

Role and commitment of the population in the development of a nation. Case of a development platform in Madagascar. Anthropological approach.

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ABSTRACT

Madagascar's potentialities (natural resources, mining, etc.) are often cited in contradiction with the poverty of a large part of its inhabitants. However, based on development theories, Madagascar's trajectory seems difficult to explain. Indeed, the crises and the difficulties of successive governments in initiating development do not seem to justify the continued impoverishment of the population. This article presents an answer by considering Malagasy culture as both an obstacle and a lever for the country's development. To illustrate this point, we will present the case of the AFK development platform.

KEY WORDS: *development, culture, commitment of the population, Madagascar.*

1. Introduction

Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 68% of the Malagasy working population earning less than \$1.25 PPP per day (INSTAT: 2013), and 33% of its population food insecure (World Bank: 2013). We are witnessing a progressive loss of Malagasy culture and a deterioration of local institutions and organizations. Madagascar's enormous potential (natural resources, mining, etc.) is often cited in contradiction with the poverty of many of its inhabitants.

Moreover, when comparing Madagascar's economic growth with other countries around the world, economists Razafindrakoto et al. (2017), assert through their analyses that culture can be an explanation for the country's various socio-economic ills. What can be done, then, to make culture a lever for development in a country, so that its people take charge of their future and can make good use of their culture and resources?

We propose to discuss the case of the AFK (Antso Fiarahamonina Kristiana) platform, which aims to be a network for development, support and sharing. It is a voluntary association whose aim is to find appropriate ways and solutions to the continuing impoverishment of Madagascar. In order to answer this question, we will first present the background and justifications for the study. Secondly, the data collection methodology used for this study and a few words about the association, thirdly the results and finally the conclusions of the study.

2. Context and rationale

In order to better understand the Malagasy context, this section presents the research carried out in the field of development in Madagascar.

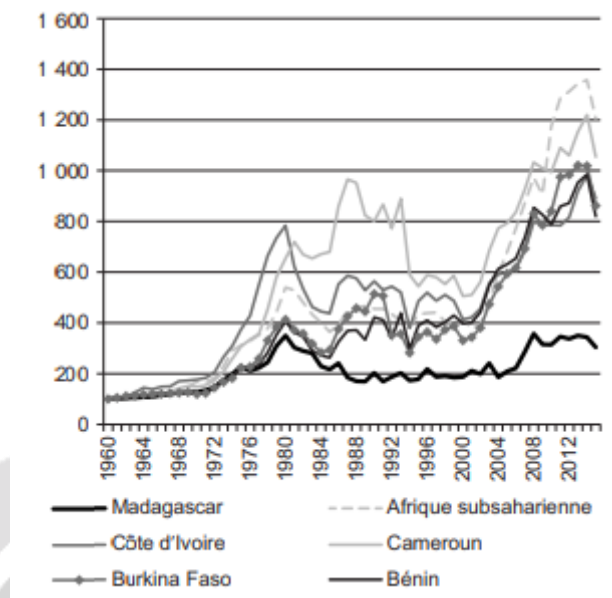
2.1. Madagascar's socio-economic context

Razafindrakoto et al.'s book *L'énigme et le paradoxe* is the main source of information for understanding the country's socio-economic trajectory.

- The country's economic recession since independence in 1960

Razafindrakoto et al (2017) analyze Madagascar's socio-economic trajectory over the last 50 years through the lens of development theories. They argue that, unlike Madagascar, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, whose variations were impacted by world commodity prices and civil war, both countries were able to set in motion sustainable growth processes. Moreover, the country has not only experienced episodes of recession, but on several occasions seemed ready to embark on a growth cycle, halted each time by a major political crisis. This is shown in the figure below.

Figure 1: The Malagasy enigma: inexorable economic decline.
GDP per capita 1960-2015 (current US\$)



Sources: Maddison (2011), WDI (2017); calculations by Razafindrakoto et al. (op. cit., 20).

- History and geography

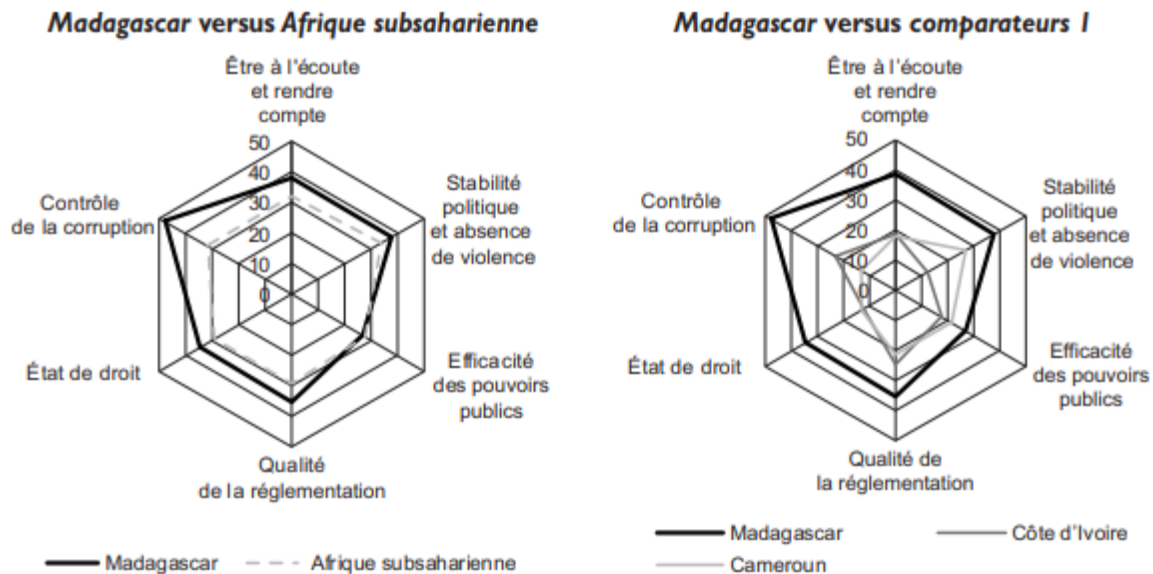
Taking history and geography into account, Razafindrakoto et al. (2017) also note a counter-performance given that the island is rich in natural resources and human capital enjoying natural borders and linguistic uniqueness and has never suffered from armed conflict. In fact, the big island is one of the five countries with the highest number of animal species, as well as a rich and varied flora, making the biological studies carried out on the island specific. Its insularity means that most of the species found there are endemic (Sarrasin and Ramahatra: 2013). According to the WWF, Madagascar is home to over 250,000 species, 70% of which are endemic, including 294 bird species, 107 of which are endemic, and 247 amphibian species, 245 of which are endemic. Added to this are the country's mineral resources.

- The country's economic policies and governance

Razafindrakoto et al (2017) also assert that the choice of economic policies does not seem to explain the country's economic recession. For them, even if institutions and governance on the island are of poor quality, this is not enough to explain the country's socio-economic situation, as the previously cited countries have nevertheless managed to get their economies off the ground, according to the following diagrams.

Figure 2: Individual dimensions of governance in Madagascar

The indicators in panels 1 to 3; correspond to the arithmetic mean of the percentile of each of the six dimensions of governance retained by the WGI for the years 1996 to 2011.



Sources: WGI, 2017 (panel 1-3) Razafindrakoto and Roubaud, 2010b (panel 4); calculations by Razafindrakoto et al. (op. cit., 37).

2.2 Cultural explanations for the country's ills

Razafindrakoto et al. (2017) insist that the population is the actor in the current situation. Other elements were highlighted by the authors, including the social structuring in the big island based on the preponderance of hierarchy and status, but also the divide between the elites and the majority of the population. This is in line with J.-M. Châtaignier's (2014) analysis of the country's equivocal situation, which points to the control of the country by a restricted elite, ethnic divisions and the confusion between political and religious spheres.

Culture thus seems to weigh heavily in the country's future. “*Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world*”, say Rajeriarison and Urfer (2016: 36). Indeed, they argue that the reason Malagasy people are poor is that they see only their day-to-day reality, without the possibility of projecting themselves further ahead, and readily accept to give up in the name of destiny.

To better understand Malagasy culture, we need to look at *fiavanana*. This is a complex concept that seems to govern Malagasy life, or at least to help us better understand Malagasy customs, but is also an ideal of Malagasy life (Kneitz, 2014; Raharilalao, 2007; Urfer, 2012).

- Definitions of *fiavanana*

As the notion of *fiavanana* cannot be translated, we will use the definitions from Raharilalao's (2007) study. Raharilalao recorded over 70 definitions. The ideas that mainly come up are mutual love, relationships, mutual aid, sympathy and ancestral customs. Rajeriarison and Urfer (op. cit., 58) state that *fiavanana* is: “(...) the intensity of social relations (...). And these relationships are modelled on the family model (...)”. In other words, the Malagasy person's relationships with family members, as well as with members of his or her community, are reflected in a sense of solidarity.

- Complexity and vision of *fiavanana*

In line with Mauss's (1923-1924) concept of the total social fact, *fiavanana* not only conveys a communal, religious and moral aspect, but also influences the country's political and economic system. Indeed, Kneitz (2014) highlights the fact that, apart from expressing solidarity and mutual love between members of a community, the main aim of *fiavanana* is peace. Peace not only with the members of the community, but also with the elements of the cosmic and invisible universe. Indeed, *fiavanana* is not only the bond uniting people in the same family, but also unites man with the invisible world (Raharilalao: 2007). *Fiavanana* not only connects the visible and invisible worlds, but also ensures peace between them. We'd like to quote Rabemananjara (2004: 101): “In Madagascar, everything is a sign. Every sign is a spirit. To live is to recognize the meaning of signs (...)”.

- *Fiavanana* in the perception of the world

However, two phenomena seem to be taking shape in the Malagasy's vision. Firstly, there has been a gradual loss of Malagasy values in recent years. And secondly, the *fiavanana* of yesteryear seems to have had difficulty adapting to the country's historical and socio-economic injunctions. According to Sandron (2014: 271), “*fiavanana* as it was practiced in the nineteenth century is indeed undoubtedly very different from that of the twentieth century and even more so from that of the twenty-first century”. Indeed, the various events and crises

that have affected the big island have influenced the gradual loss of Malagasy values, citing only the entry of Christianity, colonization, political crises and extreme poverty, which is in line with the analysis of Rafolo et al. (2000: 19-20), according to whom,

“The serious economic and social problems of the moment (pauperism, unemployment, rural exodus, school closures, etc.), the exacerbated influences of Western civilization and the perverse effects of globalization are generating a depersonalization of the Malagasy individual, who is experiencing identity insecurity and, moreover, a fear of invasion. This depersonalization can be seen first and foremost in the deterioration in mastery of the mother tongue and the use of a 'frangache' that is incomprehensible to rural people (...). Finally, it is visible in the desire of some to become French at all costs: departures or 'returns' to France (...).”

However, despite this gradual loss of identity, certain aspects of Malagasy culture seem to weigh heavily on Malagasy behavior, preventing them from taking their future into their own hands. Urfer argues that “(...) recourse to long-term history is essential to understanding Malagasy realities” (2012: 16). Firstly, collectivism, the basis of Malagasy life. Several proverbs attest to the importance of community life for the Malagasy, such as “*Aleo very tsikalakalam-bola toy izay very tsikalakalam-pihavanana*”, or better to lose money than to break a family or friendly bond. However, this system presents constraints for the Malagasy (Dahl, 2006; Rajaonah, 2014; Urfer, 2012). This manifests itself not only in their relationships with others and their community, but also in their perception of the world around them. Among the manifestations of the weight of tradition on Malagasy behavior are the difficulty Malagasy people have in making long-term plans and the fear of innovation that undermines development projects (Dahl: 2006; Sandron: 2006).

Dahl (2006) cites, for example, the importance of maintaining strong ties with one's community, even if this means encouraging nepotism, corruption or even hiding the incompetence of others. Dahl illustrates the case of a secretary who doesn't do his job as seen through Western eyes, and that of a Malagasy on the following page.

Table 1. Cases of intercultural communication - the inefficient secretary

The inefficient secretary 1. PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATION WESTERN: The secretary is not doing his job. He should be fired. THE MALGACHE: The secretary isn't doing his job. He should be re-elected. 2. “RESPECTIVE CULTURAL “FRAMES OF REFERENCE	
WESTERN VALUES - Initiative - Efficiency - Work completion - Result orientation Procedures : - Define objectives - Develop alternatives - Making plans - Be active - Implement plans - Prioritize tasks - Analyze consequences Standards : - The public sphere is separate from the private sphere - Men have interchangeable roles - Competence is valued	MALGACHESE VALUES - Harmony - Saving face - Mutual respect - Maintaining personal relationships Procedures : - Avoid tsiny - Do not blame - Do not challenge - Prioritize personal relationships - World order will rectify mistakes - Let today eliminate the incompetent Standards: - The public sphere is not separated from the private sphere - Concern for the honor of others - Non-confrontation is valued

Source : Dahl, (2006 : 124). Signes et significations à Madagascar. Des cas de communication interculturelle. France : Présence africaine.

Our aim here is not to highlight Western culture, which, like any other culture, can be perceived positively or negatively, but rather to emphasize the importance of the community's consideration for the work expected of this secretary, the symbolism of which shines through in a completely different way in Madagascan culture, where harmony and interpersonal relations are important, and where the fate of the secretary is placed in the hands of fate.

3. Field description and methodology

After highlighting the key concepts of this study, this section presents the methodology used and describes the fieldwork.

3.1 Methodology

As this is an anthropological study, we used participant observation and a questionnaire survey. The aim of the study being to highlight the cultural aspects that will help motivate its members but also to understand the logic that drives the association's members. As a member of the association since 2018, we have witnessed the different phases of deployment of the association's activities. With the association facing a shortage of resources, mainly human, few meetings are held within the association, because since its creation, those who join the association, for the most part, leave without justifying their departure, and the association must once again carry out activities to attract new members. We'll illustrate our comments with specific examples from within the association over the past five years, as well as a survey of new members in 2021.

3.2. Functioning and constitution of the association as a development platform

The main aim of the association created in 2016 is to enable Malagasy people to take the country's future into their own hands, based on the collectivist spirit of fihavanana. The association is divided into nine key pillars enabling its members to contribute to the country's development by using their skills while creating a national enterprise with well-defined, pre-studied structures. The first pillar is the Banking and Finance Center (CBF), whose role is to manage resources, understand the needs of platform members and facilitate access to flows of human, financial, technological and logistical resources. The second pillar is the Management Center (MC), whose role is to implement a network of trust, quality and transparency. Its main activities are outsourcing, management control, etc. The third pillar is the Arbitration and Conflict Resolution Center (CARC), which mediates, resolves conflicts and provides legal security. The fourth pillar, the Promotion Center (CP), handles internal and external promotion in Madagascar and worldwide. It markets the products of teams and operators. The fifth pillar, the Foreign Trade Center (CCE), centralizes needs and supplies. The sixth pillar, the Ethics and Deontology Center (CED), monitors ethical and deontological practices and facilitates the development of a healthy business environment. The seventh, the Integrity Center (CI), ensures the safety of goods and people. The eighth, the standards center (CN), is responsible for mastering and developing standards in order to set up a rigorous standards certification system for Malagasy products. Finally, the ninth, the center to which we belong, the Research and Training Center (CRF), aims to develop the skills of its members through research, skills sharing and the development of training activities. Members of the association were required to join one of the key pillars as soon as they registered and joined the association.

4. Survey results

Since its creation in 2016, 152 people have signed up for the association's activities, and around fifteen seem to be really active. Due to this lack of human resources, very few activities could be carried out by members, or if there were really active members, they stayed for around two or three months and then left the association without saying a word.

Case 1: carrying out a training project within the CRF

For those who stayed, we weren't able to carry out many activities because our numbers didn't allow it, for example in 2019 when there were only three of us at the Research and Training Center (CRF). The CRF's credo is to give everyone access to lifelong learning, so we started to think about what we could do and what training we could offer. Our real problem, however, was that we had no fixed premises, no funds to run the center or to pay potential trainers, and every time we had to meet, there was always one or two absentees. The president-trainer advised us to ask existing schools or establishments if any of them would be interested in collaborating and offering distance courses via video to communities that didn't have access to classroom courses. One higher institute agreed to collaborate with us, proposing that we film their teachers' courses and share the videos with communities in need. Unfortunately, after a few months, no videos were made, and one of the CRF members had also left the team, leaving just the two of us - me and the CRF coordinator. After many unsuccessful attempts, our coordinator also left the project, writing an e-mail saying he was tired and couldn't go on.

Case 2: Organization of conferences and open days

Each year, the membership changed as we raised awareness among the general public. Starting in 2019, we organized conferences and open days to attract more members, because we felt that if there were at least 7 active members in each center, the platform could work better, and seven books were published to situate our association's approach not only in the academic world, but also in the business world. We welcomed around fifty people to our open days, where the mornings were given over to conferences to present the association's activities, and the afternoons were devoted to workshops on finding solutions to the country's continuing impoverishment. During a workshop on finding solutions to promote the studies and experience of Malagasy academics, a man in his

fifties, an engineer by training and a member of our association, said to me: "It's all very interesting, but I don't think it's feasible! After the workshops, unfortunately, there weren't many new members signed up, and no solutions could be implemented because the people who had submitted ideas left without putting them into practice.

Case 3: Change of tactic and survey to determine new members' expectations

In 2021, we changed tactics. Another association had agreed to collaborate with us, and each time a new member joined, we asked them to fill in a questionnaire. At the time, 38 people responded to this questionnaire. Among the questions asked, we wanted to find out the expectations of new members as to their reasons for joining the association. The survey revealed that many joined with the expectation of financial reward. Following the registration of these new members, only two or three new members wanted to participate in the group's activities. Below is a table summarizing the results of the survey concerning their expectations.

Table 2. New members' expectations of the association

Why become a member of the AFK association?	Number
Financial and material assistance	15
Developing the country together	7
Training and knowledge sharing	5
Achieving personal goals	4
No answer	3
Job search	1
Support in realizing one's project	1
Talent development	1
Receive advice	1
Total	38

Source : Andriamparany, F., AFK, 2021

According to this table, of the 38 people who answered the questionnaire, 15 expected to receive financial and material assistance from the association to develop their personal projects, 07 wanted to contribute to the country's development, 05 wanted to train and were interested in sharing knowledge, and 04 said they joined the association because they needed to achieve their personal goals.

Case 4: Initiative-taking and love of speech

Apart from the apparent lack of motivation on the part of some association members, the presence of the coordinators didn't seem to have any impact on the association, as many times the association's activities were interrupted for a year or two, and the founding president seemed to be the only one who really wanted to relaunch the association. Most of the coordinators seemed to enjoy talking about the problems in the country, but when it came to taking action, only the really active members remained. For example, in 2020, we were to organize an open day and I was asked to phone one of the center coordinators, who replied by saying "If it's for AFK, I'm taking a break for the moment".

This year, in February 2023, the same scenario seemed to be happening again. The founding president felt that sharing new members by center was difficult. So he changed strategy, and instead of signing up for the centers, those attending the conference could choose between different workshops for change, related to societal change, education and so on. Each group was asked to come up with actions to implement to change the situation in the country. In our group, made up of five people, the discussions were based on the societal paradigm shift, with two people monopolizing the speaking time and talking mainly about existing problems in the country. One of them even said that before finding solutions, we should first look for the problems, even though the time for reflection was limited to 1 hour. At the end of the brainstorming time, we presented our solutions to all those present. We were then told that we were missing some concrete actions that we needed to carry out, and we were asked to meet again to highlight the actions. As we were all in a hurry to get back, as it was already lunchtime, we agreed to create a facebook group and continue discussions in the facebook group. I was in charge of creating the group. After creating the group and integrating the people present at the workshop, I started sending messages to animate the group but one of the people didn't even open the group, another said hello in reply to mine and the other two just looked at the message and none of them continued the discussion on the group for two months now.

I asked other members of the association I knew if their actions had been able to be put in place. One of them, a man, told me: “*It's complicated to achieve the association's objectives because there are no guidelines for everyone to follow, even though the association's vision is very interesting*”. Another member, a woman, said in response to this man: “*The problem is undoubtedly the lack of initiative on the part of the members. You know, it's difficult, we haven't been brought up to take the initiative*”.

5. Conclusions

The impoverishment of the Malagasy population is not getting any better with time. However, it is no longer possible to depend solely on government decisions in terms of development. Based on the results of the study carried out by the AFK development platform, the following observations were made.

- Financial compensation in development projects

According to the table presented in the Results section, development projects are still perceived as a financial windfall necessary for the realization of people's personal projects. The country is renowned for being a graveyard of projects.

- Lack of Initiative

According to the findings of this study, Malagasy people tend to need guidance. This aspect of their culture is reflected in the behavior and upbringing of Malagasy people, where their lives are often governed by fear. Urfer (2012) states that the hostile forces of both visible and invisible worlds instill fear in the Malagasy people. Expressions commonly heard in discussions include “*Sao dia...*” (lest...) or “*Matahotra aho*” (I am afraid). Furthermore, respect for authority is deeply ingrained in Malagasy culture. According to Boillon (1981), Malagasy society is also regarded as having a “patriarchal life.” Elders and ray aman-dreny (village elders) hold the highest respect within society, as they are seen as wiser, which is reflected in the Malagasy proverb, “*Manan-joky afak'olan-teny, manan-jandry afak'olan'entana*” (An elder is wise with words, while younger kin relieve them of burdens). URFER explains, “(…) *saying 'no' is considered rude, and contradicting a superior, elder, noble, parent, or older sibling threatens the sanctity of their status*” (op. cit., 56). Thus, it is essential for Malagasy people to respect their elders, regardless of the elder's competence, to avoid social exclusion from the community.

- Malagasy Perception of Time: Difficulty in Planning Ahead

The weight of traditions influences the Malagasy perception of time. Indeed, it is often said that Malagasy culture embodies the “*moramora*” (slowly, steadily) philosophy. *Fihavanana*, as we have noted, ultimately aims to preserve peace. This peace implies, in some sense, not worrying about tomorrow because it is in the natural order of the world. Dahl (2006) explains that in Malagasy culture, time is perceived cyclically and event-based, meaning that life is seen as a continuously repeating cycle where everything can be adjusted and improvised. Therefore, while the Malagasy may feel the weight of poverty affecting their country, they may not see an urgency to eradicate it nor feel personally responsible for its eradication. This is supported by various Malagasy proverbs on destiny, such as “*Ny fikasana antsika olombelona fa ny lahatra dia an'Andriamanitra*” (Humans may have good intentions, but their destiny is governed by God) or “*Aza manantena hery fa ny lahatra tsy azo rombahina*” (Do not rely on strength alone; destiny cannot be forced).

Change is challenging, but the country risks deeper impoverishment without a collective awakening. *Fihavanana* can serve as a lever for national development if individuals learn to appreciate themselves, others, and the nation. If the values of *fihavanana*, such as mutual love and support, were genuinely applied throughout the country, everyone would feel in control of their future, and the nation would undoubtedly progress. Unfortunately, today, the negative applications of *fihavanana*, such as jealousy, fear, corruption, and nepotism, are more apparent in society. We must apply an effective *fihavanana* where authorities are not the sole agents of change, but the whole community plays a role, adopting effective habits to combat poverty.

- Proposed Actions

In response to these challenges, we propose some action steps to be implemented. Firstly, it is essential that every individual and both private and state institutions come together with a shared vision for the country's development so that each Malagasy can become an agent of change.

Secondly, encouraging an appreciation of their culture among the Malagasy people and valuing individual talents and skills through self-awareness programs will allow each person to work towards personal growth and the country's benefit.

Thirdly, educational reform is needed to raise awareness of each person's role in society, ensuring that no one feels excluded or left behind. This can also begin with training and practical exchanges for teachers, parents, and students.

Finally, Madagascar should no longer be seen as a “*graveyard of projects*” by actively implementing research findings from students and scholars.

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BIOGRAPHY

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