only sweet drinks were circulated among the servants who dug the sky and among all the other participants. The work of digging the sky/pit carried on until early morning, then resumed on Sunday evening.

The sound of mañandria drums and the two marine conches (*antsiva*) announced to the participants that the awaited moment had finally arrived. The Special Servants built a temporary fence covered by the rice sacks inside the inner enclosure (menaty) to avoid being seen during their delicate/dangerous operations. Next, they began by placing large waves/slabs on the base and walls of the ditch, probably to prevent the sovereign's dangerous body from coming into contact with the earth. Then they set down a layer of white waves (pebbles) that completely covered this base. A raffia mat was laid over the pebbles, which was in turn covered by a layer of mud. The Service, or Divinity, could then be lowered into the sky using ropes. More slabs covered the coffin. The next morning, announced by marine conches, four zebus (two inside the external enclosure and two outside) were sacrificed to complete the queen's burial. Inside the enclosure, a pit was dug into which to pour the blood of the two zebus. It is probably in this pit that the body of the "sovereign's sacrificial mat" was buried before colonization (Dandouau 1911: 171). Other ethnographic testimonies (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 437–38)

suggest that some of the blood is spilled on the gate of the innermost enclosure of the royal tombs. This gate is indeed called *milalio*: "who wants blood."

Once the surface of the tomb had been surrounded, first with slabs, known as black waves, to enclose the sides, then with pebbles (white waves), the queen's body was immersed "amidst the waves," *añivon'ny riaka*. This expression is also used to designate the island of Madagascar (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 373). Once again, the network of metaphors serves the ritual to establish a synecdoche, this time between the sovereign and the island of Madagascar itself (cf. de Heusch 1987: 58). From the following day, the prohibitions on servants that had been in effect since the queen's death were lifted. The Hot Service was now complete. Only some finishing work on the tomb remained to be completed. But, once the queen had ascended into the pit/sky, it was henceforth a matter of cold services (*fanompoaña manintsy*). After that, one last thing remained to be done: to announce to the Zafinifotsy tromba that the Hot Service had been completed.

Becoming a royal ancestor or the transformations of gold and silver

In a classic article on funeral rituals, Robert Hertz asserts that "death is not mere destruction, but a transition" (Hertz 1905: 78, my translation). According to him, in this transition from the world of the living to that of the ancestors, the transformation of the body of the deceased not only prepares his or her soul but also produces a change in the survivors of the deceased. In fact, as we saw in Soazara's funeral, operations to prepare the corpse are accompanied by a transformation of the actors who carry them out. This transformation of participants and their relationships is engendered not only by the ritual actions themselves, but by the context within which they are carried out. This ritual context brings out latent identities conferred by the role each person assumes within it. Firstly, the death of the queen and the Hot Service it entailed revealed, at least in principle, the condition of servitude of those who survived the queen. This is why, during the service, the various categories of ritual actors were grouped together under the definition of "slaves of the Divinity or divinized queen." This definition, used inclusively in the official speeches during the ritual, encompasses people of different statuses, such as nobles, commoners, or descendants of slaves (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 442)—as well as foreigners, like myself. This leveling is not only nominal but is also achieved through collective submission to the prohibitions

imposed by mourning. At the time of my fieldwork, these prohibitions affected only funeral attendees, but in precolonial times they extended to all subjects. These fady bring everyone closer to the condition of the dead (Hertz 1905: 64). The prohibitions against washing, sleeping on the floor without a pillow, or shaving one's hair impose on those who respect them indigent living conditions that associate them in part with the corpse.

From this leveling-off, which made everyone a slave to the divinized sovereign, the rank identities that each group possessed in their ordinary residential context were brought into this wider ritual and hierarchical framework and became subject to change. Ambendraña's sovereign and nobles occupied the role of invocator and ritual leader of the deceased queen. They asked for the blessing and passed on the hasiñy, or generative power, of the royal ancestors to the rest of the participants. Like the two main groups of Special Servants, the Andraramaeva and the Sakalava Mañoroaomby, with whom they were associated through ceremonial dress, the Ambendraña nobles acted as the queen's intercessors (ampangataka*)* with her ancestors. As we saw in the narratives heard at Marangibato, the function of invoking the royal ancestors and transmitting their hasiñy to others is also a prerogative that characterizes the Zafinifotsy. Also worn by drowned Zafinifotsy spirits, the savôko, or white harness, thus seems to be an indication of this ritual task performed by the different groups participating in Soazara's funeral services. Although members of the Zafinimena of Ambendraña, these nobles are in fact functionally Zafinifotsy of the Analalava rulers. This was explained to me by a medium during a discussion at the Hot Service. "Why do the nobles of Ambendraña do the invocations?" I asked. "Because they are Zafinifotsy, they are the masters of clasped hands," she replied, openly associating Zafinifotsy status with the ritual role of masters of invocation. You can imagine my disappointment when, excited by this discovery, I asked the Ambendraña nobles a few hours later if they were indeed Zafinifotsy, and they claimed only their Zafinimena or Descendants of Gold identity.

But Ambendraña's nobles are not the only ones to oscillate between gold and silver at royal funerals. In chapter 4, we met the Antifañaiñy, Antifarimay, and Antifañivaña in Andampy, as groups of servants of the Zafinifotsy ancestors. However, when I arrived in Nosy Lava, I found members of these same groups identified as slaves of the Zafinimena deceased queen. Moreover, these descent groups were indeed part of the groups more broadly defined as Special Servants (Razañ'olo) of the Zafinimena rulers. Thus, in this particular ritual context, while the nobles of

Ambendraña, Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) in their village of residence, occupy the ritual position of Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) of the Analalava queen, the servants of the Descendants of Silver of Andampy were presented to me in Nosy Lava as Special Servants of the Descendants of Gold. According to the dialectic between local autonomy and hierarchical continuity that I have already had occasion to highlight, the rank positions and identities that these groups of nobles and servants occupy in village contexts are in fact reformulated by the latent hierarchy of the Southern Bemihisatra monarchy that encompasses them. It is this more general hierarchy that resurfaced during the Royal Hot Service, reactivated by the division of ritual tasks.

However, the transition from gold to silver does not only concern groups of descendants reintegrated into the new ritual context of royal funerals. As we saw with the two washings of the corpse, this transition also indicates a transformation in the queen's status, achieved through the ritual treatment of her corpse. The silver coins inserted into the jaws of the corpse, which is in turn washed with pure water, marked the state of the still-damp body and its passage from the residence of living sovereigns in Analalava to the liminal space of Antsandrarafa. On the other hand, the two gold coins marked the completion of the process of treating the corpse and reducing it to its imputrescible parts. Washed with the purifying drink of the royal ancestors—mead—the queen could finally ascend to heaven and join the royal ancestors of the Descendants of Gold in the royal tomb. These stages in the treatment of the royal corpse also show that the drowned Zafinifotsy ancestors, associated with silver, with their ever-wet corpse, can never reach the *state of gold*. Symbols of an opposition between different dynastic groups, or of a division of powers within the organization of the kingdom, gold and silver are finally reunited in the very body of the sovereign, marking two evolutionary and complementary phases in the process of her ancestralization.

In this transition of the royal corpse from silver to gold, several kinds of relationship are generated and shaped through ritual actions. Firstly, as soon as the queen dies, an identification is established between her corpse and the ritual service dedicated to it. The corpse (*faty*, in ordinary language) becomes, by antonomasia—which is a kind of synecdoche—the Service (fanompoaña) in which the servants are called upon to participate. If, as the adage goes, "the Sakalava make the living sovereign reign," they also make the royal ancestor (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 372).

Moreover, just as the collective term *andevo* (slaves) used in official speeches leveled the different kinds of participants in the ceremony, so

the term Service applies to the different kinds of objects or artifacts mobilized for the ritual work: the coffin, the stones, but also the rice and zebus needed by the servants to perform the service. This terminological identification between the queen, the royal service, and the artifacts produced during the service is further corroborated by the fact that these artifacts are treated by the participants as if they were indeed the deceased queen. Not only are these substitutes for the queen treated as expressions of her agency (as in the case of coffin and slab movements during transport), but their remains (particularly the wood splinters produced by the trimming of the coffin) are considered to be as dangerous as the fluids produced by the rotting of the corpse. For this reason, they are laid to rest in the same place as the latter. In addition to transferring the queen's power of action to these objects, this series of cumulative identifications makes it possible to attribute the properties of these materials (weight, hardness, strength) to the queen. These forms of anthropomorphism establish reciprocal influences between a human agency and its nonhuman substitutes, as we have already seen with the places that house the tromba andrano. However, although ritual objects are likewise referred to as service, the queen's corpse constitutes service par excellence. It is this identification, both metonymic and metaphoric, that exemplifies Turner's (1991) synecdochic structure of ritual, which links the ritual to its product—the sovereign's corpse—and the latter to Madagascar as a whole, both referred to by the expression "amidst the waves."

The identifications between the queen's corpse and its substitute artifacts also have another function. They serve to protect the queen's dangerous corpse. This logic of protection by substitution also justifies the use of euphemisms to avoid directly naming delicate/dangerous things. Indeed, just as the proliferation of euphemisms is linked to the prohibition on using ordinary language to indicate the queen's body or actions, the diffraction of the queen's corpse into its material substitutes is also a consequence of the prohibitions surrounding this dangerous corpse. Through her substitutes, subjects avoid referring to the queen directly, to protect her from possible malevolent or even sorcerous behavior, and at the same time to protect themselves from her dangerousness. This is probably why, during the respectful greetings for the queen, repeated daily in Antsandrarafa, people were always directed toward the fence around the coffin and never toward the house where the royal corpse lay.

It is through the treatment of these substitute materials, similar to that reserved for the corpse, that the identification of the two is achieved.

For example, the honey, or coffin, is extracted from a sohihy tree. More precisely, it is extracted from the heartwood of this tree, called *teza* in Malagasy. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 443) has pointed out, this part of the tree, also used to build the posts of the royal tomb's inner enclosure, is also the least alive, the driest, and at the same time the most durable, hence its identification with the royal corpse or, more generally in Madagascar, with the bones of ancestors (Bloch 1998: 93). Following this material extracted from the more mineral part of the wood, the royal corpse is then identified with stone, in the Black Wave Service. It is after the bearing of the excessively sweet weight of the slabs that these cumulative experiences of the different properties associated with the queen's body could condense in the final operations of the burial. It is in these final operations, in fact, that the bones, coffin, and slabs, as well as the mead, tissues, and gold, were handled and combined by the Special Servants. Indeed, this series of identifications, carried out sequentially during the various services, was preparatory to the convergence of these different substitutes for the corpse in the construction of the royal tomb: a new body for the sovereign and a new, lasting, and inaccessible index of her presence.

It is at this moment of convergence that all the queen's different kinds of so-called slaves (nobles, servants, or mediums) were also brought together, in particular the people of the living, or Antidoany, and the people of the dead, or Antimahabo. Usually separated between Analalava and Nosy Lava, and during the preparation of the corpse spatially divided between Antsandrarafa and the mahabo, at the moment of the burial the Antidoany accompany the queen they served during her lifetime, while the Antimahabo welcome and help bury the body of the future tromba they will look after. This convergence, however, was mediated by the ruler of Ambendraña, master of invocation and ancestors, and by the Special Servants, who together represented intermediaries between the living and the dead. At the hand of one of the Special Servants, the blood of two zebus was finally shed for the new royal ancestor. The queen's passage to heaven was thus complete, thanks to the "part" (anjara) each had played in its ritual realization.

Once this ritual process has been completed, the servants of the Zafinimena rulers simply inform the Zafinifotsy spirits of the ceremony's completion. Like the Zafinimena from Ambendraña, the Zafinimena from Analalava are also required to inform the Zafinifotsy ancestors of any ritual activity. This subordination of Zafinimena ritual actions to the approval of the Zafinifotsy spirits (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 393) will be

even more evident during the consecration of the new queen (as we shall see below). As the nobles of Marangibato explained, it is the approval and blessing of the Zafinifotsy that makes the Zafinimena's activities "effective" (*masiñy*). Although the Zafinifotsy were, as tromba, absent from funerals, their ceremonial garments were worn by the Special Servants and nobles from Ambendraña. This is a sign of the common ritual role played by these three different groups. The Zafinifotsy tromba, together with the Special Servants and the nobles of Ambendraña, play the ritual role symbolized by white (*fotsy*) and silver (*volafotsy*), necessary not only for the ancestralization of deceased sovereigns, but also for the enthronement and consecration of the living queen of gold. "A sovereign always needs silver," Volamarina had stressed in his account (chapter 5). It is this need for silver in royal power-building rituals that I will analyze in the rest of the chapter, starting with the ritual of enthronement of the new queen.

Manangana ampanjaka: "To Raise the Queen"

> When we announced, "We are going to raise the queen!" some things were brought in from the royal cemetery. A wooden trunk from a *harahara* tree [*Phylloxylon ensifolius*]. It has to be straight [*mahitsy*] …. Then we bought white and red silk cloths [sobahia]. Finally, we took two silver tsangan'olo coins and two gold coins. These coins we brought in the ceremonial dish [*sahany*] from Nosy Lava. Once here, we picked up the two Ambendraña nobles, a girl and a boy of about fourteen. We raised [*nitsangana*] the wooden mast by planting it in the ground. Ropes were tied to it. We attached the two red and white cloths. The two gold coins and the two silver coins were buried. The ampangataka [intercessor] from Ambendraña made the invocation …. Everything happened before sunrise, in the night… Once all these preparations were completed, the girl and the boy were made to climb [the mast]. The boy climbed first. He tied the first cloth [the red one]. Then it was the girl's turn, and when she got halfway up, she fell. We already knew the reason [for her failure]. The notables were seated, the singing continued, there was a lot of animation. The girl climbed again, but she did not make it. She was out of breath, so she took a rest. Finally, she climbed up once more and accomplished her task. Everyone stood up to celebrate her success.



Figure 23. The royal house with the *saiñy* (flag) attached to the *harahara* mast planted in the northeast corner

> But what is the reason [for her failure]? It is because of a Hôva [Merina]! The Zafinifotsy do not like Hôva and Zalifa had a child with a Hôva … There's no prosperity because of that, so she has to go [to the Zafinifotsy]. That is why this happened to her. She still must go there to ask for the Zafinifotsy's blessing ….
> Finally, once [the queen] was raised, she was taken on [eight] tours of the royal house. She was seated on a chair, and carried with the trunks of the same *harahara* tree to which the chair was attached. Then the jôro [invocation/sacrifice] was performed: it was the nobles of Ambendraña who conveyed the jôro [blessing] to her. Then they took the trunks on their shoulders and carried her to the royal house. Four young Sambarivo men carried her.

This account of the enthronement ceremony, or rising, of the new queen was recounted to me by the former first official (manantany) of the royal residence during one of my last fieldwork stays in September 2019. I had not been able to directly attend this ceremony, which had taken place the previous year on the night between Thursday and Friday,

October 26, 2018. However, I had learned the news from a Facebook post, published on a page dedicated to the Analalava Bemihisatra kingdom. A photo of the new queen dressed in red sobahia silk and adorned with gold jewelry was posted on the page. Another showed her standing surrounded by her servants and subjects seated on the floor. As Zalifa herself told me, while the enthronement ceremony had taken place at night away from any outside audience, in the morning, she was brought out to be publicly presented to the notables and inhabitants of Analalava. Cameras and journalists from the regional television station were on hand to capture the event. It was in front of one of these cameras that, after the ceremony, Zalifa declared that the time had come to make the leadership of this kingdom more modern (in French).

As the manantany's account suggests, and as a royal cemetery servant confirmed to me, before celebrating the queen's enthronement, the royal cemetery servants had summoned the tromba from Nosy Lava to ask for instructions on the ritual actions to be performed. Not knowing the customs for enthroning a new queen, it was the servants of the royal residence who called on the cemetery servants to summon the royal ancestors in the bodies of their mediums. It was the latter who provided the instructions for the ceremony, confirming the central role that mediums play in the transmission and reelaboration not only of sovereign histories, but also of ritual practices.

In the manantany's description of this ritual service, the ritual position occupied by the Ambendraña nobles vis-à-vis the Analalava queen is even more pronounced. Their ruler is explicitly designated as the queen's ampangataka (intercessor). Indeed, it is he who pronounced the invocation to the royal ancestors to give Zalifa their blessing. What is more, it is always two young Ambendraña nobles who hoist the flag (*saiñy*), the symbol of royal power. As we will see in the next chapter, this symbolic gesture echoes the fact, recounted in Ambendraña oral traditions, that it was the nobles of Ambendraña who gave the power to govern to the nobles of Analalava.

Many details of the ceremony are not available for a deep analysis of the relationships between the participants, but from this summary we can see the division of ritual tasks we have already seen at work in funerals, notably between Antidoany (servants of the royal residence) and Antimahabo (servants of the royal cemetery). While the former were responsible for the work in the royal courtyard (erecting the flagpole, carrying the queen around the royal residence), it was the Antimahabo who were responsible for transporting the materials needed

for the royal service from Nosy Lava: the flagpole as well as the gold and silver coins. As we shall also see in the queen's consecration ritual that took place the following year, it is always the ancestors of Nosy Lava who send the materials needed to consecrate the power of their living descendant. Finally, it is thanks to the invocation carried out by the Ambendraña sovereign that the hasiñy, or generative power, of the ancestors was transmitted to the new queen. In this productive couple formed by the Antimahabo and the Antidoany, the nobles of Ambendraña thus play the role of intermediaries as masters of the clasped hands, or intercessors: they invoke the hasiñy of the deceased kings, who are looked after by the Antimahabo, to make effective the royal services for the living sovereigns, performed by the Antidoany. Once again, in these ceremonies, the Ambendraña nobles occupy the ritual position of intercessors that the Marangibato nobles have attributed to the Zafinifotsy.

As we have seen in the process of making the royal ancestor, silver and gold, white and red, are both necessary to found and establish royal power. Incorporated into the queen's corpse reduced to her "enduring heart" (*teza*), these gold and silver coins are planted at the feet of another *teza*, the erect flagpole, which—as opposed to the deceased, "leaned" (*nihilana*) queen—must stand upright (*mahitsy*). Buried in the form of gold and silver coins under the mast, just as they are buried under the toñy, these complementary symbols are hoisted in the form of red and white cloths above the mast. Red identified with gold and the power of the Zafinimena, white with silver and the power of the Zafinifotsy, gold and silver are also a productive couple necessary for the reproduction of royal power, like the Antimahabo and Antidoany, men and women, paternal and maternal ancestors evoked in the ceremonies analyzed in chapters 3 and 4. This identification between the two colors of the flag and the two royal dynasties is itself made explicit in the account of the former manantany. The young girl's inability to hoist the white cloth on her first and second attempts is interpreted as a consequence of Zalifa's transgression against the Zafinifotsy ancestors for having had a child with a Merina. If she is to have complete power, she must be forgiven by the Zafinifotsy ancestors and ask for their blessing. Hence the indispensable and complementary role of Zafinifotsy power in the Zafinimena kingdom of the region.

Gathered above the new queen's mast, the red and white cloths will be left to the wind and to the wear and tear of time (see fig. 23). They will only be replaced when a new sovereign takes the place of the old one.

Mandrangitry ampanjaka: "Sharpening the Queen"

"What does it mean to 'sharpen [the queen]'? That her ancestors give her 'full powers' [*fahefana feno*]." It was with these words that the former manantany of the royal residence explained the service of consecration, or sharpening, of the queen to me. Almost a year after her enthronement, or raising, Zalifa was sharpened on Friday, September 13, and Monday, September 16, 2019, in Analalava. However, the ceremony had been prepared in Nosy Lava at least a week beforehand and was completed in front of the gates of the royal tombs a week after the ceremony in Analalava had ended. As we saw in the second chapter of the book, being erect, standing (*tsangana*), and upright (*mahitsy*) is synonymous with being alive (*veloño*), as opposed to being dead, or "leaned" (*nihilana*). But it is also a sign of power, as evidenced by the flag and the silver coins engraved with the image of tsangan'olo (standing people), associated with rulers. Being sharp, like a zebu horn or the crocodile teeth with which royal relics were made, is the distinctive sign of royal power (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 350). Any element representing royalty must be sharpened (*rangitry*), such as the posts of the menaty enclosure surrounding the royal tomb, the pointed earmark reserved for the royal zebus, or like the Long Knife (*Vy Lava*), which constitutes the relic of Bemihisatra kingship. Hence the association evoked by the manantany between obtaining full powers and sharpening.

I was directly present at most stages of the queen's sharpening service. Safina informed me of the preparations for the ceremony at Nosy Lava. It was with her that I traveled to the island to witness it, with the consent of the new officials who had replaced the former ones at the end of the funeral.

Nosy Lava: Discussions between "the sovereigns in heaven"

The week leading up to the ceremony in Analalava was marked by discussions between the tromba and officials of the royal cemetery to organize the ceremony. For the occasion, numerous mediums from different regions were present, many of whom I had already met at the Hot Service. On Friday, September 6, the four ancestors of Nosy Lava were first invoked in front of the gates of the royal tombs. While I have already had occasion to describe the two younger tromba of Nosy Lava, with their Western-style clothes marking their integration into colonial

power, this was my first encounter with the two "great ancestors" (*dadilahibe*) of Nosy Lava. Ndramañetriarivo, who lived in the second half of the nineteenth century, was dressed in a white shirt with a round collar and a beige vest, with a sobahia loincloth around his waist. Ndramamitrañarivo (who lived approximately between 1843 and 1865) was initially dressed in a long white shirt in the Muslim style but, once seated, trembling as the oldest tromba often do, was covered to the neck in a multicolored sobahia loincloth. While these two older tromba were incarnated in the bodies of two men, their two younger counterparts inhabited the bodies of two women. Their generational anteriority was reflected in the order in which they were arranged, from north to south. With their chests bent forward as a sign of respect, first the ampangataka, or intercessor, then the manantany conversed in a low voice with each of the tromba, from the oldest to the youngest. Then, the tromba entered into discreet discussion with each other. Once these discussions were over, the spirits opened up their exchanges to the other participants and launched the party. The aim of this first day of consultations with the tromba was simply to present respectful greetings to the ancestors from the mahabo.

The next morning, we reached the royal cemetery of the north (*mahabo avaratra*), where one of the collateral relatives of the kings of the southern cemetery was buried. He is considered a Muslim tromba so, in this mahabo, the servants celebrate *Aidy* (Eid) every year, at the end of Ramadan. His posthumous name is Ndramatikoarivo ("The nobleman who parted the miles"), and he is referred to as a Bemazava nobleman, originally from the Bay of Mahajamba further south. According to local oral traditions, he took refuge in Nosy Lava at the beginning of the nineteenth century due to the dynastic struggles between the Bemazava and Bemihisatra branches (see Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 334–35). The main officials of the southern cemetery were also responsible for this second cemetery—smaller and with very few servants. The exception was the intercessor (ampangataka), who at the time was a woman and permanently resided in this cemetery. Apart from the four tromba from the southern mahabo, the tromba from this mahabo was summoned in company with another tromba originally from Mahajanga. Accompanied by the latter, Ndramantikoarivo appeared from a small house in front of the tomb gates, incarnated in the body of an old woman. Holding on to a stick, he too was dressed in the Muslim style, with a long white shirt, a colorful sobahia loincloth draped over one of his shoulders, and a red keffiyeh on his head. He sat to the north of the great ancestor of the southern

cemetery, marking his genealogical anteriority. The female intercessor of this tromba spoke with him, while that of the southern mahabo spoke with the four other tromba: "each with his or her masters," as the adage goes. Then the tromba of the southern mahabo spoke in turn with their respective elders. Movement and stasis being signs of the genealogical hierarchy that exists between the tromba, the ancestors of the southern cemetery rose to approach their elder. Finally, the tromba reported the results of their discussions to the officials of the southern cemetery. Following this hierarchical circulation of words, instructions were given for the Analalava ceremony. But, as latent conflicts resurface during these ceremonies, these discussions were also an opportunity to settle conflicts between the mediums and the officials of the southern royal cemetery. The elder tromba, after consulting with the other tromba, reprimanded the mahabo officials for demanding too much money of the mediums who had come to serve at the royal cemetery. As we saw in chapter 3, the mediums are responsible for bringing the offerings collected during the possession sessions from people in other parts of Madagascar. The officials were supposed to collect these offerings and give them to the royal ancestors (that is, to their living mediums) and the queen. According to rumors, they had taken advantage of their position and kept some of this money to themselves.

The following Monday, after this consultation with the ancestor of the northern cemetery, the officials of the southern cemetery summoned the Zafinifotsy tromba. "Why do you need to call the tromba andrano?" I asked Aimé, the new manantany of Nosy Lava. "Because they 'protect' [*mitramboño*] Nosy Lava," he replied, "they are the ones who instituted the prohibitions [fady], who give the 'strength of the land' [*herin-tany*]." As the Zafinifotsy ampangataka from Ambendraña had mentioned (chapter 3), the tromba andrano, and in particular the tromba of Kotomena, are indeed responsible for the prohibitions protecting the "strength of the land" (*herin-tany*) of Nosy Lava. In keeping with their status as masters of the land, the Zafinifotsy ancestors play this ritual role. In fact, a toñy dedicated to Kotomena is located on the hill to the north of the mahabo. According to the dynamics illustrated in chapter 2, it is this toñy that establishes and guards the prohibitions governing the territory around it. The Zafinifotsy tromba are the guardians of these prohibitions. This is why, according to the manantany's explanations, when they built the relic house (*zomba faly*) in concrete and sheet metal, materials normally forbidden in this precolonial and anticolonial chronotope, the officials had to ask permission from the Zafinifotsy. It is for this role as

guarantors of prohibitions that the Zafinifotsy tromba must be consulted for the new queen's Sharpening Service.

On the day of the consultation, while the Zafinimena tromba were called to the meeting space in front of the tomb gate, the Zafinifotsy were summoned to one of the servants' houses. It was the Zafinimena tromba who joined the Zafinifotsy in their house to pay homage to Ampelabe, the eldest of the spirits present, and to seek advice and permission for the Analalava ceremony. The Zafinimena, having paid their respects to the Zafinifotsy ancestors, each returned to their place to celebrate with their servants—a dynamic indicative of the conjunction between relative autonomy and latent hierarchy existing between these two groups of royal ancestors. Once all the instructions from the royal ancestors had been gathered, all that remained was to travel to Analalava and sharpen the queen.

Analalava: The trenchant word of the royal ancestors

At three o'clock on the morning of Friday, September 13, after the night vigil, people went down to the river to wash themselves with water not yet crossed by birds. Around nine o'clock in the morning, summoned by the sound of drums, everyone gathered in front of the gates for the invocation. After the invocation, eight people—the four officials of the cemetery and four female servants—entered the fiaroaomby enclosure to collect the "difficult/dangerous objects" (*raha sarotro*) that belonged to the royal ancestors and bring them to the new queen. The intercessor and one of the two chief maids came out of the enclosure with two white dishes (*sahany*) covered in white cloth. With the ceremonial dishes on their heads, these two servants led the way for the other participants (about a hundred in number) as they made their way to the boats and pirogues. Behind the rest of the procession of people singing and clapping their hands, a black zebu with a white head (*mazava loha*) struggled with a servant from the cemetery, who dragged it with a rope to get it onto the boat.

When we arrived in front of the Analalava stadium, a crowd was waiting on the beach, singing. Their songs were echoed by the chants coming from the boats. A mixed procession of servants and worshippers following the bearers of offerings to the queen headed through the narrow streets of Analalava toward the royal residence. The mahabo officials and some of the other mahabo servants then entered the queen's residence to bring the offerings, while the singing crowd waited outside

in the royal courtyard. The servants of the royal residence and the eldest noble of Ambendraña sat in a room of the royal house reserved for ceremonies awaiting the arrival of the officials.

After the delivery of ritual speeches between the doany and mahabo officials opened by the nobleman of Ambendraña, the mahabo officials gave the offerings, contained in the two ceremonial dishes, to the queen: two gold coins, two gold rings belonging to former sovereigns, two tsangan'olo silver coins, and finally an introductory offering (*tady*) in cash. Communication between the living and the dead always being mediated, the exchange of offerings and speeches between the queen and her ancestors took place through the mediation of the ancestors' ampangataka, on the one hand, and the queen's chief servant (*talen'ny Sambarivo*), on the other. Through this mediation the queen received the offerings, putting on the two rings and setting aside the rest. This concluded the first exchange between the royal ancestors and the living queen.

When the Antimahabo left the royal court, Zalifa spoke with the Antidoany and the nobleman from Ambendraña inside the court. The municipal elections were approaching and Zalifa wanted to introduce the candidate of her association to her servants to help him get elected. She began by saying that she was counting on their support, as she could not count on that of the Antimahabo. As seen repeatedly in this chapter, royal services are not only an opportunity to reactivate the royal hierarchy and its structural divisions, but also to resurrect the latent tensions underlying it. To close this first day of ceremony, the singing and celebrations continued outside the royal court until nightfall. A few months later, the queen's candidate was elected.

Around midday the following day, the Antimahabo returned to the royal house accompanied by the mediums of the four ancestors of Nosy Lava. Once inside, the mediums arranged themselves along the eastern wall of the room. Zalifa sat behind them. The tromba descended to inhabit the bodies of their mediums in genealogical order. After the intercessor welcomed the tromba, Zalifa, looking a little shy and reverent, approached her great-grandfather, founder of the first kingdom of Nosy Lava. At length, she listened to the whispered speeches of her ancestors, one after the other, from the oldest to the youngest, her uncle. When they had finished giving advice to their descendants, the tromba also summoned the officials of the royal residence and the Special Servants to give them instructions. This rather one-way exchange of words was followed by a reciprocal exchange of goods. Zalifa gave envelopes to the first official of the royal cemetery as an offering for each of her ancestors.

Then, the intercessor presented the offerings to the tromba. The mahabo intercessor donated another envelope filled with money and a bottle of perfume to the queen in return, through her intercessor. The tromba could now leave in the same order in which they had arrived. The servants of the mahabo left the room. The maids started singing, and drinks were distributed among the servants. Thus was Queen Zalifa sharpened by her ancestors.

On Monday, September 16, the servants entered the royal residence for the last time to congratulate her, presenting her with songs that the Nosy Lava female servants had learned for the occasion. Between the songs and the clapping of hands, the intercessor and the chief of female servants of Nosy Lava stood up. With their arms outstretched and their feet beating the ground rhythmically, they danced the trotrobe before the queen and her ancestors. "We desire good things! / We are delighted!" recited the first of these joyful songs. In the afternoon, to conclude the ceremony, other offerings were presented to the new queen by her subjects amidst song and dance as a sign of their loyalty.

Speech, Power, and *hasiñy*

"What really sharpened the queen? Gold rings, silver coins…?" I asked the former manantany during our discussion about the ceremony. "What really sharpened her was the 'mouth' [*vava*] of her ancestors …. The objects they brought contributed to the sharpening, … they completed it; but more than anything else it was their mouth [speech]." Once the queen had been raised the previous year by her servants, it was, therefore, the sharp words of her ancestors that sharpened her. If "the Sakalava make the queen reign," it is the royal ancestors—prepared by the servants at the funeral and incarnated in the bodies of other servants—who granted her full powers. This process of consecration of royal power is thus the fruit of the complex journey of the ancestors' speech and its construction. If the material conditions necessary for the ancestralization of a sovereign are produced by the collective work of the slaves of Divinity at the funeral, when that sovereign's spirit breaks the sky and returns to possess the body of a living being, it is again the collective work of the mediums and officials of the royal tombs who construct and legitimize the speech of the sovereign's spirit (see chapter 2). And it is the path of the speech of the ancestors, dispenser of power of efficacy (hasiñy), that outlines a complex and ambivalent social hierarchy. Complex because

it is collectively fabricated and modified; ambivalent because, while expressing the authority of the royal ancestors, it is held by servants. This coincidence between speech and power of efficacy is made explicit in the quality attributed to the mouth of the nobles, defined as a "sacred/effective mouth" (*masim-bava*)—an expression that also means, by metonymy, "sacred/effective speech." It is no coincidence that gold and silver coins were placed in the queen's mouth at her funeral. It is these coins (called *vola*) that confer speech on the nobles and the sovereigns (also called *vola*) after their death (see chapter 2). However, it is in the properties associated with these coins that the special character conferred on the speech lies. As gold symbolizes the sovereign's power to make decisions, and silver that of blessing and making those decisions effective, both are necessary to make the ancestors' words sharp. The cutting power of the ruler's speech is made explicit in the title assumed by Sakalava rulers in the Menabe: *ampañito-vola*, "the one who cut with his speech" (Lombard 1988: 16n1).

In order to outline the hierarchy that emerges from the path of this cutting speech, let us retrace the path it took during the sharpening ceremony. The first speech to be invoked and heard was that of the former rulers of the region buried in the southern royal cemetery. Indeed, they were one of the main actors in the ceremony. Then, the following day, these royal ancestors moved to the cemetery further north to listen to the elder's speech. As we have seen, two clues to the existing hierarchy among the Zafinimena ancestors were involved in this move. The first is the location of the tomb, which conforms to the hierarchical structure of the space, according to which the north is reserved for the elders, the first to arrive, or people of higher rank. As they were all nobles, the ancestor's birthright and residential precedence probably justified their choice of location. Secondly, since displacement is a sign of subordination, this visit suggests that, despite being former rulers, the queen's ancestors recognized the hierarchical superiority of their elder. It is from the elders that one must ask the way and ask advice before starting any activity. Hence the reason for their visit. The last word to be consulted before the Analalava ceremony was that of the Zafinifotsy spirits. Being at the same time grandparents, masters of the land, and protectors of the Zafinimena ancestors, the Zafinifotsy ancestors were the last tromba to whom the Zafinimena and their servants turned for advice and to ask the way to Analalava. As with their elder, it was the Zafinimena ancestors who went to the house of the Zafinifotsy tromba to consult them, showing their subordinate position. Only after having heard their

own ancestors' speech were Zalifa's ancestors ready to in turn sharpen their living descendant. Like the blessing, the speech of the ancestors circulates from ancestor to ancestor until it reaches the living queen, first among their descendants. In this way, the living queen is subject to the authority of her ancestors, just as the latter are subject to the authority of their elders, the Zafinifotsy and the Bemazava, representatives of minor dynastic branches.

Yet, the subordinate position of the Zafinimena in relation to the power of the speech and blessing of the Bemazava elder and the Zafinifotsy tromba is indicative of the fact that the latter two occupy a similar position in relation to the reigning dynasty and sovereign power. Not only are they both descended from collateral branches excluded from power, but they are also defined as masters of the land. Like the Zafinifotsy tromba, the Bemazava noble buried in the northern cemetery was already present on the island before the arrival of the founder of the kingdom of Nosy Lava and master of the southern cemetery, Ndramamitrañarivo. So, to establish his kingdom on the island, he had to ask permission of his elder. As a medium explained to Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 335–36):

> The master of the northern mahabo, he isn't a ruler who should have people. The one with people, the one with a lot of slaves, in the south, asked for a place from the one with no people because he was there before him. Then he made a vow [with Ndramamitrañarivo] that whenever they served [the] south, they would serve [the] north too.

In exchange for setting up his kingdom on Nosy Lava, Ndramamitrañarivo promised his elder that he would send his servants to serve the latter's tomb as well. From this testimony, and according to the Sakalava regime of historicity—where the history of royal ancestors is continuously actualized by their living servants—we cannot know whether this promise was made during the two rulers' lifetime or through their tromba. In any case, this kind of promise between newcomers and old occupants recalls that between the Zafinimena from Analalava and the Zafinifotsy ancestors (see chapter 4). It is because of the same link between the Zafinimena who rule the region and their elders, the masters of the land excluded from power, that the former are obliged to inform the latter and ask the way. And it is because of the same pact that the Zafinimena are also obliged to send people to these masters of the land without a kingdom and therefore without servants to serve in the ceremonies dedicated to them.

Although the path of the speech has shown that Zalifa is subject to the legitimizing word of her ancestors, just as the latter are subject to that of their elders, there is a substantial difference between the two relationships of subordination. Between Zalifa and her ancestors, royal power passes between the former holders of this power and their successor. In the case of the relationship between the former Zafinimena rulers and the Zafinifotsy or the Bemazava ancestors, an ambiguous hierarchy persists between holders of political power and holders of the "force of the land" (*herin-tany*). In the words of Michel Izard (1985), if in the first case there is a transmission of power within the "people of power," in the other two cases there is a distribution of complementary domains between "people of power" and "people of the land." We will see in the next chapter that one relationship encompasses the other. While the new queen needs the legitimization of the former rulers to make her power effective and efficient (sharp), foreign sovereigns need the legitimization of the masters of the land to establish their power. It is this double dualism of royal power that the royal services described here have revealed. On the one hand, the power to rule is divided between the power of living sovereigns and the power of dead sovereigns; on the other hand, at a higher level, royal power is distributed between the power to rule, identified with gold, and the power of legitimization and transmission of the generative power (hasiñy), associated with silver (fig. 24).

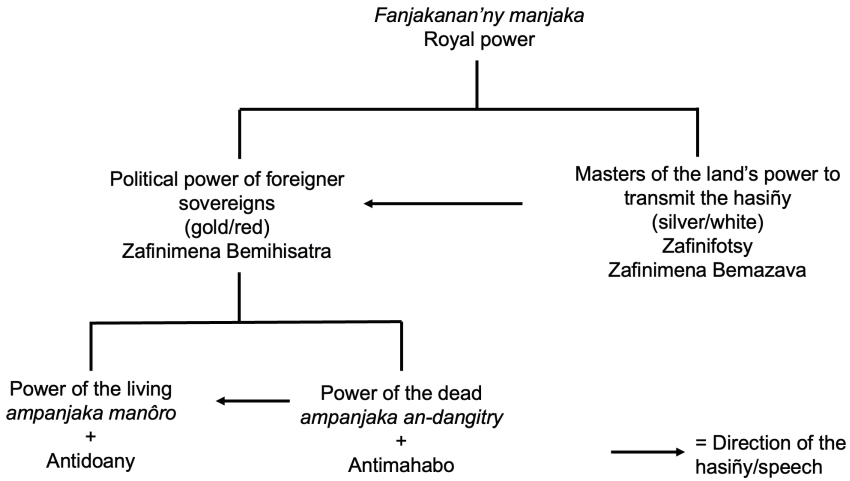


Figure 24. Simplified diagram of the double division of Sakalava royal power, based on the queen's Sharpening Service

If the masters of the land give foreign rulers access to the land and its power, when the former are represented by deceased people, living intermediaries are necessary to ensure that such access is granted. The foreign rulers need living servants who intercede with the spirits of the former occupants to receive their blessing (tsodrano) in return. This is why the Zafinimena rulers of the region gave people to these masters of the land, either permanently, like the Bevôñy for the Zafinifotsy, or periodically, like the Antimahabo for the royal service of the Bemazava ancestor in the northern cemetery.

However, while the prerogative of granting access to the land and its force belongs to those who previously resided there, the prerogative of transmitting the generative power, associated with silver, does not belong solely to the masters of the land. It generally belongs to those who have a higher rank in the social hierarchy, regardless of their political or economic power (Bloch 1977). As we have seen in the various definitions attributed to the Zafinifotsy, this power to transmit the hasiñy is associated with the elders, but also with the children of men. It is because they are considered children of men in relation to the nobles of Analalava that the nobles of Ambendraña occupy the ritual position of the Zafinifotsy, as intercessors and channelers of the generative power of the royal ancestors. However, these ranks (elders, masters of the land, children of men) may be cumulative or interchangeable, depending on the context and the position of the actors within that context. Their interchangeability is a consequence of the relational and relative nature of these hierarchical positions, whereby elders bless and give generative power to cadets, masters of the land do so with strangers, and children of men with children of women. Depending on the context, elders can be cadets of other elders, masters of the land can be foreigners to older occupants, and so on. For this reason, the social position that the Zafinifotsy occupy at a more general level in relation to the Zafinimena may in other relational contexts be occupied by other groups, such as the Zafinimena of Ambendraña in relation to those of Analalava. Hence the fact that the Nosy Lava medium had, as we saw earlier in this chapter, referred to the Ambendraña nobles as Zafinifotsy in the context of the Hot Service for the queen of Analalava.

In conclusion, the relationship between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, rather than merely designating an opposition between two dynastic branches, encompasses a set of hierarchical distinctions that structure the distribution of goods and prerogatives across generations, such as those between elders and cadets and their respective branches, or between

children of men and children of women. Consequently, this type of opposition recurs within various dynastic subdivisions, for instance between the Bemihisatra and the Bemazava within the Zafinimena, or between the Zafinimena of Analalava and those of Ambendraña within the Zafinimena Bemihisatra. Moreover, in the relationship between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, these distinctions among descendants are further complemented by a fundamental opposition that organizes access to resources and power beyond kinship—that between the masters of the land and foreigners, where temporal precedence among elders and cadets is expressed in residential terms. It is this latter opposition that shapes the diarchy of royal power that underpins the distribution of political and ritual power between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy. In the following pages, we will explore this complex relationship, its variations, and its historical evolution, in order to explain the dual nature—functional and dynastic—of the division between the Descendants of Gold and the Descendants of Silver.

CHAPTER 7

Gold and Silver, or the Royal Diarchy

In our study of the cult of the spirits of the drowned Descendants of Silver, and more specifically along the path we traveled from the Mouth of the Catastrophe to carry out that study, we came across descent or dynastic groups identified in relation to the opposition between Descendants of Gold, or Zafinimena, and Descendants of Silver, or Zafinifotsy. Moreover, this opposition also structures the social and ritual organization of Ambendraña, a village where a Zafinimena ruler resides, as well as the intercessor of the father of the Zafinifotsy tromba, Bevaoko. However, as we moved between the villages of the estuary to observe the royal services practiced there and to access different narratives and viewpoints, we saw the transformation of the rank and dynastic affiliation of these groups. Not only are the Zafinimena nobles of Ambendraña cast in the role of and defined as Zafinifotsy before the queen of Analalava, but the various groups of servants of the Zafinifotsy spirits turned out to be either descendants of slaves (as is the case for the Bevôñy) or Special Servants (as is the case for the Antifañaiñy and other Andampy groups) of the Zafinimena rulers.

We glimpsed a possible explanation for these contradictions in Marangibato, the place of origin of the Zafinifotsy (see chapter 5). Although this stage of our journey did not allow us to go further back in the Zafinifotsy family tree, it did give us access to different versions of their history. An analysis of these historical traditions has shown us that the Zafinifotsy dynastic branch appears to be much less genealogically

unitary than the traditions of the north and northwest of Madagascar present it to be today. According to ancient accounts foreign to the traditions of the Zafinifotsy kingdom of Antankaraña, the alleged genealogical unity of the Zafinifotsy seems rather to be an a posteriori construction. Consequently, the opposition between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy proves to be relative. Discussions with the Marangibato nobles made this clear. Considered as ancestors by those who today claim to be Zafinifotsy (tromba or living nobles), the Marangibato nobles interpreted these dynastic designations as titles associated with the complementary functions that the sovereign's heirs assume within the kingdom. The Zafinimena are those who have the right to reign, the Zafinifotsy the prerogative to intercede with the royal ancestors to bless and transmit the hasiñy power to the Zafinimena. In this dualistic organization of royal power, the Zafinifotsy are therefore functionally the intercessors (ampangataka) of the sovereign's ancestors. Analysis of Analalava royal rituals has provided us with an example of the ritual position of the Zafinifotsy, which can be occupied not only by groups identifying with this dynastic branch, but also by groups identifying with the dynastic branch it opposes—be they the Zafinimena nobles of Ambendraña or the Special Servants (Razañ'olo) of the Zafinimena rulers. These two groups, dressed as Zafinifotsy tromba at Soazara's funeral, played the role of intercessors of the royal ancestors and were responsible for the funeral work of the deceased Zafinimena queen. Whether living intercessors or drowned spirits to be consulted before and after any ceremony, these various Zafinifotsy figures are essential ritual actors for the Zafinimena sovereigns who reign in the region.

Several questions arise at this point in our journey. Whether they be defined as an honorary title by the nobles of Marangibato or as a dynastic branch by the servants of the tromba andrano, as well as by the deputy of Analalava and the Zafinifotsy rulers of Antankaraña, the question remains: Who are these Zafinifotsy and what is the origin of their opposition to the Zafinimena? If this opposition is indeed the result of a functional position in relation to the Zafinimena rulers that can be occupied by different people depending on the context, what are the historical circumstances and institutional solutions that produced this ritual role in relation to the Zafinimena? And consequently, what are the historical and structural reasons that justify the crystallization of this title in a dynastic branch? Deferring the answer to the latter question to chapter 8, in this chapter I propose to answer the first two. In so doing I aim to provide a new perspective on the enigma of this opposition

between Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena, which concerns both the history and the functioning of Sakalava kingship, but also to highlight, from this ethnographic case, an example of the ambivalent nature of royal power and the diarchic tensions that constitute it.

We Are All Somebody's Zafinifotsy

In historiographic and ethnographic studies of the Sakalava and Antankaraña monarchies, the proposed definitions of Zafinifotsy, or Zafimbolafotsy, are as varied as those I was able to gather during my fieldwork. However, they all have one constant: they are constructed in opposition to the Zafinimena. The reverse, however, is not so systematically true. The Zafinimena are either designated through comparison and contrast with the Maroseràña royal dynasty of the Menabe from which they originate or are not defined by this name at all. As Lambek testifies, "The clan names—Zafinimena, Zafinifotsy—are rarely used in Mahajanga; to call people ampanjaka [nobles/sovereigns] is to imply that they are Zafinimena" (Lambek 2002: 106).

For Henry Rusillon (1922: 174), who surveyed the northwest region, the children of Andriandahifotsy, one of the first rulers of the Menabe, are called Zafinifotsy or Zafimbolafotsy, descended from "common" women, as opposed to the legitimate heirs, who are called Zafimbolamena. J. V. Mellis (1938), who conducted his investigations mainly among the Antankaraña of the north, relates an account that presents the Zafinifotsy or Volafotsy as the descendants of a daughter of a nobleman from Oman, while the Zafinimena or Volamena are said to be the descendants of his son (1938: 10–11; cf. Kent 1968a: 162–63). On the basis of this common genealogical origin, Mellis then assimilates to the Volafotsy not only the Manañadabo group conquered by the Sakalava sovereigns in Boina (1938: 41), but also the Merina sovereigns (1938: 43). He goes so far as to assume that all of Madagascar's dynasties can be traced back—"perhaps arbitrarily"—to either the Volamena or the Volafotsy (1938: 7). The definition given by Poirier in his chronicle on the Bemihisatra of Analalava is of a purely contrastive nature. Poirier cites the Zafimbolafotsy as one of the two main branches of the "Sakalava tribe" (the other being the Zafimbolamena). He then adds that "only *mpanjaka* [nobles] belonging to the Maroserana or Zafinimena caste are considered to be ruling" (Poirier 1939: 45). More closely resembling Rusillon's version, Hubert Deschamps defines the Zafinifotsy as the children of

Andriandahifotsy's secondary wives, while the Zafinimena are said to be the offspring of his first wife (Deschamps 1961: 99–100; see also Vérin 1972: 134). Among the earliest references to the Zafinifotsy in European studies we find Alfred and Guillaume Grandidier (1908, 1: 197), who identify this group with those who are probably at the origin of the recovery of the "title" as a dynastic designation: in other words, the Antankaraña dynasty of the Antandrona. In the most recent ethnographies, Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 26–27), restating the point of view of the inhabitants of the Analalava region, defines the Zafinifotsy as a cadet branch of the Zafinimena without living sovereigns, who are identified with the Antandrona of the Tsimihety country. Lambek (2002: 78), on the other hand, agrees with the Antankaraña version, according to which the Zafinifotsy are a dynastic branch originating from the Menabe kingdom that arrived in the north as a result of conflicts with the Zafinimena branch. This is also recently attested by Berger (2006: 240), who adds that, as far as the origin of their split with the Zafinimena is concerned, there are "as many versions available as there are clans to tell it" (2006: 240, my translation). Finally, in the face of these divergent definitions, Samuel Sanchez, contradicting Mellis's genealogical hypothesis, proposes that "[t]his gold/silver duality contains a division of a symbolic order corresponding to an order of precedence in the broader Malagasy aristocratic context" (2013a: 117, my translation). On the basis of this observation, and after showing the absence of any solid historical foundation upon which to establish a genealogical link between the Maroseràña-Zafinimena from the Menabe and the first Antankaraña rulers, Sanchez concludes that "it would not be impossible that the sense of common ancestry between the Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena is to be found in joking relationships rather than in a genealogical relationship" (2013a: 129, my translation). In the wake of the Marangibato nobles' functionalist interpretation, Sanchez's hypothesis allows us to approach this question from a different angle than that proposed by the previous hypotheses. However, we shall see in this chapter that the two proposed possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

As we saw in the previous chapters, over the course of my fieldwork I also collected these different interpretations of the genealogical origins of the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena. The relationship between the two groups was described to me variously as a relationship between descendants of the union between a nobleman and a commoner; or between descendants of a noblewoman as opposed to descendants of a nobleman; or, furthermore, the Zafinifotsy have been defined as descendants

of noblemen not entitled to the throne, or as a nonnoble group as opposed to a royal dynasty. In short, the different origins attributed to the Zafinifotsy all point toward the position of illegitimate heirs excluded from royal power. These negative definitions of the Zafinifotsy, however, are complemented by the many positive statutory identifications we saw accumulating throughout my investigation. Whether ancestors/grandparents, masters of the land, or protectors vis-à-vis the Zafinimena, these attributes refer to the Zafinifotsy's ritual task of intercessor or ampangataka, as well as to that of diviner-healer (ombiasy or *mpanazary*), blessing and legitimizing the rulers. These functional and relational definitions are associated with the fact that the two dynastic identifications are also relational and relative to the context in which they are enunciated. Indeed, we found that while the nobles of Ambendraña define themselves as Zafinimena in their village, they are referred to as Zafinifotsy by the representatives of the Analalava monarchy. Now, if we retrace the main stages of Sakalava expansion and proceed backward to the region of origin of this division, according to the "regressive method" theorized by Bloch (1931) and revived by Wachtel (1990; see also Berger 2016), at each stage we find the same relational logic mobilized to define these two dynastic categories. In Mahajanga, in the royal capital of the Bemihisatra of Boina, one of the royal servants who served in the residence of relics (doany) told me, when I asked about the origin of the Zafinifotsy, that the Zafinifotsy were those who had abandoned the region to go further north: King Andriantsoly fleeing the Merina and his descendants reigning in Nosy Be and Analalava. Then, when I traveled further south in the Menabe to the first royal capital at Bengy, one of the oldest members of the Kamamy royal family told me that the Zafinifotsy were those who had gone north after the death of one of the first kings of the Menabe kingdom, Andriandahifotsy—namely Andriamandisoarivo and his descendants. Surprised by his account, I replied: "Yet those who now rule in the north, from Mahajanga to Nosy Be, declare themselves to be Zafinimena!" He retorted by saying, "No, no… They are Zafinifotsy—we are the Zafinimena here. Whoever told you this doesn't know the story. Or maybe Zafinimena means 'the true Sakalava kings.'"

From the brief itinerary through these Sakalava royal capitals, we can see that each reigning branch of the dynasty defines itself as Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) in the place where it reigns, as opposed to Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) who left to found new kingdoms elsewhere. Whether because of their subordinate genealogical position, or because of an outside invasion (in the case of King Andriantsoly), it is

ultimately the Zafinifotsy who are excluded from local power—at least from the point of view of those who have retained local power. However, to understand the origin of this distinction and, above all, the reasons for the ritual relationship that exists between the two dynastic groups when they are both present on site, we need to return to the Menabe, where the various historical traditions situate the split. Since the testimonies of the living interlocutors whom I was able to meet in the Menabe only helped me to a certain extent in clarifying the question, due to the loss of oral traditions on the part of the royal servants,[1] we must turn to the ethnographies that have been carried out since the 1970s on the Sakalava kingship of the Menabe to find out more.

The Menabe: Gold and Silver as Principles for the Transmission of Royal Power

In Sophie Goedefroit's (1998) monograph on the Menabe, we find a distinction similar to that between Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver, used in this case to differentiate between the king's children. *Andriambolamena*, "Nobles" or "Lords of Gold," is the name given to the children of the first wife (*valy be*) of the sovereign, while *andriambolafotsy*, "Nobles of Silver" are those born of his secondary wives (*valy masay* or *kely*) (1998: 97–98) (see fig. 25).

Moreover, this distinction is not linked to the wife's nobility status, since in the first period of the Menabe kingdom's formation, both the principal and secondary wives mostly came from the most prestigious groups of masters of the land (Goedefroit 1998: 104). I will come back to this question of the king's wives later. For now, let us focus on his children. It is the Nobles of Gold who are entitled to reside within the royal or red enclosure (valamena), and among whom the successor to the throne will be chosen, according to the criterion of eldership. The Nobles of Silver, residing outside the enclosure, are therefore also excluded from the power to reign. This is the version that Deschamps (1961) and Pierre

1. The royal institution of the Menabe, formally maintained during colonization as an intermediary body with the population, is described in the 1970s by Chazan-Gillig as "fallen into disuse" (1991: 62–63). Hence the royal servants' disinterest in preserving the memory of these traditions, which are only partially useful in legitimizing their place in the contemporary economic and political context of the Menabe.

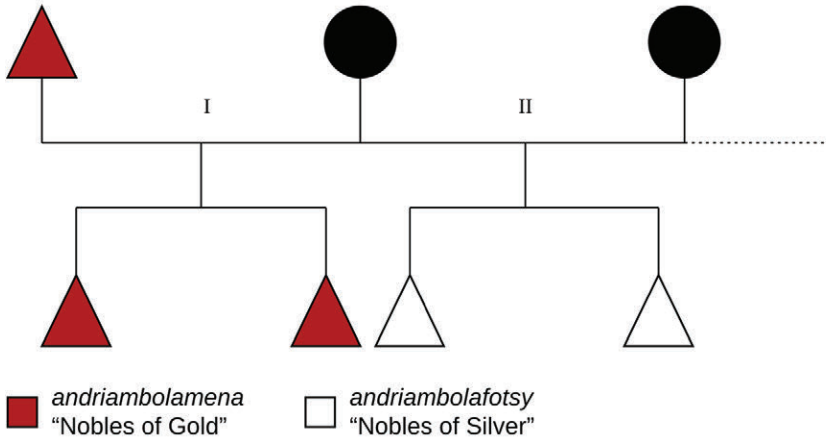


Figure 25. Distinction between Nobles of Gold and Nobles of Silver according to the principles of transmission presented by Goedefroit

Vérin (1972) report on the origin of the distinction between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy. Moreover, in this distinction of prerogatives, we also find the separation between children "in the house" (*an-trano*), or in the royal enclosure, and children "outside" (*ivelany*) the enclosure evoked in the Analalava deputy's account of the dynastic struggles between these two groups of heirs.

The rank distinction between these two categories of princes is also reflected in the burial privileges reserved for them. Just as during their lifetime, the Nobles of Gold resided within the royal precincts, upon their death they were the only ones to be buried in the king's tomb, along with their mother, the king's first wife (1998: 102).[2] The Nobles of Silver, on the other hand, are buried in a separate tomb, built on the lands of the maternal commoner group (1998: 102). According to Goedefroit, the Nobles of Silver were also entitled to relics, like the Nobles of Gold, but they could not contain gold, a metal reserved for the sovereign and his descendants of gold (1998: 102). The ban on gold, which today characterizes the Zafinifotsy spirits of the Loza bay, would therefore not be a simple distinctive element, but rather the sign of their subordination to the Zafinimena, as the legacy of the ban imposed by the latter. At most, the Zafinimena may exceptionally offer it to the Zafinifotsy, as shown by the case of the

2. Secondary wives are not allowed to go to their husband's tomb. They will be buried with their silver children in another tomb (Goedefroit 1998: 102).

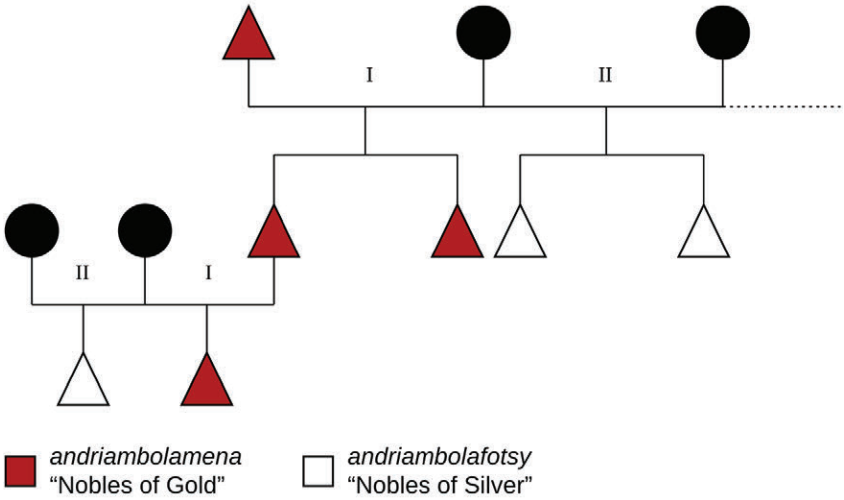


Figure 26. Distinction between Nobles of Gold and Nobles of Silver repeated in successive generations

toñy altars dedicated to the Zafinifotsy ancestors and located in Anjango and Andampy. As we saw during the treatment of the corpse of the Analalava queen, while the Zafinifotsy are not authorized to use gold (associated with the color red), the sovereign and his heirs—the Nobles or Descendants of Gold—have the right to use gold as well as silver, red and white, marking the hierarchical relationship between these two symbolic elements. The red and white ornaments of the royal tomb, as described by Goedefroit (1998: 101), make this evident. As the French anthropologist explains, red, "associated with gold and the sun, represents authority in general and royal power in particular" (1998: 94n1, my translation). As Sanchez had suggested, this gold/silver and red/white opposition in fact conceals a symbolic opposition at the very heart of royal power, and its translation into the classification of its heirs operates as a criterion of precedence regarding access to that power. Thus, although the relationship between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy is based on kinship, it is relative and can be repeated with each royal succession and each new generation, as is the case between children of men and children of women (fig. 26).

However, as Goedefroit explains, their status as Nobles of Gold or of Silver can also be inherited, materializing in particular in funerary privileges (1998: 102). These statutes and privileges will be diluted as the nobles make mixed marriages. If a Noble of Silver marries a commoner,

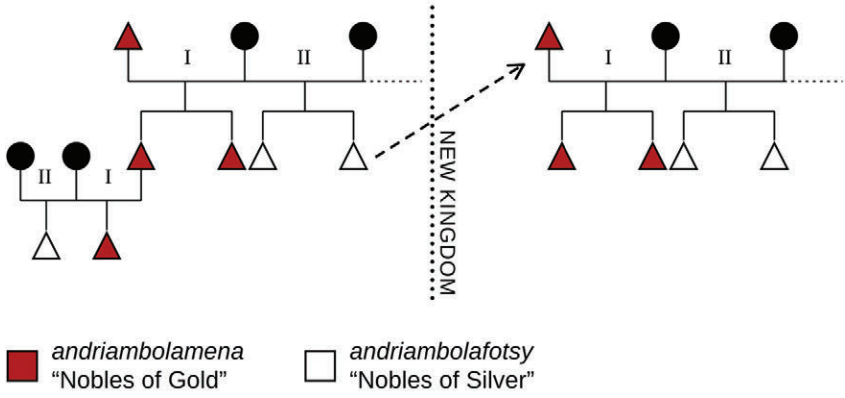


Figure 27. Distinction between Nobles of Gold and Silver reiterated at the founding of a new kingdom

for example, upon his death he loses the right to materialize as a relic, and his descendants will have only a distant reference to the royal family (1998: 102). Consequently, even if transmissible from generation to generation, this relative category of Nobles or Descendants of Silver is far from being able to be consolidated into a dynastic branch within these descent rules. In this organization of royal power, Nobles of Silver either accepted their exclusion from power and submission to the sovereigns of Gold, or emigrated to found a new kingdom elsewhere. In the latter case, according to this classificatory logic, once these Nobles of Silver founded a new kingdom as true Sakalava kings, they became new Nobles of Gold, likely to reproduce the same hierarchical distinction between their children (fig. 27).

It is this dynamic, underpinning the "struggles between kinsmen" (*ady milongo*), that characterizes the history of the Sakalava kingdoms and enabled the segmental expansion of the dynasty throughout the west coast, as well as in Androna and part of the east coast. The dynastic segments founding new kingdoms are therefore both Descendants of Silver in relation to the sovereign of the place of departure, and Descendants of Gold once they have taken root there. Hence their relative identification according to the different geopolitical contexts of enunciation. Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) and Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) are indeed dynastic variants of the original classification between the king's heirs, distinguished between Nobles of Gold (*andriambolamena*) and Nobles of Silver (*andriambolafotsy*). Both designations are ultimately only relevant within a kingdom.

Variations on the theme

This simplified dynamic model is, however, made more complex by two kinds of phenomena: firstly, the transgression of these succession criteria and the contradiction that can arise between these cumulative criteria; secondly, the assimilation of Nobles of Gold excluded from power with Nobles of Silver. Indeed, in this system, it is not exclusively the latter who occupy a position of subordination to the sovereigns of Gold. Although the Nobles of Gold are the legitimate heirs, only one of them (usually the eldest) is entitled to the throne. The other Nobles of Gold were thus in the same position as the Nobles of Silver vis-à-vis their eldest. Within the framework of opposition between Nobles of Gold and Nobles of Silver, the same hierarchy is reproduced within the Nobles of Gold. An assimilation, or even a true coalition, between these two statutory groups is therefore possible. At least, this is suggested by the narrative of the Analalava deputy and confirmed by Boina traditions concerning the succession struggle between the two children of Andriandahifotsy, which is the source of the split between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy. Indeed, according to these traditions, the king's son, excluded from the throne, allied himself with the children of secondary wives living outside the royal enclosure, against the new ruler of the Menabe (see chapter 5).

Secondly, as we have seen in the deputy's account, the transmission of royal power between the first Maroseràña rulers recounted in the historical narratives is in fact far more complex than the model they present. As Baré has shown for the Boina region (1973), these succession criteria are often in contradiction with each other and have therefore been transgressed since the beginning of Sakalava kingship. Or rather, the transgression of these rules and, consequently, the room left for individual strategies and the mobilization of allies are constitutive elements of the transmission of royal power. A paradigmatic example of this logic is provided by the narrative of the two heirs of Andriamandazoala, one of the first legendary rulers of the Menabe and ancestor of Andriandahifotsy.

Maroseràña and Misara

According to traditions collected by Lombard (1988: 22), Andriamandazoala had married two daughters of the chief of the Hirijy group, a master of the land. He married the younger daughter first, as the elder had initially refused his marriage proposal. However, he continued to court his wife's elder sister, who became pregnant before her younger

sister did. As a result, the king also married the elder sister, who thus became his second wife. The latter gave birth to Andriamisara, at once the king's eldest son and son of the king's second wife. The younger sister then bore Andriamandresy, the younger son, but nevertheless son of the king's first wife. On the king's death, it was Andriamandresy, the youngest, who came to power, following the criterion of the order of the king's wives (1988: 22; see also Chazan-Gillig 1991: 202–5). Nevertheless, Andriamisara is presented by other traditions as the legitimate heir since he was Andriamandresy's eldest son (Chazan-Gillig 1991: 205–6). According to these traditions, it was Andriamisara who refused to reign and willingly relinquished his power to his younger brother because he was passionate about wood carving (1991: 205)—a foreshadowing of his predilection for making talismans and relics (Lombard 1988: 23). Andriamisara is in fact presented by most oral traditions as the first maker of royal relics (Kent 1968b: 539–40; Lombard 1988: 23; Chazan-Gillig 1991: 206). Thus, Andriamandresy, the youngest, acceded to the throne, while Andriamisara, the eldest, dedicated himself to sculpture and divination, becoming the famous diviner-healer (*misara* or ombiasy) at the origin of the dynastic branch named Misara (Chazan-Gillig 1991: 206). Defined by Goedefroit (1998: 99) as second-rate Nobles of Gold, the Misara descended from Andriamisara represent the first aristocratic segment of the Maroseràña dynasty to be excluded from power but to have nevertheless retained a prestigious ritual position: diviner-healers to the king, they are also the guardians of the royal tomb of Tomboarivo (1998: 100n4). They were also the first to have the privilege of carrying the royal relics that their founding ancestor is said to have made for the first time (Lombard 1988: 26). All these ritual prerogatives, as we shall see, refer to the same hierarchical position that assimilates the Misara to the most prestigious groups of masters of the land. Moreover, as manufacturers and guardians of relics, they are also associated with the Special Servants of the Boina region. Finally, as descendants of the nonruling son of the king who first held ritual power, the Misara represent the first Zafinifotsy of the Sakalava royal dynasty. The complementary relationship between the Misara and the sovereign of Gold is paradigmatic of that between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy in the Analalava region.

Andriamisara's voluntary renunciation of royal power, which evokes the voluntary servitude of royal servants, not only conceals the violence of the struggles for succession, but also presents the sovereign as a transgressor of the established rules of transmission: an outlaw, or a privileged person (in the etymological sense of the term). This transgression of the

rules represents one of the "ruptures" referred to by Alfred Adler (2000: 26–28) necessary for the king to position himself above and beyond the social hierarchy. As we shall see, this transgression, like others attributed to the sovereign against the legal and moral order binding the rest of the population, serves to place the sovereign outside the social order he establishes. As Graeber summarizes—echoing a recurring thesis of theories of divine or sacred kingship (Evans-Pritchard 1948: 36; Adler 2000: 27; de Heusch 1997: 219; Sahlins 2008)—the sovereign must stand outside society in order to become its constitutive principle. It is this transcendental principle of sovereignty that Giorgio Agamben ([1995] 1998) defines as the "structure of exception," drawing on Carl Schmitt's ([1922] 2005) notion of the "state of exception": a paradoxical framework in which the social order established and guaranteed by the sovereign is grounded in its exceptional transgression or suspension by the sovereign himself.

The transgression of the rules of succession and the voluntary transfer of power are topoi in Sakalava royal narratives, as demonstrated by their recurrence in other narratives concerning not only the origin of the separation between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, but also that of the ambivalent relationship between the nobles of Analalava and those of Ambendraña.

The nobles of Analalava and the nobles of Ambendraña

As with the history of the origin of the Zafinifotsy, there are at least three versions of the history explaining the relationship between the Analalava and Ambendraña dynastic branches. The first is the one that the eldest of the nobles of Ambendraña, Arthur, told me one day in his hut:

> Ndramamitraña [founder of the kingdom of Nosy Lava] lived in the region with our ancestor [Ndramañotroño]. Their father had had two wives, he was a polygamist …. We are the descendants of the first wife, they [the Analalava nobles] the children of the second. Now, the second wife had not had many children, so she asked the other wife for power. "My children are not many—she said—if you make one of your many children reign, the kingdom will not last." So, our ancestor agreed [to cede power to her]. Hence the connection between us [and the Analalava dynastic branch]. If there is any ritual work for Ndramamitraña [and his descendants], it can only be done if we are present. They must call us. If we are not present, whatever the royal service is, it will not be performed. It's the same with the ancestral curse [*tiñy*]: we can remove theirs, but they can't remove ours.

With its genealogical and historical inconsistencies,[3] this narrative presents the same narrative pattern of the legitimate heir to the throne relinquishing power to someone who, according to the rules of succession, would not be entitled to it. However, the reasons for this voluntary transfer of power are different from those of Andriamisara or the ancestor of the Zafinifotsy. It is not the deliberate choice or haphazard inheritance of ritual power that motivates this transfer, but rather the desire to avoid a succession struggle between the first royal wife's many children. These different motives are all aimed at avoiding a succession struggle perceived as inevitable. As in previous splits, in return for the transfer of their political power, the Ambendraña nobles claimed their ritual power over the Analalava queen. These voluntary and peaceful inversions are thus the euphemistic expression of the latent tensions and hierarchical ambivalences at the root of royal power, between the sovereign and those who, while excluded from political power, ritually legitimize the person holding it.

In Analalava, the queen's former first official had presented me with a similar account, which varied from this first one insofar as she described the Ambendraña nobles as the children of man, as opposed to the Analalava sovereigns who would be the children of woman. Once again, these genealogical positions are not historically based.[4] Rather, as in the previous version, they are used as hierarchical and functional categories. In this account, it is by virtue of this position of children of man that the nobles of Ambendraña hold the privilege of invoking the royal ancestors during royal ceremonies. Here too, the hierarchical position favoring Ambendraña's nobles in access to the throne was overturned by a voluntary renunciation. However, in this version, the renunciation of power was motivated by the choice of a reproductive strategy. It was not the nobles of Analalava who asked the nobles of Ambendraña for power, but the latter who relinquished it, as they could not bear its weight. "We in Ambendraña can't bear it… There aren't enough of us! We want to be many," the ancestor of the nobles from Ambendraña told the nobles from Analalava. They thus gave the Analalava dynastic

3. Ndramamitraña, identifiable with Añono or Rano, son of Queen Tsiomeko, is in fact heir to the throne through his mother, not his father. He is therefore a child of a woman, not of a man.
4. The nobles from Ambendraña trace their most distant ancestor, linked to Analalava's branch, to a woman, Ndramañotroño, making them children of woman.

branch royal power, embodied in the relic of the Long Knife, which is also a remedy against numerous descendants (*aody tsy maro*). Thanks to their renunciation of power, the nobles of Ambendraña became very numerous, hence the name of their lineage: Marotsiraty, "the many who are not ugly."

We have seen that this proliferation of descendants among the nobles of Ambendraña is reminiscent of the numerous children of Bevaoko, grandfather of the Zafinifotsy tromba, and also of the procreation strategy attributed to the Bemazava branch of the Zafinimena (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 65–66; see chapter 5). What these dynastic branches have in common is that they were excluded from royal power and have no relics.[5] Indeed, the power of Zafinimena rulers, at least from Andriamisara onward, is exercised through their possession of relics and their ability to mobilize their subjects thanks to the legitimacy the latter confer on them. But it also relies on the strategy of avoiding a large number of descendants, to prevent succession conflicts. Hence the replacement, in the Boina region, of this multitude of children by the multitude of royal servants: the Sambarivo, the "each-is-a-thousand." On the other hand, in the absence of relics, the minor branches excluded from power favored the proliferation of descendants, notably through the undifferentiated transmission of their status and affiliation. And this, in order to be able to count on their allies and relatives, and to extend their control over land and zebus through blood ties (Feeley-Harnik 1982: 37). What this opposition of procreative strategies highlights is, in particular, the hierarchical position shared by the nobles of Ambendraña, the Zafinifotsy, and the Bemazava, as groups or categories traditionally excluded from the exercise of royal power. See the next chapter for a description of the strategy adopted by the Marotsiraty nobles of Ambendraña, about whom the Bevôñy intercessor complained.

Moreover, nobles of Ambendraña share with Zafinifotsy tromba not only the same procreation strategy, but also the same ritual prerogatives. The need for their intervention to render a royal service effective, or their intercession to remove an ancestral curse, gives them an equivalent position vis-à-vis the sovereigns. This analogy between the ritual relationship between the nobles of Ambendraña and the sovereigns of Analalava, on

5. Although excluded from power in the past, the Bemazava founded other kingdoms where they still reign today. Unlike the Bemihisatra, however, they have no relics to legitimize their power (Ballarin 2000).

the one hand, and that between the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena rulers, on the other, is corroborated by the fact that the same account of the separation of powers between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy through the choice of the two coins was told to me by Faustine, one of my first Bevôñy informants, to explain the division between the nobles of Analalava and those of Ambendraña.

Considered, according to the accounts, to be descendants of the eldest or the youngest, the man or the woman, the first wife or the secondary wife, the nobles of Ambendraña are subject to the same variety of genealogical identifications as those concerning the Zafinifotsy. However, despite their diversity, these different classificatory pairs of relatives express the same ambivalent hierarchical relationship. This is why, rather than defining a historical or genealogical reality, these kinship pairs represent models for describing hierarchical relationships between individuals and groups of individuals. At the same time, however, they are also the historical foundation of relationships that structure royal organization.

At the level of royal organization, the ritual power to remove the ancestral curse (*tiñy*) is the prerogative of the intercessors, or ampangataka, of the royal ancestors. As ethnographies on the Menabe region attest, this ritual prerogative is granted in principle to the sovereign's "joking allies," known as ziva or *lohateny*. The joking allies turn out to be the former masters of the land who gave the sovereign wives. They are therefore the king's in-laws. Hence the parental and historical origins of this ritual prerogative that characterizes the Zafinifotsy and the nobles of Ambendraña. Like Andriamisara before them, these two dynastic groups, excluded from the throne, share the ritual role of removing an ancestral curse with the masters of the land, allies of foreign sovereigns. Just as the Nobles of Gold excluded from power are associated with the Nobles of Silver vis-à-vis the sovereign, these two subordinate groups themselves occupy a position equivalent to that of the eminent groups of masters of the land, the king's joking allies (ziva). The two groups are thus linked by their role as intermediaries between the king and his ancestors, on the one hand, and between him and his subjects, on the other. As we shall see, it is this "joking alliance" (ziva) that constitutes the matrix of the hierarchical and ritual relationships existing between the Zafinimena rulers and the various Zafinifotsy figures associated with the masters of the land. In order to sketch out an archaeology of this complex relationship, let us return to the Menabe and the process of establishing Maroseràña royal power.

Vahiny and *tompon-tany*: "Foreign" Kings and "Masters of the Land"

"The kingship makes its appearance from outside the society," asserts Sahlins in a famous article on the figure of the stranger-king (1985: 73). From ancient times to the present day, in different societies, the king is often portrayed as a foreigner, a stranger—whether originating from another country, coming from another world as the descendant of a deity (Sahlins 2008: 178), or both, as exemplified by the Maroseràña dynasty. Often described as a dynasty descended from illustrious ancestors in Arabia, "the genealogical ideology of the Maroseraña is then presented as a succession of male ancestors who succeeded one another from father to son, the first of whom is God's heir, the last of whom is the father of the reigning king" (Lombard 1988: 27, my translation). As I mentioned when quoting one of Graeber and Sahlins's theses on kingship (2017), the violence of this foreign warrior's conquest of the new territory is concealed by a contract with the subjugated local chiefs, which takes the form of a marriage between the new king and the daughter of a local chief. Thus, the original usurpation of power is legitimized by the union with a local woman who embodies the link between the foreign conqueror and the masters of the land—that is, between power and land. Their descendants personify the dual foreign and native component of royal power:

> In a common configuration, the autochthonous people's access to the spiritual sources of the earth's fertility is potentiated by king's conveyance of fecundating forces, such as the rain and sun that make the earth bear fruit. Each incomplete in themselves, the native people and foreign rulers together make a viable totality—which is what helps the kingdom to endure, whatever the tensions of their ethnic-cum-class differences. (2017: 6–7)

Since the vital force (translatable into Malagasy by the concept of hery) also comes from elsewhere, as a power not controllable by humans (Sahlins 2008: 185), this ontologically foreign king (not only because of his place of origin, but also because of his rank and distinctive morality) represents the bearer of a principle external to the human collectivity over which he reigns. However, it is necessary for the earth, together with its ministering spirits and their living human intermediaries, to allow this force to become a fertilizing and generative one that is beneficial to the population (so that the hery, the vital force, becomes hasiñy, generative power). In a text that might be considered a precursor to this

cosmological model of the institution of royal power sketched out by Graeber and Sahlins, the latter, almost a decade earlier (Sahlins 2008), declared that the same logic could be found in the realm of kinship, and particularly in alliance strategies. In kinship, this logic translates into the need for a group of descendants to receive an external fertilizing force in order to perpetuate itself. This is why, he concludes, the "elementary forms" of kinship, politics, and religion are the same (2008: 197).

While the intention here is by no means to demonstrate the principle of unity between religion, politics, and kinship through the example of Sakalava kingship, this theoretical model nevertheless enables us to identify the dynamic between the foreign kings and the groups of masters of the land that underpins the process of formation of the Sakalava kingdoms and constitutes the historical and morphological substrate on which the ritual relationship between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy was built.[6] Indeed, it was through marriage and other alliance devices (such as blood brotherhood and joking alliances) that the Maroseràña stranger-kings were able to subjugate the masters of the land, legitimizing their power with the latter's support.

As Lombard observes, in line with the theses of Graeber and Sahlins (2017: 6), oral traditions from Menabe recount that the founding hero of the Maroseràña royal dynasty was born from the original union of the king with a native wife:

> The alliance between the migrants and the Andrambe [a group of Menabe masters of the land] gave rise to the first historical figure of the Andriambolamena dynasty …. This was Ra-Bararata-Vokoke [or Bararativôko]. … The Andrambe group was the first to provide the *mpitoka* of the *Mpañito* [king], that is to say, the officiant for prayers addressed to the king's ancestors. (Lombard 1988: 18, my translation)

It is not only the first king of gold who would emerge from this alliance between the Maroseràña migrants—conquerors of an initial region of what would become the Menabe—and one of the groups of masters of the land, the Andrambe, but also the first local intercessor

6. I prefer to use the local definition of masters of the land rather than the term autochthonous or indigenous, as it has the merit of making more explicit that residential precedence is the historical—and therefore always provisional—result of a political process, and not a natural and permanent condition.

needed to legitimize that king's power—the *mpitoka* or, as he is known in the north, the ampangataka. The masters of the land would thus have provided not only the new king's mother, but also the first intercessor of his ancestors. Because of their position as masters of the land, and therefore as intermediaries between the living and the spirits who protect the area, it is from these masters of the land that the king would select his main ritual leaders. As noted by Lombard (1988: 23) and Raison-Jourde (1983: 29–30), with the establishment of a kingship in Menabe, the local cult of the masters of the land's ancestors was swallowed up and replaced by the cult of the royal ancestors. In this process of cultural appropriation or "identity theft" (Raison-Jourde 1983: 29), the ancient intermediaries of the local ancestors nevertheless retain their ritual position as intercessors, not only of their ancestors, but also of the king's ancestors. This is why, although the king has subjugated the ancient local chiefs to himself, he, being subject to his own ancestors whose power is entrusted to the masters of the land, is somewhat subjugated to the latter. As Sahlins explains, "for although … the foreign warrior could conquer the land, he found himself unable to rule it without submitting to it himself, that is, without the concurrence of the native chief" (2008: 183). While the king's local wife thus becomes queen of the kingdom, her father or brothers retain ritual control of it (2008: 183). From this original dualism stems the double sovereignty (Needham 1980) or diarchy constitutive of royal power (Dumézil 1940). On the one hand, there is the power of the masters of the land, whose relationship with the land "gives them unique access to the divine and ancestral sources of its productivity—hence their indispensable religious authority and ritual functions" (Sahlins 2008: 184). On the other hand, there is the authority of the king, who "trumps these claims of priority in aggressive and transgressive demonstrations of superior might, and thus takes over sovereignty" (2008: 184). Hence the two-headed nature of kingship and the ambivalence of the hierarchy it establishes.

During the expansion of the Maroseràña conquerors into the area of the Menabe, the same policy of alliance that gave rise to the first sovereign would be reproduced by his successor, Andriamandazoala, with the Hirijy family, masters of the land, who occupied the Menabe territory further north (Lombard 1988: 22). As we saw in Andriamisara's account, this sovereign married two daughters of the Hirijy chief. Furthermore, according to accounts by Chazan-Gillig (1991: 218), it was from this alliance that the Maroseràña formed a dynasty, identified by a herd of zebus with the distinctive zebu earmark (*sofin'omby*)—borrowed from these

masters of the land—that constitutes the identifying sign of the descent groups. This group, as well as other groups of masters of the land allied with the king, would have had their mark and group identity assigned or recognized by the sovereign. Thanks to these matrimonial alliances, the first kings built up a network of local joking allies (ziva), who provided wives, identity marks, political advisors, and ritual officials (Goedefroit 1998: 104). These prominent groups of masters of the land—themselves foreign to other previously settled groups—will thus form an intermediate layer that separates the king from the rest of the population and at the same time ensures his domination over these new subjects already loyal to the former local chiefs.[7] The internal hierarchy of these local groups will then be determined by their relationship to the king, according to the order of his union with the wives given to him (Goedefroit 1998: 104).

In this alliance network, the king is in turn linked to local groups as a taker of women—as their son-in-law in a situation of uxorilocality—which places him in a situation of dependence on these groups (1998: 265–66). In a commoner context that tends to be virilocal and patrilineal, the wife-taking group is in fact eternally obliged to the donor group (Ottino 1998: 73, 396). Unlike commoner groups, the sovereign stands outside the circuit of matrimonial exchange as a taker of wives who does not give in return (Goedefroit 1998: 261n4; Lombard 1988: 79)—yet another device that allows him to be simultaneously part of the society he governs and set apart from it. However, there is always a hierarchical tension between the political superiority claimed by the king and that of the masters of the land, who are both the land's first occupants and the king's in-laws (Sahlins 2008: 184). This tension with the ruler's maternal and indigenous side is paroxysmally demonstrated in the narrative of King Andriandahifotsy's murder of his maternal uncle (Lombard 1988: 25; Goedefroit 1998: 266–67). While escaping from the maternal authority of the masters of the land, this king, Andriamandazoala's grandson, deployed the same alliance strategy in the newly conquered territory, by marrying the daughters of the local chiefs in the region (Lombard 1988: 26; Chazan-Gillig 1991: 220). These masters of the land and givers of wives thus became the sovereign's new joking allies. Ultimately, this matrimonial strategy was above all a policy of territorial annexation (Goedefroit 1998: 262).

7. Like the later French colonizers and, more recently, the multinational corporations, the new powers prefer to operate through the existing authorities, using them as an interface to impose their decisions on the wider population.

It was only once the main groups of masters of the land had been subdued and become joking allies of the king that King Andriandahifotsy imposed endogamy as a condition for the transmission of royal power. The Maroseràña were now powerful and could do without matrimonial alliances with local groups (Lombard 1988: 27). While royal power resorted to exogamy in the process of territorial conquest (Goedefroit 1998: 261), once their power was established endogamy was in principle favored. The other noble branches excluded from power, on the other hand, preferred endogamous unions in order to retain the prestige of their status and to claim their place in the exercise of power by virtue of their purity of blood (Goedefroit 1998: 261–63).

Thus, it was thanks to the use of this double alliance—the matrimonial alliance and the resulting joking alliance—that foreign sovereigns were able to assert their control over the various groups of masters of the land and the rest of the population. In return, these groups of masters of the land retained some political power through their occupation of councilor positions. But above all, they took control of the ritual power that legitimized the king: as diviner-healers, as intercessors of the royal ancestors, or as bearers of relics and guardians of the royal tombs (Lombard 1988: 131). This is how "the Sakalava made the king reign."

This alliance between the king and the masters of the land materializes in the king's toñy, which "gives sovereign power its territorial dimension" (Goedefroit 1998: 267, my translation). In the founding of the toñy, as we have seen (chapter 2), it is the diviner-healer who plays the principal role. It is this ritual specialist, often from the masters of the land groups, who will impose the prohibitions (fady) on the kingdom, to which the king must submit to transform the vital force of the land (*herin-tany*) into the power that makes his government effective and generative, the hasiñy. Thus, on a cosmological level, the ritual power of the masters of the land encompasses—in the Dumontian sense (Dumont 1981)—the political power of the king, just as the power of silver encompasses the power of gold.

If the diviner-healer is the founder of the king's toñy, it is the intercessor who is supposed to invoke the king's ancestors at this altar. It is to the intercessor that the population—including the sovereign—must turn to obtain the blessing of the royal ancestors and the power of efficacy that this blessing transmits. However, there is no analysis of the key role of the king's intercessor in works concerning the Menabe kingdom. This ritual role, strictly associated with the Zafinifotsy, is rooted in the

joking alliances that bind the foreign king to the main groups of masters of the land. As Lombard attests in the case of the first intercessor, and as the organization of the Boina confirms, these groups of masters of the land, who gave their wives to the king, occupied not only the ritual offices of diviner-healers and guardians of tombs and relics, but also those of intercessor of the royal ancestors. As the following analysis of this ziva alliance will show, the role of guardian of tombs and relics and that of intercessor of the royal ancestors are in fact strictly linked.

Ziva or the Chthonian Alliance

"Ziva are a complicated/dangerous thing" is one of the most frequent answers I received when I asked people about this kind of relationship. Another answer was, "The ziva are the ones who bury the dead." Indeed, the dead and everything to do with them is always a complicated/dangerous thing in Madagascar. But relations between ziva allies are also complicated, because these allies can do no wrong and nothing can be denied them. The term ziva and its synonym lohateny indicate a hereditary alliance between two descent groups (*firazañana*) or between two sociopolitical groups (karazaña), based on mutual aid and assistance, particularly at the funeral of a member of one of the two groups.[8] The terms indicate both the alliance and the allies. Two groups that are ziva or lohateny to each other have a reciprocal obligation to assist the living and bury the dead of the allied group. As Chazan-Gillig states, "this ziva bond predated kingship, was organic to relations between relatives and allies, and was instituted to mitigate inequalities and conflicts in a society where patrilineality was becoming widespread" (1991: 223, my translation). Therefore, to sketch out a morphology of this relationship and its variants, I will first describe it in the form it assumes in commoner contexts, and then analyze its transformation by the Maroseràña rulers to consolidate their power.

8. The etymology of the term ziva remains unclear. Various interpretations have been proposed as to the origin of the term—such as David's, which attributes the formation of the word to a metathesis of the term *vazivazy*, "joke, mockery" (1939: 67). Its synonym lohateny, on the other hand, is a word composed from *loha*, "head," and *teny*, "word, speech," and literally means "opening words, title."

Joking alliances and the exchange of life

The material and ritual services that characterize this intergroup alliance (Grandidier and Grandidier 1914: 131) are accompanied by the convenience, even the obligation, of an exchange of insults and jokes. The sovereign of Marangibato told me the following about this relationship:

> [Between ziva] it is proper to insult each other. Ziva is a kind of relationship that comes from this way of talking to each other, from which derives this relationship of the kind that exists with the children of women. The children of women address jokes [*koraña sangetaka*] to the descendants of men. This is a kind of relationship [*fifandraisana*].

It is therefore the kind of relationship that in the anthropological tradition—notably Africanist—is known as the joking relationship, and which Alfred Radcliffe-Brown defines as "a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence" (1940: 195).[9] According to Radcliffe-Brown's formal analysis of this relationship, the attitude he describes applies in particular to relations "involving both attachment and separation, both social conjunction and social disjunction" (1940: 196–97). As the ruler of Marangibato indicates, this behavior therefore concerns not only descent or sociopolitical groups, but also categories of relatives, notably allies (brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law) and their descendants (children of men and children of women). In both cases, we are dealing with groups of people who were originally strangers to each other and who have established an alliance among themselves. Hence the exorcism of a latent or past rivalry through this mocking, even insulting linguistic behavior, but toward which one cannot take offense. The linguistic isomorphism between these two types of relationship is, moreover, the sign of a more intimate affinity. Both relationships are based on the same type of exchange. As the case of the Maroseràña rulers shows, it is the matrimonial

9. It is not my intention here to present Marcel Griaule's critique of this definition (1948) nor the more recent ones, for which I refer to the special issue of *Cahiers d'études africaines* (Canut and Smith 2006) and to the works of Marie-Aude Fouéré (2008) and Étienne Smith (2010). The British anthropologist's definition has the merit of having identified certain basic formal traits on the basis of which I will analyze the specific case of the Sakalava.

alliance that is at the origin of both. If at the root of the joking relationship between children of men and children of women there is a union between two members of distinct families, in accounts about the origins of ziva alliances between commoner groups there is often one or more marriages between their members. And even if certain intergroup ziva alliances were sealed by a "blood pact" (*fatidra*) binding two members of these clans (Chazan-Gillig 1991: 50), in both cases "the ally gives his blood, he gives life" (Paulme 1939: 444, my translation).

Life debt management: From cross-cousin asymmetry to ziva symmetry

It is from this exchange of life between two initially foreign groups that the two relationships are born, implying the obligation of ritual and material mutual aid as well as a special language for this type of relationship between intimate strangers. This is why, in my opinion, interclan alliances of the ziva or lohateny type are shaped and conceived from the logical and chronological model of the relationship between cross-cousins, between children of men and children of women (Esposito La Rossa 2024).[10]

This latter relationship is in fact the legacy of the debt contracted between brothers-in-law, between wife takers and wife givers. As Radcliffe-Brown notes, these joking relationships can be of two kinds:

> In one the relation is symmetrical; each of the two persons teases or makes fun of the other. In the other variety the relation is asymmetrical; A jokes at the expense of B and B accepts the teasing good humouredly but without retaliating; or A teases B as much as he pleases and B in return teases A only a little. (1940: 195)

Among Sakalava commoner descent groups, characterized by virilocality and patrilineality, the joking relationship is rather reciprocal and symmetrical between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, whereas between brothers-in-law the situation is more complex. While it is acceptable to joke and insult each other in a more or less reciprocal way, a certain asymmetry in behavior exists between a wife's brother and her husband.

10. Marguerite Dupire (1970), describing the *Dendïraagal* joking relationship among the Peuls, already notes this continuity: "There is no break between the cross-relationship between individuals and the cross-relationship between groups" (1970: 210).

This asymmetry reflects the hierarchy that exists between groups of wife takers and groups of wife givers (Dubois 1978: 81; Ottino 1998: 396). In fact, in order to marry a woman, a man is obliged to give a "bride price" (*miletry*, *didin-karena*) to the woman's family, consisting of zebus and/or money. As mentioned above, as a wife-taker in a virilocal context, a husband is eternally obliged to his in-laws. His children, who are the children of woman for the donor group, are consequently obliged to help their maternal uncles (*zama*) as well as the latter's children (the children of man) in ritual work, especially in funeral ceremonies (cf. Berger 2006: 395). These asymmetrical services show that children of woman, in their relationship with children of man, inherit their father's debt to his wife-giving brothers-in-law. It is from this debt that the Maroseràña rulers attempt to escape, even to the extreme of murdering their maternal uncle. And it is the inheritance of this life debt that contributes, among other things, to the ambivalence of these foreign kings' relations with the wife-giving masters of the land.

However, between groups or families of the same status, the relationship between ziva is reciprocal, both in terms of services and, consequently, in terms of jokes. Even if certain ziva alliances seem to seal a generalized exchange of women, making marriages between ziva groups unidirectional (Chazan-Gillig 1991: 217), some of the testimonies I gathered during my fieldwork suggest that the historical origin of this formal reciprocity of relationships is probably an exchange of life in equal parts. This equitable transaction takes place either in the form of blood in the blood brotherhood (*fatidra*), or through a series of exchanges of women between the two groups. These exchanges tend to balance the relationship between groups of wife-givers and groups of wife-takers, and to establish reciprocity in the provision of mutual aid. Once the ziva alliance is instituted, marriage between the two concerned groups is often forbidden and considered incest (Hébert 1958: 194–95). This is why, as the Menabe data suggest, this alliance is one of the devices that formalized exogamy between the commoner groups of the Menabe region, as well as their distinction by the earmarks of their herds, necessary to differentiate ownership of the zebus and therefore to exchange them. It was this principle of differentiation and, at the same time, identification that was later instituted and reused by the Maroseràña rulers (Chazan-Gillig 1991: 223).

This exchange of life in equal parts, originating in the ziva alliance, is also attested by a case reported to me in the village of Ambendraña. As the intercessor here once confessed to me, the Bevôñy and Sandrakôro,

both defined as masters of the land of Ambendraña, are in fact linked by a ziva alliance based on a series of matrimonial exchanges between the two groups. Moreover, a comparison of the oral traditions of the village's descent groups reveals that the Sandrakôro settled on the region's land before the arrival of the Bevôñy, and that the latter, by forging a ziva alliance with them, gained access to the land. This ethnographic detail thus provides us with another piece of information concerning an essential function of this alliance: that of integrating a foreign group into a new ecological context.

The chthonian alliance and the burial of the dead

According to ethnographic evidence concerning the ziva, the origin of this alliance can have various causes, such as the resolution of a conflict (Chazan-Gillig 1991: 50), military or material assistance offered to one group from the other (1991: 217), or simply the desire to formalize the exchange of skills or goods between two groups inhabiting two complementary ecological environments (Molet 1956: 185). However, one of the main motivations for these alliances is indeed the integration of a foreign group into a new territory (see also Berger 2006: 453–54). This is why the ziva institution can be defined as a "chthonian or aggregation alliance" (Leroi-Gourhan et al. 1953: 353–56). As described by Leroi-Gourhan and Poirier, this kind of alliance was formed between a foreign group and a "native" group, giving the foreigners access to the land and its fertility. As masters of the land, the first occupants are in a privileged position to ask the spirits of the land and the spirits of their ancestors buried there for a good harvest. They are the intermediaries between foreigners and the productive forces of the earth (*herin-tany*). Hence the need for new arrivals to ally themselves with them, especially in an ideological context where ancestors and chthonian spirits are considered the principal means of production (Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 16).

Furthermore, as masters of the land, it is these former occupants who also grant access to land for the burial of the dead of the newcomers. This is probably one of the main reasons why the ziva bury the dead of their allies. The reciprocity of this prerogative could be the result of blood pacts or matrimonial alliances between the two groups. Hence the fact that the ziva alliances between groups of masters of the land and Sakalava rulers do not possess this reciprocal character: the king withdraws from this matrimonial exchange as a wife-taker without being a wife-giver in return. Consequently, while the ziva take care of the

sovereign's corpse, the sovereign does not bury the ziva's dead. On the other hand, as my interlocutors from Ambendraña told me, the sovereign may provide material support for the funeral ceremonies of their ziva, by offering money, rice, and sometimes a zebu. It is from this funeral task that the ziva derive their role as intercessors of the ancestors of their allies. As those responsible for the funeral and thus for the ritual process of ancestralization of the dead, they become the intermediaries of the ancestors they bury. Indeed, in the commoner context, ziva are present at major life-cycle ceremonies to bring rice or a zebu, but above all to invoke the blessing of the ancestors, alongside the lineage intercessor (ampijôro). This is the same role played by the ziva masters of the land of the Menabe rulers, who are relic bearers during ceremonies, guardians of the royal tombs, and intercessors of the royal ancestors. This is also the ritual function performed by the Special Servants (Razañ'olo) in the kingdoms of the northwest.

Furthermore, as intercessors of the ancestors, it is the ziva who wash away the faults of their allies toward their ancestors and remove their curse (*tiñy*). By virtue of the asymmetrical relationship between the sovereign and his ziva, while the latter can remove the sovereign's faults, the sovereign cannot remove the faults of his ziva. Hence the historical origin of this ritual prerogative claimed by the nobles of Ambendraña vis-à-vis the nobles of Analalava, and which more generally characterizes the relationship between Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena. This ritual privilege, claimed as an indication of hierarchical superiority, is in reality the legacy of political subordination. Whether they are the former ziva masters of the land of the Sakalava kings or collateral nobles assimilated to these eminent groups of masters of the land, the ritual figure of the intercessor is indeed modeled on this ziva alliance.

The ziva alliance enabled the foreign kings to put down roots in conquered territory by integrating eminent local groups, who in turn became responsible for the various bodies of the deceased sovereigns and served as intercessors for their spirits. Thanks to their privileged relationship with the land and its guardian spirits, the masters of the land became the king's intercessors with the spirits of their own deceased and—by virtue of the funeral assistance they provided—with the royal ancestors. Only the masters of the land are capable of ritually transforming "telluric forces" (*herin-tany*) into generative power (hasiñy), which they in turn transmit to the king to make his political power effective (*masiñy*). Hence the definition—functional rather than historical—of the Zafinifotsy as masters of the land.

From the Menabe to the Boina: From *ziva* to *Razañ'olo*

Whether through the process of "commonerization" (*roturisation*) of nobles excluded from power that Michel Izard observes in the ancient kingdom of Yatenga (1985: 28), or through the "sinking status" of collateral noble branches described by Clifford Geertz within the kingdom of Bali (1980: 30–31; Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 431; Valeri 2021: 48), the Nobles of Silver are statutorily and functionally assimilated to the eminent groups of masters of the land, the king's joking allies (ziva). This is why these collateral branches, although not strictly speaking the king's ziva, maintain the same kind of ambivalent hierarchical relationship with him. However, according to oral traditions, the Nobles of Silver, or Zafinifotsy, often refused to submit to this hierarchy, preferring to leave and found a new kingdom elsewhere, thus becoming new Zafinimena.[11]

As we saw in chapter 5, this is what happened when Andriamandisoarivo founded the first kingdom of Boina, the historical event on which the legendary tale of the separation between the Zafinimena and the Zafinifotsy is based. However, in his migration north, Andriamandisoarivo faced the same kind of problem as his father and ancestors: securing alliances with the local population. According to oral traditions, we can see that this new sovereign—a Noble of Silver in relation to his elder brother who remained in the Menabe, but a new Noble of Gold in his new kingdom—practiced the same alliance strategy by marrying a local commoner. This royal wife, called Andriamandikavavy, is known from oral tradition to have sacrificed herself in order to guarantee the prosperity of her husband's kingdom (Lambek 2002: 165–66; 2007; Baré 1980: 147).[12] According to this narrative, recounted to me by various people in the Analalava region, the king's diviner-healer, identified as Andriamisara, asked Andriamandisoarivo to sacrifice the thing he held most dear if he wanted his kingdom to last. It was then that his

11. Delivré notes the same dynamic in the oral traditions of the Merina kingdom: "[the eldest] ceded the throne to his younger sibling, which implies that the eldest usually had the upper hand. But other traditions, almost as old, show that siblings escaped this submission by distancing themselves from one another. Separation was thus seen as a means of avoiding subjection" (1974: 243).
12. If we compare this narrative with the foundation narratives of the Menabe region (Rabedimy 1983), we can assume that Andriamandikavavy was sacrificed to establish the toñy of Boina, the tree-altar that protects the kingdom.

wife volunteered to be sacrificed, as the thing the king held most dear. Her throat was slit with the Long Knife, which became the emblem of the Boina Bemihisatra monarchy and, according to oral traditions from Analalava, now belongs to the Analalava queen.[13] It is guarded by her Special Servants (Razañ'olo)—the Sakalava Mañoroaomby we found at the royal funeral in particular. These servants claim to be descendants of the king's sacrificed wife (Lambek 2007: 20). According to their oral traditions, it was by virtue of their ancestor's sacrifice that the members of the group, probably former local chiefs called Tsiaraña, became ziva or lohateny allies of the king. In return, they became the king's official sacrificers,[14] guardians of the relics and the royal tomb,[15] as well as the intercessors of his ancestors (Baré 1980: 147). The white savôko harness worn by a member of this group of Special Servants at royal funerals in Nosy Lava is an indication of their ritual relationship with the Zafinimena rulers, inherited from the ziva alliance. This relationship refers to that of the Zafinifotsy with the same Zafinimena rulers. It is because of the similar relationship with the Zafinimena rulers that one of the interlocutors who told me the story of Andriamandikavavy's sacrifice presented her to me as an ancestor of the Zafinifotsy and not of the Sakalava Mañoroaomby.

The same ritual position is occupied by the other two groups of Special Servants, who wore the same ceremonial garb at Soazara's funeral. Poirier (1953: 24) cites the Antankoala and Jingô as being, along with the Mañoroaomby, the "only clans empowered to wrap the bodies of kings after their deaths," prerogatives attributed to the king's ziva allies. He also testifies that it was among the Jingô that the king's funeral attendants—his sacrificial mats (*lafiky*)—were recruited. According to

13. This is the claim made by the Analalava queen's royal officials. Lambek (2007: 20, 27) attests that the knife—called by the inhabitants of the region *viarara*—is present as a relic in the tomb of Andriamandikavavy, on the banks of the Betsiboka River in the Mahajanga region.
14. Mañoroaomby literally means "zebu burners." Poirier (1939: 112) describes a ritual of blessing the king in which one of these Sakalava burns the thigh of a zebu and then invokes the royal ancestors (see also Lambek 2002: 285n24; 2007: 20).
15. This group occupies the role of guardians of the relics and the royal tomb not only in the residences of the relics (doany) in the Analalava region, but also in the Nosy Be region (Baré 1980: 60). In the Mahajanga region, they are also the guardians of the tomb and relics of Andriamandikavavy (Lambek 2007: 20).

Poirier (1953: 24), these two groups acquired this "privilege" by providing military assistance to King Andriamandisoarivo to conquer the Boina region. Through this support, they probably became the king's new ziva allies.

Among the Boina groups that claim to have inhabited the region before the arrival of the Maroseràña rulers are the ancient Manañadabo chiefs (Guillain 1845: 19; Grandidier and Grandidier 1908: 226). The Manañadabo, present today in Ambendraña as "friends" (*rangitry*) or messengers of the Zafinimena sovereign, fall into the broader category of Special Servants of the Zafinimena. It is likely that, having defeated these ancient chiefs of the region, the sovereign established a ziva alliance with them, integrating them into the monarchical system (see also Baré 1980: 185). Moreover, the position of the Manañadabo as ziva allies of the Zafinimena rulers is further attested by the fact already mentioned that, just as the Sakalava Mañoroaomby offered their ancestor as a sacrifice and continued to offer funeral services to the Zafinimena rulers (Dandouau 1911: 171), the Manañadabo offered human sacrifices at the funeral of the Boina kings (1911: 171). This is also the case of the Jingô, known in ethnographic literature for this role (Dandouau 1911: 171; Lambek 2002: 116; Berger 2006: 575). We lack explicit references concerning the human sacrifices of the other two main Razañ'olo groups (the Andraramaeva and the Antankoala). However, among other groups who belong more extensively to these Special Servants, we note that the Antifañaiñy and other Andampy groups were called upon to make the same kind of sacrificial offering (see chapter 4). The evidence provided by Soazara's royal funeral, revealing these groups to be Special Servants of the Zafinimena, and the historical inconsistencies in the accounts of these groups, suggest that the sacrifices they offered were not directed to the Zafinifotsy ancestors, but to the Zafinimena rulers. This indicates, moreover, that these groups of servants of Andampy were originally commoner groups, masters of the land, probably ziva allies of the Zafinimena rulers, and not descendants of slaves like the Bevôñy of Ambendraña.

These partial elements suggest that funeral attendants—and human sacrifices more broadly—were less an obligation inflicted on royal slaves than a privilege of the commoner groups of masters of the land, who, through such sacrifices, secured a position of prestige within the kingdom (see also Beaujard 1983: 316–17). Indeed, we have seen that the offering of life in general—in the metonymic form of women or blood—is one of the events that seal a ziva alliance. Hence the possibility of giving

a further interpretation to the term Razañ'olo, which literally means "species," "kind," or "ancestry" ([*ka-*]*razaña*) of "people" (*olo*). These are "people with ancestry." Those we have called the sovereign's Special Servants are in fact the only servants to have ancestors and therefore an ancestral group (karazaña), in contrast to the Sambarivo royal servants who, for the most part, are people torn from their original relationships and therefore strangers without ancestors (Feeley-Harnik 1982: 37).

Indeed, as Feeley-Harnik explains and as we saw during the royal services, the Sambarivo—whether servants of the royal residence or of the royal cemetery—are not comprised of descent groups but are rather organized in "enclosures" (*vala*). These symbolic enclosures structure the space surrounding and protecting the sovereigns (living or dead) in which the servants they group together are arranged. Each enclosure or group of enclosures corresponds to a task (anjara) in the royal services, which is why "labor, not kinship and affinity, was intended to draw this diverse group of strangers together and focus them on royalty" (1982: 39). Yet, as Feeley-Harnik testifies, the Razañ'olo, along with the Antandrano, the People of the Sea, are the only groups of servants not included in these enclosures (1982: 43). Indeed, they are the only servants grouped according to their ancestry. Rather than "Ancestor People," as Feeley-Harnik and Lambek translate Razañ'olo, they are "ancestral groups of people," or "people with ancestry," a name that refers to their status as distinct from that of other royal servants.

In the field, however, my interlocutors often assimilated these groups with ancestors, the king's ziva allies, and the Sambarivo, or slaves without ancestors (Baré 1980: 185). As Feeley-Harnik (1982) shows, this could be the result of a government policy implemented by the Boina rulers aiming "to transform slavery into a more significant instrument of government than it had been before" (1982: 33). Feeley-Harnik describes how, in Boina, the rulers consolidated their power through the intensification of the slave trade with foreigners—particularly the French from the Mascarene Islands—over the course of the eighteenth century (1982: 33). At the same time, these rulers built up a system of internal slavery that changed the relationship between kings and subjects. Although the existence of slavery in the Menabe—both domestic and for the slave trade—has been confirmed from the seventeenth century onward (Schlemmer 1983: 23–24; Lombard 1988: 47; Goedefroit 1998: 133–35), it became an integral part of the Boina kingdoms, driving their expansion to the west coast and other northern regions of the island. It was thanks to this multitude of slaves (Sambarivo, "each is a thousand")

and greater coercive power, gained through firearms obtained from Europeans in exchange for slaves, that the Boina rulers subverted the balance of power with the subjugated commoner groups. Unlike in the kingdoms of the Menabe, the king of the Boina was no longer isolated from the people by groups of commoners, his ziva allies, but by a cohort of slaves, led by these allied groups: the Razañ'olo. Like the transgression of social rules or the strategy of marriage alliances, being surrounded by a fence of ziva allies or slaves—who separate him from the population while acting as intermediaries—is another way for the sovereign to be simultaneously above and part of the people he governs.

At the head of this cohort of servants, the Razañ'olo groups grew throughout the Sakalava conquest of the west coast, incorporating not only prominent groups of masters of the land from the various conquered regions, but also military assistants. This is the case, for example, of the Zafindramahavita who held the position of first official (manantany) of the living sovereign in the Bemihisatra kingdoms of the northwest (Baré 1980: 102). It was by means of arms, then, that this group of commoners became an indispensable intermediary between the king and the rest of his subjects—and this to such an extent that when royal power passed from men to women, after the Merina incursions, it was the manantany of the royal residence who became the real administrator of the kingdom's economic and political power (Baré 1980: 51–52). On the other hand, the other groups of Razañ'olo were increasingly assimilated into the Sambarivo over which they ruled, due in particular to the form that labor took in the royal services, which employed massive numbers of slaves. According to Feeley-Harnik (1982: 45), the group of Sambarivo slaves, strangers without ancestors, represents a model of social organization and production opposed to that of kinship, which was central to the Menabe government. Identified by the place they occupy in the royal enclosure and by their task in the royal services, the Sambarivo thus represent a paradigm for the ritual work in which commoners are also involved, which aims to wrest the latter from their kinship relations and turn them into mere "persons" (*olo*), that is to say, subjects, servants (1982: 46). As we have seen in the Hot Royal Service, it is through this ritual work, which obliges participants—descendants of slaves, nobles, and commoners—to serve for months (or even years) far from their families and daily means of subsistence, that Sakalava commoners are transformed into Sambarivo. The Boina rulers thus used the Sambarivo to distinguish themselves from the commoners and to separate the latter from their original lineages, through the royal services (1982: 44).

Instead of the autochthonization of royal power that the foreign kings of the Menabe achieved through ziva alliances with commoner groups, the Boina sovereigns, having stipulated this same type of alliance with the masters of the land, aimed to alienate the latter through a broadly defined slavery policy.

However, Feeley-Harnik's analysis focuses on the relationship between Sambarivo servants and commoner subjects, neglecting the question of kingdom intermediaries who also came from groups of masters of the land and with whom collateral nobles are assimilated. In essence, she neglects the question of different types of representatives of the power of the silver, or Zafinifotsy, of the kingdom. While her interpretation remains valid, the situation is nonetheless more complex than can be reflected in the dualism presented in her analysis, which pits the king and foreign slaves against native commoner subjects, and consequently pits relations of power and subordination against those of kinship. As we have seen in these pages, there are more than two layers of foreigners and natives that characterize the organization of the kingdom. According to this organization, the foreign king is succeeded by foreign nobles excluded from power—that is, the Nobles of Silver assimilated to native officials, the joking allies of the king. The latter are often linked by matrimonial unions with foreign kings and hold ritual power as well as a share of political power. After this layer of commoners, who made up the king's intermediate enclosure in the Menabe, the enclosure of foreign royal servants—the Sambarivo—was added in the Boina, separating the king from his other subjects, the people (*vohitry*). While it is true that royal policy aims to assimilate these groups of intermediate commoners with the Sambarivo, obscuring the kinship ties that are at the origin of their relationship with the king, it is equally true that these kinship ties are at the root of the entrenchment of royal power in the Boina region. Hence the ambiguity of this hierarchy between commoner ritual leaders—with whom the Descendants of Silver are associated—and the foreign king, which strongly characterizes the Menabe kingdom, but which also persists in the Boina kingdoms. It was this ambiguity that the project to assimilate the masters of the land with foreign slaves, and to transform kinship ties into relationships of subordination, was intended to resolve.

As Feeley-Harnik asserts, and as Soazara's royal funeral demonstrates, it is through royal services—and the organization of space and labor they entail—that commoners, slaves or descendants of slaves, and nobles are all placed on the same plane of "slaves of the Divinity" (*andevon'I Zañahary*). With the national state now having appropriated the coercive

and political power of the Zafinimena rulers, first through the Merina invasions and later French colonization, ritual devices are the Zafinimena rulers' last remaining means of attracting subjects. Hence the importance assumed by ritual officials, that is, the various representatives of silver ritual power. Today, more than ever, "Sakalava make sovereigns reign."

Provisional Answers

Let us return to the two questions I set out to answer in this chapter: who are the Zafinifotsy, and what is the origin of their distinction from the Zafinimena? If Zafinifotsy is a functional category that can encompass different people and groups, what are the historical circumstances and institutional solutions underlying the ritual relationship between the Zafinifotsy and the Zafinimena? As Goedefroit reports, in the Menabe, Nobles of Gold (*andriambolamena*) and Nobles of Silver (*andriambolafotsy*) represent categories that organize royal succession among the king's children. Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) and Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) are a dynastic variant of this same distinctive principle. Despite their reference to generational transmission (*zafi-*, "descendants"), we have seen that these categories are used as "titles" to distinguish those who can become "true Sakalava kings" (as Kamamy put it) from those excluded from the throne. These Descendants of Silver, excluded from power through a progressive decline of noble status (sinking status), are assimilated to the most eminent commoner groups, ziva allies of the sovereign. The latter, as masters of the land and those responsible for the burial of foreign rulers, are also the intercessors of the royal ancestors needed to invoke the latter's blessing to legitimize living rulers. In the diarchic organization of kingship, symbolized by the opposition between gold and silver, or between red and white, the Zafinifotsy thus assume the same function as the masters of the land, ritually legitimizing royal power. Like the masters of the land—the sovereign's ziva allies—the Zafinifotsy play the role of intercessors for the Zafinimena. By virtue of this functional and statutory assimilation, the Zafinifotsy are thus defined as both masters of the land and protectors of the Zafinimena sovereigns. The ziva joking alliance between the masters of the land and the foreign king, on which the ritual role of intercessor is based, is the model for the ambivalent hierarchical relationship between Zafinifotsy and Zafinimena. Since this ziva institution makes it possible to deal with hierarchical or complementary relationships (between wife-givers and

wife-takers, between nobles and commoners) in terms of a "symmetrical" competition (Bateson 1958: 175–78) expressed through jokes, it contributes to making the hierarchy between the two parties ambivalent.

This ambivalent hierarchical relationship between ziva allies is also the model, within the Zafinifotsy, for the relationship between tromba and their servants. As one servant told me, groups of Andampy servants can take things from the Zafinifotsy tromba without the latter being able to refuse. Similarly, the Bevôñy of Ambendraña have the right to inherit objects belonging to mediums possessed by Zafinifotsy tromba at the time of their death. Indeed, these are certain prerogatives that characterize relations between ziva: ziva can take any object belonging to their allies, and on the death of the latter they inherit their property. This association with the ziva is further corroborated by the fact that it was from these groups of servants, notably the Bevôñy and Antifañaiñy, that the intercessors of the tromba andrano came. A ruler claiming to be Zafinifotsy and living in a small village near Maromandia explicitly told me that the Antifañaiñy, the main group of servants of the Ampelabe tromba, were their lohateny, their ziva. This is why this institution of ziva or lohateny, in addition to having been the main instrument of social organization of commoner groups and the cornerstone on which the first Sakalava kingdoms were built, also constitutes a type of relational configuration that is "good to think" (Lévi-Strauss [1962] 2017: 112) about hierarchical relations more generally. Indeed, it is the model from which the Sakalava conceive and describe hierarchical relations between socially and ontologically different groups. Based in turn on the type of relationship that exists between brothers-in-law, between wife-givers and wife-takers, and between cross-cousins, the ziva institution makes it possible to think about and organize relations between spirits and servants, kings and councilors, foreigners and masters of the land, people of power and people of the land.

Finally, the last of the three questions posed at the start of the chapter awaits answering: Given the relational origin of this category of Zafinifotsy, how could it have formed a dynastic branch, whether for the Antankaraña reigning in the north or for the tromba drowned in the Mouth of the Catastrophe? The answer to this question will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

The Return of the Zafinifotsy Ancestors, or the Formation of a Dynasty

Ancestral Paths: Migration and Territorialization

Ambendraña, September 18, 2019. In his house, sheltered from the afternoon sun, the ampangataka of Ambendraña was sharing a bottle of artisanal rum with one of the noblemen of the village, an occasional drunken companion. Showing us the small scars that marked his body, the ampangataka recounted with amusement the fights he used to engage in with zebus (called *tolon'aomby*) during his youth in Ambolobozo, his father's home village where he grew up. Seizing the opportunity of this evocation of his past, I took advantage of a momentary silence—as he poured himself another glass of rum—to ask the ampangataka how he had come from Ambolobozo to Ambendraña and how he had become the intercessor of Bevaoko's tromba:

> AMPANGATAKA: It was my [maternal] grandfather who said to my father: "My rice field is here [in Ambendraña], my residential courtyard [*haramanja*] is here, [your son] will take care of cleaning it and cutting the shrubs and weeds in my rice field." My father accepted …. However, I already belonged to other people, so my grandfather added: "When I take your son away, I'll give the customary offering [*fomba*] for your descent group." We were fourteen children, thirteen of whom survived. But I alone was his share [anjara]. … My father had said to him: "If I have more than two male children, you will

have one [of them]. But if I have only one, you won't have any." So, my eldest brother was born, then another brother arrived, then me. So, my grandfather had me come and live here. … When I arrived in the village, my grandfather was still alive …. After [his death], I was able to perform the jôro [invocation to the lineage ancestors] for my child in [my grandfather's] residential courtyard. The old women of the village arrived: "So, who does the jôro?" they said. "Women can't do jôro in the courtyard! Do the jôro for your child! You alone are the ampijôro [lineage intercessor]. But you don't yet know how to do it, which is why we've come." That's how I, their grandson, came to be in charge of village activities. Even the activities that take place upstairs [to the north], if not communicated to me, are not effective [*masiñy*]—even those of the nobles. … When their decision is communicated to me and I accept it, I tell them: "You can do that, on this or that day." But if I don't accept it, they can't do it! The decisions made there must be in line with my will.

Me: When you arrived here, did you already know the historical narratives [tantara]?

Ampangataka: My grandfather had already begun to take me with him… I used to accompany him when he went to do his meetings. I even accompanied him when he went in search of women! (*He bursts out laughing.*) … I inherited his land here; my grandfather was the owner. This land belongs to me alone. Only when I'm dead will my children fight over it ….

The nobleman: It's like his office, he can't free himself from it [*tsy hafaka*]. He can only get rid of it when he is dead. He carries it with him from the moment he wakes up until he goes to bed. That's why nobody can do his work. It's not like between us nobles: if tomorrow we don't get along with the sovereign, we replace him!

Ampangataka: Only when I die will someone be able to replace me.

Me: Were there any customs you had to follow to inherit the office of ampangataka?

Ampangataka: Yes, my grandfather, when I was quite grown-up, sent a zebu to my father's residential courtyard. Only then was he able to take me from my village. Because on my father's side, I'm Antimahabo, I belong to Nosy Lava. They must have made an invocation to the royal ancestors there. Then I could come here [to Ambendraña].

Me: And to become an ampangataka, was there a custom to follow?

Ampangataka: I had to be introduced [*ampidiriny*] to the Great Royal Residence [*Doany Be*]. On the pirogues, we brought the nobles,

> the villagers, the Divinities possessing the living [the tromba]. Then my grandfather made the invocation [to Bevaoko]. Once the invocation was over, we returned to the village. And that's when I was able to remove the prohibitions from the tromba. The prohibitions of eating chicken or fish, it's me who removes them with invocations.

Like the stories of the kings and queens presented in previous chapters, the life stories of Sakalava peasants are often stories of migration motivated by the will of royal or commoner ancestors. While the preceding pages have focused on collective narratives and practices, in this final chapter I will begin with an analysis of stories recounting fragments of individual lives, such as that of the ampangataka above. The aim, in looking at these life stories, is to question the role that ancestors play in the migratory trajectories of individuals and groups, in the construction of social identity, and in the legitimization of one's rootedness in a given place. More generally, the aim is to show how the fabrication of ancestors and of the relationship with them—notably through rituals and historical narratives—is linked to the construction of social hierarchy and the positioning of individuals or groups within it. It is this double fabrication that legitimizes the formation of new groups, whether they be descent groups, such as the Bevôñy, or dynastic groups, such as the Zafinifotsy. Thus, reconstructing these processes of migration, rooting, and legitimization by ancestors will enable us to put forward a hypothesis on the relatively recent emergence of the dynastic branch of the Zafinifotsy and the cult of the tromba andrano practiced in the Mouth of the Catastrophe. We will begin with individual migration paths.

For the inhabitants of the west coast of Madagascar, traditionally seminomadic and dedicated to cattle-breeding and swidden agriculture (*tavy*), the ancestors buried in a given place constitute both a territorialization and a deterritorialization device. Concerning the case of the Merina villages in the years following colonization (1964–66), Bloch (1971) has shown that migrations from villages where ancestral tombs reside, increasingly frequent since colonial times, represented an escape from the ancestral prohibitions and rigid rules of behavior that reigned in such places, and the possibility for individuals to act more freely in their daily lives. In today's Sakalava context, on the other hand, the case of the ampangataka of Ambendraña shows that this transfer from the village of paternal ancestors to that of maternal ancestors, while freeing him from certain obligations that characterize the servants of the royal cemetery, has nonetheless led the ampangataka to inherit new, more

restrictive prohibitions.[1] As the nobleman who took part in our conversation put it, the ampangataka will never be freed of his position or the many fady associated with it.

Indeed, the migrations of most of the people I met during my fieldwork involved less the circumvention of ancestral authority than the replacement of certain ancestors by others, and consequently of certain fady by others. In the narratives recounted by their own protagonists, displacements are often motivated by the individual or group's submission to the will of the ancestors. And, in some cases, it is a desire to escape the greater freedom of urban life—and the unforeseen and less stable relationships it entails—that motivates a return to the land of the ancestors (*tanin-drazaña*) and the acceptance, once again, of subordination to the rules inherited from them. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 231ff) has shown, the possibility of moving back to the land of the ancestors is especially valid for men and "children of men," as women and "children of women" actually have more opportunities to prosper in town than in their home village, where the former exert greater control over family property.

This choice, which benefits men and children of men, can be illustrated by two life stories: that of Edmond (my first companion in the field), which was recounted to me by his son, Adama; and that of Aimé, temporary successor to the former first official (manantany) of the Nosy Lava royal cemetery.

Edmond's life story: From Nosy Be to Komaronga

Some fifteen years ago, while living in a town on the tourist island of Nosy Be with his then wife, Edmond was struck down with an illness from which he could not recover. After consulting several doctors to no avail, he turned to a diviner-healer (moasy). The moasy told him that

1. Among the many prohibitions that the ampangataka must observe, for example, are those on wearing pants or shoes, on turning on the electric light in the main room of his house, and so on. Like a sovereign, the ampangataka is subject to prohibitions, which is why he is considered a sacred/effective person (*olo masiñy*). In his case, these fady are particularly severe regarding vazaha (European) customs, since the Zafinifotsy ancestors, whom the ampangataka serves, are guardian figures of the *fomba taloha* ("customs of yesteryear"), in contrast to the openness to Westernization that characterizes Zafinimena tromba and sovereigns.

in order to be cured of his illness, he ought to visit his father's home village and ask his paternal ancestors for their blessing. Edmond asked his mother about his father's village. "Your father is dead, but your paternal aunt is still alive. She's in Analalava, go and ask her," she replied. Edmond was in fact born in Antsohihy, where his father and mother had moved after their marriage. When his parents separated, he followed his mother to Ambanja, and had not seen his father or his father's family since. His illness was therefore interpreted as a symptom of his paternal ancestors, whom he had neglected, finally claiming their share.

Following his mother's instructions, Edmond went to Analalava to meet his paternal aunt, Dady Mariety. At the time, Dady Mariety was not in Analalava, but in Jilo, the village where she was born, on the banks of the Loza River. Edmond thus went on to Jilo with his children: Adama and his two eldest daughters. When he met her in her hut, Edmond's aunt revealed that his father's home village was Komaronga, not far from Ambendraña. So, the following day, Dady Mariety organized an invocation to the ancestors, called "holding the ear" (*mitana-sofiny*),[2] to give Edmond the blessing (jôro) of his paternal ancestors—something she could do as the eldest among her father's living siblings. Before Edmond left, Dady Mariety asked him to leave her his child, since she, never having been married, had none. Edmond offered to leave her one of the two girls, but she insisted on keeping the boy, Adama. Finally, Edmond gave in to her request and returned to Nosy Be with his two daughters. A year later, Edmond went to Komaronga to request the blessing of his paternal ancestors from the intercessor (ampijôro) of his father's group. "From that moment on, he began to get better," recounted Adama, concluding the story about his father.

Other Analalava residents told me that Edmond had once made a lot of money collecting fish from local fishermen with a group of Russian collectors, but that one day his house had burned down. It was then that he decided to settle in Komaronga, his land of the ancestors. In 2017 he bought a plot of land in this village, upon which he built his house and continued to collect fish from the village's fishermen for resale in Antsohihy. After spending the first part of his life with his maternal family, he had returned to the land of his paternal ancestors. Since then, he has been in a dispute with his elder brother, who remained in Komaronga, over the management of the family zebus.

2. This invocation to the lineage ancestors involves holding the ear of the person for whom the ancestor's blessing is being invoked.

The life of the first official of the royal cemetery: From Mahajanga to Nosy Lava

Antimahabo on his father's side, Aimé, then acting first official (manantany) of the queen's Royal Sharpening Service, had gone to live with his mother when she separated from his father. From the age of eight, he grew up in the town of Antsohihy, while his elder brother stayed with his father in Nosy Lava. However, Aimé would occasionally return to his father's home in Nosy Lava during school vacations. As an adult, he moved to Mahajanga, where he began working as a fish collector. One day, he consulted a tromba, who told him he had to return home to Nosy Lava. "In my heart, I agreed," he told me, but he continued to work in Mahajanga for another ten years. One day, while fishing, his pirogue capsized and he lost all the fish he had caught. He quarreled with his boss and even spent a week in prison. He then decided to return to the royal cemetery of Nosy Lava. There, as an adult, he began to learn historical accounts, aided by his prior familiarity with the ritual practices he had learned through regular participation in royal services. Thanks to the skills he had acquired through his schooling, he first took on the role of president of the Nosy Lava village community, before being appointed interim first official (manantany) upon the death of Queen Soazara. When I last visited Madagascar to carry out fieldwork in 2019, he had been replaced by one of the sons of the former manantany, who died during the royal funeral. However, he continued to live in Nosy Lava, where he could count on the rice paddies the queen had left to the servants of her ancestors' cemetery to make a living.

In contrast to the migration phenomenon observed by Bloch, these two accounts show that both Edmond and Aimé, according to the guidance of a diviner-healer or tromba, had to return to the rural village of their paternal ancestors to escape the precariousness of town life and work, and to find personal fulfillment. Both healing and personal fulfillment are in fact attributed, by these ritual specialists (traditional interpreters of contemporary problems), to family obligations that pass through the ancestors. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 22) states, losing one's ancestors, or being lost to them, means becoming a slave. The work of someone without ancestors does not contribute to the prosperity of his own ancestry, but to that of others. As we saw in the royal rituals (chapters 3 and 4), it is the attention and care given to the two ancestral sides inherited from both parents that indeed makes an action effective. The ancestors on each side claim their share (anjara). In a virilocal, patrilineal system, one

cannot forget one's paternal ancestors if one wishes to fulfill one's destiny (*vintana* or anjara), as shown by the cases of Edmond and Aimé. But maternal ancestors are also entitled to their share, especially if they serve royal ancestors, as the case of the ampangataka of Ambendraña shows. As Lambek (2002: 88–89) points out, echoing a thesis put forward by Bloch (1986), if Malagasy rituals create the authority of a transcendental order through the symbolic capture of others' and one's own vitality, submitting to the ancestral authority implies access to a "superior form of potency."

Individual agency is in fact dependent on that of one's ancestors. As Cole (2001: 108–9) puts it, the actions of the living must in some way achieve the desires of the ancestors. This is why freedom of choice (*safidy*) is conditioned by the will of the ancestors, and therefore by the family ties that give it concrete form. Individual freedom of choice is therefore expressed in the choices of one's ancestors, to whom one delegates a little of his or her power to in turn make one's actions more effective (*masiñy*) and thus prosper (*manjary*). This range of choices is evoked in the saying of *valo razaña*, the eight ancestors or ancestralities, or *valo añila valo añila*, that is, "eight [ancestors] on one side and eight on the other." What is more, this relative choice between several lineage ancestors can later be extended by agreeing to submit oneself to the will of the royal ancestors. This is a way of escaping the will of the lineage ancestors. It is, for example, the destiny chosen—or imposed—by mediums or royal servants of commoner origin. We can see, therefore, that to submit to one's royal ancestors rather than one's own ancestral lineage entails a dependence on different networks of social relations that extend beyond kinship ties. This underscores the importance of taking such ethical conceptions into account to understand the complex reasons underlying claims of affiliation—individual or collective—to commoner ancestors, but also to royal ancestors, Zafinimena or Zafinifotsy, in the context of contemporary hierarchical and status reformulations.

Becoming an intercessor master of the land

Let us return to the story of the ampangataka and its resonance with the life paths of Edmond and Aimé presented above. What is surprising at first glance in this story is the fact that this leader of the Bevôñy group—a group that claims to be masters of the land—is a foreigner (vahiny), affiliated with the group as a child of a woman. By virtue of his genealogical and residential position, he would therefore be illegitimate

to be assigned the role of leader of the village's ritual activities. As a child of a woman, he is a foreigner to the village his mother had to abandon to join her husband in Ambolobozo, north of Analalava. He would therefore be expected to have fewer rights to dispose of family assets, notably land and zebus, than the children of men in his lineage. It was only as a share claimed by his grandfather from his father's descent group that he was able to take possession of the former ampangataka's property and office. The latter had had no male children. Moreover, the ampangataka is also the share promised by his father, servant of the Zafinimena ancestors, to the Zafinifotsy ancestors whom his mother's group serves. Consequently, not only did he abandon the lands of his father's group (Antimahabo) to serve his mother's group (Bevôñy), but he also renounced serving the Zafinimena ancestors to become the intercessor of the Zafinifotsy ancestors. Therefore, to compensate for this adoption, the maternal grandfather had to offer a zebu to the paternal descent group and invoke the permission of the Zafinimena ancestors of Nosy Lava.

Now, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, in the precolonial and colonial periods, the Antimahabo could not form a descent group because, as captives of the sovereign, they were not allowed to look after their own ancestors to exclusively serve the royal ancestors. But today, most of the Antimahabo, including the ampangataka's father, claim to be of the Makoa group, a name that originally referred to slaves and their descendants. As a new descent group, its members take it upon themselves to bury their dead and pay tribute to them periodically by rebuilding their tombs and sacrificing zebus to them. This is why the ampangataka, at least once a year, traveled to Ambolobozo to look after the tomb of his paternal ancestors. This is the share he periodically owes to the ancestors of his paternal side, who are otherwise deprived of his daily work.

It is no coincidence that these three migration stories concern younger children. Cadets have less power than their elders in the management of family property, just as women have less power than their brothers, or the children of sisters have less power than the children of brothers. The ampangataka, Edmond, and Aimé are all cadets who followed their mother while their elder siblings stayed with their father. But while Edmond and Aimé abandoned the maternal group to return to their paternal relatives, the ampangataka took the opposite route. He replaced the paternal residential courtyard in the village of Ambolobozo with that of Ambendraña, his maternal grandfather's village. Unlike Edmond

and Aimé, who were children of men, the ampangataka did not reclaim his rightful place at birth. As a child of a woman, he had to ritually construct his residential legitimacy with the help of the other villagers. As the ampangataka's testimony suggests, if burying ancestors in a place confers a form of autochthony or mastery over the land, this can also be acquired through the ritual practice of invoking the lineage ancestors to bless one's child born on the spot. The legitimacy of residing in a place is not conferred only by buried ancestors. It can also be acquired—or rather reinforced—by the conception of an offspring on the spot, by the latter's ritual attachment to the local lineage and consequently to the residential courtyard. According to the logic of metonymic identification between father and child, it is thanks to the recognition of the child's autochthony that the father's is also affirmed. This is also corroborated by the use of teknonyms. Moreover, in this ritual practice, although women are not authorized to pronounce the invocation, in the absence of the deceased grandfather they are nevertheless competent to guide the ampangataka in his learning. While the Sakalava proverb states that hens don't crow, in this case it was the hens who taught the rooster to crow.

These dynamics of autochthonization of the new ampangataka were corroborated by the ritual role he assumed vis-à-vis the Zafinifotsy ancestors, particularly Bevaoko, the true master of the land. Once again, it is through an invocation to the royal ancestors that the former intercessor could pass on his office to his uterine grandson, with the endorsement of the other village notables. It was by virtue of this public consecration by the tromba andrano that the ampangataka was able to replace his maternal grandfather as intercessor of Bevaoko and other Zafinifotsy spirits. This role of village ritual leader, traditionally attributed to the masters of the land, is granted to the ampangataka here as a delegate of the Zafinifotsy tromba. By renouncing service to the Zafinimena tromba of Nosy Lava, and to obtain limited access to the inheritance of paternal property, the ampangataka received in exchange the office of intercessor of the Zafinifotsy spirits, the role of ritual leader of Ambendraña, as well as exclusive ownership of the land and zebus that belonged to his maternal grandfather. As ampangataka of Bevaoko, he thus became the living representative of the masters of the land.

However, the autochthony attributed to Bevaoko and the other Zafinifotsy tromba is projected not only on the ampangataka, but also on the Bevôñy as a group, who were originally allochthonous. Indeed, as the Anjango narratives presented in chapter 4 reveal, the ancestors at the origin of this group were also servants of the Zafinimena, offered

by the founding king of the kingdom of Nosy Lava. According to the settlement accounts of the various groups who inhabit the village, these former royal servants were not the first to settle there, nor were they the first group of servants of the Zafinifotsy tromba andrano. To contextualize the arrival of these former royal servants, who gave birth to the future Bevôñy group, we will reconstruct the settlement history of the village of Ambendraña and its region. This will also provide insights into the formation and autochthonization of the Bevôñy group through the worship of Zafinifotsy spirits.

Settlement Stratigraphy: Becoming a Group of Masters of the Land

As I mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, the main descent groups inhabiting the village of Ambendraña today are: (1) the noble Marotsiraty; (2) their Special Servants, mainly from the Antankoala and Jingô groups; (3) the Bevôñy; (4) the Sandrakôro; (5) the Manañadabo; and, in smaller numbers, (6) the Antifañaiñy. However, the historical accounts of Ambendraña evoke other groups that have disappeared. Although the Bevôñy claim to be the village's masters of the land, it was the ampangataka himself who told me that the Bevôñy were not the original occupants of this land. It was rather a people belonging to a group called Sandrematra, now almost "extinct" (*lany*) because of the bilateral descent strategy of the nobles of Ambendraña, who, upon their arrival, had allied themselves with them. Through exogamous alliances and the bilateral transmission of their status, the Marotsiraty nobles assimilated the Sandrematra descendants into their descent group. Indeed, as Goedefroit (1998: 95) notes, in the Sakalava monarchies, royal blood is conceived as endowed with an extra-ordinary strength (*mahery*) capable of breaking other ties of consanguinity. It is the same strength that also threatens the survival of the Bevôñy group, which is also being gradually assimilated by the nobles. As the ampangataka told me, Sandrematra was a lineage of the Misohery descent group of Special Servants (Razañ'olo) whom we found at the funeral of the queen. It was to escape the Zafinimena sovereigns that this group of Special Servants found refuge north of the Loza—that is, to escape the privilege of becoming the king's sacrificial mats.

Other accounts suggest that, before the arrival of the Marotsiraty nobles and the Bevôñy, the Sandrematra/Misohery were not the only inhabitants of this region. According to the testimony of Boriaka, the village's eldest noblewoman, the region's first occupants were other groups

of Special Servants: the Manañadabo and the Antifañaiñy. According to this noblewoman, it was the Manañadabo who sold the land to Europeans (vazaha), identifiable with the French colonizers. It is therefore likely that the Manañadabo were literally among the region's masters of the land when the French arrived in the nineteenth century. As for the Antifañaiñy, we have seen in the accounts of the toñy in Anjango (chapter 4) that it was from this group that the first intercessor of the Zafinifotsy spirits was probably drawn. And it was to this group that the Zafinimena sovereign turned for help against the arrival of the Merina. According to the dynamics of power distribution between foreign kings and local intercessors that I illustrated in chapter 7, the Antifañaiñy's ritual role of intercessor of the Zafinifotsy spirits could be an indication that they were masters of the land when the Zafinimena nobles arrived. These Antifañaiñy constitute one of the first groups of servants of the tromba andrano, while the Bevôñy are people given later by the sovereign of Nosy Lava as payment for the debt contracted for the vow fulfilled by the Zafinifotsy spirits.

In short, these accounts indicate that, before the French colonizers imposed settlement and the founding of new villages, the Loza region was inhabited by seminomadic groups that included, in addition to the Special Servants of the Sandrematra/Misohery group, those of the Manañadabo and Antifañaiñy groups. For material or ritual reasons, the latter two groups are identified as the first masters of the land, who would then have been confronted with newcomers such as the Bevôñy, Sandrakôro, or Zafinimena (fig. 28).

Migratory layers and ritual relations

In the absence of historical evidence, valuable clues as to the order of arrival of other descent groups can be provided by the ziva alliances that link these groups together. Since the main function of these alliances is to integrate a newly arrived group into those already established on site, we can hypothetically reconstruct a settlement stratigraphy on the basis of the testimonies of these ritual alliances. The importance of this institution for reconstructing migrations in Madagascar had already been noted by Jean-Claude Hébert (1958: 302) in his study on the subject. As we have already seen, according to local accounts, there is a ziva alliance between the Bevôñy and the Sandrakôro. These two groups of tromba andrano servants both declare themselves masters of the land of Ambendraña. Thanks to the ziva alliance forged by the intermarriages

between the two groups, they are almost assimilated: in the words of the noble Boriaka, "They are one person (*olo araiky*)." As for the Sandrakôro, they are also the ziva allies of the Manañadabo. I witnessed this alliance at the funeral of one of the members of the Manañadabo group, in November 2016. It was the Sandrakôro who watched over the deceased young woman's corpse before her burial, who dug the grave, and who were mentioned as the ziva allies during the final speech delivered by the eldest member of the family. The juxtaposition of these ritual alliances with previous accounts suggests that the Sandrakôro arrived in the region before the Bevôñy and after the Manañadabo settlement. They would have gained access to the land through the ziva alliance with the ancient masters of the land. According to Poirier (1953: 27), these Sandrakôro are a branch of the Jingô, present in some villages and in the city of Ambanja north of the Loza River at the time. If Poirier is right, this group, like the other masters of the land, would also have been part of the Special Servants (Razañ'olo) of the Zafinimena rulers. It would therefore be the Razañ'olo, on the run from their rulers, who populated this region north of the Loza on a more permanent basis, mainly the part stretching from the Sambirano valley to the north, where the city of Ambanja is located (fig. 29).

The former slaves of the rulers of Nosy Lava, the Bevôñy, only arrived later. They would then have allied themselves with the Sandrakôro to settle in the region. By analogy with the case of the Menabe rulers, it is possible that it was through this same ziva alliance that these former Zafinimena slaves, the Bevôñy, constituted themselves as a group of descendants, appropriating the zebu earmark of their allies, former commoner servants of the same rulers. An alliance device between two groups as well as a means of social distinction and identification, this ziva alliance probably enabled not only the foreign Maroseràña kings to constitute themselves as a dynasty, but also the former slaves to form descent groups, identified by the earmark given to their herd. As evidenced by Goedefroit (1998: 135) for the Menabe region, one of the strategies used by former slaves to form a descent group consisted in adopting the earmark of the zebus and the social identity of their former masters, who had often become their allies (see also Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 101–2, 342; and Molet 1953: 19). This identification between master and dependent through livestock markings is indeed a documented practice among various nomadic populations, such as the Arabs of northern Kanem in Chad (Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1979: 356), the Toubou in Niger (Baroin 1985: 88), and—beyond the

African continent—the Mongolians (Humphrey 1974: 480). Among these populations, such markings conveyed not only ties of kinship and alliance but also relationships of vassalage or servitude (Landais 2000: 355).

Building on this practice, Sakalava kings and slaves—outsiders situated at the two extremes of the social hierarchy—have used the same integration strategy at different times. While the kings adopted it mainly when founding their kingdoms, their slaves were only able to use it when French colonization abolished slavery, first in 1849 on the island of Nosy Be, then in 1896 in the rest of Madagascar. As the oral traditions analyzed in chapter 4 indirectly indicate, it was indeed after the arrival of the French in the region and the abolition of slavery (1897) that the ancestors of the Bevôñy arrived in the place where the village of Ambendraña stands today. Their deliverance from the duty of human sacrifice that awaited them is in fact attributed to the arrival of the vazaha (Europeans). Through a process of autochthonization similar to that of the ampangataka, it is as living representatives of the Zafinifotsy spirits, the true masters of the land, that the Bevôñy claimed to be masters of the land. This ritual and statutory position of masters of the land was further consolidated by the arrival of the foreign Marotsiraty nobles, before which the Bevôñy were effectively the last masters of the village.

According to the accounts of the arrival of the Ambendraña nobles that I have already mentioned, their settlement in the village was authorized or approved by Bevaoko's tromba. According to Bevôñy accounts, there was a pact between themselves and the nobles, which, through Bevaoko, enabled the nobles to settle and prosper in the village. As Faustine (the Bevôñy I met in Analalava) confirmed to me, this pact was in fact a ziva alliance, forged through one or more marriages. "They wouldn't even be ten people, the nobles," Faustine told me, "If they hadn't 'taken people from us' [*mahazo olo aminay*]!" So, it was through these alliances with freed former slaves that the nobles prospered, appropriating part of the Bevôñy's descendants and consequently their rice fields and herds. It was this assimilating aspect of the nobles' alliance strategies that the ampangataka denounced, and that had already led to the disappearance of one of the first groups of masters of the land, the Sandrematra. That is why today Ambendraña is known as "the village of nobles," of the "Many-not-ugly" (Marotsiraty). Only after the arrival of these nobles did their Special Servants from Antankoala and Jingô groups settle in the region.

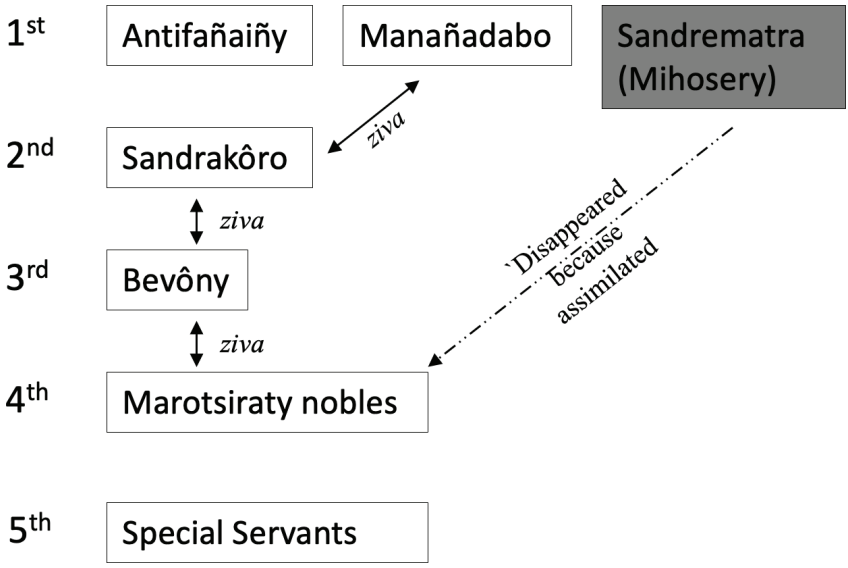


Figure 28. Order of arrival of Ambendraña descent groups

Masters of the land and foreign landowners

Then the vazaha arrived. The presence of a French colonist in the village mentioned by residents is also documented in the National Archives of Antananarivo, at least from 1956 onward.[3] This French settler is described as the owner of fifteen hectares of rice fields and ninety-nine hectares of saltworks in the village of Ambendraña. His name, as confirmed by the memory of the villagers, was Baillif. According to the story told by the president of Ambendraña's village community (fokontany), this vazaha obtained the land—which largely belonged to the Manañadabo—in exchange for protecting the villagers from forced labor imposed by the colonial administration. It was only after independence that the father of the current fokontany president bought back the land. Today, the fokontany president, occupying the house of this former colonist, is the largest landowner in the Ambendraña region, with thirty hectares of rice fields, double the amount owned by the colonist in 1956. The second largest family estate belongs to a family of Marotsiraty nobles (twelve hectares), while the ampangataka owns just over three hectares of rice fields, and the sovereign (at the

3. Analalava Monography 1956.

time of my fieldwork) just over one hectare. By contrast, in terms of statutory and descent groups, the registers that the fokontany president allowed me to consult show the Marotsiraty nobles to be Ambendraña's largest rice paddy owners, with around eighty hectares of land distributed among forty-eight declared owners. They are followed in second place by the president (thirty hectares), then the Sandrakôro (fifteen hectares). As for the Bevôñy, four owners own around nine hectares of rice fields. Last but not least, only one Manañadabo owner has a whole hectare. The Antifañaiñy and other Special Servants are absent from this register. If, on the other hand, we look at the registers of zebu owners, we find that the nobles own around seventy, the Bevôñy around fifty, the Manañadabo around twenty, and the Sandrakôro less than ten.

What do these data tell us about the history of the village's settlement and its influence on current hierarchies and inequalities? Contrary to current Bevôñy rhetoric, according to which the nobles of Ambendraña, as foreign rulers, do not own land, these foreign nobles are currently, along with the fokontany president, Ambendraña's primary landowners. Their status as landless foreigners appears more as an ideological principle to uphold the image of foreign sovereignty, echoing the Nyoro adage reported by John Beattie (1971: 166): "[The king] rules the people, the clans rule the land." The former masters of the land, whether Manañadabo or Antifañaiñy, no longer possess the material basis of their status, having probably ceded their lands to the vazaha Baillif. However, the Manañadabo have retained their statutory prestige as former masters of the region by keeping a relatively large herd of zebus. Similarly, the social prestige of the nobles is reflected in the size of their herd, which also confirms the success of their alliance strategy with local groups. The number of zebus also attests to the Bevôñy's second place in the current local hierarchy as representatives of the Zafinifotsy tromba and therefore guardians of the zebus offered by the tromba's faithful and mediums in exchange for granted vows.

Ultimately, beyond the rhetoric regarding the relative statutory opposition between masters of the land and foreigners, it is the nobles and the state official—two kinds of foreigners embodying the two forms of government, that of the sovereigns and that of the pale-eyed people—who today own most of the land in Ambendraña. This is true regardless of whether it is through the strength of their status capable of assimilating their allies or through the power inherited by the former colonizers that they have maintained their place in the hierarchical order.



Figure 29. Map of the region with main places of interest

French colonization and the historical context

These fragmentary elements suggest that Ambendraña's settlement is relatively recent. The arrival of most of the groups of Special Servants of the Zafinimena rulers, who came to populate the region, may indeed date back to the mid-nineteenth century. It was initially triggered by the abolition of slavery on the island of Nosy Be, declared by the French in 1849 after they acquired the island in 1841. The reform imposed by colonization led to the dispersal of nobles opposed to abolition and their servants to the mainland, who took refuge in the Sambirano valley, north of Loza bay. The antiabolitionist and anticolonial revolt (Sanchez 2013b) of the Sakalava nobles and other slave-owners that followed caused, among other things, the departure of the new Bemihisatra ruler Rano (or Añono, according to Baré), alias Ndramamitraña, the great-grandfather of Queen Soazara. At about six years of age, he first found refuge on the shores of Narindra Bay, and later on the island of Nosy Lava, where he established his new kingdom. He was led there by some of his Muslim advisors, notably the Zafindramahavita, themselves slave owners, with the collaboration of Arab merchants involved in the slave trade (Baré 1980: 56–57; Berger 2006: 329). According to Baré, Rano/Ndramamitraña's father, who was the son of the Zafinimena queen Tsiomeko, was the brother of the Zafinifotsy ruler of the Antankaraña kingdom (1980: 52). If Baré were right, this would make the future king of Nosy Lava both Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy. Moreover, the island of Nosy Lava, where he founded his kingdom, belonged to the kingdom of Antankaraña. Although ceded to the French in 1841, the island was not actually recovered by them until 1897 (Berger 2006: 312n88).

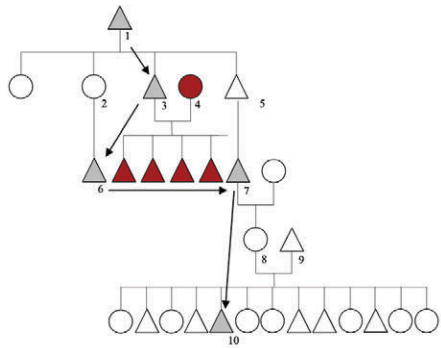
When Rano-Ndramamitraña and his councilors arrived in the Nosy Lava region, it appeared to be semiabandoned (Guillain 1845: 202–3) because of the Merina incursions. It is with the establishment of the new Sakalava kingdom on Nosy Lava that the region began to be repopulated. Faced with the threat of losing their servants and their power, the representatives of the Nosy Lava kingdom agreed to temporarily submit to the suzerainty of the Merina, who were still militarily present on the mainland. This strategic alliance ensured the representatives of the Nosy Lava kingdom at least the preservation of hierarchical order and a degree of political autonomy (Baré 1980: 57; Sanchez 2013a: 429). Furthermore, the kingdom's representatives and their new Merina protectors had a shared interest in preserving the slave trade against the abolitionist will of the French (Berger 2006: 329).

While, on the island of Nosy Lava, King Rano/Ndramamitraña and his court were reconstituting the kingdom, in the Sambirano region, the conflict between the French, Merina, and Sakalava compelled various nobles and their servants to flee and scatter across the region. It is within this context of instability, which lasted at least until the final anti-French rebellion in 1898–99 (Paillard 1983), and in which small kingdoms were unraveling and reforming, that royal servants fled from their former masters to settle in uninhabited regions or submit to new masters. This was, at least, what Captain Toquenne observed in 1897. He described the Loza region as being divided between the north of the estuary and the south (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 136). While the south, where the new royal capital was located, was under the rule of King Tondroko—father of Soazara and grandson of Ndramamitraña—the north, where Ambendraña is located, much less populated, was governed by several rulers who had retained a degree of independence (Toquenne 1897: 972). The latter did not appear, at that moment, to be surrounded by the same court of servants (1897: 973). It was probably with the abolition of slavery throughout the island in 1896 and the repression that followed the revolts of 1898–99 (Waast 1980; Sanchez 2013b) that other freed slaves and groups of servants migrated to this region and joined these independent rulers north of the Loza.

The Formation and Evolution of a Cult

The pact with the drowned spirits and the masters of the land

By comparing these historical records with oral accounts of the region, it appears that from the mid-nineteenth century onward the Ambendraña region became increasingly populated by different groups of Special Servants, whether Misohery/Sandrematra or Jingô/Sandrakôro. The latter would have joined the Manañadabo and Antifañaiñy, to whom would have been added slaves who, thanks to the joking alliances established with the most recent occupants, would have formed the Bevôñy descent group. This process of freed slaves forming new descent groups was indeed a widespread phenomenon at the time and was encouraged by the colonial administration. Thanks to the introduction of wage labor by the colonizers and despite its being refused by the nobles, those who had previously been slaves were the first to be recruited. With their wages, some former slaves were able to buy back their former masters'



1: Golo (Bevôñy/Antifañaiñy ?); 2: Tolotro (Bevôñy); 3: Kamby (Bevôñy); 4: Dabo (Marotsiraty noble); 5: Dedy (Bevôñy); 6: Voavy (Bevôñy); 7: Zara (Bevôñy); 8: Marodady (Bevôñy); 9: Tsarasoa (Antimahabo/Makoa); 10: Jaomisy (Bevôñy [Makoa]).
In gray, the ampangataka, the arrows indicating the passage of the load.
In red, the Marotsiraty nobles (ampanjaka). Since descendants of nobles inherit this status through their mother or father, and nobles cannot be intercessors of Zafinifotsy spirits, the office of intercessor was passed down from Kamby to his elder sister's child.

Figure 30. Genealogy of Bevôñy ampangataka from Ambendraña

possessions (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 138). In particular, they were able to acquire zebus to perform ritual exchanges between lineages (Waast 1980: 48–49) and thus integrate into the new social context. Finally, by caring for their dead and thus creating their ancestors, they were able to gain recognition as a legitimate descent group entitled to occupy the land where its ancestors are buried. The formation of the Bevôñy group must be considered within this broader context. Indeed, the genealogy of the Bevôñy intercessors provided to me by the current intercessor traces the founding ancestor of their group back to this period—more precisely, to the end of the nineteenth century (fig. 30).

The formation of the Bevôñy group having taken place toward the end of the nineteenth century is also corroborated by the accounts of the pact between the king of Nosy Lava and the Zafinifotsy spirits mentioned in chapter 4. According to these accounts, the king's vow to protect his kingdom from the Merina would have been made after 1849, the date of the kingdom's founder's arrival in Nosy Lava. The gift from the Bevôñy ancestors in payment of the debt is supposed to have occurred after 1897, the date of the arrival of the French in the region, who are said to have put an end to human sacrifice and saved these royal servants from death. But the story of this oath between the sovereign and the Zafinifotsy spirits seems less the testimony of a historical event than the revival of a narrative tradition. Indeed, almost identical versions of this story can be found in the oral traditions of the Sakalava Mañoroaomby

of Nosy Be, reported by Baré (1980: 151). In the Nosy Be version, it is Queen Tsiomeko, mother of the founder of the kingdom of Nosy Lava, who asked her Sakalava Mañoroaomby intercessor to pronounce an invocation over the sea to prevent the Merina from reaching Nosy Be with their boats. As in the Nosy Lava version, the Merina boats were wrecked, and all of their passengers perished. The narrative schema of this story therefore seems to have been transposed onto the context of Nosy Lava by the same groups of servants from Nosy Be who would have brought Queen Tsiomeko's successor to the island. A clue to this narrative transposition can be found in the discrepancy between the content of the story and the historical context to which it refers, since at the time of King Ndramamitraña's installation on the island of Nosy Lava, he was an ally of the Merina and not an enemy threatened by them.

If this story is, however, based on the memory of a real pact between the spirits of the drowned nobles and the ruler of Nosy Lava, what would the nature of this pact have been? Was it perhaps to defend himself against the arrival of the French that Ndramamitraña sought help from these drowned nobles? Another possible explanation might be the need for this foreign king to obtain the permission and blessing of the local tutelary spirits to legitimize the establishment of his kingdom in their territory. According to the dynamics of the formation of the Sakalava kingdom described in the previous chapter, the blessing of the local spirits, conveyed through their living representatives—the masters of the land—was essential to the legitimacy and prosperity of the new kingdom. In order to establish himself and prosper, the king of Nosy Lava is said to have given back his share to the spirits of the drowned nobles by founding their toñy, offering them human lives (ultimately spared by the French), and setting up a cycle of offerings and ritual services dedicated to these spirits, masters of the land. As oral traditions suggest, this request was made through the first Antifañaiñy intercessor of these spirits. This ritual role of the intercessor suggests that a ziva-like alliance had been established between the Sakalava ruler and the Antifañaiñy, who were among the first to settle these lands and to be responsible for the cult of the drowned nobles as masters of the region. It was probably during this period that the Antifañaiñy, masters of the land, along with the other groups present in Andampy today (the Antifañivaña, Antifarimay, etc.), would have become new groups of Special Servants of the Zafinimena rulers of Nosy Lava. It was to these rulers of Nosy Lava that such groups had to offer teenagers to be sacrificed at royal funerals, as evoked by the account of the Zafinifotsy servant quoted in chapter 4—at

least until the arrival of the French colonizers a few years later. This is why these groups of Andampy descendants, while serving the Zafinifotsy spirits, continued to give their share of zebus and labor to the Zafinimena, as attested by their presence at Soazara's funeral.

The "traveling companions" of drowned nobles and the founding of the cult

The question remains: How could a cult dedicated to drowned nobles fleeing from Marangibato have been initially administered by the Antifañaiñy, only to be taken over by former slaves of the king of Nosy Lava? On the basis of the limited data at our disposal, I can only propose hypotheses. A first possibility is that these Antifañaiñy were indeed simple healers—as their name suggests—accompanying the drowned nobles as they fled to the west coast. They would have settled on this coast after the drowning of their masters. Only once they had settled in and forged alliances with local groups would they have constituted themselves as a descent group, responsible for the cult of their former masters who had committed suicide. This would explain their absence from accounts of descent groups living in the Marangibato region today.

Another hypothesis could be that this descent group, attested in the Sambirano valley and known for their abilities as healers, used their ritual prestige to appropriate a cult of drowned nobles brought by other groups who took refuge in the region after the suicide of their masters. This is suggested by Poirier's (1953) census of groups in the region, which briefly describes one of the current groups of tromba andrano servants living in the villages of Andampy and Anjango: the Antifañivaña. According to Poirier, the Antifañivaña group originated in the Bealanana region, east of Analalava (1953: 25). Moreover, Poirier (1953: 25) asserts that some members of this descent group emigrated to the west coast with their "*Mpanjaka*," their nobles. Bealanana is mentioned by the ampangataka of Ambendraña as one of the villages where the drowned nobles had taken refuge before arriving on the Loza. Some of the nobles who descended from the Marangibato region to the west coast could therefore correspond to the nobles who committed suicide in the Loza. Their Antifañivaña servants may have found refuge on the northern banks of the Loza, successively participating in the settlement of other villages in the region. Moreover, Molet (1959: 123), in his monograph on the Tsimihety, reports an "assimilation" between the Antifañivaña group and the Zafinifotsy branch of collateral nobles settled in Marangibato. This assimilation may have taken place through ziva alliances, following the

example of the strategies of the rulers of Menabe and Boina. Just as the Maroseràña rulers of the Menabe allied themselves with local groups, leading to the formation of new groups, so the collateral nobles of Marangibato integrated with local groups, giving rise to new descent groups including the Antifañivaña.

The Antifañivaña could therefore have been the traveling companions and ziva allies of the drowned nobles. Witnesses to their masters' suicide, the Antifañivaña would thus have elaborated and transmitted the story of this tragic event. As ritual allies of the departed nobles, they would have contributed to the birth of the cult of the spirits through the contributions of ritual specialists such as the Antifañaiñy, the Healers. This role of cult originators is suggested by the presence of Antifañivaña in the two villages where the main Zafinifotsy toñy are located, Andampy and Anjango. However, the first hypothesis does not exclude the second, since the Antifañaiñy, the Healers, could have migrated with the nobles of Marangibato and their other companions to the west before establishing themselves as a descent group once established there. Alternatively, they may have arisen from an internal division within the Antifañivaña. What seems certain is that these two groups, currently established in Andampy, were the first to inscribe the memory of the suicide of the nobles in the landscape and to venerate the drowned ancestors. It was only later that the Bevôñy took up the cult of the tromba andrano.

Other accounts suggest that the Antifañaiñy and Antifañivaña who settled on the banks of the Loza had encountered representatives of the Manañadabo there who were followers of this cult and would become their first allies. The presence of the Manañadabo and the cult of the drowned spirits in the region is in fact confirmed by the testimony of Mellis (1938: 11), who visited the region from late 1899. In addition to the village of Ambendraña (called "Ambendro"), Mellis also mentions the Manañadabo as "Volafotsy princes" loyal to the cult of the tromba andrano (1938: 47). The village of Ambendraña here appears to have been founded before the end of the nineteenth century. It is probable that the Manañadabo, the main followers of the cult administered by the Antifañaiñy and Antifañivaña, were already living there. Mellis also writes that the Manañadabo "claim to be from these Volafotsy princes" (1938: 47), which is not confirmed by my fieldwork. According to my data, the members of the Manañadabo group occupy only a marginal place in the cult of the tromba andrano, and they do not claim to be descendants of the drowned nobles. Mellis's identification of the Manañadabo with the Volafotsy, or Zafinifotsy, seems to be an interpretation from

the perspective of the dynastic narratives of the Zafinifotsy Antankaraña nobles, with whom he conducted most of his research. Moreover, as we mentioned, this assimilation would also be motivated by his desire to reduce all the dominant groups in Madagascar to the opposition between Gold (*Volamena*) and Silver (*Volafotsy)* dynasties (Mellis 1938: 7).

As their oral traditions documented by Guillain (1845) confirm, the Manañadabo present in the region are indeed former chiefs from the Betsiboka region, south of Mahajanga. They are said to have been subjugated by the first Zafinimena ruler, Andriamandisoarivo, and thus to have become Special Servants of the Zafinimena. This seems to be confirmed by their current role as messengers—and their former privilege as funeral attendants—of the Zafinimena rulers (Dandouau 1911: 171). If, as Mellis testifies, the Manañadabo participated in the cult of drowned spirits, it seems that they did so not so much because they were descendants of the same dynastic branch, but rather to gain access to the fertility of the land, of which the drowned spirits were the holders. It is possible that it was with the arrival of the Marotsiraty nobles from Ambendraña that the Manañadabo lost their role as the main followers of the tromba andrano cult. According to the structural relationship between masters of the land and foreign rulers, this new group of foreign dominants replaced the old group as the main claimants of the land's fertility from the spirits who are its masters. In any case, the testimony of Mellis (1938: 47) attests that an annual service dedicated to the drowned spirits already existed at the end of the nineteenth century.

It is possible that it was through the inclusion of the cult of the drowned nobles in the Bemihisatra kingdom, as desired by the first sovereign of Nosy Lava, that the process of dynastic unification of the Zafinifotsy was able to extend outside the Antankaraña kingdom. If this unification was elaborated by the narratives of the Antankaraña sovereigns, it was in fact able to rely on the dualistic ritual organization of the Loza estuary put in place by the king of Nosy Lava, a descendant in the paternal line of the Zafinifotsy Antankaraña.

Encompassing the cult and the two sides of the ruler of Nosy Lava

As we saw in chapter 4, oral traditions from Anjango and Andampy suggest that it was the first king of Nosy Lava who integrated the cult of tromba andrano—founded by the Antifañivaña/Antifañaiñy—into the ritual system of his kingdom. As royal spirits, masters of the region's land, and rainmakers, the tromba andrano were essential to the

legitimization and prosperity of the new kingdom. Given the diarchy of royal power between foreign king and masters of the land, it was in the best interests of the king of Nosy Lava to assimilate the spirits of these collateral nobles, masters of the land, with his paternal ancestors from the Antankaraña region, who claimed to be Zafinifotsy.

On the basis of these ideological presuppositions, the institution of a ritual cycle incorporating the cult of the drowned nobles contributed to the structuring of a cult system pitting the reigning Zafinimena of Nosy Lava against the drowned Zafinifotsy of Loza. This opposition is dramatized in the ritual *rebiky* dance, which sees the Zafinimena, dressed in red, confront the Zafinifotsy, dressed in white, and refers to the conflicts between the descendants of the two dynastic groups (Feeley-Harnik 1988). It is not unlikely that this ritual dance was also created by the rulers of Nosy Lava and their advisors, since it is the servants of the rulers of Nosy Lava who perform it today, not only in the Analalava region but, probably, also during the Great Service in Mahajanga, further south.

Through this ritual system, the founder of the kingdom of Nosy Lava would have corroborated the genealogical claims of the Antankaraña rulers who, by virtue of a common geographical origin, claimed a dynastic unity between themselves and the Sakalava nobles of Marangibato. This dynastic unity was presented under the ambiguous name of "Descendants of Silver" (Zafinifotsy). Absent from historical accounts before the end of the nineteenth century, the dynasty of the Descendants of Silver, reported essentially by the traditions of the Antankaraña, would have been elaborated by the rulers of this region at this time at the latest—and this, for political reasons. The king of Nosy Lava could have had access to the Antankaraña dynastic narratives through his kingdom's officials who raised him. These royal officials, in the service of his mother, Tsiomeko, lived together with the Antankaraña ruler and his relatives in 1836. They took refuge together on the island of Nosy Be (Guébourg 1999: 75n77; Baré 1980: 52) to escape the incursions of their common enemy, the Merina, against whom they had allied themselves (Berger 2006: 326). It was probably at this time that Queen Tsiomeko married the brother of the Antankaraña king and that, under the new alliance with the Zafinimena (fig. 31), the Antankaraña nobles elaborated the dynastic narrative of the Zafinifotsy.

The king of Nosy Lava then sent his servants, ancestors of the Bevôñy, to serve the tromba andrano, not so much to fulfill the pact made with them against the Merina as to integrate their cult into the kingdom's ritual system. By sending his servants, the ruler of Gold was able

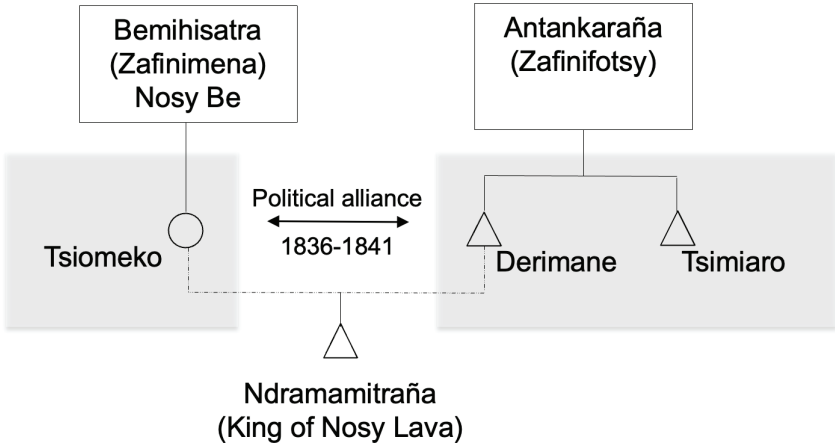


Figure 31. Diagram of the genealogical and political links between the two royal dynasties inherited by Ndramamitraña

to secure greater control over the power of ritual legitimization held by these spirits, masters of the land, and their living servants. At least this was the intention of the ruler, from which these same servants benefited through the transformations introduced by colonization. The appropriation of the role of tromba andrano's intercessor, previously the prerogative of the Antifañaiñy and Antifañivaña, may in fact have fostered the servants' entrenchment in the region and legitimized their new social identity as a descent group. This legitimacy is probably linked to the foundation of a new toñy altar in Ambendraña. According to what the ampangataka of Ambendraña told me, this toñy was founded by a foreign medium possessed by the Bevaoko tromba. However, as accounts of the founding of the toñy in Anjango attest, at the time of the pact between King Ndramamitraña and the drowned spirits, these spirits did not yet inhabit the body of any living medium. The foundation of the toñy in Ambendraña therefore necessarily occurred after the pact. Other historical data suggest that it was probably from 1916 onward that the first tromba andrano arrived to possess the living in the villages of the Loza and contributed to the foundation of various toñy in the region.

The arrival of tromba and toñy

The evolution of the cult through the establishment of toñy and mediums would have been induced by a measure taken by the colonial

administration in its spatial reorganization of the Bemihisatra kingdom. As Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 145) attests, in 1911 a prison was built on the island of Nosy Lava on the orders of French colonizers based in Analalava. It was built near the new royal cemetery where Ndramamitraña had been buried in 1865. Following the colonial administrators' observation of the connivance between the servants of the royal cemetery and the prisoners who escaped from the prison built there, and in order to free up more manpower, in 1916 the servants were transferred to a village on the coast of the Ambolobozo peninsula, north of Analalava (1991a: 146). This is the same region that the father of today's ampangataka of Ambendraña came from. This move not only created a rift—destined to widen—between the servants of the royal ancestors living in northern Loza and those of the living sovereigns established in the south. It also favored the spread of the tromba cult in the region (1991a: 147). It is probably this migratory phenomenon involving the servants of the royal cemetery, but above all the mediums residing in Nosy Lava, that contributed to the proliferation of the tromba cult in the various villages of the region. It is also what enabled the cult to assume its current form, centered on possession by the tromba in addition to the royal services of maintaining the toñy. It is therefore from 1916 onward that Bevaoko's toñy in Ambendraña could have been founded and the first Bevôñy intercessor recognized in the village. Formed into a descent group thanks to the ziva alliance with the Sandrakôro, these former slaves of Ndramamitraña would have ritually legitimized their position within the region's commoner groups as the new leaders of this local cult. Thanks to this new ritual role and the new royal ancestors to serve, they would have concealed—or attempted to conceal—their servile origins linked to the former masters of Nosy Lava. By abandoning the old masters, they found new ones over whom they had greater control.

The arrival of foreign nobles and the position of masters of the land

As we have seen, the Bevôñy claim the status of masters of the land as living representatives of the spirits who are regarded as the true masters of the land of the region. This status was corroborated by the arrival of the Marotsiraty nobles, which made the Bevôñy the last occupants vis-à-vis new outsiders. The arrival of the Marotsiraty nobles may have been favored by the conjunction of three reforms introduced by French colonization: (1) the establishment of an internal protectorate with the support of the nobles; (2) the cession of new lands to the nobles; and (3) the

effort to settle populations through the formation of villages governed by the "thirty roofs" (*telopolo tafo*) rule. Indeed, the centrifugal tendencies of the nobles and servants who had dispersed after the 1899 rebellion (Waast 1980: 56–58) were counterbalanced by the doctrine of internal protectorates elaborated by Pennequin, General Gallieni's successor as governor-general of Madagascar. As Waast reports (1980: 52), unlike his predecessor, Pennequin had learned a lesson from the 1899 anticolonial revolt and had understood the great influence the nobles had on the populations of the northwest. Power was thus given to these nobles by the colonial reorganization in order to indirectly control the population. Thanks to the establishment of this internal protectorate, several sovereigns were invested with administrative positions, such as governor or deputy-governor. Tondroko, sovereign of the Southern Bemihisatra and father of Soazara, was appointed deputy-governor in 1905, and Queen Binao, sovereign of the Northern Bemihisatra residing in Nosy Be, was appointed governor in 1895. As Baré (1980: 76–77, my translation) reports, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Queen Binao "had in fact used her title of political governor, which legally allowed her a certain number of administrative acts to grant members of the royal family or small *anadoany* [collateral] nobles landed estates; thus … the Marotsiraty of Ambendraña [received] around seventy-five [hectares]." It was probably around this time that the nobles of Ambendraña took possession of their estate in the region. This estate, which today exceeds eighty hectares, has increased in size thanks to the alliance strategy these nobles adopted with local landowners. A final factor that contributed to their settlement in the region and shaped the structure of the village as it appears today was the housing and settlement policy put in place by colonization from 1911 onward. This housing policy called for the various hamlets and small villages scattered across the island's rural areas to be agglomerated into villages with a minimum of thirty roofs (Fremigacci 2014: 402). Rather than being called by Bevaoko to settle within the village, the nobles would therefore have been urged by the colonizers to reside among the other local groups and possibly exercise their statutory authority over them to keep the peace.

It was the installation of nobles in the village of Ambendraña that may have influenced the conformation of the cult there. Nobles of Silver in relation to the rulers of Nosy Lava or Nosy Be, the Marotsiraty nobles, as a collateral branch, would have become Nobles of Gold on the spot, as new kings. As we saw in chapter 7, since nobles are originally defined as Zafinifotsy in relation to Zafinimena, the dualistic opposition

that currently structures the village probably crystallized with the arrival of nobles. Having taken possession of political power, they would have locally reactivated the opposition between foreign sovereigns of gold and masters of the land of silver. Following an analogist (Descola 2005: 280–81; Berger 2006: 414–16) and segmentary logic, this local process of crystallization of the opposition between Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver thus replicates, like a *mise en abyme*, those implemented respectively on a regional scale by the first sovereign of Nosy Lava, and on a supraregional scale by the Antankaraña kings of silver.

The Paradox of Zafinifotsy Rulers from Ankaraña to Loza

Having reconstructed the stratigraphy of Ambendraña and the emergence of the cult of tromba andrano, I will now analyze the process of consolidation of Descendants of Silver from functional title into dynasty. In chapter 5, following a suggestion made by Sanchez (2013a), I put forward the hypothesis that this dynasticization of the Zafinifotsy was initiated by the historical and political reshaping carried out by the Antankaraña nobles. The latter were the inventors of the paradoxical concept of the Zafinifotsy king, which—according to Sakalava royal ideology—would mean a king not destined to reign or an illegitimate heir to the throne. It is probably the Antankaraña royalty who came up with the story that explains the origin of this dynastic branch by King Andriandahifotsy's son's choice of a silver coin (see chapter 5). Moreover, on the grounds of their common geographical origin in the Androna region, the Antankaraña nobles claim a genealogical connection with the Sakalava dynastic branch of Marangibato. The oxymoron of Zafinifotsy king, or king of silver, would thus have enabled the Antankaraña rulers to acknowledge their historical allegiance to the Sakalava rulers of gold, while at the same time asserting their political independence. My hypothesis is that it is this ambivalent political position that the oxymoron king of silver expresses.

Sanchez is the first to question the reasons behind the Antankaraña's dynastic identification with the Zafinifotsy and their relationship with the Zafinimena, beyond the genealogical links presented in anachronistic and contradictory ways within oral traditions. According to him, the noble or dominant groups of the Ankaraña region "may have 'become' Zafinifotsy" (2013a: 156, my translation) when they were subjected to the Sakalava (Zafinimena) rulers at the beginning of

the eighteenth century. Their identification with a collateral Sakalava branch would be the "expression by these aristocrats of the suzerainty of the Zafinimena" (2013a: 156, my translation). However, if the Antankaraña became Zafinifotsy at the beginning of the eighteenth century, how is it that their designation as such is only attested toward the end of the nineteenth century? The problem is not so much when the Antankaraña became Zafinifotsy, but rather when this ambivalent category became relevant to them. As I have suggested, it was necessary not only for the Antankaraña to recognize their subordination to the Sakalava rulers, but also, at the same time, to claim the political autonomy they obtained at the beginning of the nineteenth century, first by allying themselves with the Merina (Berger 2006: 307ff), then with the French (2006: 327ff). It is the ambivalent combination of political subordination and autonomy vis-à-vis the Zafinimena that took place in the nineteenth century that explains the invention of the contradictory title of Zafinifotsy king.

From this historical elaboration of Antankaraña sovereigns, I have hypothesized that this dynasticization of the relative category of Zafinifotsy was transposed into the cultural and sociological context of the Loza estuary by the king of Nosy Lava and his royal officials. In light of Antankaraña traditions, inherited from his paternal side and passed on by his servants, Ndramamitraña would thus have contributed to the assimilation of this family of Marangibato nobles drowned in the Loza to a Zafinifotsy dynastic branch, linked to his paternal side. He and his officials would therefore have consolidated the process of the formation of the Zafinifotsy dynasty initiated by the narratives of his Antankaraña relatives through the ritual system of his kingdom. As we have seen throughout the previous chapters, collective identities and hierarchical positions are constantly elaborated and renegotiated by means of historical narratives and the ritual activities that enact and crystallize them.

In the more restricted context of Ambendraña, identifying the drowned spirits of these collateral nobles as Zafinifotsy who ruled before the Zafinimena would have enabled the Bevôñy to claim residential precedence in the village over these nobles. Moreover, because of the structural opposition to the Zafinimena, this identification of the tromba andrano with the Zafinifotsy would also have given the Bevôñy the opportunity to claim relative autonomy not only from the Zafinimena who ruled the village, but also from the Zafinimena of Nosy Lava, their former masters.

However, it is also likely that the onset of French colonization had an influence on the formation of the Zafinifotsy dynasty. This influence is linked to the interest that its administrators and missionaries have shown since their arrival in the genealogical and historical reconstruction of the various Malagasy kingdoms, which has led the actors themselves to take up and rework them in turn. This is shown by Grandidier, Rusillon and, above all, Mellis. Hence perhaps the strengthening of the link between the elaborations of the Antankaraña nobles, those of the Nosy Lava and Analalava rulers, and those of the Sakalava servants and mediums in contact with these Europeans. Indeed, the latter were among the first historians and anthropologists to attempt to reconstruct historical links between the different sociopolitical entities of Madagascar. This, at least, is what Feeley-Harnik's reflections on the emergence of ancestors in the region suggest:

> Every time I find some current term or practice cited in historical sources …, I wonder whether it stands as clear evidence of deep continuity, or as further evidence of a process, well documented in the propensities of local people to write ancestral accounts (tantara) and make studies (*fianarana*) of their own practices, based on the work of experts as well as on written books, their own as well as those of others. … The coexisting efforts to "penetrate souls," as French officials described their own efforts, are also sources from which the ancestors of this region have emerged. (1991a: 15)

In this sense, Mellis, who traveled between the Ankaraña region and the Loza estuary while pondering the same question of Zafinifotsy dynastic unity, could have played a role in this historical and dynastic construction.

For the moment, we lack solid historical data to confirm or invalidate the series of hypotheses outlined here. The scenario I have tried to reconstruct is in fact the provisional reconstruction of a puzzle of which we have only a few scattered pieces. Proceeding by analogy with contemporary dynamics, or with those of the past reconstructed by other ethnographic and historiographic works, I have tried to reconstitute the pieces that, for the moment, are missing. However, rather than giving in to the illusion that the convergence of several hypotheses restores a more plausible framework, we must consider the fact that, without external proof, these hypotheses certainly reinforce each other, but only ephemerally, as in a house of cards. However, the usefulness of reconstructing one

or more possible scenarios is that it raises new questions and generates new—more complex, and possibly more faithful—accounts of the past that are therefore more useful for understanding the present. Based on the clues currently available, the question of the emergence of the Zafinifotsy dynasty cannot be resolved with certainty. If, as Carlo Ginzburg (1979) shows, the human sciences share the same "indexical paradigm" implemented in Arthur Conan Doyle's detective novels, as in the best examples of this literary genre, my ethnographic investigation remains—at least on this point—open-ended.

However, beyond the uncertainty surrounding the still opaque beginnings of these complex cultural and historical phenomena, it seems highly likely that from the first half of the twentieth century the circulation of mediums originating from the Loza estuary in the various regions of the west coast contributed to the spread of the cult of the tromba andrano to the rest of the island, as well as favoring the emergence of the Zafinifotsy ancestors. According to data presented by Berger (2016), some of these mediums and their tromba were present in the Antankaraña kingdom from the 1920s onward, causing the successive integration of these possession rituals into local ritual practices from the 1990s onward. Tromba andrano are also key players in Mahajanga's Great Royal Service (Lambek 2002). Cults of these tromba of water, who speak with a northern accent, are also attested in the southern Menabe region. They are associated with the collateral nobles of the Misara branch (Chazan-Gillig 1991: 138–42) who, as we have seen, constitute the first silver branch of the Maroseràña dynasty. Finally, they have been present since recent times in the new Great Service of Marangibato.

When I took part in this service in September 2017, I noticed that a large proportion of the mediums of the tromba andrano were young boys from Antsiranana, a city in the Antankaraña region. The old mediums from the Loza in Antankaraña country, cited by Berger (2016), had probably trained and prepared new generations of local mediums, including these youngsters from Antsiranana. The circulation of mediums certainly played an important role in the reappearance of the Zafinifotsy ancestors, helping the collateral branches of nobles to reclaim a power now purely ritual and emptied of the material conditions of its emergence. With the gradual establishment of French colonization, and its efforts to acquire a monopoly on violence and to level out the hierarchy through the abolition of slavery and the introduction of wage labor, a number of new ancestors emerged in northwestern villages while others were hidden.

The Emergence and Concealment of Royal Ancestors

The emergence of the Zafinifotsy ancestors in Sakalava country is also accompanied by the appearance of new Zafinifotsy rulers. As we have seen, since the living are legitimized by the dead, it was following the appearance of the Zafinifotsy ancestors, embodied in mediums, that the rulers of silver emerged. The role itinerant mediums played in this emergence of the living and dead Zafinifotsy was made apparent to me by two nobles whom I met in October 2016 in a small village next to Maromandia, north of Analalava, called Mahiakoho. In this semiabandoned village of around twenty palm-tree huts, my travel companion Adama and I met a brother and sister, Jaomazava and Mariety, who seemed surprised to see such unusual visitors. It was in Maromandia that we learned that there were still living Descendants of Silver in this village. These two Zafinifotsy noble siblings confirmed this information. They told Adama and me the story of the village, which had been founded in 1928 by their grandfather, and of the toñy dedicated to tromba andrano, recently founded by their "elder" (*zoky*). This toñy consisted of a wooden courtyard protecting a royal house where ritual objects were kept (fig. 32). They explained to us that, for the moment, there was no Zafinifotsy ruler, but that they expected to appoint one soon. According to their account, the village's founding ancestor, identified as a Zafinifotsy nobleman, was hiding in the area when the Zafinimena rulers arrived to rule. As the Zafinimena did not recognize the Zafinifotsy as the former occupants of the area, its inhabitants began to fall ill. "They got sick because they trampled on the silver. That's why now they're giving importance back to silver," Mariety explained to us. "There may have been a few obstacles [*raha ni-coincé*] in front of them, so they drove all the Zafinifotsy out," continued her brother, Jaomazava, adding, "If there are activities to be done, we have to call the people who lived here before, so that the people who live here after can prosper. That's why [the Zafinimena] remembered the silver. That's why we got the power to do business without hiding anymore." As they later explained, it was thanks to the tromba who inhabited the living mediums that they were able to resume their ceremonies. "They are the ones who trace the path [*manambara sori-dalaña*] that we follow. They're the ones who brought us out into the open," explained Jaomazava. "After that, everyone took care of their ancestors," he concluded.

The account of these two nobles testifies to the emergence of new Zafinifotsy nobles and rulers, which is part of the current proliferation of



Figure 32. Toñy of the tromba andrano in Mahiakoho with the two ampanjaka Jaomazava and Mariety

new kingdoms and royal residences in the northwest.[4] From their explanations, we can deduce that the return of the Zafinifotsy to the region is a recent phenomenon, indeed linked to the arrival of the tromba andrano mediums. And as we have seen in the life stories of Sakalava farmers, forgotten ancestors often manifest themselves in illnesses or obstacles that prevent prosperity and effective action. It was therefore to cure illnesses and loosen the constraints on the activities of the region's inhabitants that the mediums brought out the tromba andrano and the Zafinifotsy living nobles, who had remained hidden during the reign of the Zafinimena. According to the explanations of these two nobles, the mediums were assisted in their ritual activities by intercessors belonging to the Antifañaiñy group. As they later explained to me, the Antifañaiñy and Antifañivaña were the region's former occupants, having forged ziva alliances with these Zafinifotsy nobles. The Antifañaiñy and Antifañivaña presence in the area could therefore corroborate the hypothesis that they were at the origin of the cult of the tromba andrano. In any case, it was

4. Over the course of my fieldwork, between 2015 and 2017, I was informed of at least two new doany that had been founded: one in Maromandia, the other in Antsohihy, in September 2016.

these mediums and their Antifañaiñy intercessors who traced the path for the living nobles, ordering them to found a toñy dedicated to their forgotten ancestors and inciting them to resume their ceremonies. Indeed, as Jaomazava made clear, the stories they know are those told by the tromba. Hence the central role played not only by the Antifañaiñy, but also—and above all—by the mediums of the tromba andrano in the reshaping of traditions and the construction of this small Zafinifotsy kingdom. This small kingdom is tolerated by Maromandia's Zafinimena neighbors by virtue of the ritual role of the Zafinifotsy as masters of the land and holders of the power of silver. As we saw in chapter 7, and as the account of the noble siblings confirms, this dynamic between foreign occupants and former masters of the land is therefore cyclical and relational. Deprived of political power since colonization, the Zafinimena rulers have had to share a power reduced to its ritual dimension with the masters of the land and their representatives, be they mediums, common servants, or collateral nobles.

Ultimately, this case suggests that, while for the Antankaraña the creation of the contradictory category of Zafinifotsy rulers does not seem to be linked to the presence of the tromba andrano mediums, the emergence of new Zafinifotsy rulers in the northwestern regions is probably correlated to the mobility of these mediums in the new colonial and postcolonial context. Zafinifotsy rulers are currently attested in Nosy Be and Nosy Komba.[5] As we have seen, the rulers of Marangibato are also in the process of attaching themselves to this new Zafinifotsy dynastic branch, thanks to the influence of these tromba andrano mediums and the support of representatives of the national government. While, during my first meeting with the nobles of Marangibato, the sovereign explained to me that Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy were just titles, when I attended the royal service in Marangibato the following year, in 2017, I noticed with astonishment that the village's nobles were wearing T-shirts that read "*Zafinifotsy miray*" (Zafinifotsy united) (fig. 33). When asked about the origin of these T-shirts, the sovereign explained that he had received them from a newly formed Mahajanga association (*fikambanana*), of which the Analalava deputy, Volamarina, was also a member. During my last fieldwork in September 2019, I was even more surprised to see the same T-shirt worn by a Marotsiraty noble from Ambendraña who was residing in Analalava. Despite the lack of further data on the matter,

5. A new sovereign was elected in Nosy Be in October 2019, as announced in a Facebook post (G.I.V. 2019).



Figure 33. A nobleman from Marangibato wearing the T-shirt of the "*Zafinifotsy miray*" (Zafinifotsy united) association

this new dynastic network seems to be linked to the Analalava deputy's plan to create an island-wide Zafinifotsy association that also includes the nobles from Ambendraña. Furthermore, this project is not unrelated to the participation of one of these nobles in the investiture ceremony of the Analalava deputy (see chapter 6), or to an enthronement ceremony that the deputy organized for the new ruler of Ambendraña in the nearby town of Befotaka in September 2017.

To sum up, on the basis of this scattered information, we can see that the process of formation of the Zafinifotsy dynasty, begun by the Antankaraña and continued by representatives of the tromba andrano, is still underway, and that we have only presented part of it, with certain foggy areas still to be clarified. In this process—initiated by royal servants, mediums, and nobles seeking legitimacy in a changing social context—political figures, with their parties and associations, play an essential role. They are particularly involved in the ongoing reformulation of local hierarchies rooted in royal Sakalava ideology. Thus, new ancestors have emerged from the sea or land where they had been abandoned and have enabled segments of the population—traditionally subaltern, at different levels—to claim a new place in an evolving society. New commoner ancestors were created by freed slaves, such as the Bevôñy,

so that they could form a descent group, rooted at last in ancestral lands to be cultivated. But new royal ancestors also resurfaced in the bodies of the mediums or in the toñy, enabling these former slaves to legitimize their autonomy from their former masters. The Bevôñy thus began to serve other drowned nobles, who in turn became their masters. It was these drowned royal ancestors, collateral nobles of silver assimilated to the masters of the land, who were recuperated by representatives of the Sakalava monarchy, traditionally excluded from power, to claim a new political legitimacy. This occurred in a context where the royal power had been stripped of its material basis and had come to rely primarily on the ritual power traditionally held by the Nobles of Silver. It was in this context of new demands for autonomy from the old powers that, as Jaomazava asserted, everyone took charge of their ancestors: everyone sought their place in present-day society through their newly recognized ancestors. In this same vein, Feeley-Harnik (1984: 13) declared, admittedly provocatively, that the Malagasy people's acknowledged interest in their dead is in fact "a relatively recent development," as the "realm of the dead … has become the hidden abode of production" and "the principal arena where still-unresolved struggles over labor and loyalty continue to be carried on" (1984: 13). Rather than freeing themselves or distancing themselves from their ancestors, the Sakalava chose which of the new economic and political powers introduced after colonization they would pledge their allegiance to, simultaneously choosing which ancestors to serve or creating new ones.

In contemporary Malagasy society, where democratic and liberal discourse rubs shoulders with the hierarchical values of royal ideology (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 188), the emergence of new ancestors is accompanied by the concealment of others. This phenomenon of erasure concerns not only the descendants of slaves who try to hide their origins, which are still stigmatized (Somda 2009; Freeman 2013; Regnier 2020), but also those at the other end of the royal hierarchy, namely the nobles. "*Ampanjaka raha sarotro*" (Nobles are a complicated/delicate/dangerous thing), I was repeatedly told by my interlocutors in the field. Displaying the rank of noble or slave implies placing oneself in a complicated condition, especially in the town. This is particularly true after the colonial state's attempts, using different strategies at different times, to level out local hierarchies with the aim of turning everyone—noble, commoner, or slave—into a part of a salaried workforce for the new foreign masters. But the noble condition is also complicated within the new postcolonial republican state, first socialist (1972–80), then capitalist, which has tried

ambiguously, and in vain, to replace monarchical values with republican ones—whether communist or capitalist. This is why most of the noble descendants I met in Analalava were keen on keeping their noble origins hidden. Revealing them would complicate their day-to-day relations with people of lower rank, due to the many prohibitions that surround them and that everyone continues to fear. Whether town hall officials, bartenders, or sailors on boats crossing the Loza, the status or rank of ampanjaka is hardly compatible with their salaried work and with the horizontal relationships that develop in the town. Nobody wants to work or have a drink with someone who is constantly careful not to insult them, touch their head, go over their legs when lying down, and so on—all under the threat of incurring the dreaded ancestral curse (*tiñy*) of the nobles. But also, for the nobles it becomes complicated to respect the prohibitions imposed on them by their ancestors and their diviner-healers, such as not eating from the same plate as another person, not drinking from an already-opened bottle, or not rubbing shoulders with sick people, but also not going to dirty places (public toilets, for example). As Bloch shows, the nobles are themselves subject to an ideology that is supposed to legitimize their power over others (1986: 177). Or rather, to put it in local terms, they are the first to bear the weight (*zaka*) that they are meant to impose on others. This is why, outside of rural villages, where, despite the transformations introduced by colonization, spatial organization and ritual activity still give it meaning and guarantee its conditions of existence, the rank of noble becomes a difficult burden to bear—particularly in town. This is at least the case for those who cannot take advantage of it to occupy a position of prestige beyond the village context.

Moreover, even in rural contexts affected by the market economy, signs of nobility are often concealed. For example, the nobles of Ambendraña explained to me that they no longer adopt the pointed earmark (called *tsimirango*) for their herds, because if they wanted to resell a zebu on the market, no one would dare buy a noble's zebu, due to the strength (hery) attributed to it. This strength characterizes not only royal blood to the detriment of other blood ties, but also royal zebus that are retained to prosper at the expense of other zebus in the herd. As Cole (2001: 170ff) attests, even if the sacrifice of zebus enables people to negotiate prohibitions and legitimize changes in lifestyle in the eyes of the ancestors, the prohibitions that a noble must respect are so numerous that sacrificing an entire herd would not be enough to bring urban lifestyles into line with the demands of his or her ancestors. This is a contradiction that town-dwelling nobles are aware of, which is why they have tried to

make the weight of the ancestors lighter by circumventing some of the prohibitions and hiding their status. This status will be displayed anew at the time of their death, when their strongest ancestral side claims its share and nobles dispersed in the town return to their villages of origin to be buried with their ancestors. Indeed, as the proverb quoted by Feeley-Harnik (1984: 1) puts it, "Even the dead want to be numerous" (*Ny maty aza te ho maro*). This is why, even if the village of Ambendraña is deprived of most of its nobles today, as they have dispersed themselves among the various towns in the northwest to study or to seek waged labor, the royal cemetery is the center of gravity to which these wandering nobles return when they die. It is where they find their place in the hierarchy inherited from their ancestors.

But the weight of the ancestors is becoming increasingly difficult to bear for some of the royal servants too, as evidenced by the servants of Analalava and Nosy Lava, or those of the residence of the Mahajanga relics. As we saw at Soazara's royal funeral, many Special Servants had deserted the Royal Hot Service, which had become too onerous and complicated (sarotro) for them. And as the first official of the cemetery explained to me, soon, with the backing of the Zafinifotsy tutelary spirits, the two wooden enclosures of the tomb would be built in concrete to compensate for the lack of manpower. "People are disobedient (*maditry*) now, they don't want to serve anymore," he had concluded. Similarly, the official medium of Mahajanga, explaining to me the reasons for the abolition of one of the royal services, had declared, "We knew that people's lives had changed, they are civilized [*civilisés*] now, they can no longer be slaves [*esclaves*]."

Although the weight of the royal ancestors is presented in the discourse of their servants as being desirable, when we go beyond the rhetoric of voluntary servitude the Sakalava story I have told shows that some of these servants and the Sakalava nobles have been trying to make this weight more bearable or at least more advantageous since as early as the middle of the nineteenth century. This aim is pursued either through the creation of new ancestors and obligations to replace the old ones, particularly in rural areas, or by hiding one's ancestors to adapt to urban life.

Finally, while today some Sakalava nobles lack the material conditions to make the most of their ancestry and try instead to hide it, the political representatives of the national state draw on the generative power (hasiñy) attributed to royal ancestors to legitimize their own power and win new supporters and voters. This is the case, for example, with the deputy of Analalava, who uses the structural cleavages of the Sakalava

monarchy—between reigning nobles (Zafinimena) and collateral nobles (Zafinifotsy) or between servants of the living and servants of the dead—to extend his influence at the expense of the queen of Analalava. But this is also the case for the latest candidates for the presidency of the Malagasy Republic, who have sought the support of Sakalava sovereigns and nobles to mobilize the West Coast electorate, promising them places in the national government in exchange.[6] What is more, in Imerina, the region where state power is concentrated, the presidents of the Republic have always maintained an ambiguous relationship with the legitimizing power of the royal ancestors and the places that represent them.[7] This is despite the fact that the Merina monarchy was abolished in 1897 by French colonization, and that royal ancestor cults have been repressed since the second half of the nineteenth century.[8] Although initial attempts were made to build a secular, democratic state, first on the French model under President Tsiranana (1958–72), then on the socialist model under Didier Ratsiraka (1975–80), from the 1980s onward

6. On this subject, see for example, the tensions between President Hery Rajaonarimampianina and Prince George Kamamy of Menabe following the 2013 elections (Ramambazafy 2015).

7. To cite just a few examples, the first President Tsiranana (1958–72), a Tsimihety of commoner origin and Catholic faith, did not participate directly in royal cults but nevertheless "used intermediaries to have oxen sacrificed regularly at Ambohimanga" (the former capital of the Merina kingdom) (Rakotomalala, Blanchy, and Raison-Jourde 2001: 386–87). Ratsiraka (1975–93), a Betsimisaraka, initially Marxist in orientation, promoted ancestor cults against the power of the churches with the process of Malgachization: in 1975 he incorporated the jôro ritual (sacrifice/invocation to the ancestors) into public ceremonies, only to abolish it in 1985. With the liberal turnaround of the 1980s, he tried to reconcile himself with the ecclesiastical power of the FFKM (Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar) (2001: 383). His successor, Albert Zafy, a native of the north of the island and openly Catholic, actively participated in the public ceremony of the *Alamahadibe* royal tradition (the equivalent of the Sakalava Great Service), which was also updated by the Ministry of Culture during his presidency with a view to the patrimonialization of ancestral cults (2001: 395–99).

8. Under pressure from the London Missionary Society's Protestant missionaries (who had arrived in the region in 1820), Prime Minister Rainilairivony and Queen Ranavalona II converted to Christianity in 1869. In the same year, the *sampy* (the protective amulets that had belonged to the sovereign Andrianampoinimerina) were burned.

there was a quest for religious legitimization of political power. After the collapse of the socialist project, faced with the quest for a new source of identity on which to build Malagasy national sentiment, the new political leaders began to rely on the power of the churches,[9] as well as on the symbols of the former rulers. Since the late 1980s, the battle over the monopoly of this royal ancestry has been reenacted in the Imerina region as the source of new identity-based nationalism. This conflict pits new political personalities from the industrial bourgeoisie (such as Presidents Ravalomanana and Rajoelina) against the old Merina noble families. It is rather in reaction to these new men, who draw on the symbolic capital of the royal past to legitimize their power, that the *andriana* ("nobles," in the Merina variant) have federated into associations, claiming their exclusive right to nobility, or *andrianity*. It is by virtue of this status inherited from their ancestors that they also claim the legitimate exercise of political power (Rakotomalala, Blanchy, and Raison-Jourde 2001: 332–36). The recent controversy surrounding the construction of a concrete coliseum within the grounds of Antananarivo's royal palace (*Rova*), a proposal put forth by the president-elect in 2019, is an example of this ambiguous and controversial emergence of the legitimizing power of the royal ancestors at the very heart of republican power (Verneau 2020).

In summary, buried underground or drowned in the sea, ancestors are the main heritage of the living. As the principal holders of generative power (hasiñy), the ancestors are considered by the living to be their main means of production. Made present by tombs or toñy, the ancestors are also a way for the various strata of "descendants of the land" (*zafin-tany*) to appropriate the land and make it prosper. However, the share that these ancestors demand in return is sometimes difficult to bear. Whether it be through choosing ancestors from one side rather than the other, creating new ancestors to free themselves from the old ones, or hiding one's ancestors in an attempt to lighten the burden of the latter, individual and collective possibilities for self-fulfillment have expanded since the arrival of colonization and the upheaval of social hierarchies. But hidden or forgotten ancestors still claim their share. In the form of illness or misfortune, they denounce their oblivion. This is

9. President Ravalomanana (2002–9), since 2000 vice-president of the most influential Protestant church in Madagascar (FJKM), had the reference to the secular nature of the State removed from the Malagasy Constitution in 2007, which he replaced with the principle that the Malagasy people believe in God (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, and Wechsberger 2017: 96).

why, as the case of Mahiakoho has shown, even if their weight is heavy, in order to avoid falling ill or being hindered, one must carry it. Hence the recent phenomena of migration from town to the rural village of one's origin, which is recounted in terms of a therapeutic journey. Moreover, these exoduses have intensified since the economic crisis of 2009.[10] Through the option to choose between "eight [ancestral] sides" (*valo ila*), counting the eight great-grandparents, and through the resurgence of new royal ancestors or the rediscovery or concealment of old ones, not only do individuals seek to legitimize their new social position and their recent rootedness in a territory, but representatives of the national state try to win votes. The latter is also an attempt to reinvest a power that is still in search of legitimacy in the eyes of the population. It was in this ambiguous sense that the Analalava deputy declared, at the Marangibato ceremony (chapter 5), that without the preservation—and creation—of ancestral customs (*fomban-drazaña*) there can be no development (*fandrosoaña*).

10. Following a coup d'état that saw President Ravalomanana resign and brought Rajoelina to power, social and political instability had led to a drastic decline in tourism and foreign investment. As a result, opportunities for salaried employment in the city became extremely limited.

Conclusion: General Considerations

Continuities and Ruptures (Reprise)

As they move from threshold to threshold on the path to prosperity, which, passing first through the elders and ancestors of the lineage and then through the sovereign and royal ancestors, leads through an infinite number of intermediaries to the God above (*Zañahary añabo*), the Sakalava are confronted with the authority of these various intercessors. The latter are the gatekeepers who can grant or deny them the way. In the dual direction of offering/request and blessing/fulfillment, this path of the speech and of the hasiñy power seems to trace a linear hierarchy between the various intercessors, whether living or dead (fig. 34). However, dichotomous breaks or bifurcations divert this great continuous chain of intermediaries. Among the living humans within the lineage (*tariky*), it is the elder who occupies the top of the hierarchy as the link in the chain that connects the rest to their ancestors, and who holds the power to intercede with them. These ancestors, in turn, will intercede with the chthonian spirits and the God above to make the earth fertile and their descendants prosperous. As we pointed out in chapter 7, echoing Graeber and Sahlins (2017), ancestors and spirits are indeed considered the primary means of production in Sakalava cosmology. Controlling access to their hasiñy or generative power implies holding this means of production. Hence the political power that derives from it, whether within the lineage or beyond it. Hence, also, the absence of a clear distinction between work and ritual (Feeley-Harnik 1989b; see chapter 3).

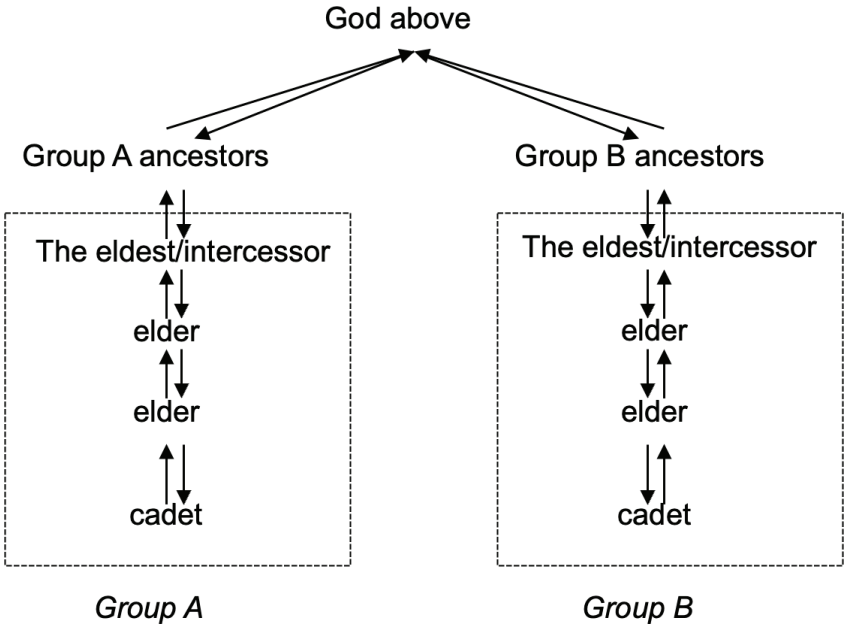


Figure 34. Sketch of the speech-hasiñy pathway in two groups

In the Menabe, in the southwest of the island, this intermediary figure is called *mpitoka* (intercessor), and is the master of the *hazomanga*, the "exquisite wood" or lineage altar.[1] In northwestern Boina, he is called ampijôro, the one who makes the jôro, the invocation and offering to the ancestors. He holds the "plate of the ancestors" (*kapilan-drazaña*) and is the master of the residential courtyard around which his lineage revolves (*haramanja*), or of the toñy, the altar-tree dedicated to the ancestors (fig. 35). Because of this prerogative, it is the intercessors who make decisions concerning the lineage or descent group.

However, in a territorial collectivity made up of several lineages articulated into descent groups (*firazañana)*, this lineage gerontocracy is embedded within ritual alliances that make hierarchical relationships between persons and groups more complex. To avoid war or to seal its end, a local group faced with potentially rival strangers may forge an alliance with them to enable peaceful coexistence and the sharing of ecological resources. Whether through marriage or blood pacts, these exchanges of

1. The translation of *hazomanga* as the "exquisite wood" is borrowed from Jacques Lombard (personal communication).



Figure 35. On the left, a *hazomanaga* altar in the Menabe region (Goedefroit and Lombard 2007: 71); On the right, a toñy from Marangibato dedicated to the royal ancestors

life have often taken the form of joking alliances (ziva), institutionalized through recourse to ancestors and consequently made transmissible from generation to generation. It was these alliances that probably contributed to the emergence of distinct descent groups, identified not only by ancestors, but also by their oxen's earmarks, their coats of arms (Birkeli 1926). Hence the identification between oxen and ancestors reported by Fiéloux and Lombard (2008: 56) mentioned in chapter 3.

Thanks to this ziva alliance, a foreign group can gain the right to access the land and its fruits through its allies, the masters of the land, who hold the power to invoke the chthonian spirits and ancestral masters of the place. It is these spirits and ancestors who control the means of reproducing life, at least for the human inhabitants of the territory. However, while the group first established in a place has the power to invoke the local spirits and ancestors, foreign groups, by virtue of their alliance with the masters of the land, have the power to convey the blessing of the ancestors of the masters of the land to them. Hence the complex and ambivalent hierarchy that governs the different descent groups resident in the same territory, and which becomes even more complicated with the arrival of a foreign group imposing itself as ontologically superior and therefore noble.

If, as we have seen, with their arrival, the stranger-kings hierarchically replace the commoner ancestors of the masters of the land with their own ancestors, the artifacts that embody their power (tombs, relics,

toñy, and tromba) impose themselves as new objectified forms and new centers of propagation of this generative power. However, sovereigns still need the blessing of local ancestors and the intercession of the masters of the land. What is more, it is also these masters of the land who participate in the manufacture of these new artifacts of royal power (such as corpses, relics, and tombs) and who guard them. Through the role of being in charge of the ancestralization of the deceased sovereigns, ratified by the ziva alliance, the masters of the land also become the intercessors of the living sovereign. The collateral royal branches, the nobles of silver, excluded from political power, will share this ritual power with the masters of the land.

This relationship between nobles and commoners is in fact based on the configuration that the ziva joking alliances took on in the commoner context even before the arrival of the Maroseràña nobles. In this context, through these ziva alliances, the ideally linear link between descendants and ancestors is diffracted to integrate a new group of allies into the relationship. Thus, this integration is enshrined in an alliance that passes through the ancestors. Allies bury each other's dead and intercede with each other's ancestors to ensure the prosperity of each other's descendants. The prosperity of a group is thus entrusted, in part, to the allied group. Although the senior member of a group has the power to intercede with the group's ancestors for its members, he will always need the intercession of his ally to make his group's ritual activities effective. It is the ziva ally who will ultimately request and transmit the blessing of his allies' ancestors to them (fig. 36). This is why, during life-cycle rituals, it is the ziva who pronounce the invocations following those of the group's intercessor (ampijôro).[2] Thus, the ritual relationship that the ziva have with the ancestors of their allies vis-à-vis the latter encompasses that which the group's intercessor has with his ancestors vis-à-vis the other members of his group. However, this encompassing relationship is reciprocal. This is why each person is autonomous in his relationship with his own ancestors, but at the same time depends on his allied group to maintain this relationship. In my opinion, it is in this relational configuration that the dialectic between linear continuity (within a group) and dualistic ruptures (between different groups) lies, characterizing the Sakalava hierarchy that I have tried to present since the first chapter, under different aspects and at different levels.

2. Each lineage and descent group has several ziva, testifying to the past alliances forged by these collectives during their migrations.

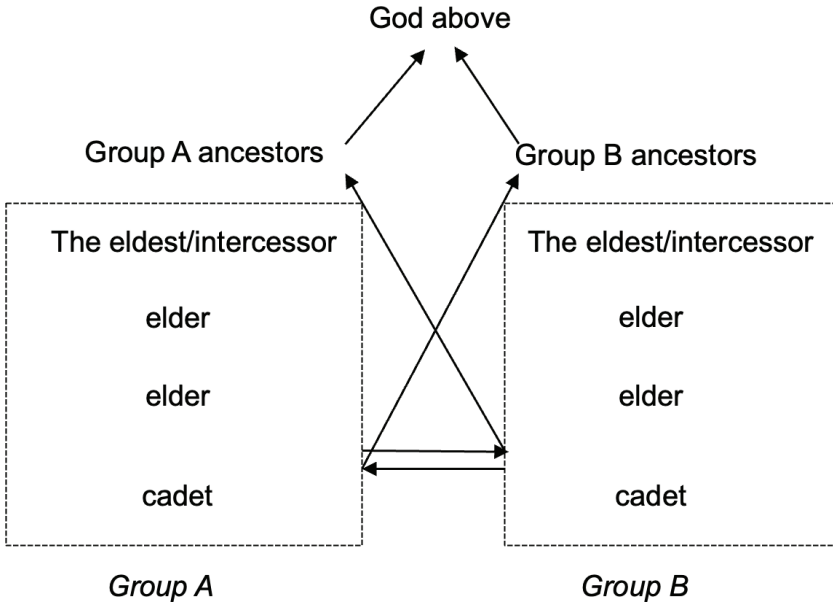


Figure 36. Sketch of the paths of invocation (jôro) between two ziva allied groups

This ziva alliance is one of the main historical and logical models underlying other Sakalava hierarchical relationships (see chapter 7). Even the segmentary ruptures caused by internal group splits are linked and arranged according to this relational model. According to the logic underpinning this alliance, there must always be a peer or ally (*vady*) from outside the group who can render a ritual action effective, and who at the same time can testify to the village community of the group's ancestors through their invocation (Waast 1980: 57). And this, at different levels of social agglomeration. Indeed, this dialectic between autonomy and subordination, or between hierarchical superiority and ritual dependence, concerns not only the relationship between ziva, but also that between children of men and children of women, between children in the home and children outside it, or between foreigners and masters of the land. But it also concerns the relationship between mediums and intercessors, or between kings and intercessors, and ultimately between the living and the dead. While in this series of couples, those who are listed first have preferential access to the exercise of a certain kind of power, they nevertheless require the support of the second to be legitimized and to be able to make their actions effective and generative. It is this

principle of productive couples, whose terms are in an ambivalent hierarchical relationship, that lies at the heart of the royal rituals we have analyzed in chapters 3, 4, and 6. This is why the ziva alliance can also help us understand power relations within the royal organization.

Ambivalence of Royal Power

The dynamic described above of ritual legitimization of the actions and words of those with decision-making power is indeed to be found at the foundation of royal Sakalava power, but without the reciprocity that characterizes ziva relations between commoner groups. Just as, in the commoner context, the ziva allies intercede with the ancestors of their allies to make the latter's actions effective, in the royal context the sovereign's ziva allies, his or her intercessors, intercede with his or her ancestors to make effective and legitimize the sovereign's power over his or her subjects. In concrete terms, in transmitting the hasiñy power of the royal ancestors to the sovereign, the intercessors confirm the sovereign's position in the royal genealogy evoked in the invocations. But they also collect the hasiñy-offers of the sovereign's subjects. The intercessors or ampangataka are indeed the pivotal point in the path of these two types of hasiñy (Bloch 1977), connecting the sovereign to his or her ancestor on one side and to his or her subjects on the other. What is more, they also legitimize the word of the royal ancestors embodied by their mediums (see chapter 2). This is why the authority to legitimize the sovereigns through their ancestors, as well as the power to validate the words of those ancestors, is entrusted specifically to the sovereigns' intercessors, who are the masters of the land.

As I described in chapter 7, the sovereign's ziva intercessors are historically drawn from the most eminent groups in the region he or she conquered. It is thanks to the ziva alliance with the local chiefs, who become masters of the land in relation to the stranger-king, that the latter anchors his power in the region. Hence the structural tension between the power of the stranger-king and the legitimizing power of the masters of the land. This tension surrounding the legitimacy of royal power vis-à-vis former local chiefs is accompanied by an internal tension within the royal dynasty between legitimate descendants (Zafinimena) and descendants not legitimized to rule (Zafinifotsy). These tensions are all the more acute because the rules of succession are not always clear, and, even when they are recognized, are presented in the narratives as being

constantly transgressed. Hence the tensions between the sovereigns and these two subaltern groups. It is the Zafinifotsy, like the masters of the land, who legitimize the power of the Zafinimena, the *true* Sakalava sovereigns.

As pointed out by Radcliffe-Brown (1940), if these joking alliances help to manage ambivalent relationships, characterized by both latent rivalry and collaborative union (such as those between affines), they constitute one of the Sakalava models of power relations between different "kinds of people" (*karazañ'olo*). In other words, they are exemplary of a conception of the exercise of power. Indeed, based on the idea that ancestors make the actions of the living effective, the ziva make their allies' actions effective in the same way that the masters of the land do with the sovereigns, and the Zafinifotsy do with the Zafinimena. The legitimizing power that the masters of the land—with whom the Zafinifotsy are associated—exert over royal power is also evoked in the oft-quoted principle that "the Sakalava make the king reign." The power of the sovereigns rests on the support of their ziva allies, just as it rests on that of their collateral relatives (the nobles of silver) and the mediums of their ancestors. Finally, it rests on the support of their people, who are identified with their Sambarivo servants.

This structural relationship between the dominant power and its relative dependence on the dominated is in fact the product of the history of a power that claims to be absolute, divine, but which must take account of the elements that limit it and are at the same time necessary for its legitimate exercise. To use the terms of Graeber and Sahlins (2017: 7–8), what is at issue here is the dialectic internal to royal power between the two principles of "divine kingship," which presupposes the king's ability to act like a god, and "sacred kingship," according to which the king's prestige derives from his separation from the rest of the population, through the prohibitions that surround and limit him. The principle of sacred kingship (de Heusch 1987, 1993) is paradigmatically represented in the dual function of the enclosures (*vala*) of royal servants, or in the prohibitions (fady) that surround the figure of the Sakalava sovereign.[3]

3. However, in the Sakalava case, there seems to have been a historical evolution between these two types of royal power. During the expansionist phase of the Boina rulers (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), although slaves and royal servants enabled the latter to exercise unpunished violence and domination over subjugated populations (like a god-king), from the Merina invasions in the 1820s onward, these servants

These human and moral enclosures serve both to protect the sovereign's generative power (hasiñy) and to limit his or her political power. It was these internal tensions that French colonization exacerbated by recognizing the political position of sovereigns as local representatives of the colonial state, while empowering slaves and servants through their economic and statutory emancipation.

These tensions permeated the local form that power relations stipulated by the ziva alliance took. For this reason, the ziva alliance enables us to think more generally about the ambivalent power relations between dominant and dominated, between masters and servants. As Ottino (1998) explains, this ambivalence and reversibility of power are characteristic of the very concept of "master" (*tompo*):

> The expression *tompon-tany*: "native or master and responsible for the land" … or *tompon-dolo*, *tompom-paty*, *tompon-jama*, *tompon-drazana*: "master/responsible for the corpse, the dead, the ancestor" or others, all linked to death, burials or second funerals, allow me to return to the crucial concept of *tompo*: of "master," "responsible," or "first concerned." Very briefly, by expressing both possession and responsibility, the idea of *tompo* also implies a relationship of both identity or identification and reciprocal appropriation. In other words, just as humans "possess" ancestors, the land, the corpse, etc., they are possessed and dominated by them, the first form of possession being, as Jacques Lombard notes, dreams in which ancestors appear to their descendants (personal communication). This means that, while reciprocal, the *tompo* relationship is asymmetrical, with the added precision that *this asymmetry is reversible*: alternately, depending on circumstances, some take priority and possess and dominate the others. (1998: 540)

It is no coincidence that the examples of master, or *tompo*, "linked to death" chosen by Ottino coincide with the essential role of the ziva allies, who are the masters of the ancestors or of the corpse. It is the ziva relationship that underpins the power of the master par excellence, the sovereign, and so ambivalently shapes not only the exercise of his or her power, but also the hierarchical relationships between people and groups of people.

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increasingly assumed a protective function and were organized into fences (*vala*) around the rulers, both living and dead (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 96–102).

Contextual Hierarchy

This hierarchy among the living is seen as a legacy of the hierarchy drawn up by the ancestors. The ancestral hierarchy itself is rooted in the soil in which the ancestors are buried. As Bloch (1971: 107) has shown for the Merina, it is the grave that determines the social position of the dead and their descendants. The same is true for the Sakalava. This is why social hierarchy varies according to the territory in which power is exercised. By virtue of this principle, cadets, rather than accepting their submission to the elders of the lineage, may leave to found a new lineage and build up a new herd elsewhere. Thus, within Sakalava royalty, young noblemen of silver, rather than contenting themselves with their ritual function on the spot, emigrate to found new kingdoms elsewhere and thus become new nobles of gold. Hence the segmented fragmentation of the Sakalava kingdoms at the root of their expansion on the west coast. However, even if these young noblemen of silver become politically autonomous as new nobles of gold, in order to retain their dynastic allegiance, they will still be ritually obliged to their elders and the royal ancestors who legitimize their power. More generally, this principle of rooting power in place implies that people who move from one residential context to another change their social status in doing so. Not only do the Descendants of Silver (Zafinifotsy) who emigrate become new Descendants of Gold (Zafinimena) vis-à-vis other Descendants of Silver, but among commoners, children of men in one village are considered children of women in the village of their maternal group. Thus, as we have seen, while the nobles of Ambendraña are referred to as local Zafinimena rulers, in Nosy Lava or Analalava the same nobles are defined as Zafinifotsy, funeral officials of the local Zafinimena rulers (chapter 6).

The hierarchical position occupied by each group of descendants therefore depends on the relational context of a given place and time. Regarding the chronotopical conjuncture that shapes these hierarchical relationships, a previously developed example concerns the arrival of Marotsiraty nobles in Ambendraña and the consequent transformation of the Bevôñy's status. Prior to the arrival of the nobles, the Bevôñy were probably considered the village's foreigners (vahiny), whereas when the nobles moved in, the Bevôñy were able to assume the status of masters of the land vis-à-vis the new foreigners. This relative position in the local settlement order was, however, consolidated by the Bevôñy through their role as ritual intermediaries for the Zafinifotsy spirits—who are considered the masters of the land. The dualist organization that characterizes

the village today was thus developed from this historical context, reformulated in the light of the contrastive opposition between Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, on the one hand, and between foreigners and masters of the land, on the other. These hierarchical relationships between people and groups, which I have presented as structural in the current village context, can thus be broken down and recomposed differently according to the geographical and historical context of reference. This is what I have tried to show in my investigation, moving from one place to another and following the traces of different eras. Thus, the Bevôñy, who in Ambendraña claim to be the masters of the land and traveling companions of the drowned Zafinifotsy nobles, are seen from the point of view of other groups as descendants of former slaves of the Zafinimena rulers, originally strangers to the village where they reside.

In the same way, the segmentary structure (Southall 1956: 249–63; 1988) attributed to the political organization of the Sakalava monarchy of Boina is rather the historical consequence of this segmentary, relational logic governing hierarchical relations among people at different levels of social organization. Following this logic, the hierarchization is redundant: it exists in dualistic relationships (elder/younger; women/men; foreigners/masters of the land, etc.) and is repeated and articulated at different levels of social agglomeration (generational, lineage, descent or dynastic group).[4] Thus, the dialectic between allegiance and autonomy or between the continuity and the rupture of this hierarchy, which is based on a principle of residential contextuality, gives shape, at a higher level, to the segmentary political organization that Lambek and Lombard recognize in the Sakalava state of Boina. It is this same segmentary and relational logic that allows a social category to refer to a larger or smaller aggregate of people depending on the historical or circumstantial contexts of its enunciation. It is this logic that underlies the alternation between a relative or functional use and a more or less essentializing use of categories such as children of men and children of women, or Descendants of Gold and Descendants of Silver. As we have seen over the course of the chapters in this book, in certain relational contexts, these relative categories, which are relevant within a single generation, can in fact be used to designate an entire lineage or dynasty. In the last chapter, we saw that contextual definitions such as those of Zafinimena and Zafinifotsy, used to organize succession to the throne among the sovereign's children

4. As we have already said, in this sense, the logic in question corresponds to the analogist logic described by Descola (2005: 280–81).

within a generation, can consolidate more stably into dynastic appellations under particular historical and political circumstances. In light of this, I sought to reveal the conjuncture of the structure—that is, the circumstances that gave rise to cultural categories—and the "structure of the conjuncture" (Sahlins 1985)—namely, the historical transformations of the meaning of these same cultural categories. It was the concomitance of the dynastic claims of the Antankaraña nobles and the ritual elaboration carried out by the first sovereign of Nosy Lava that crystallized the relative category of Zafinifotsy into a dynastic designation. However, as the nobles of Marangibato have suggested, and as this book has attempted to show, these two versions—the relative and the essentialist—still coexist. And it is this coexistence that produces the contradictions, even paradoxes, that enable people and groups to negotiate their hierarchical positions according to historical and residential contexts.

The "Eight Sides"

Beyond the ambivalence of hierarchical relationships, beyond their contextual relativity, and beyond the ambiguity of the categories that express them, the hierarchical system we have studied here is made even more dynamic by the relative freedom of choice people have in positioning themselves in this social hierarchy.

While I drew critically on Dumont's model (1981) to sketch out a morphology of the Sakalava hierarchical system, within this system, I have nevertheless tried to pay attention to the power of action of the people who make it up, as the main manipulators of the social categories mobilized within it. Strathern (1988) offset the relational approach to Dumont's social structure with her reflections on the Melanesian conception of the person, deconstructing the concept of a totalizing society from below (see Barraud, Iteanu, and Moya 2016: 27–29). The ideal horizon for this book is a compromise between the two approaches. Although I have often resorted—with some discomfort—to totalizing categories, such as society, group, dynasty, or lineage, I have at the same time tried to show the relational processes that constitute these segmentary agglomerations and the range of possibilities available to actors to modify them or to move from one agglomeration to another. In particular, at the beginning of the last chapter, I presented this process through a plural and "dividual" conception (Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988) of social identity and group affiliation. In the terms of kinship studies, this

amounts to the question of cognatic filiation. If the dividual conception of the person cannot be reduced to the question of cognatic filiation, the latter is based—at least among the Sakalava of the northwest—on the same relational conception of the person, according to which "persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them" (Strathern 1988: 13). Whether from a physical point of view (through the flesh and bones that mother and father respectively transmit [Ottino 1998: 70]), an ethical point of view (through the prohibitions received from both paternal and maternal sides), or a legal point of view (one potentially inherits paternal and maternal property), Sakalava people are constituted by the relationships between the eight ancestors (*valo razaña*) inherited from both parents. Despite the insistence on a patrilineal ideology in commoner groups, people have the choice of reactivating their maternal group affiliation and can sometimes also renew their links with one of the eight ancestral ties inherited from their great-grandparents. These potential affiliations can be reactivated through residential choice, for example, by contributing to the work (agricultural and ritual) that ensures the chosen group's prosperity. However, everyone must also give their share (anjara) to the other "sides" (*ila*), notably in the form of occasional ritual services. It is the tomb in which people are buried that sanctions the achievement of the reactivation of group membership. However, these individual choices are limited by the strength of certain ties over others, such as that exerted by the paternal group among commoner Sakalava, but also by the strength (hery) recognized in aristocratic status vis-à-vis other statuses. This particular type of hery is exploited especially by the collateral noble branches, who increase their descendants through bilateral or cognatic filiation, as demonstrated by the Marotsiraty nobles of Ambendraña.

While for the Merina, cognatic and endogamic principles are not in competition with other principles of filiation and alliance, among other social groups in Madagascar there is a tension between cognatic and patrilineal filiation (Feeley-Harnik 1991a: 225).[5] This is the case, for example, for the Betsileo analyzed by Kottak (1980: 180), who emphasizes

5. As Ottino (1998) has shown, this ideology of kinship is linked to the type of main inheritance passed on to descendants. In the Merina case, the land is for cultivation, hence the requirement not to disperse this nonreproducible asset. In the Sakalava case, on the other hand, it is above all the zebu herd that represents a group's main wealth, hence the need to forge exogamous alliances to find new land for grazing and breeding zebus. Thus,

the same segmentary and contextual logic underlying this tension. Moreover, the coexistence of different principles of group affiliation goes hand in hand with a performative dynamic of affiliation that Southall recognizes in Malagasy kinship systems more generally:

> What seems to be distinctive about all Malagasy kinship systems is not their qualities of cognation or agnation, but their emphasis on kinship and descent status as something achieved gradually and progressively throughout life, and even after death, rather than ascribed and fixed definitively at birth. (1986: 417)

This is why Southall defines Malagasy kinship as "cumulative" (1986: 417). However, it is not a linear accumulation that he refers to, but rather an accumulation of possible affiliations that are reactivated in specific relational contexts. This tension or ambivalence of group affiliation is, in my opinion, another variation in the kinship field of the segmentary, relational logic that operates at different levels of Sakalava social organization.[6] While in a given context (in this case, residential), certain relationships and the categories that express them are consolidated around specific social groups (patrilineages, descent groups), in other contexts and depending on the different strategies adopted by people, these relationships can be recomposed or reconsolidated in different ways.

Before continuing and concluding, I would like to make it clear that rather than attempting to present a coherent system of thought, the intention of this conclusion is to relate elements that have been treated separately in previous ethnographies, but which seem to me to be governed by the same logic. The coherence displayed in this analysis is therefore a rhetorical device aimed at presenting a new point of view for tackling these different issues.

The Two Versions (Reprise)

Discussion of the choice of group membership brings us to a final recurring theme in the anthropology of Madagascar: that of the nature of

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also, the importance the Sakalava accord to friendship and alliances with outsiders, as emphasized by Feeley-Harnik (1991a: 228–29).

6. This is a characteristic found in many sociopolitical groups of Austronesian origin (Fox 1988; Fox and Sather 2011).

the identification of these social agglomerations, be they descent groups (*firazañana*) or sociopolitical groups (karazaña or *foko*). Indeed, the question of the functional or essentializing use of the dynastic appellation Zafinifotsy that we have analyzed in the book echoes the question of the dual nature of collective identities addressed by several anthropologists who have worked on Madagascar (Southall 1971; Huntington 1973; Hurvitz 1980; Eggert 1981; Bloch 1993; Astuti 1995a, 1995b; Lambek and Walsh 1997). Without going into the details of the various interpretations and ethnographic contexts, what emerges from most of them is the performative nature of the construction of collective identity and group membership. Hence the porous nature of the boundaries that constitute these groups. We have already noted that Feeley-Harnik asserts that what defines the Sakalava as an "ethnic group" is their submission to the ampanjaka, the rulers of the Maroseràña dynasty (1991a: 26). Lambek and Walsh (1997: 308) note that the definition of the Antankaraña as a group is linked to the performance of shared practices (respect for prohibitions, participation in rituals, transmission of historical narratives, etc.) rather than to a distinctive and exclusive categorization. Rita Astuti (1995a, 1995b), writing on the Vezo of the southwest, notes that their identification as such is based on their mode of subsistence and the technical practices that characterize it (notably fishing), rather than on their links to ancestors or a common past. All those who learn and follow these particular practices anchored in their ecological context can become Vezo (1995b). However, these examples also demonstrate the relational and differential nature of these collective identities, which are constructed in opposition to other neighboring groups (the Sakalava in opposition to the Tsimihety; the Vezo in opposition to the Masikoro, etc.). The same type of consideration applies to descent group identifications. Hurvitz (1980, 1986), for example, notes that the term Anjoaty is used both as a ritual category, based on specific practices and knowledge, and as a descent category (1980: 17). It is a problem of the same order that we found in the descent group identifications of the Antifañaiñy, according to which a ritual and relative category was consolidated in the descent group appellation. This was also the case in the Zafinifotsy dynastic process, which saw the crystallization of a functional category, relating to the organization of royal succession and power sharing, in a dynastic branch.

Rather than resolving the theoretical contradictions posed by the double dimension of these identity definitions taken in themselves, I have shown, with an approach that is both historical and relational or

pragmatic, that the two versions of these polythetic definitions (Needham 1975) still coexist. What is more, they are valid—true—depending on the context of enunciation, and therefore of identification. This is the same segmentary logic that governs the identity definitions of people and of the different levels of social aggregation to which they belong. And it is also the constant questioning of anthropologists and historians in the face of the contradictions that give rise to attempts to essentialize these definitions (whether they be ethnic, dynastic, or descent-based) and theoretically decontextualize them. The aim of this book has been to move from such ethnocentric questionings to an *emic* understanding of the contextual and relational issues that justify these definitions.

As I have tried to show in these pages, identity is always a relational question, and any attempt to essentialize it is the fruit either of an ethnocentric and colonialist operation, when carried out from outside, or of a political operation justified by historical conjunctures, if conducted from the inside. The political consequences of this essentialization from the outside have been racist theories and identity-based nationalism inherited from the colonial past (Amselle and M'Bokolo 1985). Faced with the racist ethnic essentialization imposed by the colonial bureaucracy, which has influenced postcolonial discourse on Malagasy national identity,[7] certain groups have exacerbated the essentializing aspect of their collective identity. This is not to deny the historical reality of some of the sociopolitical groups to which contemporary ethnic groups refer. However, to essentialize them without taking into account the historical and relational context that gave rise to them, or to fix people in these ethnic (or descent) categories without taking into account the double or even multiple ancestral heritage that characterizes people in Madagascar, are certainly colonial or colonialist operations. Like group affiliations, ethnic affiliations are inherited from both parents, and possibly from their ancestors as well, meaning that people can move from one group to another depending on the context in which they live. The borders of these groups are therefore much more porous, and their identity value more relative, for local actors.[8]

7. I am referring here to the national narrative of the eighteen *foko*, or "ethnic groups," derived from the political groups identified and consolidated during colonization by its bureaucratic apparatus and by the race policy put in place by General Joseph-Simon Gallieni (Gallieni 1900: 30–31).
8. The same colonial obsession with individualization, which clashes with Sakalava practices, can be seen, for example, in the choice imposed on

Finally, it was through the ethnic and dynastic essentialization of historians and anthropologists that local and contextual categories were incorporated into a more general and decontextualized narrative, thus uprooted from the places and groups that produced these segments. In this construction of a general history and in the ethnic mapping of the island, the protagonists have obviously played an active role, albeit without being troubled by the contradictions arising from the mapping process or from scientific bureaucratization. These contradictions remain valid only for an external, foreign, and general point of view, not anchored in the different places and contexts that justify them. The contradictions that emerge on the map, therefore, do not have the same value as those that exist in the territories. The main aim of this book was to bring the reader into the territory, without forgetting to keep an eye on the maps.

people of a single first name and surname to be recorded on their identity card. The people with whom I lived were in fact referred to by several names over the course of their lives and could identify with several families.

Glossary

Ampangataka: the one who makes the *hataka*, meaning "a request," "petition," or "invocation to the royal ancestors"; translated as "intercessor"; it is also referred to as *ben'ny varavarana*, meaning "guardian of the gate/door."

Ampanjaka: from the verb *manjaka*, meaning "to reign, to govern"; the root of this verb is *zaka*, which means "something that can be carried, endured, or borne." The nominal form *ampanjaka* refers not only to the sovereign who rules (sometimes called *ampanjakabe*, meaning "great prince or noble"), but also to all members of the royal family. Therefore, to distinguish their status, I alternatively refer to them as "aristocrats" or "nobles," and sometimes as "princes."

Ampijôro: "the one who performs the *jôro*," meaning the offering or invocation to the lineage ancestors; translated as "intercessor." In Menabe, in the southwest, this role is referred to as *mpitoka* ("the one who performs the *toka*").

Andevo: "slave" or "captured servants"

Anjara: from *zara*, meaning "part, lot, share"; figuratively, it refers to one's share of "responsibility," "domain," or "destiny."

Antankaraña: "the inhabitants of the Ankaraña," a region in the northern part of the island, where the *Zafinifotsy* sovereigns reign

Antidoany: "the people of the *doany*," referring to the royal residence or relics; "servants of the royal residence or the residence of relics"

Antimahabo: "the people of the *mahabo*," referring to the royal cemetery; "servants of the royal cemetery"

Bemazava: a dynastic branch of the *Zafinimena* of Boina, opposed to the *Bemihisatra*

Bemihisatra: a dynastic branch of the *Zafinimena* of Boina, opposed to the *Bemazava*

Doany: the residence that houses the sovereign and/or their relics

Fady: "taboos," "prohibitions"

Fanompoaña: from *manompo* (formed with the transitive verbal prefix *man-* + *tompo*), meaning "to make [someone] a lord, master"; refers to royal service or chore labor for tasks (both ritual and ordinary) intended to ensure the prosperity of the kingdom. It is distinguished into *fanompoaña mafana* (Hot Royal Service), which refers to royal funerals, and *fanompoaña manintsy* (Cold Royal Service), which refers to all other royal ceremonies. During funerals and before the burial of the sovereign, this term refers to both the ceremony itself and, by metonymic extension, to the sovereign's corpse and its various substitutes (such as the coffin or the tomb slabs). Lastly, it can denote any object used in service (such as the rice offered to feed the servants, etc.).

Fanjakana: from the same root as *manjaka* and *ampanjaka*, "government" or "kingdom," "monarchy," "kingship"; it can therefore refer to both the national government and kingship. It is also used metonymically to designate the spirits of sovereigns or the "ancestors of the kingdom" (*razañ'ny fanjakana*). For a subject of the monarchy, the term *fanjakana* refers more to the *tromba* than to the national government.

Firazañana: from *razaña*, "ancestor": "descent group" (e.g., Bevôñy, Manañadabo, etc.)

Fokontany: "the community (*foko*) of the land (*tany*)"; administratively indicates the "basic decentralized community"

Hasiñy: "generative" or "efficacious power," at the root of social and cosmic order.

Hataka: "request" or "petition"; term used to indicate invocation to the royal ancestors in the Boina region; it differs from *jôro*, "invocation," "prayer" or sacrifice," which is used to refer to common ancestors.

Hery: vital force or power with an ambivalent character.

Jôro: invocation and sacrificial offering to the ancestors of the lineage or descent group.

Karazaña: from *razaña*, "ancestor"; "type," "class," "kind" or "species"; it also refers to ancestral groups, such as sociopolitical groups (e.g., Sakalava, Merina, etc.). It can also refer to statutory groups (nobles, commoners).

Mahabo: "which raises," the cemeteries of the Sakalava sovereigns, normally located on high ground

Makoa: generic name given to the descendants of slaves imported from East Africa.

Manantany: "the one who owns the land"; "first in charge," "first official" or "Prime Minister" of the Sakalava sovereigns.

Maroseràña or **Maroserañana**: the first royal Sakalava dynasty formed in the Menabe, in the southwest of the island, from which the Zafinimena or Zafimbolamena dynasty of the northwest descended.

Menaty: "red inside"; internal enclosure surrounding the royal tombs.

Moasy: "diviner-healer," a variant of the term *ombiasy*, which is used in the northwest.

Mpanazary: from *hazary*, "remedy, amulet," another term used to refer to diviner-healers.

Mpitoka: in Menabe, southwest Madagascar, "he who makes the *toka*," an invocation/offering to lineage or royal ancestors; synonymous with the terms *ampijôro* or *ampangataka* used in Boina, in the northwest region.

Ombiasy: term used in the Menabe to refer to diviner-healers.

Razaña: "ancestor(s)."

Razañ'olo: "ancestors" or "ancestralities of people," also interpreted as a diminutive of *karazañ'olo*, "class or kind of person"; it is translated here as "Special Servants" or "servants with ancestors," as opposed to servants descended from slaves.

Saha: term used to describe mediums possessed by the spirit of a deceased sovereign or nobleman; its derivative *sahabe* (the great *saha*) refers to royal mediums who are officially recognized by those in charge of the royal cemetery as being the principal medium of the royal spirit they possess.

Sambarivo: "each one is a thousand," royal servants largely descended from slaves.

Tantara: "history," "historical narrative," or "account" (as opposed to *angano*: tales, fables).

Tariky: "lineage."

Toñy: tree or stone dedicated to an ancestor protected and surrounded by a wooden or concrete enclosure, used as a place for invocations and sacrifices to the ancestors; it can also mean "calm, quiet."

Tromba: spirit of a sovereign or Sakalava noble incarnated in the body of a medium (*saha*).

Tromba andrano: "the royal spirits [drowned] in the water/sea," a group of nobles drowned in the Loza, identified as representatives of the Zafinifotsy royal branch.

Tsangan'olo: "the standing people," in reference to the image by Augustin Dupré of Hercules surrounded by two allegorical figures (Liberty and Equality), all standing, engraved on silver coins of different franc sizes, depending on the period; term used to describe silver coins used for royal ceremonies, particularly invocations to royal ancestors.

Tsodrano: a term I have translated as "ancestral blessing," it is a noun formed from *tsoka*, "the action of sprinkling with the mouth," and *rano*, "water."

Vahiny: foreigner, guest, from a village other than the one where he lives.

Valamena: "red enclosure," normally referring to the enclosure surrounding the royal residence.

Vazaha: foreigner referring to Europeans or foreigners from northwestern countries.

Zafinimena: abbreviated form of *Zafimbolamena*, Grandchildren or Descendants of Gold, indicates the dynastic branch of the Maroseràña ruling in Boina, northwest Madagascar.

Zafinifotsy: abbreviated form of *Zafimbolafotsy*, Grandchildren or Descendants of Silver; dynastic group with which the tromba drowned in the Loza and the nobles from the Antankaraña kingdom are identified.

Zanakan'ny lahy: "children of the man," or "of the brother"; in a pair of siblings who are brother and sister, the descendants of the brother are called in this way.

Zanakan'ny vavy: "children of the woman," or "of the sister"; in a pair of siblings who are brother and sister, the descendants of the sister are called in this way.

Ziva: term used to indicate joking or funeral alliances; the same word is used to refer to both the alliance and the allies; synonymous with *lohateny*.

Zomba: from the Swahili word *majumba*, meaning "big house"; used by the Sakalava to refer exclusively to the royal house or the house of relics.

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