Résumé
G. Campbell — Crise de la foi et conquête coloniale : les conséquences de la famine et de la maladie à Madagascar à la fin du XIXe siècle.
Dans la pensée malgache traditionnelle, les calamités majeures étaient attribuées à l'influence maligne d'êtres surnaturels. Après 1820, deux conceptions du monde entrèrent en conflit : la conception du monde traditionnelle qui, jusqu'en 1869, jouit d'un statut officiel, et le christianisme qui fut adopté par la cour merina, celle-ci faisant de l'Église d'État son principal instrument de pouvoir. L'accroissement du nombre de famines et d'épidémies qui se produisirent par la suite — calamités dues à la politique coloniale du travail forcé — fut attribué à des forces surnaturelles, furieuses d'avoir été supplantées. L'infériorité du christianisme fut rendue manifeste par l'incapacité d'endiguer l'épidémie, et lorsque les Merina ne profitèrent pas de l'occasion offerte par la mort de Ranavalona II en 1883 pour restaurer l'ordre religieux traditionnel, il se produisit une violente réaction de protestation. Lorsque, en 1895, les Français établirent leur protectorat et qu'ils décidèrent de conserver la structure administrative merina, une révolte, connue sous le nom de Menalamba éclata et les biens et les personnels de l'Église d'État furent les principales cibles des rebelles.

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Crisis of Faith and Colonial Conquest

The Impact of Famine and Disease in Late Nineteenth-Century Madagascar*

The 1896-97 Menalamba (lit. “Red cloth”) revolt in Madagascar, and the spate of uprisings which followed it, have recently been the focus of considerable academic attention. Two main interpretations of the revolt have emerged: that it constituted a precolonial nationalist attempt to overthrow the newly established French imperial regime (S. Ellis 1985; Rennemo 1986) and secondly that it was rather a revolt against the institutions and agents of an exploitative state-church, the essential structure of which had been left in place following the French takeover of the island in 1895 (Campbell 1988a). This paper examines the possibility that the revolt was one of a number of reactions by the Malagasy population to a crisis of faith in a cosmic order which failed to guarantee general security and welfare, particularly within the context of a deepening spiral of famine and disease from the late 1870s.

The Traditional Malagasy Concept of Illness and Misfortune

In Madagascar, as in most non-Western countries, religious beliefs and practices embraced a traditional medical system that has been described as “l’art d’empêcher l’âme (ambiroa) de quitter le corps des vivants” (Radaody-Ralarosy 1971: 76) although it would more accurately be defined as “a patterned set of ideas and practices having to do with illness” (Glick 1977: 59). Illness, in its turn may be defined as “any state, organic or psychic, real or imaginary, that disturbs a person’s well-being” (Dubos 1977: 32). The Malagasy held natural causes responsible for some

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ailments, in the treatment of which the physical efficacy of a large variety of medicinal plants, and of some techniques, was recognised:

"The pharmacopoeia of the Malagasy, though simple and limited as regards the substances embraced, admits of considerable variety in their mode of administration [...]. With the medicinal qualities of many of the indigenous productions of the country, the natives, especially the mpana ody [sic]. (Malagasy physicians and diviners), seem to be correctly acquainted. Barks, gums, leaves, roots, &c., possessing an aperient, cathartic, diuretic, tonic, or sedative property, are generally applied in cases in which they are specifically required. Hence they are able sometimes to arrest the progress of the fever, when the symptoms of inflammation are violent and decisive. The remedies taken internally consist of decoctions or infusions. External applications are in the form of fomentations, poultices, or ointments by heating the fat of animals [...]. the vapour-bath is a favourite remedy with the sick, and frequently in the early stages of the fever [i.e. malaria] it is the most successfully applied" (W. Ellis 1838, I: 222).

Some such remedies were made up and sold in the market place by mpanao ody ("maker of medicine and talismans") (ibid.: 223). In addition, the principles of using splints to mend broken bones was successfully applied, and mpanao ody had even been known to successfully amputate limbs (ibid.: 227-228). However, Glick (1977: 61) excludes ailments and remedies of a natural origin from the domain of the traditional medical system in which illness and misfortune, as well as its prevention or cure were directly attributed to the power, inherent or acquired, of supernatural or living beings. As Ellis (1838, I: 221) stated: "All diseases are supposed to be inflicted by an evil spirit, either in consequence of evil destiny, the incantations of some enemy, or the neglect of some rite or ceremony". It is in this sense that the term "victim" could be applied instead of "patient" (Glick 1977: 62), a concept reflected in the Malagasy word for medicine, fanafody, which literally means "that which will put away the power of charms or enchantments" (Richardson 1885: 5).

Within the traditional medical system, the critical issue was to identify where the power in a specific socio-cultural system resided, and how it was manipulated. Both the agent of illness and its victim could be identified individually, whilst its outcome was determined by a struggle between the power, innate and/or harnessed, that each could respectively summon (Glick 1977: 60, 62-63). However, in cases where misfortune affected society at large, particularly over an extended time period, the power battle could involve a host of forces, or even conflict between different cosmic systems. This was most likely to occur in societies undergoing a radical economic and social transformation, such as Madagascar experienced in the nineteenth century, where a traditional

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1. Rivers (1924) distinguishes further between "religious" and "magical" illness, the causal agents being supernatural beings in the former, and humans in the latter (Welles 1977: 50; see also Hardyman 1971: 208-221).
cosmic system representing the old order is challenged by another which represents the forces of change (Hardyman 1971: 210; Lieban 1977: 13-31; Dubos 1977: 31-41).

In the traditional Malagasy cosmic order, a balanced relationship existed between the living and a hierarchy of supernatural beings, at the apex of which stood an ultimate creator, called Andriamanitra—the term the missionaries chose for “God”—or Andriananahary in the interior and Zanahary in coastal regions. Andriamanitra was considered too remote and disinterested to have any impact upon the daily life of mortals, unlike the vazimba, the ancestors and royalty who were also referred to as “gods”. The vazimba, considered to be the tompon’tany, or original occupants of the land, from which they were chased by later waves of immigrants, were in their turn believed to be more remote than the razana or ancestors, the degree of whose involvement with the living lay in positive correlation with the recency of their death. The relationship between the living and the ancestors, symbolised in the Merina flag by red (for ancestors) and white (for the living). (Radaody-Ralarosy 1971: 63) was renewed annually through the fandroana, or New Year royal bath, a festival which emphasised the pivotal role of the sovereign as the representative on earth of the supernatural world; in Imerina the monarch was termed Andriamanitra hita maso, “the visible god”. Through an annual affirmation of the sovereign’s hasina, or ritual sacredness, the fandroana assured the supernatural blessing necessary for human and agricultural fertility and national prosperity in the widest sense of the term. Finally, there existed a host of minor spirits, that included the ghosts of people who had never been interred in their ancestral tombs and who were believed to wander restlessly through the forests with animals and birds of ill-omen, such as the owl. The Merina believed that the agitated spirits of the unburied could be calmed by the erection of a three-sided cenotaph by their surviving relatives. Grave misfortune was generally believed to stem from punitive action by a supernatural entity, such as a vazimba or razana, caused by acts of disrespect for them and their fady, or taboos. For example, should the giant vazimba Rasaloa of Ambohimanoa not be venerated one could expect to be stripped of one’s wealth, or one’s journeys to be visited by mishaps (Ellis 1838, I: 90). However, disrespect of fady could bring retribution not only on the individual transgressor, but also upon the entire community (Ruud 1970: 21). Supernatural anger could be countered both by preventative and curative measures. Preventative medicine in Madagascar comprised fanefitra (“medicinal treatments”) and preservative charms termed fanidy.

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2. Ellis 1838, I: 255-256. In Sakalava land, misfortune was averted by the tonytany (“talisman”) erected in each village by the ombyasim (“diviner”) (Rahedinny 1983: 177, 189).

3. Fady pronounced faly on the west coast where it also means sacred, see Ruud 1970: 1.
The mpanao ody possessed a number of preventative remedies for the petty irritation that minor spirits could cause (Ellis 1838, 1: 255-256), but the most important protection against illness and misfortune in the Malagasy system was offered by talismans, called ody and sampy. The mpanao ody produced talismans for individuals and families—at an average of 2.00 piastres each in the early 1830s—to be kept in the house or worn in order to ward off misfortune. One of the greatest demands for talismans in the nineteenth century was by Merina travelling to the coastal districts, where they wished to be preserved from malaria (ibid.: 224). Griffiths (1843: 18) commented: “All Malagasy peoples, and every tribe and family, of whatever rank, possess their own idols and charms etc., and spend more in cash and goods in the service of those idols, as a proportion of his total wealth, than the most selfless Christian in Britain contributes to religious causes”. In Betsileo, where Shaw (1878: 2) remarked that “Every man was his own priest, and every home a temple” everyone relied upon individual ody, but in Sakalava land, royal, and in Imerina, royal and clan, talismans existed, called respectively tony-pany and sampy, cared for by guardians called mpitahiry (lit. “guardian”) or mpitondra (lit. “leader”). Sampy, which Ferrand (1891: 31) claims emerged in Imerina towards the close of the fifteenth century, were upgraded ody that had brought striking good fortune to their owners (Berg 1979: 103-104). The royal sampy were of critical importance as they safeguarded the well-being of both sovereign and kingdom. All royal sampy were believed to offer protection against illness (Callet 1974: 207), but most important in this regard was the rano-mafana, or holy water of the chief national sampy, Ramahavaly, also addressed as the Doctor and Curer of Diseases (Ellis 1838, 1: 224-225). Ramahavaly was also believed to offer protection against lightening and crocodiles, as well as to ward off drought by inducing rain. The other five sampy of major importance were Rakelimalaza, Rafantaka, Manjaksiroa, Rabehaza and Ratsimahalahy.

Other sampy with protective powers included Manara-mody ("restorer to one’s home"), popular with Merina expeditionary troops. Keli-manjaka lanitra ("little but ruler of the heavens"), which could preserve the rice crop from hail, and Rakapila ("half dishevelled") which could foresee and provide preventative charms against rice blights and human diseases (ibid.: 412-413).

4. For different types of ody and their remedy, see Ferrand 1891: 30-31; Callet 1974: 124.
5. The purchase of a talisman for 2.00 piastres represented between 25 and 50 full days work for most “free” Malagasy hired workmen, and between 17.6 and 35.3 days work for a slave porter.
6. Translation is mine, G. C.
As with the vazimba and razana, respect for the fady of the talismans promoted human welfare, whilst acts of disrespect provoked a malign reaction (ibid.: 224, 395-396, 398, 401, 417). The chief talismans possessed a formidable list of taboos. For example, the fady of Rakelimalaza included guns, gunpowder, pigs, onions, speckled cloth, goats, horses, the colour black, funeral or tangena (poison test) meat, cats, owls, sifotra (snail-like shellfish) and sitry (an animal resembling a young crocodile). It was also essential to respect the fady of general ody. Thus during the faravaratra, or rainy season, it was forbidden to leave white rice on domestic shelves, to burn rice-chaff, to play the Merina kicking game, or to stone someone, lest the ody havandra, the four fady which protected the crop against hail, be offended. Similarly the fady of the ody valala (lit. “talisman against locust”), which protected against locust damage to crops, prohibited the wearing of dark coloured clothing (ibid.: 417).

The procedure with curative treatment was more complex. Once misfortune had struck, it was critical to first identify, then nullify, the causal agent. For this diagnosis, victims sought the assistance of the mpsikidy, or diviners, in Imerina and the ombiasy, or diviner-healers in Betsileo, the south-east and west of Madagascar:

“The object for which the sikidy is worked is, to ascertain what must be done in cases of real or imaginary, present or apprehended, evils. During illness, the sikidy is the grand physician, deciding what house and village the patient may remain in, from what food he must abstain, what water he may drink, what medicines must be used, and what friends or relations may be allowed to visit him” (ibid.: 434).

In Betsileo the mpsikidy formed a much larger and more accessible group than in Imerina; it was estimated that approximately one third of the adult population in Betsileo, both male and female, were mpsikidy. Moreover, there was no exclusiveness, so that slaves and free alike could learn the art of divination (Shaw 1878: 3). Once the nature of the illness had been diagnosed, the mpsikidy could suggest the appropriate treatment. Some talismans were believed to possess curative powers. Thus Ramahavaly, reputed to be capable of curing disease was summoned during the 1826 epidemic in central Imerina to perform the miafana (“to avert”) ceremony whereby ranomafana (“the water of averting”) was sprinkled over the assembled population of Antananarivo to protect them from the disease (Ellis 1838, I: 224-225, 407-408). At a similar ceremony called the mitiodrano, the assembled people were sprinkled with holy water at times of epidemics, when the rice was ripening, and when distant military campaigns were about to be undertaken (ibid.: 407, 420). Some

8. Some renowned nineteenth century mpsikidy in Imerina were Ramahaly from Ambatolampy, Randriambelona from Ankatakana, Rainibango from Ambatobe, Ralikitra from Ilafy and a “Rainibe” (Brygoo 1971: 57).
9. For comparison with the Javanese dakun, see Geertz 1977: 146-153.
misfortune could also be removed by *faditra*, “any offering made to avert evil” or *sorona*, “a sacrifice [...] to obtain a desired benefit from that to which one prays” (Richardson 1885: 145, 591)—generally a *vazimba*, *razana*, or a *sampy* whose particular powers were required. Most *faditra* and *sorona* were selected carefully by the *mpsikidy* in accordance with the precise manifestation of the misfortune.10 The *mpsikidy* commonly directed that sacrifices be made at the sites of *vazimba* tombs, considered to be shrines and generally positioned on top of prominent hills and the *vazimba* was deemed *masina*, or holy, when such a supplication was successful, but *masiaka*, or fierce, when unsuccessful (Ellis 1838, I: 84, 424-425).

The most malign agent of misfortune was the *mpamosavy*, or sorcerer/witch, often believed to be an outsider possessing *ody mahery*, powerful and unknown charms that were difficult to counter (Ruud 1970: 13) The two main categories of outsiders in Imerina in the nineteenth century were slaves and foreigners. The former suffered considerable persecution as suspects of witchcraft during the first half of the nineteenth century but, following the 1869 conversion of the Merina crown to Christianity, the 1877 emancipation measure which freed 150,000 slaves, and the 1883-85 Franco-Merina War, foreigners became the prime witchcraft suspects. Foreigners had always been less controllable than slaves, and therefore potentially more dangerous. For instance, when the Sultan of Zanzibar despatched Hamisy as an ambassador to the Merina court in 1833, Ranavalona I wouldn’t permit him to enter Imerina lest he bewitch her.11 This was particularly the case with groups like the missionaries who propagated ideological values opposed to traditional Merina ones. Indeed, all Merina converts to Christianity were by traditionalists considered capable of witchcraft by virtue of being possessed by the foreign god Jehovah, manipulated by foreign missionaries, and themselves manipulating Christian talismans such as the Bible. Thus Rakoto Radama’s conversion to Christianity in 1846 was blamed by his mother on bewitchment by Christians (Ellis 1859: 6).

The customary way to catch and eradicate sorcerers and witches was through the *tangena* poison test, although the *sampy* Rakelimalaza was often used by Ranavalona I to identify potential and practising sorcerers and witches.12 However, such methods were not foolproof for, as Griffiths (1843: 129) noted: “The tangena is ineffective when given to the sorcerers and other wicked men—even when it is administered several times”.13

13. Translation is mine, G. C.
The First Cosmic Battle in Madagascar, 1830-1861

Christianity represented an alien cosmic order that could take deep root in Malagasy society only if, firstly, traditional ancestral powers were seen to be failing to guarantee national security and prosperity, and secondly if the pantheon of Christian powers could subsequently demonstrate that they were able to restore and maintain the national welfare. During the decade following the establishment of a Protestant mission in Imerina in 1820, very few converts were made, despite the symbols of the traditional religious order being attacked by missionaries and mocked by the Merina king. For instance, Radama I banned the use of the tangena, or poison ordeal, in the mid-1820s, and also permitted pigs, a fady object, to enter the sacred cities of Imerina—they were again barred and the tangena reintroduced under Ranavalona I from 1828.

The conversion to Christianity of probably several thousand Malagasy from 1830 took the missionaries by surprise. As early as July 1830, Baker, the London Missionary Society (LMS) printer, informed the LMS directors in London in prophetic terms:

“Our means of spreading the Gospel are immensely increased... Never have I observed so much appearance of some emotion and effect being produced, and a spirit of enquiry excited as at the present time. Conversation among the natives on religion is frequent, and the preaching appears to reach, with impressive force, the consciences of some. If things continue in this state for one or several years the question may arise, ‘Is Christianity to be received or rejected?’ The answer can scarcely be indecisive, or the result of a lukewarm or middling nature. It may indeed be fatal to our cause as individuals, but can scarcely fail to leave an impression favorable to the Gospel”.

In most part, the movement represented a loss of popular faith in the traditional Malagasy cosmic order to guarantee health, wealth and security during a period of dramatic social upheaval and increased court exploitation of the masses. The fifty per cent fatality per annum amongst soldiers in the imperial army, and the devastating smallpox epidemics of the early and mid-1830s (Campbell 1988b, 1991) were only explicable in the Merina mental framework, as punishments for some awful transgression. If recourse to traditional preventative and curative measures failed to protect ordinary Merina from misfortune on a national scale, they were

16. “Baker to Arundel, Antananarivo, 1 July 1830”. SOAS/LMS MIL Bx3 F3 JC.
entitled to reject them (Callet 1974: 178-179). In the 1830s and 1840s increasing numbers of Merina turned to embrace the alternative cosmic order proffered by the missionaries, as is reflected in the establishment of Christian prayer and Bible-reading groups, many by Merina expeditionary and garrison troops. Part of this movement may be explained by the mass draft of missionary school pupils into the army, but converts also comprised many ordinary civilians, "persons not connected with the Schools, nor the Army nor directly employed in any Government Service, but traders. Cultivators of the soil &c".18

From 1830 to 1861, an indigenous church emerged despite official persecution—which included the use of the *sampy* Rakelimalaza to try to "smell out" Christians (Berg 1979: 108)—and the absence, through expulsion, of foreign missionaries (Campbell 1985). Underpinning the indigenous church was the enormously powerful Christian *ody*, the *taratasy* (lit. "paper", "letter"), comprising Christian literature. In 1834, the translation into Malagasy of the Bible was completed, and it was printed, with the result that many people rejected their talismans and rushed to possess this most sacred of *taratasy*.19 The following year, the Merina court ordered the destruction of all books possessing the words Jehovah or Jesus Christ, popularly considered to be the ancestors of the Europeans. This impression was reinforced by the LMS Directors when they claimed that: "England is an intelligent, wealthy and powerful nation, and, for the advantages it possesses, it considers itself indebted to the influence of the Bible and the operation of the principles of the Christian religion".20

Many converts defied the authorities and illegally retained Christian texts that, according to Griffiths (1843: 69, 72, 82), they considered to be more valuable than gold. Certainly such literature formed virtually the only reading matter to the 20,000 Merina estimated to have been literate in 1840 (ibid.: 16).

One of the most celebrated of conversions, and one which illustrates the crisis of traditional belief, was that of a *mpsikidy*, later called Paul, the son of a *sampy* guardian. From 1827, the loss of family wealth, the death of his father and a brother, and his draft into a military expedition in which thousands of troops perished, undermined his faith in traditional religion. He subsequently adopted the Christian *taratasy* and, giving his *sampy* to his wife, told her: "you and the idol keep on one side of the

17. "Johns to Orme, Antananarivo, 4 Dec. 1830", SOAS/LMS MIL. Bx3 F4 JC.
18. "Johns, Freeman and Canham to Ellis, Antananarivo, 18 Nov. 1833", SOAS/ LMS MIL. Bx4 F4 JC.
20. Edward Baker, "Brief Account of the Suppression of Christianity in Madagascar, 1835", SOAS/LMS MIL. Bx5 F2 JC.
road, and I and my A. B. D (his Spelling Book) will keep on the other".\(^2^2\)

Thereafter, "Paul" influenced many other Malagasy to adopt the Christian taratasy and "praying".\(^2^3\) Indeed, Raombana reports that fully one third of sampy guardians started attending church, including Andriamanadanona, head guardian of the royal sampy Ramahavaly, which he surrendered to Griffiths.\(^2^4\) The prohibition by the Merina court of the Christian church and expulsion of the missionaries in 1835 came too late. The Christian powers were judged to be more powerful than those of the ancestors, as evidenced, for example, by the explosion of the cannon fired to signal the execution of eight Christians in July 1840 (Griffiths 1841: 28). Thus the clandestine church grew in numbers and influence until the persecution ended in 1861.

**The Triumph of the Christian Order in Imerina, 1862-1869**

The return of the missionaries from 1861-1862 and the adoption of Christianity as the state religion by the Merina court in 1869 signified the official rejection of the traditional Malagasy cosmic order.

Jehovah was commonly believed to have been the agent responsible for firing the villages of Andohamandry and Anjakanana, close to the ancestrally sacred capital of Ambohimanga at the precise time that the body of queen Ranavalona I was being interred there, in retribution for the late queen's persecution of the Christians (Rahamefy 1954: 390). Her successor, Radama II, who had long been popularly identified with the clandestine Christian movement, dismissed the royal sampy, openly disregarded their fady and even ordered the destruction by fire of the "home" of the chief sampy Ramahavaly. He further abolished the fandroana, or Malagasy New Year, and the traditional Merina calendar upon which sikidy, the basis for the entire structure of traditional interpretation and manipulation of spiritual and temporal forces, depended. At the same time, he lifted the ban on the entry into Madagascar of foreigners, and not only permitted Christian missionaries to embark on a major church building programme but also instituted the Christian taboo on Sunday trading (Ellis 1867: 251, 299; 1870: 233-236)). Finally, at his coronation, he permitted the Jesuit priests to construct a "sanctuary" which they filled with Roman Catholic images.\(^2^5\)

However, Radama II failed to complete the official substitution of the

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22. Quoted in "Johns and Freeman to Ellis, Antananarivo, 20 Sept. 1832", SOAS/LMS MIL Bx4 F4 JB.
23. See "Freeman to Clayton, Antananarivo, 20 Sept. 1832", SOAS/LMS MIL Bx4 F3 JC.
Christian for the traditional value system, for he renounced his former belief in Christianity and declared himself to be a free thinker. He thus critically undermined the sacred status of the monarchy which could no longer fulfil its function as a social cement and bridge to the world of the ancestors. In traditional thought, this could only result in social chaos and the application of ancestral sanctions on a fearsome scale (Rahamefy 1954: 384-386). Thus the ruinous droughts followed by floods in both 1861-62 and 1862-63, a thunderstorm which broke up the king's party, and the collapse of the house of the leader of the Protestant mission, were interpreted as sure signs of supernatural anger at Radama II's sacrilegious acts.26 By January 1863, after a number of sampy guardians had converted to Christianity, tension in the traditionalist camp had risen to fever pitch. For instance, that month, a sampy guardian at a village near Ambohimanebola, to the east of the capital, murdered his daughter when she converted to Christianity. Radama II ordered that he be placed in chains for life and that a fine be imposed upon the village (Ellis 1867: 244-245, 252), but the failure of the rice crop that year was popularly interpreted as ancestral anger at the king's apostasy (Toy 1878: 71).

Shortly afterwards, the Ramanenjana movement erupted, precipitating a revolt which culminated in the overthrow of the sovereign. Known elsewhere as bilo, tromba, salamanga and menabe (Walen 1882: 18-20), the Ramanenjana was a form of choreomania which commenced in Bet silo and spread north into Imerina. Always affecting large segments of the population, it was an indication of "des fautes graves ou collectives, qui appellent un châtiment collectif, et alors vengeresse, s'abat la nuée des esprits" (Estrade 1977: 366). Its effect was to create a social "safety-valve" to release and thereby heal the tensions caused by a discordance between ancestral values and reality (Walen 1882: 118-120). Raison/Raison-Jourde (1976, 1983) argues cogently that the Ramanenjana was a means of bringing the idealised past of the royal Ancestors into the present in order to legitimise opposition to existing authority—which in 1863 was Radama II and his Menamaso (lit. "red eyes") followers. To legitimise protest not only against Radama II's apostasy, but also against the "praying" [i.e. Christianity] and the foreigners who had bewitched him, the Ramanenjana claimed to be possessed by the royal Ancestors, and also sought out marshlands and lakes, the traditional haunts of the va simba. On reaching the capital, they attacked symbols of Christianity and threatened leading missionaries like Ellis who was, in April 1863, menaced by charms left at the door and window of his house, designed to bring about his death by fire (Ellis 1867: 259-260). The conservative

26. Oliver 1886: 454; Ellis, 1867: 212, 227, 229-230, 343-344. See also “Boye a Jouen, Tananarive, 5 févr. 1862”, in Correspondance P. Jouen, 1859-1869, Archives historiques de la Vice-Province (henceforth AHVP), Société de Jésus de Madagascar, Antananarivo, C52.
faction at court, alarmed that the *Ramanenjana* were paralysing normal life, acted to restore order: in the second week of May 1863, the Anda-
fiavaratra clan of Northern Imerina, who controlled the army, had Radama II ritually strangled, his chief supporters executed and the *Ramanenjana* suppressed. They then placed Radama II’s widow Raso-
herina on the throne in a ceremony which restored one of the royal *sampy*.  

The official approval of the traditional ideological order, and the due arrival of rains in November 1863 (Toy 1878: 71)—commonly interpreted as a sign of ancestral approval for the new government—ensured that the missionaries again found great difficulty attracting ordinary Malagasy to their services (Ellis 1859: 311). Despite a poor rice harvest in 1864, a fire that year which destroyed about fifty houses and the recently completed chapel at Ampamarinana, and the successful suppression of a rebel movement led by a man who claimed to be Radama II, was considered further confirmation of the resurgent power of the traditional supernatural order (Ellis 1867: 343; 1859: 289, 348-349, 352, 388-413, 418-422).

However, the new regime did not prohibit Christianity. Although proselytization was largely limited to Antananarivo and its immediate surrounds for most of the remainder of the decade, the Merina court offered the missionaries their full protection, and encouraged their educational and medical work. The missions, backed by a powerful if small indigenous Christian community, offered greater resources, and a structure and ideology which could be manipulated far more easily than those possessed by the traditional religious establishment. In a bold political gamble in 1869, Rainilaiarivony, Merina “prime minister” and effective dictator, fully aware of growing political opposition both inter-
nally to his reign, and in the provinces towards Merina rule, made Christianity the state religion. He and the queen were baptised, he had the royal *sampy* publicly destroyed, and the remainder were ordered to be surrendered—the Jesuit priest Finaz visited one district where three hundred *sampy* were delivered to the authorities for destruction. Sub-
sequently, Rainilaiarivony instituted a Palace Church, with himself as head, at the apex of the church in Madagascar. Henceforth all church personnel, including the missionaries, were considered state agents, and Christianity with its *fady*—including prayer, religious literature, communion bread and wine—was proclaimed the guarantor of indi-

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27. *Ellis* 1867: 280-289, 313-314. In 1867, the Merina court ordered that swine be kept even further away from Antananarivo, lest they offend the *sampy* (*Ellis* 1859: 360).


vidual and national welfare (Rahamefy 1954: 394-395). Raison (1973: 192-193) even argues that churches, notably those with tall spires, became perceived as the Christian version of the ancestral “standing stones”. There was no powerful traditionalist backlash, and the abundance of the next harvest appeared to indicate the vindication of the Christian powers (Fuglestad & Lode 1986: 59).

**National Misfortune, ca 1879-1895**

For almost a decade, the new state-church structure appeared to prosper. However, from the late 1870s, the Merina empire was rocked by a dramatic and sustained series of crises that steadily undermined faith in the efficacy of the new Christian cosmic order (Campbell 1991: 428-429). Most historians of Africa consider that contact between Western and African societies at the end of the nineteenth century involved unprecedented violence and social dislocation which so upset the ecological balance that a catastrophic series of human and animal diseases occurred (Caldwell 1978: 14-15). However, the cycle of disease and famine in late nineteenth-century Madagascar may be traced partly to natural causes, such as the climate, and in the main to excessive fanompoana, or unre-munerated labour taxes, imposed by a bankrupt precolonial Merina regime (Campbell 1991).

The policies of the Merina state had a major impact upon the demographic regime. The birth rate in Madagascar, which at the start of the nineteenth century probably surpassed the forty-eight per thousand average postulated for precolonial sub-Saharan Africa (Iliffe 1989: 168), was profoundly upset by the adoption of fanompoana from the mid-1820s. Fanompoana decreased income opportunities for young adults, which probably resulted in a rise in the average age of marriage and in depressed fertility, and it involved long periods of harsh physical labour, with inadequate rations, which delayed puberty and altered ovulatory cycles in women, thus depressing fertility, as well as increasing the incidence of miscarriages (Nurse, Weiner & Jenkins 1985: 253-254). Traditionally, women worked harder than men and their burden increased from the adoption of autarky, notably in the gold fields from the 1880s (Campbell 1988a, 1988b, 1988c). Thirdly, the frequency of conception was reduced as fanompoana often separated men and women and, in order to spare the future generation from fanompoana some couples probably limited their family size through practising abortion and, despite the royal ban, infanticide. Decary (1947-48: 30) and Sibree (1924: 253) estimate that infanticide was responsible for the deaths of 14.29 and 25 per cent respectively of Malagasy babies.

Also, whilst it is impossible in early medical reports to distinguish between cases of venereal disease and what the Malagasy termed faravisa,
which included all chronic diseases with cutaneous symptoms (Paillard 1987: 37), the venereal variety spread rapidly in the latter part of the nineteenth century, due mostly to the increased tempo of *fanompoana* which seriously disrupted social and family life, undermining monogamy, and which fostered the growth of promiscuity and prostitution, notably in male labour camps. Such was the barrenness of plateau women by the late nineteenth century that many made votive offerings to phallic shaped standing stones in an attempt to regain fertility (Shaw 1878: 4; Sibree 1924: 41). Many taboos also existed in non-plateau regions to assist fertility and to enhance the chances of a successful birth (Ruud 1970: 244-245). Despite having long enjoyed the best medical and administrative services in the island, Imerina had the lowest fertility and highest infant mortality rates by the end of the nineteenth century (Grandidier 1908: 343; Valette 1966) so that the natural increase in population on the plateau was, at most, slight.

The bulk of evidence also points to a low life expectancy from birth in nineteenth century Madagascar, due to an interaction between the effects of state *fanompoana* and disease, the incidence of which in Madagascar increased sharply from the 1870s. In part, its spread was facilitated by steamships, which carried diseases to the island from other regions of the globe, but malaria, the major killer disease on the plateau of Madagascar, reached epidemic proportions from the late 1870s due to three main factors: the mass circulation of forced labour units between the traditionally malaria-free plateau and the forest and other malarial areas, increased *fanompoana* which resulted in the abandonment of irrigated rice-fields which in consequence became breeding grounds for the anopheles malaria vector, and bouts of unusually wet weather. (Campbell 1988a, 1988c).

Whilst there were periods of excessive rainfall, the period 1882-1893 was, in general, a markedly dry one. Le Bourdiec (1974: 215) gives the average number of rainy days at Antananarivo, in July, at the peak of the dry season, as 10, and in December, in the rainy season, as between 20 and 25, but from 1882 to 1893, the number of rainy days in July never exceeded 5, and in December varied between 11 and 24. This inevitably had a serious impact upon riziculture, which was critically dependent upon precipitation patterns. Too little rainfall at the commencement of the rice growing season, followed by torrential rainfall and floods in the later stages—a feature of this era—resulted in many ruined harvests of rice, the staple food, and therefore of famine (See Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, Campbell 1991).
Impoverishment and famine were complicated on the plateau by cold winters and inadequate clothing which made ordinary people, notably the very young and old, highly susceptible to influenza, bronchitis and related diseases. Hundreds perished in the influenza epidemic of 1894-95, and it is possible that nineteenth-century rates were similar to those of the early colonial era which reveal, for example, that in Antananarivo between April 1900 and March 1901, 13.1 per cent of deaths were flu-related and 33.29 per cent bronchial in comparison to 7.51 per cent malaria-related (Paillard 1987: 36).

In the Fianarantsoa region of Betsileo from 1932 to 1946 respiratory diseases accounted for 33.28 per cent of all hospitalised patients (behind malaria at 43.80 per cent) once the plague, which only became a serious affliction during the colonial era, is discounted (bronchial pneumonia and pneumonia accounted for 53 per cent of all respiratory cases) (Ralinoro 1954: 733-734; Dubois 1938: 1041-1042). The plateau was also largely unforest, so that ordinary people were denied the variety of fruits and roots to which people of the wooded lowland regions had access (Oliver 1886: 459; Toy 1878: 73-74).

This combination of climatic and dietary factors, accentuated in forced labour camps by insanitary conditions, facilitated the spread of disease.
Only in the case of smallpox did the state take preventative action: at the start of the second smallpox pandemic of 1884-1889, which followed that of 1875-1881 in which thousands of plateau people died, parents were ordered to present their children to be vaccinated on pain of a 0.025 piastre fine.30 However, smallpox continued to spread, epidemics breaking out in Betsileo in 1886 and on the north-east coast from 1892. From 1882, Antananarivo and Toamasina were also regularly visited by typhoid, the spread of which was facilitated by insanitary conditions and poverty.31

Thus in overall terms, a plateau environment traditionally considered healthy was, from the late 1870s, transformed into one wracked by unrelenting disease and famine. This change, following hard upon the adoption of Christianity as the imperial religion, tested to the limit the ability of the latter, in the form of its preventative and curative prescriptions, to meet the crisis. Of notable importance in this were

Western medicines and the *taratasy*, the most powerful of Christian talismans.

**Western Medicine, the Christian Taratasy, and the Crisis of Faith**

**Medicine**

Under the new Christian regime, Western medicines assumed increasing importance. In the early part of the nineteenth century, Western forms of treatment had largely been reserved for members of the Merina élite who requested it, and for confessed Christians. (Ellis 1859: 421; 1867: 67, 73-74) but from 1862 medicines and health care, again largely a monopoly of state-church agents, were viewed as a major means of facilitating Christian proselytization (Brygoo 1971). By 1867, some twenty to thirty trainee Malagasy doctors and fifty trained nurses had been formed and by 1892 twenty Malagasy had graduated from the Medical Missionary Academy to practise Western medicine. In 1893, there were eighteen European trained Malagasy doctors in Madagascar, most of them in Antananarivo (*ibid.*: 62-63, 66; Valette 1966). Attendance at mission hospitals fluctuated considerably from 5,000 per annum in the first years following the opening of the first hospital in 1865, to reach a peak of 17,000 in 1871, before declining sharply to 4,000 in 1875. Attendance doubled by the following year, and reached a second peak of 14,000 during the epidemic of 1879. Thereafter it decreased to 3,000 in 1883.32

In some instances, notably regarding the use of mercury, iodide of potassium and sulphur—the latter for scabies—*mpanao fanafody* adopted Western medicines in their own treatments (Medical Work ... 1884: 15, 19). This, however, represented more the ability of traditional medical practice to absorb new elements than a capitulation to Western medicine. In similar fashion most Malagasy who consulted European-trained practitioners, or consumed Western medicines, also consulted the *mpanao ody* and *mpsikidy*, and when a cure was procured it was, even if caused by Western treatment, generally attributed to the traditional healer.33

Until the late 1870s, popular response to disease was measured by recourse to both Christian and traditional medicines and treatments. This occurred in a context in which Imerina was viewed as disease free. As a Malagasy account written in 1882 stated:34

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33. The Madagascar Times, 16 Apr. 1884, p. 130.
34. The Madagascar Times, 15 July 1882, p. 83
With regard to the climate, Imerina stands alone. All other parts of the country are extremely hot and cause much fever, but here the temperate climate exempts it from all the disadvantages of an extremely hot or extremely cold country. It can be said that, with the exception of Vonizongo, there is scarcely any sickness in Imerina. All the surrounding country is rife with fever, but even though the fever is brought here, it rarely takes any root. In fact Imerina may be considered the sanatorium of Madagascar.

However, Christian medicines and talismans proved incapable of stemming the relentless waves of disease and famine that hit Madagascar from the late 1870s and which were popularly interpreted not only as the malign manifestation of supernatural beings angered by the state-church and all it represented, but also as demonstrating the superiority of traditional powers over Christian. More concretely, any disease with nervous symptoms, such as fever, grief, paralysis, epilepsy, or hysteria were considered to be signs of being afflicted by a vazimba. Thus the waves of malaria and similar epidemics from the mid-1870s would have been attributed to vazimba anger (Radaody-Ralarosy 1971: 66).

As a result, ever increasing numbers of Malagasy abandoned the Christian for the traditional medical system which they had used as a counter to disease, despite occasional court disapproval, until the conversion of the Merina crown in 1869 (Shipp 1870: 380). For instance, when the 1876-77 smallpox epidemic in Imerina killed large numbers, despite a state-church vaccination programme (in the northern Faravohitra church district, the evangelist Rasoamaharo alone vaccinated 600 people), many rural congregations disbanded, and there was an outbreak of Ramanenjana, or choreomania, in the Ambohimanga district of Imerina:

“During the harvest (March and April) there was a revival of the mysterious nervous affection called by the natives Imanenjana [. . .] As the evening drew on, especially if moonlit, singing and discordant music could be heard on all sides, and people in large numbers could be met on the roads following some poor dancing creatures and encouraging them by singing and clapping hands. They went to the tombs and placed stalks of sugar-cane and other offerings upon them: and a dish in which water was brought has remained untouched for months upon a tomb not a hundred yards from our house.”

The aretin’olona (malaria) and smallpox epidemics on the plateau in 1878 and 1879 initially provoked a heavy demand for “Christian” medicine. thousands flocking to the missionary dispensary in Antananarivo. However, ordinary people were distraught not only by the

fact that the epidemics were hitting areas that had never before been visited, but also by the inability of “Christian” medicines to counter its ravages. Thus one missionary commented of the Ambatonakanga district:

“The fever which in ordinary years visits the neighbourhood in a more or less mild form, assumed this year a more virulent typhoid character, complicated in many cases with pulmonary affections, dysentery, and diarrhoea. It is impossible to describe the misery and desolation that prevailed during April, May and June, when the disease was at its height. In the South Andringitra valley, extending east to Ambohimanga, whole families were sometimes swept off in a single day... The rice rotted in the fields unreaped. Apathy, listlessness, and terror paralysed the poor people and unfitted them for all self-help... Many ounces of quinine, besides other medicines kindly supplied by the Queen and Prime Minister, were supplied to the poor people: but with so much fever-breeding malaria constantly around them it could only be a palliative, and in sixteen or eighteen small villages more than a thousand people died”.38

In Imerina, the epidemic was worst felt in Avaradrano, whence the proverb: “Tazon’Avaradrano ka tsy mahamasimpanafana” (“Avaradrano fever fears not the powers of any medicine” [Radaody-Ralarosy 1971: 50]). In southern Betsileo, an estimated 10,000 people died during epidemics in 1878 alone and such was the incidence of disease in areas previously untouched that Christian medicines were popularly believed to be ody mahery, or evil charms: “The great majority of the people refused to have any medicine, or to come near me. Many of them thought that we Europeans were in some mysterious way the cause of the disease coming upon them”.39

Popular suspicion of Western medicine helps explain why the public avoided both the LMS Malagasy Medical College, which collapsed shortly after its chief medical missionary, Dr Davidson, was expelled in 1876, and the Palace Medical School, which closed down after a brief existence.40 Whilst in part a result of fees, the decreased attendance may also signify a move away from “Christian” and back to traditional medicines and forms of treatment for fear of Christian sorcery. Also, during medical training, corpses were dissected, a practice abhorrent to the Malagasy and sure sign that Western medicine constituted witchcraft. Indeed, so resistant were the Malagasy to the dissection of corpses that the missionaries were obliged to use the bodies of imported African slaves.41

There followed a massive return to traditional ody, particularly marked amongst the older generation of Malagasy: “Nearly all the churches and schools were broken up, and in many instances the terrified

38. Report of the Madagascar Mission for 1878, p. 29. LMS.
39. Jeremiah Pel ferry quoted in Report... for 1878, p. 57, and also pp. 75, 106 (see supra fn. 38).
40. Breygaa 1971: 60, 62; see also The Madagascar Times, 16 Apr. 1884, p. 130.
people sought out the old diviners and soothsayers trusting to escape the disease through their charms and incantations”.42

In the large village of Ambohimalaza, to the east of Antananarivo, the tanga, or poison ordeal, was revived in order to root out the witchcraft believed to be the cause of the epidemic.43 The chief suspects were Europeans, and slaves, particularly those of coastal and Mozambican origin who, unlike the Merina, were protected from malaria because they carried the sickle cell trait.

In 1879 the malaria epidemic returned, affecting a greater part of Ime-rina than that of the previous year, with between twenty-five and thirty per cent fatality in some districts. “Western” medicines were virtually a missionary monopoly and, although the missionaries permitted indigenour state-church agents, like evangelists to sell quinine, it was always in very scarce supply. Selling at a price between 6.5 and 10 piastres an ounce, it was beyond the reach of ordinary Malagasy.44 many of whom followed their elders, rejected Christian ways and re-embraced traditional medicine.45 Thus the missionaries observed:

“Many of them decline to take medicine which comes from Europeans, believing that Europeans are the chief cause of their troubles, and that their greatest safety is in returning to the faith and customs of their forefathers. This feeling has evidently taken possession of a large number of the people, though only a few of them are bold enough to give expression to it, except by their irregular attendance at chapel and their utter indifference to the ‘praying’ [i.e. Christianity].”46

This trend was accentuated when, that same year, a severe earth tremor hit Vonizongo on a Sunday, the fady day of the Christians. (Sibree 1887: 518).

Although by the 1880s, state-church agents were vaccinating every week against smallpox, the campaign had little effect in total terms (Oliver 1886: 472). The 1884 government decree that smallpox vaccination be compulsory was met with heavy resistance, probably because, as had occurred in 1833, vaccination was widely considered to be a method by which the missionaries were deliberately infecting the

42. Report... for 1878, p. 33 (see supra fn. 38).
43. Report... for 1878, p. 41 (see supra fn. 38); CHAPUS 1925: 241-242. At the close of the eighteenth century, Andrianampoinimerina had ordained that all vendors of fanafody had to take the tanga poison ordeal prior to selling their product, see BRYGOU 1971: 57. For the tanga, see Raombana, “Histoires”. 1853, p. 42 (see supra In. 15).
44. “Prime Minister to Briggs, Antananarivo, 28 May 1881”, Correspondence from the Prime Minister to the Imerina District Committee of the London Missionary Society, 1867-1888. Fiangonana Jesosy Kristy Madagaskara Archives (Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar) (hereafter FJKM), Antananarivo; The Madagascar Times, 16 Apr. 1884
45. Report of the Madagascar Mission for 1879, pp. 26, 33, 47, 70, LMS.
46. Report... for 1879, p. 8 (see fn. 45).
population with the disease. From their side, the missionaries blamed popular refusal to accept western medical treatment as a critical factor exacerbating the impact of diseases, such as the 1893 influenza epidemic which, it was claimed, killed 10,000 in Imerina alone (Fenn 1893: 110-111). The impact of disease that year was accentuated by natural disaster; for a storm in January 1893 caused the river Ikopa to overflow, flooding the Betsimitatara plain and ruining the rice crop. Significantly, the storm occurred on a Sunday and destroyed many buildings, including hundreds of churches (Sibree 1893: 115-116). Traditionally interpreted, these acts represented hostility against the state-church by ancestral supernatural powers.

The Taratasy

The background to the taratasy has already been given. Basically the state-church, through the missionaries and state-church institutions of the chapel and school, possessed a monopoly of the taratasy—basically scriptural writings considered to be a powerful Christian _ody_. It is in this light that ordinary Malagasy would have viewed the placing of the Bible at the queen’s side during Ranavalona II’s coronation in 1868 (Escande 1923: 43). Indeed, some people referred to the Bible as a “god”—a term occasionally applied to missionaries after 1869 (Shaw 1876: 110).

By extension, the skill of literacy, also acquired talisman status. From 1869, the number of books imported or printed in Madagascar by the missionaries rose dramatically. By 1886, for instance, it was estimated that the Bible Society in Britain had shipped 40,335 Bibles, 112,192 New Testaments and 276,706 Epistles to Madagascar (Escande 1923: 42).

“Stationary is needed by a constantly increasing number. The market is chiefly supplied by the missionary printing offices which have the privilege of importing such materials of instruction free of duty. The slates required to meet the wants of upwards of a quarter of a million children registered as scholars in the various schools, and the Bibles, New Testaments, and hymns and prayer-books, etc., which are purchased by them and the adult adherents of over 1,500 churches and congregations scattered throughout the island form no inconsiderable item of general trade” (Pickersgill 1885: 223-224).

47. For resistance to smallpox vaccination, see _The Madagascar Times_, 15 Oct. 1884; also _ELUS_ 1838, II: 478.
48. In South-East Madagascar, an Arabic script called sorabe existed, confined to a few Antaimoro scribes and their disciples. It was considered to be sacred and a powerful preservative (Ferrand 1891: 31, 36-37). In Sakalava Menabe, the taratasy was described as “la grande science de parler aux yeux comme on parle aux oreilles”: “Neyraquet à Jouen. Nosibé, 10 aout 1849,” AHVP, Société de Jésus de Madagascar, Carton sec. I. C. 28d.
Indeed, the purchase of Christian literature, and the school “equipment” which accompanied it, was often regarded as part of state-church fanompoana.

Directly and indirectly associated with the taratasy were other Christian talismans: the sermon, praying, baptism and communion, all of which were based upon the Bible, were considered verbal extensions of the magical powers inherent in the Christian taratasy. Thus from 1835 to 1861, non-communicants retired during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper because of the “sacredness” imputed to the bread and wine (Ellis 1867: 152) whilst the Betsileo, upon witnessing the Christian communion service for the first time, considered “prayer” to be an ody which paralysed one (Ravelomanana 1971: 117). The monologue nature of the sermon contrasted with the traditional Malagasy discourse in which response formed an integral part, and in similar fashion, the missionaries deliberately altered the early traditional Malagasy rhythmic style of hymn singing to the European style lyrical singing (Sibree 1924: 49, 53). Other powerful Christian ody included the black clothes and white collar of the European missionary (Rakotovao 1967: 31, 67) and Roman Catholic images—talismans which attracted great public interest, but which some Protestant state-church agents demanded should have been destroyed alongside the sumpy in 1869.49

Associated with Christian talismans were Christian fady, one of the most important of which was the Sabbath, termed Alahady in Malagasy, the zokin’andro or “oldest of days”, traditionally considered the most powerful day of the week (Ruud 1970: 31-32). At the same time, traditional standards of cleanliness and dress were replaced by “Christian” standards which have persisted to the present day: “And when one becomes a Christian, then one must also accept a little civilisation such as the cleanliness and dress befitting the Christian, for to enlighten one’s life and soul, one must also cleanse one’s body”.50

However, the taratasy and associated Christian talismans, all viewed as powerful talismans, were considered capable not only of protecting but also of harming. Indeed, they became increasingly feared by ordinary Malagasy. Firstly, the chapels and schools, with which it and the praying were directly associated in the Malagasy mind, became from the late 1870s institutions for the recruitment of unremunerated imperial fanompoana, or forced labour, and therefore of extortion and exploitation (Campbell 1988a).

In addition, from 1869, missionaries and other state-church agents were for the first time encouraged by the Merina court to establish themselves in regions of Madagascar outside Imerina. All state-church

50. FAGERENG 1924: 76. Translation is mine. G. C.
agents were equipped, at the outset of their posting, with a letter of authorisation from the prime minister,\(^51\) that was regarded by subject peoples as a foreign ody of immense power (Ravelomanana 1971: 101-102). A few ordinary people became convinced of the superiority of such taratasy to traditional talismans, and adopted it (Sibree 1924: 210-211), whilst it was in an attempt to gain access to the powers of the taratasy that some provincial leaders, such as king Lahimerisa in Toliara, accepted state-church officials.\(^52\) However, the majority of provincial chiefs regarded the Christian taratasy as a weapon wielded by the Merina court to subjugate the other peoples of the island. It was in such a light that they interpreted missionary messages like the following:

“I long that you, my friends, the Hova [i.e. Merina], may become the conquerors of many nations... that, the Ibara, and the Sakalava, and all the tribes of Madagascar, may be conquered by you, and all be brought into the Kingdom of Christ. I do not want you to take spears and guns and cannon in this warfare, for I have no confidence in weapons such as these. Let it be the gospel alone which you carry with you” (Sewell 1876: 35-37).

Literacy was so closely identified with the Merina, that peoples hostile to Merina rule considered the taratasy a form of European witchcraft harnessed by the Merina. For instance, when the Jesuits in 1845 requested permission to establish themselves in the territory of king Baba of St Augustin Bay, in the south west of the island, he replied: “Vous venez nous tuer, nous livrer aux Ovas [the Merina], nous ensorceler, nous empoisonner, Vos taratas sont des sikili (vos lettres sont des sorcelleries): elles nous rendrons aveugles puis nous tueront”.\(^53\)

Similarly, the Jesuits discovered that for the Malagasy authorities at Toliara, “nos chants, notre musique, nos prières, nos images, tout n’est plus que sorcellerie... on leur avait fait des lettres une frayeur horrible”.\(^54\)

The Merina dialect, the medium of the Bible and the state-church, was in the provinces regarded as the language of Jehovah and Jesus Christ, popularly considered ancestors of the Europeans. It was for this reason that Sewell (1875: 24), an American Quaker missionary, advocated the limited use of the non-Merina dialects. Attendance at the established state-church signified allegiance to the Merina crown (Richardson 1877: 41, 44; Shaw 1876: 107-108), as did the observance of other Christian fady which had a significant impact upon daily economic routine. Thus in 1873,

\(^{51}\) Prime Minister to Briggs. Ambohimanga, 29 Alahasaty 1874”, FJKM. Correspondence of the Prime Minister to the Imerina District Committee of the LMS, 1867-1888. FJKM.

\(^{52}\) Rostvig to Aldrick Tullear. 25 Nov. 1882”, Tolia Kopibok, Norwegian Missionary Society. Tiangonana Loterana Madagaskara Archives (henceforth NMS/FLM). Isoraka, Antananarivo

\(^{53}\) Denieau ses congréganistes de Mefan, Toulia, 5 sept. 1845”, AHVP. Société de Jesus de Madagascar. Correspondance C. 35.

\(^{54}\) Denieau ses congréganistes... see supra fn. 53.
Rainilaiarivony informed the subjected Betsileo: “All you Betsileo subjects, do not fetch things as formerly. Do not fetch water from the well on Sunday. Respect the Sabbath. Prepare the water, pound the rice and fetch firewood on Saturday. Follow the laws of God and toil not on the Sabbath.”

Traditional fears of European sorcery were accentuated by the inability of the taratasy and prayer to stem the tide of misfortune. For instance, when church prayers failed to end the exceptional drought of 1877-78 on the plateau (total rainfall in Antananarivo in 1877 was 54.65 inches [Oliver 1886: 451]), there was a considerable desertion of Christianity and a return to the sampy. The failure of the prayers was accredited to ancestral anger, which also was considered responsible for lightening that separately struck state-church agents; in one instance instantly killing an LMS College student and in the other melting the pocket watch, and driving the nails from the shoes of a Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) missionary who, however, was left unscarred—a sure sign of his superior power (Sibree 1915: 84-85).

The Christian Affront on Ancestral Religion

The Merina court was clearly identified with the state-church and the forces intent on harming the ancestors. From the outset, missionaries had publicly flaunted ancestral taboos, and encouraged their proselytes to do likewise (Ellis 1838: I: 425-428). One of the most notable breakers of traditional fady in the later nineteenth century was the Jesuit priest Roblet, a map maker who spent much of his career mounting the summits of hills in order to conduct accurate surveys. In so doing, he frequently trespassed on the sacred graves of the vazimba or ancestors. The punishment for such sacrilege was inevitably awesome:

“The graves of the Vazimba are regarded with equal fear and veneration by the natives. To violate a grave by taking away one of the stones composing the hillock, or to pluck off a twig from the shrubs usually found growing near it, would, in their estimation, be regarded as acts of such flagrant presumption and wickedness as the Vazimba would himself resent by inflicting disease and death upon the unhappy subject of his displeasure [. . . ] should any one accidentally stumble against their graves, or, by the merest chance, happening in the dark, kick his foot against one of the stones, dreadful is the doom he incurs” (ibid.: 424).

56. Following the drought of 1909-10, the pastor of the church at Andranomalaza, in the Isoavina district of Imerina, led the revival of traditional sacrifices in an attempt to bring rain (Ten Years Review of Mission Work in Madagascar, 1901-1910, p. 71. LMS. See “Dahle to Prime Minister. Antananarivo, 26 Dec. 1877 and 31 Jan. 1878”, ANM. HH6.
Roblet (1897: 28-29) justified his action by stating that it represented the will of the Merina queen. This was a clear identification of the missionaries and the state-church lined up against traditional religious forces. Moreover, it was not a question of angering merely the mpsikidy, or the guardians of sacred ancestral ground, as the following proverbs concerning the vazimba demonstrate:

1. “Na adala no manitsa-bazimba ka ny lehibe no aolanolany”.
   “When the ignorant tread on the vazimba, it is the important people that they hurt [lit. ‘twist’].”
2. “Ny Vazimba no voahitsaka, ka ny akoho no voahanton-doha”.
   “It is the Vazimba who is trod upon, and the chicken that is hung by the neck”.
3. “Ny Vazimba no mankarany, ka ny akoho no voatapa-doha”.
   “The Vazimba causes illness, and the chicken has its head cut off” (Radaody-Ralarosy 1971: 66; also Callet 1974: 7).

Such acts of sacrilege were further evidence that state-church agents were mpamosavy, or sorcerers/witches (Radaody-Ralarosy 1971: 66). It is also in this light that the missionary preoccupation with observing the weather must be considered. Nothing was so critical to the Malagasy economy than the rains that assured the rice crop. For instance, when drought hit the region of Fandriana (approximately 52 km north of Ambositra, 84 km south-east of Antsirabe) at the close of 1871, it was considered to be a sign of ancestral anger against the coming to the region at that time of Nygaard, a NMS missionary, who wished to establish a mission post at Ambohipo (Sahamadio). He faced great initial opposition to his plan, and a plot was hatched to kill him.57 Thus, the collecting of rainfall figures, which the missionaries did routinely, could be considered suspect, especially if, as occurred on a number of occasions in the late nineteenth century, periods of unusually light or heavy rainfall were experienced. It is quite conceivable that the theft of missionary rainfall and temperature records for August to December 1892 was provoked by a fear that the missionaries were tampering with the weather (Richardson 1892: 505). Similarly, the Malagasy regarded with the greatest suspicion the Jesuit meteorological station at Mahamasina, built in 1888, and particularly the Ambohidempona observatory which succeeded it in 1889 and that was not merely packed full of meteorological and astronomical instruments, but was also extensively used at night, when witches were most active. Such was the hostility towards the building that in September 1895, before the Menanamba uprising, the prime minister bowed to popular pressure and ordered its destruction (Poisson 1950).

57. “Fantara tohifohy milaza ny fiangonana Lotarana aty Fisakana”, n.d., NMS/ F.I.M. Boks 57F.
The Reaction: Dissent and Religious Revivals

Faced with the vast scale of national misfortune from the end of the 1870s, the inability of Christian powers to stem it, and the unwillingness of the Merina court to abandon Christianity and return to ancestral ways, there emerged a number of popular reactions, representing attempts by ordinary people to solve their predicament on an individual and societal basis.

“Christian” Reactions

In Imerina, the heartland of the Merina empire, and its two neighbouring provinces of Antsihanaka and Betsileo, where imperial control was strongest and where adherence to the state-church was greatest, there were popular “Christian” reactions to the failure of state-churchism in the face of the crises of the late nineteenth century. Such indigenous movements tended to combine elements of both Christian and traditional religion. In this sense, “Christianity”, rather than replacing the ancestral system, potentially increased the “medical” options available to the Malagasy. It is in this light that the development of Christian sects in the late nineteenth century must be viewed (Lieban 1977: 27).

There was a considerable movement towards the founding of Christian churches independent of state-church control. This was less marked than in many other African countries, but was the more remarkable because the church in Madagascar was considered an intrinsic part of the Merina administrative structure, under the tight control of the imperial court. Attempts to establish churches independent of the missionaries, who were considered state-church agents, should be viewed as one of the protest alternatives to the state-church alongside that of brigandry and the Menalamba revolt. Indeed, the authorities could and sometimes did perceive independent Christian movements as a challenge. Such groups shared in common the centrality of prayer, regarded as a talisman of immense protective and curative power in both the Christian and ancestral tradition. At a time when illness and disease appeared uncontrollable, this power was treasured. Most such movements, which grew out of existing congregations, had their origins in “revivals” or in internal church disputes. In 1891 Antananarivo and its immediate neighbourhood experienced a major Christian revival that was particularly marked amongst the young. The missionaries successfully attempted to divert the energy of those affected into a formally established Christian Endeavour Society (Clark 1906: 63-64) but failed to stem the formation of independent splinter churches that occurred shortly afterwards. For instance, when in 1893 the pastor of Ambatokangana Memorial Church in Antananarivo was expelled by the LMS missionaries for “gross sin”, he and a considerable portion of his congrega-
tion formed an independent church. His example was, in the 1890s, followed by many other Merina pastors, a final reconciliation between these separatist congregations and the LMS affiliated churches only occurring in 1913 (Sibree 1924: 171).

The same trend was manifested in Betsileo. In 1885, there was a religious revival in the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) region of Northern Betsileo (Buchsenschutz 1938: 8). Again, in ca 1894, NMS and LMS pastors in the Farafangana district (Antsirabe region) threatened to found independent churches unless their salaries were raised. However, the most famous independent Christian movement on the plateau was the Fifohazana (lit. “awakening”) which was started by Rainisoalambo, guardian of the royal children at the court of Rajoakarivony, king of Isandra, a Betsileo principality to the west of Fianarantsoa. A renowned mpsikidy and omxiousy (traditional healer), Rainisoalambo converted to Christianity after traditional religious measures had failed to dispel a malignant sickness which afflicted his entire family. In consequence of praying to the Christian god in October 1894, he was not only healed but experienced a vision of a man (some reports say a white man) dressed in brilliant white, and of God who summoned Rainisoalambo to serve him. Subsequently, Rainisoalambo employed prayer to heal members of his own family, and twelve others. Indeed, healing through the laying on of hands and prayer, following conversion, became the hallmark of the movement. This was of enormous significance at a time when the cycle of disease in Betsileo appeared to be unstoppable, for the adherents of Fifohazana practised exorcism by which they addressed the traditional Malagasy belief that all misfortune had a causal agent—in this case possession by an evil spirit (Escande 1926: 14, 20). Rainisoalambo quickly acquired a following and, in June 1895, at Anendaka-Ambatoreny, he and twelve disciples founded the Fifohazana movement in which no Whites were involved, which was unsanctioned by the state-church, and in which females played a prominent role, including that of preachers. Membership was based upon a number of rules.

By the end of 1895, the Fifohazana movement had spread through Isandra and the rest of Betsileo, subsequently affecting Vakinankaratra and Imerina. It is of prime significance that this was the time of the

58. F. Bjertnes, “Correspondence with Norwegian Missionary Society and other Lutherans”, n.d., FJKM, ms.
59. RAZAHIMANDIDY 1967: 207. See also “Ny Fifohazana”, n.d., NMS/HLM, ms. 57V.
60. These rules were as follows: Acceptance of the Holy Spirit; Learning the Christian taratasy; Preaching Bible truths; Dressing hair in a distinctive “Christian” fashion [short?]; Maintaining clean houses; Maintaining domestic fires; Cultivating enough land to be self-sufficient; Praying regularly; Replacing ritual cattle slaughter at funerals with prayer, sermons & song; Wearing clean clothes at funerals (RAZAHIMANDIDY 1967: 208). See also “Ny Fifohazana”, n.d., NMS/HLM, ms. 57V.
French advance upon and capture of Antananarivo, and the start of the *Menalamba* revolt in Imerina and Northern Betsileo.\(^6\) The movement gained rapidly in the aftermath of the *Menalamba* uprising, and was so firmly established throughout the plateau region by the start of the twentieth century that, from 1901 until his death in 1904, Rainisoalambo went on tour, preaching to and encouraging *Fifohazana* groups. During this period, particularly good relations were established with the NMS congregation at Soatariana, first settled as a missionary district by NMS missionary Londo in 1876, and a region greatly affected by the *Fifohazana* revival (Rakotovao 1967: 136, 209).

**Non-Christian Reactions**

1. *On the Periphery, and Outside, the Merina Empire*

The state-church provided the ideology of empire, representing the Merina as possessing a religion and civilisation superior to those of the other peoples of the island. Most provincial peoples therefore shared the view of one Betsimisaraka community that “the Gospel was ‘an engine of Hova [Merina] rule’” (Pascoe 1901: 380). Some communities reacted by wishing to adopt Christian talismans, and thereby gain for themselves the new source of supernatural power tapped by the Merina. This was the case with Ikongo, a “republic” which successfully resisted Merina rule yet which requested and received Betsileo Christian teachers from 1874 in order to learn, and thus master the power of, the *taratasy* (Shaw 1875a: 67-68; 1875b: 12-18).

However, most provincial peoples protested in one form or another against the Merina state-church. This was even true by the end of the nineteenth century of the Tsimihety, who had initially viewed the Merina as liberators from the Sakalava, and had accepted state-church Christianity (Rusillon 1923: 18-19, 48). Indeed, amongst the Sakalava, an ideology of resistance towards the church-state developed in which it was claimed that the adoption of Christianity and its *ody* was proof that the Merina were themselves an alien race to the island, and as such should be resisted (Walen 1881: 15). Amongst the Sakalava, missionaries and evangelists quickly learned not to use the term “Jehovah” because of its phonetic resemblance to Hova, a term commonly used to describe the Merina, whom they detested (Rahamefy 1954: 399). Such was the scale of provincial opposition to the state-church that some Merina colonists renounced their religion. For instance, in 1882, it was observed that many rank and file soldiers in the Merina garrison of Mahajanga were adopting Sakalava customs, applying Sakalava charms to their ailments, and

61. Razahimandidy 1967: 108; and Nilsen. “Ny Tantaran’ny Distry Fianarantssoa...”, p. 18, NMS/FLM, ms. 57H.
making offerings to the Razan'Aandriana (i.e. the royal [Sakalava] ancestors). 62 Again, provincial characterisation of missionaries as “agents of the dominant race” led some missionaries to argue that Christian proselytisation would be possible only if missionaries isolated themselves from Merina garrisons in the provinces. 63

The reaction to state-church agents ranged widely. In some cases they were faced with “pacific” protests like boycotts. For instance, in 1876 Renarivo, the Bara chief living nearest to Betsileo, refused to grant missionaries an audience (Shaw 1876: 108), and when the LMS missionary, Richardson, visited the large Betsileo town of Ambohimandroso in 1877, only four people attended the local church (Richardson 1877: 7). One of the most explicit accounts of rebuffal to a missionary is that of NMS missionary Johnson who, in 1893, persuaded the Bara chief Sambo to consider his request to establish a mission under his protection, but who was successfully opposed by the people in an open kabary, or public debate:

“The People: Our Lord, we have come here in order to beseech you, for we do not agree to the establishment of this red-eared white here as we are not acquainted with his ways namely this ‘praying’ and learning the taratasy [. . .] This ‘praying’ and the learning of the taratasy are not part of our ancestral tradition, and we will not permit our children to learn them. And those wishing to purchase all those articles from you, such as plates [?] and beads should approach you and your white man and leave here, for they are not wanted by us”.

Similarly, the state-church institutions of chapel and schools were boycotted. 65 However, as the cycle of famine, disease and poverty continued, despair vent itself increasingly in attacks upon the state-church and its agents. 66 From 1877, most missionaries carried guns when travelling anywhere outside Imerina. Betsileo and the main commercial corridor from Imerina to the east coast port of Toamasina. 67 However, indigenous church-state agents in the provinces were frequently unprotected, and thus formed easy targets for local hostility: in mid-1885, for example, the Sakalava of Morondava killed Rainivony, an NMS employee (Rakotovao 1967: 37).

63. J. Sibree, “South East Madagascar”, 1876, p. 73, FJKM. ms. X52.
64. Quoted in P. Tavolo, M. Johanera & A. Hoimyr, “Tantaran’ny fiangonana Lote-rana aty Ivohibe Bara”, nd., pp. 6-7, 11. NMS/FLM. ms. 57M. Translation is mine, G. C.
65. Finaz, “Mémoire…”, 1876, p. 59. AHVP, Société de Jésus de Madagascar, Daires II.24 (see supra fn. 49).
67. “Ihosy: Ny tantaran’ny Fiangonana aty Bara”, nd., NMS/FLM. ms. 57N.
2. *In the Imperial Heartland*

By far the majority of the Malagasy population, even in Imerina, the stronghold of the state-church, were only superficially touched by Christianity. For instance, despite the state-church and its insistence upon the taratasy, few even in central Imerina were literate. Even amongst regular church-goers there was a surprisingly wide range in the literacy rate; in the Amparibe church district in 1900 those church members who could read, though not necessarily write, ranged between twenty-six per cent at Antanety and seventy-five per cent at Ambohijanaka.  

Again, the NMS confessed that ninety per cent of the population of Vakinankaratra, the province to which their endeavours were largely restricted, was non-Christian (Rennemo 1986: 138).

Many did not take seriously the court’s avowed conversion to Christianity in 1868, instead considering it a cynical ploy to curry favour with foreign powers. For instance, in the first few months following the public burning of the sampy Ramahavaly in September 1869, there was public panic because of the popular belief that the court had negotiated with Europeans the renewal of the export slave trade.  

Many ordinary people, obliged by court orders to attend church, continued to observe traditional religious customs. Thus in a village in the Ankadibeavava district of Imerina, the missionaries discovered a man “who regularly performs the rites sacred to the great idol *Ikélimalaza*—burnt some years ago—and is secretly resorted to by hundreds of people, many of whom are members of one or more of our churches”.  

With the commencement of the Franco-Merina War in 1883, and the death in July that year of the “Christian” queen, Ranavalona II, many ordinary Malagasy anticipated the rapid dismantling of the state-church structure, the expulsion of missionaries, and the official restoration of traditional religious symbols. In the district of Isoavina, local leaders even publicly announced that the Merina court had ordered the closure of all chapels, whilst in many districts churches closed even without such “orders” (Crosfield n.d.: 78).

The maintenance of Christianity as the official religion by the Merina court, despite the French attack on the island, marked a major turning point in the public attitude towards the state-church structure. Thereafter, public hostility became more overt. One reaction was the increase in


choreomania. Raison argues that from 1863-64, a return to the ancestral cult of the tomb, rather than to possession cults, became "un mode de résistance au pouvoir" (F. Raison 1976: 289). Nevertheless, Davidson and Sibree stated that choreomania appeared in a mild form every April, at the time of the ripening of the vary vaki-ambiaty, or chief rice crop of the year. It also appeared to be common in regions of tension. Thus, it was noted in the disputed region on the frontier of the independent forest republic of Ikongo (Shaw 1875b: 9) and was commonplace in the conquered province of Antsihanaka (Sihanaka 1877: 63). However, it only assumed epidemic proportions at times of great social excitement, as in 1877 (Davidson 1889: 26-27). In 1884, a year of major diseases and war, choreomania—started by a 22 year-old "black" (i.e. slave) girl who danced to appease the dead by touching their gravestones—broke out at the village of Ambohimandray, in the Marovatanana province of Imerina and further disturbances of a similar nature were averted only by a good crop.72 Again, when social tension rose to fever pitch in early 1895, it was remarked that choreomania "was exceedingly prevalent and gave much trouble to missionaries in the country [i.e. in the rural districts]",73 In a crisis, even the most "Christianised" element of the population reverted to ancestral ways. Thus Sibree (1924: 180-181) noted that at the time of the French advance in 1895:

"I remember at the time of the second Franco-Malagasy War [in 1895] how, as the foreign troops were slowly advancing up the country from the north-west, the native women at each village used to gather together morning and evening, and with spears in their hands and passion in their voices, send up their prayer-songs or rary, to God, praying for the protection of their fathers and husbands, brothers and sons, against their invaders. somewhat in this fashion:

  Protect Thou them. O great Spirit:
  May the spear have no power to wound them;
  May the rifle-bullets do them no harm;
  May they conquer their enemies!
  Whether they fight by night or by day.
  May they be helped to defeat our foes!"

Following the 1896 rebellion, it was remarked of the state-churches in Imerina that "many of the former occasional attendants have left altogether".74

Many Betsileo, the most colonially suppressed people, similarly reacted by recourse to traditional rites. It was observed that consumption there of toaka, or indigenous rum, increased markedly from the 1870s. Toaka consumption not only drugged the senses and thus helped to

72. The Madagascar Times, 16 Apr. 1884, p. 130; and 6 Aug. 1884, p. 289.
73. Moos 1895: 339. Again in 1909, when three Malagasy priests ascended Ambondrombe, which in ancestral belief was home to the dead, it was followed by an epidemic of bilo or choreomania (Druot 1938: 1088-1091).
74. Stribling, "Some Rough Notes...", pp. 99-100 (see ref. supra in 68).
distance the pain of exploitation, but also constituted the traditional means of opening a path of communication to the supernatural. It therefore played a central ritual role during the era of immense social and economic dislocation from the late 1870s, for it was believed to remove the voina lehibe, or the major “sins” which had caused such disequilibrium. At the same time, it was used to assist in the process of requesting the ancestors to restore order and security. It was as important in the rituals of the famidihana, or reburial of the dead, when communion was again established with the ancestors in an avowal of traditional values and social harmony. Intoxication thus carried sacral significance and was sanctioned by the mpsikidy and ombiasy whose continued ability to attract the mass of peasant religious devotion in Betsileo was noted with alarm by the missionaries. A marked increase in toaka consumption in Imerina from 1870, allegedly due to the large influx into Antananarivo that year of Creoles from the Mascarenes, was also noted by the missionaries who pressured the imperial court into passing the 1877 law prohibiting rum drinking in Imerina. The ban was so ineffective that, in the early 1880s, a special missionary meeting was convened at which it was decided that the elimination of toaka production and consumption was a priority.

Other communities reacted in a more violent manner. At the start of the Franco-Merina War, it was observed of fresh Merina conscripts:

“When the soldiers were sent away to resist the French, many of them took charms with them and returned to their old heathen customs. They offered sacrifices to their ancestors, took earth from tombs to secure protection from the balls of the enemy... when the [Jesuit] priests were sent away, and the English were brought up to the Capital, and guards stationed at their houses, great numbers concluded that ‘the praying’ [i.e. Christianity] was at an end. They hated the sight of a foreigner.”

Protestant missionaries, for fear of attack, confined themselves to the main imperial towns of Antananarivo, Antsirabe and Fianarantsoa during the initial stages of the conflict, as angry Malagasy pillaged a number of Jesuit mission stations following the retreat of French missionaries from the island in 1883 (Crosfield n.d.: 78). In February the following year, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel church (SPG) in the Zoma, Antananarivo, was stripped of all ornaments and in December the SPG college complex at Ambatoharanana was broken into and two altar frontals, one linen altar cloth, twenty-seven surpluses, twenty-five

76. Report of the Imerina District for 1877, LMS.
77. Report... for 1882, pp. 30-31, 42, 62, 89, LMS (see fn. 70). See also “Johnson to Prime Minister, Faravohitra, 19 Oct. 1889”, ANM, HH4.
78. Report of the Madagascar Mission for 1883, p. 9, LMS.
cassocks, two stoles and one brass reading desk were stolen. In May 1884, the NMS missionary, Jørgenson, and his family were attacked and robbed by a fifteen-man gang from the village of Andraratsy, whilst travelling through the Ankaraatra range from Antsirabe to Antananarivo. The same year, in Betsileo, two LMS mission houses were burnt as, the following year, were two LMS cottages and a school (Gow 1979: 98). Similarly, over the same period, there were numerous attacks on NMS affiliated state-churches and schools by “robber bands” in Vakinankaratra and Northern Betsileo (Scarborough & Fuglestad 1986: 105).

The attacks on the state-church and its ody grew more insistent following the war, and culminated in the Menalamba rebellion in 1895. This revolt can be traced directly to the explosion of brigand activity from the close of the 1883-85 War. As a result of greatly increased imperial fanompoana, which was organised through the state-church (Campbell 1988a, 1988c), large numbers of young males forsook their tanindrazana, the “land of the ancestors”, a concept made concrete by reference to the physical location of the ancestral tomb, which was of immense ritual importance to the Malagasy. By so doing, they severed ancestral, familial and geographical ties for the hazards of life alone or in the company of an itinerant band of unrelated individuals. The mass movement of labour units, and the flight from villages, associated with fanompoana in the late nineteenth century, also undermined the attachment to the tanindrazana. Indeed, whenever an individual travelled any distance, he or she always carried a portion of soil from the tanindrazana as an amulet and, should someone die outside Imerina, the most strenuous efforts were always made by relatives and friends, regardless of cost, to restore the bones of the dead to the ancestral tomb. Only in the most dire circumstances would a peasant abandon his tanindrazana and put himself outside the law, thus forfeiting the automatic right to burial in the ancestral tomb. Bandits were considered outcasts and therefore, in the traditional sense of the word, sorcerers, with access to powers which could be used to harm the structure and security of the established community. However, following the 1869 creation of the state-church, the latter became increasingly identified as the force most destructive of traditional values and lifestyle. Moreover, it was aided and abetted by white foreigners who by definition lay outside the ancestral pale and were thus more qualified to be sorcerers than Malagasy bandits. The adoption of Christianity as state religion and the destruction of the national sampy was an act of apostasy which meant that from 1869 Malagasy refugees and brigands could claim ancestral sanction for their opposition to the imperial Merina regime, and

80. Two of the gang were later captured (*The Madagascar Times*, 6 June, 6 Aug. and 3 Sept. 1884).
state-church and its personnel who the bandits considered had pushed him into exile.

From 1888, attacks on mission property became more pronounced. Early that year, the LMS sanatorium at Ambatovory was attacked by bandits led by the son of the police superintendent of the district. Although twenty members of the band were later caught (Mathews 1904: 276-278), attacks continued, it being noted three years later that:

“The robber-band nuisance is spreading. Formerly it only affected the poor defenceless Malagasy, but now the leaders of the gangs have seemingly become emboldened by the impunity they enjoy, and are seemingly ‘going for’ the Missions, whose educational work is the only barrier apparently to the robbers becoming the ‘uncrowned kings’ of the island. Last November we recorded a monstrous outrage upon one of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus during a burglary, and also several burglarious attempts upon the houses of some of the L.M.S. and F.F.M.A. [Friends’ Foreign Mission Association]; and in our last issue we protested against the recent attempts upon the houses of Miss Gilpin F.F.M.A. and Dr. Thesen, N.M.S., and now it is our disagreeable duty to state that the neighbourhood of St. Paul’s College, Ambatoharanana, is seriously disturbed by evening and night robber alarms.”

The attacks on Ambatoharanana were by organised robber bands. So serious was the threat to missionaries that, following an attack upon a Jesuit mission building in Antananarivo in 1890, Caussèque, the “Procureur” of missions in France, addressed an urgent request to Ribot, the French foreign minister, for 100 revolvers and 6,000 cartridges to afford the French missionaries in Madagascar some protection against attack (Raison 1977: 44).

Attacks upon individual missionaries, which also intensified, were especially significant as they commanded greater publicity than attacks upon the Malagasy, and were also likely to result in heavy foreign pressure being brought to bear upon the Merina court to catch and punish the culprits. Such assaults can only be interpreted as a reflection of deep-seated popular disillusionment with a Christian establishment that was manifestly failing to guarantee national health and security and which, as evidenced by the deepening spiral of natural disasters, had invoked a deeply hostile reaction from the supernatural powers of the ancestral cosmic order.

From 1885 the only increase in state-church building was in the subjugated provinces of the empire and, from 1890, there was an actual decline in the number of chapels due both to excessive fanompoana, which deprived the churches of a congregation, and to arson—a device

traditionally employed in order to expel an evil spirit (Ellis 1870: 25) and a means of demonstrating protest and revenge (Ellis 1867: 346). In 1891, the unfinished mission hospital in Antsianaka was fired (Gow 1979: 97). Again, in 1893, both the Sakalava and local brigand bands were responsible for the destruction of churches in Ilaka, in Betsileo.\(^{83}\) Borchgrevink’s warning to the prime minister of brigand threats to state-church property in the area was underlined by the firing, in April 1894, of the house of the LMS missionary, Brockway, in the Ambositra region. So serious did the position become for missionaries in northern Betsileo that they requested of the governor armed guards to safeguard their station whenever they were absent from it (Ravelomanana 1971: 31, 96).

In 1894, theft of the door of the prestigious Ampananianana Memorial church, in the centre of the imperial capital, led an outraged missionary to exclaim: “People generally should know that in attacking the Memorial Churches they are attacking not only the property of the LMS but also the property of the Queen”.\(^{84}\) However, as disorder continued to spread, the missionaries started privately to blame the exploitative policies of the Merina court, from which they belatedly attempted to distance themselves.\(^{85}\)

**The Menalamba Revolt**

The *Menalamba* revolt commenced in Imamo which, with its neighbouring province of Mandridrano, well illustrates the forces involved on the plateau in the late nineteenth century. Imamo, a populous province, and Mandridrano to its west, had acquired by the mid-nineteenth century a considerable reputation for insecurity. Indeed, such was their fear of brigands that, in the early 1850s, the entire population of Fenoarivo attempted to flee the region, and were thwarted only by soldiers despatched from the imperial capital.\(^{86}\) Moreover, Mandridrano was the base for rebellion against the regime that usurped the throne in 1863 (Raison 1976: 287-288). Imamo and Mandridrano were scarcely touched by Christianity before the establishment of the state-church in 1869. Speaking of the first missionary endeavour in the former in the mid-1860s, a Merina evangelist (quoted in Clark 1906: 30) commented:

84. “Briggs to Cousins, Ambatorary, 18 June 1894”, T. & F. LMS Local D. & F., FJKM; see also “Cousins to Prime Minister, Antananarivo, 19 June 1894”, FJKM. Letters to the Government. Folder 1.7.
86. They had their property confiscated and were relocated close to their home town (RAOMBANA 1930: 15).
The work was very difficult, as in all these places there was hardly anyone who understood what was meant by the 'praying'. And not only this, but all the people in the district were almost the most stupid and foolish in all Imerina [ . . . ] The majority of the people who were put in chains for offences against the government were from this district [ . . . ] The only religion was idolatry, or a kind of fetishism: the country was infested with robbers, men-stealing and cattle-lifting were common in the most westerly portions, and bull-baiting, witnessed by thousands, was often a weekly amusement at the close of the market day. Not a single school was in existence, nor a chapel, except at, perhaps, three places”.

The subsequent imposition of the state-church was in consequence more dramatic and resisted with greater fervour than in most other regions of Imerina (ibid.: 30, 51-52). When in 1883 the French declared war on Madagascar and the first “Christian” Merina monarch, Ranavalona II, died (13 July 1883), a few hours after the most severe earthquake to hit Antananarivo for at least sixteen years (Shaw 1885: 312), many subjects were convinced that the Merina court would be obliged to replace Christianity with traditional beliefs as the official religious system. An erroneous declaration was made in western Imerina that the prime minister had ordered the closure of all churches, as a result of which many congregations voluntarily disbanded.87 About the same time, an indigenous Roman Catholic schools inspector travelling to Imamo was stopped near Ambatolinaivy by an armed gang comprising six men and two “children”.88 From 15 to 17 September, the region was hit by a major locust plague (Sibree 1884: 116). Such an event would have been blamed on a state-church agent like Wilson, the Quaker missionary doctor, who opened a cottage hospital in Mandridrano in 1888 (Crosfield n.d.: 121), and who was popularly considered a sorcerer. His daughter (Emmeline Cadbury, quoted in ibid.: 94) recalled one occasion in the 1880s when an attempt was made by traditionalists to remove his influence:

“After one journey [ . . . ] he [William Wilson] came back and was very ill with fever, and whilst he was lying ill we were very much bothered with the ‘witches’ [ . . . ] they would come in the middle of the night and tap on our windows to try to cause the evil spirit to take away the life of the white man [ . . . ] they [the servants of the household] would sit up all night pacing around the house to keep off the witches—they would fire off blank cartridges at intervals”.

In 1889, it was reported (Sibree & Baron 1889: 124) that: “Numbers of villages to the north and west of Imerina have been ravaged, and the congregations and schools utterly broken up; many of the people have been killed, and numbers have been carried away into slavery”. Moreover, the traditional sampy were revived, despite the royal ban.

Thus, in 1892, it was commented that: "In Imamo near Itasy, the Sakalavas have pulled down churches and set up their idols".89 Again, in July-August 1894, three Christian girls in the Arivonimamo district were seized by salamanga (possession by spirits), a reflection of acute societal strain (Dubois 1938: 1085-1086). In July 1895, the Quaker missionary in Arivonimamo, William Johnson (quoted in Doncaster 1896: 239), commented: "There is evidence [...] that very many who knew nothing of the things we try to teach, have gone back to their old fetishes, and practice in secret the old divination and witchcraft".

Four months later and one month after the French troops captured Antananarivo, the ombiasy of the western Imamo district of Ambodirano, revived the sampa Ravololona and, rallying under the clan name of Zanak'antitra ("descendants of the ancestors"), urged the assassination of all foreigners and the destruction of places of Christian worship (Mathews 1904: 308-309; Ferrand 1893: 70-71). This marked the start of the Menalamba uprising whose first white casualties were Johnson and his family (Doncaster 1896). Subsequently, the Menalamba destroyed thousands of state-church buildings on the plateau,90 and by December 1896, no LMS affiliated churches were functioning on the east coast.91 It is perhaps no coincidence that the chief target of the southern rebels became the NMS complex at Sirabe, which included not only churches and schools, but also a large hospital, the symbol of Western medicine, and a hot spring spa, reserved for the exclusive use of Protestant missionaries and members of the Merina élite, built largely with fanompoana labour from the nearby Soamalaza sulphur and lime works (Chapus & Birkeli 1944-45). In 1896, Menalamba, armed with mohara, or ody-basy, supplied from Matitanana on the east coast (Edmonds 1896: 421-425), attacked the centre, destroying all medical buildings there and dispersing the patients. In similar fashion, the rebels destroyed the NMS leper village at Ambih piantrana, comprising twenty-two houses and a church built with fanompoana labour and opened in 1888 (Chapus 1954: 311-312).

89. "Joseph F. Radley to Rosaas. Faravohitra, 22 May 1882", NMS/FLM. Boks 477K.
90. E.g., they destroyed the evangelist's house at Ambohiapiara, in the Lavahitsiny church district, and burnt the house of Rainidonia, the Palace Church evangelist at Ambohiapiara, three and a half hours from Antananarivo. Stribling, "Some Rough Notes . . .", see supra fn. 68.
91. "Houlder to Wills, Tamatave, 10 Dec. 1896", FJKM. L. & E. LMS Local D. & E.
Traditionally, historians of Madagascar have seen the *Menalamba* revolt from 1895-1897 as a patriotic reaction to the imposition of French colonial rule in the island. S. Ellis (1985) has refined this standpoint, arguing that the *Menalamba* represented a nationalist movement, one of the first in Africa. I have posited an alternative view that the *Menalamba*, far from being nationalist, represented the culmination of at least three decades of popular reaction to oppressive policies, implemented predominantly through the state-church, by the precolonial Merina regime in Madagascar.

This paper re-examines the period through an analysis of the Malagasy interpretation of misfortune and illness. In Malagasy thought, all major misfortunes, particularly those affecting large segments of society, were caused either directly by a supernatural agency, or by a human tapping supernatural forces. As these supernatural beings possessed both benign and malign powers, it was important to fulfil the rites securing the former. In the event of misfortune occurring, specialists were consulted for the appropriate curative measures to be employed.

The advent of Christianity in the island presented the Malagasy with an alternative cosmic system to their own. Whilst the traditional ancestral religion was officially maintained by the imperial Merina court, missionaries and their converts were regarded as a danger to national security and welfare because of their possession of an alien system of talismans. However, when the powers of the traditional system appeared incapable of stemming the severe crisis brought about by *fanompoana*, disease and famine, in the period 1830-1861, many Merina abandoned the ancestral symbols of power and adopted Christianity and its major talisman, the *taratasy*, or Bible. The 1860s witnessed considerable social and political unrest which culminated in 1869 in the Merina court adopting Christianity as the imperial religion, and instituting control over the missions and indigenous converts through the creation of a state-church.

However, from the mid-1870s, Madagascar was hit by a devastating combination of natural and man-made disasters which quickly undermined popular belief in the efficacy of the new official Christian cosmic order. When the imperial court demonstrated its determination to maintain the state-church, ordinary Malagasy increasingly opposed it. Their reaction was, in part, non violent. In this category may be included the Christian breakaway groups, the most important of which was the *Fifoha-zana*, central to which was the power of healing through the laying on of hands. Non-Christian reactions of a similar nature involved an eschewal of Christian medical treatment and talismans and a
reembracement of traditional ways of coping with misfortune and disease. Prominent amongst these were choreomanic movements and possession cults, in which the consumption of alcohol formed an essential role. Violent reaction against the state-church, its personnel, buildings and talismans, grew dramatically from the outbreak of the 1883-85 Franco-Merina War, from which time labour exploitation and epidemic diseases appeared to combine in ever-increasing cycles. Incendiaryism played a critical role, and was used with particular effect against missionary houses and hospitals. The *Menalamba* may be considered the climax of this violent reaction against the state-church, for their revolt occurred only after the French had declared a protectorate in which they left the existing Merina administrative structure in place, whilst their chief aim was the destruction of all symbols of the state-church order. Only by achieving this could the sorcery of the Christian powers be destroyed, the malign anger of the traditional supernatural powers be placated, and the welfare and security of Malagasy society be reestablished.

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