

WHO ARE THE MAHAFALY ? CULTURAL AND SOCIAL MISIDENTIFI- CATIONS IN SOUTHWESTERN MADAGASCAR

par

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« Dans le Sud-Ouest, les Mahafaly (ceux du pays faly, tabou) occupent au nombre de 80 000 le territoire entre la mer et les fleuves Onilahy et Menarandra » (Decary, 1951:12-13).

« MAHAFALY : nom de la peuplade qui occupe le pays calcaire et sablonneux compris entre la Menarandra et l'Onilahy, dans la partie S.-O. de l'îleleur nombre n'est que 90 573 au dernier recensement, dont 5 000 en dehors de leur territoire d'origine » (Rajemisa-Raolison, 1966:210).

« Les Mahafaly occupent dans le Sud-Ouest de l'île, la région comprise entre les fleuves Menarandra et Onilahy ...Au total, les Mahafaly seraient un peu moins de 100 000 personnes dont près de la moitié vivraient hors de leur aire d'origine, à Tuléar et au Mangoky notamment » (Schoermer-Gernbock, 1971:81).

I

INTRODUCTION

When I entered the Mahafaly Region in Southwestern Madagascar in February 1970 to begin an ethnographic research project there, my thoughts and actions were guided by one preconception above all others. I «knew», as a result of what I had read, that most of the people living there were «Mahafaly», members of one of Madagascar's major tribes. To me, in other words,

the Mahafaly were already established in my mind as a real group with a known size. Its members resided in a specific territory and practiced a distinctive way of life. By the time I left the Mahafaly Region in June 1972, however, I had learned that the people living there who I had come to know, people who should have been Mahafaly according to the literature, simply did not classify or identify themselves as Mahafaly. Whenever I asked them to tell me who they were in a social or cultural sense, they answered me by citing their membership in 8 different kinds of groups, the name of none of which was Mahafaly.

This paper is about this discrepancy : the use of the term «mahafaly» as a group label in the literature and its nonuse as a group label by those people to whom the literature indicates it is supposed to apply. The argument that is developed in the paper is simply this. As seen from the perspective of the Mahafaly Region's people, the social and cultural label of «mahafaly» is a complete misnomer. It is not a term that they ever choose to apply to themselves. It has neither social or cultural substance for them. Instead, the term «mahafaly» is a group label that has been imposed upon them out of ignorance by outsiders (both Westerners and Malagasy alike).

In the paper's next section, Section II, attention is given to the problem of whether or not the people of the Mahafaly Region either now or in the past have been organized into a Mahafaly social group. Section III considers the question of whether or not they have ever formed a Mahafaly cultural group. The information that is analyzed in both Sections II and III comes from 3 kinds of sources : ethnographic notes that I took on the behavior of the Mahafaly Region's people between February 1970 and June 1972 ; descriptions of the region's population made during the colonial era (1860 to 1960) by people who had actual contacts with them ; and, accounts of the region's people during the precolonial era (- to 1860) according to traditional oral histories and reports of eyewitnesses. Section IV, the paper's conclusion, includes speculations about how the term «mahafaly» originally came to be misapplied to the region's people.

Before beginning my argument, however, I want to say something more definite about the people in the Mahafaly Region who supplied me with the ethnographic information that is presented below. My personal knowledge of the region's people comes to me, as I have already mentioned, from contacts I had with them while I was living among them from February 1970 to June 1972. But, the Mahafaly Region and its population are large, and I cannot claim to have lived and visited everywhere within it or to have met and talked with all of its people. Most of my information comes instead from a far more restricted segment of the region's population. Specifically, the individuals from whom I learned live toward the center of the region in a roughly rectangular area, the boundaries of which run between the coastal village of Beheloke on the northwest, the market center of Ambatry on the northeast, the administrative town of Ejeda on the southeast, and the coastal village of Itampolo on the southwest. All of the people within this area with whom I talked are what

might be called traditionalists. That is to say, they are all farmerherders who had never attended school, did not know how to read or write, could speak no other language but Malagasy, had not converted to Christianity, and had deliberately not extended their contacts with outsiders beyond a necessary minimum. What I present in the ethnographic segments of this work, as well as my interpretations of what others have written about the region, are biased toward these people's views, which may be unlike those of residents in other parts of the Mahafaly Region.

II SOCIAL GROUPS

Social groups, as defined here, have two distinctive characteristics. First of all, their members are aware of their membership in them. Members can, and do, talk about belonging to their groups and use their membership in them to identify themselves as social beings. Second of all, social groups' members purposefully meet with one another from time-to-time in an organized fashion in order to carry out specific projects. Social groups are corporate groups.

My argument is that the people who are commonly referred to in the literature as Mahafaly do not presently form a social group. They claim no membership in a Mahafaly tribe or kingdom or clan. Moreover, it seems just as likely that people who lived in the region in the past also never organized themselves into a single Mahafaly social group.

A. SOCIAL GROUPS : THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PRESENT (1970 to 1972).

There are 5 kinds of groups to which region residents belong that fit the definition of social group that is being used here. Four of these groups are kinship groups. One of them is a geographically-based, political alliance. The order in which they are described below corresponds to the size of their membership, with the smallest ones being discussed first and the largest last.

1. **The Household** (*Tragno*). The smallest, but in many ways the most important, social group to which the region's people belong is the household. Each household is identified with the oldest, living male within it. It is «his household». When his name happens to be Evelo, for instance, the household which he heads is known to everyone in the community as «Evelo's household» (*tragno-n'Evelo*). The reason why households are identified with their oldest males can be located in the male-oriented rules of residence which the region's people follow. At marriage, the new wife is expected to leave her father's household and move into her husband's household. All children that she has by her husband are legally attached to their father's household as long as they remain unmarried. Among those children who marry, males establish their own households, which they are supposed to locate near their father's, be it in the same village or neighborhood, while females move into the households of their husbands, as has already been mentioned. If a male household head and his wife divorce one another, it is he who always retains custody of he and his

wife's children, keeping them with him in his household. His wife leaves his household and returns to her father's.

Household composition is highly variable and fluid. There is a necessary core membership to each household, consisting of a man and his wife (or, wives). If they have any unmarried children, then they, too, are members of the household. A variety of other kinds of persons can also be household members, as long as they are related to its male head. Among others, they may include his widowed mother, his divorced daughter, his divorced daughter's young nursing infant, his widowed or divorced sister, and his dead brother's son or daughter.

The organized, goal-directed activities of a household as a social group are concerned primarily with subsistence. Household members are responsible for the production of all of their own food, which they accomplish together by clearing, planting, and harvesting a common set of fields. Any cattle that individual household members own are also herded together under the supervision of one of the household's younger, male members. Apart from subsistence, household members also function as a group in planning and celebrating their own marriages, sponsoring curing ceremonies (*rombo*) when one among them is seriously ill, and organizing funerals whenever one of the members dies.

2. **Foko.** A *foko* is a social group whose members (who are also referred to verbally as «*foko*»), constitute all of the direct descendants of a living man or woman, as traced through all possible lines of kinship. Each person belongs simultaneously to a number of *foko*. He or she is first a member of as many separate *foko* as he or she has direct, living ascendants, belonging, for example, to the *foko* of his or her mother, father, mother's mother, mother's father, father's mother, father's father, and so on. Beyond membership in each of these *foko*, however, every person who is old enough to have had direct descendants of his or her own also stands at the head of his or her own *foko*, with the members of it being persons such as his or her sons, daughters, sons' sons, sons' daughters, daughters' sons, daughters' daughters, and so on.

Each *foko* is identified with the individual who stands at its head, the individual (either male or female) from whom all of its members are directly descended. If a *foko*'s head is a man named Evelo, for instance, the *foko*, as a group, is known as «Evelo's *foko*» («*foko-n'Evelo*»), while each of the group's members is also known as «Evelo's *foko*» («*foko-n'Evelo*»).

The size of a *foko* is a consequence of the age and reproductive success of its head, as well as of his or her descendants. Thus, the largest *foko* are typically those whose heads are older men or women who have had many children

(1) The definition and description of «*foko*» that appears here is substantially different from the definitions and descriptions of «*foko*» that are found in the works of other authors who write about other groups of people in southern, southwestern, and western Madagascar (e.g., Faublée 1954:56-65 ; Ottino 1965:45-6 ; and, Lavondes 1967:107-110).

and whose children have had many children. The largest *foko* with which I am familiar has 19 individuals in it. The smallest *foko* are, in contrast, those headed by a man or woman who has only a single descendant.

The members of a *foko* meet and operate as a social group only when the individual from whom they are descended, the *foko*'s head, is in need of their support. Such a situation usually occurs when he or she is physically ill or financially in debt. When the *foko*'s head is ill, for example, his or her descendants are called together so that they, as a group, can sing healing chants, attend a curing ceremony (*rombo*), or simply provide moral support with their presence. If the *foko*'s head is in financial trouble, his or her direct descendants meet in order to pool their funds and pay off his or her debt.

3. **Tariha.** One of the strongest social identities a person has comes from his or her membership in a social group called a *tariha*. A *tariha* is a group whose members are the descendants, as traced exclusively through male links of kinship, of a common male ancestor. This common ancestor has died recently enough in time so that at least the oldest living members in the *tariha* remember him as an actual, named person. Memory of him is so strong, in fact, that *tariha* members are able, upon reflection and consultation, to trace their own exact kinship ties to him, which also means, of course, that they know their precise ties of kinship to one another.

A *tariha*'s common male ancestor is, nevertheless, only its genealogical focus. It is the oldest living male in its uppermost, extant generation who is the person with whom the *tariha* is verbally identified. He is the person after whom the group is named. It is known as «his *tariha*», which means that if his name is Evelo, the *tariha* is known as «Evelo's *tariha*» («*tariha-n'Evelo*»). All members of the *tariha* are called «his children» (e.g., «Evelo's children» [*anaka-n'Evelo*]). A male who is a *tariha*'s leader acquires his position because he stands closest to the groups ancestors in generational age, although generational age does not necessarily correspond to chronological age; therefore, he is the most qualified person in the group to pray to the group's ancestors on behalf of its living members. All of his prayers to the ancestors take place during formal sacrifices that are given in their honor and called «*soro*», and as a consequence of his supervisory functions at these *soro*, the *tariha*'s patriarch is called its «*mpisoro*».

The sizes of individual *tariha* vary as a result of the reproductive success of their male members, both past and present. The *tariha* with which I am most familiar are all rather small. One has, in fact, only one living member. Even the largest ones rarely have more than 100.

Many, if not most, of the members of a *tariha* live near one another, making up the population of the ward of a village, an entire village, or a whole group of villages. Thus, the *tariha* has a spatial identity. The reason *tariha* members tend to be associated in space is because of the residential ideal that says closely related males, and especially fathers, sons, and brothers, should live near

one another. Most of the males in a *tariha* try to do this, although a few of them occasionally move away because of conflicts they have had with other *tariha* members or because of their desire for better farming and pasture land or because they want to work for wages. Even when male members of *tariha* move elsewhere, however, they frequently do so in groups. Two or more brothers, either real or classificatory, will travel to Tolera, for instance, in search of work as fire wood cutters. As for the female members of *tariha*, those that marry men from other *tariha* move away. Since marriage with men within one's own *tariha* is often possible, and many times preferred, however, even many women in the *tariha* remain in the group's area after their marriages.

Tariha members act as a social group in a number of situations. They come together, most importantly perhaps, whenever any of them needs to perform a *soro*, an honorary sacrifice, to his or her ancestors. As has already been said, such sacrifices are supervised by the *tariha*'s patriarch, its *mpisoro*. But beyond this, many, but not necessarily all, *soro* take place before the group's ancestral shrine, a pointed post about 2 meters in height which is called a *hazomanga* and which is located in the village of the group's patriarch. *Tariha* members are moved to hold *soro* whenever they experience illness, death, sterility, famine, marriage or any other conditions for which their ancestors protection is needed. Besides *soro*, there are other occasions during which the members of a *tariha* operate as a social group. They discuss and resolve serious disputes between group members or between group members and strangers ; they travel to other settlements together to attend funerals, parties, curing ceremonies, and so forth ; they support their young men in ritual wrestling matches (*ringa*) against the young men of other groups ; and, they move their cattle in a single herd to distant water sources whenever they are faced with a severe drought.

4. **Karazana.** These social groups are closely related to *tariha*. Indeed, in a developmental sense, they are probably just overgrown *tariha*, *tariha* which have undergone critical transformations because of increases over time in the sizes of their membership and in the genealogical removal of their members from their founding, common ancestors.

To begin with, a *karazana*'s members, like a *tariha*'s members, belong to their group because of their descent from a common male ancestor as traced through strictly patrilineal ties of kinship. But, unlike *tariha* members, *karazana* members do not remember their common ancestor as an actual person because he died generations before any of them were born. They cannot trace, therefore, their precise kinship ties to him. In many instances, they cannot even explain how they are exactly related to each other, knowing only that they are relatives because they do belong to the same *karazana*.

Every *karazana* has a name, which its members often use to identify themselves. This name is not derived, however, from the name of the group's oldest living male, as is the case with *tariha*, nor is it linked to the name of the group's founding ancestor. It is instead a historically descriptive name, the meaning of which is derived from the characteristics of the group's founding ancestor and

his first descendants or of the area in which he or they originally lived. «Tam-bohitse» is, for example, the name of a *karazana* whose founders came, according to tradition, from a mountainous area («Ta-» = «people of-»/«-vohitse» = «mountain»), while the «Temarofaty» *karazana*'s original members experienced many deaths among their ranks («Te-» = «people of-»/«-maro-» = «-many-»/«-faty» = «-dead person(s)»).

Karazana are greater in size than *tariha*, often being made up in fact, of two or more *tariha* whose members believe themselves to be genealogically related to the same common ancestor. Some of the *karazana* with homelands (*tanindraza*) on the Mahafaly Coastal Plain are said to have as many as 2,000 members (Battistini 1964:62) ; however, the largest *karazana* for which I have a complete census has only 147 members.

Karazana are local groups but in an even more definite sense than are *tariha*. First, most of their members follow the etiquette of residence and try to live with one another in the same locality. But beyond this, each *karazana* is spiritually based in an «ancestral homeland», its «*tanindraza*». It is here that most of its members live, for it is here that the group's ancestral post (*hazomanga*) is permanently located. Since all *karazana* members who wish to perform important sacrifices (*soro*) to their ancestors must hold them before the group's *hazomanga*, *karazana* members are reluctant to move away from their *tanindraza* for it means they will be without ancestral support. *Karazana* members who do move away must go through the inconvenience of returning home whenever they need to honor their dead predecessors in the group.

Karazana wide sacrifices are the only occasions when *karazana* members deliberately meet and act as a group. They are held, however, infrequently, taking place only for matters that are of extreme significance for the entire group. For the members of the *karazana* which I knew best, this happened only twice between February 1970 and June 1972 : once when the poor harvests of the preceding agricultural year moved *karazana* members to begin the new planting season by formally asking their ancestors for rain and fertility, and once when the ancestors' help was sought in curing a sick old man who had once temporarily acted as the group's *mpisoro*. And, speaking of *mpisoro*, all *karazana* have one. He is the oldest male in it in genealogical age.

5. **Ziva.** The largest social groups to which people belong are called *ziva*. Today, however, individuals only occasionally talk about their membership in *ziva*, and they even less often purposefully meet with the other members to carry out specific projects.

But *ziva* were not always so unimportant. Before the colonization of the Mahafaly Region by the French in the early 1900's (Lyautey 1903), *ziva* played a much deeper role in its people's lives. They were then, as David (1939a:66-72) has written and as the older persons with whom I have talked have confirmed, nonaggression alliances. *Ziva* were groups that the members

of two or more *karazana* formed in order to alleviate the raiding and fighting that seem to have been common in the region. *Ziva* members were individuals who had pledged peaceful relations with one another.

Although *ziva* were structurally composed of several *karazana*, they were not in any technical sense kinship groups because the attraction that the members of their different *karazana* had for each other was based on geographical and not genealogical principles. That is, the *karazana* that came together to form a *ziva* did so because their individual homelands, their *tanindraza*, when joined together, formed a single, contiguous geographical area, within which farming, herding, and trading could be maintained in peace.

Conditions changed drastically in the Mahafaly Region, however, when the French militarily invaded it and forcefully subjugated its residents just after 1900. In regard to *ziva*, one especially important move that was made by the French was their assumption of the responsibility of suppressing all of those kinds of disputes which *ziva* had been intended to counteract. Thus, for the region's people, *ziva* suddenly became redundant and expendable institutions. They no longer had to worry about creating new ones or maintaining those that were already in existence. *Ziva* were allowed to atrophy over the years by their members into what they are today – mutual aid societies which operate only during the funeral ceremonies of their members.

The preceding 5 groups (*tragno*, *foko*, *tariha*, *karazana*, and *ziva*) are the only groups to which the people of the region belong that fit the definition of social group being used here. What is relevant about them to the argument of this paper is that none of them corresponds to a Mahafaly social group. None of them, that is, has as its membership all of those people who are referred to in the literature as Mahafaly, nor is any of them, to my knowledge, called «Mahafaly». There does not seem to be, in short, any contemporary Mahafaly social group.

B. SOCIAL GROUPS : THE COLONIAL ERA (1860 to 1960).

The information that is presented and analyzed in this section comes from descriptions of the Mahafaly Region and its people that were written between the 1860's and the 1960's by individuals who actually seem to have traveled there and had face-to-face contacts with its residents. The question to which this section seeks an answer is this : Do any of the social groups that were observed in the region during this time correspond to a Mahafaly social group in either size or name ?

The social groups that observers from this era mention to the almost total exclusion of all others are what they call «kingdoms» («royaumes»). The leaders of these kingdoms they call «kings» («rois»). There is disagreement, however, between observers as to the number, size, and location of these kingdoms. Alfred Grandidier (1867:10) and Captain Toquenne (1898:994-5) mention only three of them ; Lavoisot (Lyautey 1903:135), David (1939b:

120), and Speyer (Poirier 1953:29) list four of them ; Lucciardi (Lyautey 1903:46) records five ; and, Bastard (1899) speaks of six. And, even when different observers agree about the number of kingdoms into which the region is divided, they are not always writing about exactly the same ones (for example, compare the 4 kingdoms that Speyer (Poirier 1953:29) mentions to the 4 that Lavoisot (Lyautey 1903:185) lists).

Statements about the number of people and the size of territories in Mahafaly kingdoms are rare and seem to have little substance to them. Bastard is the only observer to offer anything approaching a population estimate for a kingdom, the one ruled by a king named Refotaka in the northern part of the Mahafaly Region.

« J'estime que Refotaka a bien 150 villages... et peut-être 6 à 8 000 sujets » (1899: 503).

He also speculates about how many men kings have at their call, by which he clearly means men who are old enough to be considered a physical threat to the impending French invasion.

« ... Tsiaranga, qui commande à 500 hommes... » (1899:503).

But it is impossible to derive any population estimates from such figures. The territories of Mahafaly kingdoms are graphically represented in several maps (Bastard 1899 ; Toquenne 1900 ; Lyautey 1903 ; and, Poirier 1953) that were drawn by observers during the Colonial Era, but discrepancies between them, plus doubts about the reach of the authority of kings, suggest that the areas they mark off are at best only rough generalizations.

Few observers discuss the internal organization of Mahafaly kingdoms, and the only one among them to offer any detail is Toquenne, in his presentation of information that was originally supplied to him by Tandra and Payet, two traders who had commercial dealings with people in the region. Toquenne characterizes Mahafaly kingdoms as feudal hierarchies (1898:996-7). At their bases are individual villages, each of which is made up of several related families. The chief of each village is the man who is the « father » of its residents, but his power as chief is limited since important village decisions are made in meetings involving all of the village's men. Villages whose families are related to one another are grouped together into what Toquenne calls « tribes ». At the head of each tribe is a chief who owes his position to his membership in the specific family in the tribe that holds the hereditary right to chieftainship. Following a tribal chief's death, he is succeeded by his own son. If he has no son, then it is one of his own brothers who follows him as chief. Tribes which are genealogically related form a kingdom. The king of a kingdom is sovereign but only in an ideal sense. The chiefs of his kingdom's tribes can, and do, act in council to override him.

Toquenne's descriptions of the internal organization of Mahafaly kingdoms conforms in many ways to the description of the 5 contemporary social groups

that were presented in the preceding section. His villages of related families sound very much like the villages in the Mahafaly Region that I saw, where household heads were members of the same family (*tariha*). And, the village-level decision making process he mentions, in which all the men meet in council, is also identical to the present day decision making process in *tariha*-based villages. What Toquenne calls «tribes» could easily be *karazana*, for the members of *karazana* are indeed generally divided into a number of separate villages. However, the path to succession he mentions in regard to tribal chiefs does not correspond to the path of succession involving *karazana mpisoro*. Succession in *karazana* is not, as it is in Toquenne's tribes, from father to son; it is from brother to brother within the same generation. As for Mahafaly kingdoms, they would be, following out this line of speculation, social groups that were composed of genealogically related *karazana*. This kind of group is an entirely conceivable one to me, although I personally never encountered one. The only groups that united *karazana* of which I knew were *ziva*, which were not kinship groups at all. The possibility that what colonial observers called kingdoms are related structurally to *karazana* seems even more probable when Delorme's 1936 article concerning the events surrounding the installation of a new ancestral post (*hazomanga*) belonging to a group which is supposed to be the family of a king is taken into account. It is clear that the group's present «king», a man named Tsiosa, is actually the *mpisoro* of a specific *karazana* (Tevondray). The ritual Tsiosa is participating in, even down to the adoration of his group's ancestral relics at its conclusion, is essentially the same as that of numerous *soro* which I recorded in the region in the early 1970's.

Observers of Mahafaly kingdoms all seem to point out that the authority of their kings was quite limited. In many cases, it is the chiefs surrounding the kings who seem to have held real power (A. Grandidier 1867:11-12 and A. and G. Grandidier 1914:79). Bastard's experiences with the kings Refotaka and Tsiverenga furnish examples of such situations. Many of Refotaka's chiefs openly opposed his conciliatory attitude toward the French and they eventually forced him to withdraw from his kingdom's capital, Manera (1899:489). Later, further south in the region, Bastard finds that king Tsiverenga is also at the mercy of his chiefs, being unable to even meet with French representatives without their permission (1899:489).

Even though the kings of various Mahafaly kingdoms are believed to have been related through kinship to each other (G. Grandidier n.d.:1 and A. and G. Grandidier 1928:215), there is little evidence to suggest that their kingdoms were ever organizationally connected. David says explicitly that these kingdoms formed no clan (1939:121). Rather, it is open distrust, and sometimes outright hostility, that marks relations between kingdoms (Toquenne 1898:996-7 and G. Grandidier 1908:450-1). The conflict between two former kings that is mentioned by Bastard may have been a typical king of expression of inter-kingdom fighting.

« En 1889, Leitafiky, père de Refotaka, était roi des Mahafaly de l'Onilahy. Leitafiky était fier, arrogant et jaloux de tous ses voisins. Un jour de cette année 1899 (sic), il réunit tous ses guerriers et partit avec eux pour le Sud, afin d'aller se battre avec Refionga et de lui voler ses bœufs. Refionga, frère aîné du roi actuel Voriandro, était lui aussi un roi puissant. De plus, c'était un homme brave. Il attendait sans trembler Leitafiky et le mit en déroute. Et l'histoire dit que la bataille fut sanglante, puisqu'il y eut trois hommes tués parmi ceux du Nord et autant parmi ceux du Sud, dont le propre fils de Refionga » (1899: 494).

Mahafaly kingdoms are, however, only the Mahafaly Region's most frequently mentioned social groups during the Colonial Era. Apparently existing alongside of them at the same time are an indefinite but considerable number of small, sometimes isolated social groups which are politically independent (Bastard 1899:502). These groups, which are sometimes called «villages» (Lucciardi in Lyautey 1903:46) and sometimes «tribes» (G. Grandidier 1908: 450-1), seem to constantly be in a state of conflict with each other. As late as 1939, David estimates that there are at least 160 «tribes» in the entire region, most of which presumably are these small independent social groups. This is a rather startling number and an indication of the strength of these groups since the official French policy after 1900 was to administratively join them to the larger, more easily governable kingdoms (Lavoisot in Lyautey 1903: 185 and G. Grandidier 1908:450-1) (2).

Between 1860 and 1960, then, even granting maximum size to various Mahafaly kingdoms, it is obvious that there is no Mahafaly social group, be it a tribe, clan, federation, or kingdom. First, none of the observed social groups included as members the major population of the region. Second, none of them is called by the name «Mahafaly». It is instead all of the kingdoms that are called Mahafaly kingdoms, which indicates «mahafaly» is more of a cultural term than a social one.

C. SOCIAL GROUPS : THE PRECOLONIAL ERA (- to 1860).

In assessing the case of the existence of a Mahafaly social group before 1860, two kinds of information – traditional oral histories and eyewitness accounts – are relevant. Most of the statements in the literature about life

(2) Might it not be possible that the all encompassing power that is today associated with Mahafaly kingdoms, especially by the contemporary descendants of their past kings (e.g., Battistini's interview with Tsihazoa [Battistini 1964:63-4]), could be, in part, a consequence of French sponsorship of them during the Colonial Era ?



in the region at this time come from traditional oral histories which for the most part were collected by outsiders from the region's inhabitants *after* 1860. Unfortunately, the outsiders who collected them rarely mention whom they collected them from or how they edited them for purposes of publication. This makes it difficult to evaluate and compare different accounts. There are, surprisingly, numerous eyewitness descriptions of the region and its people which date from before 1860. Many of them come, in fact, from the late 1500's and early 1600's when the Bay of St. Augustine, on the northwestern corner of the region, was a major anchorage for European ships traveling back and forth between Europe and the East Indies (e.g., de Houtman 1959 ; Middleton 1607 ; Finch 1608 ; Keeling 1607 ; Mandelslo 1639 ; Boothby 1640 ; Hammond 1640 and 1643 ; and, Waldegrave 1649). However, the majority of these descriptions are too superficial to be of any use in analyzing the early social organization of the region's people since the observers who wrote them had only brief contacts with local residents and possessed no command of the local language. Out of all of these eyewitness accounts, it is only the journal of Robert Drury (1729) that contains any useful details because Drury did remain in southern and southwestern Madagascar (if not in the Mahafaly Region, specifically) for a long period of time (17 years), spoke the local language fluently, and participated actively in the people's daily lives.

1. **Traditional Oral Histories.** Writers who use traditional oral histories as a basis for their reconstructions of precolonial social organization in the Mahafaly Region agree generally that the region's people were affected by three broad periods of social history.

In the beginning, the region's original inhabitants, who are called «*renitane*» («*mothers of the land*») by some authors (David 1939:121-2 and Schomerus-Gernbock 1971:81), lived in isolated and independent settlements and fought frequently with one another (Ralaimihoatra 1969:65). They are said also to have practiced only a limited amount of agriculture, with much of their food supply coming instead from hunting and collecting. Among the names of these original social groups are Faloanombe, Sive (Tsive), Tampasy, Tesendre, Zanakanga, Antantoso, Antangola (Antanalana), Antimitongoa and Folahazomanga (A. and G. Grandidier 1914:213-14 ; David 1939b:121-2 ; and, Schomerus-Gernbock 1971:81-2). Most of these names are similar in a linguistic sense to the names of contemporary *karazana* ; they seem to be, that is, historically descriptive names. Furthermore several of them are indeed the names of contemporary *karazana* which I encountered in my own research (e.g., Tampasy, Tesendre, Zanakanga, and Antimitongoa).

The only collected tradition that seems to contradict the preceding picture of the region's original inhabitants is one that was published by David (1939b:121-2). In it, one of the region's original social groups, the «*Renilime*» («*five mothers*»), is said to have politically dominated and organized a number of groups living near it in the northeastern part of the region. At this unspecified

time, in other words, an incipient, supra-*karazana* organization of groups may have already begun.

The second broad period in the region's social history is connected with the immigration into it of a number of groups from the southeastern section of Madagascar (A. and G. Grandidier 1914:213-4). Among these groups, however, one family, the Maroseranana, is supposed to have been dominant. Its members installed themselves as the dynastic rulers of a hierarchical society that they eventually created in the region by political innovation. Members of the social groups that had immigrated into the region with them comprise the privileged class, while the region's original inhabitants make up its inferior, common class (Deschamps 1965:95-6 and Schomerus-Gernbock 1971:81-2). According to one writer, tradition says that the Maroserana, at this time (circa 1500's), named the region «Mahafaly» land ; yet, there is no indication that they named their kingdom the Mahafaly kingdom, even though the founding of their initial hierarchical state marks the first time that the sources so far reviewed in this section of the paper mention a single, social group as encompassing the inhabitants of the region.

If the region's population belonged to a single social group at the beginning of the Maroseranana kingdom, it was, according to tradition, divided into a number of separate Maroseranana kingdoms within a matter of generations because of disputes over succession. Thus, even as early as 1661, news of the region reaching outsiders tells of a socially divisive situation.

« Tout ce pays des Machicores est ruiné des guerres ; autrefois le Grand qui s'appelait Dian Baloualen... était le maître de tous ces pays des Machicores, Concha, Manambouille, Alfissach et Mahafales, ainsi que même encore les habitants le confessaient, et, alors, tout vivait en grande paix, le pays et les environs étaient très florissants et riches, mais, après sa mort, ses enfants se sont tellement fait la guerre qu'ils se sont tous ruinés, et chacun a tiré de son côté... » (Flacourt 1661:73-5).

These separate Maroseranana kingdoms into which the region seems to be divided during its third historical period are generally accepted as being ancestral to the various Mahafaly kingdoms into which the region was divided at the commencement of the Colonial Era (Ralaimihoatra 1969:147 and A. and G. Grandidier 1914:215).

2. **Eyewitness Accounts.** As has already been said, the only detailed description of events in the Mahafaly Region during the Pre-Colonial Era which is of much analytical value is Robert Drury's personal journal (1729). Drury is, of course, the young Englishman who was shipwrecked in southern Madagascar in 1702 and who lived in various parts of the southern and southwestern sections of the island until 1717. As fascinating as Drury's journal is, however, the information it contains about how the people in the Mahafaly Region,

which Drury calls in one place «mefaughla» and in others «mercaughla», organized themselves into social groups is ambiguous. In several places, he speaks as though all of its people are under the rule of a single king (1729:87 and 193), but in another, he says that there are at least 3 different kings.

«Ry-Nanno told me that the whole country of Merfaughla lay between us, extending itself from the utmost part of Anterndroea, where Deaan Murnanzack's cattle are kept, to the river which runs into St. Augustine Bay, which river is called Oneghayloghe. ...I inquired what kings lived in the way. He said none ; for there were three. Rer Trottock is the first to the northward, then Rer Chulu-Mossu-Andro and Zaffentumppoe ; this last at the head of the river Oneghayloghe, to the eastward ; but there are none of their people live within almost two days' long journey of the road » (Drury 1729:165).

Furthermore, Drury also makes it clear that these kingdoms do not take in all of the region's people. There are other groups in the region that exist in total independence of them.

«There are in the remote parts of this country some people whose habitations are in secret places in the woods ; they live easy, indolent lives, never coming near towns nor concerning themselves with any affairs of peace or war, foreign or domestic ; they keep no cattle, lest their bellowing might betray them, and their value induce some evil-minded men to disturb their peace by robbing them ; but content themselves with small plantations and what nature produces, which is indeed sufficient. They never trouble themselves who is lord of any particular place, or king of the whole » (Drury 1729:153-4).

What then can be said about the existence of a Mahafaly social group in the Mahafaly Region in the Pre-Colonial Era ? Oral histories, as recounted through the publications of outsiders, imply that the region's population may have been united in a single kingdom shortly after the arrival of the Maroseranana family and its allies in the 1500's ; yet, this initial unity seems to have been only short lived, with the Maroseranana kingdom having split apart into several different branches by the first half of the 1600's. In addition, it is not at all certain what this initial, all encompassing kingdom was called : Was it the Mahafaly kingdom ? Or, was it the Maroseranana kingdom ? The only eyewitness account of any credibility mentions no single Mahafaly social group for the period between 1702 and 1717. Instead, according to it, the Mahafaly Region is divided into several large kingdoms, plus many small, independent groups.

III CULTURAL GROUPS

At best, the evidence in support of the idea that there is now, or ever has been, a Mahafaly social group is weak. When various writers mention a Mahafaly group, therefore, they can only be in error if they mean that it is an organized entity whose members actually meet to carry out group projects. Nevertheless, there is the possibility that the region's people, even if they have never constituted a social group, might still be members of a Mahafaly cultural group. The difference between a social group and a cultural group is simply this. A cultural group is a group that exists only in its members minds. It is a group, that is, to which people say they belong, even though, as group members, they never actually meet with one another in an organized fashion to do specific things. The criteria for membership in a cultural group is the possession by members of certain attributes, such as residence or language or diet or ritual, which they perceive of themselves as sharing but the members of other cultural groups as lacking.

A. CULTURAL GROUPS : THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PRESENT (1970 to 1972)

The people living in the Mahafaly Region with whom I am familiar say that they belong to 3 kinds of groups, each of which seems to fit the preceding definition of what a cultural group is. Their membership in these groups, in other words, is purely ideational and results in no organized social activities.

1. **Local Cultural Group.** This is the term I have coined for the smallest kind of cultural group in which people claim membership. The first criterion for being a part of a local cultural group has to do with geographical residence. A local cultural group's members are individuals who have come to identify themselves as native residents of a particular locality in the region, either because they were born and raised there or because they have permanently established themselves there after immigrating in from elsewhere. Some members of the group may even live outside the locality, having moved out for one or another reason while continuing to identify themselves with it. The localities with which local cultural groups are associated are generally quite small, rarely extending beyond 30 or 40 square kilometers in size. They are also often separated from other localities by open areas of uninhabited land. Despite their smallness, each of these localities is physically distinct in the eyes of the members of its cultural group. Its uniqueness may be related to its topography or vegetation or water resources or any other of its natural features. Whatever its distinctive characteristic is, however, it is reflected in the name that is given to the locality. «Andranomay» is, for instance, the name given to a locality whose outstanding characteristic is its «hot spring» («An-» = «place of-»/«-rano-» = «-water-»/«-may» = «-hot»). The members of the cultural group found in a particular locality, in turn, draw their group name from the locality's name. Members of the cultural group found in Andranomay, for example, publically identify themselves as a cultural group as «residents of Andranomay» («*tompon-tany Andranomay*»).

But being associated with a locality is not the only criterion for membership in a local cultural group. Group members must also practice what are for them a distinctive set of customs («*fomba*»). It is their customs, along with their physical ties to a locality, that gives substance to their cultural identity. The kinds of customs that serve as cultural markers vary from one group to another, because anything that people do that they can perceive of as being distinctive of themselves has the potential of being a critical cultural criterion.

The local cultural group which I know best can serve as an example of all of these points. Its members, to begin with, consider themselves to be native residents of a specific locality, in this case an open grassy plain which is surrounded by a xerophytic forest that isolates it from neighbouring localities. They call their locality «Andranomonto» («the place with a water source in the open plain» ; «An-» = «place of-»/«-rano-» = «-water-»/«-monto» = «-open plain»). They call themselves, as a cultural group, «residents of Andranomonto» («*tompon-tany Andranomonto*»). Some members of their cultural group have moved away to pioneer new land or work for wages ; yet, even these absentees still consider themselves to be, and are still considered by others to be, group members. A number of shared customs (*fomba*) are also criteria for group membership. One is language. The people of Andranomonto claim that their pronunciation of certain Malagasy words is distinctive of their speech patterns and their's alone. They also use words which no other people use or understand. Another distinctive custom has to do with their cattle herding practices. Unlike members of the surrounding local cultural groups, they do not move their animals to different pasturelands during changes in the season. A final custom that sets their way of life apart is their emphasis, in farming, on certain specialty crops.

2. Intra-Regional Cultural Groups. Intra-regional cultural groups are identical to local cultural groups in principle : they are geographically based groups whose members see themselves as sharing certain distinctive customs (*fomba*). They differ from local cultural groups only in their size, having both larger territories and memberships. Indeed, each intra-regional cultural group includes within it both the localities and members of numerous local cultural groups. Taken together, intra-regional cultural groups are the largest cultural groups into which the people of the Mahafaly region divide themselves.

The territory associated with each intra-regional cultural group is believed by the group's members to possess a distinctive environmental character, and they can easily describe, when asked, exactly what the climatic or vegetational or topographical features are that make it unique. According to the people with whom I lived, the western 2/3rds of the Mahafaly Region is divided into 3 intra-regional cultural areas : «Andriake» («the ocean province») ; «Ankara» («the high interior») ; and, «Analana» («the region of the sand dunes»). Andriake roughly corresponds to that part of the Mahafaly Coastal Plain that stretches south from the village of Nisoa (slightly south of Itampolo) to the Menarandra River ; Analana is the narrower part of the coastal plain that runs

from Nisoa north to the Onilahy River ; Ankara is the name given to the entire Mahafaly Plateau which runs from the Onilahy to the Menarandra River and sits between the Mahafaly Coastal Plain and the interior of the island. The eastern 1/3rd of the Mahafaly Region, the section of the region that corresponds to the Mahafaly Penepplain, is divided into numerous intra-regional cultural areas, the names and extents of which I am not at all certain since I know people living there less well than I know people in the western 2/3rds of the region. The eastern areas with which I am familiar are all named after the dominant villages that are found within them. There are for example, intra-regional cultural areas named after the villages of Betioke, Ambatry, Beroy, Gogogogo, Beahitse, and Anjamena.

The people who claim membership in the cultural groups that are associated with these areas name themselves, as groups, after them. The residents of Andriake are Tandriake, those of Ankara are Tankara, those of Analana are Tanalana ; while, in the east, the residents of the areas associated with Betioke, Ambatry, and so forth call themselves, simply, residents (*tompon-tany*) of Betioke, Ambatry, or wherever else they might live. But, again, residence in an intra-regional cultural area is not sufficient for membership in its cultural group. To belong to the cultural group, individuals must also practice all of those customs that are believed to be distinctive of it, whatever they might happen to be.

As an illustration of an intra-regional cultural group, take the Tankara, the distinctive population living on the Mahafaly Plateau. Besides their common residence, the feature of their behavior that they most frequently mention as being one of their cultural characteristics is their attitude toward the «modern» world and its inhabitants. They fear it and them. As Tankara, they say, they are individuals who run into the forest at the sight of an automobile or truck. But Tankara also claim to have skills that the members of intra-regional cultural groups have lost. They still place great emphasis, for example, on hunting and collecting as subsistence techniques, knowing how to trap boars and *tenerec* and *akanga* and how to locate and tap bee hives for their honey.

Some of the intra-regional cultural groups that I mention above are also referred to by other writers. Battistini, for instance, writes of both Tandriake and Tanalana (1964 :62 and 67) but he defines them in slightly different ways than I do. Tanalana, to him, seems to be a social group of related *karazana* ; Tandriake is simply a geographical, and not cultural, label. Deschamps also mentions the Tanalana but says they are both culturally and socially different from the rest of the region's population (1965 :95-6).

3. *Gasy*. The terme «*gasy*» is, of course, a shortened form of the word «*malagasy*», which is, in turn, the label that is today popularly and officially used to designate all of the Malagasy-speaking people in Madagascar. But when «*gasy*», or «*malagasy*», is used by people on the Mahafaly Region as the name of a cultural group, it is given by them a much more restricted meaning. To them, *Gasy* are, first of all, individuals who are residents of the flat, semi-arid

savannah lands of southern, southwestern, and west central Madagascar which runs in a broad arc from approximately Morombe on the north to Amboasary on the southeast. In the literature, outsiders call the people living in this part of the island Tandroy, Bara, Tanosy, Vezo, and Masikoro, as well as Mahafaly.

Besides their common residence, what makes all of these people *Gasy* is their practice of a common set of customs which distinguish them from other groups. Out of these customs, some of the most frequently mentioned ones have to do with language, subsistence, and ancestor worship.

Gasy, by their own definition, speak a different language than the rest of Madagascar's people (3). Some of the features of this language are phonetic. In the language of *Gasy*, the sound «l» is found in positions where the sound «d» is found in other Malagasy languages: the word for «taboo» is, thus, «*faly*» in *Gasy* and not «*fady*» as elsewhere in Madagascar, while the word for «wife» is «*valy*» and not «*vady*». Another phonetic substitution that is distinctive of the speech of *Gasy* has to do with the letter combination «tse» which is found where «tra» is found in other Malagasy languages. The *Gasy* word for «skin» is therefore «*hoditse*» and not «*hoditra*». Equally important to the identity of the language of *Gasy* are numerous differences in vocabulary. As examples, the *Gasy* word for «woman» is «*ampela*» and not «*vehivavy*»; the word for «dog» is «*amboa*» and not «*alika*»; and, the word for «person» or «people» is «*ndaty*» and not «*olona*».

Subsistence economy is another area in which *Gasy* distinguish themselves. In the realm of agriculture, for example, they are quick to point out that they grow corn as their staple crop and not rice, as is the case with non-*Gasy*. In terms of herding, they say that cattle for them are a form of security and not simply a source of food. They keep cattle so that they can use them in either of two ways to counteract human misfortunes. First, they offer them to their ancestors as honorary sacrifices in return for their ancestor's support in combating illness, sterility, death and so on. Second, *Gasy* either trade their cattle for corn and rice, or sell them for cash with which to buy corn and rice, whenever there is a serious famine.

A third major attribute of cultural identity for *Gasy* has to do, they say, with the way in which they worship their all-important ancestors. All prayers

(3) The people's claim stands in contrast to the common assumption that is made in the literature that all of Madagascar's people speak the same language, or at least regional dialects of it (e.g., Deschamps 1965:19 and Rajemisa-Raolison 1966:184). Yet, in an objective, linguistic sense there may be more to what the people say than at first meets the eye. Verin, Kottak, and Gorlin (1969), using a 100 item basic word list, found that 4 major Malagasy «dialects» spoken in the section of Madagascar that *Gasy* believe to be their homeland have a shared cognate rate of only between 60 and 70 % with the Merina dialect of Malagasy, the island's official dialect. Since many linguists draw the line at which different dialects diverge enough to become different languages at a 70 % rate of shared cognates (Dyen 1965:18), the language that *Gasy* speak may indeed be another language.

and sacrifices that they offer to them are presented before ancestral posts (*hazomanga*), which are the property of the patrilineal common descent groups (*tariha* and *karazana*) into which all *Gasy* are born. The supervision of these rituals is by *mpisoro*, the generational patriarchs of these respective descent groups.

Under examination, it is clear that none of the 3 preceeding cultural groups is what might be called a Mahafaly cultural group. Local cultural groups and intra-regional cultural groups are too small to be. They actually subdivide the region's people into a series of cultural groups of only limited size. On the other hand, the cultural group called *Gasy* is too large, including within it people from outside the Mahafaly Region.

B. CULTURAL GROUPS : THE COLONIAL ERA (1860 to 1960) AND THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA (- to 1860).

It is nearly impossible to determine what cultural groups the people of the Mahafaly Region assigned themselves to during the Colonial and Pre-Colonial Eras because it is unclear in the published accounts dealing with these time periods whether or not the information that they contain is based on the people's own interpretations of their world or on the observer's ethnocentric interpretation of their behavior.

The only information that can safely be assumed to represent the people's own interpretation of their world are those found in the oral histories that were collected and published in the Colonial and Pre-Colonial Eras. And, as presented in the works of various authors, they all seem to concentrate on the history of the Maroseranana Family (A. Grandidier 1867:10 ; Jakobsen 1902: 51 ; and, David 1939a:66). Distinctive cultural attributes of the Maroseranana are said to be a common genealogy, unique grave posts (*aloalo*), ancestral posts (*hazomanga*), family relics, and decorative house planks. But is what is common to the Maroseranana the same as what is common to the Mahafaly ? Are Maroseranana cultural markers also Mahafaly cultural markers ? The answer is probably no. As one specific instance, the people of the Mahafaly Plateau, the region's largest area, are said to have been excluded entirely from the Maroseranana's way of life (Schomerus-Gernbock 1971 : 81-2). Also, it is interesting to note that many people in the region, unlike the Maroseranana, had no common traditions concerning their social past ; Maroseranana traditions do not overlap perfectly with the traditions of other people in the region (Toquenue 1899: 593 and G. Grandidier 1908: 450-1).

Outside of the area of oral traditions, the cultural traits of the Mahafaly that are described in the literature for the Colonial and Pre-Colonial Eras are certainly not cultural traits that the people attribute to themselves. They are traits which are defined as cultural markers by outside observers. Moreover, even when this is recognized, the traits are still of little value in an analytic sense because they are not at all distinctive of the Mahafaly region's people, they are only characteristic of them. Take as an example the warlike nature of the Mahafaly, which is often mention in description of the region's people.

«... les guerres de tribu à tribu soient fréquentes, puisqu'elles constituent une des principales sources de revenu des autorités» (Toquenue 1898 : 996-7),

«... la population à l'origine se livrait à des luttes incessantes et à des razzias» (Ralaimihoatra 1969 : 65).

It is first doubtful that «warfare» is a cultural trait which the people themselves ever said was distinctive of themselves. Second, warfare is a characteristic that observers also noticed and used to characterize almost all of the other groups in southern and southwestern Madagascar (Nielsen Lund 1888 : 447, 451 and 455, and Kottak 1971 : 139-40).

If the people of the Mahafaly Region formed a distinct cultural group, therefore, it is not at all clear what the cultural attributes are that they believed to be distinctive of themselves.

IV

«MAHAFALY» AS A MISNOMER

In the preceding two sections, information has been presented that suggests that, from the point of view of the residents of the Mahafaly Region, the term «mahafaly» has no meaning as a social or cultural label. They do not presently consider themselves to be members of a Mahafaly social group or a Mahafaly cultural group. Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest that the people who lived in the region in past generations thought of themselves as belonging to a Mahafaly social or cultural group, either. If this is true, the question that arises is this. How did the term «mahafaly» come to be used by outside observers as a social or cultural label for the region's people in the first place? I have strong thoughts about a probable answer, but they are unfortunately all speculative. I present them here, therefore, only as hypotheses to be tested through historical scholarship.

One clue to «mahafaly's» genesis as a social and cultural misnomer lies, I believe, in the way the word is used by the region's present inhabitants. Even though they do not accept «mahafaly» as a social or cultural label, they do use the word as part of their vocabulary. Its meaning is a consequence of the juxtaposition of its two morphemes, the prefix «*maha-*», which means «to have the ability to...», and the root «*-faly*», which means «taboo». As a part of speech, «mahafaly» is used as a descriptive term, not a substantive one. It describes a certain kind of quality that some objects or substances or persons have — «the ability to taboo». Even though «mahafaly» theoretically can be used to describe any object, substance, or person that has this ability, the way in which it is used most often is as a term to describe the region in which the people live — the Mahafaly Region. To them, the land lying between the Onilahy and Menarandra Rivers is a distinct geographical entity. Furthermore, it is a geographical entity with a unique character. It creates taboos in the lives of all of those people who choose to live upon it.

With this use of the term «mahafaly» in mind, it is useful, I believe, to reconsider the ways in which outsiders have used the term in the literature. In addition to their use of «mahafaly» as a social and cultural label, they all seem to recognize that it also has geographical implications. In other words, the Mahafaly people are always defined as those people living in Mahafaly territory, the land between the Onilahy and Menarandra Rivers. One observer, interestingly enough, goes one step further. Robert Drury, who may have understood the lives of the people in southern and southwestern Madagascar better than any other outsider, uses the term «mahafaly» exclusively as a geographical term. In each and every place in his journal where «mahafaly» appears it is as the name of a country and not a people.

«On this manner did Deaan Mevarrow, his brother, and some others of Deaan Crindo's people enter some of the king of Mefaughla's remote and defenseless towns...» (Drury 1729:87),

«That Deaan Woozington, the king, and his son Chemermaundy, and Ryo- pheck, his nephew, a gallant man, commanded the army of Merfaughla, entered the country without opposition» (Drury 1729:88).

«Now orders were sent to...prepare to hunt the wild boar, by which they meant the king of Merfaughla» (Drury 1729:193).

The people's use of «mahafaly» as a geographically-related term, plus most outside observer's recognition of the region's people as a geographical group, suggests one possibility to me. Outside observers, few of whom had any fluency in the local language, may have mistaken the word «mahafaly», as the region's people used it to describe their homeland, for a social or cultural label. When people from the region told them, in other words, that they were residents of Mahafaly land («*tany mahafaly*»), they may have automatically assumed that they must be the Mahafaly people.

If this was the case, then once outsiders began classifying the region's people as Mahafaly, the term, itself, underwent a transformation into a «real» social and cultural label. First, for outsiders, and in particular those associated with the French Colonial regime, the «mahafaly» became one of Madagascar's official «tribes». Thus, they proceeded to send soldiers to the region to «pacify» (intimidate) the Mahafaly, to assign civil administrators to the region so that they could count and tax the Mahafaly, to allow missionaries to enter the region in order to convert the Mahafaly, and to even encourage scholars to travel to the region to study the Mahafaly. Second, the people of the region, the ones who found themselves being labeled as Mahafaly, soon learned, as the weak partners in the colonial dialogue, that it was to their advantage to begin acting like Mahafaly. They had seen that it was always dangerous and sometimes fatal to oppose outsiders and their ideas. Therefore, whenever they were

in the presence of people who they knew believed them to be Mahafaly, they behaved as Mahafaly, even to the point of calling themselves Mahafaly, Nor did this strategy of compliance on their part end with the end of French Colonial rule. The region's people have continued their masquerade as Mahafaly, since the Malagasy national government has continued to use Mahafaly as a name for the predominant population in the Mahafaly Region. Yet, when alone among themselves, the people reveal their true social and cultural selves, none of which is Mahafaly.

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RESUME

Après deux années de vie et d'enquête (février 1970-juin 1972) au cœur du pays mahafaly, l'auteur s'est rendu compte que le nom «Mahafaly» ne correspondait à rien pour les gens auxquels la littérature historique, politique et ethnographique l'attribuait.

L'hypothèse de l'auteur est la suivante : le terme «mahafaly» n'a jamais servi aux populations du Sud-Ouest de Madagascar que l'on désigne sous ce nom pour se nommer ni pour se définir. Au contraire, ce label de groupe leur a été imposé au cours de l'histoire par les étrangers, occidentaux aussi bien que malgaches.

— Dans une première partie, l'auteur aborde le problème en interrogeant la réalité «mahafaly» du présent, grâce à son expérience personnelle, et du passé, grâce aux témoignages européens de l'époque coloniale et pré-coloniale, et grâce aux différentes traditions orales, recueillies par lui-même ou par d'autres. Si les «Mahafaly» ne reconnaissent pas ce nom générique, du moins peut-on retrouver aujourd'hui ou jadis une organisation sociale regroupant tous ceux auxquels on attribue le label ethnique ? Si ce mot n'existe pas du moins peut-on penser que la réalité «mahafaly» elle au moins a quelques fondements sociaux ? Il n'en est rien. Que l'on considère le présent ou le passé, il ne semble pas qu'une telle entité, le groupe social mahafaly, ait jamais existé. Au contraire, les «Mahafaly» se reconnaissent et organisent leurs relations entre eux sur la base de cinq groupes différents dont aucun n'est «mahafaly». Il s'agit, du plus petit au plus étendu, de la maisonnée (*tragn*) définie souvent par le nom du doyen, le *foko* ou groupe de descendance d'un homme ou d'une femme vivant, le *tariha* ou groupe de descendance patrilinéaire depuis un ancêtre dont le décès n'est pas suffisamment ancien pour que les plus âgés aient perdu son souvenir précis. Cet ancêtre défunt donne son nom au *tariha*, tous les membres du *tariha* sont appelés ses «enfants». Ce groupe a rarement plus de 100 membres dont la plupart vivant à proximité l'un de l'autre. Le quatrième groupe, appelé *karazana* est étroitement lié au *tariha*, en ce sens qu'il en est l'extension numérique et généalogique. La différence vient essentiellement de ce que l'ancêtre commun, qui n'est pas éponyme, est trop éloigné dans le temps pour que l'on se souvienne de lui et que l'on puisse tracer avec certitude les liens patrilinéaires qui relient à lui tel ou tel membre du *karazana*. Le nom du *karazana* n'est pas celui de l'ancêtre mais correspond à certaines caractéristiques de ce fondateur. *Tariha* et *karazana* sont des groupes locaux, mais *karazana* assigne une précision géographique plus importante, en ce sens que chaque *karazana* est spirituellement fondé sur un territoire ancestral, le *tanindrazana*, où d'ailleurs la plupart de ses membres résident. Le plus important groupe par lequel les «Mahafaly» se définissent est le *ziva*, du moins était-ce vrai par le passé, les liens de *ziva* tendent à s'estomper aujourd'hui. Les *ziva* étaient des alliances de non-agression,

entre deux ou plusieurs *karazana*, pour réduire les raids et combats qui semblent avoir été si fréquents dans cette région. La base en était géographique et non généalogique.

Aucun de ces 5 groupes, les seuls auxquels appartiennent les gens de la région, ne correspond à un groupe social mahafaly et aucun ne s'appelle «Mahafaly».

— Dans une seconde partie, l'auteur cherche dans la littérature historique et ethnographique la signification et l'extension sociale de l'appellation «Mahafaly». La littérature de la période coloniale (1860-1960) ne connaît qu'une réalité, celle des «royaumes» identifiés par leurs chefs ou «rois». Une chose frappe : aucun témoin de cette époque n'est d'accord sur le nombre de ces royaumes, mais il est évident qu'il n'existe ni groupe, ni tribu, ni clan, ni fédération ou royaume mahafaly regroupant tous les gens de cette région connus comme «Mahafaly» ; il est clair aussi qu'aucun royaume ne s'appelait «Mahafaly». Ainsi c'est l'ensemble des royaumes qui est appelé «Mahafaly», ce qui indique que «mahafaly» est un terme plus culturel que social.

Cette impression est encore renforcée par l'étude des sources pré-coloniales (avant 1860) qui sont de deux ordres : écrits de témoins étrangers, récits de la tradition orale dont beaucoup ont été collectés par des étrangers après 1860. Après avoir critiqué ces deux sources, l'auteur en dégage les grands traits de l'évolution historique des groupes dits «mahafaly». Dans un premier temps le territoire aurait été occupé par des groupes «renitane» ou «renilime», groupes dans lesquels l'auteur reconnaît des groupes *karazana*, mais pas de groupe mahafaly. Il en va de même durant la seconde période qui voit l'installation de groupes originaires du Sud-Est de Madagascar, parmi lesquels une famille, les Maroseranana, aurait été dominante. Cette famille, qui se constitua en dynastie et organisa les habitants en classes hiérarchisées, c'est elle qui aurait donné le nom «Mahafaly» à la région, mais aucune source n'indique qu'elle ait baptisé son royaume, «royaume mahafaly». A supposer que les populations de la région aient appartenu à l'origine à un seul groupe social, le royaume maroseranana, elle était à une époque très ancienne (mi-XVII^{ème} siècle) déjà divisée en nombreux royaumes maroseranana qui subsistèrent jusqu'à la période coloniale, auxquels s'ajoutaient des groupes indépendants.

— Dans la troisième partie de son exposé, l'auteur considère la question de savoir si les «Mahafaly» ont jamais formé un groupe culturel, un groupe qui n'existerait que dans l'esprit de ses membres, sans institution ni forme apparente de rassemblement. Les critères retenus par l'auteur, pour juger de l'existence de ce groupe culturel, sont la possession commune d'une même résidence, d'une même langue, d'un même régime alimentaire, de mêmes coutumes, attributs perçus par eux comme propres à eux-mêmes et différents ou manquants dans les autres groupes. La démarche de l'auteur est la même que dans la seconde partie, partant de son expérience ethnographique personnelle, il remonte dans le temps pour confirmer ou infirmer ses propres constatations à la lumière de la littérature.

L'auteur a découvert trois groupes recouvrant sa définition d'un groupe culturel, le premier est le groupe culturel local défini par la résidence géographique, une localité de 30 à 40 km² séparée des autres par un espace non habité. Ce groupe local se détermine aussi par des coutumes particulières, traits de langage, pratiques pastorales ou agricoles.

Le second groupe est défini par l'auteur comme «groupe culturel intra-régional». Il ne diffère du premier groupe relevé que par la taille, ayant un territoire plus vaste et des membres plus nombreux, c'est le groupe culturel le plus étendu dans lequel les gens de la région mahafaly s'intègrent eux-mêmes. Selon les témoignages recueillis par l'auteur il en existe trois dans les deux tiers occidentaux du pays mahafaly : l'Andriake, l'Ankora, l'Analana. Le tiers restant correspondant à la pénélaine est divisé en de nombreuses aires culturelles intra-régionales moins connues de l'auteur. Pour illustrer sa démonstration l'auteur analyse le cas des Tankara, exemple de groupe culturel intra-régional. Mis à part leur résidence commune, le trait de leur comportement qu'ils avancent comme caractéristique de leur identité est leur attitude à l'égard du monde «moderne» et de ses représentants ; ils les redoutent.

Le troisième groupe relevé par l'auteur est le «gasy», abréviation de «malagasy», nom générique des habitants de l'île mais utilisé par les habitants de la région mahafaly d'une façon beaucoup plus restreinte. Pour eux sont *gasy* ceux qui habitent la région plane et semi-aride du Sud, du Sud-Ouest et du moyen-Ouest de Madagascar. Tous ont en commun des pratiques qui les distinguent des autres groupes, relatives au langage, au mode de vie et au culte des ancêtres.

Aucun de ces groupes culturels ne correspond à ce que l'on pourrait appeler un groupe «mahafaly».

Arrivé à ce point l'auteur se demande comment le terme «mahafaly» est devenu dans la pratique des gens de l'extérieur un label social et culturel pour désigner l'ensemble des populations de la région. En réponse, il avance plusieurs hypothèses fondées sur l'usage et la signification des termes qui composent le nom *ma'na-faly* qui peuvent se résumer ainsi : le nom *ma'na-faly* a désigné à l'origine une région géographique dont l'unité est incontestable et s'est ensuite étendu à ses habitants.

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