



Reconsidering Trauma, Identity, and the African Diaspora: Enslavement and Historical Memory in Nineteenth-Century Highland Madagascar

Pier M. Larson

The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., Vol. 56, No. 2, African and American Atlantic Worlds. (Apr., 1999), pp. 335-362.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0043-5597%28199904%293%3A56%3A2%3C335%3ARTIATA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

The William and Mary Quarterly is currently published by Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/omohundro.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Reconsidering Trauma, Identity, and the African Diaspora: Enslavement and Historical Memory in Nineteenth-Century Highland Madagascar

Pier M. Larson

I N our time, collective identities and memories of trauma are deeply intertwined. Most ethnic minorities anchor their collective identities in the remembrance of past and present victimization. Victims of social trauma and their descendants often engage in purposeful and explicit remembering as a form of empowerment and identity formation. Conversely, perpetrators and their descendants seek to obliterate and question the validity of such memories and thereby undermine the empowerment and the identities they generate. In no domain of the North Atlantic experience is this process more conspicuous than in the history of slavery and the slave trade, although it finds parallels in the Holocaust, Basque nationalism, the internment of persons of Japanese descent in U.S. concentration camps during the Second World War, the crystallization of Irish American identity, and the gay rights movement, among many others. The Second World War marked an important point of departure for this mode of imagining identity from experiences of trauma, although such a pattern of memory and identity has historical antecedents, as in Québec, where the official motto "Je me souviens" ("I remember") dates to the late nineteenth century, or in the case of Jewish experiences of persecution since Assyrian and Babylonian exile.¹

Informed by this commonly accepted relationship between trauma and identity in the West, historians of identity in the African diaspora have emphasized how Africans and their descendants in the Americas forged a sense of community from and through the shared trauma of bondage and exploitation.² This article questions the universality of the relationship between

Pier M. Larson is assistant professor of history at The Johns Hopkins University.

¹ Paul Antze and Michael Lambek identify "the central role that trauma and victimization have come to play within a politics of memory"; see Antze and Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York, 1996), vii. More pertinent, Paul Gilroy adheres closely to this understanding of memory and black identity formation in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), esp. chap. 6.

² See, among others, Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial*

remembering enslavement and identity formation in the African diaspora by expanding that diaspora into Africa and—with a case study from highland Madagascar—the Indian Ocean. Despite their centrality to the experiences of Africans exiled and displaced by the slave trade, Africa and the Indian Ocean remain on the periphery of most writing about the African diaspora, which has become virtually synonymous with the western Atlantic in much recent literature. There are two key reasons for this marginalization: Americanists who embrace the diaspora as their field of study know little about slavery and displacement in Africa and the Indian Ocean, and scholars working on the slave trade and migration in those regions tend not to claim the African diaspora as their domain of expertise. The fragmentation of scholarship and the formation of specializations in geographically defined fields (West Africa, East Africa, Indian Ocean, North America) have contributed to a growing amnesia about the importance of Africa and the Indian Ocean to the African diaspora.

Numbers testify to this amnesia. Although the transatlantic slave trade was the single largest extracontinental forced migration of Africans occurring over the half-millennium between 1400 and 1900 (some twelve million leaving Africa), the trans-Saharan trade (nearly eight million) and the Indian Ocean and Red Sea trades (more than four million), although operating over longer time spans than the transatlantic trade, together approximated the volume of forced African migrations to the Americas.³ Linked to each of

South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York, 1974); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1979); Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, La., 1981); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York, 1987); Stuckey, *Going through the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History* (New York, 1994); Margaret Washington Creel, "A Peculiar People": *Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullah* (New York, 1988); William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth Century New England* (Amherst, Mass., 1988); Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992); Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and British Caribbean, 1736–1831* (Urbana, Ill., 1992); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, La., 1992); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

³ Ralph A. Austen, "The Transsaharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1979), 23–76; Austen, "The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea Coasts): A Tentative Census," in William Gervase Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1989), 21–44; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983), 19, 21, 25, 45, 137. Joseph E. Inikori, who has also published estimates for the various slave trades, dissents from these widely accepted figures. He places the transatlantic trade at 15.4 million and the trans-Saharan trade at nearly 4 million; see Inikori, "Africa in World History: The Export Slave Trade from Africa and the Emergence of the Atlantic Economic Order," in B. A. Ogot, ed., *Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 5 of *General History of Africa* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 82–83.

these migrations from Africa were the internal slave trades serving domestic African markets, probably equal to or greater in magnitude than all three of the external movements combined.⁴ The cultural significance of intracontinental displacements of Africans as a result of the slave trade has been largely ignored in diaspora studies, in part because the race-based definitions of minorities in host societies that scholars commonly employ to define diaspora communities are inadequate in most continental African contexts. In Africa, language and ethnic differences loom greater than race. Seen in its broader context, then, the transatlantic slave trade represented about one-half of the external forced migration of Africans and only about one-quarter of the entire African diaspora resulting from enslavement. How can we account for these unfortunately forgotten persons and their experiences?

One way is to explore the relationship between identity formation and the traumas of enslavement in different parts of the African diaspora. The present study examines this relationship in highland Madagascar, from which about seventy thousand persons were forcibly exiled as slaves to two French Indian Ocean plantation colonies between 1770 and 1820. Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world, lying just off the east coast of Africa, is Africa's "British Isles," historically, economically, and culturally linked to the continent yet jealous of its separateness and insular identity. Its population deriving from the dual expansion of Bantu- and Austronesian-language speakers into the western Indian Ocean over the last two millennia, Madagascar supplied slaves in different periods to multiple external destinations, including the Cape of Good Hope, Dutch Indonesia, the Americas, and East Africa, and developed a significant internal trade, especially during the nineteenth century.⁵

⁴ For domestic commerce linked to the transatlantic slave trade, see Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 60–65; Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge, 1990), 38–59; Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison, Wis., 1988), 140–69, 379–442 (esp. 440–41); James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700–1860* (Cambridge, 1993), 44–58 (esp. 53). The African counterparts to the Indian Ocean and Red Sea slave trades are quantified in Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, 38–59; William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "The Economics of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea Slave Trades in the 19th Century: An Overview," in Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade*, 3; Austen, "The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade," 21–44; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 153. For links between the domestic African commerce and the trans-Saharan slave trade, see Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, 38–59; Austen, "The Transsaharan Slave Trade," 23–76; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 60–65.

⁵ For the peopling of Madagascar, see Pierre Vérin, "Le problème des origines Malgaches," *Taloha*, no. 8 (1979), 41–55; Jean-Pierre Domenichini, "La plus belle 'énigme du monde' ou l'historiographie coloniale en question," *Omaly sy Anio*, nos. 13–14 (1981), 57–76; Robert E. Dewar, "The Archaeology of the Early Settlement of Madagascar," in Julian Reade, ed., *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity* (London, 1996), 471–86. For work on slave trades to and from Madagascar, see J. T. Hardyman, "The Madagascar Slave-Trade to the Americas (1632–1830)," *Studia: Revista Semestral*, no. 11 (1963), 501–21; Virginia Bever Platt, "The East India Company and the Madagascar Slave Trade," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 26 (1969), 548–77; James C. Armstrong, "Madagascar and the Slave Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *Omaly sy Anio*, nos. 17–19 (1984), 211–33; Gwyn Campbell, "Madagascar and the Slave Trade, 1810–1895," *Journal of African History*, 22 (1981), 203–27; Campbell, "Madagascar and Mozambique in the Slave Trade of the Western Indian Ocean,

This study focuses on only one external flow of slaves from Madagascar at the turn of the nineteenth century: from the highlands of central Madagascar, a region today known as Imerina, lying about forty-five hundred feet above sea level, to Ile de France (Mauritius) and Bourbon (Réunion), the two largest Mascarene Islands. Colonized first by Holland and France, then Britain from 1810 (Réunion was returned to France in 1814), the latter islands developed plantation economies dependent upon servile labor in the late eighteenth century and became intensive sugar producers during the early nineteenth. Until 1820 when the flow of slaves from highland Madagascar ceased, the labor force of the two islands hailed from East Africa and Madagascar in roughly equal proportions.⁶

Today known as Merina (an ethnic name), the people of highland Madagascar first acquired a collective identity at the turn of the nineteenth century when politically disparate communities joined a rapidly growing kingdom forged by a merchant king named Andrianampoinimerina. Originating as a political identity signifying loyalty to Andrianampoinimerina's polity, being Merina later evolved into an ethnic identity as highland Malagasy employed that political allegiance as a cultural resource in struggles with their sovereign. The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of memory and amnesia as they relate to the origins of Merina identity during the nineteenth century.⁷

In the external slave trade to the Mascarenes, highland Madagascar was a source for slaves rather than a destination and therefore usually not considered among diaspora communities. But there are compelling reasons for including both source and destination societies for slaves within the scope of the African diaspora, transformed as both types of communities were by economies of enslavement and their accompanying displacements. Most African societies that exported slaves, for example, were themselves consumers of servile labor; highland Madagascar imported slaves from East Africa and other regions of the island while simultaneously exporting them into the Indian Ocean. Slavery internal to highland Madagascar (*fanandevozana*) became significant primarily after 1810, as Merina armies conquered the coastal regions of Madagascar and marched slaves back to Imerina.⁸

1800–1861,” in Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade*, 166–93; Campbell, “The Structure of Trade in Madagascar, 1750–1810,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 26 (1993), 111–48; James C. Armstrong and Nigel A. Worden, “The Slaves, 1652–1834,” in Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, eds., *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840* (Middletown, Conn., 1988), 109–83; Claude Allibert, “Les hollandais et Madagascar,” Gabriel Rantoandro, “Madagascar vue des Pays-Bas depuis les frères de Houtman,” and R. J. Barendse, “Slaving on the Malagasy Coast, 1640–1700,” in Sandra Evers and Marc Spindler, eds., *Cultures of Madagascar: Ebb and Flow of Influences* (Leiden, 1995), 87–99, 101–16, 137–55.

⁶ Auguste Toussaint, *Histoire des îles Mascareignes* (Paris, 1972); J.-M. Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1974), 163–74.

⁷ For the formation of Merina identity and the role of enslavement in fostering it, see Pier M. Larson, *Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar: History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement, 1770–1822* (Portsmouth, N.H., forthcoming).

⁸ Slaves and their descendants, known as the *mainity* (blacks), nourish their own memories of enslavement. See David Graeber, “Painful Memories,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 27 (1997), 374–400.

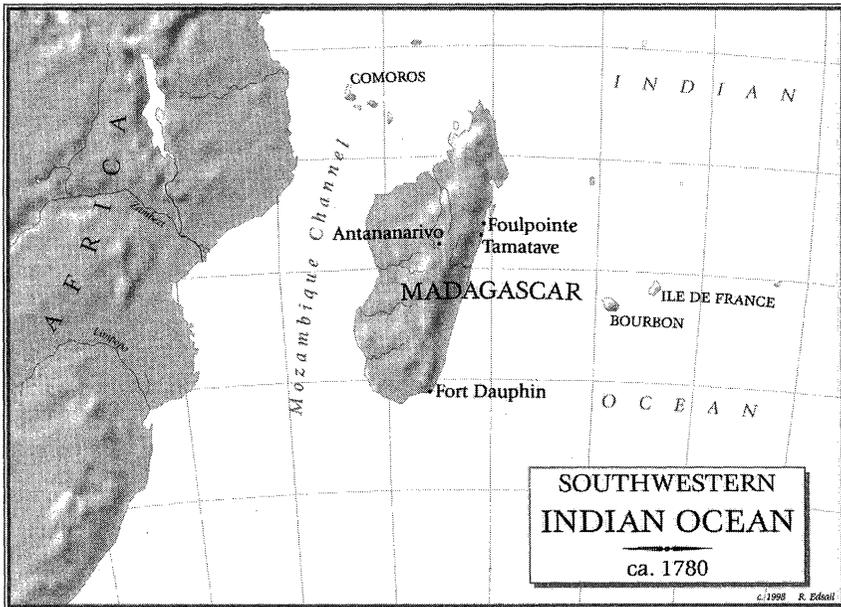


FIGURE I

Madagascar in the Southwestern Indian Ocean. Drawn by Robert Edsall.

Two related paradoxes inform this study. First, whereas prevailing theories of identity formation in the African diaspora would set memorialization of enslavement at the center of identity formation for the Merina of highland Madagascar, the descendants of those who suffered through the era of slaving effaced rather than retained explicit memories of enslavement in their historical narratives. Second, although highland Malagasy tended to forget enslavement and the slave trade, documents produced by European participants in Malagasy enslavement memorialize the slave trade and its social impact (there were also Malagasy participants in the slave trade, but they did not produce contemporary records). For highland Madagascar, the relevant question is, not so much how the slave trade is explicitly remembered, but how it was and continues to be forgotten, its memory only tacitly embedded within ritual symbolism and the structure, language, and focus of historical narratives.⁹ Why did highland Malagasy elide direct memories of the external slave trade and victimization by enslavement in imagining themselves as a collective ethnic community at the turn of the nineteenth century?

⁹ There is one fundamental similarity here in *fotsy* (nonslave) and mainty memories of slavery and the slave trade: in both cases, memories are “somewhat veiled and indirect,” embedded, in part and for differing reasons, in “ritual idiom” and historical narrative; see Graeber, “Painful Memories,” 375.

Setting highland Madagascar within the African diaspora, this article argues three closely related points. First, the commonly assumed link between remembering the traumas of enslavement and identity formation is a phenomenon particular to time and circumstance, not a universal of the African diaspora. If scholars are interested in the interconnections between memory and enslavement in all parts of the diaspora, including *both* sides of the Atlantic, they must be prepared to understand how remembering and forgetting can underlie ethnogenesis. African memories embodied in popular historical narratives often underpin different modes of identity formation from those in the northern and western Atlantic of the late twentieth century. Varying patterns of traumatic memory (or amnesia) and identity formation complicate Paul Gilroy's contention that a "black Atlantic" identity arises from memories of enslavement. Second, attention to African memories and narratives of the export slave trade will transform the way historians write about African experiences of enslavement and identity formation in exile and at home. Recent historiography of the transatlantic slave trade and its domestic (African) ramifications has been dominated by reconstructions from contemporary European documentation. Important as those are, African narratives and memories must intrude upon the business of historical reconstruction, or—to put it more accurately—upon the way that historians remember the slave trade through selection and organization of evidence. Although seldom contemporary, vernacular narratives are key to understanding the meaning and texture of African experiences of enslavement and identity formation. Third, reintegrating Africa and the Indian Ocean into the African diaspora not only shifts the center of gravity in diaspora studies back to Africa, the origin of diaspora populations and the location of the greatest volume of human displacements in the slave trade, but will enrich diaspora studies by framing localized studies within a broader comparative context. The present study seeks to demonstrate how enslavement and identity formation in an East African/Indian Ocean source society for slaves contrasts with studies of identity formation in the African diaspora of destination societies in the western Atlantic. Comparison across a rich and varied diaspora fosters appreciation and respect for the diversity of experiences of dispersion and opens new terrains of intellectual investigation into trauma and identity in modern times.

During the half-century between 1770 and 1820, highland central Madagascar supplied about seventy thousand captives to the slave trade furnishing the French plantation island colonies of Ile de France and Bourbon. The average population loss to export slavery from this external flow remained below five per one thousand annually. Relatively insignificant when compared to the high rates of mortality during periodic outbreaks of smallpox and cholera in nineteenth-century highland Madagascar (10 to 30 percent in a few months), this rate of population loss to enslavement for export is similar to that in the Angolan slave trade to the Americas.¹⁰ To judge the impact of

¹⁰ Filliot, *La traite des esclaves*, 163–74; Pier M. Larson, "A Census of Slaves Exported from Central Madagascar to the Mascarenes between 1769 and 1820," in Ignace Rakoto, ed., *L'esclavage*

the slave trade exclusively or primarily by its influence on demographic structures, however, is to overlook the profound social, economic, and cultural dislocations that flowed from practices of enslavement and highland Madagascar's links to a global economy of mercantile capitalism. Although highland Madagascar is landlocked, it was not a backwater nor simply a hinterland to distant ports, isolated from the main currents of trade in the western Indian Ocean during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Because its merchants and citizens played a direct role in producing and transporting captives, highland central Madagascar became a key component of the regional economy of the western Indian Ocean. Like East Africa, highland Madagascar was a principal source of slaves for the Mascarenes and other destinations, and it experienced economic, social, and political transformations similar to those in the East African interior during the same period.¹¹

The impact of the external slave trade was deep and broad. By the turn of the nineteenth century, everyone knew some close kinsperson who had been enslaved. By 1820, perhaps as many as 70 percent of highland Malagasy households experienced the loss of a member to the export slave trade. The existence of an export market for human beings dramatically transformed the relationships between common people and their leaders.¹² During the late eighteenth century, the rulers of several minikingdoms competed with one another for the political loyalty of highland farmers and for the wealth of international trade. The first highlanders to enslave persons for export, and those who accumulated the most wealth from participation in the trade, were highland kings. Most rulers created and sold slaves from among their own subjects, a practice that swiftly produced a disloyal populace searching to transfer its allegiance to kings who promised to enslave only from *outside* their realms. The slave trade to Ile de France and Bourbon significantly contributed to political instability and a social climate of extreme distrust and personal insecurity within highland Madagascar.

After 1785, Andrianampoinimerina, ruler of one of the many minikingdoms of highland central Madagascar, managed to corner the supply of slaves to European merchants on the island's east coast. He conquered all the highland minikingdoms, united them into a single polity (commonly called the Merina kingdom), and captured the popular support of common folk. He monopolized the slave trade by besting his competitors at supplying foreign

à Madagascar: aspects historiques et résurgences contemporaines (Antananarivo, Madagascar, 1997), 131–45; Miller, *Way of Death*, 153–54; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 117. This section of the article summarizes research findings reported in part 1 of Larson, *Becoming Merina*.

¹¹ Gilbert Ratsivalaka, *Madagascar dans le sud-ouest de l'océan indien (circa 1500–1824): pour une relecture de l'histoire de Madagascar*, 2 vols. (Nice, thèse de doctorat d'état, 1995), 1:137–361; Edward A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Patterns of International Trade in East Central Africa to the Later Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, Calif., 1975); Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, Conn., 1977); Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London, 1987); Steven Feierman, "A Century of Ironies in East Africa (c. 1780–1890)," in Philip Curtin et al., eds., *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, 2d ed. (London, 1995), 352–76.

¹² By "common people" and "commoners," I refer to most members of both the *hova* and the *andriana* groups of highland Madagascar, who were of similarly humble means. These groups are defined below in the text.

slave traders on favorable terms and preventing French merchants from gaining commercial access to his political rivals in the Malagasy highlands. His tactics included temporarily offering his competitors' slave merchants twice the price for their slaves as Europeans were willing to pay for them, then incurring a substantial financial loss by selling those same prisoners at market prices to European merchants. Despite these temporary losses, Andrianampoinimerina prospered overall and distributed the wealth he acquired through commerce to clients and potential clients in his own and in competitors' kingdoms, convincing them to switch their loyalties to him. At the same time, he threatened any communities who refused to join his increasingly successful and expanding polity with sure enslavement. The success of these strategies rested upon Andrianampoinimerina's ability to protect his subjects from enslavement and to capture his enemies. Andrianampoinimerina named his growing kingdom Imerina and ruled there until his death in 1809. Those who joined the kingdom he granted a political identity as Merina citizens. Being Merina, therefore, originated as a political identity denoting loyalty to Andrianampoinimerina; later, when it was employed to protest the policies of the founder king's successors, it was transformed into an ethnic identity.

One of the most significant collections of highland Malagasy historical memories, those of the *fotsy*, or nonslave "owners of the land," is a set of published texts that originated as oral narratives. Working from existing oral accounts, Malagasy who in mission schools learned to write their language in Latin script after the abolition of the export slave trade in 1820 produced a range of written historical texts.¹³ Most of these were histories of royalty, others were descent group histories, and still others descriptions and justifications of highland cultural practices increasingly challenged by foreign missionaries and the ruling Christian elite at the Merina kingdom's capital of Antananarivo. In the mid-1860s, François Callet, a French Jesuit priest, recognized the value of these historical manuscripts and began to collect them. Callet supplemented these manuscripts with oral information (*lovan-tsofina*, or "inheritance of the ears") from highlanders across the Malagasy countryside and published them. The resulting work has come to be known as the *Tantara ny Andriana* (The history of sovereigns, abbreviated throughout as *Tantara*) and in its most recent edition is issued in two volumes of more than twelve hundred pages.¹⁴

¹³ Françoise Raison-Jourde, "L'acculturation par l'écriture sainte à Madagascar: une religion de l'écriture dans une civilisation de l'oral," in *Histoire du texte: recherches sur la place du livre dans le christianisme* (Paris, 1974), 72–82; Raison-Jourde, "L'échange inégal de la langue: la pénétration des techniques linguistiques dans une civilisation de l'oral (Imerina, début du XIXe siècle)," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 32 (1977), 639–69; Bonar A. Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant Impact: The Work of the British Missions, 1818–1895* (New York, 1979); Pier M. Larson, "Capacities and Modes of Thinking: Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity," *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 969–1002.

¹⁴ François Callet, ed., *Tantara ny Andriana eto Madagascar: documents historiques d'après les manuscrits malgaches*, 2 vols. (Antananarivo, Madagascar, 1981). For critical studies of the *Tantara*, see Alain Delivré, *L'histoire des rois d'Imerina: interprétation d'une tradition orale* (Paris, 1974); Pier M. Larson, "Multiple Narratives, Gendered Voices: Remembering the Past in Highland Central Madagascar," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 28 (1995), 295–325.

Tantara narratives portray the highland Malagasy past in local terms, seldom connecting insular developments to international trade. Much of the compendium recounts the founding of the Merina kingdom at the turn of the nineteenth century, but little describes the international commerce in slaves. Rather, as the name Callet chose for the compendium indicates, its narratives concerning the period between 1770 and 1820 are focused largely on the persons, personalities, and policies of Malagasy sovereigns. Whereas contemporary European documents identify Andrianampoinimerina as an astute slave merchant whose political success was dependent upon wealth generated in the slave trade, *Tantara* narratives reveal little about Andrianampoinimerina's export slaving activities.¹⁵ Why, if the slave trade exerted such profound social effects in highland Madagascar and was the means of Andrianampoinimerina's rise to power, were references to these fundamental experiences so removed from highland Malagasy historical memories?

A preliminary answer is that, when *Tantara* narratives were being recorded during the mid-nineteenth century, highland Malagasy did not have the slave trade foremost in their minds. Callet compiled *Tantara* narratives about two generations after the end of the export slave trade, when Merina sovereigns reopened their kingdom to Europeans and Christian missionaries after nearly three decades of forced exile.¹⁶ In a new climate of rapid social and religious change promoted by the rulers of highland Madagascar, those who provided Callet with his manuscripts and oral accounts sought to preserve what they considered venerable Merina custom. They held up traditional rulers and practices of yore as examples of ideal governance and political stability in an environment of religious and social change they found disappointing.¹⁷ Primary among these examples of traditionalism and excellence was Andrianampoinimerina, about whom storytellers wove mythologized narratives of praise and admiration. As a result, *Tantara* narratives focused on Andrianampoinimerina as an embodiment of tradition, shunting memories of enslavement aside.

¹⁵ Although the *Tantara* say little about Andrianampoinimerina and enslavement, they do not neglect enslavement altogether. Enslavement and slavery are seen primarily in domestic terms, however, with prisoners of war becoming slaves to their conquerors or ransomed back to their kin. See *Tantara*, 495, 508, 537, 543, 549, 605, 854. Several *Tantara* narratives mention the importance of muskets and gunpowder to political conquest but say little about how they were acquired through external trade (384, 488, 912–16). Two passages mention the names of markets where highland captives were offered for export sale (668, 854).

¹⁶ Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant Impact*, 1–77; E. Colin et P. Suau, *Madagascar et la mission catholique*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Paris, 1895), 1:21–29; Françoise Raison-Jourde, *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar au XIXe siècle: invention d'une identité chrétienne et construction de l'état, 1780–1880* (Paris, 1991), 167–237.

¹⁷ This was comparable to the codification of "traditional law" in colonial Africa. See Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in Eric Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Martin Channock, *Law, Custom, and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge, 1985); Elizabeth Schmidt, "Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Men, Women, and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1939," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 (1990), 622–48; Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1992). On this point, see also Delivré, *L'histoire des rois d'Imerina*, 119–38.

What then, can be the utility of Malagasy historical narratives—memories concerned primarily with Andrianampoinimerina, his predecessors, and his successors—to the professional historian of the slave trade and its cultural effects in highland Madagascar? This question is relevant well beyond Madagascar, for historians of the African slave trade have seldom employed African narratives, which are often suspected of factual inaccuracies associated with the malleability and unctemporaneous nature of much oral testimony.¹⁸ Although popular narratives often display the mutability and manipulability of memory, they can, with their silences and their distortions, be meaningful historical evidence, even (or especially) when they were not written down during the period they describe.¹⁹ If highland Malagasy narratives differ substantially from contemporary European documents concerning the slave trade, how do those narratives remember the period of the slave trade and what do such remembrances reveal about highland Malagasy experiences during that era?

Highland Malagasy historical memories concerning the period of the slave trade coalesce around the person, practices, and words of Andrianampoinimerina. These narratives say little about the slave trade plainly and directly, yet upon closer examination unmistakable traces of enslavement and Malagasy reactions to it are implicitly embedded and encoded within them. This evidence is not immediately recognizable, for to gain access to it scholars must know not only the Malagasy language but the intellectual paradigms through which highland Malagasy made sense of their world. Consider Andrianampoinimerina's reported political discourse, a cloak of self-justification spun by the founder king and his entourage of administrators and hangers-on. As recorded in the *Tantara*, Andrianampoinimerina often described the period before his rise to power as a time of *fanjakana hova* (literally meaning authority/government of and by *hova*, or "commoners" who are neither royalty nor servants-slaves). The expression evoked notions of decentralized power, shrinking primary social groups, immoral lawlessness, contention, and disorder and associated them all with *hova* and, therefore, illegitimate rule.²⁰ *Fanjakana hova* was conceptually set against *fanjakan'andriana* (authority/government of and by a single *andriana*; *andriana* are Malagasy royalty and their relatives) as a model of single, orderly, united, moralized, legitimate government. Andrianampoinimerina portrayed his own rule as characteristic of orderly *fanjakan'andriana*. By claiming he brought order to chaos, Andrianampoinimerina invoked a globally common rhetorical justification for usurpation of power: chaos stories are typical of

¹⁸ See, especially, Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550–1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford, 1991), 5. Mostly, however, historians of the slave trade are simply silent about the utility or disutility of African-produced narratives.

¹⁹ Karen Fields, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly," in Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York, 1994), 150–63.

²⁰ *Tantara*, 854, 855, 784, 861, 873, 878, 884, 888; H. Randzavola, ed., *Firaketana ny Fiteny sy ny Zavatra Malagasy (dictionnaire-encyclopédique malgache): avoakan'ny "Mpiadidy ny Fiainana" sy ny namana maro eran'ny nosy*, vol. 3 (Antananarivo, Madagascar, 1937), s.v. "hova," 296–97.

foundation myths in general. The point here is, not that this type of political language was unique to highland Madagascar, but why and how it was meaningful to highland Malagasy at the turn of the nineteenth century given their historical experiences over previous decades.

The rhetorical power of Andrianampoinimerina's political language lay in its appropriation of everyday experiences of social disintegration and disorganization during the era of the slave trade, when kin were torn from their families and individuals were on the move, to help justify political conquest and unification at the turn of the nineteenth century.²¹ Andrianampoinimerina's orderly rule would replace the communal chaos and insecurity of the economy of enslavement. The new king's language of andriana order versus hova chaos served as a template from which much popular rhetoric and ritual were cast. Although languages and ritual practices invoking symbolic oppositions of chaos and order most likely predated the rise of Andrianampoinimerina, such symbolic exercises did not represent a timeless, unchanging, "transcendental" ancestral order of highland Malagasy culture, as anthropologist Maurice Bloch has argued.²² Bloch's claim fails to account for either the popularity or the contextualized meanings of ritual and political language during Andrianampoinimerina's reign. Contrary to a first impression of the *Tantara* as an erasure of memory concerning experiences of enslavement, the slave trade was centrally, albeit tacitly, anchored in highland Malagasy social memory in the form of political rhetoric and ritual even generations after primary experiences of enslavement for export.

To capture the support of potential subjects and to position his rule in symbolic opposition to the insecurity, social atomization, and creeping poverty resulting from enslavement for export, Andrianampoinimerina instituted a series of social reforms. These measures articulated new civic virtues for highland Malagasy and included land redistribution, the promotion of rituals of community solidarity, a discourse heavily critical of the lazy and the rich, protections for the poor in market transactions, and many other social innovations. These populist policies are reported in *Tantara* narratives, and they dovetail with Andrianampoinimerina's claims about restoring order to a chaotic society. The emotional power and political popularity of Andrianampoinimerina's social reforms, like the things he said, drew upon commoners' experiences of enslavement. An illustration of the way in which Andrianampoinimerina's social policy was designed to solve common people's predicaments is the

²¹ For social disintegration and mobility during the late eighteenth century, see Larson, *Becoming Merina*, chaps. 3, 4; Ratsivalaka, *Madagascar dans le sud-ouest de l'océan indien*, 1:221-23, 411-12; Larson Fieldwork Collection, Sound Recording, nos. 18, 39, 82, 95, 120, 122, 124; Pier M. Larson, "Narrative Bridging: The Art of Popular History in Highland Madagascar" (paper presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, Seattle, Jan. 11, 1998); William Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 2 vols. (London, 1838), 1:245.

²² Maurice Bloch, "Death, Women, and Power," in Bloch and Jonathan Parry, eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge, 1982), 211-30; Bloch, *From Blessing to Violence: History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina of Madagascar* (Cambridge, 1986), 157-95; Bloch, "From Cognition to Ideology," in Bloch, *Ritual, History, and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology* (London, 1989), 106-34.

founder king's "politics of death," with its emphasis on the building of stone tombs.²³

Conspicuously present nearly everywhere in highland Madagascar, tombs (*fasana*) link the living to discrete ancestral territories (*tanindrazana*) and provide a physical dwelling for the bodies and spirits of the dead. Highland Malagasy periodically remove ancestral remains from family tombs and rewrap them with new winding sheets, a ritual called *famadihana*.²⁴ Because of the centrality of tombs and mortuary ritual to modern highland Malagasy identity and cultural practice, tombs and *famadihana* have come to be seen as quintessentially Merina.²⁵ Most scholars have portrayed Austronesian preoccupations with the dead, family tombs, and proper burial on ancestral lands as a time-honored tradition, part of a wider Austronesian civilization of death. A careful examination of the historical evidence for highland Madagascar, however, suggests that, although mortuary habits have ancient antecedents, the modern social meanings of death and related cultural practices have been in constant flux.²⁶ Highland Malagasy mortuary practices owe much to popular cultural politics and royal policy in the era of the slave trade.²⁷

²³ Larson, *Becoming Merina*, chap. 5. I owe the term "politics of death" to Gillian Feeley-Harnik, "The Political Economy of Death: Communication and Change in Malagasy Colonial History," *American Ethnologist*, 11 (1984), 1–19 (esp. 7).

²⁴ For studies of Malagasy tombs and their accompanying mortuary ritual, see Guillaume Grandidier, "La mort et les funérailles à Madagascar," *L'Anthropologie*, 23 (1912), 322–48; Raymond Decary, *La mort et les coutumes funéraires à Madagascar* (Paris, 1962); Gérard Althabe, *Oppression et libération dans l'imaginaire: les communautés villageoises de la côte orientale de Madagascar* (Paris, 1969); W. R. Huntington, "Death and the Social Order: Bara Funeral Customs (Madagascar)," *African Studies*, 32 (1973), 65–84; J.-F. Barré, *Pouvoir des vivants, langage des morts: idéo-logiques Sakalava* (Paris, 1977); Jean-François Rabedimy, "Essai sur l'idéologie de la mort à Madagascar," and Narivelo Rajaonarimananana, "Achèvement des funérailles et offrande de linceuls: rites funéraires et commémoratifs des Betsileo du Manandriana," in Jean Guiart, ed., *Les hommes et la mort: rituels funéraires à travers le monde* (Paris, 1979), 171–79, 181–93; Conrad Phillip Kottak, *The Past in the Present: History, Ecology, and Cultural Variation in Highland Madagascar* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1980), 228–59; Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate: Restoring Independence in Madagascar* (Washington, D.C., 1991); Bloch, *Placing the Dead*; David Graeber, "Dancing with Corpses Reconsidered: An Interpretation of *Famadihana* (in Arivonimamo, Madagascar)," *American Ethnologist*, 22 (1995), 258–78; Karen Middleton, "Tombs, Umbilical Cords, and the Syllable Fo," in Evers and Spindler, *Cultures of Madagascar*, 223–35.

²⁵ Bloch, *Placing the Dead*, 145–71; Graeber, "Dancing with Corpses Reconsidered," 258–78; Raison-Jourde, *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar*, 705–38; François Rajaoson, *Contribution à l'étude du *famadihana* sur les hauts plateaux de Madagascar* (Paris, thèse de 3e cycle, 1969); Louis Molet, *La conception malgache du monde, du surnaturel et de l'homme en Imerina*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1979), 2:295–98.

²⁶ Robert Hertz, "Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort," *L'Année Sociologique*, 10 (1907), 48–137; Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1991); Peter Metcalf, *A Borneo Journey into Death: Berawan Eschatology from Its Rituals* (Philadelphia, 1982); Douglas Miles, "Socio-Economic Aspects of Secondary Burial," *Oceania*, 35 (1965), 161–74; A. B. Hudson, "Death Ceremonies of the Padju Epat Ma'anyan Dayaks," *Sarawak Museum Journal*, 13 (1966), 341–416.

For an examination of a broad range of transformations in highland Malagasy mortuary culture, see Pier M. Larson, "Royal Power and the Renaissance of Secondary Burial in Highland Madagascar: A Modern History of *Famadihana*," *Ethnohistory* (forthcoming).

²⁷ Similar modifications in mortuary practices, including tomb architecture, have taken place elsewhere in Madagascar. Among the Hazohandatsé of the south, for example, modern practices of monumental stone tomb building can scarcely be traced back 200 years; see Middleton, "Tombs," 224.

Tombs are associated with some of the earliest archaeological sites in highland Madagascar, but their absence around many settlements until the nineteenth century suggests that tomb burial was not always the norm. Considerable variety in burial methods and tomb architecture characterized the Malagasy highlands during the late eighteenth century, and such variation in mortuary culture paralleled fractured social and political identities. According to the *Tantara* and Nicolas Mayeur, a French slave merchant (who described a highland tomb in 1777), the dead were usually buried individually or by single households. Nearly all eighteenth-century tombs surveyed by archaeologists were constructed for individual burial.²⁸ Many of these tombs could not be entered easily by the living. In 1777, Mayeur observed rectangular tombs for collective burial by single households measuring eight feet wide by six feet deep. Bodies were commonly placed on wooden trestlelike beds within those tombs. Before the advent of tiered wood beds, one passage of the *Tantara* claims, bodies were simply piled one atop the other. Both contemporary and memorial sources concur that, when highland Malagasy constructed tombs during the eighteenth century, they fashioned them of small stone and clay mortar. Highlanders generally erected large stone obelisks (*orimbato*, *tsangambato*, *vato-lahy*, *vato mitsangana*) in the vicinity of their tombs to mark the location of burial, which may suggest that tombs were not visually prominent. Not everyone was buried in household tombs. Individuals might choose a personal site of interment away from a tomb or collective burial ground. In the absence of any overarching cultural or administrative code defining proper burial, highlanders followed local precedent and were free to exercise considerable choice.²⁹

Historical memory corroborates archaeological findings and contemporary reports that suggest a progression from diverse burial practices to near universal interment in collective stone tombs. "In earlier times," Andrianampoinimerina is reported to have said, "everyone did as they wished when someone died; they buried their dead wherever they desired." "According to former practice every household constructed a small tomb to bury all the members living in one house. These were small individual graves like those in which persons not yet placed in the tomb are buried in and that could not be entered. They were constructed from small rock, and stones were erected

²⁸ Susan Kus and Henry Wright, "Survey archéologique de la région de l'Avaradrano," *Taloha*, no. 10 (1986), 49–72; Victor Raharijaona, "Reconnaissance archéologique dans la Manandona (Vakinankaratra)," *ibid.*, 85–86; Molet, *La conception malgache du monde*, 2:271; Decary, *La mort*, 59–62; Jean-François LeBras, *Les transformations de l'architecture funéraire en Imerina* (Tananarive, Madagascar, 1971), 10–43; Solo Rakotovololona, "Note sur la fouille d'une tombe découverte à Ilafy," *Taloha*, no. 10 (1986), 115–32.

Reports from the eastern regions of Imerina during the first decades of the nineteenth century suggest that individual burial prevailed there. In the Vakinadiana, also in the east, people in certain villages were interred individually in common burial grounds corresponding to village political moieties. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tombs for collective burial appeared there as networks of kin constructed separate burial places of stone. See Keturah Jeffreys, *The Widowed Missionary's Journal* (Southampton, England, 1827), esp. 132–33; Claude Vogel, *Les quatre-mères d'Ambobibabo: étude d'une population régionale d'Imerina (Madagascar)* (Paris, 1982), 121–29, 170–75.

²⁹ *Tantara*, 259; Nicolas Mayeur, "Voyage au pays d'Ancove (1785) par M. Mayeur, Rédaction de M. Dumaine," *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache*, 12 (1913), 48; LeBras, *Les transformations*, 11.

outside to mark the spot." Tombs built after 1800 were more uniform and contrasted significantly with most of those constructed before the turn of the nineteenth century. The tombs Andrianampoinimerina urged his subjects to construct were generally much larger than earlier ones, normally from three to five times the size of late-eighteenth-century models. Larger tombs united multiple households in wider networks of kin who built and maintained a single common place of burial rather than smaller separate ones. "In the time of Andrianampoinimerina the people were urged in speeches to employ their kinship to build huge tombs. Join together to drag the stones [for constructing the tomb], for this is what will make you love one another. Join together to drag the stones that do good." Writing after 1820, British missionaries to central Madagascar reported that some of the new rectangular tombs were twenty feet wide by fifty feet long.³⁰ Many new tombs measured twenty by thirty feet in width and breadth and ten feet from floor to ceiling.

As tombs became larger and more conspicuous—monuments in themselves—highland Malagasy discontinued erecting external obelisks to mark the location of burial. The wood trestles lining the floors of eighteenth-century tombs were replaced within nineteenth-century sepulchres by multi-tiered beds of granite usually placed along the north, east, and south walls.³¹ Most important, highland Malagasy shifted their building techniques from small stone and mortar constructions to solid frameworks of rock exfoliated from granite outcroppings by alternately heating and cooling fissures in the stone. In these new tombs, five massive stone slabs served as the four walls and the ceiling; the floor of the tomb consisted of packed earth.³² Transitions in architectural style and method of burial were neither instantaneous nor uniform but new ideals that highlanders strove to emulate. Often, stone slabs were retained as the primary interior framework of a tomb; the tomb was then embellished with horizontally aligned small stone on the outside, maintaining a stylistic continuity with eighteenth-century models. Soon after British missionaries introduced clay bricks to highland Madagascar, some highlanders constructed tombs from them. Tomb owners moved bodies from old tombs to new ones, rewinding them with fresh shrouds in the process. Transferring bodies from old tombs to newly constructed ones was among the key reasons for an upsurge in famadihana.³³

Constructed with an interior framework of huge granite slabs, most nineteenth-century tombs were more permanent and considerably more expensive

³⁰ *Tantara*, 258–59, 784, 800; Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 1:245.

³¹ LeBras, *Les transformations*, 40, 64. During the 19th century, burial obelisks were erected only for individuals whose bodies were never recovered for proper tomb burial; see *Tantara*, 268–69. LeBras suggests that freestanding obelisks were replaced by integrated columns in 19th-century Labordian-style tombs; see *Les transformations*, 63–64.

³² Kus and Wright, "Survey archéologique," 60–61; Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 1:245. For a description of these tombs during the late 19th century, see James Sibree, *The Great African Island* (London, 1880), 227–30; James Sibree, *Madagascar before the Conquest: The Island, the Country, and the People* (London, 1896), 300–01.

³³ Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 1:246; Molet, *La conception malgache du monde*, 2:276–308; Graeber, "Dancing with Corpses Reconsidered," 259; Raison-Jourde, *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar*, 717–25; Larson, "Royal Power and the Renaissance of Secondary Burial."

to build than earlier models. Their durability and the outlay of collective labor required to construct them were precisely the reasons they became an object of royal policy. Building tombs brought extended kin together to finance construction and facilitate the transport of cumbersome sheets of granite, some weighing more than a ton. Quarrying and construction required skills best left to specialists, but transporting granite from quarry to the construction site occupied the entire community. As many as five to six hundred persons were sometimes mobilized to drag the ponderous granite slabs by means of ropes. Festive labor, “dragging the stone” (*mitari-bato*) united extended kin and their coresidents to accomplish ritual work that reaffirmed moral values of social solidarity and care for the departed. A call and response song commonly sung during such stone dragging is reported in the *Tantara*. It captures both the festivity of the occasion and reinforces its social purpose.

Dislodging this stone.	Let's dislodge it.
It's but thin!	It's but thin!
Dragging!	Dragging!
Oh my!	Oh my!
Eha!	Eha!
Or can't you do it?	We can!
Is there some?	Yes there is some!
Astounding!	Astounding!
When a man dies.	That's why such a “march”!

“Made to sing,” the passage narrator concludes, “the rock moves along until its weight is lessened.”³⁴

The dramatic collective energy invested in tomb construction during the early nineteenth century can be fully appreciated only when set against life experiences within highland Madagascar's economy of enslavement. “Signs and techniques often come to be potent precisely because of the historical circumstances in which they acquire their meanings,” Jean and John Comaroff write in the preface to a recent compendium of articles on local cultures in global interaction. Indeed, transformations in highland Malagasy mortuary culture reflected “the global processes that hitch local cultures and communities to the increasingly global forces that encompass them.”³⁵ Tomb building brought highlanders together in communal, multiple-household expressions of social solidarity that held potent symbolic value in a time of social crisis. Seldom directly expressed as such, tomb burial on ancestral land was in effect a guarantee against enslavement for export expressed through a royally advocated cultural policy. No doubt this policy was also pressed upon Andrianampoinimerina by his rural constituency. Although the *Tantara* attribute tomb building to the initiative of Andrianampoinimerina, popular will probably lay at the origin of the movement.

³⁴ Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 1:244–46; *Tantara*, 269–71.

³⁵ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, “Introduction,” in Comaroff and Comaroff, eds., *Modernity and Its Malcontents* (Chicago, 1993), xxii.

Archaeologists Susan Kus and Henry Wright conclude their investigation of early-nineteenth-century archaeological sites in the Avaradrano district of northern Imerina by noting: "Even if we don't use the accounts of oral tradition, we can know from only the archaeology that an essential sociopolitical transformation took place in Avaradrano." Changes in tomb building and mortuary practice were key components of that sociopolitical transformation. The cultural politics of kingdom building at the turn of the nineteenth century reinvented death in highland Madagascar and invested it with new cultural significance and practices. Far from practicing an unbroken and unchanging culture of death, highland Malagasy found in tomb building and the new forms of mortuary ritual that accompanied it a practical solution to their predicaments of social atomization and insecurity in an economy of enslavement. Tombs were key locations for performance of ritual and important sites for the enactment, interpretation, and manipulation of ancestral and royal authority, important idioms of power in highland Madagascar.³⁶ During the reign of Andrianampoinimerina, tombs and funerary ritual were expressions of Merina political identity and symbolized the popular alliance between a powerful king and his subjects.

This exploration of the ways in which social memories of the era of the slave trade are tacitly embedded within highland Malagasy historical narratives and mortuary culture raises two questions. First, why do popular memories of the era of the slave trade provide information about that commerce and its sociocultural effects implicitly through the discourses and programs of Andrianampoinimerina rather than directly by detailing the actions of slave makers and slave traders and the structure and functioning of the external slave trade? Second, and related to this first question, why do highland Malagasy memories of the slave trade crystallize around the person and deeds of Andrianampoinimerina as a cultural and political hero rather than as the principal highland Malagasy party to the slave trade? The short answer to these questions goes to the heart of the relationship between Merina ethnogenesis and social memories of enslavement: the cultural politics pursued by highland Malagasy to protect themselves from the depredations of the slave trade and collectively to imagine themselves as Merina served to erase a direct memory of that trade. This effacement of explicit memories of the slave trade is only a paradox if scholars claim to know how highland Malagasy should have remembered their experiences of enslavement. But why not assume a meaningful purpose to erasure? Forgetting is, not the opposite of remembering, but its complement. Remembering is selectively forgetting.³⁷ The meanings that highland Malagasy sought to impart to their historical narratives and the purposes to which they employed them required a selection and organization of data and perspective that both favored and suppressed information

³⁶ Kus and Wright, "Survey archéologique," 61; David Graeber, *The Disastrous Ordeal of 1987: Memory and Violence in Rural Madagascar* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996); Feeley-Harnik, "The Political Economy of Death"; Feeley-Harnik, *A Green Estate*.

³⁷ David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago, 1994), 22.

about past experiences. There is a collective purpose behind the suppression of memory, and the historian's task is to determine what that purpose was and why it was important to highland Malagasy.

Key to explaining highland Malagasy erasures of direct memories about the slave trade was the profound political popularity of the most powerful and successful of highland Malagasy slave traders, king Andrianampoinimerina.³⁸ Highland Malagasy attitudes toward enslavement, like those of most Africans during the period of the slave trade, were not fixed and categorical rejections of slavery. Rather, shifting senses of justice and legitimacy found little fault with slavery in principle but regulated who might be legitimately enslaved, how they could be enslaved, and under what circumstances they might be so. According to highland Malagasy, persons acquired from outside the moral community—in this case the Merina kingdom—were generally considered legitimately enslavable. Thus, in theory, it was perfectly consistent for Andrianampoinimerina to be both a slave trader and a popular ruler as long as he acquired his captives only from outside the bounds of his moral community. Enslaving others while remaining popular among his own subjects was precisely the secret of Andrianampoinimerina's political success (other rulers failed in public opinion because they enslaved their own subjects).³⁹ What impressed highlanders most about Andrianampoinimerina was his ability to protect them from enslavement and to deliver on his threats of death and bondage to those who opposed him.

Additional clues to understanding highland Malagasy erasure of explicit memories concerning enslavement are the histories and uses of *Tantara* narratives before Callet collected and published them during the mid- and late nineteenth century, or “the story of the story,” as David Cohen puts it. In reflecting on their history, why did nineteenth-century highland Malagasy remember their first king in greatest detail and at greatest length while devoting little attention to those sovereigns who reigned closest to their time (some 640 pages, or more than half of the *Tantara*, is devoted to Andrianampoinimerina; fewer than 200 pages describe the reigns of the founder king's six successors). Narratives in praise of Andrianampoinimerina were composed at the turn of the nineteenth century by court historians surrounding the founder king, who wanted to justify his ascent to power. Typical of royal praise literature, these oral legends celebrated the king by recounting the excellence and popularity of his politics and by announcing his prophesied right to rule. They seldom referred to the principal material basis of his power, international trade. Such information might suggest Andrianampoinimerina was more worldly and politically calculating, less mystical and sacred (*masina*), than royal ideology would

³⁸ For Andrianampoinimerina's slaving activities, see Ratsivalaka, *Madagascar dans le sud-ouest de l'océan indien*; Larson, *Becoming Merina*, chap. 4.

³⁹ *Tantara*, 321, 678, 779, 912–16; Nicolas Mayeur, “Mémoire historique, politique et commercial,” Archives Départementales de Caen, Fonds Decaen, Caen, France, Series 102, 57v; Ratsivalaka, *Madagascar dans le sud-ouest de l'océan indien*, 1:408. On King Rabehety of Marovatana, see Raombana, *Histoires*, 2 vols. (Fianarantsoa, Madagascar, 1980), 1:462, 477. On Amboatsimarofy of Antananarivo, see *Tantara*, 760–61; Raombana, *Histoires*, 1:328–31, 462–67.

have it. Court historians preferred not to call attention to Andrianampoinimerina's slaving activities lest they raise questions about his civic virtue or distract from his popularity. For their part, highland Malagasy were willing to overlook enslavement among Andrianampoinimerina's commercial activities as long as he delivered on his promises to protect *them* from the misfortunes of capture and exile across the seas. Andrianampoinimerina's praise narratives were popular narratives in their time because they expressed the necessity for a new sense of social order and populist economic morality that benefited the majority of highland poor while censuring the wealthy and powerful. Highlanders embraced the narratives, making of them a shared Merina history superimposed over their many and varied descent group chronicles.⁴⁰ During the lifetime of Andrianampoinimerina, highland Malagasy warmed to the praises of their king; royal histories were, not left to Andrianampoinimerina and his courtiers, but told and retold by common people.

When Andrianampoinimerina died in 1809, power passed to his son, Radama. Unlike his father, Radama was an unpopular leader because, in many ways, he recreated highlanders' experiences of the economy of enslavement that Andrianampoinimerina had worked so assiduously to eradicate. Radama ended the export slave trade by concluding treaties with Britain in 1817 and 1820, yet he soured his relationship with highland Malagasy. As a counterpart to the European treaties of friendship and alliance, Radama received assistance from the British government to raise and train a permanent standing army with which to expand his kingdom outward from the Malagasy highlands. For their part and through their support of Radama, the British acquired an informal empire in Madagascar. Whereas before the rise of Andrianampoinimerina kings enslaved young men and shipped them off to the Mascarenes, Radama drafted young men into a standing army and into obligatory and unremunerated labor service brigades (*fanompoana*), where mortality ran as high as 50 percent per annum. In the years after his rise to power, Radama enlisted more young men into his sickly armies of expansion than the export slave trade had ever removed from highland Madagascar. Radama's armies reached one hundred thousand strong, and, in some disastrous campaigns before and after 1820, at least thirty thousand of those soldiers perished from starvation and disease within a few months.⁴¹ The social and economic effects of the loss of young men to household economies during the time of Radama were similar to those during the high era of the export slave trade, but of greater magnitude.

This similarity was not lost on highland Malagasy, who resorted to a sophisticated politics of memory to defend themselves from the pernicious practices of their new king. To protest Radama's military expansion, common

⁴⁰ Cohen, *The Combing of History*, 1–23; Larson, "Multiple Narratives," 299–309, 316–22.

⁴¹ Pier M. Larson, "A Cultural Politics of Bedchamber Construction and Progressive Dining in Antananarivo: Ritual Inversions during the *Fandroana* of 1817," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 27 (1997), 239–69. For mortality in Radama's armies, see "Extract of Report by James Hastie," Antananarivo, Madagascar, Mar. 17, 1825, box 2, folder 2, jacket A, Griffiths to Arundel, Antananarivo, Madagascar, Dec. 20, 1825, box 2, folder 2, jacket D, Archives of the London Missionary Society (now Council for World Mission Archives), Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 2:188, 254.

highland Malagasy recited narratives in praise of Andrianampoinimerina and his social policies. Radama's elite courtiers no longer espoused the narratives, for they promised social justice, a moralized economy in which rural subsistence and agriculture figured centrally, an end to the plunder of unremunerated labor from rural communities, and the geographical anchoring of kin groups, all of which ran directly counter to Radama's plans for highland Malagasy soldiers and forced laborers in his expanding empire. When Callet collected the *Tantara* narratives, he found their authors scattered across the highland countryside, not concentrated at the royal court, as they once had been.⁴² By the mid-nineteenth century, the *Tantara* were less royal histories than popular histories of royalty.

Andrianampoinimerina's praise narratives were grafted onto descent group histories by local historians and redirected against the royal court as incisive rhetorical weapons of criticism.⁴³ If they dared not challenge Radama and his successors directly and in plain language, highland Malagasy could recite the praises of Andrianampoinimerina, which embodied an implicit and thinly veiled criticism of royal politics after the founder king's death in 1809.⁴⁴ When they employed historical memory to invoke the promises of personal security and subsistence once conferred upon them by Andrianampoinimerina, highland Malagasy appropriated Merina identity from the sovereign, using it to curb the actions of their king and those who would literally or metaphorically

⁴² See the map in Delivré, *L'histoire des rois d'Imerina*, 66, which shows the locations from which *Tantara* narratives were collected. Delivré writes that a preponderance of *Tantara* texts concerning the reign of Andrianampoinimerina were collected in the regions of Antananarivo, Ambohimanga, and Alasora, all three of which are in Avaradrano, the king's home district (60–61). Although this may be the case, others were collected in the regions listed on his map. There is a problem with the method Delivré employed to determine the provenance of Callet's narratives, for colloquial Malagasy does not respect the rules he lays out for *particules locatives* on page 47. Take *aty* (here, at the place of the speaker), for example. When, in telling a story, a narrator says "aty Ambohimanga," she does not necessarily mean that she is herself standing in Ambohimanga but that, being elsewhere in Imerina, she desires the listeners to imagine along with her that they are standing in Ambohimanga, in the middle of the action being described. This colloquial usage is common in storytelling and conversational Malagasy. Since most of the actions related in *Tantara* accounts of Andrianampoinimerina take place at the king's twin capitals of Ambohimanga and Antananarivo, this particular use of *particules locatives* in Malagasy could well place many of the *Tantara* narratives believed to have originated from those two places in other regions of Imerina. Employing this assumption, what Delivré's method of determining the "origin" of stories does, in effect, is to generate a catalog of locations where the action in *Tantara* narratives took place, not where the texts were actually collected. This problem requires further inquiry. More important, though, Delivré fails to account for how historical narratives were performed and employed in 19th-century highland Madagascar; he is interested only in the physical texts collected by Callet. Even if Callet collected most of his narratives from the rural north and west of Antananarivo, the narratives as verbal histories were not in the sole possession of those who owned transcripts of them; they were much more broadly disseminated. Far more significant than the written transcripts were verbal memories of Andrianampoinimerina and the reasons they were recited. See Larson, "Narrative Bridging."

⁴³ For examples of how local historians wove *Tantara* narratives together with their descent group histories, see Larson, "Narrative Bridging."

⁴⁴ Even in extraordinarily direct challenges to the sovereign, such as during the Avaradrano women's revolt against Radama's haircut in April 1822, highlanders resorted to praiseworthy images of Andrianampoinimerina as an exemplar of tradition. See Larson, *Becoming Merina*, chap. 6.

enslave them. During the reigns of Radama and his successors, highland Malagasy claimed the praise narratives of Andrianampoinimerina to imagine themselves as a community of interest independent of their sovereign, ethnicizing their collective political identity. Such was the case even during the reign of Queen Ranavalona I (1828–1861), who, rising to power upon the death of Radama, understood the magnitude of the swelling rift between common highlanders and the royal court. Although she attempted to recapture the admiration of her subjects through symbolic alignment with the memory of Andrianampoinimerina in a way that succeeding sovereigns did not, her excesses in military recruitment, war making, labor service, and summary justice pushed many of her subjects into starvation and banditry.⁴⁵ It was narratives of latent protest against such experiences, which invoked a popularized memory of Andrianampoinimerina, that Callet collected into the *Tantara* soon after Ranavalona's death.

By turning Andrianampoinimerina into a symbol of all that was desirable in a sovereign, highlanders effaced evidence of the founder king's participation in the slave trade, devalued his successors by comparison, and reinforced royal power. Although commoners played a key role in reproducing royal power, they did so in their own fashion while pursuing self-defined interests. This was the irony of their success. Because a majority of highland Malagasy became owners of slaves themselves during the reign of Radama and his successors, their elision of painful experiences related to enslavement and slaving from historical narratives might well have served to ease their brusque transition from targets of enslavement into slaveholders. Highlanders suppressed fundamental historical experiences in their collectively held memories for a variety of reasons, then, but those suppressions were necessary if narratives of Andrianampoinimerina were to be pressed into the service of local autonomy from the exactions of royalty.

Since most professional histories of the early Merina kingdom have drawn heavily upon popular Merina historical narratives as evidence of events rather than as historical memory, elision of the presence and influence of international commerce and enslavement on highland Malagasy society at the turn of the nineteenth century has been reproduced in the secondary literature. Even British missionaries, who were so positioned against the slave trade on principle when they first arrived in central Madagascar during the 1820s, retold the history of Andrianampoinimerina from popular narratives by completely ignoring the founder king's commercial activities. Reflecting popular opinion when they composed their impressive *History of Madagascar* during the first decade and a half of their presence in the highlands (the compendium was actually published in 1838), they acknowledged the prevalence of slaving during Andrianampoinimerina's reign but attributed the activity to the king's immoral "robber" opponents, leaving the founding hero and the most wealthy and powerful of slaving kings unsullied.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 2:517–19, 521–22; Robert Lyall to Charles Colville, Tananarivou, Madagascar, Nov. 6, 1828 (entry for Oct. 22), Mauritius National Archives (Coromandel), Series HB, folder 19, piece 8.

⁴⁶ Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, 2:122–29 (esp. 124, 127). The profound influence of highland Malagasy historical narratives on professional histories of the Merina kingdom is simi-

The interplay of enslavement, historical amnesia, and ethnogenesis in highland Madagascar leads to the connection between memories of enslavement and transformations in collective identity in the African diaspora. Diasporas are normally defined as migrant ethnic or racial minorities in foreign host societies that maintain some connection to homelands of origin.⁴⁷ The term was originally coined for the Jewish dispersion but is now frequently used in a variety of contexts, most notably to designate the scattering of Africans in destination or host societies as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. If many modern definitions of the African diaspora pay lip service to the movement of Africans in both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans as well as across the sea of the Sahara, it is the dispersal of Africans about the Atlantic, especially in the Americas, that captures a monopoly of diaspora studies.⁴⁸ There are compelling reasons to enlarge the spatial and analytical scope of the African diaspora in practice to encompass all the movements of African population during the early modern and modern eras and to facilitate greater cross-fertilization of research and perspective.

Opening investigation of the diaspora to the full range of African experiences in early encounters with expanding Europe and its economies as well as with other world systems will illuminate rather than obscure Africans as historical agents and victims in global history.⁴⁹ New approaches to the diaspora can be developed in two concrete ways: first, by incorporating the continental

lar to the founding of Zulu historiography on nineteenth-century African histories of King Shaka. See Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

⁴⁷ For definitions of the African diaspora, see George Shepperson, "Introduction," in Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 1–10; Ruth Simms Hamilton, ed., *Creating a Paradigm and Research Agenda for Comparative Studies of the Worldwide Dispersion of African Peoples* (East Lansing, Mich., 1990); Elliot P. Skinner, "The Dialectic between Diasporas and Homelands," and George Shepperson, "African Diaspora: Concept and Context," in Joseph E. Harris, ed., *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C., 1993), 11–40; Harris, "The Dynamics of the Global African Diaspora," in Harris, Alusine Jalloh, and Stephen E. Maizlish, eds., *The African Diaspora* (Arlington, Tex., 1996), 7–21.

⁴⁸ Few Indian Ocean studies, for example, are specifically framed in terms of the African diaspora. The primary exceptions are the following works by Joseph E. Harris: *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (Evanston, Ill., 1971); "The Black Peoples of Asia," *World Encyclopedia of Black Peoples* (St. Clair Shores, Mich., 1975), 264–72; "A Comparative Approach to the Study of the African Diaspora," in *Proceedings of a Symposium on the African Dispersal: Expectations and Realities* (Boston, 1976), 46–56; "Return Movements to West and East Africa: A Comparative Approach," in Harris, *Global Dimensions*, 51–64; *Abolition and Repatriation in Kenya* (Nairobi, Kenya, 1977); *Recollections of James Juma Mbotela* (Nairobi, Kenya, 1977); *Repatriates and Refugees in a Colonial Society: The Case of Kenya* (Washington, D.C., 1987). See also H. Neville Chittrick and Robert J. Rotberg, eds., *East Africa and the Orient: Cultural Syntheses in Pre-Colonial Times* (New York, 1975); A. Popovic, *La révolte des esclaves en Iraq au III^e et IX^e siècle* (Paris, 1976); Y. Talib, "The African Diaspora in Asia," in M. Elfasi, ed., *Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, vol. 3 of *General History of Africa* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988), 704–33; Vandana Kohli, "Africans in India," in Hamilton, *Creating a Paradigm*, 61–63.

⁴⁹ The Islamic world, for example, which bordered the Indian Ocean to the north, east, and west, has been considered a world system. See John Obert Voll, "Islam as a Special World-System," *Journal of World History*, 5 (1994), 213–26.

African destinations *and* homelands of African exiles into the diaspora and, second, by taking into account the mass external movements of Africans within the Indian Ocean and across the Sahara. Individuals entering these forced migrations were coercively uprooted from their homelands and transplanted into new societies under circumstances comparable to those of Africans in the Atlantic.

Both the sparseness of evidence concerning enslavement within Africa and a reluctance to acknowledge that many Africans were avid and independent participants in the slave trade has shifted scholarly attention concerning the African diaspora toward the western reaches of Africans' bitter path of Atlantic exile. Victims tend to emerge into focus in the Atlantic system as they enter oceanic transportation networks.⁵⁰ How continental Africans variously met the challenges of European expansion and the hungry external demand for servile labor must be given greater attention in diaspora studies and become an integral component of Atlantic-oriented histories.⁵¹ Scholars of Africa are currently conducting such investigations and, despite obstacles, have learned much in the last fifteen years about the lives of slaves and their masters within African destination societies.⁵² Few Africanist scholars of displacement, dispersion, and slavery, though, claim to work on the African diaspora, and many refuse to draw the inescapable connections between human dispersal within Africa and in other parts of the diaspora, such as in the Americas. Historians need to know more about the lives and strategies of slavers and slaves within Africa as well as the divergent actions of those faced with managing the lasting consequences of enslavement there. Those who remained behind frequently reconstructed kinship relationships, moved their places of residence, and shifted social organization and cultural practices, creating an internal dispersion comparable in many respects to the experiences of the enslaved in exile from their

⁵⁰ For 3 recent examples from studies of African-American culture history, see Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 154–55; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 58–80; and Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 100–05.

⁵¹ That has been stated by others, yet practical application of diaspora studies almost inevitably comes back to the western Atlantic. Contrast the statements about the importance of Africa in "Introduction and Overview," in Hamilton, *Creating a Paradigm*, 6, 8–9, 11, with the absence of Africa-based examples in the same compendium.

⁵² Influential works include Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*; Lovejoy, *Transformations*; Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*; Claude Meillassoux, ed., *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975); Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960* (New York, 1982); Robert Ross, *Cape of Torments: Slavery and Resistance in South Africa* (London, 1983); Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1983); Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (Cambridge, 1985); James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700–1860* (Cambridge, 1993); Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838* (Hanover, N.H., 1994); Elizabeth A. Eldredge and Fred Morton, eds., *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier* (Boulder, Colo., 1994); Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1995); Ibrahim K. Sundiata, *From Slaving to Neoslavery: The Bight of Biafra and Fernando Po in the Era of Abolition, 1827–1930* (Madison, Wis., 1996); Pamela Scully, *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823–1853* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1997); Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998).

homes. The center of gravity in diaspora studies must be Africa rather than the Atlantic, and scholars working on the diaspora should, by definition, consider both the intra- and intercontinental experiences of forced African migrants and their kin.⁵³

Long neglected in diaspora studies, intracontinental African population movements and transformation in source societies for slaves will accent the similarities and differences of human experience across the global dispersion of African people. To be sure, Africans forced to cross the ocean and adapt to life in the Americas and the Indian Ocean had different experiences from those internally exiled among foreign peoples on the African continent. Yet, there are sufficient similarities across the diaspora to merit fruitful comparisons. How did slavery in Africa compare to bondage elsewhere in the diaspora? How did local economies and ideologies shape master-slave relationships? Did slaves in Africa form distinct cultures in the societies of their enslavement, or did they become thoroughly integrated into their masters' cultures? What is distinctive about race as a means of labor control in the Americas when set alongside African systems of servile subordination based upon ethnicity, language, and other social markers? How were ethnic identities formed and reshaped in the internal African diasporas compared to those of North America or the Indian Ocean? How were continental African cultures (both sources of slaves and their destinations) remade as a result of slaving activity? By whose actions were these changes effected? And, what light do sociocultural changes in Africa shed on the rise of African-American cultures in the western Atlantic? Such comparisons across the diaspora will undoubtedly offer much insight into African slavery as a global phenomenon differently experienced in its many regions, much as recent comparative work in the Americas has served to stress the similarities and differences among various slave societies there.⁵⁴

Opening the diaspora beyond the Americas and Africa into the Indian Ocean will further enrich understanding of the dispersion of African people. Slaving in the Indian Ocean brought captives in varying numbers to destinations in the Americas, to the length of the East African coast and some hinterland societies, to the Cape of Good Hope, to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, to the Arabian Peninsula, to the Indian subcontinent, to Far Eastern destinations in China, Japan, and Indonesia, and to the Indian Ocean islands, including, most notably, Zanzibar and Pemba, the Comoros, the Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Réunion.⁵⁵ Sources of slaves destined

⁵³ On this point with reference to the Atlantic, see also Paul E. Lovejoy, "The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion under Slavery," *Studies in the World History of Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation* (electronic journal), 2, no. 1 (1997).

⁵⁴ See, especially, Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*.

⁵⁵ Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade*; Ralph A. Austen, "From the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean: European Abolition, the African Slave Trade, and Asian Economic Structures," in David Eltis and James Walvin, eds., *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origin and Effects in Europe, Africa, and the Americas* (Madison, Wis., 1981), 117–39; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory*; Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi, India, 1998), 247–50.

for most societies of the Indian Ocean and beyond spanned the entire sub-Saharan coastline of Africa, though the overwhelming majority of captives exited along the east coast of the continent proper or from Madagascar and were generally drawn from its eastern and central hinterlands. Transatlantic, trans-Saharan, and Indian Ocean trade economies intersected both in the interior of Africa as merchants and markets encountered each other from opposite directions and in the frequent movement of seaborne commerce between Africa's two flanking oceans and the Mediterranean Sea. With distinct economic and trade patterns, both the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans became integrated into the same world economy after Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1498. Africans of the Indian Ocean diaspora were therefore subject to an array of experiences comparable to those of Africans in the Atlantic: enslavement, disruption of source societies, forced labor, and political, cultural, and identity transformations in both source and destination regions.

Although suggesting insightful similarities, Indian Ocean diaspora experiences and the varied contexts in which they took place offer fruitful contrasts to the Atlantic diaspora. Most of the slave societies and economies of the Indian Ocean were differently organized than those of the Americas, and the flourishing trade that predated the arrival of Europeans was conducted by Persians, Chinese, Arabs, Asians, and Africans, among others.⁵⁶ That ancient commerce continued to operate alongside and interact with European trade and colonial economies into the modern era. Islam was an important influence on many slaveholders of the Indian Ocean, and local ideologies of slavery emerged from a heterogeneous set of agricultural and commercial cultures. In his treatise on slavery in Zanzibar, Frederick Cooper demonstrated that setting Indian Ocean plantations beside those in the Americas problematized much about the roles of labor organization, race, and religion for Americanist scholars who mistakenly believed American experiences of slavery were normative.⁵⁷ Indian Ocean studies less well circulated among or celebrated by scholars of the Atlantic likewise offer fresh perspectives on diaspora, economy, society, and culture.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Auguste Toussaint, *History of the Indian Ocean*, trans. June Guicharnaud (London, 1966); K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York, 1985); Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990); Ashin Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson, eds., *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500–1800* (Calcutta, India, 1987); McPherson, *The Indian Ocean*.

⁵⁷ Blair B. Kling and Michael Pearson, eds., *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia before Domination* (Honolulu, Hawaii, 1979); Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1998); McPherson, *The Indian Ocean*, 137–97; Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder, Colo., 1995); Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*.

⁵⁸ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory: Alpers, Ivory and Slaves*; U. Bissoondoyal and S.B.C. Servansing, eds., *Slavery in South West Indian Ocean* (Moka, Mauritius, 1989); Vijaya Teelock, *Bitter Sugar: Sugar and Slavery in 19th Century Mauritius* (Moka, Mauritius, 1998); Claude Wanquet and Benoit Jullien, eds., *Révolution française et Océan Indien: prémices, paroxysmes, héritages et déviances* (Paris, 1996); Rakoto, *L'esclavage à Madagascar*; Richard Allen, *Creating a Garden of Sugar: Creoles, Indian Immigrants, and Domestic Capital in Mauritius, 1721–1936* (forthcoming).

By probing diverse experiences across the vast and varied African diaspora, scholars will shed new light on the uniqueness of enslavement, memory, and identity in particular areas. Full appreciation for the rich and varied identities in the African diaspora must be based upon culturally specific investigations of historical memory as manifested in the stories African peoples tell about the past and on the language and cultural logic in which they tell them. Paul Gilroy's concept of a black Atlantic is unsatisfactory in this respect. In his work, Gilroy subordinates transatlantic "communities of interpretation and sentiment" to the cultural logic and languages of Africans in North America and the Caribbean. "I want to develop the suggestion," he writes, "that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective." For Gilroy, however, "vernacular culture" in the black Atlantic is Anglophone, North American, and Caribbean. Yet self-identification as black in Anglophone speech communities is but one thin slice of the African Atlantic (much less the diaspora proper), ringed as it is by a variety of African cultures. The black Atlantic is significantly more complex, multidimensional, and multilingual than Gilroy allows. By mistakenly conflating the Anglophone Americas with the black Atlantic, Gilroy explores only one subset of the many African cultural experiences in the diaspora, virtually ignoring its African and non-Anglophone portions. Gilroy's interest in "mutation, hybridity, and intermixture" works well in examining the cultural interactions within an Anglophone world but is less useful for understanding the whole of the black Atlantic (and notably Africa) with its varied modes of narration and memory.⁵⁹ "Transnational and intercultural" approaches to the black Atlantic must recognize the profound cultural discontinuities that have characterized and continue to characterize cultural diversity in the Atlantic world, despite persistent intercommunication. Slave ships crossing the Atlantic and Indian Oceans linked disparate societies, languages, and cultural worlds; African, European, Middle Eastern, and Asian cultures were never unified, despite intensive intercommunication and integration into a single world economy.

Memorialization of enslavement has proved a powerful means of identity formation for Africans in the Americas.⁶⁰ Among others, Gilroy characterizes how memories of slavery have recently served as a cultural resource for black identity formation. But experiences of enslavement, as in the case of highland Madagascar, are not universal sites for historical memory and identity formation in the diaspora. The relationships between continental African identities and the slave trade are far more complex and contradictory than those between African-American identities and the commerce in human beings, if only because Africans in their homelands were both masters and slaves in large numbers. In highland Madagascar, more than half of all free persons owned slaves in the middle of the nineteenth century. This pattern

⁵⁹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 15, 223. Gilroy centers his narrative on Anglophone (male) writers, scholars, and music makers, such as W.E.B. Dubois, Frederick Douglass, Richard Wright, Martin Delaney, Edward Wilmot Blyden, James Baldwin, Alexander Crummell, and others.

⁶⁰ Note, for example, the standardization of stories about enslavement among 19th-century African Americans as explored in Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 199–214.

was repeated widely, though unevenly, across Africa during the nineteenth century. If experiences and memories of enslavement and racial oppression are key to African identities in the Americas, similar trauma has been purposefully forgotten or differently remembered by many Africans in other parts of the diaspora. Although remembering and commemorating enslavement is characteristic of some Africans, particularly the descendants of slaves, countervailing forces of historical amnesia are particularly robust in many parts of the continent, especially among the descendants of slaveowners.⁶¹ Coming to a unified understanding of what might more properly be called “the African Atlantics” or, in its expanded version, “the African diasporas” will require seriously complicating Gilroy’s black Atlantic and the politics of memory lying behind it. In this sense, the philosophies of the North American Afrocentric movements (which largely reject memorialization of enslavement as a means of identity formation) act as an important intellectual force demonstrating that memorialization of trauma is not universal to the African diaspora, even in its western portions.

But the slave trade and its multiple effects, including experiences of enslavement, forced migration, masterhood, and economic-cultural transformation in host and destination societies do offer powerful lenses through which varied experiences can be appreciated as a whole. The challenge for scholars of African dispersion is, not to generalize from one specific set of African experiences, modes of popular memory, or types of identity formation to the whole of the African diaspora, but to ask descendants of the various African diasporas how they fashion narratives concerning the historical experiences of their ancestors. This approach to a period of profound economic, political, and cultural transformation for many African peoples at home as well as across the seas recognizes the centrality of human bondage to modern diaspora identities. At the same time, it allows for a diversity of remembering and forgetting—of modes of memory—to characterize African cultures and modern identities.

Researching the varied experiences of African slavery via memory, memorialization, and amnesia—through the historical representations of the African diaspora’s diverse peoples—adds a cultural and humanistic component to the often dry and disembodied business of historical reconstruction from contemporary European sources. Unfortunately, historians of the slave trade and slavery in Africa have been narrowing rather than broadening their field of historical evidence and their professional methodologies in recent years. Although some of the earliest studies of the slave trade emerging from the renaissance of African history during the 1960s and 1970s were partially based upon popular and elite African narratives (formalized “oral traditions,” for the most part), most major studies of the slave trade published during the last twenty years are based exclusively or nearly exclusively upon contemporary written documents produced by Europeans.⁶²

⁶¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 219–20; Graeber, *The Disastrous Ordeal*, 67–68, 268–70; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 159–282; Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, ed., *Quand nos pères étaient captifs: récits paysans du Niger* (Paris, 1976); Graeber, “Painful Memories”; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 274–75.

⁶² Studies based upon oral narratives, at least in part, include Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Allen F. Isaacman, *Mozambique: The Africanization of a European Institution: The Zambesi*

Taking historical memory seriously entails moving beyond the comfortable territory of European languages to work earnestly in vernacular languages and to carefully excavate African cultures for traces of the past. It means allowing interpretations and reconstructions of contemporary data to be shaped by historical experience in African narratives, vocabularies, artistic expressions, ritual practices, and embodied sentience (such as spirit possession).⁶³ Following such clues to the African past will require moving away from overly formal definitions of African narratives as “oral tradition,” serviceable as evidence in the same way as the archives.⁶⁴ Rather, where African narratives exist, whether oral or written, they must be considered as memorial evidence, stories with their own histories whose evidence often lies subtly embedded in language, genre, emphasis, and historically developed silences. To access these memories of the past, historians will need to renew attention to “the appearance of historical knowledge in unexpected locations.”⁶⁵

Histories of slaving attentive to memory will move from a focus on markets, prices, organization, demography, and the social and political impact of the slave trade—important themes that scholars have advanced markedly in the last years and, indeed, continue to refine—to transformations in culture and identity.⁶⁶ This sort of paradigm shift has already characterized studies of

Prazos, 1750–1902 (Madison, Wis., 1972); David Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford, 1978); Robert W. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500–1891* (New Haven, Conn., 1981); Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York, 1993); E. J. Alagoa, “The Slave Trade in Niger Delta Oral Tradition and History,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Madison, Wis., 1986), 127–35.

Influential works that largely eschew African narratives include Lovejoy, *Transformations*; Manning, *Slavery and African Life*; Miller, *Way of Death*; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*; Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce*; Law, *The Slave Coast*; Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (Oxford, 1970); Phyllis M. Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast, 1576–1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango* (Oxford, 1972); Joseph E. Inikori, ed., *Forced Migration: The Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies* (London, 1982); David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1987); Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham, N.C., 1992).

⁶³ Most work on historical memory embedded in African cultural practices has been conducted by anthropologists, and Anglophone scholars of Madagascar are prominent among them. See Paul Stoler, *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa* (London, 1995); Michael Lambek, “Taboo as Cultural Practice among Malagasy Speakers,” *Man*, 27 (1992), 245–66; Lambek, “The Sakalava Poiesis of History: Realizing the Past through Spirit Possession in Madagascar,” *American Ethnologist*, 25 (1998), 106–27; Jennifer Cole, “The Work of Memory in Madagascar,” *ibid.*, 610–33; Karen Middleton, “Circumcision, Death, and Strangers,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 27 (1997), 341–73. See also Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), 41, 104.

⁶⁴ See Isaacman, *Mozambique*; Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*; Northrup, *Trade without Rulers*; Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow*.

⁶⁵ Cohen, *The Combing of History*, 112. See also David William Cohen, “The Undefined of Oral Tradition,” *Ethnohistory*, 36 (1989), 9–18.

⁶⁶ For new work in this vein, see Rosalind Shaw, “The Production of Witchcraft / Witchcraft as Production: Memory, Modernity, and the Slave Trade in Sierra Leone,” *American Ethnologist*, 24 (1997), 856–76; Shaw, *The Dangers of Temne Divination: Ritual Memories of the Slave Trade in West Africa* (Chicago, forthcoming); Robert Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1999).

industrialization and its related social and cultural transformations in Europe and is now occurring in a plethora of studies on cultural transformation in the African diaspora of the Americas. As highland Madagascar's confrontation with the external slave trade suggests, African cultural transformations run much broader and deeper than recent studies of the demographic and economic impact of the trade demonstrate. Much work remains to be conducted on the refashioning of African cultures through the actions of slave makers and merchants, adjustments by communities targeted by enslavement, and contributions of slaves to the societies of their capture.

African popular and elite memories that serve distinct purposes in their times and places bring historians closer to how their subjects experienced, considered, and managed the slave trade and its multiple effects on their lives. Because memory is about interpretation as well as retention and elision of data, memories and their absence challenge historians to reconcile their own interpretations of contemporary data with those of Africans over the years. Rather than distorting professional histories of enslavement, the slave trade, and slavery, African narratives will enrich and modify them, enabling scholars to unlock and appreciate the diverse patterns of identity formation in the African diaspora. Most of all, listening closely enough to African memories of trauma and enslavement to identify elisions and silences will assist scholars in understanding the diversity of diaspora experiences, setting the transformation of African identities in the Americas within the wider comparative context of the full African diaspora.