

https://dspace.org/

Limits of politics from below or the 1991 movement as perceived from Tamatave (Madagascar)

Randrianja, Sofolo

1994-07-13T06:03:40Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8060

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

RANDRIANJA

DEMOCRACY



POPULAR PRECEDENTS PRACTICE CULTURE

13 - 15 JULY 1994

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

LIMITS OF POLITICS FROM BELOW
OR
THE 1991 MOVEMENT AS PERCEIVED FROM TAMATIVE (MADAGASCAR)

Sofolo Randrianja
Department of History
Universite de Tamatave, Madagascar

AFRICANA

HWS 348

LIMITS OF POLITICS FROM BELOW
OR
THE 1991 MOVEMENT AS PERCEIVED FROM TAMATAVE (MADAGASCAR)

A first version of this paper was published by the French academic journal Politique Africaine, december 1993, No 52A A.Fanomazantsoa (pseudonym): "The Ambiguous Regicide" (Special Madagascar).

By S.Randrianja
University of Tamatave

Although Madagascar is a largely rural country, with towns of modest size and half of the urban population living in semi-rural agglomerations, the seat of power and that of the experimentation with new forms of societal management is in toens. The great change which marked the political history of Madagascar started from towns: thus, while the peasant uprising in the south of the country caused the death of more than 2,000 in 1971, the street movement which began in Tananarive reached other towns in May 1972, resulting in the fall of the First Republic. As such, Tamatave, politico-administrative capital of the eastern province, has always experienced critical political upheavals like the one which shook the island in the early 1990s. This town, with its multi-ethnic middle class, is the main protagonist in the movement for democracy. It is an interesting observatory place from which to appreciate the movement, in particular from outside the capital and its close surroundings.

1. TAMATAVE: POLES AND REGION

In terms of administrative division under the Second Republic (from 1975 to 1991), Tamatave province, with 415,539 inhabitants

(of whom half live in the *Fivondronanas* of Tamatave I and Tamatave II), was the third in population after that Tananarive and Fianarantsoa. In terms of urbanization, Tamatave I is the second largest Malagasy town, competing with Antsirabe and in direct contrast to Tamatave II which is a rural zone located within a radius of 80 km around Tamatave.

Tamatave province is among the least urbanized provinces. However, the increase of population is very rapid, generating a new socialization. It should be added that the natives of Tamatave are not much inclined to emigration. Moreover, there was immigration due to economic activities of the region (ports, plantations...).

Towns of the province, especially Tamatave, have a cosmopolitan population: "petty Whites" linked to the Réunion island, the most important of the allogenous communitiesbefore 1972; "half-caste Chinese" who are the descendants of women of the region and Chinese tradesmen, organized in a real "new ethnic group", some of whom are seeking an autonomous social strategy through an economic network situated in a very important part of the province with ramification in other parties of the island; an active Indo-Pakistanese minority constituting an important economic and social lobby (though it is divided into multiple entities like the Bohras or the Sourtis, a sub-group speaking a XIXth creole); finally, there are also "allogenous Malagasy", mainly native of the South and the Southern East and of the central High Lands.

The urban population, just as the rural population of the Tamatave province are ethnically heterogenous. The state census undertaken after independence identified 18 offical tribes. Thus, there is no proof confirming that the Betsimisakara, like any

other ethnic group settled elsewhere.

Moreover from its cultural and economic activities, Tamatave has important corporations which are relatively organized like those of port workers with strong trade unions, or those of students of the university. Tamatave is the second universty town of the island. Its 4,000 students represent more than 6 % of over fifteen years old inhabitants of the town. Obviously, this population is reflective of various ethnic groups.

In this political environment divided into numerous groups, it is inevitable that the national state is subjected to competing demands, including ethnic ones. This has led to political poles and various ethnic clienteles seeking access to central administration and political power.

The survival of communities' authorities had been linked to the noted system. There is a double consequence: the extreme polarization of the administration involving the allegiance to the ruling party but also its ethnicization. Indeed, decentralization, the hobby horse of the Second Republic régime, was perceived and conceived as the opportunity to promote local élites at the community level, and at the same time an occasion to divide the Betsimisakara into a multitude of "sub-ethnic groups".

This perversion of the ethnicism may be called tribalism, but it is a tribalism opposed to the system. Indeed, different administrative divisions initially made under colonization were principally aimed to oppose inhabitants of central High Lands and those of the coasts. This opposition has been internalized by Malagasy people. It is firmly rooted into the popular collective memory through efforts of political unification led by the King-

dom of Madagascar in the XIXth century following European military strategies of that era. Sovereigns of the central High Lands were the promoters of the Kingdom of Madagascar. However, these oppositions of the XIXth century did not erase those more ancient in the history which constitute another part of the life of various groups.

Thus, in the XXth century if "local" in the town of Tamatave often means "ethinic" that is to say "Betsimisakara", elsewhere in the province, the Betsimirakra is someone who comes either from the Sud or the North, as well as natives of the Alaotra region non-Betsimisakara but belonging to the province. Political competitions for the controle of Tamatave, the capital, are marked by oppositions between various "sub-ethnic groups".

When the authorities of these collectivities formed and conducted the federatist movement in Tamatave under the banner of the Betsimisaraka identity in 1991, the movement was perceived as an products of the régime and further, as a product of the state system. This was because it was initiated by the threatened local dignitary and because it gave a ethnicist interpretation of the contestation movement. The Betsimisakara unity was artificially directed against the "others" in particular against Merina, the movement for democratization being presented as beginning from Tananarive. Thanks to the party MFM (Mpitolona ho an'ny Fandrosoan'i Madagasikara) the major opposition party in the late 1980s, the movement for democratization has begun in Fianarantsoa (town located at 400 km from Tananarive and considered as the stronghold of the MFM), and extended to the majority of principal towns.

In Tamatave, the faithfulness to the régime has to be perceived through the loyalty vis-à-vis the ethnic group with the main

argument that President Ratsiraka is a native of Tamatave which presented as his "political stronghold". This is the mechanism of the ethnicist ideology. If such an interpretation of the movement is difficult to verify on the ground, it however compels "natives" of Tamatave to become implicitly supporters of Ratsiraka and his régime if they do want to be marginalized. During a period, opponents, natives of this region, spread the rumour that Ratsiraka was not a Betsimisaraka.

Decentralization allowed the growth of "ethnicism" and "tribalism". However, though presented as natural entity, territorially fixed by the administration from 1927, the ethnicity corresponds neither to the history, nor to the evolution of homelands and region comprising the province. On this ground, the Tamatave province may be divided into at least five regions which are competing, if not opposed each other, the main stake being the control of Tamatave I. The later is the politico-administra-tive centre through which to access Tananarive. The latter is of course the seat of national state administratively as well politically speaking. It is therefore the centre of the central power (Fanjakana Foibe) despite the claims of decentralization.

Economically, Alaotra region, which is not a Betsimisaraka one, is inward-oriented, its products are consumed in the island in contrast to those of coastal regions. Historically this region was precociously in contact with the Kingdom of Madagascar since its formation at the end of the XVIIIth century. More than the coastal zones, it benefited from the efforts of evangelization and schooling led by the Kingdom in the XIXth century. Without speaking about integration, it is undeniable that historically and culturally the Alaotra has favoured links with the Imerina than with the coast. Some landscapes of the Alaotra resemble to those of the Imerina with its villages characterized by steeples

of protestant temples and catholic churches.

The North region, polarized by urban centres like Maroantsetra and Mananara and based on export cultivation, considers itself as the birthplace of the "betsimisarakatude" in respect to the South region of Tamatave province, in decline and completely enclosed. Historically, this region is initiator of the constitution of the Confederation Betsimisarak in the XVIII century. This region believes it represents the authentic "*betsimisarakaness*" in contrast to that of the South; the latter would be culturally depreciated because included into the Confederation after being defeated during the unification war.

Economically, region activities are close to those of East region of the Diego Suarez province, situated a bit to the North. Vanilla and coffee are the main products. They are produced in smaller quantity compared with the North but it is sufficient enough for this part of Tamatave region. The later considers itself to be richer than the South region, and this in spite of difficulties faced by these products since the late-1970s.

During March 1989 presidential elections, President Ratsiraka obtained only 20% of votes in Maroantsetra, and during the legislative ones in May 1989, a minister had to stay during one month in the town pressuring inhabitants to vote (with a very high percentage of abstention). The presidential party's candidate was the rector of the university of Tamatave. Maroantsetra was among the county towns of Fivondronana to "revolt" against the President during the 1991 movement.

As for the southern region of the province, its isolation and the absence of protected harbours which could allow to reach its maritime coast, have always constituted obstacles to this region,

confining it to a self-subsistence economy. Isolation whose consequences on the cultural ground are very important. Few intellectuals and native managerial staff of the Tamatave province have received their education in the South.

During the 1989 presidential elections, the South region distinguished itself by its loyalty to President Ratsiraka who is a native of this region. Some villages like Marolambo had voted 100% in his favour. In the majority of vote bureaux of the region, the candidate of the principal opposition party , the MFM, got only 4% of votes. Probable electoral frauds and irregularities notwithstanding, it can be stated that, though being the most backward region in the province, its electoral choice may be also justified by its legitimist character.

There is also the case of the inhabitants of Sainte Marie island who are largely considered by all Betsimisaraka to be francophile. Historically this contention dates back to Sainte Marie's particular status. Indeed, the island was "given up" to the French company of the eastern Indies in the XVIIIth century and its inhabitants enjoyed a double nationality status until 1975. During this year the socialist government organized a referendum asking them to opt for sole Malagasy nationality.

Under colonization, an important number of Saint Marians were auxiliaries of the colonizers. During the 1974 insurrection, in the eastern coast, several Malagasy guards responsible for repression were native to this island. The socialist régime had rehabilitated this armed insurrection against colonization by granting a pension to the Malagasy who were caught "arms in hands". This rehabilitation mainly regarded Betsimisakaras of the Great Land and was in general directed against Saint Marians.

By voting at 70% for Manandafy Rakotonirina, the principal opposition party's candidate in 1989, inhabitants sanctioned or expressed their desire to change régime.

The fifth and last sub-group is the Central-Tamatave region, relay between the central power and Tamatave province. Historically, Tamatave Town symbolized powers which succeeded each others in the zone. The French of the mercantile era attempted to settle there from the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. The Kingdom of Madagascar is the origin of its expansion as a town from the second half of the XIXth century. At the beginning of the XXth century, General Galliéni wanted to make it the capital of Madagascar, which had become a French possession. Main port town of the island, Tamatave is made up of various ethnic groups since at least two centuries. Multi-ethnic border town, Tamatave is perceived as an ethnic capital because of administrative divisions, though historically, the Betsimisarakas did not develop an urban civilization.

Economically, this region is, after Tananarive, the second pole of tertiary activities characterized by administrative jobs and the port. All political forces aim to control it. This control is conditioned to the adherence of the powerful middle class because the tertiary sector represents nearly 75% of economic activities in the region.

2. THE MIDDLE CLASS

Several people in the middle class support the régime because of the profit they get from it and extralegal potentialities the system provide to them. But the opposition also recruits the majority of its militants within this middle class whose purchasing power diminished by 60% during 16 years of the

socialist régime.

Generally, this class has the same rythm of life as that of Tananarive to which it is daily linked by two flights, a roadrail line, and numerous taxis. Tamatave is one of towns which receive regularly daily newspapers from Tananarive. Since the installation of parabolic aerials and the inauguration of the weekly route Tamatave-La Réunion, this middle class experiences modernism and has adopted the western lifestyle. Centre of "tribalism", this town is also a cultural mixture place. Tamatave generates a culture of integration vis-à-vis the plurality of rural societies of the province. Although rural population is numerically in majority, it remains politically and somewhat socially passive. This is due to the absence of cohesion rather than that of a conscious collective will.

The middle class is the social vehicle of this culture which is potentially integrative through its networks with various agglomerations and therefore with countrymen, links often characterized by a multiform domination.

One of the components of this middle class, civil servants, has played a fundamental role in the opposition movement against Ratsiraka's régime. On the 106,818 civil servants (except the ministry of Defense), that is to say the 1/4 of wage earners of the formal sector, Tamatave I and II accounted to 3.682 whose 51% belong to social ministries, 35% to the general administration, and 14% to technical ministries. One should note that, for Tamatave town, the ratio of civil servant/population is about 1 civil servant for 100, what is slightly below the national average (1,3%). In the entire province, the rural areas are underadministrated, the ratio being 9%. This situation is the same throughout the country. It should be noted that half of

civil servants belong to social ministries and the ratio for the whole Tamatave province exceeds the national average (54% versus 51%).

In the private sector, Tamatave I and II are tertiary sector-oriented. This sector plays the biggest role in the exploitation of primary sector's products. Moreover, production of export cultivation is done by small Malagasy farmers. The middle class is therefore for a double reason interested by production of export products as well as by their exploitation through service activities. At these two levels, the middle class is victim of the collapse of prices in international market: collapse of price causing the decrease of exports which finance, through the state, common equipments in towns.

Several attempts were made by the Second Republic authorities to re-orient the economy of the town by trying to create new poles of production. The first time, at the approach of 1981 presidential elections, were installed in Tamatave *clés-en-main* factories (or turn-key factories, that is to say, imported factories supposed to be ready to be used in the host country). But because none functioned, the town was transformed into a "white elephants" cemetery. A second time toward the late 1980s; the institutiton of "*zones franches*" (or preferential investment area) aimed to attract investors. The double argument was that, in the one hand, Tamatave being the political stronghold of Ratsiraka, this zone should be a security for stability and social peace and, in the other hand the presence of the port in the zone should be an investment incentive. But "zones franches" did not attract investors given especially weak technical formation of natives of this region. Mainly interested in textile activities, investors went in the central High Lands.

As for export products farmers, gradual but inexorable decrease of prices in international markets, compelled to increase yearly their production twice or three times in order to keep the level of their income. Thus, the exported quantity of vanilla, coffee, and *letchis* has been multiplied by 11 within 5 years but whose price from the producer has been divided for the same by four. Moreover, producers are victims of intermediaries given the state subsidies. Indeed, by subsidizing storage of vanilla in order to increase its price, the government occasions the creation of fictitious stocks, enriching stockers while producers are not able to sale out their products or are compelled to sale them at a price inferior to the minimum advised by the state. Such a situation partially explains why vanilla producers were to the centre of the 1991 movement against Ratsiraka.

The gradual and inexorable decrease of coffee, vanilla, and *gironfle* prices in international markets led the state, like under colonization and during the world depression, to subside producers and dealers in general. This system generated corruption. Indeed, the collapse of prices compelled the government to advise dealers to stock products, to rarefy them in order to cause increase of prices. Thus, for vanilla, some stockers lived from speculation because the government remunerates the stockage.

Another component of the middle class are private sector wage-earners. Concerning salaries, Madagascar had in 1988 near 270,377 wage-earners. Since 1960, their number remained the stable (204,924). This stability which is actually a stagnation, illustrate the weakeness of real performances of the island in the formal sector. 839 companies of the 14,834 existing in Madagascar are based in Tamatave. A proportion of 78% operates in the tertiary sector, 12% in the primary sector and 10% in the secon-

dary one. Enterprises have an average of 11 employees (the national average being 18).

Seventy-five percent of tertiary sector's wage-earners of the whole province are in the town. Being for decades strongly involved in trade union movement, port employees (about 3,000) are a significant group among wage-earners.

The appearance of first trade unions in Madagascar dates back from the period between the two world war). Tamatave was, from this time, an important centre of trade unionism. Elections of port personnel representatives sponsorized by trade unions were attentively followed and constituted a thermometer of social atmosphere.

Social peace in Tamatave depends on social peace at the port. During a long time, the obsessive fear of town's authorities (and the dream of political party) was to see port employees joining university students, another potential threat for social peace in Tamatave in the 1980s. This category of wage-earners though being numerically weak, constituted socially and politically a potential power.

However, official statistics hide the true nature of wage-earning. The majority of big corporations in Tamatave remunerate seasonal workers under very precarious work and life conditions. During *letchis*, vanilla or *girofle* season, seasonal workers work 18 hours per day during 3 to 4 months. Seasonal work, like an important part of the informal sector is mainly the domain of migrant workers, natives of the south and southern east. They are organized through associations of natives, controling entire quarters of the town. Opportunists according to their community's interests, these associations compensate the absence of a social

security system.

However, the existence of associations ethnically-based weakens social peace in the town. Thus, Tamatave's history is punctuated with tribalistic riots. During severe economic and political crises, minorities are victims of these riots (in Tamatavian society, each ethnic group, individually considered, constitutes a minority). In 1946, riots against Comorian community paved the way for the 1947 armed revolt against colonization. In 1986 and 1987, riots were directed against Asian traders; natives of south and southern east were accused to be responsible for these riots. In 1989, malevolent rumours were spread against Saint Marians.

This disadvantaged part of Tamatave which is similar to the proletariat used to utilize violence as a means of expression. That is why any political force and especially each government attempt to get agreements with these associations. Remaining in opposition vis-à-vis the state, is a condition for their survival because it provides them with the support of adherents. The essential function of these associations is prosaically to guarantee the defense and survival of their members in such a town considered by all Tamatavians as that in which the life cost is the most expensive in Madagascar.

3. TAMATAVE AND THE 1991 MOVEMENT

The absence of a regional lobby of contractors in the European bourgeois style of the XIXth century or that of a part of the High Lands' bourgeoisie, endowed with a real autonomy vis-à-vis political power, has favoured the supremacy of a group which is linked to the régime because of the utilization by the later of its prerogatives of administrative power.

As for the rural world, its associations and institutions have been included in the dominant party and administration. Numerous *Tangalamena* (a kind of persons who hold concurrently spiritual and administrative power in villages) have been appointed rather than elected. Thus, during street movement in June 1991, numerous *Tangalamena*, who are supposed to represent the population, were presented on the Télevision supporting President Ratsiraka in the later's bunker in Tananarive. Recoursing to a non-efficient methods, the rural opposition movement, especially in the North region of Madagascar located between East and West coasts imitated the late President of the First Republic who used to speak through a medium. Such practices date back from the *Sakalava* monarchy which controlled the island untill the XVIIIth century.

In the town of Tamatave, the middle class components with their numerous and somewhat powerful associations will constitute the framework of the 1991 movement. Indeed, they have been autonomous from the successive régimes.

In 1989, the government initiated a political opening which did not correspond Tamatavian realities and aspirations. The political opening aimed to attract the opposition in order to weaken it (two political parties, the VITM and the MoNiMa joined the presidential sphere).

This false political opening reinforced the opposition entrenchment with the middle class and its associations. Among these associations, the Christian associations played a preponderant role. The Catholic University Chaplaincy, for example, whose French chaplain had been politely and firmly "dismissed" in 1989 after enquiry and questioning led by the DGID (political police), carried a lot of influence with students. Very influential with managerial staff and technicians natives of the High Lands, the

Protestant network was also an important element. The unification of Christians with the FFKM constituted, through the network of Christian associations a significant step toward their freedom of speech.

Moreover, the ethnically-based mutual aid associations (like Zafin'i Iarivo, Sons of Tananarive, Natives of the South and Southern East, etc...) which are usually sponsorized by individuals exercising a liberal profession, constituted forums of debates. In spite of their numerical and economic importance, Malagasy non-natives of Tamatave are politically marginalized. During crises, some communities were designated as scapegoat. Manupilating the ethnically-based adherence of some communities and Ratsiraka partisans' claim to be the "First Occupant" of the town, the populist tendency of the 1991 movement opposed them. During confrontations between Federatists and anti-federalists in the last week of August 1992 in Tamatave, there were about twenty persons killed. This ethnic killing was indeed a result of political competition.

Moreover, several associations established in Tananarive recruit their members within the Tamatavian middle class in order to have a national image. Debates and activities in these associations contributed to maintain a political culture which is relatively ancient in Tamatave. In contrast of many places in Madagascar, the opposition in Tamatave enjoyed a particular status. For a long time, each political organization had, for example, its own day devoted to demonstrate its force through the support of the components of civil society.

However, the "firmness" of local authorities under Ratsiraka's régime, constituted an obstacle against free speech.

The movement for democracy began in April 1991 in Tananarive (more specifically in Fianarantsoa) under the impetus of opposition parties. Initially, Tamatave observed with attention and prudence the movement which became rapidly a "national movement"). Several political leaders visited Tamatave and attempted to involve the population at their respective side.

The university of Tamatave constituted the centre of the movement against Ratsiraka. Confronted with several social problems, the university was a permanent concern for authorities because it was a centre of social tension susceptible to "contaminate" other sectors like the port and the rest of the town. During their strikes, students often demanded the dismissal of the rector, accused to be the cause of problems faced by the university. But in the system, the functions of rector are more political than academic ones because he was a native of the province and a member of the presidential party. Claims were indirectely addressed against the very foundation of "decentralization" as it was understood by the AReMa. Authorities marginalized the university by practising a harsh policy of repression because for them, it was full of "foreigners" and "fictitious" students.

From June 13, 1991, students at the university of Tamatave whose several leaders were members of the MFM and natives of "coasts", went daily to demonstrate the centre of the town, baptized "Place of Democracy" following the example of Tananarive.

The state of uncertainty due to the fear and prudence which was noticed in a part of the middle class occasioned the accession to the leadership of local committees of the movement by some individuals without sufficient political culture.

In contrast with some other towns such as Tulear or Fianarantsoa

where the *Mayamandrenys* (moral authorities such as university lecturers and medical practitioners), were involved in the movement since the beginning.

This demonstration marked the irreversible character of the movement which was oriented against Ratsiraka since the later was perceived as the pivot of the ethnicist ideology.

After the closing of the university at the end of July, the population of Tamatave town continued the movement which did not run out of steam. But from a symbolic voilence, the movement became actually violence.

Thus, while pronouncing discourses on democracy following those of Tananarive, leaders of the movement favoured the development of violence which is opposed to "soft transition" proned at the beginning.

Because of divisions which occured within the street movement, the later started its collapse in the beginning of August in Tamatave. As said above one of the factors explaining the weakness of the movement was its lack of a leadership endowed of political culture. This leadership proved to be unable to negociate population's claims as initially formulated.

The middle class which proclaimed itself "the people" (or at least its "non-legal" but "legitime" representation) was stimulated by its opposition to the Ratsiraka's régime, even to Ratsiraka himself. There was no project of society.

Hostile to this watershed and in order to take over from the régime, the notables formed Tamatavian sections of numerous associations and Tananarivian parties which constituted the

"political department" of the movement. Coinciding with the re-opening of negotiations with Ratsiraka, this watershed helped the movement to lift out of the wood.

This process led to interminable bargainings about the establishment of a government of transition which had to organize different elections and to elaborate a new Constitution. One of the phases of this process was the organization of "Regional Forums" in order to collect ideas for formulating the new Constitution. The Regional forum of Tamatave II following the example of numerous county towns of the province opted for a new administrative division of the province as recommended from 1989 by the MFM. This proposed division aimed to implement the principle of effective decentralization.

As for the Regional Forum of Tamatave 1 which numbered a hundred of nearly the totality of associations representatives, it was unable to harmonize a project of society. It opposed the proposed new administrative division.

The absence of a common viewpoint revealed the division. Anti-Ratsiraka populism was the unique way to escape it. The organization of the consultative referendum of November 25, 1992, was threatened and disturbed by Ratsiraka's supporters.
The presidential elections (February 1993) and the legislative ones marked the end of street movement through party alliances. Thus, politics "from below" temporarily ended.

CONCLUSION

The anti-political party discourse professed by a significant part of the movement for democracy favoured the emergence from within the movement of a dominant populist tendency. Without a project of society, this populist movement considered itself a adversary to Ratsiraka. Ratsiraka's discourse on national unity and that opposed to the first of federalism contained the seeds of ethnicism. Political competitions were essentially ethnic competitions, which hindered the emergence of a project of society. The transformation of ethnicism into tribalism in the Tamatave province through polarization "from above" of the province by the town, also hindered the emergence of numerous poles. These poles might occured from a new administrative division based on a true decentralization which takes into consideration local realities.

Thus, as for the Tamatave town, the recognition of its multi-ethnicity is a necessity for the existence of democracy in this town. Tamatave may become a model of implementation of a culture and economy based on "trans-ethnicity". The regicide accomplished by students at the "Place of Democracy" would lose its symbolical character and become unambiguously true.