Constructing history, culture and inequality: the Betsileo in the extreme Southern Highlands of Madagascar
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Chapter five

Marovato Revisited

On March 29, 1996, I returned to Marovato after a four year absence. Immediately upon arrival, I was confronted with several visible changes in the village.

The day of arrival

It is still early in the morning when the truck drives into Marovato. “Va^aba, va^aha, Marovato”. I had dozed off on a huge pile of rice bags. The boy who tried to wake me quickly moves towards the front of the stowage, where he signals to the driver to stop by knocking on the front cabin. I peak out through the canvas of the truck. Western Marovato. What initially was a collection of poorly constructed huts has been replaced by two solid brick dwellings, separated from the little huts by a sand path. One of the buildings has a first floor with a veranda, the kind of houses usually inhabited by tompon-tany. My first reaction at this sight is one of great unease. I recall this type of architecture everywhere but here in the Western part of the village.

As the truck comes to a stop, I jump off and find myself surrounded by a group of children calling out greetings. I wade through them as best as I can, and move in the direction of the village centre. I vaguely recognise two of the boys, who look to be around five or six. One of the two approaches and asks me where I am going.

“To Rafidy Andriana’s.”

I hope to find Rafidy Andriana, as he has the key to my hut.

The same boy says: “He moved. Now he lives to the Eastern side of the river.”

This unsettles me further. Why would Rafidy Andriana have taken up quarters outside of the village?

“So he does not live in Marovato anymore?”

The boy spots my confusion: “Come. We will take you.”

A few minutes later, I am standing in front of one of the recently erected brick dwellings I had seen upon entering the village. Rafidy Andriana waves me inside from the veranda.

I gladly accept Rafidy Andriana’s offer to join him for breakfast. His wife, Ramavo, hands me a bowl of rice, smiling. Before I am seated on the grass mat, I have already asked Rafidy Andriana three questions.

“What are you doing in this part of Marovato?
Why did you do this?
What are you doing here?”

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1 This chapter is based on my 1996 field work.
Rafidy Andriana’s response is a smile: “Well, I can see that you have not changed. You still ask too many questions. Here in Marovato, much has changed. My son Randriamahalasa came back to Marovato. He told us tompon-tany many good things. About how we can both please our ancestors and ourselves. Marovato has many new people as well, family that we want to help. They are mpikarama (“labourers”). I must leave for my field now. See you tonight.”

After finishing my bowl of rice, I resume my interrogation. What is different in Marovato compared to the 1992 situation? Who is Randriamahalasa? I have never heard of him before. And what exactly had he told the tompon-tany? Who are the mpikarama? And most importantly, did any of these developments have an impact on conclusions to which I had come based on earlier research.

Here is what happened that same evening:

Just before dusk, I walk home from the river with tompon-tany Ratema, Rafidy Andriana and Randriamahalasa, who is telling the story of his arrival in Marovato.

“I told my father Rafidy Andriana that I can be important for Marovato. You know that a lot of the land of the tompon-tany is not used. I explained that if they cultivate most of it, they can become rich and have many cows, just like me. Naturally, he was interested. He even offered to let me live in one of his family houses until I finish my own house.”

Ratema: “I still remember the day that Rafidy Andriana proposed the settlement of Randriamahalasa to us tompon-tany because it was a very important day. Everybody likes to have many cows. He said all we have to do is hire mpikarama.”

Randriamahalasa adds: “Yes that is true. The tompon-tany of Marovato have so much land available, while many of their family members near Ambalavao suffer from land shortage. At the same time, I know that there are many problems with the people of Western Marovato. They are good for nothing, do not perform their duties because they are lazy. Instead, it is better to invite family members to Marovato. They will be glad to work hard as mpikarama.”

Rafidy Andriana continues: “After you left, the problems with the impure people became worse. All tompon-tany knew that something had to happen. So, when my son Randriamahalasa proposed this to us, we all thought it to be a good idea. Around the same time, my father appeared in a dream. He advised me to withdraw the land from andevo. That is what we did. The andevo had to leave the village.”

Ratema: “Yes, it must have been a few years ago. All the tompon-tany came together to discuss the matter. I remember that everybody liked the idea. Only Andriabe was worried. You know that he is andriana (“of noble descent”). He wondered who would do the maloto work for him after the andevo had been sent away. He obviously could not ask his andriana relatives to do this work.”

Randriamahalasa interrupts: “This is no problem. It only means that he should hire olompotsy (“commoner descent”) family members. That is what I do. They never

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2 It was only later in my field work that Rafidy Andriana cared to explain the nature of these problems. See chapter seven.
complain because they look up to me for being an andriana. Then everybody agreed. The andro had to leave.”

Ratema seems puzzled by this conclusion: “But did you forget about Ragaby? He feared that all andro had to leave. Also those who married olompotsy. And he refused to take the land from his cousin Rakoto who is married to an andro.”

Randriamahalasa: “Yes, that is right. Finally, we decided that we would first clear out Western Marovato, where all the andro families live. That would already help the situation in Marovato. But me and my father think that in the end all the andro have to leave.”

Rafidy Andriana nods his head. He seems proud of his son. As so often when I walk home from the river with people from Marovato, we arrive before I have the answers to all my questions. Rafidy Andriana bids me good evening. I know that I am in for another sleepless night, attempting to decode “the situation in Marovato”.

5.1 The mpikarama: changing village demographics

The principal reasons behind the socio-economic changes in Marovato, which coincided with the arrival of Randriamahalasa, were all mentioned during my initial conversations with him, Ratema and Rafidy Andriana upon my return. In general terms, both Randriamahalasa and the tonpon-tany recognised structural problems brought on by Madagascar’s declining economy which were affecting life in Marovato. A combination of inflation (45.2% in 1995) and declining market prices being offered for manioc, the main source of tonpon-tany income, had forced certain tonpon-tany to resort to selling their cows. This was as sure a sign as any of declining personal wealth, for nothing more symbolises tonpon-tany prestige than the number and quality of cows they own.

Randriamahalasa, who had closely followed this situation, presented a solution of radical simplicity to Rafidy Andriana. Your problem, he suggested, is that your system of land cultivation is not being optimised. Firstly, not enough land is being exploited. Secondly, the land under cultivation is being worked by the andro, a lazy group lacking in loyalty. His remedy called for the wholesale expulsion of the andro and their replacement by the mpikarama. The plan was grounded in what appeared to be irrefutable logic. It also appealed to local prejudice. So, it is not surprising that other tonpon-tany welcomed Randriamahalasa.

3 Since Rafidy Andriana’s family compound is at the heart of the village, overcrowding developed into a pressing issue. Any family land still available for further expansion is very inconveniently located outside the village, to the Southwest of the andro quarter. So, after Randriamahalasa and Rafidy Andriana decided that the andro had to leave, Rafidy Andriana asked the oldest descendant of the former royal family in Anjoma, Randriamahalasa’s paternal uncle, to purify the ground to the West of the sand path which divided land belonging to him from the huts of the andro. After this ritual was performed, Rafidy Andriana built and moved into the two houses which I discovered on the day of my return. From the outset of my 1996 field work, I asked him why he had moved to the Western side of the village. After three months, I received his answer: “The river becomes more and more important. There is not enough rain. The river should be the centre. So I live to the Eastern side of the river.” Despite his obvious relocation to the Southwest of Marovato, no villager challenged Rafidy Andriana’s statement and even said themselves that Rafidy Andriana lived “at the Eastern side of the river”.

4 Cf. Bilan du monde (Le Monde 2000: 107). In 1996, 1 Dutch guilder was worth about 2,600 FMG.

5 The problem of declining manioc prices will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.
The arrival of the *mpikarama* during my 1992-96 absence was sudden and dramatic. In 1992, no *mpikarama* dwelled in the village, whereas in 1996 there were 166. The village population had grown by 37.7 per cent (from 458 to 631). This growth was principally due to the arrival of the *mpikarama* and an increase in the existing population. With the exception of one intermarrying *mpiaiy* (see infra), newcomers to the village were labelled *mpikarama* and not *mpiaiy* as had been the case in 1992. This was a clear break with the 1992 settlement policy of the *tompon-tany*, under which newcomers who were unrelated to the *tompon-tany* were called *mpiaiy* and were automatically offered land to lease upon arrival. So, who were these *mpikarama* who had arrived so suddenly and in such numbers in Marovato and what was their role in the village?

The *mpikarama* were first and foremost a solution to a twofold problem of great urgency in the mind of Rafidy Andriana: how to rid Marovato of the *andevo* while increasing production and expansion of existing farmlands. The position of the *andevo* will be discussed in chapter six. I will now focus on the family link between the *mpikarama* and the *tompon-tany*. The relationship between the *tompon-tany* and his *mpikarama* is expressed by both parties in a language of unity. They unfailingly stress that they are family and that there is *gret/jaiwiana* (“friendship”) between them. When asked who their *ray aman-dreny* (“parents”) are, *mpikarama* refer to the *tompon-tany* family leader and his wife. The *tompon-tany* family leader calls his *mpikarama* *^anakalahy* (“sons”) and *^anakavaty* (“daughters”). The *tompon-tany* treats his *mpikarama* in much the same way as his own children. He cares for them when ill, even to the point of procuring medicine, arranges marriages for them and contributes to the bride price payment when his male *mpikarama* get married. I will refer to these issues later in this chapter. In fact, as the following table shows, most *mpikarama* are family of the *tompon-tany*, albeit a particular category of family members.

Table 1: family relations between the *tompon-tany* and *mpikarama*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tompon-tany family leaders</th>
<th>relatives of <em>tompon-tany</em> wives</th>
<th>relatives of <em>tompon-tany</em> family leaders</th>
<th>not related</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rafidy Andriana</td>
<td>15 M 3 F 8</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>5 0 0</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratema</td>
<td>4 0 0</td>
<td>4 3 3</td>
<td>2 0 0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andraibe</td>
<td>10 2 1</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>1 1 0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitsiky</td>
<td>10 1 2</td>
<td>1 1 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragaby</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
<td>1 1 2</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralambo</td>
<td>2 0 0</td>
<td>3 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randriamahalasa</td>
<td>48 8 13</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>4 2 3</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niaina</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>90 14 24</td>
<td>10 5 5</td>
<td>12 3 3</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 In 1996, Marovato had 631 inhabitants. 314 of them were classified as *tompon-tany* (“masters of the land”), 151 as *mpiaiy* (“migrants”) and 166 as *mpikarama* (“labourers”). Of the total population of Marovato, 31 persons were referred to as *andevo*. So, despite the plan to expel the *andevo*, many remained living in the village.

7 This also is the case with those *mpikarama* who are not actually related to the *tompon-tany* family leader.

8 M refers to male and F to female *mpikarama*. The categories listed include marriage partners and *vaki-ra* relatives. In the group of relatives coming from the *tompon-tany* family leaders’ side, many of the *mpikarama* are *vaki-ra* relatives. Of the 15 adult *mpikarama*, seven are relatives through *vaki-ra*. On the other hand, the 104 adult *mpikarama* of the *tompon-tany* wives’ families include only two relatives through *vaki-ra*. The parents of children under 13 are adult *mpikarama*. 68
Most mpikarama are relatives of tompon-tanj wives. They generally arrived in Marovato as young unmarried men. They attribute their previous inability to improve their economic situation to the system of land division upon succession, which they say leaves them with too little land for a sufficient income. Most of the mpikarama come from villages close to Ambalavao and Fianarantsoa where there are acute shortages of land. Some arrived in Marovato on their own initiative. Others came at the invitation of the tompon-tanj family leader.

The mpikarama principally claim to be olo/npotsy (“of commoner descent”). Only three are of andeo origin. They are family members of Tsija (cf. informants index) who is said to be andeo herself. So, the tompon-tanj of noble descent appeared to have followed Randriamahalasa’s advice to only hire family members who were olo/npotsy (cf. case at the beginning of this chapter).

The mpikarama system clearly had altered the socio-economic fabric of the village. It was obvious to me that both the triggering agent and metaphor of this change was Randriamahalasa. A brief parenthetical look at this canny and brilliant businessman might be in order before discussing the socio-economic influence of the mpikarama. No one had anticipated events in the “new” Marovato with more prescience than Randriamahalasa and he successfully turned his read of events to his own advantage.

5.2 Randriamahalasa: the agent of change

Randriamahalasa claims to be a direct descendant of a former royal family. His father, Andriafotsy, is the brother of Andriamaheva who still, as of the date of this writing, performs “purification” rituals. Andriafotsy and his wife lived both in the town Ambalavao and in the village of Marovato.

When Andriafotsy died in 1979, his wife permanently settled in Ambalavao, bringing Randriamahalasa and the other children with her. Only Randriazaka remained behind in Marovato to look after the family house and tend to the land. In 1992, Randriazaka, together with three cousins, formed one of the eight tompon-tanj families of Marovato. As a small family, they were not entitled to name a representative to the tompon-tanj village council. This did not appear to cause them undue concern. Randriazaka was frequently absent, dealing with matters related to his cow trade business. Two of the three cousins had serious alcohol problems, and were rarely seen sober. One of those two, Andriamaho, was initially selected by the tompon-tanj to be a local member of the fahov-tanj council on the basis of his pedigree alone. Andriamaho, however, displayed little interest in the position, failed to attend meetings and eventually lost his privilege. He died within a few months of Randriamahalasa’s arrival, apparently of a mental disease.

Randriamahalasa married in the town of Ambalavao where he took up the zebu trade, assisted in the business by his brother, Randriazaka. Zebus purchased during the course of business were for the most part stalled in Marovato. Towards the beginning of 1993, Randriamahalasa began to implement his plan to reside in Marovato. It was essential, in the long run, that he become established in a rural setting. Only the country could provide room needed for his cows, and the opportunity to build his house and develop existing family land holdings.

Randriamahalasa changed environments with great ease and fluidity. In Ambalavao, he portrayed himself as a self-made cow trader with knowledge and savvy in the vazaha ways.
But in Marovato, he assumed the mantle of fervent defender of the *fomba gasy*, or at least a certain version of it advanced by himself and Rafidy Andriana. That this was a well thought out strategy on his part became clear to me when I met Randriamahalasa in Ambalavao.

June 5, 1996: I am entering the town of Ambalavao where I have travelled to meet some of my informants. It is Wednesday, market day for both food and the zebu auctions. As I enter the market square, I hear a voice calling my name. I look over my shoulder and spot a husky man wearing dark sunglasses, jeans and a chic, brightly coloured shirt.

"Don't you greet me anymore?"

It is only when he begins speaking that I realise that it is Randriamahalasa. He is virtually unrecognisable, as in Marovato he always wears a *lamba*, the long cloth usually worn by the Betsileo.

SE: "Sorry, I did not recognise you. You do not look the same as in the village."

Randriamahalasa is unfazed by my observation.

"If you want to accomplish something nowadays, you have to be smart. If I wore a *lamba* here in Ambalavao, people would think that I am just any ordinary peasant. People here admire me for my nice clothes. In Marovato, it is different. The young people would like it but they would get jealous and you never know where that might lead to. But more importantly, the older *tompon-tanj* would not like it. They think that the *lamba* is the correct way to dress. You see you need to know about the *fomba gasy* and the *fomba va^aha* to get rich nowadays."

Since Randriamahalasa is already quite drunk despite the early hour, I bid him goodbye and continue onwards to make my purchases.

I eventually learned that Randriamahalasa was not the biological son of Rafidy Andriana. Because the two addressed each other publicly as father and son, I initially failed to consider that they had established a *vatti-ra* ("blood bond"), the common ritual for *tompon-tanj* to become family and therewith create bonds of solidarity.

Rafidy Andriana saw many advantages in the presence of Randriamahalasa in the village. He was to prove the perfect candidate to resolve a whole series of issues plaguing Rafidy Andriana. Uppermost in his mind was the dual problem of succession and that of socio-economic expansion. Rafidy Andriana had already expressed concerns to me about his succession in the past. He had only two adult sons, both from his first marriage, and he found neither of them suitable for the job. Raboba, the eldest, often refused to follow his father's orders (cf. chapter three). His other son Ramosa, who worked as my assistant, had lived away from the village for most of his adult life. According to Rafidy Andriana, he no longer behaved as a proper Betsileo, which automatically disqualified him as a candidate in his father's eyes.

Within a year of concluding his *raki-ra* with Rafidy Andriana, Randriamahalasa had consolidated his power within the village. Firstly, he acceded to the position of leader of his own family in Marovato. Then, when his cousin Andriamaho died, the *tompon-tanj* village council members appointed him as the Marovato *fokon-tany* representative.
This latter position deserves some explanation, as it does not enjoy the same prestige as that attached to being member of the *tompon-tany* village council. *Fokon-tany* representatives are usually chosen from the ranks of younger members of influential *tompon-tany* families. Their powers are not unfettered. As a rule, they must consult senior family members prior to taking any decisions. In practice, I found *fokon-tany* councils to be passive entities. Furthermore, its members only held meetings a few times per year. Although Randriamahalasa had recently become a member of the *fokon-tany* council, he rarely attended meetings. He nevertheless informed me that he had a practical reason for accepting his position: “You see, Mademoisely, as a *fokon-tany* member I can say that I represent the *fanjakana gay* ("the Malagasy government"). This gives me all kinds of possibilities here in the village.” As my field work progressed, I was to personally witness his talents at implementing this principle. Randriamahalasa turned out to be a master at manipulating the levers of local politics.

5.3 Restricting access to the ruling *tompon-tany* group

Randriamahalasa’s *mpikarama* system appeared to resolve chronic economic (under-exploitation of land, the declining national economy) and social (presence of the *andeho*) issues with a single stroke. But the solution brought with it a problem, as most *mpikarama* were *tompon-tany* family members. Under the system which existed prior to my 1996 return, any member of a *tompon-tany* family arriving in the village enjoyed the automatic attribution of certain rights, including land allotment. However, a large influx of such a privileged group would threaten the existing *tompon-tany* land monopoly. The following three sections will further detail this particular issue and indicate how the *tompon-tany* tried to resolve it.

Tomb group association and land division

Every *tompon-tany* family has a tomb in Marovato. However, this does not necessarily mean that all members of the family will be buried in it. Members and affines of *tompon-tany* families theoretically have a wide range of tomb choices, including the tombs of their parents, grandparents or even great-grandparents of either the husband’s or the wife’s family. The choice of a specific tomb usually is made after marriage. It entails participation in the maintenance of the tomb. Those who undertake to maintain a designated tomb form the tomb group.

During my 1992 field work, tomb group association was not the primary point of reference for determining status in Marovato, since any newcomer who succeeded in demonstrating a family link with *tompon-tany* or who had entered into a *vaki-ra* became, *ipso facto*, part of the privileged *tompon-tany* grouping. Failure to satisfy this requirement meant relegation to the *mpiaiy* category. If, on the other hand, one member of an incoming household could prove he was related to a *tompon-tany* family, the other members qualified as *tompon-tany* in the eyes of the villagers. They could enter the family compound of the *tompon-tany* family leader and were offered land for cultivation. However, these newcomers often had no intention of being buried in the family tomb of the *tompon-tany* family leader and therefore did not contribute to tomb maintenance. Already in 1992 Rafidy Andriana considered this problematic:

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9 Kottak (1980: 13,14) writes: “People have the right to be buried in any tomb where they have an ancestor, and this can (in theory, but rarely in practice) extend right back to eight great-grandparents...the social organisation of the dead people in the tombs turns out to be patrinely skewed, since most people choose to be buried in the tomb of their local descent group.”
"You know well how land is divided over and over again through heritage. When family members join us, we have to give them land as well since they are family. What will be left of our land after a few generations if we have to divide it between more and more people? And what do we get in return? Is it clear to you that most of these people do not contribute to the maintenance to my family tomb? They will be buried elsewhere." (field work diary, August 20, 1992)

In 1996, I discussed this problem again with Rafidy Andriana, as it had become particularly pressing due to the large number of incoming mpikarama, most of whom were related to the tompon-tany. Rafidy Andriana stated:

“Oh yes, the mpikarama. It was my son Randriamahalasa who explained to us how we could prevent our land from splitting up. These mpikarama are all family but instead of giving them land, we now let them work for us. If they do well, they may lease land from us, so that they can eventually make their own living and no longer have to work for us. Then, they are no longer mpikarama. They have become mpiavy. So, whereas people before became either tompon-tany or mpiavy, they now have to act as mpikarama first. That is how we keep our land.”

SE: “But what about the mpikarama who want to join your tomb group?”

Rafidy Andriana: “Naturally, for them it is different. If they pay for the upkeep of my tomb, they are tompon-tany and I have to provide them with land. That is why I do not allow people to live with me if I think they will join my tomb group.”

Other tompon-tany claim to follow the same principles as Rafidy Andriana.

Settlement policy concerning newly arriving mpikarama is a matter for the tompon-tany village council. By 1996, the tompon-tany had determined by consensus decision that a mpikarama could only become tompon-tany if he/she was both related to a tompon-tany family leader and eligible to join his tomb group. Subsequently the tompon-tany predominantly accepted mpikarama who came from their wives’ families and therefore were less inclined to join tomb groups of the tompon-tany, as will be discussed in the following section.

Status attribution: tompon-tany, mpiavy, mpikarama

In most cases, households are categorised as tompon-tany, mpiavy or mpikarama on the basis of the household leader, which as a rule, is a man. When the wife of the household is related to a tompon-tany family, as in the case of one Marovato household which arrived after 1992, the situation is more complex and settlement status might cut right through the household. This was the case for Ravo and his wife Ramija. Ramija is the daughter of Rajasoa and Rapi-rafy, both of whom are deceased. The mother of Rajasoa was the sister of Rafidy Andriana. People in Marovato call Ramija tompon-tany and she also considers herself as such. Ravo has no family in Marovato. Rafidy Andriana accepts Ramija’s husband and their children as part of his family. He insists, however, on the fact that Ravo is a mpiavy (he is the only post-1992 mpiavy) and leases him land as such, rather than granting him a plot as

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10 Although tompon-tany consistently state that all mpikarama are related to them, this is not actually the case. In fact, eighteen of the 166 are not family members.

11 Villagers say that in former days people could afford to be part of more than one tomb group. Today, this is a rare phenomenon.
would be the case for any tonpon-tany. Ravo accepts this and justifies it as follows:

"Yes I am mpiavy. I have no intention of being buried in the family tomb of Rafidy Andriana, although I could if I really insisted on it. I am sure that I could. But I do not want to, since I want to join my father in his tomb in Ambalavao. It would also be embarrassing to be buried in the tomb of my wife's family. It should be the wife who goes to the family tomb of her husband. I pay for my father's tomb and not for any other."

Ravo expresses a point of view commonly held in Marovato. Both men and women claim that according to the famba gasy, a wife should join her husband's family tomb, whereas the man should be buried patrilineal. Most people, including the mpikarama, follow this custom. Some do not, either by choice, or because they are excluded. For example, wives of alleged slave descent are not allowed to be buried in their husband's tomb.

In 1992, the tonpon-tany or mpiavy categories were determined by tonpon-tany family leaders. These categories remained relatively stable. In 1996, the tonpon-tany category was still comprised of the same people, except for the addition of Randriamahalasa. The same was true for the mpiavy category, where only Ravo was added. Membership to either the mpiavy or mpikarama group, however, had become more fluid and was subject to change.

**How mpikarama become mpiavy**

Most mpikarama initially live with and perform services for the tonpon-tany family. Upon arrival, mpikarama must relinquish their identity card to the representative of the sokon-tany village council, who in Marovato is Randriamahalasa. The mpikarama's future possibilities are portrayed by the tonpon-tany as follows: If the tonpon-tany consider that a mpikarama has worked well, they may grant leases of land and the right to build their own house in Marovato. Subsequently, they may marry or, if already married, bring their wife and children to join them. With these extra hands, they will have the means to live off their leased land. At this time, a mpikarama may apply to the tonpon-tany to become mpiavy. If the tonpon-tany accepts, the mpikarama is returned his identity card and accedes to the status of mpiavy. As Solomainty (18), a mpikarama of Ratema, explained:

"I am still mpikarama, but I already have built my own house and I also have leased land from Ratema. My wife recently came to Marovato as well. Ratema told us that we can become mpiavy soon. Then, I can work for myself. I will be very proud when I get my identity card back."

The importance of the identity card can best be measured in the mpikarama's constant questioning of each other as to whether they have obtained return of their identity card. In fact, the implied question is "have you already become mpiavy?" Conversely, the withdrawal of the identity card is the means chosen to ensure the mpikarama will not flee their responsibilities. As tonpon-tany Ratema clarified:

12 The surrender of the identity card is a remarkable development. In 1992, none of the incoming mpiavy were required to surrender their identity card, not even those of alleged slave descent.

13 In reality, however, only three of the eight mpikarama households that recently built their own huts currently lease land. All three are former mpikarama of Ratema.
“You know nowadays, you cannot even trust your own family anymore. They come to make a profit and then all of a sudden disappear. Especially when the hard work has to be done during the harvest season. I need many workers and cannot have them running away from me. Because we have their identity card, they are unable to leave.”

The *fihavanana*, or family solidarity, seemed to work quite differently where it concerned the *mpikarama*. The fosterage system is a good example of this. In 1992, the fosterage system served as an important tool, both to cement loyalties within each *tompon-tany* family household and to create solidarity bonds between the various *tompon-tany* families. In 1996, most of the children who had been fostered were still living with their foster parents, unless they had left to marry. After my 1992 departure, twenty-seven children of *tompon-tany* households had been given up for fosterage, but all of these children were fostered within the network of *tompon-tany* households or between *tompon-tany* families. The eight *mpikarama* households who had recently established domicile in their own huts had not fostered any of the children. Rakotozafy (27), a first cousin of the wife of Ratema, described this phenomenon:

“We are all family of the *tompon-tany* but we are not *tompon-tany*. We are just *mpikarama* who hope to become *mpiaiy*.”

Ratema, who was present, interrupted my conversation with Rakotozafy with this comment:

“Children are very important and so is their upbringing. *Mpiarama* still have many things to learn in the village. They cannot possibly raise our children.”

Thus, despite the fact that both *tompon-tany* and *mpikarama* never miss an opportunity to stress equality, the fact is that the arrival of the *mpikarama* brought with it the implanting of a new socio-economic hierarchy. Three striking features led me to conclude that the *tompon-tany* deliberately intended on creating a new socio-economic undergrouping. Firstly, the *mpikarama* are not tomb group members of the *tompon-tany*. Secondly, they are required to hand in their identity card upon arrival. Thirdly, they are judged unfit to participate in the fosterage system.

5.4 Economic influence of the *mpikarama*

In the next section, I will review the influence and benefits of the *mpikarama* in the economic development of Marovato by examining land use, cultivation, livestock and the prices of staple food products in the village.

**Land use**

The following tables show increases in land under production. Compared to 1992, *tompon-tany* land cultivation increased by one-third (1992, 69.8 hec. was cultivated and in 1996, 97.3 hec.).
Table 2: *tompon-tany* land use, the amount of fallow land\(^{14}\) and land leased in hectares\(^{15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>rice/tobacco</th>
<th>manioc/maize</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>additional land in lease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>tompon-tany</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noble:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmland</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fallow land</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tompon-tany</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commoner descent:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmland</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fallow land</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total farmland</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>115.3</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total fallow land</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: *mpiaiy* and *mpikarama* land use and the amount of fallow land in hectares

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>rice</th>
<th>manioc/maize</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>mpiaiy</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>households of free</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>descent:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmland</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fallow land</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>andro</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>households:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmland</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fallow land</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>andro/free descent</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>households:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmland</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fallow land</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mpikarama</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmland</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fallow land</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total farmland</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total fallow land</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cultivation**

Increased land use and manpower brought on by the arrival of the *mpikarama* led to a corresponding growth in manioc production in the village.\(^{16}\) However, the popularity of the crop led to overproduction. Manioc buyers who made the trip from Fianarantsoa to Marovato to make their purchases up until 1993 were now able to buy affordable manioc closer to Fianarantsoa. They either stopped travelling to Marovato, or arrived late in the harvest season when prices had seriously declined. I have personally witnessed many

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\(^{14}\) Farmland totals include fallow land. Of the 24.5 hectares of rice/tobacco land owned by the *tompon-tany* 1.7 lays fallow.

\(^{15}\) This table is based on my own measurements (1996 field work) and information provided by the *firaisana* Vohitsaoka. The *firaisana*, as stated earlier, is an administrative unit of the state made up by its *fokon-tany*, which might be one village or a combination of several villages. Marovato is part of a *fokon-tany* with two neighbouring villages.

\(^{16}\) Maize cultivation did not increase between 1992 and 1996.
tonton-tany desperately waiting for these buyers, as unsold piles of manioc perished before their eyes.

In 1992, one kilo of manioc sold for 175 FMG. By 1996, the average price for manioc in the Marovato region had risen to 300 FMG. The higher price was a reflection of the dramatic devaluation of the FMG and not to an increase in real market value.

Rice cultivation has been, and remains problematic in the village. Many rice fields were left fallow in 1992. Tonton-tany refused to cultivate them with other crops, partly in the hope that rainfall was imminent, but also because they consider the quality of their rice fields as too superior for other crops. But Randriamahalasa persuaded them to change their point of view on this issue. He planted tobacco in his rice fields close to the river. Within one year, his harvest was successful.37 Other tonton-tany were quick to emulate him. Today, the Zomandao riverbanks are covered with tobacco plants, as tonton-tany of other villages have also followed the Marovato example.

Livestock

Randriamahalasa promised the tonton-tany that surplus land under cultivation would bring them profits, and therewith additional zebus. But, profits did not meet Randriamahalasa’s predictions.

The tonton-tany claim that they did in fact purchase zebus, but that an even greater number was given away as bride prices, offered to the ancestors during funerals, or died due to illness. Regardless of the cause, there were fewer zebus following implementation of Randriamahalasa’s mpikarama system. In 1992, tonton-tany and mpiaiy possessed 325 zebus (cf. chapter four) and in 1996, their number had decreased to 276.38 Mpikarama do not own any zebus.

Table 4: Zebus per status group (andriana, hora, olompotsy, andero, other) and settlement status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status Group</th>
<th>Number of Zebus</th>
<th>Number of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tonton-tany</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andriana</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alompoatsy</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpiary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Descent</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrso/Free Descent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrso</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Antaisaka Households</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tonton-tany zebu herds have relatively high market value. An ox is worth about 1 million FMG. A cow has a market value of about 500,000 FMG, a heifer 400,000 FMG and a calf 17

17 Tobacco cultivation is labour intensive. Plants require watering at least twice per day. This work is principally carried out by the mpikarama. After harvest, the leaves are dried for several months, by hanging them from ceilings of tonton-tany houses. Tonton-tany principally cultivate tobacco for personal consumption.

18 In this table, I have not included the households of Randriamahalasa and his brother Randriazaka. Since they are cow traders, their herd varies from fifty to about one hundred. Unlike the other tonton-tany, they view their cows principally as economic commodities.
200,000 FMG. But, with the notable exception of Randriamahalasa and his brother, tompon-tany do not perceive their cows in such terms. Selling them for economic reasons is seen as an offence against fombagasy. If they feel obliged to sell the cows, they ask the ombiasy to perform rituals to appease the ancestors.\textsuperscript{19}

Tompon-tany and some mpiaiy of free descent also raise pigs. They engage in this practice solely for economic reasons.\textsuperscript{20} In 1992, there were only seven pigs in Marovato, owned by two tompon-tany families. By 1996, there were over ninety pigs or piglets in the village. Villagers informed me that in 1995, the pig population was even higher, but that many died due to a mysterious disease that had also decimated the zebu herds. Most pigs were owned by the tompon-tany, all of which possessed some. Three mpiaiy families of free descent own a total of eight pigs and the andevio possess none. The dramatic growth in the pig population has had devastating consequences on hygiene in the village. Contrary to zebras, which are penned inside corrals, pigs circulate freely within the village, and even in and out of residential dwellings.

In 1992, tompon-tany families owned an average of three chickens per household. By 1996, every tompon-tany household had at least six and even most mpiaiy of free descent possess chickens. Both pigs and chickens are slaughtered on special occasions, such as visits of family members. The sale of pigs and chickens is not prohibited according to fombagasy. No rites to appease the ancestors are necessary, since no cultural value is attached to them. On the other hand, the sale of pigs and chickens is not seen as being commercially viable. Only manioc cultivation is associated with wealth.

**Prices of staple food products in 1996**

As the following table shows, consumer prices for staple products has considerably increased since 1992 (cf. chapter four)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>product</th>
<th>price in FMG</th>
<th>product</th>
<th>price in FMG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>butter</td>
<td>not for sale</td>
<td>sugar</td>
<td>4,000 FMG per kilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oil</td>
<td>7,000 FMG per litre</td>
<td>salt</td>
<td>300 FMG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>milk</td>
<td>1,250 FMG per litre</td>
<td>beef (fat)</td>
<td>7,000 FMG per kilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coffee</td>
<td>5,000 FMG per kilo</td>
<td>beef (meagre)</td>
<td>4,500 FMG per kilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tea</td>
<td>1,250 FMG per package</td>
<td>pork (fat)</td>
<td>9,000 FMG per kilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maize</td>
<td>600 FMG per kilo</td>
<td>pork (meagre)</td>
<td>4,500 FMG one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manioc</td>
<td>300 FMG per kilo</td>
<td>chicken</td>
<td>8,000 FMG one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beans</td>
<td>1,500 FMG per kilo</td>
<td>duck</td>
<td>1,700 FMG one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rice (paddy)</td>
<td>1,800 FMG per kilo</td>
<td>fish (average size)</td>
<td>5,000 FMG one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rice (white)</td>
<td>4,000 FMG per kilo</td>
<td>egg (chicken)</td>
<td>500 FMG one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tobacco</td>
<td>6,000 FMG 10 dried leaves</td>
<td>egg (duck)</td>
<td>700 FMG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To conclude, on the basis of land use, cultivation, livestock and the prices of staple food products, the economic situation in Marovato did not markedly improve with the arrival of the mpikarama. However, macro-economic causes, such as the national economic decline

\textsuperscript{19} The cultural value of zebras will be discussed in chapter seven.

\textsuperscript{20} Pigs are worth between 50,000 and 100,000 FMG. Sheep and goats are still rare commodities in Marovato. Andriabe, a village andriana, owns three sheep. Rafidy Andriana owns two sheep and three goats. Other than chickens, virtually no poultry is raised in Marovato.

\textsuperscript{21} Vegetables are still only cultivated for personal consumption in Marovato.
and the devaluation of the FMG make an assessment of this sort very difficult and beyond the scope of this study. Regardless of actual results, other villages in the region obviously saw benefits in the mpikarama system. Of the twenty other villages within a fifteen-kilometre radius of Marovato that I studied, tompon-tany had an average of five mpikarama in their employ.22

5.5 Payment system of the mpikarama

Tompotany land already under production in 1992, is exclusively cultivated by family members. They either inherit the land or receive it by inter vivos gift. Land which has been converted into production since 1992 is exclusively worked by mpikarama. As was the case in 1992, free descent tenants only assist tompotany during the harvest season if they lease land from them. None of the andro currently work the fields of the tompotany. They are exclusively recruited for malto tasks, such as cleaning the cattle corral and digging holes prior to laying foundations of tompotany houses. Tompotany of noble descent still do not pay andro for this work.

Tenants of free descent are paid an average of 1,400 FMG per day for their work during the harvest season. This payment is usually made publicly at the end of the day. I never witnessed mpikarama being paid by the tompotany at the close of any of these harvest days. They explained that mpikarama are paid weekly and not per diem. Tompotany were reluctant to discuss the subject of wages paid to mpikarama. I presumed their reticence was due to the practice of paying their own family members wages, an apparent breach of the principle of fihavanana, which precludes money payment for services rendered between family members. Rafidy Andriana eventually responded to my repeated questions on the issue of mpikarama wages:

"I do not know why money is so important to you. I just try to help them. But if you really insist, I give men 4,000 FMG and women 2,500 FMG when they still live and eat with me. When they later make their own food and build their own house, I give them 8,000 FMG per week and women 5,000 FMG. Children who help, I just give some coins of 100 FMG."

Randriamahalasa acknowledged paying a similar amount to men, but paid his female workers much less than Rafidy Andriana. He justified this as follows:

"Most of my mpikarama are strong young men who live under my roof. I pay them about 4,000 FMG per week. Once they become established in Marovato, they earn up to 7,500 FMG per week. I have only ten women working for me. They are the wives of some of my mpikarama. I only pay them around 2,000 FMG whether they live with me or not. I pay their husbands well. So they can take care of them."

The only other tompotany who agreed to speak on the issue of mpikarama wages was Ratema:

"For men, it is 7,500 FMG and for women 5,000 FMG if they provide for their own food. If they eat with my family, they receive about half. I give nothing to children who wish to help their parents because they just play around in the fields."23

22 These villages include fourteen tanana tany "ancient villages", which originally were inhabited by tompotany exclusively and six migrant villages (cf. chapter two).
Armed with this information, I approached the mpikarama with similar questions. They also were initially reluctant to specify the amount they earned. It was only upon being informed that the tonpon-tany already had made certain disclosures to me on the topic that they provided any information. Their figures corresponded with those provided by Rafidy Andriana, Randriamahalasana and Ratema. For a few weeks, I presumed my information was accurate, as it was confirmed by both parties.

However, I discovered that I was missing an essential element during a conversation with Soanirina (13), daughter of Andriabe, who runs the épicerie of her parents. While asking her some general questions concerning her customers, she recounted the following:

“Many customers have debts and I am not sure whether they will ever be able to pay. I mostly ask my parents when somebody wants to buy something and does not have money. For andro, I do not have to ask them because they never get anything from us if they do not have money. With other mpiaiy and mpikarama it is different. They mostly get the little things they want. But I have to write it all down so that my father can later contact them for the money. Here is my book of all the people who have debts with us. You can see it if you want. But do not tell my parents. I am not sure if they want you to see it.”

This was an offer I could not decline and I reassured her that I had no intention of telling her parents anything.

The book listed the names of seven debtors of tonpon-tany families with an average debt of 3,100 FMG, 18 names of mpiaiy of free descent with an average debt of 9,230 FMG, and 89 names of mpikarama with an average debt of 17,210 FMG. Thus, the majority of the 134 adult mpikarama had outstanding debts at this épicerie. The percentage is even higher if one takes into account that sixteen of the twenty-two female mpikarama are partners of mpikarama men. I also asked the shopkeepers of the other three épiceries whether they had debtors. Without exception they responded: “misy maro” (“there are many”). But none of them admitted to keeping records of these debts, although, as Soanirina said: “Naturally they write it all down. How will they later remember? With all the new mpikarama here, nobody can possibly remember.”

Not long after Soanirina had shown me her accounts ledger, I visited Solomainty, one of Ratema’s mpikarama, who had fallen ill. He lives in Southeast Marovato. When I enter his hut, he is alone. Beads of sweat run down his face. He appears feverish. I ask him how he is faring.

Solomainty: “I feel weak and I am very worried. Yesterday the ambiasy of my father’s family came to see me. When he comes to see you, you are in trouble.”

SE: “Do you mean that you are very ill then?”

Solomainty: “No, it is the money that worries me. You see I just leased some land of my father and that already costs me quite a bit. I do not want to further increase my debt towards him.”

SE: “I am not really in the clear about what you mean. Doesn’t your father pay for the ambiasy and the medicines you might need?”

23 He is referring to Ratema.
Solomainty: “Yes. He pays for everything. But then later it is taken from my wage and these *ombiasy* are so expensive that it can cost you your wage for the whole year.”

SE: “But I noticed that many *mpikarama* often consult *ombiasy* when they get ill.”

Solomainty: “Yes, and that is not all that costs money. Everything seems for free but it only so until you have to pay it back. You know Mademoisely, everything the *tompon-tany* do for their *mpikarama* is expensive. We always hope that the *tompon-tany* will not charge us in the end, but almost always we notice that we have to pay upon the day that we are supposed to receive our wage. I do not think you will be able to find *mpikarama* who actually receive money at the end of the week. Most of us are in debt. If we are sick too often, our debt towards the *tompon-tany* gets even higher and I am also sure that many of us are indebted to the *epiceries* here in the village.”

I express my surprise at never having heard of all this previously.

Solomainty: “Yes, that must surprise you. Nobody speaks about this but everybody knows it. I think I would like to sleep now. Thank you for coming to see me.”

Prior to my conversation with Solomainty, I had principally focused on the work that the *mpikarama* performed for the *tompon-tany*. It now became quite clear to me that I had to more closely scrutinise services the *tompon-tany* rendered for the *mpikarama* in order to understand the state of *mpikarama* indebtedness.

During the following days, I asked various *mpikarama* whether they actually received money for work performed for the *tompon-tany*. Almost all initially replied in the affirmative. But, when I asked what transpired when they fell ill and the costly services of the *ombiasy* were required, they admitted that, in such a case, they had no choice but to forgo wages for long periods following the illness. Although all of the *mpikarama* accepted the fact that they had to pay for these kind of services, they complained that the *ombiasy* in the region were too expensive. They quoted consultation rates ranging between 10,000 and 50,000 FMG. “Medicine” prepared for an ailing person was on average, in the order of 15,000 FMG. I decided to question Rafidy Andriana about the work of the *ombiasy*.

Rafidy Andriana: “*Ombiasy* are very important. Every *tompon-tany* family has his own *ombiasy* who advises us and cures our ill people. My *ombiasy* is very powerful and he will not help anybody in Marovato unless I have allowed this.”

SE: “I am sure such a powerful *ombiasy* costs a lot of money.”

Rafidy Andriana: “Yes everybody who goes to see him, has to pay me first, so at the end of the yearly manioc harvest, I can give him a cow.”

SE: “What about the medicine he prescribes?”

Rafidy Andriana: “Medicine is not always needed. But, if somebody who I have sent needs it, I will discuss it with the *ombiasy* and I sometimes also give him a chicken. Then he is satisfied.”

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24 It is interesting to note that as soon as the problem of debt comes up, the word “fathers” is dropped in favour of *tompon-tany*. 80
SE: “Do you ever give him money?”

Rafidy Andriana: “No.”

Rafidy Andriana pauses for a moment, as if debating whether to continue. Then, he abruptly concludes the discussion: “I will tell you all about ombiasy some other time. There is still a lot that you need to know about them. I am going to the river now to see how my tobacco plants are doing.”

On various occasions afterwards, Rafidy Andriana spoke to me about the ombiasy and their work (see chapter seven). The tompon-tany monopolise access to the ombiasy in the region through exclusivity agreements. Other tompon-tany family leaders later confirmed to me that mpikarama can only see an ombiasy with the prior consent of the family leader. Most of the mpikarama visit the ombiasy once every two weeks for consultations in order to receive advice on medical problems and a range of other matters such as, for example, the suitability of a future wife. Fees for these consultations are paid by the tompon-tany, usually in the form of a zebu given to the ombiasy after the harvest season. Tompon-tany eventually admitted to me that they would estimate the cost of these consultations and deduct it from the mpikarama’s salary. None of the ombiasy I spoke with wished to reveal the costs of their consultations, claiming it would bring bad luck. It nevertheless appears that the tompon-tany integrate considerable added value when mpikarama visit the ombiasy.

As time went on, I was to discover that the tompon-tany billed the mpikarama for other services as well. Rajean (20), a mpikarama of Rafidy Andriana, explained this to me during a discussion we had at the river.

SE: “How are you doing?”

Rajean: “I think I will get married soon. My father is checking out some candidates now.”

SE: “Do you mean that Rafidy Andriana is?”

Rajean: “Yes, and when he finds a girl for me, he will also pay for the bride price.”

SE: “But don’t you also have a father back home?”

Rajean: “Yes, I have. But I have many brothers there and it will be too difficult for him to pay the bride price for all of us.”

SE: “That is very kind of Rafidy Andriana then.”

Rajean: “Yes, he is a great man. He helps so many people out. I hope that after I get married I will be able to lease some land from him. To make money.”

SE: “But you make money now while working as a mpikarama, don’t you?”

Rajean: “Not for the time being. I think that I have worked for over a year now. But the expenses were so high. I was sick for a while and needed the ombiasy. And now the bride price. It will take a lot of work before I have paid that back.”

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SE: “What do you mean? You have to pay the bride price back?”

Rajean: “Yes every mpikarama has to. But it still is great that he advances it. If not, I and many others would be very old before they have the money to get married.”

The mpikarama debt relationship with the tompon-tany family leaders was far more extensive than I had originally imagined. In fact, I was to learn that they hardly ever actually received the money they worked for at the end of the week. So, although both parties refer to their relationship as that of a father with his children, it was hard to ignore the pervasive economic components.

The position of the mpikarama and pre-1992 mpiary of free descent bears certain similarities, particularly with respect to the debt relation that the mpikarama have towards the tompon-tany family leaders. In the same manner, mpiary, especially the andero, have debts with the tompon-tany they lease land from (cf. chapter four). But the reasons for such debts vary considerably. Mpiary principally accumulated debt because they did not have sufficient capital to pay for leased land. However, mpiary, most of whom arrived in the village as married couples with children, do not rely on the tompon-tany for marriage arrangements. Nor do they ask his help when they want to consult an ombiasy. Rasolo, who leases land from Rafidy Andriana, explained this to me:

Rasolo: “Being mpikarama has certain advantages. Most are family of the tompon-tany who will take care of the mpikarama. For us, it is different. We are not family with them. That is why, for example, Rafidy Andriana would never allow me to see his ombiasy. You see, he does not trust anybody outside his own family. He thinks that we might have bad intentions. His own family he will help, it is his family.”

SE: “I wonder whether the mpikarama have to pay for the things that the tompon-tany do for them.”

Rasolo: “Of course not. They are family.”

All mpiary I asked replied in this manner. They seemed to be under the impression that they were the only debtors of the tompon-tany. They considered their relationship with the tompon-tany family leader as an economic one. Nor did they refer to the tompon-tany and his wife who leased them land as their ray aman-dreny (“father and mother”), as opposed to the usual practice of mpikarama.

One may well ask where the andero were in all of this. By 1996, very few andero still worked for the tompon-tany. Any work they did obtain was sporadic and without economic value. They now exclusively performed maloto jobs. Tompon-tany justified the replacement of the andero by the mpikarama by two simple reasons. When asked why the andero were no longer employed as workers, the tompon-tany replied that the andero were lazy and useless. Mpikarama, on the other hand, were praised for their working spirit in the same breath. Secondly, the new system was credited for increasing land under cultivation.

To conclude, in 1992, inequality permeated the language of production in Marovato. The andero socio-economically operated in the margins of society. In 1996, the language of production had substantially changed. Unity, equality and fikavanana (“friendship”) were

25 I subsequently discussed this subject with Rasolo. It is related to the fear of poisoning and sorcery. This will be explored in chapter eight.
constantly stressed by both the *mpikarama* and the *tonpon-tany*, despite the clear socio-economic gap between the two groupings. Like other newcomers who had preceded them in Marovato, they were promptly relegated to a clearly demarcated position in the village hierarchy. This begs the question as to the role of the remaining *andevo* in Marovato, once their economic function had been usurped by the *mpikarama*. The next chapter will focus on these *andevo* and their lives over the previous four year period.