

# Rituals and coutumes in the European slave trade on Madagascar in the 17th and 18th centuries

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In this text, we will retrace the commercial interactions linked to the slave trade between Europeans and Malagasy in the 17th and 18th centuries. As is often the case, this commerce was much more than a simple exchange of products, it can be termed a ritual, created by Malagasy sovereigns to which the Dutch and French merchants had to adhere. This ranged from presenting courtesy gifts up to the delivery of oral and written veneration, and represented an important confirmation of power. The monarch often kept the upper hand over the Europeans who found themselves on hostile terrain, though the latter were not completely stripped of power as they effectively controlled the volume of this external commerce.

*Key words:* slave trade, Indian Ocean World, local sovereignty, history of Madagascar, European companies

In July 1732, the VOC<sup>1</sup> ship *Binnenwijzend* arrived in the bay of Boeny on the Northwest coast of Madagascar. Senior merchant Jan Munnink is sent ashore to visit the King's residence, Marovoay, which lies several day's march inland, to pay homage to the Sakalava sovereign and to obtain a trading license:

*"I approached the King, and after having given a compliment, His Majesty reached out his hand on which I pressed three times my lips. I said to him that we have come from His Highness of Batavia, searching to revive the old friendship and commerce, which was done with the previous kings of Boina. We also requested His Majesty for a license in order to purchase captives, to be exchanged against our merchandise. The King assured us to be pleased with our arrival, and he promised to give us a trading license as he was desirous to live in friendship with the Dutch (NA, VOC 11257)."*

In this paper we will focus on the interactions between the European merchants and the Malagasy sovereigns and the difficulties that had to be overcome in the slave trade. With a combination of well-known and unedited French and Dutch sources we will show that commerce with Madagascar, especially the slave trade, was of major importance for

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviation of *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or Dutch East India Company. This was a Dutch commercial organization with the monopoly on trade in the Indian Ocean Region between 1602 and 1799.

both parties. What was considered a simple exchange of products for Europeans, vital to obtain a labor force for their Indian Ocean possessions, represented for the Malagasy the basis of their political and economic power, both materially and ideologically. And to ensure successful commerce, Europeans needed to follow and respect the proceeding—that might take the form of paying homage to the Malagasy sovereign and even extend to accepting bad merchandise in order to smooth trading relations. In the first part of this paper, we will explain the context of the European slave trade in Madagascar during this period, especially the necessity for the Dutch and the French to engage in this trade. In the second part, we will discuss the dynamics of this trade, how the commercial relationships between Europeans and Malagasy were created and evolved over time. To that end we will especially focus on the proceedings that had to be followed.

### **Eighteenth century Indian Ocean region**

Long before the arrival of Europeans in the Western Indian Ocean region, the Island of Madagascar had been one of the main slaving reservoirs for Arab, Indian and Swahili merchants (T. Vernet 2009: 39-41). They traded their slaves on the Northwestern Coast, mostly from the Boeny Bay and Bombetoka Bay, perhaps as early as the tenth century onwards. The Dutch, who arrived in the Indian Ocean at the end of the sixteenth century, started to settle on the island of Mauritius in 1638 and especially at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. Both territories were considered supply stations for ships sailing from and to India and Insulinidia that were at the heart of their commercial activities (N. Worden, 1985: 19-21). Similarly, the French, who arrived somewhat later in the Indian Ocean region, chose to settle on nearby Bourbon Island (now La Réunion) in 1648 and later on Mauritius (renamed Île de France) in 1715. These islands also served as supply stations for their ships going to the Indian subcontinent (M. Vaughan, 2005: 23).



Figure 1: Map of the Indian Ocean World

These territories, mere stopping-off points for passing Indiamen, were considered of secondary importance to the commercial empires of the Dutch and the French. Nonetheless, in order to produce enough food for passing ships, these regions needed an important labor force to increase the agricultural output (J.C. Armstrong & Worden, 1989: 110-112; M. Vaughan, 2005: 24-26). And while the Dutch at Cape Colony remained engaged in wheat and wine agriculture, the French colonists on the Mascarene Islands shifted their attention to commercially more interesting tropical agriculture such as coffee, sugar and indigo. With the absence of a sizable European labor force and the impossibility of obtaining free labor from the Indian peninsula, Madagascar as slave reservoir became a rather natural choice, as it already served African and Asian traders and due to its proximity to the destinations (J.-M. Filliot, 1973: 113-115; J.C. Armstrong, 1983: 214-216).

### Madagascar's role

The Island of Madagascar, at this point, was divided in multiple independent communities that had more or less powerful chieftains. As early as the middle of the seventeenth century, at the beginning of the European slave trade, fire arms were introduced in Madagascar that gave certain coastal communities superior firepower over their neighbors. Consequently, these groups were able to expand their territories through violence (J.C. Armstrong, 1983: 220-221). While every community around a commercially active port was somehow influenced by external trade, the most important of those communities during first half of the eighteenth century were the Sakalava of Boina and the Betsimisaraka. Other ports, such as Fort Dauphin and St. Augustine Bay, remained in the hands of weaker chieftains who failed to gain pre-eminence over their neighbors.



Figure 2: Map of Madagascar

In this paper we will distinguish between the community occupying the Northwestern slaving ports and the other coastal ports. The former, called the Sakalava of Boina, was a junior branch or the Sakalava of Menabe who conquered Boeny Bay and Bombetoka Bay at the end of the 1680s (P. Kneitz, 2014: 97-100). They installed the first centralized Malagasy kingdom which remained firmly in place until the end of the 18th century while expanding the external commerce that had existed for centuries (J. Lombard, 1988: 46-48; S. Ellis, 2009: 419-420). The ways of conducting trading are much more undisturbed than elsewhere. And most of the sources we possess concern these communities because an important part of the Dutch and French slave trade during this period was conducted from this region.

Other regions where regular external trade was conducted include the Northeastern coast between Antongil Bay and Tamatave, Fort Dauphin, St. Augustine Bay and Morondava. These ports had only recently been opened to the European slave trade and as a consequence, trade was operated quite irregularly. We should, however, note that differences existed in place and time, the most notable being the creation of the Betsimisaraka community somewhere in the 1720s, who managed to control most of the trade on the Northeastern coast of Madagascar, by conquering of the slaving ports of Foulpointe and Île Sainte Marie. Yet, the trading ritual remained rather simple, in comparison to that of Sakalava of Boina, and due to continuous civil war, their power was also reduced significantly from the 1750s onwards (R. Cabanes, 1982: 174-177).

### **The European slave trade on Madagascar**

Slave trade in the Indian Ocean has not been as thoroughly researched as its Atlantic counterpart. For the Atlantic slave trade an online database has been created that gives details about nearly all European slaving expeditions that were conducted from the fifteenth till the nineteenth century (<http://slavevoyages.org>). Concerning the Indian Ocean region, however, data remain fragmented, despite the recent publication of Richard Allen's work, as we even lack the most basic knowledge concerning the number of ships that traded on the Island (R.B. Allen, 2015). Here, I focus on the Dutch and the French, because they are the European slave traders that had the largest presence on Madagascar and who have left us important archival material. To give an impression of the importance of this commerce, I will present some figures based on personal archival research. Between 1641 and 1786 the Dutch organized more than 70 expeditions taking nearly 7,000 slaves, the lion's share of which were taken from the Northwestern coast to Cape Colony.<sup>2</sup> The French, on the other hand, took at least 25,000 slaves on more than 1,400 expeditions between 1718 and 1810, most of which were traded on the Northeastern coast to the French Mascarenes. The number of slaves for the Dutch is fairly accurate, thanks to the enormous amount of archives that the VOC left us. Concerning, the French, however, we lack sufficient data to make accurate estimates, but the number of slaves traded is likely to have been three to seven times higher.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> James Armstrong only talks about 33 slaving expeditions: J.C. Armstrong, 1983, 227.

<sup>3</sup> In comparison, Richard Allen, estimates that 365 slaving voyages has been conducted at Madagascar to the

## **What makes trade with Madagascar different from the rest of the Indian Ocean region?**

The most important European trade routes went to India and Insulinidia, where spices and textiles were traded. Slaves were also a commodity as Europeans, especially the Dutch, expanded already existing trade routes, taking captives from these regions to important commercial *comptoirs* as Batavia and Colombo (M. Vink, 2003: 148). Madagascar was thus part of the economic periphery of the Indian Ocean World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The irregularity of this trade, sometimes the Dutch would not set foot on Madagascar for up to ten consecutive years, explains the absence of permanent European factories.<sup>4</sup> The Dutch, for example, while possessing multiple strong outposts in the rest of the Indian Ocean region, did not find the commerce with Madagascar important enough to create a trading post on the Island (E.M. Jacobs, 2000: 12-13). On the Western Coast of Africa, however, the regular and commercially important slave trade was directed by permanent strongholds. These had to protect their interests in creating a regular flow of captives to their New World possessions. On Madagascar, the absence of Europeans attracted pirates who between 1680 and 1720 found in St. Maria's Island the perfect hiding spot (A. Bialuschewski, 2005: p. 407-408).

Also, the Europeans had to face, at least in one part of the Big Island, some fierce competition from African and Asian traders, which was absent in West Africa. While captives were effectively the most important item sought, the trade was much more diverse on Madagascar. The English, lacking a supply station in the Indian Ocean, used St. Augustine bay to obtain salted beef and rice (J.C. Armstrong, 1983, 217-218). The French, on the other side of the Island, obtained slaves to work on the plantation economy of the Mascarenes, The absence of a solid food source for an ever growing servile population, meant that the French had to import significant amounts of rice and cattle, especially during times of war.

These ships trading on the Big Island often carried a mixed cargo of slaves, rice and cattle (J.-M. Filliot, 1973: 124). All these products were obtained in exchange for firearms, ammunition, Indian textiles, alcohol as well as silver coin (J.-M. Filliot, 1973: 81-82). This is another example of the proximity to important commercial systems like the Indian subcontinent and the experience that the Malagasy have in trading with Asian merchants.

### **Early trade on Madagascar**

When the Europeans first arrived at Madagascar, they were only interested in obtaining supplies for passing ships. This first form of commerce was conducted by bartering for food using goods (W. Lodewijksz, 1915: 17-20). This often involved a hostage exchange system that assured that commerce was conducted without any incidents in peripheral ports like St. Augustine Bay, Fort Dauphin and Antongil Bay. The notable ex-

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Mascarene Islands: R.B. Allen, 2015: 68-69.

4 For example: between 1719 and 1732, no Dutch ship traded slaves on Madagascar.

ception was the Northwestern coast of Madagascar being the only place where external commerce was conducted for centuries (S.F. Sanchez, 2013: 41 & 53). The hostage system continued until the second half of the seventeenth century, when trade became more and more regular in other regions as the Dutch and the English, and later the French, started to search for slaves (NA, VOC 3998). The hostage system was thus exchanged for a collection of rituals that can best be described as a ceremony of arrival. First identified in the Northwest Coast of the Island, it likely spread to other regions. As seen in the anecdote at the beginning of this paper, these rituals were very important to the Malagasy sovereigns and they could be different according to the region visited, but some applied to all of Madagascar. Most of the information we possess are from the Dutch VOC merchants visiting Boeny Bay and Bombetoka Bay, especially from the 1680s onwards when the Sakalava installed themselves there, or from French ships arriving on the East Coast in the mid-eighteenth century. We will first focus on some general guidelines that had to be followed in all regions where traded was effected.

### **Ceremony of arrival**

When arriving in a commercially active port on Madagascar, even before setting foot on land, the European ships first had to fire a cannon shot to make their presence known. In 1667 in Antongil Bay, for example, the Dutch ship *Westwout* shot its canon to attract canoes and start trading, the same is done in St. Augustine Bay by the French (NA, VOC 4002). This sign of arrival seems to have been rather universal, because even when passing in the commercially remote region of Nosy Be, the French ship *Élisabeth* fires her cannon in 1742 and attracts the attention of local fishermen who are not afraid to come aboard this vessel (AN, MAR, 4JJ/74). The use of canon in the ceremony of arrival was however more complex than simple arrival shots. Very few of the Malagasy sovereigns lived directly on the coastline, but rather in a village inland. They had to be informed of the arrival of a ship, before they decided to come to the shore. And when they finally arrived in the slave trading port, often after several days' march, they were usually honored with multiple cannon shots. In 1737, the officers of the French ship *Duc d'Anjou*, trading in Fort Dauphin, explain:

*"About one o'clock in the afternoon, we fired three canons shots, I think more by politics than to respect to Messieurs nègres who appeared however to express satisfaction with our arrival. (AN, MAR, 4JJ/76)".*

This mark of honor is repeated when the King is invited aboard the European ship, which is normal procedure. The same ship *Duc d'Anjou* fires three cannon shots when the leader of the Betsimisaraka community, Ratsimilaho, comes aboard to dine with the captain, and three other shots are fired when he disembarks for Foulpointe (AN, MAR, 4JJ/76). In 1762, a certain Salima, who is identified as a 'queen' of Bombetoka, indicated to the officers of the *Meermin*, that she feels offended that she did not received cannon shots upon her arrival (NA, VOC 4229). The origin of the cannon shot might be found in the special place that firearms have in the Malagasy society and the use of them (G. Berg,

1985: 274-276). The ritual of inviting important members of the Malagasy community is also a normal procedure in most regions. In Antongil Bay and St. Augustine Bay different sovereigns are invited on board as in Fort Dauphin by the French and by the Dutch. Notable exception to this rule is the Sakalava of Boina, where the King never boards European ships. Instead, his emissaries come to the shore and board the ship regularly.

Upon arrival on the shoreline, the European merchants are usually welcomed by local dignitaries while they have to wait for the arrival of the sovereign. Concerning St. Augustine Bay, for example, the King lives in Tuléar Bay, situated several kilometers away (P. Westra & J.C. Armstrong, 2006: 54-55). And the Betsimisaraka sovereign Ratsimilaho lives in Banivoul quite close to Foulpointe (AN, MAR, 4JJ/74). The only notable exception is the Sakalava community of Boina, where the King rarely leaves his residence. The Dutch merchants of the *Binnenwijzend* explain in 1732:

*“Yet the King was considered too great a monarch to come to greet us and he would be much ag-grieved in his decency, because every nation that arrives here, go with their presents to the King (NA, VOC 11257).”*

In any case, the Europeans have to go inland to visit the King or wait for him on the shoreline, because no trade could be conducted without the agreement of the leader of the coastal communities, except for some minor food supplies such as vegetables, chicken and eggs (AN, 4JJ/88). Obtaining this trading license is the most important goal of the merchants and also the most difficult aspect because they have to discuss the prices of slaves.

The ritual of the trade discussions between the European traders and the Malagasy sovereign is a crucial part of the ceremony of arrival. First, the merchants have to present themselves to the King, shaking or kissing his hand in the case of the Sakalava (P. Westra & J.C. Armstrong, 2006: 90-91) and explaining the reason of their arrival. Then, they offer their gifts to the King, which are a way to honor his Majesty. In return they often receive a counter-gift. We will first discuss the differences in presents with Dutch and French as well as different regions. Below we find a list of the presents given in 1733 to the Sakalava King of Boina by Dutch and French merchants:

Dutch expedition	French expedition
1 black hat with golden edge	Some fine muskets
1 pair of shoes	Some pairs of pocket pistols
2 pieces of fine cloth	4 large simple mirrors
1 piece of satin	2 sofas of red leather with golden border
1 mirror	2 armchairs and 12 chairs
1 Chinese sofa	One piece of scarlet drape
6 Chinese chairs	Some golden and silver drapes
2 muskets	6 clean knives
10 pounds of gunpowder	6 clean knives
3 bottles of arak (NA, VOC 2266)	6 pairs of fine scissors (ANOM, COL, C3/7)

As we can see, the gifts for the Sakalava sovereign of Boina consist of luxury items, and they are more lavish than those given to other Kings as we can see in the following examples. To the sovereign of St. Augustine Bay, the French give in 1734:

1 musket  
 60 pounds of gunpowder  
 60 pounds of bullets  
 250 gunflints  
 18 jars of *eaudevie* (AN, MAR, 4JJ/97)

And to the sovereign of Fort Dauphin they give in the same year:

1 fair buccaneer gun  
 20 ounces of gunpowder  
 500 gunflints  
 300 bullets  
 6 red mirrors  
 2 handkerchief of cotton  
 6 bottles of *eaudevie* (AN, MAR, 4JJ/86)

These gifts are generally rather valuable and the Europeans also often give minor gifts to the King's relatives, emissaries and middlemen (AN, MAR, 4JJ/87). This last group can be influential in the trade as the officers of the Leidsman note in 1715 that the second man of the Sakalava kingdom has not received a gift, "and these people, particular their leaders, notice these things" (P. Westra & J.C. Armstrong, 2006: 96-97). In return the Malagasy sovereigns normally give one or several oxen to the European merchants (Chamuleau, 2004: 8-9; AN, MAR, 4JJ/76). This should be seen as an important gesture, as cattle are very valuable in Malagasy society (J. Lombard, 1988: 70-71).

When the exchange took place in Boeny Bay, it could have been accompanied with a letter from the Governor of Cape of Good Hope, written in Dutch and in Latin, as happened over a period of several years, for example the letter sent by Simon van der Stel, dated 31 Oct 1696, addressed to:

"Most Illustrious and wealthy Monarch [...] of the Island of Madagascar", signed by "thy Excellency's obedient friend and neighbor of the Dutch East India Company's Extraordinary Council and Governor of the Cape of Good Hope (NA, VOC 4036)".

While the Sakalava did not seem to have attached a lot of importance to these letters, this insistence on friendship is important, and the monarch returned the favor upon calling himself the father of the Dutch traders (R. Chamuleau, 2004: 10; P. Westra & J.C. Armstrong: 90-91). As we can see, we are far from the hostage exchanges that existed in the middle of the 17th century when the trade was only beginning: we are talking about well-established trade relations where Malagasy intermediaries, fluent in a European language, are at the disposal of the merchants to ensure smooth trade negotiations (R. Thiébaud, forthcoming).

### Price negotiations

When the exchanges of presents and other courtesies, as named in the anecdote in this introduction, are over, the price negotiations can begin. Everywhere, Malagasy refuse to trade their slaves and oxen before trading license is granted by their sovereign. This is often the most difficult part of the commerce, especially in regions with powerful sovereigns such as the Sakalava and Betsimisaraka communities. They could take a lot of time and the Sakalava sovereign seems to have used rather intimidating tactics to obtain favorable prices. As in 1694 with Dutch traders on the Tamboer passing in Boeny Bay:

*“Finally he [the King] came with a brave slender boy for whom he demanded 20 rijksdaalders<sup>5</sup>, and we offered him first 14, then 15, 16, 17 and 18 rijksdaalders, but he persisted in his initial demand and he stated that if it we did not like his demand, we had to leave directly, and he showed himself very fierce towards us, grabbing a double-barreled gun, and threatening to shoot our interpreter in the head (NA, VOC 1544).”*

In 1719, the Dutch passing near Morondava, feel so intimidated by sovereign Rome-ny, which they qualify as a ‘bullebak’ and a ‘black tyrant’, that they do not dare to bargain on the offer that stands (T. Den Haze, 1758: 163-164). Normally, these negotiations are not that violent, but the atmosphere could be rather tense. The discussions concerning the prices of slaves could take a whole week as happened on the *Binnenwijzend* in 1732 (NA, VOC 11257). In St. Augustine Bay and Fort Dauphin, these discussions are much faster, probably because slaves are of secondary importance in comparison to live cattle and rice (J.-M. Filliot, 1973: 142).

The role of alcohol is very important during the negotiation process as it works as a ‘lubrifant’ to smoothen the discussions (G. Campbell, 1981: 300-301). Since the introduction of strong alcohol like brandy and eau-de-vie on Madagascar, the inhabitants have become fond of it. The Sakalava Kings in particular are known for their fondness for arak, the Dutch indicate that they ‘drink like beasts’ (P. Westra & J.C. Armstrong, 2006: 124-125). This also applies to the intermediaries and representatives of the sovereign and the VOC ship *Binnenwijzend* notes a consumption of more than 1000 liters of strong alcohol in only two months (NA, VOC 11257). The Betsimisaraka sovereign also often harasses the French captains for alcohol (ANOM, COL, E/171). And in 1734, the King of St. Augustine Bay is given 1½ bottles of eau de vie every day as long as the French ship *Philibert* remains in the bay (AN, MAR, 4JJ/114). As the law of economics dictates, supply and demand are very important aspects in this trade. VOC merchant Hubert Hugo, passing for the first time in Boeny Bay, complains in 1672 that some five years ago the English only paid 2 rijksdaalders for one male captive and now prices has risen to 12 rijksdaalders (NA, VOC 4009). 25 years later the prices have doubled (R. Chamuleau, 2004, p. 17). The French, passing on the East coast, state that prices have increased a lot during the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) when trading activity with Madagascar peaked (ADTG, 20J/125). They

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5 Dutch silver coin.

reached a zenith at the beginning of the 19th century (J.-M. Filliot, 1973: p. 216). Once the prices of slaves is determined, they account for all the subjects of the Malagasy sovereign who want to trade captives or livestock with the Europeans for the entire stay of the ship. They do not count, however, for the next ship that passes, nor for other ships that might arrive there, whether they be foreigners or of the same nation as the Dutch ship *Tamboer* who meets the *Standvastigheid* in Boeny Bay in 1694 (NA, VOC 1544). The merchants can get back to the shoreline and have their temporary stronghold built with wooden lodging and store surrounded by a wooden wall (ANOM, COL, C2/273). Then, and only then, can trade begin.

The situation is slightly different on the East Coast of Madagascar where the French create a permanent presence with a stronghold from the 1750s onwards (J.-M. Filliot, 1973: 132). This *comptoir* is situated at Foulpointe, capital of the Betsimisaraka sovereign. Instead of paying homage for every ship, they have to pay some kind of annual duties to the King and other dignitaries as in 1785 when 22 chieftains are given muskets, cloth and alcohol (BL, Add. Mss. 18139). Price negotiations for slaves, cattle and rice are conducted during the *kabary*<sup>6</sup> or general assembly that are convened every year. Smaller *kabary* settle disputes or disagreements between Malagasy and French.

While in most regions such as St. Augustine Bay, Fort Dauphin and Foulpointe the Europeans treat directly with the King and his subjects, in Boeny Bay, the Sakalava sovereign rarely leaves his residence. In order to ensure his own trade and make sure that the right price is paid, he sends representatives to the coastline. Foreign trade is also regular enough to detect the presence of intermediaries, fluent in at least one European language (R. Thiébaud, forthcoming). On the East coast under the rule of Ratsimilaho the French could occasionally obtain refreshments on credit in the 1740s (ANOM, COL, C2/274). But this was based on strong mutual trust and vanished after his dead.

### The exchange of goods

Once the prices are fixed and trading license is obtained, the slave trade can commence. The European merchants stay most of the time in their temporary or permanent stronghold and wait for individual merchants to offer captives for sale. In Boeny and Bombetoka Bay, these can be Islamized traders, known as *Antaloatra*, who have been present on the Northwest Coast for centuries (S.F. Sanchez, 2013: 54-55). They seem to be responsible for an important amount of the slaves traded. Of course, the Sakalava sovereign as with other monarchs often account for another essential number of captives offered. The rest is obtained from individuals. It was in the advantage of the Europeans, that this process took the least time possible, as was the case with the *Leidsman* in 1715 (P. Westra & J.C. Armstrong, 2006) and the *Sirène* in 1729 (AN, MAR, 4JJ/112), who respectively loaded 200 captives in two weeks at Boeny Bay and 410 slaves in only one week at Foulpointe. But these are exceptions, and in general it took one to three months to complete a cargo.

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6 *Kabary* are public reunions that are held when a certain affair concerns the entire community (P. Beaujard, 1998: 382).

Because the Europeans are essentially looking for a labor force, they privilege young adult males between 16 and 24 years of age (NA, VOC 4017). However, in order to keep healthy trading relations, they are generally obliged to also purchase women and children to satisfy the Malagasy sellers. However, Dutch merchants refuse old and broken captives. Nonetheless, sometimes they are obliged to buy even this type of captive, because refusing them might stall the trade completely as is indicated in the trading instructions for most VOC slave ships (NA, VOC 985). Other obstacles, however, could be much more difficult to overcome.

### Obstacles in trade

Multiple obstacles can be noted during the period of slave buying and one must remember that, especially in the absence of a permanent stronghold, the Europeans are on hostile terrain, where the Malagasy have the home advantage. Intimidation could be used, as the officers of the *Standvastigheid* who finds themselves at the King's residence surrounded by 200 armed soldiers which makes it difficult to make rational decisions (NA, VOC 1560). This was a rare occurrence, though fraud was rather widespread among both parties. The French complained that the Malagasy cheat with the bamboo measurements of rice, trying to make them smaller, making it always a point of discussion (J. Vallette, 1966: 3-4). They also try to dissimulate the physical state of their slaves. In 1769, for example, despite the rigorous checking by a Dutch surgeon of all captives, the Malagasy manage to sell a blind slave to the VOC merchants (NA, VOC 4257). Malagasy traders can also be very persistent, trying to sell the same captive that has been refused up to five consecutive times or three times selling a slave that has fled the Dutch traders (NA, VOC 2585). But the Europeans are also guilty of using these methods. They sometimes send the same firearm to shore that has been refused by the Malagasy multiple times hoping to use it in their exchanges (NA, VOC 11257).

Going beyond the fraud, the sovereign often tries to stall the trade, hoping that the Europeans will stay longer. This happened rather often and in multiple regions. In the 1730s, the local monarchs of Antongil Bay invite the French to come to their village, because they have:

*“a lot of cattle and captifs to give to us, but we did not see fit to go there, because what they say can only be to amuse us and to make us lay anchor (AN, MAR, 4JJ/76).”*

In Boeny Bay, the Sakalava monarch often asks the Dutch and the French to be patient, as in 1732, when he asks them to wait until the next moon for a lot of slaves to arrive, but this is said to be pure fiction (AN, MAR, 4JJ/86).

This tactic to delay the Europeans, can also be based on the desire to gain more presents. While the gifts offered upon the arrival of the merchants to the monarch are clearly a formal duty to open the trade, more presents can always be given in order to further facilitate the slave trade, which is done on multiple occasions. In 1732, the officers of the *Binnenwijzend*, decide to give the following present because they are afraid that otherwise

they would not be able to attain the desired number of slaves in the limited amount of time that they have:

5 pieces of different Indian cloth  
 2 muskets  
 2 bottles of alcohol (NA, VOC 11257)

Even if the Europeans are in hostile territory, they have an important trick to use if the Malagasy persist in stalling the trade or demanding high prices. In 1736, the captain of the Griffon, exasperated by the refusal of the Sakalava monarch to diminish the powder measure, feigns sailing away by making all the ordinary preparations for departure. He explains that:

*“This had a very good effect because they send a canoe and [...] after having diminished the bamboo [unit of measurement] at the height at which Monsieur Anjot had established with them on his departure, they sent it by the same canoe begging us to stay and trade with them (AN, MAR, 4JJ/86).”*

### **Closing ceremony**

The closing ceremony is much less formal than the opening. The Sakalava King often makes a list of goods he wants to have and the Europeans demand that next time they pass, the King would have a shipload of captives ready (NA, VOC 2266). In general, the European merchants give farewell presents to the Malagasy King as well as to the intermediaries that have assisted them during the process. Here the example of the Binenwijzend (1732):

*“After the boarding of the goods, we went again to the village, and shortly afterwards to the boat, where we found a crowd of people as well as the princess who guided us under the shouting of Salamca or “good journey”. And we separated ourselves with all signs of friendship from our interpreters, envoys of the King and the common people (NA, VOC 11257).”*

Of course, it was important to leave a good impression in order to facilitate trade for future expeditions.

### **Conclusion**

Overall we can say that the European slave trade, from the moment it was firmly implanted in the Malagasy regions, that is to say from the 1680s to 1710s, turned on formal agreements that the coming merchants had to follow. This was a continuous process that changed very little over the course of the 18th century. It only changed when the Malagasy communities, Sakalava and Betsimisaraka, lost their predominance over the rest. The first remained effectively a Kingdom, but when the sovereign lost much of his prestige and was not in a position to supply enough slaves, the Dutch ships went to other communities on the Western coast of Madagascar. The Betsimisaraka community imploded due to civil warfare and the Eastern coast was divided between smaller chieftains. As

a reaction, the French, who were completely dependent on trade with the Big Island, decided to create a permanent stronghold at Foulpointe in 1756 in order to control this commerce. The weaker communities became also more susceptible to external pressures from the Europeans.

As we have seen, the European slave trade on Madagascar differed from other types of trade conducted on the African continent or in the Indian Ocean World. It was also effectively much more than a simple exchange of slaves for trade goods. It can be termed a ritual which explains why the VOC as well as the *Compagnie des Indes* preferred to employ experienced naval officers to ensure that no mistakes would be made in these rather complex proceedings. For the Malagasy sovereigns the whole ritual of presenting gifts confirmed the elevated status of the sovereign vis-à-vis the European traders. It can be seen as the affirmation of the power they held over their Kingdom, because it was the only way to obtain firearms and ammunition which were vital in securing their predominance. The slave trade thus effectively contributed to the upheaval of the coastal Malagasy communities to a degree that had not been seen before.

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