

Religious coexistence, a catalyst for questioning

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ABSTRACT: Ethnic diversity is not only evident in Majungai's socio-cultural context, but also represents a deeply rooted symbol of identity that makes the region a cultural showcase for the island. In this vein, the contributions of internal and external migration, as well as the uniqueness of the Sakalava people, define the variety of local practices. Traditional and exogenous practices coexist. Christianity and Islam, which are very prevalent, are the two exogenous religious communities with many adherents among the inhabitants. Foreign values are fiercely imposed, yet certain religious traditions continue to endure. However, despite the syncretic adaptation conveyed by this religious coexistence, the trend is towards deculturation. This could result in evils flooding the daily lives of the population. It is currently observed that inhabitants are using the power of the imagination to harm society. It has become a tool for seeking personal gain. In this dimension of multiculturalism, the aim of this article is to shed light on the coexistence and religious change visible in this society.

KEYWORDS: Mahajanga, religion, culture, ancestor, globalisation

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I. INTRODUCTION

The city of Mahajanga has not been left behind by the current wave of globalisation, but it has retained some aspects of its ancestral cultural originality. The encounter between the national characteristics of various ethnic groups and new foreign influences gives it its contemporary flavour. Tradition thus merges with modernity. This dualism can be seen in many different ways, but here we will focus on the religious and cultural spheres. Atheism is not a fiction; it is a belief without faith held by non-believers, individuals who do not believe in God or other deities. Nevertheless, the majority of the Earth's population accepts the existence of God and other parophysical forces that can interact with human life. This latter perception essentially constitutes the foundation of the civilisation of the peoples of the ancient and contemporary world: the imagination. Mahajanga is a cultural showcase for Madagascar, linking the past, present and future through the world of the imagination. This mythical perception conveys a lively and dynamic expression of the imagination, which manifests itself in concrete and symbolic forms, thus enriching the culture. The coexistence of religions in Mahajanga is the result of lasting interactions between local beliefs and foreign influences. In general, the religious trilogy refers to the coexistence of Christianity, Islam and traditional practices.

This work aims to highlight that traditional religion has played a significant role in ensuring harmony within Malagasy societies. The current religious coexistence, however, raises many questions.

As everywhere else in the world, every religious community, whether endogenous or exogenous, teaches good manners and invokes divine blessings for collective well-being and social harmony. However, the socio-economic and religious realities of the city can no longer hide its secrets; they are open to interpretation. To what extent can religions be seen as a lever for responding to the socio-economic and spiritual needs of individuals in a society inundated with multifaceted crises? Are traditional religions capable of withstanding contemporary challenges, or do they risk becoming triggers of divergence in the face of societal change?

Through his ideas, Pierre RANDRIANARISOA has argued that Madagascans hold Zanahary (God) and Razana (Ancestors) in high regard and that they revere and honour them and speak of them only with respect⁽¹⁾. Today, a shift has taken place, and several forms of desecration can be observed. Inspired by the idea of Modjahid DOMINJOU, who said that illness and death before old age are abnormal occurrences resulting from evil influences such as the discontent of ancestors and the failure to observe the 'Fady'⁽²⁾ (prohibitions), we venture to hypothesise that the socio-economic and health problems that are currently worsening could stem from the same source. Despite the syncretic adaptation of ancestral customs in terms of religion and related practices, over time, the spread of exogenous practices would lead to the stifling of local identities.

To highlight the challenges posed by this religious pluralism and to gain insight into the future of local religious practice, this study takes a comparative approach through a religious trilogy in the city of Mahajanga.

1- Persistent traditional beliefs:

Although Mahajanga has been influenced by globalisation and Westernisation, ancestral beliefs still persist. Reality and dreams are the subject of collective and individual worship, reflecting local practices from ancient times. Traditional beliefs are often passed down from generation to generation. They are integrated into family rituals, daily customs and local festivals. They continue to fuel social, spiritual and cultural needs. However, in Mahajanga, resistance to cultural erosion does not apply to all practices.

1-1 Circumcision:

It was probably the Jews who arrived in Madagascar in ancient times who introduced it. This is especially true when we analyse the simplicity of Betsimisaraka circumcision, which bears a strong resemblance to the Jewish circumcision mentioned in the Bible concerning the circumcision of Moses' eldest son by Zipporah using a type of sharp stone knife called a *fiharatra*⁽³⁾.

In the past, anaesthesia did not yet exist, so communities adapted to natural conditions to perform the operation. In general, circumcision was performed during the cool season, a favourable period for healing the wound. To ease the pain, the operation was carried out at dawn, ideally before 5 a.m., and the boy was suddenly submerged in a river before the foreskin was removed. Part of this process is still practised today.

In Mahajanga, some families practise circumcision in a 'neo-traditional' way. That is to say, they maintain the traditional spirit of the practice, but for hygiene reasons, they perform American (modern) circumcision. The reason for practising circumcision is far from being a question of childbirth, as some people assumed, because men can father children without being circumcised. Most hot countries perform circumcision, as high temperatures can cause health problems in uncircumcised male children. From a philosophical and moral point of view, circumcision is closely linked to the imagination. It is a rite of passage that allows a young boy to attain a new social status. Without circumcision, a male is not yet a human being, let alone a boy or a man, despite his physical appearance as indicated by his sex. He does not enjoy the privileges that individuals with human status should enjoy. Jacques Philipe ROMBAKA corroborates that circumcision is, in a way, a baptism, a rebirth; he says that:

" (...) An uncircumcised child is not considered to be human, but rather 'ahitra'⁽⁴⁾ or 'ranon-draha'⁽⁵⁾. If he is alive, he is not given 'fen'akoho'⁽⁶⁾ (chicken thigh); if he dies, he is not buried in the family tomb and no one mourns for him"⁽⁷⁾.

The new birth through Christian baptism did not prevent some Christians in the south-east, living in the city of Mahajanga, from forbidding the entry of an uncircumcised body into their churches or from allowing it to benefit from a mass in the house. This helps us to understand how important it is to be filled with joy on this occasion. It is the first day for the animal to attain its human status and regain its masculine identity, and therefore a memorable moment granting the child his place in the collective tomb when the day comes.

1-2 Exhumation:

One of the most widely practised rites in Madagascar, exhumation, still survives. For Malagasy people, who hold their ancestors in high regard, although the body of a deceased person rests in the grave, their spirit remains alive and watches over them. Thus, everything they undertake must have their approval and, above all, their blessing. Access to this sphere of the ancestors is conditional. According to tradition, the practice of exhumation is one of the criteria that allows the soul of the deceased to find the gateway. Exhumation is also an opportunity to strengthen the 'fihavavana'⁽⁸⁾, as cohabitants, all blood relatives or those with family ties are invited to attend.

1-3 'Joro' and 'Fitampoha':

Despite interpretations that contradict and diverge from ancestral Malagasy customs, 'Joro'⁽⁹⁾ remains uncompromising and continues to convey the cultural uniqueness of Madagascar. During 'Joro', believers use one-sided verbal expressions in the void to communicate with God, ancestors and other subordinate spiritual entities. Facing east, the ritual often begins with a cry to attract the attention of the recipients. Unusual words are then carefully pronounced, accompanied by bodily gestures invoking the recipients one by one. Usually, a white or transparent flat plate containing water and green leaves is required.

The bathing of royal relics is a cultural event practised in many regions of Madagascar, but in Mahajanga it has taken on a remarkable scale. Like a sacred light, this local culture of Mahajanga has a far-reaching influence that extends beyond Madagascar. 'The ceremonies that take place in Mahajanga in July (Alakarabo) are typical ceremonies. They are the same in all the Doany, but they are less lavish'⁽¹⁰⁾, says Louis MOLET. This bridge between faith and tradition arouses the interest of local and foreign believers as well as non-believers. There are various reasons for the large turnout. Devout believers come to honour their royal ancestors, as it is an important time for them to ask for blessings, protection, health and prosperity. It is therefore an act of piety and respect for

Malagasy cultural traditions. For the Sakalava, particularly the Sakalava of Boeny, it is a demonstration of their attachment to their identity, allowing them to reconnect with their roots, pass on ancestral values and revive royal history. The main object of worship is to maintain the ‘fitampoha’⁽¹¹⁾, the bath of royal relics or ‘Dady’⁽¹²⁾.

Being a unique and mysterious practice, Fanompoabe piques people's curiosity. This cultural commemoration is no longer limited to the practice of ancestral traditions; it also stimulates contemporary socio-economic and even political events. Non-believers in ancestral spirits, including foreigners, participate en masse to discover a living, spectacular and meaningful tradition. Students and researchers wishing to expand their knowledge of culture were quick to take advantage of these special days of celebration. To mark their visibility, politicians honour the event. As for traders, these moments are very conducive to their activities. They are attracted by the abundance of participants. Around ‘Doany’⁽¹³⁾, lively stalls have been set up to meet the immediate needs of the crowd.

Some have come just to have fun and let loose, as the atmosphere is electric. It is punctuated by various performances featuring traditional and modern acts. This event is also an opportunity for some singles to socialise and find a partner. During ‘Fanompoabe’, the area around ‘Doany’ is a strategic location for sex workers wishing to maximise their professional opportunities.

II. Local cultural identity in decline:

Despite resistance from the local culture, the current trend is toward deculturation.

2-1-Imposition of foreign values:

Colonization, currently neocolonialism, social networks, and the media, which are factors of globalization, are the main vectors for the spread of Western culture. Since the second half of the 19th century, the penetration of colonization in Madagascar has inevitably destroyed ancestral Malagasy practices. The indigenous people have ended up forgetting and even hating their true cultural identity. Since the collapse of socialism in 1991, capitalism has openly gained ground on a global scale. This “liberal ideology,” once called “imperialism” by pro-Soviet forces, has promoted globalization. Although it has many positive aspects, this globalization also has some negative effects. The clash of civilizations affecting Third World countries is also impacting Mahajanga. Local cultures are not only limited in terms of propagation; they are also defenceless and can only suffer. Westerners have become the benchmark, and those who do not follow their traditions are considered uncivilized.

In Mahajanga, as in all other regions of Madagascar, deculturation is reflected in the gradual weakening of traditional practices. Its image is displayed everywhere.

One of the ancestral customs that characterizes Sakalava territories, “tromba” in the sense of spirit (common language) is considered a member of the family despite its invisible nature. According to belief, it lives with the living and helps overcome many socio-economic difficulties. In the past, the practice was exercised freely and without fear. But today, only a minority of the population has the courage to publicly maintain this cult. In schools, the children of the “saha” suffer humiliation and moral violence from their classmates and even teachers. The “saha” feel excluded from society. Many men looking for a wife (marital relationship) inquire deeply about this. Even if they accept certain ancestral customs, they are repulsed by women who harbor “tromba.” As a result, parents strongly advise their children not to inherit this practice. Because that could be an obstacle for the future.

In ancient times, the royal family received special consideration through verbal expressions and body language. Today, these attitudes of consideration are rarely seen. Only the servants of the royal family have managed to preserve these customs. Furthermore, in “Doany,” the cultural and symbolic heart of Mahajanga, where buildings should traditionally be made of plant materials, it would not be a good sign to see stones and industrial materials.

Formally, as is the case throughout the island, there are days and times in Mahajanga when burials are not permitted. Today, burials no longer take these “Fady” into account, but rather other socio-economic contexts, and burials may take place on prohibited days and at prohibited times.

During life, we can go wherever the storms of life take us, but when death comes, it is of utmost importance to return to the “Fasandrazana”⁽¹⁴⁾ (collective burial place), that is, to “mody” (return). This belief is the most significant aspect of “Fihavavana” and ‘Firazanana’⁽¹⁵⁾. In the event that the body of the deceased cannot be found, the family erects the “tsangambato”⁽¹⁶⁾, a stone raised to welcome the soul among the groups. Some family members who have decided to depart from “Fasanadrazana,” often forced by socio-economic and professional circumstances, must carry out meticulous customs assisted by elders who specialize in “joro.” All this shows that “very fady”⁽¹⁷⁾ is very painful for the Malagasy, because it is, in a way, death twice over, as they say. But nowadays, followers of introduced religions hardly consider this value.

2-2 Religious tension:

Although coexistence has existed for a very long time, the cultural practices freely exercised in Mahajanga present discrepancies. Nevertheless, even if rivalry is strong, it generally remains cold and rarely degenerates into open violence as in many regions of the world.

It manifests itself first and foremost through the cultural and religious triangle of the city of Mahajanga: Christianity, Islam, and ancestral practices. During certain elections or periods of national tension, religion can be exploited to mobilize part of the population or create divisions. Religious favoritism is sometimes felt during job offers and service provision. The relevant services grant many privileges to applicants from the same religious community. This attitude, as in politics, similarly affects educational institutions.

Evangelicals frequently undertake conversion efforts that could affect the Muslim community. Some Muslims in Mahajanga treat these actions as spiritual aggression and consider Evangelicals, in particular, to be ungodly new doctrines. On the other hand, Christians perceive Muslims as being communitarian. Sometimes, marriages between believers from different communities are the subject of heated debate. The people perceive this coexistence as religious competition. This climate of religious discord affects the protectors of Malagasy tradition on both sides. Both Muslims and Christians condemn ancestral Malagasy practices. Evangelical churches prohibit ancestral practices and order their followers to reject them and sometimes to break ties with family members who engage in these customs. Generational conflicts are therefore very difficult to resolve and can lead to exclusion and the concept of “fanitofalafa”⁽¹⁸⁾.

In Mahajanga, there may also be intra-religious fragmentation. Within the Christian community, there are diverse groups whose numbers are growing daily. These groups have different views on faith, liturgy, and other behaviors, both physical and non-physical, related to the practice of their religion. As a result, mutual judgments are very strong.

What's more, the “coastal-highland” context has long weakened the Malagasy “fihavanana.” Currently, religious affiliation may be linked to ethnic or regional affiliation, which further complicates relations between Christian communities.

Within the Islamic community, places of worship may be specified according to the socioeconomic status and origin of worshippers. Differences appear in religious practices between the rich and the poor, with the rich receiving preferential treatment. This reality is seen as a kind of divide within the Muslim community, which runs counter to the Islamic ideal of equality before God. Added to this is the geographical and historical context relating to origin. Muslim “Karany” (residents of Indian origin), for example, who are economically prosperous, are not particularly open to others. They build places of worship that are not frequented by large numbers of followers of Islam.

2-3. Religious syncretism:

Many Malagasy people feel that they combine exogenous religions with endogenous ones. The majority of the population of Mahajanga identify as Christian or Muslim, but many of them continue to practice or respect certain traditional beliefs. For some people, Christianity does not exclude the practice of “joro.” The voice of society in Madagascar says: “Zanahary iray ihany, mamosavy no tsy azo atao” (God is one, only witchcraft is forbidden)⁽¹⁹⁾.

From pregnancy to birth, many Christians entrust this difficult time to “Razana” and maintain traditional rituals and “Fady.” They do not neglect the rites and magical requirements for the baby or the mother. Infertility robs a woman of happiness and the chance to find a husband. However, childbirth is a happy but difficult time, like carrying a bag of gold across water infested with crocodiles. Louis MOLET recounts the complexity of this passage, saying that:

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So, out of fear of the narrowness of this passage and the desire to see their child safe and sound, parents invoke supernatural forces that they hope will watch over them and act invisibly on their behalf. Human strength and effort are not enough to build homes; one must entrust one's wishes to the imagination. To do this, “Zanahary” (God), Jesus, and “Razana” are words that are frequently used together to implore the fulfillment of desires. To reinforce their pleas, the owners of the building attend mass and sometimes fast. However, before digging the ground as much as for the inauguration, rituals describing the consideration of “Razana” and tradition are not forgotten. Nowadays, in Mahajanga, mixed marriages between followers of monotheism and animists are a reality, despite the refusal of union imposed by some communities.

During times of mourning, gospel songs are heard, but family discussions about decisions concerning the deceased often stem from ideas conveyed by “Firazanana.” Words of comfort drawn from biblical verses and local proverbs are heard. The collective wake is indeed important for providing moral and financial support to the bereaved family, even if it is beginning to lose its meaning. Louis Molet affirms:

"The mourning that strikes an individual or their family is the subject of a ritual intended to comfort the survivors. It is normal to follow it scrupulously, both in terms of what one must give and what one receives. Failure to comply would result in accusations of clandestine burial."⁽²¹⁾ At funerals, customs corresponding to astronomical and geographical connotations, as well as the "Joro," are respected by many Christians. In cemeteries, membership of the Christian community is symbolized by a raised cross. However, on some graves where crosses are found, various objects (plates, spoons, shoes, money, etc.) are placed, indicating the preservation of ancestral traditions. All Souls' Day (November 2) is currently celebrated together with people of other religions.

In the past, the "sobahia" was forbidden to the people and reserved for the royal family. It symbolized the prestige of great power. "Sobahia" is a high-quality garment made using very refined craft techniques. Its aesthetic appeal made it a symbol of high social status, reserved for those who represented supreme authority. As a result, it took on a sacred character, distinguishing the sovereign from the people. The only occasion on which ordinary individuals were allowed to wear this garment was during the "tromba"⁽²²⁾ ritual, when the spirits of deceased sovereigns possessed the "saha"⁽²³⁾ or mediums. Nowadays, this type of garment is no longer reserved for the "Doany" or the royal family, but has found its way into churches and mosques. It has now become a stylish trend in contemporary fashion.

When faced with health problems, Christians consult traditional healers, while animists seek help from Christians and Muslims. Patients seeking healing may also combine different approaches, such as Christian, Islamic, and traditional consultations. This phenomenon involves merging practices from different beliefs and spiritual systems to meet holistic healing needs, both physical (therapeutic) and spiritual. For example, this process can be seen in the treatment of spiritual illnesses.

A very common occurrence, religious conformism mainly affects urban areas in Madagascar, and Mahajanga is no exception. Globalization tends to change mentalities and perceptions of society. This is perceived as a great pressure and forces some people to unintentionally deviate from their religion without completely abandoning their faith. Consequently, in order to avoid being frowned upon and judged by the transformed society, these people have joined Christian communities even though their faith is still oriented towards ancestral customs. In the city, this divergence between faith and cultural practices particularly affects people who hold a special position and belong to an important social class. In order to remain true to their faith despite their public appearance, they esoterically practice ancestral customs.

III. The imaginary, a double-edged sword:

Most of the world's population hopes for the intervention of superhuman forces to bring harmony to their society. They await the favorable touch of "Zanahary" and "Razana" as well as other forces capable of intervening beyond human capacity. However, the actions of these forces are not necessarily beneficial to all inhabitants.

3-1. "Ody fitia" and "Ambalavelona":

In many cases, love is not reciprocated. It can happen that you fall in love with someone who does not feel the same way about you. Then, driven by the power of love, the idea arises to compel the target in a peaceful way using "ody fitia"⁽²⁴⁾. "Ody vehivavy" is the spell that men use to get women who reject them. Through the power of black magic, the foolish women unwittingly approve of a deep love for the man. On the other hand, "ody lahy" is the spell that women use to seduce men who are not interested in them. A person engulfed and bewildered by this spell usually suffers torture and all forms of violence (physical, moral, economic, etc.). This is because, having become aware of the witchcraft, the beneficiary abuses the situation.

"Ambalavelona" or "njarinintsy"⁽²⁵⁾, depending on the dialect, is currently posing a major challenge for spiritual healers. In Mahajanga, this curse is very much felt. Schools are the most affected. Surveys conducted in schools have shown that uncontrolled initiation into love is most often behind this disturbing phenomenon. Girls account for a high proportion of victims, with eleven (11) out of thirteen (13) cases observed in schools in the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years, or 84.6% being girls. The disease rarely affects girls under the age of 12; it is seen in students entering adolescence, middle schoolers and mainly high schoolers. However, this affliction is not very common among university students. For adults, other explanations may apply.

3-2. Marriage between the dead and the living

The spirit of the deceased man (royal family) enters, for example, a woman whom he imposes as his "saha." To be known and accepted, his expressions translate into a succession of socio-health and economic problems. These daily complications force the chosen woman to consult diviners or spirit healers, who explain the mystery to her. Once the presence of the spirit (tromba) is confirmed, it dictates all the rules of cohabitation during incarnation, such as dietary restrictions, the obligation to purchase clothing and other items, forbidden days, etc., which are often unusual and difficult to bear. However, this is a commitment between the chosen woman and her actual husband. The spirit now confirms that he is the invisible but present husband of the woman, despite the existence of a real husband for brides (legal or according to traditional custom). The real husband must accept the co-marriage with the spirit.

But in reality, as a man from an important family who still wants to exercise his superiority, his mind cannot tolerate co-marriage and he harbors jealousy. With his superhuman abilities, he creates difficulties in order to bring about separation. In addition, the “saha” are partially “desocialized.” They are deprived of many acts of social fraternity. During mourning, they cannot enter the house where the body is laid out or eat the mourning meal. Whereas true Malagasy society requires that all those attending the mourning should consume the meals prepared. Even watching over or caring for sick family members is forbidden to the “saha.” It has also been observed that some spirits, whether male or female, had bad habits or associations during their lifetime. The “saha” tend to unintentionally imitate these behaviours, such as drug use, prostitution, alcoholism, etc., thereby causing marital discord.

3-3. The flipped side of exogenous religions:

As with the aforementioned harmful ancestral spiritual practices, occultism has penetrated the Islamic context. According to Islamic teachings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, the use of black magic to cause harm to others is prohibited. However, some people do not necessarily follow Islamic principles and engage in occult practices. Many people hide behind Christianity to manipulate others and carry out evil deeds. Misguided believers have become instruments of evil. They harm society without realizing it by defending injustices, despising others, and supporting abuse.

IV. CONCLUSION

In short, imagination is at the root of religious coexistence between Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs in Mahajanga. Some ancestral cultural practices still remain, and Mahajanga regularly hosts a succession of cultural events. However, changes in the international context suggest that, over time, ancestral customs have taken on new characteristics that no longer reflect any traditional aspects that mark the local originality. Globalization has become an enemy of traditions in developing countries. Religious syncretism is only a transitional form of adaptation leading to deculturation. The fundamental principles of these religions should fill the city with harmony, peace, and prosperity. For religious ideologies are references for good deeds. Apart from ancestral religious practices, Christianity with its sub-communities and Islam are developing extraordinarily. However, the realities describe critical situations. Poverty is becoming more radical, insecurity reigns, and inhuman behaviour is spreading. He has thus come to believe that in the future, religious coexistence will be the subject of open civil war. It could become a weapon to inflame social unrest. In the past, entrusting one's life to the supernatural world was a solution for a better everyday life, but today we can no longer rely on the imaginary to console socio-economic situations. God and ancestors, who have turned their backs on us, will have severed their connection with the living world. Only the wrath of God and “helo-drazana” (the wrath of the ancestors) remains, merging and invading society. Malicious spirits take advantage of the situation to entrench evil. No rule or law has yet been found to be effective in guaranteeing social peace. Indeed, it would not be surprising if difficulties were to “escalate” and worsen, unless radical action is taken.

NOTES

- (1) See Pierre RANDRIANARISOA, 1967, p.22.
- (2) See Modjahid DOMINJOUUD, 1959, p.160.
- (3) Régis RAJEMISA –Raolison: *Fomba amam-pahendrena malagasy* (Customs and wisdom of the Malagasy ancestors) Librairie Mixte, Antananarivo, 1978, pp.20- 21
- (4) Ahitra: weeds, used to describe something that has no value in society and can easily be thrown away without regret.
- (5) Ranon-draha: water from something here to express uselessness.
- (6) Fen'akoho: chicken thigh offered to children to show them great affection.
- (7) Jacques Philipe Rombaka: *Fomban-drazana antemoro*, (Ancestral customs of the Antemoro), Ambozontany, Fianarantsoa, 1970, p.55
- (8) Fihavanana: refers to the state of society that reflects solidarity, mutual aid, and all forms of kindness associated with Malagasy tradition.
- (9) Joro: human expression addressed first to Zanahary, the creator god, then to ancestors and other imaginary forces likely to interact with human life to implore the fulfillment of wishes.
- (10) Louis Molet: *Le bain royal à Madagascar* (The Royal Bath in Madagascar), Lutheran Printing House – Antsahamanitra Tananarive, Madagascar, December 1956, p.32
- (11) Fitampoha: the act of washing or cleaning the relics of the four deceased kings who are objects of veneration.
- (12) The dady: the relics consist of hair, nails, teeth, a cervical vertebra, and phalanges taken from the skeletons of Andriamisara and his three successors, known collectively as “Andriamisara efa-dahy,” and preserved in bull horns tied together. See Louis Molet: *Le bain royal à Madagascar, l'imprimerie luthérienne – Antsahamanitra Tananarive, Madagascar*, December 1956.

(13) Doany: a sanctuary where rites of veneration of the deceased kings are performed and blessings are sought from their spirits. It may contain relics.

(14) Fasandrazana: collective burial place for those who share the same ancestral link.

(15) Firazanana: a bloodline connecting ancestors (ancestors, grandparents, etc.) to descendants (current and future generations) that is sacred and indelible.

(16) Tsangambato: a stone raised to symbolize the spiritual presence of a deceased person whose body cannot be found.

(17) Very faty: describes the situation of a person whose body could not be placed in the collective or ancestral burial site upon their death.

(18) Fanitofalafala: refers to an act between two (2) or more people sharing the same kinship or ancestral bond to swear to break or sever that bond.

(19) Although religious beliefs vary, proponents of syncretism argue that the only true prohibition according to God is to harm others. Combining different approaches to healing does not constitute a transgression.

(20) Louis Molet: *La conception malgache du monde du surnaturel et de l'homme en Imerina* (The Malagasy conception of the supernatural world and man in Imerina), L'Harmattan, volume 2, Paris, 1979, p.35

(21) See Louis Molet, 1979

(22) Tromba: possession rituals during which the spirits of deceased kings and royal descendants communicate with the living. In everyday language, it refers to the spirit.

(23) Saha: a person chosen by the royal spirit to manifest its reappearance after death.

(24) Ody fitia: a kind of sorcery used to have a relationship with a partner with their consent but without their natural will.

(25) Amblavelona or njarinintsy: depending on the dialect, this refers to the evil actions of spirits on a person, doubling the strength of the possessed during possession to inflict physical torture.

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