

# THE VALUE SYSTEM OF THE MALAGASY PEOPLE LIVING IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE SOFIA REGION

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## ABSTRACT

*Malagasy people living in the rural areas of the Sofia Region have a value system that can be divided in « needs », « wants » and « prestige ». Needs gather all the goods and services necessary for the survival of the people. The fieldwork resulted in those 03 necessities : housing, labour and foods. As for the second type, « wants », it combines everything related to comfort, entertainment and hobbies. In terms of prestige, as its name suggests, the goal is to improve the social status.*

**Keywords :** *wants, prestige, needs, value, Sofia Region*

## 1 Introduction

Value or value system is a complex concept to seize. Many economists and anthropologists attempted to understand it as it seems to be the core of exchange and the root of culture too. Exchange because value is the one that determines the price of a given thing. Adam Smith[1] argues in his book that the value of a goods equal to the labour needed to produce it. Many economists followed his theory of value while others like Jean Baptiste Say affirms that the value of a goods depend on its use [2]. As for anthropologists, Melville Herskovits argues that value is what limits people's choices [3]. Some anthropologists such as Nancy Munn explain the concept of value through actions. It is not the things or the goods that are seen as valuable but the actions that come with them [4].

This paper, on the other hand, attempts to look closely on the value system of the Malagasy people in the rural areas of the Sofia region. The approach used is mainly anthropological with economic insights too. Since the first part already gave a brief introduction of the concept of value, the second part will uncover briefly in a few lines how the data collection was made. Then the rest will explain one by one each type of value as found through the fieldwork done in the rural areas of the Sofia Region.

## 2 Fieldwork in the rural areas of the Sofia Region

The data collection for this article is divided into two parts. The first one started on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 and ended on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March of the same year. 04 rural Communes have been visited : Ambatoriha Est Commune, Ambodiampana Commune, Ambatosia Commune and Anjiabory Commune. As for the second part, it included Ambodimadiro Commune, Antsakanalabe Commune, Malakialina Commune and finally Ampasimatera Commune. The fieldwork for those 05 ones started on the 02<sup>nd</sup> of April 2022 and ended on the 08<sup>th</sup> of May 2022.

As for the main sources of data : focus groups, meetings with local civil servants, interviews and observations have been used. And 03 essential functions or roles have to be respected to keep the stability and the efficiency of data collections if we quote Alain Blanchet in his 1982 article : *Epistémologie Critique de l'Entretien d'Enquête de Style Non Directif. Ses éventuelles distorsions dans le champ des sciences humaines* [5].

- Production role : the researcher stimulates the discussion as to get the maximum data.
- Confirmation role : here the researcher tries to get the people to confirm their answers. By doing Region Sofia, the researcher not only manages to confirm his data but, he also manages to ignite trust into people as they feel listened.

- Orientation role : for the talk not to go off the track and create unnecessary data, the researcher has to guide the discussion.

### 3 Different kinds of value or value system

The fieldwork leads to the result that in the rural areas of the Sofia Region, people have 03 kinds of value which shape their value system. As a matter of fact, those 03 kinds of value are closely linked to the article about the Malagasy version of kakeibo as a solution to the prodigality of people in rural areas of the Sofia Region [6]. Indeed, the structure of the Malagasy version of kakeibo is shaped through the value system seen in the rural areas of the Sofia Region.

#### 3.1 « Needs »

Here, everything from services to goods that are absolutely needed for survival is recorded. During the fieldwork, we understood that everyone has his own definition of what could be called goods of absolute necessity. Some answered that after having kids, it became a necessity to have television and radio. Most people said that food, clothes, health is their most absolute in life. Others added housing and a job as crucial g for survival. After analysing everyone's answers, those constitute what could be called needs : housing, a job and foods.

By a job, the Malagasy people mean having a rice field and then one zebu at least. Indeed, the people living in the rural area of Sofia Region have a very physiocratic point of view as far as labour is concerned. Growing rice and having oxen are what defines their wealth. In other words, someone without any of those has no social status in the community.

#### 3.2 « Wants »

The second part of the value system is what we call « wants ». Here, there is no obligation attached unless people choose to satisfy their wants obliging themselves. At that time, they create for themselves an obligation to be fulfilled. To illustrate, people pay the water bills so they can enjoy the water service at home instead of fetching water in the river. They want to just open the faucet to get water, in that case, they have to oblige themselves to pay the bills. That is the price of comfort.

Comfort could be another name for this type of value. And it is easy to think that after survival comes the comfort, the hobbies or entertainment but in the rural areas of Sofia Region not all rich people live in comfort. One participant of a focus group in the Ambodimadiro Commune talked about a family who has hundreds of zebu but his housing is made of leaves, the kids are malnourished and undernourished. It is not a lack of capability as developed by Amartya Sen [7]: « *Capability is a derived notion and reflects the various functioning he or she can potentially achieve, and involves the person's freedom to choose between ways of living* .» Instead, it is a choice made by the said family like many others in the rural areas of the Sofia region.

#### 3.3 « Prestige »

The last but not the least out of the 03 types of value is the « prestige ». For the sake of keeping their honour, people would spend thousands and millions of ariary to host a party or to buy zebus. Prestige could be attained through small gestures too like giving gifts or helping during happy events such as birth, circumcision or wedding.

Out of the 02 types of value, prestige is the one that is a combination of symbols and meanings. And it is the meaning that gives the value of prestige. As Pierre Bourdieu [8] said, the value cannot be grasped by people who do not understand the meaning. Indeed, to get more zebus has a different meaning in Madagascar and in western countries for instance. In the first, it means more prestige while in the western countries it means more profit. Also, it is because of this prestige that Malagasy people living in the rural areas of Sofia Region are reluctant to sell their animals aside the fact that it is used in the rice-field.

In other words, out of the 03 types of value, none takes the first place. It is possible to see a household full of prestige but having no food at home in the rural areas of Sofia Region. Prestige is an important aspect of the life of those people. It can be even more important than the survival of the person.

### 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, we could suggest that the value system in the rural areas of the Sofia Region has no hierarchy. People's prestige tends to take first place above their needs and wants as we observed during our fieldwork.

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