Constructing history, culture and inequality: the Betsileo in the extreme Southern Highlands of Madagascar
Evers, S.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter two

The Construction of Inequality among Migrants

Settlement of the region between Ambalavao and Ankaramena (see Madagascar map) is relatively recent. According to archival records, this former no-man’s-land between the Highlands and the South was virtually uninhabited prior to the twentieth century. The archives indicate that runaway slaves and, at a later stage, ex-slaves were the principal occupants of the area. Beyond this affirmation, virtually no information exists. The first settlers called themselves Betsileo like the other inhabitants of the Southern Highlands (Archives d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, cf. Kottak 1980: 5, 48, 49, 101).

High status local residents estimate that the first settlers arrived in Marovato in the 1930s. They describe themselves as Betsileo and as tompon-tany (“masters of the land”). Current socio-economic relations in fomba gasy (“Malagasy customs”) are viewed by them as stable and timeless. The tompon-tany use the imprimatur of ancient custom and history to confer legitimacy upon present-day regional and local socio-economic configurations. Reality, however, is much more grounded in the recent past. For example, the andevohafa (“slave” or “of slave descent”) status of certain migrants was imposed by the tompon-tany. How this was achieved, and its consequences will be explored in this chapter.

2.1 Acquiring free descent status through tombs

Until the latter half of the 1960s, settlement and acquisition of land in the Ambalavao-Ankaramena region was relatively easy. The mere occupation of land gave settlers the opportunity to accede to the status of tompon-tany. In both Merina and Betsileo society, possession of land and a family tomb are markers of family origin in a particular region (cf. Bloch 1971: 106-108). So, this initial wave of migrants “became” tompon-tany simply by building a family tomb on their own land, thereby conferring upon it the status of ancestral land. These pre-1967 migrants currently form the established group dwelling in the zone between Ambalavao and Ankaramena. They claim either commoner (olo/npolsy) or even noble (rakoto or andriamena) origins. Based on reports of slave settlement in the Archives d’Outre Mer, however, it appears more likely that this migrant group is of slave descent.
I tried to verify whether the migrants who became *tompon-tany* were of actual free descent. Most were willing to disclose their place of origin. On the basis of that information, I visited seven villages that were claimed as the ancestral homelands of seven *tompon-tany* families in Marovato. I tracked down a certain number of their relatives (they were principally family of the *tompon-tany* wives) but it was difficult to conclusively determine whether or not the villages were in fact their homelands. Often, these relatives disclosed that they also were migrants, who had themselves only recently become *tompon-tany* by establishing a family tomb on their newly acquired land. Moreover, questions about descent had to be framed with care, so as not to be considered offensive. People with tombs were unsurprisingly not reluctant to discuss their family tomb. Indeed, it was a source of pride and an opportunity to showcase their social status. In their *tana tara* ("tale") which recounts their lives, the tomb generally constitutes the point of departure. People of slave descent, however, displayed a natural reticence on the topic of ancestral lands and tombs, which might reveal either the absence of a tomb or its recent pedigree. Because of this, the project of determining actual origin turned out to be a hazardous adventure, with no guarantees of success. After several long trips (ranging from 15 to 50 kilometres on foot) to places that people had identified as their ancestral homeland, I decided that it would be more fruitful to examine perceptions and claims in this area, which I felt, were more relevant than alleged historical reality. In summary, I was increasingly coming to the conclusion that it was not authentication of the *tompon-tany* free origin which confirms their status, but its legitimisation through the tomb.

The *tompon-tany* now principally dwell in fourteen Betsileo villages located within a fifteen-kilometre radius of Marovato. The inhabitants of the Marovato region refer to them as *tanana taloha* ("ancient villages"). The centre of this type of village is composed of two level ancestral homes made of brick. The upper level is usually inhabited by family elders. From the balconies, they can observe their offspring who dwell in small houses and huts surrounding the ancestral dwellings. "Ancient villages", as a rule, are inhabited by no more than one or two *tompon-tany* families.

A migrant could only aspire to *tompon-tany* status in the Ambalavao-Ankaramena region if he possessed land. It is precisely this *sine qua non* that presented an obstacle for post-1967 migrants. These later migrants moved to the area for three main reasons. The first group of Antandroy, Bara and Betsileo were fleeing the terror of cattle thieves operating in Southern Madagascar. The second group included people of slave origin who hoped to start afresh by moving to another region. The third group of migrants came for economic reasons, as the region is renowned for its manioc harvests.

Settlement was to prove more arduous for these latter migrants. By the end of the 1960s, all available land in the former no-man's-land had been claimed by the *tompon-tany*. These *tompon-tany* are now very selective in accepting migrants into their villages. In the Marovato region, only family members are considered acceptable candidates. Non-Betsileo Malagasy are rejected outright. To justify this, the *tompon-tany* stereotype them as "different people" (*olona hofo*). Migrants of non-Betsileo origin are often the victims of prejudice, but none more so than the Antandroy, who are referred to as *olona ratsy* ("bad people"). The Antandroy are not allowed to reside in Betsileo villages. Nor do the *tompon-tany* permit them to lease land. This policy reflects a deliberate attempt to rid themselves of the Antandroy. Yet the Antandroy have stayed to this day, living in small hamlets, where their

---

6 For the purposes of this thesis, the Marovato region includes these and other villages located within a fifteen-kilometre radius of Marovato.
basic means of livelihood is rearing cattle. The Antandroy have no tombs in the region. When someone of their community dies, he or she is transported back to the ancestral land or buried near the mountains. Antandroy hamlets are located close to road (RN7), at a distance of between one to five kilometres to the East or West from the small town of Ankaramena. Their settlements are scattered, composed essentially of a few families dwelling in little huts.

At the present time, migrants without relatives in the Marovato region usually try to settle in Ankaramena or the village of Marovato. Over the years, Ankaramena has evolved into a mosaic of migrants arriving from virtually every region in the country. These migrants principally try to eke out a living as itinerant traders. Where possible, they lease land from local tompon-tany. Settlement policy in Ankaramena is administered by the municipality. Newcomers fill out a settlement application form in which they state their grounds for moving to the region and their preferred settlement location. This form is submitted with the applicant’s identity card. If admitted as a resident of Ankaramena, he/she obtains a certificat de résidence. However, migrants who intend on earning income in agriculture usually apply for residence in Marovato or one of the other six migrant villages in the region. In these villages, settlement policy is regulated by tompon-tany “gate-keepers.”

Before analysing the settlement policy of the tompon-tany in Marovato and its current socio-cultural configuration, an overview of the village history is required.

2.2 The creation of Marovato

Marovato is located about forty kilometres Southwest of Ambalavao. About sixty years ago, Marovato was founded by Andriamaro and Rafidy Andriana on “Route Nationale 7” (RN7). The French colonial government (1896-1960) can indirectly be credited with their initiative. The integration of Southern Madagascar into the national economy was high on the political agenda of the French administration. Initial energies were devoted to infrastructure projects in the Highlands, after which the administration turned its attention towards the South. One of these latter projects, completed in the nineteen-thirties, was the extension of the RN7 from Fianarantsoa to Ihosy and Toliara on the Southwest coast (Portais 1974: 20-26).

---

7 The zebus of the Antandroy often trample and destroy the manioc fields of the tompon-tany, which only serves to reinforce their bad image and leads to further animosity. Local tompon-tany also claim that Antandroy hamlets are located on their territory, which for them is unacceptable. However their fear of the “dangerous” (mampidi-doza) Antandroy prevents them from taking concrete action to expel them from their lands.

8 There are hills and mountains on both sides of the road (RN7), at an approximate distance of one and a half kilometre from the Antandroy hamlets.

9 Marovato is a migrant village. 36.2% of its population has settled since 1970. They are called mpiany (“migrants”) because they do not have a family tomb in the region. Later in my field work, I discovered six more migrant villages in the Marovato region where similar socio-economic configurations exist.

10 Once the application is granted the identity card is returned.

11 Villages in the Marovato region largely escape state regulatory control for a variety of social and economic reasons discussed in chapter one.

12 The road from Fianarantsoa to Ihosy and Toliara is presently called “Route Nationale 7” but during the colonial period the French referred to it as “Route d’Intérêt Général.”
The weight of French infrastructure ambitions was passed on to the Malagasy in the form of increased taxes.\textsuperscript{13} Nor were the Malagasy spared the physical hardship of these colonial mega-projects.\textsuperscript{14} As corvée labourers, all men were conscripted to devote part of their workweek for the colonial government. To mobilise these workers, the French relied on the traditional local authorities, the tompon-tany, who selected the corvée labourers from their villages (Ralaikoa 1987: 71-78).

In 1934, construction of the Ambalavao-Ankaramena section commenced. Topographically, this region is a hilly transition between the Highlands and the arid semi-desert flatlands of the South. The rocky, hilly terrain of the extreme Southern Highlands proved to be particularly hazardous. It took labourers several months before they were able to push the road through the hills as far as the Zomandao river. The Zomandao had attracted many migrants at the beginning of the twentieth century from both the Highlands and the South, who had established themselves in little villages along the river banks. They lived mainly from cultivating rice and fishing. Two of these villages were Marovotry ("many ants") and Vidia ("at the same route").

Local tompon-tany and Rafidy Andriana recounted the story of these villages and the creation of Marovato to me.\textsuperscript{15} Rafidy Andriana was born in Vida in 1918, just one year before Andriamaro, whose birthplace was Marovotry. They were childhood friends and married at approximately the same time. To provide an income for their families, they sold food to labourers at the RN7. They were soon emulated by other villagers, but none attained the success of the two friends. That was no doubt partially due to the fact that Rafidy Andriana and Andriamaro's meals were reputed to come with equally enticing tales, which were highly appreciated by the workers.

When they first started doing business, Rafidy Andriana and Andriamaro travelled an hour on foot to the RN7 each morning, accompanied by their wives. Eventually they abandoned this practice, and set up lodgings at roadside. As their income from selling food far exceeded anything they could hope for working the rice fields at the Zomandao river, the attraction of their home villages decreased. After a period of several months, they devoted their exclusive efforts to the catering business.

Still, Rafidy Andriana and Andriamaro never intended on permanently settling at the roadside. With the departure of the labourers, they assumed that they would return to their families. However, travellers descending into the desolate Southern regions began stopping off for food supplies en route. Business flourished. Rafidy Andriana and Andriamaro displayed their newly acquired wealth (at least by Malagasy standards) by building brick houses, still a rarity at the end of the 1930's. Soon, brothers and sisters from their villages of origin joined Rafidy Andriana and Andriamaro or built hamlets within proximity of Marovato. To seal their friendship, the creation of Marovato and common success, Rafidy

\textsuperscript{13} Ralaikoa (1987: 112-124) describes these tax increases during the colonial period in Madagascar, with specific reference to the Southern Highlands.

\textsuperscript{14} During the first decades of the colonial period, the French imported coolies from India to work on the roads, but these labourers could not resist the Malagasy climate: most of them fell ill in no time and many died (Delval 1975: 1-2).

\textsuperscript{15} The settlement history of Marovato was gathered by in-depth discussions with nine tompon-tany family leaders from Marovato and neighbouring villages.
Andriana and Andriamaro concluded a blood bond, raki-ra.16

Anyone who does not enjoy the advantages of a biological line can nevertheless become family by the creation of the vaki-ra blood bond (raky here means "cut" and ra "blood"). The two participants, called fati-dra,11 sit down facing each other. An ambiasy ("traditional healer") makes an incision in the chest of both. The blood that comes from the wound is collected in a bowl. Water and fragments of charcoal (ba^omang) are added to it. While the two participants drink the liquid, the "traditional healer" pronounces the words: Ho velona mandraki^ay (the vaki-ra "will last forever") followed by ary harena sany manana ny ary fa misamony no atao ("to each man his wealth within the bond of mutual assistance"). The "traditional healer" sprinkles some drops from the bowl into the Northeast corner of the house, a location associated with the ancestors. He then calls upon the forefathers of both participants to grant their blessing to the newly created raki-ra. After the ritual, the vaki-ra is celebrated by a feast in which the families of both participants establish the basis for their shared future. The raki-ra not only binds the two friends as brothers, but also their respective extended families.

The vaki-ra of Rafidy Andriana and Andriamaro was instrumental in creating social cohesion in Marovato. This is clearly evidenced in the layout of huts and houses in the village. The South side of the road, Marovato-amihany (high Marovato), is principally inhabited by the descendants and relatives of Rafidy Andriana and Andriamaro (see 1992 Marovato map). In 1985, Andriamaro died, survived by his wife and two daughters.

Villagers usually claim that Betsileo social organisation is primarily patrilineal.18 However, I noted a number of exceptions to this rule. Men are said to be the preferred family leaders. Rafidy Andriana, for example, did not consider it appropriate that one of Andriamaro’s two daughters succeed him as family leader. Rafidy Andriana therefore proclaimed that he would assume the leadership.19 To commemorate his accession, he ordered his sons to build a corridor on the first floor joining his house with that of his deceased “brother”. Later, he connected this corridor with his bedroom, allowing him a panoramic view over all inhabitants of South Marovato.

At the time of Andriamaro’s death, Marovato had already grown significantly. Ratema played an important role in its development. In 1965, he moved from the town of Fianarantsoa to Marovato. Ratema’s search for land had led him to the Marovato region.

16 The description is a synthesis of vaki-ra rituals I observed and discussed with the villagers.

17 Fati-dra actually is the Merina synonym for vaki-ra, but in the Marovato region villagers use the word to mean “those undergoing the vaki-ra ritual”.

18 Kottak (1980: 13), who worked in Betsileo villages close to Ambalavao, comments as follows: “A capsule anthropological description of Betsileo social organisation would call it ambilineal (or cognatic), with a strong patrilineal bias. Almost all marriages are virilocal;”

19 And by unifying leadership of the two families of the co-founders, he consolidated his position as village leader. When I asked other villagers who attended the funeral of Andriamaro how they viewed Rafidy Andriana’s appropriation of leadership over Andriamaro’s family in lieu of his eldest daughter, some said that according to “Malagasy customs” daughters actually can replace the father if no sons are available for succession. They all were quick to add that this was a special case because Rafidy Andriana was the founder of the village. “Malagasy customs” they asserted, gave Rafidy Andriana the freedom to impose his will and leadership on Andriamaro’s wife, offspring and relatives living in the village. None of the villagers I spoke objected to the way Rafidy Andriana had dealt with the situation.
His plan was to cultivate manioc on a large scale. The first step in implementing his plan was to take possession of unclaimed land, which at that time was still abundant. Other villagers had reservations about his experiment, and paid it little due, as they considered rice superior to other crops. However, severe water shortages brought on by low levels of precipitation would eventually force them to consider the feasibility of Ratema’s activities.

Ratema’s experiment proved to be a success. He was the first to build a house on the Northern side of the road in Marovato ambanj (lower Marovato). Other villagers eagerly followed his example and started cultivating manioc themselves. Andriamaro and Rafidy Andriana were pleased with the life that Ratema had injected into the village economy and enjoyed their personal benefits from their own manioc harvests. In 1974, they invited Ratema to enter into a vaki-ra with them. Ratema accepted and through the vaki-ra succeeded in being integrated into the social structure of Marovato.

During this same period, new migrants were arriving in Marovato, also wishing to cultivate manioc. Two of these newcomers were Randriavelo and his wife Rantsiry. They migrated to Marovato in 1966. Upon arrival, they claimed a parcel of land near Marovato and started cultivating manioc. After they died, approximately ten years ago, their children chose to remain in the Northeastern part of the village (see Marovato maps: family C). As the numerous sons of the family continued working the lands they inherited from their parents, family wealth steadily increased. Within one year after settlement of Randriavelo’s family, Mitsiky and Ragaby arrived with their wives and children from Ihosy to test their luck in the manioc business. They were among the last migrants who were still able to convert unclaimed land for purposes of production and thereby qualify to become tompon-tany. Both families and their descendants live in North Marovato. Three more families, admittedly smaller, joined the five aforementioned families. All eight families arrived prior to 1967. They call themselves tompon-tany. Migrants who came afterwards also consider them as such. The tompon-tany all have built tombs on their land.

Manioc provided villagers with sufficient income to exceed subsistence needs. Success brought with it the desire to expand, an appreciation of the intrinsic and lasting value of land and the need to possess. This, according to the tompon-tany, led to the 1967 meeting of the tompon-tany of the region, held in Marovato. At the meeting, all unclaimed land was divided between them, and the tompon-tany concluded a pact under which land would henceforth only be leased and not sold. This amounted to nothing less than a de facto exclusion of later migrants from tompon-tany ranks. Large parcels of the land claimed by the tompon-tany at this meeting nevertheless remains fallow to this day (see chapters four and five).

Thus, newcomers arriving in Marovato after 1967 could no longer hope to own their own land. The tompon-tany refer to them as mpiaiy (“migrants”), a label not challenged by the mpiaiy, who settle exclusively in Eastern and Western Marovato. They asserted that they are obviously mpiaiy since they have no tombs in the Marovato region. In 1992, Marovato was inhabited by 458 people, including 292 (63.8%) who claimed to be tompon-tany, and 166 mpiaiy representing 36.2% of the village population. The villagers are socially organised into

---

20 Betsileo in general are all part of a named descent group. It is noteworthy that only one of the eight families referred to above was capable or willing to provide me with this name. The family in question claimed descent from the former royal family near Anjoma, to the Northeast of the Marovato region. The fact that members of the other seven families refused to provide me with their descent group name is also consistent with and suggests origins of slave descent.
The *tompon-tany* families are characterised by their particularly strong internal cohesion. One of the principal agents of interdependence which binds the households is their large-scale fosterage system. *Tompon-tany* households exchange children of both the wife’s and the husband’s family (see table one). The biological parents of boys and girls who are fostered are usually Marovato residents. Although the *tompon-tany* fosterage system is largely confined to Marovato, some children come from greater distances. The fosterage system is the principal reason behind the relatively uniform size of *tompon-tany* households. Adults and children are for the most part equally divided by sex and age. This is designed to both stimulate internal family solidarity and create a balanced work force within the various *tompon-tany* households. Only one of the *tompon-tany* families (family C, containing eight households) does not adhere to the fosterage principle, allegedly because the children are needed as a labour force and the households of the family prefer to raise their own offspring. The different households do not get along very well.

Table 1: Origin of relatives in *tompon-tany* and *mpiavy* households in Marovato

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>households</th>
<th>relatives wife</th>
<th>relatives husband</th>
<th>relatives of both wife and husband</th>
<th>no relatives in household</th>
<th>total households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n° %</td>
<td>n° %</td>
<td>n° %</td>
<td>n° %</td>
<td>n° %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tompon-tany</em></td>
<td>5 9.1</td>
<td>14 25.4</td>
<td>5 9.1</td>
<td>31 56.4</td>
<td>55 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mpiavy</em></td>
<td>1 3.3</td>
<td>5 16.7</td>
<td>2 6.7</td>
<td>22 73.3</td>
<td>30 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fosterage system is also a reflection of the importance that villagers attach to children. A household without children is seen as socially “handicapped”. If a recently married couple has no offspring, they will invite children of their family to dwell with them. In the villagers’ opinion, this increases happiness and stimulates the fertility of the wife. From a

---

21 Kottak (1980: 131, 171) sees the *fianakarianana* as the minor descent group of relatives (havana) living in the same village as opposed to the maximal descent group (foko or karavana), which is a named descent group with branches throughout the region. Kottak defines descent group as follows: “A Betsileo descent group consists of people who maintain that they share common ancestry. Members of the same descent group typically share a descent group name, which they believe to have been taken by or bestowed upon early members.” (ibid.: 131). Descent in anthropology at large and also with respect to Madagascar has been the subject of much debate. The *fianakarianana*, therefore, should be seen as an inclusive category which also includes members who entered by way of adoption, fosterage or the *vaki-ra*. In Marovato, villagers use the term *fianakarianana* principally in two senses: firstly, referring to the whole family group within the village, which corresponds to Kottak’s minor descent group, and secondly, to the various living units making up this group. For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term households when referring to the latter category. Households include parents with their biological children and other relatives and/or non-relatives who enter the household through adoption, fosterage or the *vaki-ra* and, occasionally, even through friendship. They generally live in the same house, work and eat together. The household is not a static group, as its composition may change from time to time.

22 Kottak (ibid.: 192) states that the fosterage system and strategically arranged marriages are important means to integrate local and regional descent groups. In his study, principally boys are fostered. He views this as a typical coming of age event for boys, and compares it to the woman’s break with her parents after marriage (ibid.: 198). In Marovato, both girls and boys are fostered. None of the villagers perceived fosterage as a system designed principally for boys. This different perception probably is due to the fact that Kottak studied *tanana taloba* “ancient villages” of the Betsileo whereas I worked in a migration region. As a consequence, fosterage in Kottak’s study principally occurred within the regional family network, i.e. between villages. In the Marovato region, it commonly takes place within the local descent group. Thus, children remain in the village of their parents.

23 The data appearing in this table is based on my 1992 field work. The numbers in the table refer to the number and percentage of relatives that live in *tompon-tany* and *mpiavy* households.
practical standpoint, the children make themselves useful by assisting the couple with their daily household chores and tilling the fields.

The foregoing justifications and explanations for the fosterage system were freely provided by the tompon-tany. They nevertheless studiously avoided referring to any of its underlying political implications. Socio-economic dependence of the households and solidarity within a tompon-tany family consolidates its political force. Furthermore, the system also exists at the inter-family level, where it serves as a connector between tompon-tany families. Through the creation of inter-family vaki-ra and marriage alliances, the tompon-tany families became intertwined. These ritual and marital relations then lay the groundwork for fosterage and therewith the further integration of the tompon-tany families.

Whereas tompon-tany families may be characterised as an integrated social block, mpiaiy households have few or no relatives living with them and do not engage in the practice of fosterage. Relatives dwelling with mpiaiy families generally are from the husband’s side (see table one). Patrilineal family obligations of the mpiaiy dictate that eldest brothers shall act as primary caretakers of relatives who are unable to provide for themselves. In Marovato, such dependants are mainly orphaned children of the husband’s deceased brother or sister, or his parents. In tompon-tany families, elderly people retain a large measure of independence, because children of the family often move in with their grandparents to help them and keep them company, while adults dwelling in the vicinity monitor them. This is not the case for mpiaiy households who generally do not have the advantage of family networks. Mpiaiy view the arrival of relatives into their household as more a burden to be suffered than an advantage to be enjoyed. They simply do not have the means to feed the extra mouths. Another noteworthy difference between tompon-tany and mpiaiy is the fact that marriage alliances are more the exception than the rule between mpiaiy households. Nor do they enter into vaki-ra-bonds.

Thus, viewed from the standpoint of settlement, Marovato is comprised of two categories of inhabitants. The first category is made up of the well-integrated block of tompon-tany families. They owe their social status as Betsileo of free descent to their lands and family tombs. The second category is comprised of the internally fragmented mpiaiy (“migrants”). They depend on the tompon-tany for land. At an earlier stage of my field work, I hypothesised that all mpiaiy in Marovato were considered alona hafa (“other” or “different people”) by the tompon-tany, much in the same manner as Antandroy living in neighbouring villages. However, I later discovered that the tompon-tany applied another criterion to socially distinguish the mpiaiy households.

2.3 Identifying the “Others”

The previous section discusses social differentiation based on the settlement history of Marovato, which led to the emergence of the two clearly divided groups of tompon-tany and mpiaiy. This primary binary classification is based on settlement status. A second social means of distinction is based on perceived descent. Marovato comprises four Betsileo status groups: andriana, hova, both seen as nobility, olompotsy or “commoners” and andro, those of alleged slave origin. But, the villagers also split their settlements on quite another

---

24 The groups defined in this section are not really descent groups, because many people within each category share no biological bond. This is why I prefer to call them “status groups”, following Max Weber (1968: 926-939), to refer to the social formations based on common social honour and status.
The first group is composed of villagers of free descent, andriana, bora and olompotsy. They call themselves olona madio ("pure" or "clean people"). The other constitutes villagers of purported slave origin, andevo. People of free descent designate them as olona maloto ("impure" or "dirty people"). Here it should be noted that, despite differences in alleged origin, there are no physical distinguishing features between the two groups. Prior to examining the meaning and implications of the second binary classification, I will describe the settlement policy of the tompon-tany in Marovato and how it impacts on membership in either of the two categories.

The tompon-tany of Marovato collectively meet in the tompon-tany village council. Its members informed me that, during the tompon-tany meeting of 1967, a stringent settlement policy for new migrants was adopted. The ostensible reason for this was increased scarcity of land and the fact that migrants depend on them for land. However, they say that knowledge of the newcomers’ history (tantara) is equally important. They do not allow olona bafa ("other" or "different people") in their village. This would appear to correspond with the practice of the tompon-tany of the ancient Betsileo villages (tana taloha) in the region, who remain inhabited by a few tompon-tany families only. Migrants are not welcome. And even in the migrant village of Marovato, only two non-Betsileo households have been allowed into the village by the tompon-tany. These Antaisaka (originating from the Southeast of Madagascar) were able to enter principally due to the efforts of Ragaby, one of the tompon-tany members, who fiercely insisted on their settlement. The tompon-tany are of the opinion that they fall within the “pure people” category.

Betsileo identity is highly context bound. The extent to which context determines how a person identifies himself may be illustrated by taking the case of a hypothetical traveller, a tompon-tany habitant of Marovato claiming noble descent. Upon meeting a non-Malagasy during his sojourn, he would identify himself as a Malagasy. Later, if he met an inhabitant of the capital city of Antananarivo, he would refer to himself as Betsileo. Upon meeting a Betsileo outside Marovato, our hypothetical traveller would call himself tompon-tany. And upon return to Marovato, he might stress his status as member of the village nobility. Thus, the way he identifies himself each time is conditioned by the geographical location and the nature of the person he meets.

Every Betsileo migrant who wishes to live in Marovato must first report to the members

25 The term andevo refers to people who are called andevo by others. It is not historically proven that they are of actual slave origin.

26 The tompon-tany village council has five members, each of whom is the head of one of the five largest tompon-tany families in Marovato: Rafidy Andriana, Ratema, Andriabe, Mitsiky, and Ragaby. The tompon-tany village council functions next to the formal jokon-tany council. Marovato has one representative in this assembly, who with four members from two neighbouring villages, constitutes the council. The Marovato representative is appointed by the tompon-tany council. Generally, tompon-tany choose one of their relatives. The jokon-tany delegates represent the national government at a local level. They do not interfere with the tompon-tany’s settlement policy.

27 Being different in the eyes of the tompon-tany does not necessarily mean that one is perceived as an “impure person” (olona maloto). Just like the members of two Antaisaka households, Antandroy living in neighbouring hamlets are also classified in the “pure people” (olona madio) category by tompon-tany, despite the fact that they are on bad terms with the Antandroy.

28 These migrants’ claim to be Betsileo is unquestionably accepted by the tompon-tany, whereas their social origin within the Betsileo group is subject to an inquiry into whether the migrants really have family tombs.
of the *tompon-tany* village council. The council necessarily will raise the question of the location of the applicants’ ancestral land and family tomb for the purpose of determining origins of the newcomer. Any migrant who is vague about his descent is deemed to be of slave origin, since all free-born persons in the Highlands have ancestral land and a family tomb in their native region. *Tompon-tany* refer to migrants who cannot identify their ancestral land as people who “do not have a history” (*tso misy tantara*) or have “lost their history” (*very tantara*). Their identification as such relegates the newcomer to marginalised status.30

Over the last few decades, the *tompon-tany* have only allowed migrants deemed to be of slave origin to settle in Marovato if they agree to live in the Western periphery. Migrants of free origin may locate in the Eastern part of the village. Dwelling in Western Marovato automatically entails being deemed by other villagers to be a member of an inferior group. Generally, Betsileo ideology considers the West as the least favourable ritual location (cf. Kottak 1980: 137-141). In Marovato, land in the Western quarter is openly seen as impure. No Betsileo of free descent would consider living in the Western periphery.31 Those who dwell in Western Marovato are referred to as *andevo*. People of free descent designate them as *olona maloto* (“impure” or “dirty people”), whereas they call themselves *olona madia* (“pure or “clean people”).

The numerical composition of the four free descent status groups (*andriana, hova, olompotsy, other “ethnic” origin*) and *andevo* is summarised in the following table. In this regard, it is important to note that none of the *andevo* expressly acknowledged their *andevo* status in 1992. The table therefore indicates *andevo* as designated by others. And even claims to free descent (*olompotsy, hova, andriana*) should be viewed with prudence as the proof of their historical accuracy is highly problematic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>status groups</th>
<th>andriana</th>
<th>hova</th>
<th>olompotsy</th>
<th>other</th>
<th>andevo</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>.tompon-tany</em></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mpiairy</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table two shows, all *andriana* are *tompon-tany*. The high proportion of noble descent *tompon-tany* can be compared with the high number of villagers of supposed slave origin (*andevo*) in the migrant population, 26.5% of all *mpiairy*. All *andevo* living in *tompon-tany* families have entered through marriage. This implies that the original *tompon-tany* families claim free descent without exception: they are of either noble (*andriana* and *hova*) or commoner (*olompotsy*) origin. So, the *andevo* of Marovato came into the village as marriage partners or as migrants.

30 Bloch (1980: 120) writes on this issue: “Without an ancestral homeland one was a non-person.”

31 This would appear to be a general phenomenon in the extreme Southern Highlands. I personally observed six Betsileo villages other than Marovato with similar East-West configurations. Kottak (1980: 137-138) also refers to this practice in his study on Betsileo villages around Ambalavao.

32 One household of the 44 *mpiairy* (“migrants”) called *andevo*, actually claims noble descent (*andriana*) but are in fact called *andevo* by the other villagers and treated as such. Its members live in Western Marovato and work without pay for the *tompon-tany* village nobility from whom they lease land. More information on this household will appear later in this chapter.
2.4 *Olona madio*, "pure" or "clean people"

The majority of the "pure people" claims to be *olompotsy*, of commoner descent. *Andriana* and *hora* form the nobility of Marovato. Although they allegedly share noble roots, the villagers classify them into two distinct groups. Noble informants, both *andriana* and *hora*, explained to me that this division originates in the nineteenth century Merina hegemony over the Southern Highlands.

The story of these informants is as follows. Prior to the Merina conquest of the Southern Highlands, Betsileo nobility was considered to be *andriana*. But, since the Merina nobility shared this name, the conquerors decided that it was necessary to degrade the rank of the Betsileo nobility. The Betsileo were consequently renamed *hora*, the name ascribed to Merina commoners. One would assume that, following the period of Merina rule, the Betsileo nobility would be free to reappropriate their title as *andriana*. My informants stated, however, that this decision was beyond their control, as only the ancestors have the right to determine which noble families may rename themselves *andriana*.

After the decline of Merina hegemony, Betsileo who succeeded in convincing fellow villagers of their cognate descent from the former kingdom were able to reclaim their *andriana* title. In Marovato, only one family (G on the Marovato maps) can trace these roots, which allegedly go back to the former king near Anjoma, about twenty kilometres to the Northeast of Marovato. These two brothers, their wives and children now live in a large, but rundown villa in Northeast Marovato. They were later joined by two of their cousins, who dwell in the central quarter of Marovato. Their claim to *andriana* status is accepted by the other villagers.

Claims to collateral kinship to the former king by descendants depended upon their ancestors “speaking” before they could start using the *andriana* name again. During the third month of my 1992 field work, I witnessed one of these phenomena (quotation from field work diary June 3):

> It is still early in the morning. I am at the river doing my washing with some women of Marovato. At the other side of the stream, Lahy and Moha, the two eldest sons of Rafidy Andriana’s third marriage, are fishing. They have chosen their spot based on the theory that our washing activities chase the fish in their direction. While engaged in the hard work of cleaning clothes, I hear the boys scream “renibe, renibe, renibe”. I assume they have caught a fish, but when I see the women running out of the water, I instinctively follow them. My limited experience has taught me that following the crowd is the best way to survive harsh country life. Meanwhile, the women have joined the chorus, screaming: “renibe, renibe, renibe”. I know the word renibe means grandmother, but I cannot see what its relevance is in this context. The women are pointing at something green in the river. It is a crocodile. While I am still reflecting on what might have happened if I had not replicated the women, everybody breaks into a run towards Marovato, still crying out “renibe”.

That same evening I learn more about the significance of the day’s events. The boys and women had recognised the crocodile as the reincarnation of the mother of Rafidy Andriana, since it supposedly moved just like she did. Immediately, a feast

---

33 Kottak (1980: 89, cf. Dubois 1938: 562) recorded similar stories of his informants, he states: “Formerly, as in Imerina, the Betsileo noble group had been known as *andriana*. After Merina annexation, however, Betsileo *andriana* were gradually demoted to the status of *hora*, the term used in Imerina for its commoner stratum.”
and ritual offering for the visiting mother are organised. Two chickens are led to the
hereafter, and some of the meat is placed in the Northeast corner of Rafidy
Andriana's house as offering to the ancestors. With the rest of the meat and lots of
rice the descendants of Rafidy Andriana's mother celebrate her visit throughout most
of the night.

Andriana tompon-tany explained the event by way of myth. When someone of a noble family
dies, a small worm emerges out of his back. The family elder immediately transports it to
the Zomandao river, where it transforms itself into a crocodile. This crocodile is the
reincarnation of the deceased person. Only authentic andriana have the power to
reincarnate. As soon as the little worm is discovered, the noble family is allowed to reclaim
its andriana name. Not long after my arrival in Marovato, Rafidy Andriana had informed me
about this reincarnation of andriana. Its full significance only became clear to me after my
encounter with the crocodile.

Although Rafidy Andriana called himself andriana even before the visit of his "mother", he
was very pleased with the confirmation of his noble status. If anyone harboured doubts
about his andriana descent, nobody expressed them openly. Any villagers I asked, regardless
of status group in Marovato, were convinced that the crocodile was Rafidy Andriana's
mother.

There are only ten people in Marovato who refer to themselves as bona. They are allegedly
of noble descent, but do not reincarnate. Most villagers claim to be of commoner descent,
olompozy (59%, 270 individuals). These people of commoner origin are hierarchically
organised into regional descent groups called foko or karazava. The longer a family lives in a
certain locality, especially when they are considered tompon-tany because of the presence of
their family tomb, the higher its status is considered to be.

After this brief introduction to the Betsileo "pure people" status groups composed of the
andriana, bona, and olompozy, I will now describe the villagers who are called "impure
people" due to their alleged slave (andevo) origin.

2.5 Olona maloto, "impure" or "dirty people"

In order to provide some insight into the practice and consequences of the settlement
policy of the tompon-tany village council of Marovato, I will describe the personal histories
of the villagers who were categorised as andevo in this process of selection and social
classification.

The huts of the andevo are concentrated in Western Marovato. To the Northwest of the
village centre are a few yards of open field, mostly occupied by pigs searching for whatever

34 The story of reincarnation is a good example of the tompon-tany (particularly those claiming andriana descent)
construction of their superior social status. Myths of reincarnation into reptiles are well-known in the
1880: 170). The tompon-tany have taken bits and pieces from these various stories and adapted them to suit
their requirements.

35 The cases are abstracts from my 1992 field work diary. The first paragraphs are based on information
provided to me by the andevo. I have summarised their stories and quoted them literally whenever possible.
Discussing their past was a source of great anxiety for the andevo. Often they even tried to avoid my questions
by preventing me from meeting them. For further details, I relied on other villagers. If they presented
contradictory versions or gave additional data, this is presented in the last paragraphs of each case.
food they can find. At night, the villagers use the field as a latrine. Just prior to reaching the field, one passes the hut of Velo (32) and Zafindravola (30).

It is early in the morning on May 22 when Ramosa and I visit Velo and Zafindravola. Their hut is built of low-quality laterite and is divided into two parts by a piece of cloth. The right space is used for cooking over a wood fire. On the left side, Zafindravola and Velo sleep with four children: three girls who look to be between the ages of four and seven and a little boy who is just under a year old. Velo is not the father of the two eldest girls. Zafindravola says that they were born before she knew Velo. The fathers are "unknown". The family moved to Marovato in 1988.

Velo: "When we came to the village, I went to see the village leader. His name is Rafidy Andriana. I told him that we really would like to live in Marovato. First, he asked me with how many we were. I told him with four, my wife was pregnant with another baby. His second question concerned our ancestral land. Well, I answered him that we came from a village near Fianarantsoa but he wanted to know the name. I just could not remember. He replied that he could not accept us and that we had to leave. But we could not leave. Zafindravola was very pregnant. He said that he had to consult his ancestors on this matter. We waited three days. We slept at the riverside. His son came to see us and told us that his father had received a dream in which the ancestors had spoken. We were allowed to live here. We had nothing. We had to build the house ourselves. Nobody helped. We also could lease some land from a family who has a lot of land in Marovato. I try to cultivate it now but it is far away, near the mountains, and there are too many stones in the ground. I have nobody to help me."

Zafindravola: "The house was not even finished when I got my baby. I was alone. Nobody came to see her. I could not understand it. It was not clear. I was very sad."

Velo quickly interjects: "Later someone told me that we live in the wrong part of Marovato, the maloto part which is reserved for people who do not have ancestral land and a tomb. That is why people speak ill of us. I went to see the village leader again and told him that we do not belong here. But he thinks we do."

The pigs feeding area also borders on Kazy's hut. It is May 24 when Ramosa and I visit her.

It is dark in the little hut. I extend my hand by way of greeting, but can make out nothing but dark silhouettes. Ramosa pushes me to the corner and orders me to sit down on the floor. My eyes slowly become accustomed to the darkness. Eventually, I can make out two women and two children staring at me.

Their names are Kazy (61), daughter Vavy (19) and her children Ndimby (5) and Jumene (1). Kazy calls her life a stormy one. At the age of eleven, she gave birth to Sambo, he also lives in Marovato (see chapter three). His father is "unknown". Afterwards she married seven times. Each of her husbands abandoned her. After six marriages that were not blessed with children, she conceived three daughters in her last marriage. Vavy lives with her mother, and the other two daughters reside with their stepbrother Sambo. Vavy, like her mother, was very young, only fourteen, when she gave birth to her first child. Her second child arrived four years later. The fathers of both children are married and live elsewhere.
I raise a series of questions concerning their geographic origin. Both women categorically refuse to provide me with their place of birth. I do not understand why their initially detailed and open manner has now yielded to an obstinate stonewalling tone. Kazy: "We are born in a village near Ambalavao. Now you should go. We are very busy." With less than half my questions answered I leave them, confused and well aware that I must have broken a "taboo" (fady). Ramosa had remained silent throughout the conversation, leaving me to ask the questions directly in Malagasy. I beg Ramosa to assist me in understanding what has just transpired. He responds that he is not surprised that we were ordered to leave.

Ramosa and other villagers later inform me that Kazy and Vavy were born in Vohimena near Ambalavao, a village which, according to Ramosa, is inhabited exclusively by andevo. This statement is confirmed by other informants afterwards. They also tell us that Kazy's place of origin was revealed in 1988, by a visitor to Marovato who recognised her. At the time of this discovery she was living in the Eastern part of Marovato. The tongan-tany immediately ordered her to move to the Western periphery. She was allowed to continue cultivating the plot of manioc land that she was leasing from Rafidy Andriana.

To the South of Kazy's dwelling, one passes a cattle corral. These resting places for the zebus are fenced off by massive tree branches to prevent the animals from escaping or being stolen. Just past the corral, about fifty metres from the road (RN7), is the house of Ratsimbazafy (59) and Lalao (43).

Ratsimbazafy and Lalao have nine children, of whom only one daughter is married (see chapter three). During most of my research, I lived with their two daughters, Fara (10) and Raozy (12), in a little hut in South Marovato. Although I resided with the two girls, I never had much contact with their parents.

From the first day I saw Ratsimbazafy, I was intrigued by his peculiar behaviour. Whenever our paths crossed, he performed the same ritual. He would doff his hat, make a deep bow and greet me good morning, afternoon or evening depending on the time of our encounter. Initially, I thought I was the only recipient of his courtesies, but later I discovered that others in Marovato were saluted in like fashion. I was to subsequently learn the reasons behind his personal ritual when I unconsciously provoked him. Since I saw Ratsimbazafy several times daily, I thought this elaborate greeting was a burden to him. One day, I told Ratsimbazafy that a simple good day (akoty aby) would suffice without the bowing and so forth. To my surprise, he reacted angrily: "I greet you like I greet the others, just like my forefathers did, I do and my children will do." He strode off angrily. I was too shocked to realise what had happened but I had surely offended one of the hitherto most friendly villagers.

May 1: Several weeks after this incident, Ramosa and I visit Ratsimbazafy and his wife. I am entertaining no illusions of a fruitful conversation. But unexpectedly, upon

36 Ramosa had refused to talk to me for several days, as he objected to us visiting the villagers in Western Marovato (see also chapter one).

37 On various occasions, I had been told of the existence of andevo villages near Ambalavao. Kottak (1980: 105) also mentions them. In the Highlands, people commonly know which villages are inhabited by andevo.

38 See chapter one for the consequences of this living arrangement.
our arrival, he executes his well-known bow and asks me what I would like to know. He answers my questions in detail. Even revealing his place of birth poses no problem to him: His birthplace is Andrianarivo ("place where many andriana live"). His wife comes from Ambalamanenja. Both villages are located near Ambalavao. I hesitate somewhat to press further after my recent experience with Kazy and Vavy. Also, despite the fact that both Ratsimbazafy and Lalao provide clear answers to my questions, I am unable to obtain much information about their personal histories. Ratsimbazafy constantly refers to the "Malagasy customs" (fo/nba gasy) in general terms, but when I try to reduce his general statements to his personal situation he suddenly becomes less talkative.

At the end of our conversation, I ask whether they would like to add any information I had omitted. Ratsimbazafy replies with yes. In my "book", he states, I absolutely should write about the horrible things that happened in the past. Raising his voice, and with considerable conviction, he tells me that when a former king died, slaves were killed to accompany and serve him in the hereafter. However, when I ask whether he knows anything more about the period of slavery in Madagascar, he cuts off the discussion: "tsy misy" ("nothing"). There is much work to do, he announces, and we feel obliged to leave.

On a number of subsequent occasions, I try to initiate new conversations with Ratsimbazafy on the topic of slavery, but my attempts always meet with the response "tsy misy".

To corroborate the statements of Ratsimbazafy and Lalao, I seek out information from others. The first to confirm to me that Ratsimbazafy and Lalao are of slave descent is Andriamaheva, the oldest descendent from the former royal house in Anjoma. He, like seven other villagers, claim that Ratsimbazafy's grandparents were slaves of a royal family near Ambalavao. After the abolition of slavery, they married and continued living within the vicinity of their former master's property on a small plot of land leased from him. Our informants assert that this is what most ex-slaves did. These former slaves named their settlement Andrianarivo. When the grandparents died, their children inherited the usufruct rights to the land.

Ratsimbazafy's father was one of these children. When he died, his usufruct rights were transmitted to his son. Ratsimbazafy married Lalao at a young age. She also is presumed to be a descendant of a former slave family. My informants state that Ratsimbazafy and his wife came to Marovato in 1982 to escape the vicious cycle of land dependence on the former royal family. Ratsimbazafy confirms 1982 as the year of their arrival. He chose Marovato based on its reputation for manioc cultivation. Members of the tompo-ty village council inform me that they immediately suspected Ratsimbazafy and his wife to be of slave origin since they could not trace their tombs. They were allowed to live in Marovato, provided they settle in the Western periphery. Ratsimbazafy agreed and was permitted to lease land from Ratema.

Just opposite Ratsimbazafy and Lalao's house, on the North side of a cattle corral, is a little hut, which I had initially presumed was used to store manioc. I subsequently learned that it was the home of Maka (35), his wife Poeta (29) and their three children.

39 Kottak (1980: 104) postulates that many former slaves of the villages near the town Ambalavao remained living on or near the estates of their former master after the abolition of slavery.
May 4: It is early in the morning when I knock on the door of Maka and Poeta’s hut. I am far from certain that they wish to speak to me, as they are careful to avoid me when our paths cross in or near the village and do not socialise with other villagers.

The door opens and I find Maka, Poeta and the children, seated, eating their manioc breakfast. With a nod downwards, Maka indicates that his dirty hands prevent him from greeting me properly. I take my place next to the family on the floor.

Maka and Poeta tell me that they came to Marovato in 1988 with the dream of owning their own manioc field. Prior to their arrival, they had lived together in the town of Ambalavao for about ten years. They never married, as Maka was unable to provide the bride price. His family refused to help him. When Poeta became pregnant with their third child, he thought the time had come to take a decision. Maka: “I left my work as land labourer. This job was no good anyway. They only paid me some manioc.” Maka felt that by cultivating manioc independently, he would be able to earn enough money to pay for the bride price. He had heard from another land labourer that Marovato offered good prospects for manioc and that the tompon-tany of the village welcomed new settlers. Maka: “They were not as nice as I thought. At first, they even refused to let us live in the village because they said we were impure people (plona maloto).” Poeta: “When I cried, one of the tompon-tany, Ratema, said we could stay but the only place available to us was here, next to the cattle. He also offered us some land to lease.”

Unlike in the cases above none of the villagers admitted to any knowledge of Maka and Poeta.

On the Southwestern side of the road, Tovo (57) lives in a small hut. I had already noticed him in the village due to his hunched over, hobbling gait, caused by a back injury. Tovo is gaunt to the point of being sickly. His torn clothes barely mask the silhouette of a body that can only be described as malformed.

May 2: Tovo shares his little hut with one chicken. As I squeeze myself inside his dwelling, accompanied by Ramosa, Tovo is advancing towards the chicken, cursing it. Paying us no heed, he grabs the chicken by the throat and hurls it into the corner of the hut. As if nothing has happened, he promptly sits down and enters into a monologue about his life.

Before his arrival in Marovato, he lived with his wife and three children in the town of Ambalavao. In 1987, when his wife died, he remained in the house with his children, earning money as a land labourer. He eventually fell ill and was fired. Tovo: “My children could hardly manage their own expenses. They could not afford to feed another mouth.” He thought that cultivating his own land would be a possible way to escape poverty. Since land is scarce and expensive in Ambalavao, he left and asked in every village he passed through for land, but none was available: “Just looking at me, people did not like me. In Marovato I spoke to Ragaby, who provided me with some land to lease.” Tovo did not wish to discuss how he ended up in Western Marovato.

Ragaby, and other tompon-tany, refused to provide any information concerning Tovo’s arrival. Finally, three months later, Ragaby broaches the topic while heavily intoxicated by toaka gay (a Malagasy spirit produced in the village): “When I first laid
my eyes on him, I saw that he was in poor shape. Nobody wanted him, not even the 
tompon-tany of Marovato. Tovo is olona maloto. I did not give up and said that I would 
lease him some land and would make sure that he stays in Western Marovato. Finally, 
they accepted.”

Nirina’s (32) hut is located at a distance of about fifty metres from Tovo’s dwelling, where 
he lives with his wife Soa (29) and their children. They have virtually no contact with the 
other villagers. They often sleep on a plot of land they lease at the foot of the Ifaha 
mountains to the North of Marovato. I tried to establish contact with them on many 
occasions, initially through Ramosa and subsequently during brief encounters at riverside. 
When they finally did agree to meet with me, they failed to appear at our designated 
meeting place. It was only after two months of field work that I succeeded in speaking with 
them. Our conversation was brief, and took place while they continued working the land.

was somewhere near Ambalavao.” When I repeat my request for the name of the 
village, he responds that he and his wife were born in the same village but claims to 
have forgotten its name. Manioc, he quickly specifies, was the sole reason they came 
to Marovato. As if just recalling it, he adds that they lease the land they now cultivate 
from Andriabe, who claims to be tompon-tany of noble descent. “That’s why we are 
very busy”, he concludes, turning back to his work, and I take this as his cue that the 
interview is over.

Other villagers inform me that the couple comes from Andrianarivo, near the town 
of Ambalavao. Ratsimbazafy, whom villagers also call andeo, was born in 
Andrianarivo. It is reputed to be a village where only andeo live. This information 
confuses me. Although they both live in Western Marovato, I have never seen 
Ratsimbazafy and Nirina together. So, when I meet Nirina two weeks later on my 
way back from the river, I ask him whether he knows Ratsimbazafy. Nirina: “Yes, I 
know him very well. I was born in the same village as Ratsimbazafy.” For the third 
time, I ask him the name of the village. Nirina: “I don’t remember.”

Bia’s (60) household is also in Western Marovato. She denies being andeo, “I am from an 
andriana family.” But whereas all andriana (“noble descent”) are proclaimed tompon-tanj 
and live in solidly built houses in North and South Marovato, Bia’s hut is in very poor 
condition. It is only about six square meters. She shares it with her daughter (18) and her 
son (17).

May 11: Bia says she was born in Ambositra in the Northern Betsileo area. At a very 
young age, she married Rakotozafy. Bia: “He is andriana, just like me.” After thirty-five 
years of marriage and four children, her husband ended the marriage, as she was 
beside her fertile years and he desired more children. Bia: “After he left me, I fled 
Ambositra with my two youngest children, as the other two were already married. I 
was embarrassed and hurt. I did not know where to go.” She led a nomadic life for 
some years. When she heard that in Marovato she could maybe cultivate manioc, Bia 
decided to give it a try.

In 1989, her case was discussed by the members of the tompon-tany village council. 
They decided to allow her to settle in Western Marovato. Rafidy Andriana leased her 
some land. The village did not provide Bia what she hoped: “I had so many dreams 
when I came here, but I have been sick ever since my arrival. Maybe it is the change
of climate. Or, maybe it is because I do not feel welcome here. People never accepted me."

Rafidy Andriana subsequently informs me that he thinks Bia is of slave descent and therefore should live in Western Marovato.

The above cases are typical examples of how the settlement policy of the tompon-tany village council is implemented in daily life. The tompon-tany laid the foundations for the ascribed identity of Betsileo newcomers by classifying migrants either as olona madio ("pure" or "clean people") or olona tnahto ("impure" or "dirty people"). The tompon-tany argued that the past of the migrants determines their future social position in the village. But how can these tompon-tany be sure about a migrant's history, or his/her social origin? The answer lies in the presence or absence of a tomb. Those who can demonstrate their free descent through a family tomb join the "pure people". Those who cannot are labelled andevra and "impure people".

The andevra label is imposed upon the newcomers by the tompon-tany. The fact that migrants were unable to prove their free descent by means of a family tomb does not necessarily mean that they are of actual slave descent. Sometimes, their place of origin and family tomb are too far away for the tompon-tany to conduct an in-depth inquiry. In such cases, the tompon-tany leave the newcomers with two options - departure or settlement in the Western part. Bia (see last case), for example, agreed to live in the Western quarter of the village despite claiming to be of andriana descent, thus becoming a de facto andevra in the eyes of other villagers. After numerous futile attempts to personally verify claims of tompon-tany origin, I knew that any similar research into the origin of migrants in Western Marovato would serve no useful purpose. The important and central reality appeared to be that tompon-tany shaped the destinies of newcomers by ascribing their social identities according to their own criteria. These identities have become part of the world with which migrants have to deal, and even part of own their conceptual scheme.

Internalisation of the andevra label is a significant component of social relations in Marovato. It is most poignantly demonstrated by the andevra bowing to passing tompon-tany nobility, and in their self-imposed adherence to rules of avoidance determined by "pure people". The internalisation of inferiority is clearly visible in Western Marovato. The andevra display a number of different behaviour traits from other villagers. For example, contrary to other villagers, none of them ever shook hands when greeting me. They also seemed to suffer from "amnesia" when I inquired about their place of origin. Other villagers never lost the opportunity to refer to the land of their ancestors, implicitly legitimising their current social status as people of free descent. Another distinguishing facet of life in Western Marovato is that every household acts as a different socio-economic unit, hardly interacting with other villagers. This is a distinct departure from the usual practice in the rest of the village, where both women and men carry out their daily activities on a communal basis. In contrast, the typical andevra household works its own plot of leased land and the women cook individually.

Social marginalisation of the andevra is articulated through the fear villagers of free descent have of being polluted by them. Not only do they feel superior to "impure people", they also keep their physical distance from the inhabitants of the Western periphery. Villagers who come into contact with olona madio immediately become themselves "impure". This pollution can only be eradicated by a ritual cleansing carried out by the oldest member of the former royal family in Anjoma. However, despite the tompon-tany's classification system
and their prohibition of social contacts between “pure people” and “impure people” there can be no doubt that the principle of keeping at a “safe” distance from “impure people” is sometimes best honoured in the breach, as demonstrated by the seven mixed marriages in Marovato. This subject will be discussed in the next chapter.