

https://dspace.org/

Labour and the problem of class in nineteenth century Imerina (Madagascar)

Campbell, G.

1987-02-14T06:18:22Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7731

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

CAMPBELL.



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE MAKING OF CLASS

9 - 14 February, 1987

AUTHOR: G. Campbell

TITLE: Labour and the Problem of Class in Nineteenth Century Imerina(Madagascar)

AFRICANA LIBRARY

Labour and the Problem of Class in Nineteenth Century Imerina (Madagascar)

By Gwyn Campbell

Introduction

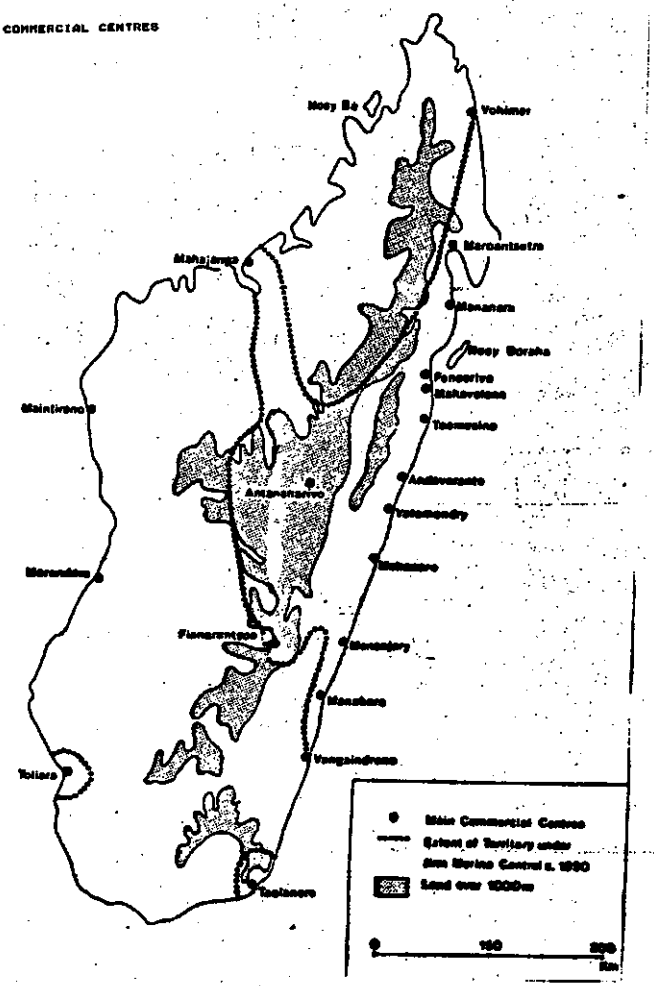
Historians have traditionally tended to identify the history of Madagascar in the nineteenth century with that of the Merina of the central highlands whose court claimed sovereignty over the entire island. In one sense the attention devoted to the Merina is unfortunate, as in reality it never established effective rule over more than one third of the land surface of the island, and in consequence the history of non-colonised Malagasy peoples has been neglected. The positive effect of such historical attention has been that the history of the Merina is one of the best documented of any nineteenth century African people. As might be anticipated, the concentration of research on the Merina has led to divergences of interpretation, and nowhere is this more evident than in the analysis of possible class formation in nineteenth century Imerina. This paper first surveys the debate, and then examines the evidence for the emergence of proto-class consciousness and organisation in the two segments of the imperial labour force where it would have been most likely to occur, the industrial workforce of 1828-57, and the slave porters. It is hoped

that such a study will provide a basis for the evaluation of the subsequent history of labour in Madagascar.

Caste and Class in Merina Society

The first European accounts of Madagascar in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries referred to groups occupying the coastal regions. They invariably reported extreme political fragmentation, the littoral and its immediate hinterland being divided into numerous petty 'kingdoms'. The sovereign was chosen from a small group of nobles, opposed to whom were the mass of 'free' subjects, and slaves. The eighteenth century witnessed the elevation of some of those kingdoms to positions of considerable regional hegemony, the most notable of which were the Sakalava in western Madagascar and, in the last two decades, the Merina state of the central highlands. In all these larger kingdoms the sovereign was regarded as semi-divine, and barriers between nobles, subjects, and slaves were rigidified. There is considerable dispute about the origins of these Malagasy kingdoms; Grandidier claims that they, like the Malagasy, were basically an Indo-melanesian import, but that the ideology of kingship owed much to Arabic influence; Kent contends that the 'homeland' of both the people and the ideology of kingdoms is to be sought in East and Central Africa. Others, like Filliot, offer the simpler explanation that the new kingdoms were a natural outcome of internecine competition for control of foreign trade which expanded markedly from the mid seventeenth century. [1]

MADAGASCAR IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY - THE MERINA EMPIRE AND MAIN COMMERCIAL CENTRES



The issue is of importance because the rulers of Imerina, claiming divine authority, proclaimed absolute ownership of all the resources of their realm. This included manpower which in the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was organised into social, political, and economic units, the relations between which were closely regulated. Raison elaborates on the first impressions gained by European visitors to Imerina, which were that the kingdom was run on essentially feudal lines, the king partitioning his realm into *menakely*, or manorial fiefs, distributed amongst his nobles and favourites. Each lord was in turn absolute ruler within his fief, imposing taxes in money and in kind on his serfs as well as demanding unpaid labour from them. The 'serfs' were confined to villages from which they were forbidden to move without the express permission of their lord. Thus the basis of the social structure became geographically fixed habitations, centred on the *fokonolana*, or village community, and what Bloch terms the *deme*, the basic kinship unit organised with reference to a specific location. Acceptance of such an interpretation lays the foundation for an analysis of nineteenth century Merina history on proto-class lines, particularly with the attempted industrialisation of the central province between 1828 and 1857. (2)

There is also strong support, in both indigenous oral traditions and in nineteenth century literature on Madagascar, for the contention that caste rather than class formed the basis of the Merina social structure. The degree to which the famed Anteimoro diviners, from the south east of the island, were responsible for propagating an ideology of caste is debatable. (3) There are, however, interesting parallels between this group and the Brahmins who reached the Indonesian Archipelago in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.,

possibly at the same time that the proto-Malagasy left their Indonesian homeland. The Brahmins, with their sacro-magical powers, legitimised the rulers of new large kingdoms of the Indonesian Archipelago, a process which involved the ritual caste-like separation of the ruling families from the ruled. [4] The Merina kings of the eighteenth century similarly summoned Anteimoro diviners in order that the sacro-magical powers of the lattermight be used in their service, and at the same time the sovereigns instituted a caste structure which both rigidified and rendered theoretically immutable the already deep divisions between nobles, subjects, and slaves. A marked feature of this was caste endogamy, any transgression of which incurred dire penalties. The major castes were subdivided by royal order into a hierarchy of sub-castes, each of which was ascribed a specific locality to inhabit. Forced labour service to the nobility and crown was rendered by units of people to whom had been ascribed the same caste or sub-caste status. Thus it is possible to argue that caste, rather than class, underpinned the Merina social structure of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. [5]

Empire and Ethnicity

The most marked feature of Merina history in the nineteenth century was its spectacular territorial expansion in which a small plateau kingdom laid claim to all Madagascar, and succeeded in establishing its rule over one third of it. Its reign was brought to an end in 1895 by the French who, however, retained much of the existing administrative structure and personnel. Apologists for French rule set out to demonstrate both the exploitative nature of Merina rule

and the inability of Merina rulers to substantiate their claim to be masters of the entire island. The majority of post-independence historians, led by Deschamps, Valette and Ayache, have countered by claiming that the Merina empire created a nation of all Malagasy peoples and, before the French invasion, had laid the foundations for a mighty indigenous civilisation. Dealing with the question of imperial exploitation of subject peoples, Ayache argues that Merina rule, like the sovereign power of any kingdom, was intrinsically exploitative, expropriating much of the wealth created by the labour of subject peoples. He stresses that the lower classes in Imerina were as exploited as the lower non-Merina classes in subject provinces, and that the Merina ruling class co-operated with provincial ruling classes in that exploitation. He contends therefore that social conflict in nineteenth century Madagascar was the result of the clash of class rather than oftribal animosity. Put in historical perspective, the creation of the Merina kingdom was a necessary process in the creation of a unified Malagasy nation. Once that ideal had been realised, class conflict would then be enabled to fulfil its role in effecting the democratisation of society - a process which had to be postponed in the event until the post-independence era. [6]

There is much evidence to back Ayache's contention that Merina subjects were exploited. Indeed, on the basis that the surplus extracted from skilled labour is greater than that derived from unskilled labour, it could be argued that the Merina, to whose renowned traditional craft expertise was added certain European craft skills in the 1820s and 1830s, were more exploited than the inhabitants of other provinces. However, exploitation may alsobe evaluated by subjective feeling, and on that account it would be difficult to deny that

subject peoples, notably the Betsileo, 'felt' more exploited than did ordinary Merina. Elite collaboration is a marked, and one might argue essential, feature of imperial rule in all its historical settings. Non-Merina were specifically excluded from the imperial army, whilst Merina were encouraged to colonise subjugated territory. Both soldiers in military outposts, and civilians who composed Merina colonies in the provinces, remained quite distinct geographically and socially from the conquered peoples that surrounded them. [7] They also retained and emphasised the niceties of their caste status amongst themselves. Like colonists everywhere, they were tied to their homeland, in this case Imerina, to which they felt that they belonged even after several generations. The most poignant example of this is the emphasis placed on the return of the bones of Merina colonists, who had died in the provinces, to be encased in their ancestral tomb in Imerina. Not to do so was regarded as a major tragedy. [8] A corollary of this was that colonists sought to extract as much gain as possible from their temporary settlement and expatriate it to their homeland. The activity of Merina colonists in Betsileo, where wholesale seizure of the property and even of persons of the subject race is amply recorded, gives backing to the argument that many ordinary Merina were active participants in the process of imperial exploitation. There is virtually no evidence to suggest that there existed any class empathy between the ordinary Merina and the subject peoples of the Merina empire. Imperial Merina exploitation has left lasting scars, and the antipathy felt for them by other Malagasy peoples remains one of the major obstacles in the way of national unity in Madagascar. [9]

The Industrial Experiment, 1828-1857

In large part the initial imperial expansion of the Merina was due to its alliance with Britain - diplomatic relations were established in 1814 and treaties signed in 1817 and 1820 - which supplied considerable military and technical aid to the Merina regime in return for the latter accepting the status of a British satellite power, and banning the export of slaves from the island. By 1826, the Merina court realised that the disadvantages of accepting British informal rule outweighed the advantages accruing from the British alliance, and inaugurated an autarkic policy based on the manufacture of armaments from indigenous resources. A multitude of other products, ranging from paint to glass, were also manufactured during this brief phase of Merina industialisation, but the mainstay of Merina industry remained armaments. Assisted by European artisans who signed contracts with the imperial court, water-powered factories were established at Analakely, Isoraka, Ilafy, and Mantasoa from 1828. Factory labour was in each case housed close by. The first three sites were located in or close to the suburbs of Antananarivo, the imperial capital, but Mantasoa was remote from habitation, located near iron-ore deposits on the periphery of the eastern forest. By 1835 the various factories had started producing a steady stream of swords, spears, daggers, muskets, balls, gunpowder, cannon, grenades and rockets. By 1850, following a major explosion at the Isoraka powder manufactory and considerable labour unrest, the production of armaments slowed. In 1857, Laborde, the French brain behind the industrial complex at Mantasoa, was expelled from the country after being implicated in a plot to unseat the sovereign. The Mantasoa labour force reacted to his dismissal by destroying much of the factory site before

themselves fleeing the site. [10] This prompts the questions, to what extent did class consciousness emerge amongst the industrial workers, particularly at Mantasoa where they lived in a self-enclosed industrial community, and to what degree could the unrest exhibited by the industrial workforce be attributed to class animosity.

Any evaluation of an answer to these questions needs to consider the composition of the industrial labour force. Most of the factory labour force was selected on the principle of *fanompoana*, or unremunerated and obligatory imperial service. In this it did not differ from any other form of imperial forced labour. Word was sent to the heads, in the districts of Imerina, of *fanompoana* units into which the civilian population was divided. These units were subdivided into smaller groups so that from 10 to 1,000 people could be summoned for imperial forced labour from a given district at any time, depending upon the requirement. In theory this system encompassed the entire population, but the imperial court had long placed high value on skilled workers, mostly specialised craftsmen. and these it had set aside in special 'craft villages' where they were subject to constant *fanompoana*, in contrast to the rest of the population for whom *fanompoana* was a burden imposed intermittently. Both types of *fanompoana* unit were composed on the established territorial principle of caste affiliation. Over time, certainly by the second decade of the nineteenth century, even unskilled *fanompoana* units had been associated with specific tasks, so that one sub-caste would be summoned when the imperial court required firewood to be gathered, another to catch fish, and so on, although there always remained the demand for units of general labour . It would appear that it was mainly groups of the latter and

units of craftsmen with skills, like iron-working, specifically required in the manufacture of armaments, that were summoned to the new industrial sites. [11]

The demand of the armaments industry for unskilled labour outstripped the willingness of members of the imperial court to divest themselves of labour resources required to maintain their high status lifestyles. From 1820 the nobility was quick to adopt European tastes and indulge in a competitive spree of building country houses and gardens, and elaborate tombs, as well as decorating their town houses. [12] Moreover, since a Scottish missionary artisan named Cameron, who established the first two industrial centres at Isoraka and Andohalo and who was a hated figure amongst his workforce, had been deliberately pitched into a lake by his bearers, the court was reluctant to over-stretch the patience of the local 'free' population. [13] It consequently summoned labour from the ranks of the imperial army, as well as convicts, especially to work at the isolated Mantasoa complex. Prominent amongst the criminal workforce from 1836, after Cameron and the last missionaries had been expelled from the island and the Christian faith banned, were Christian proselytes. In general, the different elements that made up the industrial labour force were initially unlikely to gell into a unitary 'working class'. Their ascribed status in terms of caste, military rank, and the distinctiveness of the condemned Christians who had forsaken ancestral traditions for the 'God of the Anglisy' agitated for a perpetuation of divisions amongst them, which only radical change might alter.

In industrial locations elsewhere, a shared lifestyle, in and out of work, has proved one of the critical elements contributing to an emerging consciousness

of class. When this consciousness is transformed into united action against exploitation by the oppressor class, the genesis of a working class is evident. If such a consciousness was to emerge on an industrial site in Imerina, it would have been at Mantasoa. Despite the workers sharing specially provided accommodation, being subjected to the same arduous work regime, and at times protesting vehemently against exploitation of their labour, there is no evidence that a working-class consciousness emerged at Mantasoa or on any of the other industrial sites. No leaders emerged to articulate the views and feelings of the labour force, although these were voiced in popular song and aphorisms. Such protest as there was resulted from the work of small groups or individuals and in no way represented united action by the body of workers as a whole. [14]

The failure for the emergence of class consciousness and organisation in the Merina 'industrial era' between 1828 and 1857 may be largely attributed to three factors. Firstly, as noted, the strong caste ties of each labour unit agitated against the formation of a wider class allegiance, and in this respect the Christians who provided much of the convict labour may be considered as an out-caste which largely conformed to caste principles. Secondly, massive and rigorous state supervision of the industrial workforce reinforced existing caste cleavages and would have determinedly suppressed any signs of a proto-working class organisation. Finally, the industrial experiment was too weak and too short lived to have constituted the catalyst for the forging of a working class identity. Despite the wide variety of products manufactured on the four industrial sites, it was only in the manufacture of armaments that a serious attempt was made at mass production. In the late 1830s and in the

1840s production accelerated impressively, but it foundered before reaching a state of mass production, whilst forward and backward linkages were minimal because most raw materials were extracted from deposits located on or in close proximity to the site where most processing also took place. Imerina's industrial experiment was an isolated and temporary affair involving about 30,000 out of a working population of possibly one million. [15]

Following the failure of the attempted industrial revolution in Imerina, the rigid social cleavages caused by caste and ethnicity appear to have hardened. Potential divisions on class lines were weakened by the accession to power of certain northern Imerina families of the common *hova* or 'free' caste in the 1860s. The fact that they broke the noble caste's monopoly of political power, and at the same time ruthlessly suppressed competition from *hova* factions of southern Imerina, strengthened territorially based caste allegiance, and gave substance to the claim that the Merina as a whole, rather than the nobility alone were responsible for imperial exploitation. [16]

The Slave-Porters

(i) Slavery

In this context, any expression of class consciousness was likely to arise in the section of the community least affected by bonds of caste and ethnicity,

although it might appear surprising that the first evidence for a proto-working class should have developed among slaves. The latter were considered the lowest category in the Merina caste hierarchy, and were divided into two broad groups. The *mainty* (lit. 'black'), were the oldest category of slave. They comprised in the main Merina who had been enslaved through indebtedness, as a punishment for crime, or more commonly by having been captured in war or kidnapped in slave raids. Although reduced to slavery, most strove to redeem themselves and, once manumitted, they automatically regained their former caste status. Like Merina colonists in the provinces, they thus clung fervently to their caste ascription and kept their distance from the non-Merina around them. The second group of slaves was termed *andevo* (lit. 'slaves'), composed in the main of non-Merina slaves. In the eighteenth century these were derived from battles and raids on neighbouring provinces, most of the captives thus gleaned being destined for the export rather than the domestic slave market. However, the ban on slave exports from Merina dominions, combined with the huge drain on Merina manpower involved in the military and administrative expansion of empire, and in the short-lived attempt at industrialisation, to create a large domestic demand for slaves of non-Merina origin. Because fatality in the provinces was high, due more to the ravages of starvation and malaria than to military opposition, and the Merina-only rule for employment in the imperial service was in the main adhered to, domestic demand for slaves increased beyond what the war-torn provinces could provide. From the late 1820s slaves were imported from the east African coast, at a possible rate of 10,000 per annum in peak years, until imports declined absolutely from the time of the Franco-Merina War of 1882-85. 17]

It was in the ranks of the *andevo* that a proto-class consciousness emerged, unique in its type, in nineteenth century Madagascar. By the mid-nineteenth century slave ownership was universal amongst 'free' Merina, whilst instances of slaves owning other slaves were not uncommon. Most newly imported slaves were destined to find themselves in the company of other slaves, though the number might vary from a handful to groups of a thousand and more owned by the wealthy. These would have been selected according to criteria of strength, beauty, age, and skill, and not according to ethnic or cultural background. Slaves were imported from a wide variety of regions in Madagascar and East Africa, and although semblances of caste allegiance were manifest in the non-Merina peoples of Madagascar, they were lacking in those of recent African origin. Moreover slaves were seized and sold on an essentially individual rather than group or even family basis, so that any caste or ethnic links that had existed prior to enslavement were broken once a person was reduced to the status of a slave. At the same time, the likelihood of reforging prior allegiances was small once the slave had reached Imerina. This was due both to the admixture of culture and ethnicity amongst the *andevo*, and to their exclusion from Merina society. There was no channel in Imerina for slaves to gain acceptability, such as existed in Muslim societies fgor slaves converted to Islam, whilst rigid caste barriers in Imerina prevented all but a tiny handful of *andevo* from gaining status and respectability through the performance of military and administrative duties, as occurred in some West African states. In theory, the *andevo*, like the *mainty*, could redeem themselves, but unlike the latter, a former *andevo* had no caste status and therefore no position in Merina society. At the same time, a former slave was, upon emancipation, immediately susceptible to state *fanompoana*, or

unremunerated forced labour. [18] In such a situation, there are very few instances of voluntary manumission, most slaves who were in a position to purchase their freedom preferring to pay all but the last cent of their redemption price. They were thus in a stronger bargaining position with their master, who knew that he could lose them at any moment, and avoided the dangers of being defenceless but free in Merina society. 19]

However, there are major obstacles to slave populations bonding on class lines, chief of which are the normally wide geographical dispersal of the slaves and the variety of work undertaken by them. Most *andevo* in Imerina were engaged in agriculture, specifically in the labour-intensive irrigated riziculture characteristic of the central highlands of Madagascar, as tenders of stock, or as domestic servants. Agricultural and domestic service occupations are notoriously poor ground for the development of class consciousness and organisation, mainly because of the dispersal of the workforce and the difficulties of establishing and maintaining communication between different regions. Such difficulties were exacerbated in the case of slaves who were generally closely supervised, their masters often working alongside them in the field, and their mistresses omnipresent at home. Supervision was more relaxed in the case of slaves employed as commercial agents by their masters. Many of these traded on their own account at the same time as catering for their owner's interests, and if skilful soon become reasonably prosperous. Such prosperity in the face of general poverty agitated against the development of subjective feelings of exploitation amongst such trader-slaves, whilst the nature of their employment was essentially individualistic and placed barriers in the path of bonding with other traders.

(ii) Porters

The last major occupation reserved for slaves was that of porterage. In common with the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, no wheeled transport had developed in Madagascar, except in small white-planter enclaves on the coast. Similarly, animal labour as a supplement to human labour was not used outside the wet-rice fields of the central plateau. Transport therefore devolved upon human porterage. Initially this was provided, as in East Africa, by free labour, working in the dry, off-peak agricultural season for wages in kind or money. With the expansion of foreign trade in the nineteenth century, East African tribes, notably the Nyamwezi, increasingly specialised in long-distance porterage. In Madagascar, where the expansion of trade coincided with the rapid enlargement of the imperial Merina frontier, the court extended its control over all aspects of foreign trade, which provided one of the major sources of revenue for the state. Shrewdly realising the huge profits to be made from the transport of goods to and from the coast, the nearest stretch of which could be reached in an average of seven to twelve days from the imperial capital which lay in the heart of the island, members of the court organised a full-time porterage system using their personal funds of slaves. 20)

Organised in gangs, these porters were led by a captain, also a slave but appointed by his owner, who was responsible for bargaining with potential customers over the wage to be paid, for the care of porters en-route, and for the safe arrival of freight and persons transported. These gangs could only be hired on the release of an official passport which documented their names, the names of their owners, and the itinerary. These were checked at the military

posts which had been established at regular intervals along all major trade routes, and which kept in contact through an official courrier service. This ensured that slaves would be unlikely to abscond, for failure to arrive at a given military post at the expected time would result in the despatch of a contingent of troops to hunt them down. Another disincentive to escape was payment, for the syndicate that ran the porterage system permitted slave porters to retain up to 50 per cent of their earnings, although until the mid 1860s porter wages remained low and practically stationary. [21] Thereafter they rose rapidly, a reflection both of increased demand for porters, and their growing organisational strength. It is in this period, and particularly in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, that evidence exists for the development of proto-class consciousness and organisation amongst the porters.

The porters fell into two categories, the *mpaka* or *mpitondra entana*, or carriers of freight, and the *mpilanza*, who specialised in the carriage of people. The work was arduous, *mpaka entana* carrying an average of 40 kg per man, and the *mpilanja* supporting generally a weight of between 20 and 25 kg, the most used route being the 350 km between Antananarivo, at an altitude of about 1,500 m, and Toamasina, at sea level. *Mpaka entana* generally covered the distance in 15-30 days, and *milanja* in 5-8 days depending on the type of weight or passenger to be transported, and the state of the roads. Evidence from European travellers is overwhelming in its praise of the porters for their skill, strength, speed, and good humour over rough and often seemingly impassable country. [22]

Within larger porter gangs comprising generally between ten and forty men, *mpaka entana* worked in pairs, transporting their burdens on bamboo poles suspended between their shoulders. It was usual for *mpilanja* to work in units of eight, four carrying the *mpilanjana*, or palanquin, and four others running alongside as the relief team, and as travellers generally travelled in groups, there were normally a minimum of sixteen *mpilanja* per expedition, in addition to a cook, whilst the slower *mpaka entana* travelled separately. Common experience of travelling the same routes, enduring the same difficulties of carriage, weather, and terrain, and possessing the same attitude towards employers created a natural bond between members of both categories of porters. There were, of course, differences between them. The *mpilanja* were composed of young, and extremely fit men, and were, unusually, mostly Christian protestant converts, whilst the *mpaka entana* were generally older and were notoriously 'pagan'. Nevertheless, both groups forged strong ties based on common workexperience. They developed a common cultural identity, marked especially by songs, and a mutual aid system which included, amongst other 'benefits', assistance to members falling ill en route. (23)

It was on this platform of shared work experience that a proto-class consciousness emerged amongst porters. This was taken a stage further, towards the development of a class-based organisation by the 1880s. The core of such an organisation might well have been the mutual-aid system, but this was augmented by the institution of *fatidra*, or blood brotherhood. This united them in a class-based unity, much as common ancestral links tied the Merina in caste-based groups. The *fatidra* assisted co-operation, particularly where work grievances arose and a show of strength was deemed vital in order to achieve

the aims of the porters. This proto-trade union was assisted by the captains, who formed natural leaders, having gained long experience in wage bargaining and in articulating their men's viewpoint. For example, one such captain, Rainiketramanga, led his gang of fifty porters in protest against the London Missionary Society agent in the east coast port of Mahanoro in December 1886 for delaying them over the traditional '*fandroana*', or New Year holiday. [24] It was also at this time of year, when labour was scarce, that porters combined to demand higher wages. They argued initially for a temporary rise, but once a higher wage rate had been granted, they combined to make it permanent. Porter wages, which had remained stable at $0.17 per day from the close of the eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century, rose to $0.25 per day by 1884, whilst the rate for the Antananarivo-Toamasina route increased from $2 to $5 a man between 1866 and 1888, and again to $8 by 1894. Rates continued to rise with the French occupation, although in 1897 General Gallieni attempted to enforce a maximum rate of $9 per man for the Antananarivo-Toamasina trip. The porters were fastidious about being paid in non-adulterated money, it being customary for each to carry a pair of trusted scales in order to ensure that the correct weight of silver was exchanged in each transaction. The rise in money wages was accompanied by improvements in conditions of work for the porters. They wrested from employers a right to share the gifts traditionally distributed by travellers to the headmen of host villages, and the right to cease work at sunset, and to enjoy occasional nights of rum drinking during a particularly long journey. [25]

By the early 1870s porters had already earned a reputation for being 'extremely independent', and there is little doubt that by the 1890s they had

formed a strong class-based organisation involving up to 60,000 men, or possibly 70% of the male slave population of Imerina. As Catat shrewdly observed, 'Ce sont leurs occupations bien plus que leur origine qui en ont fait une corporation ayant ses usages et ses coutumes'. [26] However, their days were numbered from 1895 from which time the French administration started to invest heavily in transport improvements and, despite large protests by the porters, these effectively pushed human porters off all main routes by the eve of the First World War. [27]

Summary

There has been considerable debate amongst historians of pre-colonial Madagascar about the strength of class as opposed to caste as a socio-economic bond. The focus of the debate has been the Merina kingdom of the central highlands which expanded rapidly in the nineteenth century to constitute a formidable empire in the island. The sum of evidence concerning the Merina social structure, and relations within the empire between the Merina and subjected peoples suggests that relations were cemented to a far greater extent by ties of caste and ethnicity than by class. Class-based social relations were far more likely to be evident in groups of labour whose conditions of work would agitate against pre-existing caste and ethnic bonds. Two such groups were analysed, the industrial workforce of the period 1828-57, and the slave porters of the late nineteenth century. Whereas the former showed no evidence of an emerging class consciousness and organisation, the latter did. The contrast between the two groups is evident. The industrial

workers comprised caste-based labour units, were closely supervised, relatively small in number, and were involved in an industrial experiment of short duration. The latter, as slaves, had negligible caste and ethnic ties, were relatively loosely supervised, possessed experienced and articulate leaders, were numerous, and forged close bonds over the greater part of a century based on shared working experience.

References

1. A. & G. Grandidier, Histoire physique, naturelle et politique de Madagascar IV.I. (Paris,1908),1-186; R.A. Kent, Early Kingdoms in Madagascar, 1500-1700 (Berkeley,1970); J.M. Filliot, La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle (Paris,1974); also see J. Lombard,La royauté Sakalava. Formation, développement et effondrement du XVIIe au XXe siècle. Essais d'analyse d'un système politique (Tananarive,1973); E. Fauraux,La formation Sakalava ou l'histoire d'une articulation raté (Paris,1975).

2. J.P. Raison,'Perception et réalisation de l'espace dans la société mérina',Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisation 3 (1977); M. Bloch,Placing the Dead (London,1971).

3. F. Raison-Jourde,'Introduction' in idem (ed),Les souverains de Madagascar (Paris,1983),7-65.

4. J.C. van Leur,Indonesian Trade and Society (The Hague,1955),89-116.

5. Callet,Histoire des Rois I (Tananarive,1974),86-116, 136-9, 173-236, 247-8, 252-68.

6. H. Deschamps,Histoire de Madagascar (Paris,1972),151-223; J. Valette,'Radama I, the Unification of Madagascar and the Modernisation of Imerina (1810-1828)' in R. Kent (ed),Madagascar in History: Essays from the 1970s (Berkeley,1979),168-96; S. Ayache,'Pouvoir central et province sous la monarchie merina au XIXe siècle: un thème de recherche', paper presented at the Colloque d'histoire, Université de Madagascar (Toliara,1979); see also G. Althabe,'L'utilisation de dépendance du passé dans la résistance villageoise à la domination étatique' in Raison-Jourde (ed),Les souverains,427-9; F. Esoavelomandroso,'Rainilaiarivony and the Defense of Malagasy Independence at the end of the Nineteenth Century' in Kent (ed),Madagascar in History,228-51.

7. A. Martineau,Madagascar en 1894 (Paris [1895?]); H.M. Dubois,Monographie des Betsileos (Paris,1938).

8. Callet,Histoire I, 268-9.

9. Gwyn Campbell, 'The Role of the London Missionary Society in the Rise of the Merina Empire, 1810-1861' Ph.D (University of Wales,1985),11-18.

10. J. Chauvin,'Jean Laborde, 1805-1878',Mémoires de l'Académie Malgache 29 (Tananarive,1939); J. Cameron,Recollections of Mission Life in Madagascar during the Early Days of the LMS Mission (Antananarivo,1874); S. Chapus,Quatre-vingts années d'influences européennes en Imerina, 1815-1895 (Tananarive,1925),194-233.

11. Grandidier,Histoire IV.I (1908),249, 370, and ibid IV.IV (1928), 134, 166, 370; J.J. Freeman & D. Johns, A Narrative of the Persecution of the Christians in Madagascar (London,1840), 25-6, 42, 78, 107.

12. Campbell,'Role of the London Missionary Society' chs 6 and 7.

13. Raombana,'Annales', 357-60 and idem,'Histoire',134, Archives de l'Académie Malgache (Tsimazaza,Antananarivo).

14. see references, note 10.

15. see references, note 10.

16. Deschamps,Histoire,171-80.

17. Callet,Histoire I, 321-31; Grandidier,Histoire IV.I (1908),265-68; Gwyn Campbell,'Madagascar and the Slave Trade, 1810-1895',Journal of African History 22 (1981), 203-27.

18. Callet,Histoire I, 323.

LWS 46

19. Chapus,Quatre-vingts années, 301.

20. Gwyn Campbell,'Labour and the Transport Problem in Imperial Madagascar, 1810-1895', Journal of African History 21 (1980),341-56.

21. Chapus,Quatre-vingts années, 294.

22. Grandidier,Histoire IV.IV (1928),351-3.

23. Campbell,'Transport',349, 351.

24. J. Mullens,Twelve Months in Madagascar (London,1875),134; E.J. Knight,'From Fort Dauphin to Fianarantsoa',Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine 19 (1895), 363-371 and (1896),397-401; Campbell,'Labour',347.

25. Grandidier,Histoire IV.IV (1928), 351, 353-7; L. Catat,Voyage à Madagascar (Paris,1895),22-3.

26. Catat,Voyage,20.

27. Grandidier,Histoire IV.IV (1928),353-7.