

Effects of Madagascar's political economy on development and environment

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Question

Based on recent literature in French and English, what are the key aspects of Madagascar's political economy which affect inclusive, environmentally sustainable livelihoods and growth, and basic issues in sustainable human development in the country? Identify the significant barriers and, where possible, any major positive factors.

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1. Overview

Since Madagascar's independence in 1960, socio-political crises and their aftermaths have regularly wiped out, and even set back, the country's macroeconomic growth and human development (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 9). GDP per capita has consequently kept decreasing since 1960, with political crises in 1972, 1991, 2001-2002, and 2009-2013, as See: Figure 1 below shows. The 2009 crisis and its repercussions were thus only the latest in a longer-term pattern of economic contractions, followed by rare moments of economic revival, which in turn are brought down by popular protests (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 9–11).

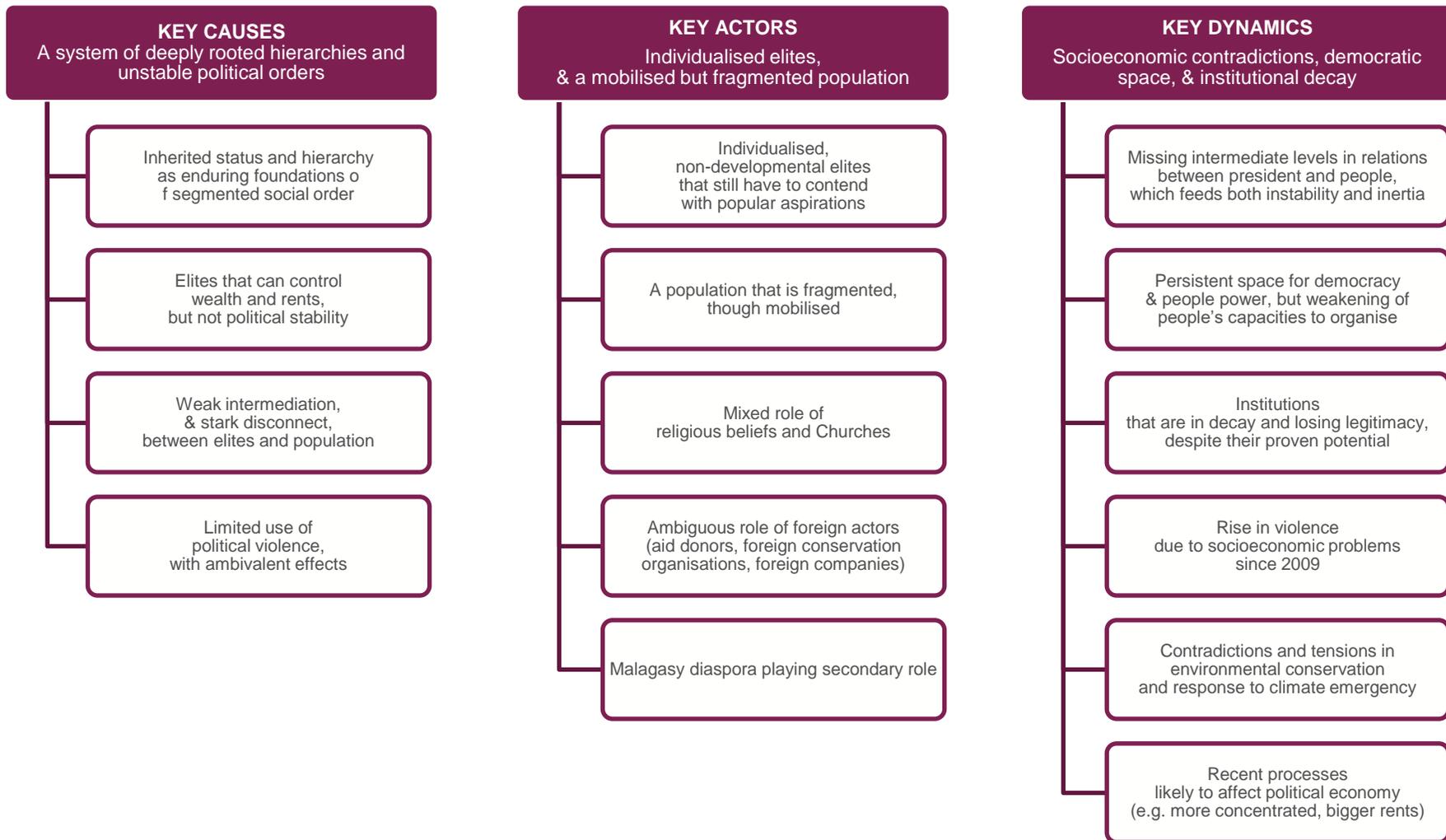
See: Figure 1. The Malagasy paradox: growth and socio-political crises, 1960-2016, *source: Razafindrakoto et al., 2017a, p. 21, based on INSTAT (2014), world development indicators (2014), and authors' calculations*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108770231>

The succession of Malagasy crises has had three main features (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 11):

- **long-term de-development** (the puzzle of “involution”);
- **an acceleration of the cycles of crises** over the decades;
- **a paradoxical interplay between times of economic growth, and political crises.**

Key causes, actors, and dynamics in the country's political economy explain this trajectory, and how it affects development and environment. They are synthesised in Figure 2 (next page, p. 3) and in the rest of this overview.

Figure 2. Key causes, actors, and dynamics in Malagasy political economy that affect development and environment



Source: author's own

The causes of Madagascar's trajectory lie in a system of deeply rooted hierarchies and unstable political orders, which has four key aspects.

First and foremost, the enduring foundations of Malagasy society have been inherited status and hierarchy, leading to a segmented social order. Inherited status and hierarchy have remained its fundamental social structures since the 18th century, though these have evolved over time. Still, to this day, descendants of the former noble (*andriana*) and higher-status commoner groups remain overrepresented among the elite as part of the dominant *fotsy* group (defined as 'Whites' for several centuries, based on social orders during the era of kingdoms), while descendants of other commoners (*mainity*, defined as 'Black commoners') are the vast mass at the bottom.

Elites – who are disproportionately more educated and made up of men than the average population – have **managed to reproduce their position at the top through a variety of strategies**, including (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a):

- investing in their children's schooling and advanced higher education;
- inheriting and transmitting their status, especially relating to *andriana* descent;
- 'straddling', whereby they get involved in several fields – political and economic, public and private, State and associations – to occupy the various spheres of power;
- participating in selected elite associations and networks;
- matrimonial alliances.

The persistence of this system has made **extreme, lasting stratification the basic structure of Malagasy society, economy, and politics.** In this system, individuals and families – elites most of all, but the rest of the population too – constantly compete against each other for differentiation and ranking. The stark status- and hierarchy-based structure is associated with two forms of enduring segmentation: social segmentation between elites and the rest of the population; and spatial segmentation, with major rift between urban and rural areas. This is completed by the persistence of a political theology that grants rulers legitimacy as the default.

Second, elites can control wealth and rents, but not political stability. One reason for this is that, historically, rents have been limited, and captured by individualised elites. The major sources of historical rents have been: lands and other real estate properties; crops such as coffee, vanilla, clove, and tea; large public and private companies; trade in consumer goods; free trade zones for exports; and foreign aid. Malagasy elites have also been unable to form stable organisations and robust coalitions, due to the individualised nature of elite competition. They therefore cannot form a stable political consensus on wealth, distribution, and social regulation. As a result, the longstanding pattern is one where specific individuals accumulate wealth for themselves and their close relations, which creates tensions and contradictions with other elites and ordinary people, who eventually oust them from power.

Third, there is weak intermediation, and a stark disconnect, between the elites and the rest of the population. In particular, both formal and informal intermediate bodies are weak – be it political parties, civil society associations, local elected officials, or traditional leaders. In addition, not only are elites disconnected from the population, but extreme inequalities are normalised, which feeds the population's passivity.

Fourth, the country stands out in its limited use of political violence since its independence, but this has had ambivalent effects. While this brings the benefits of peacefulness, and contains conflicts among elites to minor, individualised dimensions, it rests on two politically manipulated sets of norms that have led to popular pacification and acquiescence. One is the norm of *fihavanana*, which calls on people to uphold social harmony by avoiding direct conflict. The other is the status-based norms of inequality between *fotsy* and *mainity*.

The key actors shaping Malagasy political economy are domestic. On one side are the elites who are atomised, i.e. invested in individualised logics, not in sustained social relations beyond a small circle. They have adopted practices that are non-developmental, with a particularity: because they never stay in power for long, they do not even try to consolidate their hold on power through medium- and long-term plans; instead, they just seek to accumulate as much wealth as possible when in a position of power, before leaving it or being ousted.

On the other side are the ordinary Malagasy, whom elites, for all their power, still have to contend with. The population is atomised, and rural people are not objects of political or economic capture by elites – not even for clientelism. Interpersonal trust is low (as it is among elites). And yet, for all its fragmentation, the population can occasionally take collective action. This is because people's aspirations and capacities to mobilise have persisted and grown. Popular discontent with economic and democratic realisations has played a crucial role in all the political crises of the country. People's capacities for mobilisation are hindered, but real.

One more significant category of domestic actors is the variety of Christian Churches in the country. Their role has been mixed. They have provided useful services to the population (e.g. education), and at times helped to resolve political crises. At other times, they have sided with specific members of the elites, much to their believers' discontent. More deeply, they can, wittingly or not, perpetuate hierarchies, and the political theology legitimising rulers.

As for foreign actors, they have had ambiguous roles. In particular, aid donors' actions have had problematic effects. Since the 1980s, their policies and programmes have contributed to shrinking and weakening the already undersized and weak public sector. The way donors work has also entailed some poor choices, from short-termist disbursements and a lack of country contextualisation, to levels of aid that are too low, to counter-productive conditionality.

Foreign companies have also played an ambivalent role. Some have contributed to the positive effects of free trade zones. Others have been involved in extractive economies (e.g. agricultural exports, mining), which the population has challenged, but also sometimes accepted.

The Malagasy diaspora has played a secondary role in the country's political economy.

The country's major factors in political economy and its main actors come together in producing **some major dynamics revolving around socioeconomic contradictions, democratic space, and institutional decay.**

First, the **missing levels in vertical social relations** mean there are no possible intermediaries between the population and the president. This has led to personalisation, lack of responsiveness, and instability at the top, while creating a vicious circle of economic recessions, and weak popular capacities to demand change, for everyone.

Second, **space for democracy and people power** has remained.

Third, and at the same time, **Malagasy institutions are in decay and losing legitimacy**. This is despite some proven potential for performance by formal economic and political institutions such as free trade zones and fights against corruption, which showed effective but often ephemeral capacities.

Fourth, there has been a **rise in violence due to socioeconomic problems since 2009**.

Fifth, **some processes that have arisen in the past 10-15 years** are likely to change the actors and dynamics of Malagasy political economy, and possibly even its causal factors:

- The emergence of **more concentrated, bigger rents**, in illicit exports of rosewood, in contracts for mining exploration with foreign companies, and with private economic operators that support some State functions or some individuals in power.
- A **weakening of the political theology** that establishes non-violence and respect for hierarchies and leaders.
- **Environmental changes** due, among others, to climate change.

See: Figure 3. Trends in Madagascar's component indices of the Human Development Index, 2000-2018, *source: UNDP, 2019, p. 3, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MDG.pdf*

As a result of its political economy system, Madagascar is one of the only countries worldwide to have seen its development worsen in recent decades, as widely noted in the literature and illustrated in See: Figure 3 to the left.

The people of Madagascar are among the poorest in the world. By GDP per capita, Madagascar was among the 10 poorest countries in the world in 2016 (Latek, 2018, p. 2). By then, Gross National Income (GNI) was under US\$400 per capita, and the rate of monetary poverty stood at an abysmal 90% (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 9). Over 77% of the population lives with less than US\$1.90 per day in purchasing power parity, according to the last available data from 2008-2009 (UN Development Programme [UNDP], 2019, p. 6).

When accounting for multidimensional poverty, a total of 89.6% of the population is affected: nearly 20 million people are multidimensionally poor, and over three more million people are vulnerable to this (UN Development Programme [UNDP], 2019, p. 6).

This is despite Madagascar's natural assets, and strengths in its population, with real advances in health and education. The country has unique natural resources – in minerals and biodiversity –, and a young and fairly well-educated population (Latek, 2018, p. 3). Between 1990 and 2018, “life expectancy at birth increased by 15.7 years, mean years of schooling increased by 0.9 years and expected years of schooling increased by 4.0 years” (UN Development Programme [UNDP], 2019, p. 3). During the same period, GNI per capita decreased by about 11.7% (UN Development Programme [UNDP], 2019, p. 3).

Still, Madagascar ranks at a very low 162 out of 189 countries and territories on the 2019 human development index (UN Development Programme [UNDP], 2019, p. 2). When the index is discounted for domestic inequalities in having a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living, the country's index further loses over 25% of its value (UN Development Programme [UNDP], 2019, pp. 4–5). Most regions of the country experience a very low level of human development, malnutrition, and a major deficit of infrastructures and transportation (Latek, 2018, p. 3).

The present report assesses, synthesises, and signposts recent academic, practitioner, and policy literature that identifies what, in Malagasy political economy, has affected inclusive, environmentally sustainable livelihoods and growth, or basic issues in sustainable human development (such as health, nutrition, gender equality, and public services for social protection). It is based on a rapid review of French- and English-language literature published in the past 5 years, with a few forays into the past 10 years as relevant¹. At DFID's request, the report author prioritised references that offered the more general, cross-cutting perspectives, i.e. that did not focus on any particular sector, commodity, or region.

To explore Malagasy political economy, **there is a large body of high-quality knowledge. The literature nonetheless has a number of imbalances**, such as under-research of urban areas, elites' sociology, and inequalities (such as gender). One of the books found during the literature searches (and widely praised by country experts) happens to exhaustively and authoritatively speak to DFID's enquiry while synthesising and discussing most of the available academic, practitioner, and policy literature: **'Puzzle and Paradox. A Political Economy of Madagascar', by Mireille Razafindrakoto, François Roubaud, and Jean-Michel Wachsberger** (2017, in French, with the English-language version forthcoming²). In light of this, the present report has made this book its backbone, while also using and signposting other references, and listing over 200 additional ones in an appendix. To avoid repeating multiple citations across Sections 3 to 5, readers are invited to also refer to the following country-wide analyses with similar points:

- By the same authors: (Razafindrakoto et al., 2015, 2018a, 2018b; Razafindrakoto, Razafindrakoto, et al., 2014; Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2014; Wachsberger, 2010);
- By other authors, see among others: (Brimont, 2018; Châtaigner, 2014; Crisis Group, 2014; Fremigacci, 2014; Galibert, 2011; Rafitoson, 2012; Rajerison, 2013; Urfer, 2014; Véron, 2017)³.

The **report structure** is as follows. The next section (Section 2) offers a detailed assessment of the state of research, knowledge, and public data on Malagasy political economy. Section 3 presents the key causes that make the country's political economy generate such adverse effects on development and environment. Section 4 adds further information on the key domestic and foreign actors involved. Section 5 brings all the previous components together in showing what longstanding and recent dynamics this political economy has generated.

¹ All translations from French sources to English were done by the author of the present report.

² <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/puzzle-and-paradox/1682005820116494BA71BCC10D7DB73E#fndtn-contents>

³ For more technocratic approaches that speak to political economy but the limitations inherent in their positioning, also see publications by the International Monetary Fund [IMF] (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2019a, 2019b), and the World Bank (Osborne et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2018, 2019; Stocker et al., 2019; World Bank, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).

2. State of research, knowledge, and public data

Within a vast amount of literature available on Madagascar, there is **a large body of empirical knowledge that addresses political economy** in the country, and its role in shaping Malagasy development and environment (some of this knowledge explicitly refers to ‘political economy’, while most of it uses other terminology to examine such questions). As agreed with DFID, the present section details and assesses what research, knowledge, and data are available.

Strengths of available research and knowledge

Taken as a whole, the knowledge base has a number of strengths which make the **knowledge available of very high quality**.

First, it draws on a **diversity of sources**. A large majority of relevant references found through this rapid review are from academia. However, practitioner and policy sources do also offer a number of relevant references. Importantly, **academic, practitioner, and policy literature** largely cover the breadth of DFID’s query, so knowledge from all these types of sources can be used to shed light on the different aspects of the query, and to cross-check findings and interpretations.

In addition, a **large variety of authors** have published on Malagasy political economy and its effects on development and environment. While a few authors are country specialists who have authored multiple publications, a wide variety of authors is engaged on this overall, making for diverse viewpoints.

Similarly, **no single institution or funder seems to dominate the production and publication of knowledge** on Madagascar, though a few institutions have been core actors in this.

Second, the knowledge base is built on **research that used multiple languages**, from various Malagasy languages to French and English. As for publications, many of the relevant ones are in French, but there is also a significant number of English-language references (there are also, of course, publications in Malagasy languages, but the report author could not read these). French- and English-language literature both cover a similar breadth of topics, which enables further cross-checking of findings.

Third, available knowledge is based on **a mix of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods**. Further, within each type of method, the available knowledge base derives from **a variety of:**

- **approaches** (from systematic analysis to comparative or single case studies);
- **levels of analysis** (from macro to micro, from nationwide to particular regions or locations, and from international dimensions to local ones);
- **timeframes, often with some historical depth** (from short- to long-term considerations, from one-off investigations to longitudinal enquiries repeated over many years);
- **disciplines and inter-disciplinary collaborations**, within and between environmental sciences and social sciences (e.g. economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, history, development studies, area studies);
- **specific research questions, theories, and methodologies** (e.g. from years-long ethnography to cross-sectional qualitative household questionnaires to satellite imagery).

The mix and diversity in methods and approaches is present at the level of the whole literature, and, quite often, within single publications.

Fourth, based on the rapid review conducted for this report, **research and conclusions drawn from it appear to be rigorous in the vast majority of references**, when this is assessed against basic criteria such as clear and logical writing of arguments, conclusions matching what the data shows, and avoiding generalisations beyond the scope of data. Further, the academic references found are peer-reviewed publications (with a handful of exceptions made for relevant conference papers and academic blogs). As for practitioner and policy references, they are typically edited pieces published for or by well-established entities such as multilateral aid organisations, longstanding foundations, practice-oriented research institutions, or donor-supported NGOs.

Fifth, **findings laid out in references are typically analytical**, not just descriptive or narrative, **and conclusive**, not just indicative. Indeed, **many references identify causalities**, not just correlations.

Sixth, authors' findings are **broadly consistent across the literature**. One noteworthy difference is that the most in-depth, analytical pieces on political economy (typically, academic pieces) do not identify corruption as a cause of political economy problems, but rather as a manifestation of them and a dynamic. They also differentiate between high-level and petty corruption. In contrast, a number of practitioner and policy pieces pin corruption in general as a cause of problems. This makes for less fine-grained reasonings about how Malagasy political economy affects development and environment. The present report follows the lead of the more analytical pieces in this regard, while still citing the points made in other references.

Similarly, an important difference is how interdisciplinary and integrated authors' perspectives are. Some publications bring together economic and political considerations into a fully integrated political economy analysis (for a prime example, see e.g. Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a). Others focus primarily or exclusively on either economics or politics – this is typically the case with pieces by the IMF and the World Bank, as noted by Razafindrakoto et al. (2017, p. 11). The present report makes use of sources that use any of the above approaches, but seeks to be anchored in the broader, interdisciplinary, integrated one.

Seventh, considered as a whole, the knowledge base **covers the whole country**. In terms of territory, a small minority of references discuss the country as a whole, and the rest of the references cover a selected region or small-scale location. This adds up to a whole-country perspective with nuanced subnational investigations. In terms of natural environment and geography, authors cover a range of settings, from e.g. inland forests to coasts.

Eighth, some references address **aid as part of the political economy of the country**, thus offering insights that can speak to DFID's work. Some of these address aid overall as a component of Malagasy political economy. Others look at how interventions for development, humanitarian aid, disaster risk management, or peacebuilding interact with political economy.

Imbalances and gaps in available research and knowledge

In contrast, research and knowledge on Malagasy political economy, taken as a whole, have **some imbalances and gaps**.

Few general political economy analyses

To begin, **comparatively few references are general, cross-sectoral political economy analyses covering the whole country**. Instead, many references are about political economy in specific regions or locations, specific issues (e.g. land use), and/or specific sectors (e.g. particular agricultural sectors or crops).

In light of this, as DFID's purpose with the present report was to gain an overview of major issues in Malagasy political economy, the report prioritises using the few general political economy analyses found, followed by selected references with somewhat narrower, but still broad scopes. Simultaneously, the report provides an appendix with all the other references found, organised thematically for ease of use, to facilitate more in-depth investigations into specific aspects of political economy.

Notable imbalances in coverage

In addition, there are **some notable imbalances in what the knowledge base covers**.

Under-research on urban areas

Urban areas have been much less researched than rural ones. This is, in part, understandable, because an estimated 78% of Madagascar's population is rural (UN Development Programme [UNDP], n.d.), rural populations suffer from very poor living conditions, and rural isolation and poor transports are major features of the country, as universally noted in the literature. Nonetheless, the imbalance is striking indeed. Some of the practitioner, policy, and even academic research on Madagascar has thus been about "ghost towns", in that it has either ignored cities or adopted biased perspectives about them, as noted in an academic review of French geographic research in Madagascar (Fournet-Guérin, 2011).

To illustrate the rural bias in the literature, this review shows that French geographic studies on the country have **overwhelmingly focused on rural areas, or on geomorphology and hydrology. Rural and environmental studies have predominated**. This stark disinterest towards Malagasy cities among geographers in France is largely rooted in the colonial and post-colonial stereotypes which purports that cities clash with what supposedly constitutes Madagascar's essence: rurality, seen as the defining feature of Malagasy authenticity (Fournet-Guérin, 2011, p. 53). Against this, the capital Antananarivo is approached as too modern, ugly, dirty, or big to some, being the country's main city by size, profile, and diversity of its urban functions. Such perceptions apply to the other cities in the country, though to a lesser extent as the capital is about 10 times larger than the next cities (Fournet-Guérin, 2011, p. 53). Well into the 2000s, researchers with a rural bias have tended to study cities as either quaint and picturesque, or as a rural entity that had inordinately grown (Fournet-Guérin, 2011, p. 55).

A political economy has developed around this rural focus. Most of the numerous research institutes in Madagascar – be they foreign (IRD, CIRAD) or Malagasy (*Office national pour l'environnement*, *Centre national de la recherche appliqué au développement rural*, *Centre national de la recherche sur l'environnement*, *École supérieure des Sciences agronomiques d'Antananarivo*) focus on research about agriculture, forests, or environment. This is reinforced by the presence of big conservation NGOs, especially US-based ones (World Wide Fund for Nature – WWF, Conservation International), large international UN agencies (e.g. UNEP), networks of NGOs and national agencies (the Swiss-based International Union for Conservation

of Nature), and some bilateral aid agencies (Swiss or Norwegian ones). All these offer research facilities structured around rural areas.

In contrast, the review notes that **varied, high-quality geographic studies on Malagasy cities have emerged** (since the 1970s, in the case of France), but have remained few and far between. Only since the late 2000s have some French aid donors started up research programmes on cities (Fournet-Guérin, 2011, pp. 54, 59).

Even so, **some aspects of urban life remain under-researched**. One under-covered aspect is the formal sectors of the economy. Another is the middle and upper classes, despite their role in structuring exchanges with the outside world and in driving social change. Yet another is the spatial and social consequences of free trade zones, which employed around 100,000 persons in Antananarivo by the time of the review. A final one is about Indians, who ran most wholesale and retail trade in Antananarivo and reportedly owned a large share of the companies in the capital, at the time of the review. In contrast, finding studies on urban poverty in Antananarivo is easy. Many of those studies focus on the dimensions of poverty, more than on the actors and processes of urban economic change. This leaves unexplored the roles of elites, rulers, people with power and wealth, in the development (or lack thereof) of economic and social changes in Malagasy cities (Fournet-Guérin, 2011, pp. 62–63).

This reflects a ‘Third-Worldist’ approach to cities, but also **a political economy which has developed around studies on Malagasy cities**. Many of these studies arise in response to research tenders or funding streams from institutions that focus on poverty issues, such as the UN or the World Bank. Moreover, such donors often require studies to use normative concepts unsuited to local realities, which leads to distorted accounts of the actual situations (Fournet-Guérin, 2011, p. 63).

Consequently, only a relatively small body of knowledge is available (though it is of high quality) to explore the effects of political economy on development and environment in urban contexts, be it in the larger cities or in medium-sized towns.

Scarcity of precise, systematic research and knowledge on elites

Literature on Madagascar offers **scant precise, systematic knowledge on the country’s elites**, even as it offers many data and analyses centred solely on the poor, and to a much lesser extent on the middle classes. As a result, not only have Malagasy elites remained “*terra incognita*”, but **the inequalities they generate are likely to be massively underestimated**, as they are in all developing countries⁴.

This dearth of research and knowledge on elites is due in part to the difficulties inherent in doing quantitative and qualitative research on elites in any country, which are even greater in low-income countries. Defining, conceptualising, and getting empirical data on Malagasy elites is challenging. Moreover, the international development agenda has focused nearly exclusively on poverty reduction, making the poor and the strategies to exit poverty the main interest of research and policies, “even as studying the ‘upper end of the distribution’ (of incomes, wealth, or

⁴ (Guénard & Mesple-Soms, 2007, writing about developing countries, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 192)

power more broadly) has left the picture and become relegated to the background” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 191–192).

Massive proportion of studies on environmental protection

A massive part of political economy research and knowledge about Madagascar focuses on environmental protection (e.g. how the political economy of rural people's livelihoods often clash with conservation efforts). In contrast, there are **distinctly fewer political economy discussions of other aspects** of inclusive, environmentally sustainable livelihoods and growth, and of basic issues in sustainable human development (e.g. health, education, social protection). On these, the references found tended to be descriptive pieces about poor development indicators, or descriptive or prescriptive pieces about existing public policies. They offered little connection to political economy as a cause in this, so the report author did not take up those references.

Lack of systematic consideration of structures of inequalities, including gender

Most political economy discussions fail to integrate a number of structures of inequalities, while covering others very well.

References on Malagasy political economy typically cover socio-economic class, kinship, descent (in relation to historical slavery), and ethnicity very well. In addition, they cover quite well, though not systematically: age (across ages, from childhood and youth to middle age and older age); institutions based on religion and beliefs; migration of Malagasy nationals within the country and out of it, and immigration by wealthier people into Madagascar. Valuably, the references approach these structures of inequalities analytically, as dynamic power structures that are produced and reproduced, rather than descriptively. For example, most references refer to the formation and dynamic of wealth and livelihoods, not just to poverty. In addition, the references usually address the interplay between all the above structures too.

Conversely, **most references drastically under-examine gender, and migration by non-wealthy foreigners into Madagascar, while there is barely any discussion of disabilities, and of sexualities.** Moreover, many of the reference that do integrate these issues adopt a descriptive approach, for example merely discussing women and girls instead of analytically examining gender. Hardly any references bring all the perspectives together to assess political economy through the interplay of all the structures of inequalities.

Dearth of research and knowledge on positive factors in political economy

Lastly, there is **a dearth of research and knowledge on any positive factors** in Malagasy political economy that could help support development and environment. This is certainly because existing Malagasy political economy is overwhelmingly negative for development and environment, but the lack of focused research into positive factors, outside a few academic, practitioner and policy references, is worth noting.

Issues with the availability and quality of public data

DFID also asked what public data, especially on statistics and budgets, is available, and whether experts think it reliable. The rapid literature review conducted for this report shows a consensus that **national and subnational statistics and budget information from Malagasy public institutions remain partial in availability and lacking in quality and reliability.**

Quantitative macroeconomic data were nearly non-existent before 1960, and have remained patchy ever since, including on the most recent period. In addition, their reliability is widely acknowledged to be questionable (Jerven 2013, & Devarajan 2013, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 12). For example, the IMF, in coordination with other donors such as DFID, has conducted technical assistance on government finance statistics for several years to help the Malagasy authorities improve their macroeconomic statistics. While Madagascar has sought in recent years to improve its production of statistics, the IMF points out serious remaining problems (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019b, pp. 4–5).

Core national budget and statistics

Some of the problems are with core public budgets and statistics. As of late 2019, there is **no financial balance sheet showing the government's stock of financial assets and liabilities.** The government has made no progress in providing information on its various assets, and thus in collecting core information to prepare an accounting balance sheet (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019b, p. 12).

There has been a **lack of public transparency in preparing and adopting national budgets.** In 2018, an IT breakdown delayed the publication of the budget plan. Elected representatives were left to adopt the budget without civil society having had time to make its recommendations (Verneau, 2019).

The 2020 budget has lacked transparency too, according to a December 2019 article in French daily *Le Monde*. Civil society organisations have repeatedly sounded the alarm about the lack of transparency surrounding the draft budget. Following multiple demands on their part, the Ministry of Finance eventually published the draft budget bill (*projet de loi de finances*) online (Verneau, 2019).

In addition, in the 2020 draft budget, a €196 million line, representing 8.4% of the total budget, listed no allocated use. Organisations from Malagasy civil society mobilised to demand clarity on how this money would be used, fearing this was “an open door to corruption or embezzlement”, according to Hony Radert, the general secretary of the Collective of citizens and citizen organisations (*Collectif des citoyens et des organisations citoyennes*). One anonymous donor staff interviewed on the same issue stated that their concern in this regard was rather that the budget line resulted from cash that had remained unspent due to delays in executing some programmes, and that it risked not being spent if such delays went on (Verneau, 2019).

Problems lie not only with the production, collection, and publication of data, but also with their accuracy and reliability.

To illustrate this in one area, there has likely been **significant fraud and tax evasion** at customs, through undervaluation and misclassification. This is despite the availability of simple methods that could identify products or sectors with the greatest risk, and then target higher-risk importers and customs brokers and their import operations (Chalendard et al., 2016).

The estimated losses due to customs fraud represented 30% of total non-oil revenues collected by customs in 2014, according to a World Bank estimate (Chalendard et al., 2016, p. 3). Undervaluation and misclassification accounted for a loss of revenue of US\$53.7 and US\$42.4 million, respectively. Clothing (textile, footwear, and leather goods) and high tech (telephones, digital cameras) seemed substantially undervalued in 2014. In addition, some actors used customs tariffs not subject to duties and to value-added tax (VAT) for tax evasion. There is “reasonable evidence” that some goods subject to high taxes were declared as products exempt from duties and VAT, notably as fertilisers or rice (Chalendard et al., 2016, p. 3). As customs officials reported very few infractions despite carrying out inspections, there was probably collusion between some economic operators and some customs agents (Chalendard et al., 2016, p. 3). In contrast, in 2015, the number of reported frauds sharply increased, suggesting that collusion may have declined that year (Chalendard et al., 2016, p. 3).

Budget and statistics on other public entities

In addition, much data is missing on **entities outside the core national budget, such as the National Social Security Fund** (*Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale*), **Administrative Public Entities** (*établissements publics administratifs [EPAs]*), and **decentralised subnational governments** (*collectivités territoriales décentralisées [CTDs]*) (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019b, pp. 4–5). For example, on EPAs and CTDs, accounting data present anomalies, as data are not recorded in accordance with the balance architecture, which means that “[o]nly the most basic accounts can be classified accurately” (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019b, pp. 10–11).

According to the IMF, priorities are (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019b, pp. 5–6):

- resolving the problems with accounting sources in the balances of EPAs and CTDs;
- establishing government finance statistics “for the extrabudgetary central government, social security, and local government subsectors” (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019b, p. 6);
- identifying the main intergovernmental transfers, and then aggregating and consolidating the general government subsectors based on these;
- adopting the statutory document governing the Research Directorate (*Direction des études [DE]*) at the Ministry of Finance and Budget.

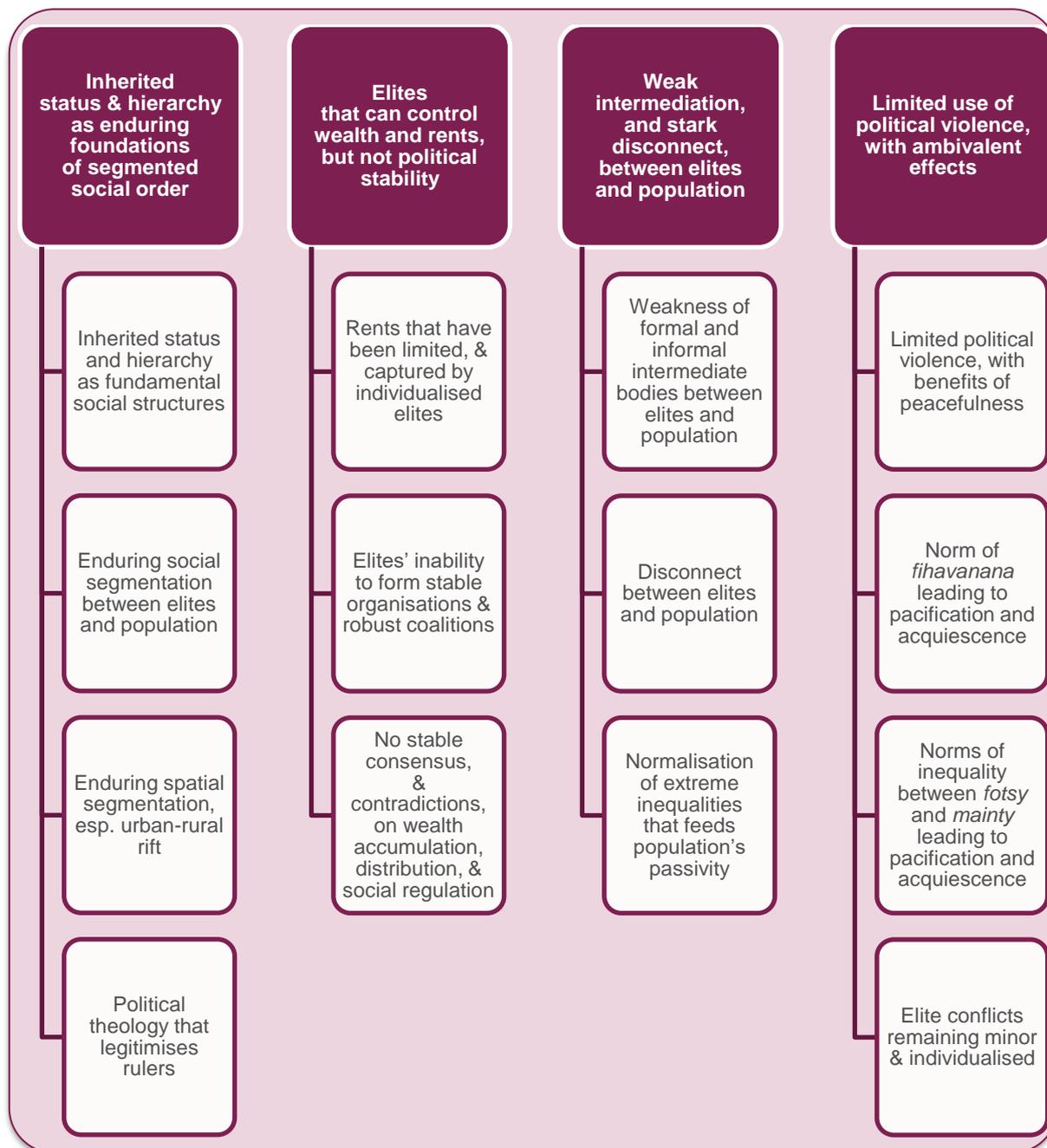
International organisations’ macroeconomic data and projections

Figures about actual and projected macroeconomic developments, including growth, are eminently political, especially following the 2009 crisis. Moreover, international institutions have a “structural atavism” whereby they establish optimistic macroeconomic projections, which very often end up being disproven in reality. All this therefore calls for great caution in assessing and taking up macroeconomic data and scenarios put forth by international organisations (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104).

3. Key causes: a system of deeply rooted hierarchies and unstable political orders

The key causes of Madagascar's trajectory lie with a system of deeply rooted hierarchies and unstable political orders structuring its political economy. They are synthesised in Figure 4 below, and detailed in the rest of this section.

Figure 4. Key political economy causes affecting Madagascar's development and environment



Source: author's own

The obstacles in Malagasy political economy that generate a lack of economic development, and recurring political-economic crises are first and foremost internal to the country, specialists agree (see e.g. Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187). Certainly, the country's configuration "is a set of imported and local elements that are in constant interaction", but endogenous dynamics are the leading ones (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 232). This becomes clearer when comparing Madagascar to many countries experiencing a similar international environment, including in Sub-Saharan Africa: most of these other countries, such as Burkina Faso, are less endowed in production factors (e.g. natural resources, education and other assets of the labour force), yet have fared better than Madagascar. Indeed, in methodologically rigorous polls, both the population at large and Malagasy elites massively name internal factors as the main cause of the Malagasy failure (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 171). This being said, external factors do also play significant roles (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 171). These are explored in the discussion on external actors in Section 4 (p. 47).

Inherited status and hierarchy as enduring foundations of a segmented social order

The main social order in the country's political economy, which has endured over time, has been the rift between the elites and the vast majority of the population (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231). Malagasy society has fundamentally remained structured around status groups and hierarchies that are inherited from the times of precolonial kingdoms and independence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 230). The lasting power of a profoundly unequal social order has been the major barrier to development: individuals' status and place of birth still strongly determine their fates (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187).

This has been worsened by further social and territorial divisions. Major social divisions are the distinctions within groups sharing the same status of origin, and marked interpersonal distrust across society. Major territorial divisions are: the gap and disconnection between cities and countryside; inequalities in the development of different territories; the isolation of some territories; and the disproportionate weight of the capital city (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 230).

All this combines to create structural obstacles to development in the country (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 230).

Inherited status and hierarchy as fundamental social structures

Extreme, lasting stratification as the basic structure of society

As a recent in-depth sociology of Malagasy elites concluded (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 202):

“the Malagasy elite, associated by definition with the ruling elite, has overall been the same in Madagascar since independence [...]. It is made up in large part by the *andriana* and *hova* bourgeoisie, which inherited symbolic power (before colonisation for the *andriana* [the nobles from the era of kingdoms], before and during colonisation for the *hova* [commoners described as ‘White’], as they were in charge of managing public affairs). Members of major ‘coastal’ families joined this group, thanks to the position they acquired on the national scene, among others as representatives for their region, since the colonial period.”

To this day, a major part of Malagasy elites stem from the former aristocracy in the country (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 226). In fact, some family names repeatedly come up among Malagasy elites since independence. Although some new names appear, overall an oligarchy made up of a bourgeois elite (including members from the coast) has remained central ever since independence⁵. This is despite status groups and castes having been formally abolished at the end of the 19th century, and despite some members of the elites denying that status still plays an important role for them personally, and for society (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 202–203).

Interlocked with this, Madagascar’s long-term sociohistory of inequality has also persisted through the distinction between a *fotsy* minority and a *mainity* mass (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 120). This distinction between ‘Whites’ – *fotsy* – and ‘Blacks’ – *mainity*, originally the ‘Black commoners’ in the era of kingdoms – remains found across Madagascar, and is already documented e.g. in the 17th century as structuring social relations on the island⁶. The terms are not purely symbolic: they also refer to differences in skin colour and in origin – Austronesian vs. African⁷. Differentiation originating from the system of status groups has tended to simplify over time into a very large majority of *mainity*, and a small minority of *fotsy*. The system of status groups that assign unequal value to individuals remains anchored in people’s bodies and minds (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 120–121).

This has set up an occult system that is not spoken about openly, but that strongly conditions people’s behaviours, especially on marriage and ownership (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 120–121). The symbolic hierarchy is thus also a real one, since *mainity* are “confined into the social reproduction of poverty, through prohibitions of certain marriages, [and] often excluded from rural land and urban property” (Galy, 2009, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 121).

⁵ (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 206–207; also citing Fremigacci, 2014)

⁶ (Randrianja & Ellis, 2009, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 52)

⁷ (Razafindralambo, 2005; Ramamonjisoa, 1984; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 52)

Malagasy social structure is a major factor explaining why there are no significant forces for change in the country (outside the times of political upheaval against a leader in power), even though the political system is not locked down. Certainly, factors other than social structure contribute to this general inertia too. But enduring, inherited stratification is a major factor (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169).

Sociological profile of Malagasy elites

A ground-breaking systematic study of Malagasy elites provided a sociology of people who belong to Malagasy elites in at least one of the following spheres: political (government, elected officials, political parties); public institutions (including administration); army and law enforcement entities; economy (large public or private companies); civil society (including media, employers' or employees' trade unions, associations); religion; and international organisations (including international non-governmental organisations). For feasibility reasons, the study excluded from its scope local elites, diaspora elites, and international elites that influence Madagascar (e.g. the French president, the World Bank president, the head of an international company operating in Madagascar), though such actors do play a role, as the study authors readily note. On the other hand, the study did cover the main foreign communities long established in the country: Indian (*karana*), Chinese (*sinoa*), and descendants of settlers (*zanatany*) (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 194–195)⁸.

What sociodemographic features set elites apart from the rest of the population

Taken as a whole, and compared to the rest of the population, Malagasy elites (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 196–197, 199):

- are mostly (52%) descendants of *andriana*;
- have a higher education degree at a much bigger rate (97%), and are 'over-educated' in several more ways (over 80% state they have spent more than three years at university, over 40% more than five years, and incommensurably more elite members state that they have studied abroad and master French than do ordinary citizens);
- are predominantly of Merina ethnicity, located around the capital city (64%), distantly followed by Betsileo (11%), another group from the highlands, with just 25% from ethnicities that are from coastal regions;
- are disproportionately made up of men (80% are men);
- are older (mean age of 52 years, 55% above 50 years old);
- comprise a balanced mix of Protestants (FJKM) and Catholics, with other Churches making up roughly a quarter of the total.

⁸ On Chinese migrants and their descendants, also see: (Tremann, 2014).

Strikingly, this means that, compared to the population at large, elites (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 196–197, 199):

- are **34 times more likely to be descendants of *andriana* or similar status groups**;
- are **31 times more likely to have a higher education degree, 50 times more likely to have studied at Master’s degree level, and 200 times more likely to have gone on to studies beyond that**;
- are **twice more likely to be from the highlands**;
- are **2.5 times less likely to be women**;
- are **2.5 times less likely to be under 45 years old**;
- **overrepresent FJKM protestants (37 % vs. 20 %), and catholics (38 % vs. 31 %), to the detriment of other denominations.**

Differences among elites by sphere of power

Some of the above characteristics hold true across spheres of power. For example, **profiles are similar by religion across all spheres** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 200).

However, in other regards, elites’ profiles differ somewhat by type of sphere and field of power. **The political sphere is by far the one with the highest proportion of men (86%) and the oldest (30% over 60 years old).** To a lesser degree, this applies to high-level civil servants. Members of the economic sphere, and most of all, members of civil society and members of the spheres outside political, economic, or public institutions have more women and are younger. However, in no sphere does the proportion of women rise beyond 30% (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 197, 199).

In this regard, Malagasy elites often mention the fact that five women reigned over Madagascar in the 19th century as supposed proof that no barriers prevent women from accessing political power, and that the fight for gender equality is therefore not relevant. However, historical evidence shows that *andriana* queen reigned, but their *hova* prime ministers were the ones governing Madagascar. More importantly still, Western influences imposed during colonisation (1896-1960) deeply changed the structures and modalities of access to power in the country (Rabenoro, 2012)⁹. This changed dominant norms to such an extent that today, **most elites, and most of the population at large, considers it normal – traditional even – “that both the reality and the appearance of power be men’s purview”** (Rabenoro, 2012, p. 75).

There are some notable differences based on ethnicity and status groups. **By ethnicity, Merina are relatively more present in the economic sphere**, which they massively dominate (76%), **and are very invested in public institutions** (two high-level civil servants out of three), **and in civil society and spheres other than the political sphere.** In the political sphere, they are a minority, though still present at 47 % (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 200).

⁹ On women’s access to political leadership, also see: (Altius & Raveloharimisy, 2016).

Status groups present fewer variations by field of power. **Descendants of *andriana* are a majority in all spheres, “except in public institutions, where they nevertheless occupy 48% of positions”** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 200). Descendants of *hova*¹⁰ are present more in the economic sphere, and in public institutions. In total, the highest rate of people from higher castes is found among the heads of large public or private companies, at more than 70% (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 200).

Hierarchies and unequal power among elites

There are **strong inequalities among elites themselves**. The in-depth study on Malagasy elites created an aggregated indicator to gauge elite individuals’ relative power, and their place in elite hierarchies, with four levels of power (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 200–201).

This indicator reveals that **the oldest members of the elites are most often at the top of this ‘scale of power’**: 83% of those over 60, 73% of those aged 46 to 60, and 63% of those under 45 are in the top level of the scale. As for gender, **the higher the place in the power scale, the fewer women there are**: while women make up roughly half of elites at the two lowest levels, there remain only 18% of them at the highest level (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 200, 202).

Other sociological characteristics are associated only with minor differences or none. Somewhat more *andriana* reach the highest level of power than the average for all elites (75% vs. 72%). There are no notable distinctions based on religion or ethnicity (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 200, 202).

How Malagasy elites reproduce their position

Objective reproduction, through actors’ strategies

To access spheres of power and to remain in them, elites adopt **several simultaneous strategies** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 193–194, 205–213, 226–227).

First, they rely on **inter- and intra-generational mobility**, especially through¹¹:

- **inheriting a place in the elite from parents**. Membership in the elite on the basis of family is a proven mechanism of elite reproduction in the country. 46% of elite members acknowledged they had at least one parent who belongs (or belonged) to elites, and this is probably an underestimation.
 - This mechanism may even be intensifying, as younger members of the elite tend to have at least one parents in the elites at a higher rate than older members.
 - Such reproduction applies to all spheres of power. It is strongest in the economic sphere (52% of entrepreneurs are children of elites, and even 68% for those under 46 years old), and in international organisations (respectively 54% and 64%).

¹⁰ *Hova*, a term primarily used among Merina, referred to a higher-status strata made up of commoners, and of clans with the same privileges as nobles, during the era of kingdoms (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 196).

¹¹ (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 193–194, 205–213, 226–227, unless otherwise noted)

- **inheriting status, especially relating to *andriana* descent.** The goals of this are to foster the persistence of hierarchical distinctions, and to anchor these in the past in order to reinforce their sacred character. With this achieved, belonging to a high-status group then becomes a resource that can be mobilised to control power, by limiting access to power to their heirs of this status.
- **investing in schooling and higher education well beyond the Malagasy average (including through studies abroad).**
 - This itself is facilitated by the pre-existing financial and human resources of an individual's parents and social circles.
 - Access to higher education is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition to integrate Malagasy elites. 'Over-educated' individuals have weight across all elite spheres, and especially so in politics and in public institutions (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 199).

Second, elites rely on a diversification of their positions in social space through '**straddling**', **whereby they invest several fields – political and economic, public and private, State and associations – to occupy the various spheres of power.** The vast majority of members of the elites purposefully take up positions in different spheres of influence, such as: the government, the National Assembly, the Senate, the army, the business world, public institutions, or civil society (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 193–194, 205–213, 226–227). In particular (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 193–194, 205–213, 226–227):

- At the time of authors' study, 49% of elite members concurrently held positions of authority in at least two distinct spheres, and 20% in three distinct spheres.
- In their trajectories since the first position of authority they have held, individuals from the elites multiply and diversify their power by being present in different spheres, at once or over time: "84% have held high-levels positions in at least two spheres, nearly two thirds in at least three spheres, and 41% in at least four different spheres" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 207).
- This shows that elites' strategy is not only to accumulate functions or positions as a matter of course, but also to diversify their anchor points over time.

Third, elites rely on **maintaining and mobilising their individual networks**, especially through participating in associations. Individuals grow and sustain their own self-centred networks. Elite individuals' social capital consists of a network of contacts that is rich in three aspects: the size and scale of the network; its diversity; and the intensity of the links established within elite circles. Elites then strategically mobilise their social capital, particularly in order to access the highest hierarchical position (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 193–194, 205–213, 226–227).

In particular, **Malagasy elites participate in associations at much higher rates** than the general population: over 80% of elites belong to at least one, when around 20% in the population does (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 193–194, 205–213, 226–227). In particular (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 193–194, 205–213, 226–227):

- The higher someone's place in the power scale, the greater their involvement in associations. This confirms that social participation and access to power are connected: elites make utilitarian choices to get involved in associations, as this setting lets them reinforce connections that they can then mobilise to access, maintain, or strengthen their position in elite hierarchies.

- They choose associations that are only accessible to a restricted circle of persons, since access is based on co-optation. What they seek through this is to foster relations among themselves as members of the elite. Examples of these associations including ‘service associations’ (e.g. Lions club, Rotary), ‘*associations d’originaires*’ – groups of people from the same specific location such as a hill in a city (which are a placeholder for status-based positions) –, and Masonic lodges.
- Membership in associations, and the networking strategies that derive from it, differ by gender. Elite women are comparatively more invested in service associations than men (22% vs. 18%), and less so in *associations d’originaires* (39% vs. 48%).
- There seems to be a specific link between participating in associations, and accessing political power. Elites, especially political ones, seem to find support or legitimacy through their membership in such circles. Compared with elites overall, those elites that have, or have had, a role in the political sphere have a distinctly higher involvement in associations (87% vs. 81%), in *associations d’originaires* (67% vs. 46%), and in Masonic lodges (14% vs. 11%).

Elites also selectively network with contacts they trust based on **connections outside associations too**: elites can build on “individual, family, professional links, as well as on contacts made in school settings (alumni associations, or children’s school), religious affiliation, sports activities, etc.” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 211).

The size, structure, and density of elite networks is both a source of and testament to their effectiveness. 73% of elites have at least one elite contact they can directly call who works or has worked in large public or private companies; 82% have one in public institutions; and 85% have one in government. Contacts in these three spheres are the ones most mobilised by elites to get help (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 211). Elites also have the networks with the greatest density of elite contacts. This is particularly pronounced for people who have, or have had, a role in the political sphere: their networks are the densest by number of elite contacts, number of close relations who belong to the elites, greater diversity of spheres of power the contacts are in, higher number of frequent relations with contacts, and number of contacts they have received help from. Social capital is essential for individuals to reach the highest positions of power too. The higher an individual is on the power scale, the richer their network. Networks are thus likely both a resource and a result in elites’ process of accessing, maintaining, and preserving their power, in a two-way causality (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 211–212).

Fourth, elites rely on **matrimonial alliances** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 193).

Consequently, **without forming a truly united group, Malagasy elites’ mobilisation of their networks, and their specific mode of elite reproduction, has enabled them to secure and maintain their control over power**, in more or less direct ways. Considering this over the long term, from precolonial times to today, elites have thus inherited power, and then succeeded in preserving it by entrenching their hold on different sphere (political, economic, and bureaucratic ones in particular), making themselves inescapable actors of public life, and gaining some forms of legitimacy in influencing decisions (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 227).

Whether elites apply their strategies to control power, to lock it down, or to constitute a solid basis for themselves in it, their social capital ensures that they themselves, and their nearest relatives, can rise up the elite hierarchy. Their straddling strategies **reinforce the stranglehold, hoarding of resources, and concentration of power that some elites and their relatives exert over the various spheres of influence in Madagascar** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 208–209). See: Figure 5 below (p. 23, in French) represents this distribution of power, and the interactions between the various groups of elite actors in the economic sphere, political sphere, public institutions, and formal civil society.

See: Figure 5. Distribution of power, and interactions between the various groups of elite actors, *source: Razafindrakoto et al., 2017a, p. 208, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108770231>*

Subjective reproduction, through elites' distinct value systems

A comparative survey of values, conducted by country specialists, reveals that elites depart from the majority views of the population in several consequential ways. The main disagreement is about the order of priorities on the political agenda. **For elites, maintaining order takes precedence (37%) above all else, including over improving living conditions for the poor (28%).** For the rest of the population, improving poor people's living conditions must be the priority (52%), well ahead of preserving order (28%). This rift is an illustration of the stark divides between these groups. This obviously plays out to the detriment of the population: since elites are the ones with power, they more easily influence the political options that get implemented. Keeping an unchanged social order has largely enabled elites to preserve their status ever since at least colonial times, or even since kingdoms before that, regardless of the interests of the vast majority of the population (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 221–222, 227).

Two more differences in values between elites and population are noteworthy. First, elites express a **rather mixed embrace of democratic principles**. Second, while they align with popular opinion in denouncing successive rulers' bad management of the country, they seek to **partly exonerate themselves from their share of responsibility** in this. To do so, they cite other root causes for poor development and social stalemate. They more often blame external factors (colonial legacy, donors' diktats), and the population's supposed backward culture and mentality (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 227).

Enduring social segmentation between elites and the rest of the population

Social mobility and fluidity between elites and the rest of the population are weak (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 226). This is a longstanding problem. A study on social mobility between the 1930s and the late 1960s shows that social mobility was particularly weak during this time in Madagascar. Children of farmers remained farmers themselves at much higher rates than in Ghana, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, and Uganda, even though the structure of their work activities did not evolve very differently from that in the comparison countries. This strong professional 'heredity' is mainly attributable to heredity in schooling, as rural farmers benefited much less from access to schooling during this period (Bossuroy & Cogneau, 2013, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 158).

As a result, Malagasy society is structured to this day around **enduring social segmentation centred on the wide gap between elites and the rest of the population**, as represented in See: Figure 6 below (p. 24, in French).

See: Figure 6. Social structure and factors of inertia in Madagascar, source: Razafindrakoto et al., 2017a, p. 170, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108770231>

At the top of the Malagasy social pyramid are the president and his henchmen – a few dozen persons in total. They tend to monopolise power and rents (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169).

Just below are the other members of the elites, representing around 0.1% of the Malagasy population. “They are rather in favour of the *status quo*, and [...] fear upheaval in the established order, as this could lead them to lose their privileges and to move lower in the social hierarchy” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169). In a feedback loop, **they benefit from rents generated by their elite situation:** inherited descent, education level, and networks. These enable them to secure living conditions for themselves that are well above those of the vast majority of the population. Importantly, **they can achieve this without needing to organise and mobilise** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169).

In this context, country specialists add that there may well be “a tacit **pact between elites and the ruling power in place**” at any given time, since the majority of elites participate in power, or are connected to personalities in power (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169). Only two types of individuals in the elites are forced to organise to access rents: those who wish to get hold of and dominate rents at a large scale, or beyond a certain threshold; and those who start off from a lower position, as new arrivals on the public scene. Even then, the organising they need to do is minimal: they need to seek short-term allies – staying allied with them just long enough to capture power –, and to create a climate of turmoil. But these elites are individuals acting alone or in small groups. They are not willing or able to mobilise and rely on true organisations, be they formal (e.g. parties, civil society organisations) or informal (e.g. militias, service associations, pressure groups) (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169).

The middle class, representing around 7.9% of the population, is not a force capable of prompting mobilisation either. It is made up, among others, of urban workers from the formal public and private sectors, such as civil servants and private operators. It has already suffered from downward social mobility and a loss of status, as economic recession has massively deteriorated their situation. Their relative impoverishment was compounded by the effects and legacies of the Washington consensus and adjustment policies. As the staffing of the civil service has been cut, the middle class has dwindled. Moreover, they have become demobilised because they have experienced a succession of dashed hopes, and they fear they could experience further social decline in a divided society (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 170).

Below the middle class are marginalised people in the informal urban sector, representing around 14% of the population. They cannot count on authorities' support and feel excluded. Their exclusion is worsened by their informality, which marginalises them from the legal systems and places them outside any State control. Their lives are entirely taken up by a daily individual struggle to survive, and their environment is not conducive to taking the initiative to start up collective movements. Elites have no need to try and capture followers in this group (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 170).

Lastly, the vast mass of farmers in rural areas, representing 78% of the population, are even less likely to speak up. They “are isolated geographically, atomised, excluded, and totally disconnected from public affairs” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 170). They therefore “have no means to organise and to constitute themselves into a force for change” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 170). And here again, elites have no need to try and capture followers in this group (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 170).

Enduring spatial segmentation, with major rift between urban and rural areas

A key dimension of Madagascar's political economy is spatial: **extreme inequalities are embedded in space, and manifest as an increasing disconnect between the urban and rural worlds** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187).

Fundamentally, ruling elites have forgotten, even despised, rural people, while favouring cities. The countryside has been the most neglected in public policies (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 159, 187). Urban-rural gaps in development indicators are evidence of this. For example, over 80% of city residents have at least completed primary school, and over 70% of them secondary school. In contrast, neglect for the countryside has led to rates of respectively 52% and 33%. Among African countries with a fairly educated urban population, Madagascar has some of the worst urban-rural gap in this area (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 159). Similarly, compared to about 20 other African countries, Madagascar's road infrastructures fare quite well in cities, with 90% of urban roads paved. However, the rate barely reaches 30% in rural areas. Here again, the country is among the worst for the urban-rural gap, coming third after Zimbabwe and Namibia (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 159).

Entrenching all this, low social mobility in Madagascar has gone together with very low spatial mobility. There are very low within the country, between provinces and areas of residence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 158–159). They are also very low internationally. In 2010, the emigration rate stood at 1%, lower than the 1.7% average for Sub-Saharan Africa. Even more strikingly, people express little *wish* to emigrate. One 2015 survey shows that, whereas an average of 32% of African respondents wished to emigrate one day, just 11% of Malagasy did. And among those who wished to emigrate, they were four times less likely than the African average to want to do so permanently and within the coming year, and only 0.07% of them reported taking actual steps to do so (OCDE & AFD, 2015, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 158–159). Low social mobility and very low spatial mobility have reinforced each other over a long historical period. As a result, both hierarchical structures and geographic divides endure and grow (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 159).

In such a context, **extreme deprivation and isolation have understandably left rural people atomised and little able to mobilise** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 159, 187). One dimension of the urban-rural rift is the discrepancy in citizens' interest for public affairs. For example, in a 2008 survey, over 70% of urban respondents expressed interest for public affairs, but only 55% of rural respondents did. This manifests rural Malagasy's feeling of exclusion – or their self-exclusion – from public affairs, which in turn influences their political participation (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 161).

Persistence of a political theology that legitimises rulers

Over centuries, a “political theology” has developed and taken hold in Madagascar (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 149). Originally, it granted *a priori* legitimacy to the person identified as the traditional leader. Its legacy keeps playing a strong role in today's Malagasy politics (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 149). In particular, **people in rural areas, which remain dominated by this ideology, tend to grant legitimacy to authority figures and to bear with their own fate due to this** – though this should not be taken as an absolute or as an essentialised cultural trait of Malagasy people (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187).

Farmers' adherence to this ideology **enables political power to maintain itself without having to rely on a clientelistic network** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 167). Certainly, the sway held by this political theology has tended to weaken since the late 1980s. However, Marc Ravalomanana's access to power marked a return to this political symbolism with “a shift from traditional ruler to charismatic rule: the providential man”¹². This legitimacy enabled him to maintain a monarchic State and to enjoy popularity (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 168). To this day, elite actors keep making use of this political theology. Members of the historically most influential families keep intervening in public debate as *raiamandreny*, i.e. akin to the old sovereigns as being their people's father and mother¹³. Political leaders keep behaving as monarchs by making unilateral decision, providing no accountability for their actions, and sometimes using violence against people (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 168).

Elites that can control wealth and rents, but not political stability

Rents that have been limited, and captured by individualised elites

Historically, **economic rents have never reached a large scale**, because they have been limited by nature, or for lack of a strategy expand them.

¹² (Razafindrakoto et al., 2009, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 168)

¹³ (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 52)

The main sources of rents have been (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 105–106):

- **Lands and other real estate properties.**
- **Crops such as coffee, vanilla, clove, and tea.** They grew out of colonial-era economies of trade exploitation (“*économie de traite*”¹⁴), had a period of success, and then stagnated, and even declined, in the 1980s and 1990s due to a lack of adapted policies, and to international competition.
- **Large public and private companies.** The nationalisation of foreign companies in the 1970s, and their privatisations in the 1980s-1990s enabled a few national entrepreneurs to emerge alongside the long-established *Karana* and *Zanatany* minorities¹⁵. People closest to power had the best information, and profited from trade liberalisation, tax exemptions, subsidies, and misappropriations of large public investments.
- **Trade in consumer goods.** Although the domestic market is limited, the distribution of consumer goods is a profitable sector, in which the *Karana* are very present.
- **Free trade zones for exports.** Their development from the late 1990s has attracted mostly foreign investors, because they had the necessary networks abroad.
- **Foreign aid.** These are the most easily accessible rents, because they can be captured through contracts or public procurement. About 70% of funds for activities under Malagasy development plans come from foreign aid¹⁶.

Since the 2000s, new rents that could change the game have emerged, in mining and in illicit trade in precious wood. The amounts of money at play are immeasurably higher than those extracted from the previously listed sources of rents. They bear with them the potential for major destabilisation or conflict (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 105–106) – this is discussed again later in this report (see pp. 29, 72).

For now, despite their historically limited scale, **rents do represent a windfall and generate dramatic inequalities, in a country with prevalent poverty where a very select number of actors (heirs of elites or insiders) get to distribute them** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 106). Rents in Madagascar have thus primarily resulted from “opportunities or benefits that individuals could seize occasionally (or during short periods) thanks to a positions of privilege that they inherited or that they acquired in spheres of power or in relations with them” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 106).

¹⁴ This refers to an economic system piloted by large foreign companies in which trade exploiters buy produce harvested by growers – primarily in order to export them –, while keeping growers dependent by selling them imported products (food and supplies, seeds, household utensils, plastic items, industrial goods) and by meeting their funding needs (Badouin, 1967, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 57).

¹⁵ *Karana* is the name given in Madagascar to Indians who came to the country at the end of the 17th century (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 57). *Zanatany* is the name for descendents of colonial settlers (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 195).

¹⁶ (H. L. Ravaoharinirina, 2018, cited in Latek, 2018, p. 5)

Elites' inability to form stable organisations and robust coalitions

Importantly, **elites' strategies to access and control rents operate at the scale of individuals or families, not groups**, individualisation being a characteristic feature of elites' workings. As for anyone outside spheres of power, rents remain inaccessible (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 106).

Indeed, beside the stark hierarchies between elites and ordinary people, **principles of differentiation and ranking operate among elites too, which has contributed to preventing them from organising themselves collectively in any sustained fashion**. Alliances among individuals in the elites are most often temporary “alliances of convenience, to counter a person, family, or clan that is becoming too important, or to prevent a new arrival from getting into elite inner circles” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187). Such alliances are undone as soon as they have met their goal. This helps explain both political instability – since elites are incapable of forming stable organisations and robust coalitions – and long-term social inertia – since the rift between elites and ordinary people fosters the lasting reproduction of the system (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187). Indeed, all heads of State since 1960 have, directly or indirectly, accessed and/or left power through a political crisis¹⁷.

No stable political consensus on wealth, distribution, and social regulation

A major source of the difficulties experienced by Madagascar is its **historically “weak capacity to establish a stable political consensus around processes of wealth accumulation, and modes of wealth distribution”** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 49).

Longstanding patterns of accumulation and contradictions, and their ongoing legacies

Since the 18th century, throughout the six main periods of Malagasy history, the country saw the **main contradictions of its political economy remain unresolved**. Each period saw both “relative renewal in the elite coalition in power, in the mode of production and extraction of wealth, and in elements of social regulation”, and “a major political crisis that revealed its contradictions and precipitated its end” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 49).

These periods have been getting ever shorter, showing that **successive regimes “manage less and less to ensure their stability”** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 49).

Each period has generated some structuring, cumulative legacies that have left their mark in today's Malagasy political economy¹⁸.

¹⁷ (Rabemananoro, 2014, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 105)

¹⁸ (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 50, unless otherwise noted)

1. The constitution of the Merina State (18th century to 1895) shaped the country through:
 - Merina hegemony;
 - a mode of production resting on two pillars, namely on one side village communities inherited from the previous basic mode of production, which represent the largest part of the population, and on the other side forms of State organisation that centralise these villages and impose paying a tribute on them (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 52–53);
 - social structuring into status-based groups;
 - a symbolism of power that supports the political theology presented earlier in this report.
2. Between the start of French colonisation (1895) and the 1972 crisis, colonisation and the country's "first independence" left as legacies:
 - the importance of French interests in the country;
 - the rise of coastal elites;
 - the development of an "*économie de traite*" (economy of trade exploitation).
3. The period between 1972 and 1991, when the economy was 'malagasied' (*malgachisation*), led to:
 - the promotion of some meritocratic elites;
 - the development of State rent.
4. In the period following the 1991 crisis and ending with the 2002 one, a relative economic and political opening led to:
 - Some degree of development and expression of new actors, in connection with greater democratisation and economic liberalisation;
 - Greater political and economic instability.
5. From 2005 to the 2009 coup, the head of State and his henchmen set a precedent of attempting to get a stranglehold on, and monopolise, all powers – economic, political, and symbolic-religious.
6. Since 2009, key features have been the incapacity of elites in power to:
 - constitute a stable coalition;
 - control violence;
 - counter the drift towards a mafia-like organisation of parts of the political economy.

The situation since 2009

Since 2009, **the continuous decay of the Malagasy State has been both a cause and an effect of political and economic instability**, through direct and indirect effects (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 98).

The freezing of most international aid from the 2009 crisis until late 2011 left the transition regime with seriously curtailed revenues (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 101–102). In response, **public authorities sought new sources of funding**, such as:

- exporting **rosewood**¹⁹;
- signing land deals with foreign investors in the sectors of **mining, agriculture, and tourism**, especially contracts for mining exploration (Burnod et al., 2014; Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 102);
- “securing **financial support from private economic operators**” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 102).

There was no real control on these operations. As a result, trafficking developed on a grand scale, and **corruption and massive misappropriations in the administration grew** (Pring & Vrushi, 2019; Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 102; Razafindrazaka, Razafimamonjy, & Soullisse, 2019).

Meanwhile, **the halt to public investments and the limitation of economic activities weighed down economic growth**. They also led to a deterioration of road and health infrastructures, an increase in poverty, and a decline in education. “Criminality surged in cities, but also in some rural areas where *dahalo* (cattle thieves) terrorised populations and thwarted police forces (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 102).

The return to electoral legitimacy in 2014 has not put a stop to this decaying of the State.

The semi-parliamentary system set up in 2010 has quickly shown its limitations, since it has proven difficult to constitute a stable majority in the National Assembly, and consequently to form stable governments. By late 2016, electoral turnout had remained low, and ruling elites still had trouble constituting stable coalitions of economic and political allies (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104).

In the meantime, **the trafficking of natural resources is establishing itself as a permanent feature** in the country’s political economy, and is constituting a mafia-based economy, or even a “criminal governance”, as J. Ramasy put it (Bat, 2016, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104). The State remains powerless to control the violence and insecurity created by thefts of zebus (Pellerin, 2014, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104).

Political normalisation seems to have some enabled economic growth to return (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2019a; Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104; Stocker et al., 2019). However, **there is no certainty that economic growth will continue**, since it depends on keys Malagasy actors upholding democratic norms and fostering political stability. Beyond any particular individuals and the return to constitutional order, “the socio-political regime remain unchanged in any way, so [...] the conditions for a new crisis are still present in a latent manner” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104).

¹⁹ (Anonymous, 2018; Randriamalala & Liu, 2010, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 101–102)

Weak intermediation, and stark disconnect, between elites and population

The stark social segmentation of Malagasy society, rooted in the weight of inherited social positions and urban-rural divides, and the deep disconnection of elites from the rest of the population, combine with another structural obstacle to development: **the atomisation of the population and, to a lesser extent, of the elites** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 158).

Weakness of formal and informal intermediate bodies between elites and population

Weak formal intermediate bodies

In Madagascar, **formal and informal intermediate bodies²⁰ are extremely weak, placing Madagascar at the bottom of collective organisation in Africa**. This is both a cause of the population's isolation, and an effect of it (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 151–154).

Participation in associations is extraordinarily low (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 152–153). The membership rate in associations is extremely weak. In the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, 70% of respondents reported not being a member of any volunteer association or community group, with respectively 69% and 71% of men and women respondents reporting this. This lack of involvement was even more pronounced in cities, with 79% of urban respondents reporting this, and 67% of rural ones (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 13). Even so, disengagement was even more marked in the previous survey. In 2014, 77% of respondents had reported not belonging to any association (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 152–153).

Further, among the remaining 30% of 2018 respondents, most were not active members: 20% of total respondents reported simply having signed up to their association or group, and just 5% reported being an active member, and a further 5% being a leader (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 13). This singular situation of Madagascar is confirmed in other statistics, such as those of the International Institute of Social Studies in La Hague (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 152–153).

The vast majority of the population also does not feel that political parties represent them.

The number of political parties has considerably increased since the 1990s, but that “number seems inversely proportional to their popular representation” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 151). In the latest Afrobarometer survey, conducted in 2018, a low 29% of respondents said they felt close to a political party – with only 23% of women saying so (vs. 35% of men), and 27% of rural respondents (vs. 37% of urban respondents) (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 57). Moreover, the rate has been decreasing over time in Afrobarometer surveys: the total proportion of respondents who feel close to a political party went from 38% in 2005 to 37% in 2008, to 30% in 2013, to 29% in 2018 (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 57; Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 152).

²⁰ “Intermediate bodies (political parties, trade unions, pressure groups, community groups...) are independent and autonomous social groups that can reliably provide the link and the interactions between individuals and the State” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 151).

Even at the local level, individual Malagasy engage little with political representatives. For example, in the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, 72% of respondents said that they have never contacted their municipal councillor in the past 12 months about an important problem, or to discuss their ideas. In particular, 80% of urban respondents said so (69% of rural ones), and 78% of women (65% of men) (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 14).

Consequently, “**neither local authorities, nor political parties, nor civil society have any real power**” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 152). From their end, they have no sway over the population. Conversely, their weak influence means that the population feels no need to solicit them (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 152). Despite the population’s increasing discontent with its deteriorating living conditions and with rulers’ waste and fraud, resistance has thus remained weak and fragmented. There is no dearth of citizens’ initiatives, but these lack a grassroots base (Rafitson, 2016). Simultaneously, the independence of civil society from politics is problematic, according to Rafitson (2016).

Weak informal intermediate bodies

Further, **informal structures resting on traditional leaders are weak too, and thus do not compensate the weakness of formal intermediate bodies.** In Madagascar, traditional leaders have little influence on public life – against making the country stand out from the rest of the African continent. Customary leaders are thus confined to entirely secondary roles (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 152–154).

First, **they have little influence.** In the 2008 Afrobarometer survey, only 13% of respondents considered that customary leaders influenced governance in their locality, against a 46% average for the African countries surveyed (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 154).

Second, **they are seen as bad at listening.** In the same survey, just 20% of people stated that traditional leaders did their best to listen to the population, against a 43% average for the African countries surveyed (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 154).

Overall then, traditional leaders are discredited just like formal authorities. People may evoke traditional leaders’ symbolic power in some circumstances, but this owes more to a wish to respect elders and therefore ‘traditions’ than to acknowledgement for their role. This discredit is due to the history of the country, especially to colonial strategies that crushed traditional authorities (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 154).

Consequently, **people do not engage much with, and trust, traditional authorities.** In the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, only 19% of respondents reported contacting a traditional leader *often* over the past 12 months about an important problem or to discuss their ideas, whereas 48% reported never contacting them, 8% reported contacting them once, and 21% reported contacting them a few times. 62% of urban respondents reported no contact (45% of rural respondents), as did 54% of women (42% of men) (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 15). There is some limited trust at play too. Only 41% of respondents reported having a *lot* of trust in traditional leaders, with respective rates of 20% in urban areas, 47% in rural areas, 45% among men, and 37% among women (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 24).

Disconnect between elites and population

In this configuration, **a major feature of Malagasy society is the disconnect between elites and the vast majority of the population** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 162).

In turn, this disconnect produces a number of **major negative effects in political economy**:

- It is a source of exclusion;
- It is a source of popular demobilisation;
- It hinders the country's democratic consolidation;
- It enables elites "to instrumentalise and manipulate a poorly informed population, which contributes to political instability" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 162).

The disconnect is heightened by the rural-urban gap: the inequalities between the elites and the rest of the population are all the more problematic as urban residents experience conditions that, by some indicators, are fairly good compared to other African countries, while elites who live lives of privilege make no effort to improve the situation of the mass of people locked in poverty traps (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 161–162).

Additionally, **international dynamics that elites belong to make domestic inequalities even worse**. The globalised elites of Madagascar "manage to align their standard of living with that of developed countries" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 162). Their presence increases yet further the gap with the mass of the population who live by the rhythm of domestic growth, i.e. with stagnation and recession. In 2015, *Forbes* magazine published its first ranking of the wealthiest persons or families in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa. Four Malagasy families featured in it, in 5th, 6th, 11th, and 23rd position (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 162). A similar *Forbes* ranking in 2019 listed three Malagasy men in the top 20: Yilas Akbaraly in 5th place (with a wealth of US\$ 710 million); Hassanein Hiridjee in 6th place (US\$ 705 million); Iqbal Rahim in 11th place (US\$ 419 million) (Lobé Ewané, 2019).

Elites often place a large part of their savings outside Madagascar too, be it out of a distrust in the country's future, or simply by economic calculation. Data from the Swiss branch of HSBC revealed that Malagasy were among the top 30 nationalities to have money placed with this bank in 2006-2007, when taking into account the GDP of the nationality countries. These Malagasy placements represented 2.9% of the country's 2005 GDP, making Madagascar the 4th country from Sub-Saharan Africa most affected by these placements, behind Liberia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya (Cogneau, 2015, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 162).

A normalisation of extreme inequalities that feeds the population's passivity

The status- and hierarchy-based structure of society "promotes a form of passivity that, in turn, reinforce [this structure]", whether **people normalise inequality by constraint or choice** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 171). In a 2015 survey that asked Malagasy respondents about the extreme inequalities between rich and poor in the country, over half of them considered this situation as being normal. 26% agreed with the statement 'it's normal because to each person their fate', and 25% agreed with the statement 'it's normal because it's the fruit of their efforts'. As for the half of respondents who worry about inequalities, 23% agreed with 'it's not normal but you cannot do anything about it'. This left only 25% of respondents

agreeing with 'it is not normal and it should be changed' (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 171).

This ties into a larger system of **symbolic violence that invisibly and lastingly weighs down and represses any animus to question the hierarchical system** – this system is explored in the next section. The vast majority of Malagasy “are torn between fatalism, internalised domination, and resignation: three quarters of the population accept glaring inequalities, either because they find them natural, because they find them legitimate, or they think they cannot do anything to reduce them (Wachsberger et al., 2016, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 171).

Limited use of political violence, with ambivalent effects

Limited use of political violence, and the benefits of peacefulness

Despite repeated political crises, there has historically been limited use of political violence since independence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 145, 230)²¹.

Political conflicts have remained of low intensity, and have never degenerated into mass killings. Rulers have never been able to use violence without being condemned, and most often evicted, for it. Ruling regimes' use of violence that have precipitated their downfall, as happened in 1972, 1991, and 2009. Conversely, regimes changes, even during crises, often unfold with very little violence, as do elections and political struggles (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 115, 145).

One of the country's major assets thus remains control over, and limitation of, political violence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 109, 145). It is “as if violence was not, or could not be, a legitimate strategic resource in the Malagasy political game” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 115). The condemnation of any use of physical violence in public life has remained widespread (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 115)²².

Norm of *fihavanana* leading to pacification and acquiescence

Some authors say this is due to a taboo deeply rooted in Malagasy society, referring particularly to *fihavanana*²³. However, such culturalist explanations are not entirely convincing. First, *dahalo*'s 'anti-social' behaviour in the southern countryside offer a strong qualifier, if not a rebuke, to such an analysis. Second, other societies, including African ones, also regulate

²¹ On violence, its regulation, and de-escalation, also see: (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017b; Razakamaharavo, 2018).

²² Most authors who write about this, however, fail to specify that this taboo is about violence in public life, and thus do not acknowledge that there is significant domestic, gender-based violence in the country. For more on this, see the references listed in the Global Database on Violence against Women, particularly the report with concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UN Women, n.d.).

²³ *Fihavanana* is supposedly an ethos shared by all Malagasy, an ideal of harmony and social understanding that forces people to control themselves, and to hold back from expressing disagreements that are too sharp, abiding instead by *fiaraha-monina* (social tact, the art of living together) (Ottino, 1996, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 119).

behaviours through socialisation and witchcraft, and this has not stopped extreme violence from happening in these societies (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 119).

In fact, relations between culture and politics are much less mechanical and unidirectional, as demonstrated by the most recent research²⁴. The concept of *fihavanana* was, at the time of independence, a traditional code of social relations within neighbourhoods and kinships. From that time though, it 'migrated' and became a citizenship contract. In other words, *fihavanana* is less a primary reality, and more an 'imaginary' link that helped enable the constitution of a Malagasy nation. It was theorised as such in the 1970s, and has been regularly exalted in political discourse since, inscribed in the preamble of the Constitution in 1992, and circulated via media and school programmes (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 120).

“Such repeated references to *fihavanana* as a ‘**citizenship contract**’ sustain the fiction of a **society where equal conditions would prevail**, and thus bear down on individuals’ political behaviours and representations” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 120).

As the promised citizenship contract is far from being realised, **the norm conveyed by *fihavanana* also leads to the weaker citizens consenting to submission** (Raison-Jourde, 2014, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 120). The notion of *fihavanana* condemns any action that challenges social harmony. In this context, it is the source of “a structural and invisible violence that represses any form of opposition to the established order” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 120).

Status-based norms of inequality between *fotsy* and *mainty* leading to pacification and acquiescence

As a complement, the low levels of political violence can also be explained by Madagascar’s long-term sociohistory of inequality between the *fotsy* minority and the *mainty* mass (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 120). Malagasy society has remained founded on extreme hierarchies where individuals are always distinguished and ranked according to an unequal inherited order, “whose symbolism has endured over time in spite of the country’s political-social changes” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 120).

Given the very real material consequences of the *fotsy-mainty* hierarchy, **social relationships in the country do in fact rest “on symbolic violence** that maintains over time the domination of one small group of individuals over the larger mass of the population” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 121).

In such a configuration, the main danger to the existing social order would come from this larger mass rejecting such inequality. One reasons for **elites’ rejection of, and even taboo on, the use of violence in politics may ultimately “be their fear of setting off a social disorder that they, collectively, would have much to lose from [...]”** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 121). In turn, this feeds the dynamic of political instability: the price that elites pay in physical violence for their occasional attempts at sedition is particularly low. This is because legal powers do not have credible deterrent forces, and because the population is easily intimidated by

²⁴ See: [Kneitz, 2014](#) (and [Blanchy, 2015](#), for a discussion of [Kneitz, 2014](#)); as well as [Raison-Jourde & Randrianja, 2002](#); [Galibert, 2004](#); cited in [Razafindrakoto et al., 2017](#), p. 120.

threats that would be considered as being of low intensity, were it not for the taboo on political violence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 233).

In this context, **the population's aversion to violence fosters the perpetuation of unequal hierarchies, through popular inertia** towards enduring forms of symbolic violence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 145).

Consequently, the existing system remains in place in part because there is **some acceptance, in the minds of both elites and the rest of the population, of the "principles of differentiation that grant an unequal value to individuals"** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 121). That basis enables political leaders to often "act as they please without referring matters to anybody" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 121). It also enables a few descendants of 'high-lineage families' to proclaim themselves to be *raiamandreny*²⁵ and to intervene in political debate, especially during crises (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 121).

In turn, the status-based pacification paradoxically **enables political rulers to act with little care for their constituents, including for their lives**. Such disregard for life has been visible in Malagasy regimes since independence. For example, law enforcement institutions have often repressed peasant riots or *dahalo* activities with deadly force, without elites, and more broadly urban people, being truly upset about this. The ruling classes simply see the human lives of common people as cheap (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 121–122).

Conversely, the importance of symbolic domination over the *mainity* could also explain why **popular violence that sometimes occurs following political crises most often takes the form of outbursts that unleash frustrations yet fail to articulate themselves in political terms**. This was the case in the 19th-century Menalamba revolt, in peasant riots in the early 1970s (despite more organised leadership), and in urban protests (*rotaka*) and anti-*karana* operation in the 1980s. Today, *dahalo*'s organisation into armed groups could, in the same way, be a "reaction to inequalities, and to the constant neglect of the poor by central authorities" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 122).

However, since the 1980s, **the country has been opening up culturally to the rest of the world, which has been conducive to a new awareness**. Music bands such as Mahaleo and, to a lesser extent, Rossy have been carriers of these new realisations. The emerging recognition of inequalities "could explain the gradual rise of violent outbursts and transgressions, especially those observed during the 2009 crisis and since then" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 122).

²⁵ This dates back to 17th and 18th kingdoms, when sovereigns would gain legitimacy among others by presenting themselves as their people's father and mother to whom respect is owed (*raiamandreny*) (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 52, 164).

Conflicts among elites remaining minor and individualised

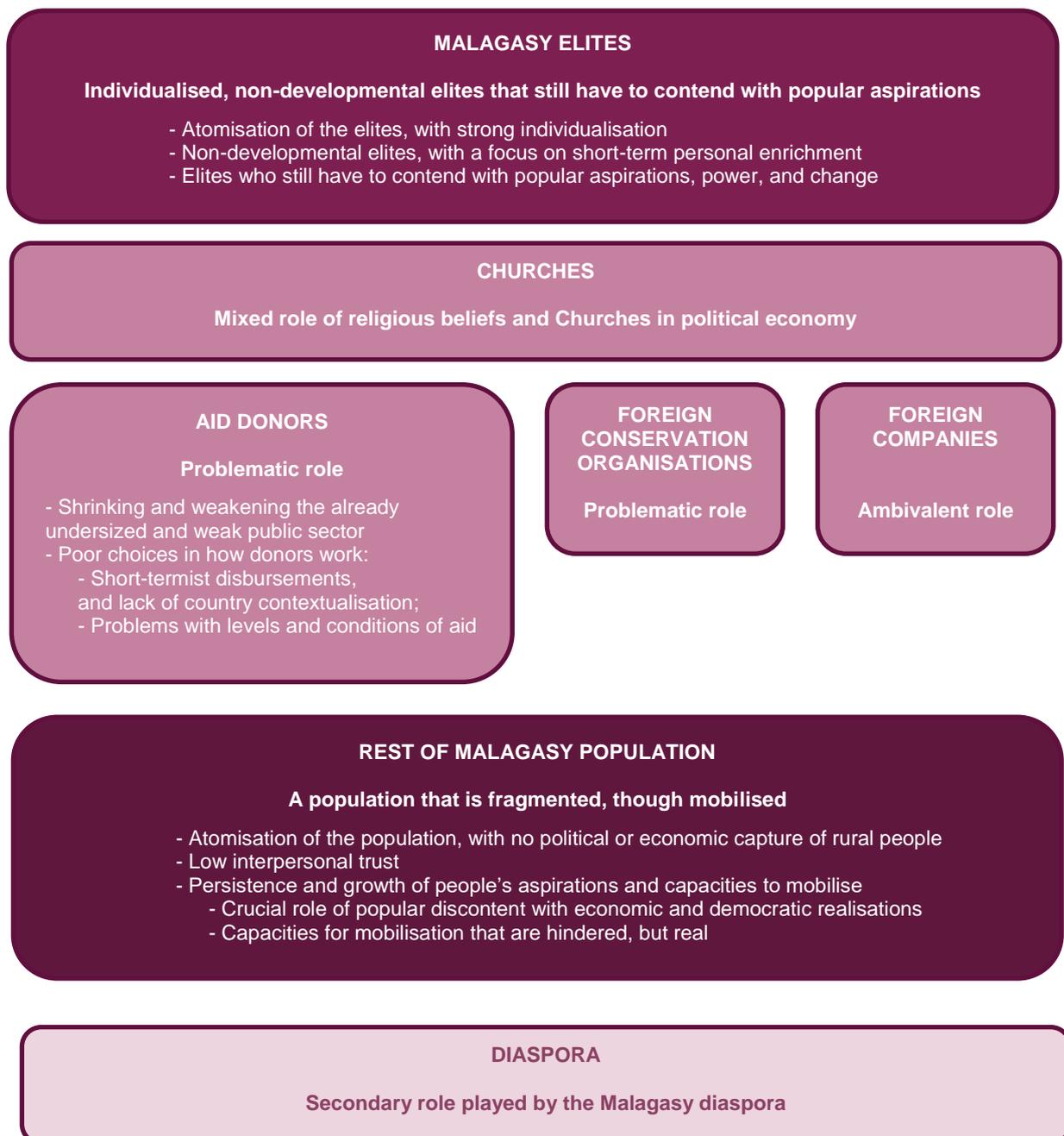
In Madagascar, **conflicts among elites are usually minor, and do not require forming really sustainable coalitions**. They look less like a struggle between well-established elite groups, and more like a struggle over positions (*ady seza*) between individuals, families, and clans. When conflicts do arise, elites can form “temporary arrangements, alliances of convenience, that are flexible and heterogeneous (e.g. Forces vives, Trois Mouvances...)” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 157). Such alliances result from negotiations that only commit individuals to them, without being inclusive and putting at stake the credibility of any organisations. Consequently, they do not last (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 157–158).

Since independence, elites have not felt any necessity to organise, because **there have not been real conflicts with any well-identified enemy groups, be they external to the country or internal to it**. Paradoxically, Madagascar’s national cultural unity, its geographic distance, and its lack of relevance to economic sources of international conflict have contributed to stagnation. There just has never been a big enough conflict for elites to constitute or strengthen their collective groupings. Conversely, the lack of divisions between constituted, lasting groups that individuals would identify with helps explain the lack of conflict (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 158).

4. Key actors: individualised elites, and a mobilised but fragmented population

The key actors of Madagascar's political economy are its individualised elites, and its mobilised by fragmented population. This section presents a few points about elites and the rest of population that complement those already set out in Section 3, and introduces information about additional actors. Figure 7 below offers an overview of all key actors.

Figure 7. Key actors of Malagasy political economy affecting development and environment



Source: author's own

Individualised, non-developmental elites that still have to contend with popular aspirations

Atomisation of the elites, with strong individualisation

In relations among elites, individually distinguishing oneself and ranking high in the hierarchy matter more than being alike. This is because principles of ranking and distinction between individuals, which are prevalent across Malagasy society, are especially pronounced among elites. Consequently, elites are particularly marked by social atomisation, which is why they are structured as families, extending sometimes to clans, rather than as elite factions or organisations (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 157).

Throughout the past three centuries, Malagasy political economy has led to a reciprocal assimilation of elite groups into each other, rather than to the rise of competing factions²⁶. Certainly, in each main historical period since the 18th century, political economy produced several strata of power, and the balance between different powers shifted, leading to a relative renewal of the dominant coalition. However, at the same time, the various groups in power have had porous boundaries. People from the various groups have adopted individual strategies to remain at the highest level of power²⁷. This has led to a merging of elite groups into each other. Elite circles have remained very restricted, and marked foremost by strong social heredity that is increasing over time (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 157).

As a result (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 157):

“neither ethnicity, nor geographic proximity, nor belonging to the same status group, nor having identical economic, religious, or political activities determine sufficiently solid interpersonal solidarities to constitute fixed lines of opposition between groups”.

A small number of families has thus historically dominated the political and economic spheres, but none of them have sufficient power to organise society – hence the extreme weakness of non-State organisations in Madagascar²⁸.

Elites’ incapacity to form sustained organisations and alliances has persisted ever since the 2013 election, as intra-elite conflicts and instability have continued. For example, the election of H. Rajaonarimampianina was followed by multiple stalemates, from difficulties in designating a Prime Minister to MPs’ shifting allegiances, and no-confidence votes. Attempts at institutionalisation remain fragile and fraught, as shown by the conflicts around a new mining code for example (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 237).

²⁶ (Bayart, 1989; Galibert, 2011; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 157)

²⁷ As explained in section 3, their key strategies have related to schooling, marriage, conversion from one sphere of power into another, and changes in allegiances (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 157).

²⁸ (Galibert, 2011; Fremigacci, 2014; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 157)

Non-developmental elites, with a focus on short-term personal enrichment

Theories of non-developmental elites apply in part to Madagascar, though they need to be adapted and complemented with country-specific explanations, including the role of common people in shaping the country's trajectory, especially its political crises (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 229).

Certainly, elites have preferred inequality over growth, i.e. getting a bigger part of a smaller wealth pot, rather than embracing a growth that is more inclusive and stronger, where they would get a smaller share of a larger wealth pot. They thus get an elite rent of lower value. This can only be explained by elites' embeddedness in, and preference for, a society that works through infinite hierarchies and rankings, supported by the dominant political theology (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 234). Elites have thus been able to secure and maintain control over power in the country for a very long time (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231).

Elites' atomisation has made it possible to concentrate power "into the hands of a small number of individuals who are neither constrained nor incentivised into having a medium- and long-term vision, and taking into account the interests of the great majority of people" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231). As top-level alliances are limited to those closest to the president, they exclude and frustrate elite groups that are potentially influential and that have destabilising power. At the same time, no single faction can mobilise violence on a large scale (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231).

In this context, given the general weakness of formal and informal, institutions and organisation, **"it is easy to bring down the ruling power with derisory financial and human means"** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231).

In turn, **this leads elites to not have any long-term vision, including any strategy to ensure the sustainability of their power**. Members of the elite make arrangements to be ready to quickly leave the country at any time, be it due to reprehensible actions they have taken while in power, or, when they have done nothing wrong, to avoid 'sinking with the country'. Indeed, those who accumulate wealth do not invest it back into the country, and instead place their capital elsewhere in anticipation of not lasting long in their current position. Clientelism does operate, but rent distribution stays rather restricted to the narrow group of those directly linked to the ruling power. In fact, elites who access power do not try to develop or favour their region of origin. Their primary objective is not even to maintain the existing order, since it maintains itself fairly well outside times of crisis. Instead, it is to enrich themselves, without being willing or able to establish a lasting system (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 231–232).

Elites who still have to contend with popular aspirations, power, and change

However, **elites do not have total control over the people and the system** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231).

First, elites have not always anticipated the popular uprisings that have marked the country's history (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231).

Second, the political system is to totally locked. A case in point is the double transition that took place in the 1990s, economically – with the arrival of a class of new entrepreneurs –, and politically – with the population genuinely espousing the democratic system. The transition could not be consolidated, but it still showed that elites do not entirely control Malagasy political economy. The successive rise of M. Ravalomanana, A. Rajoelina, and H. Rajaonarimampianina likewise show that there remain possibilities for political competition that comes from personalities originating outside elites’ most inner circles. This relative openness of the political scene is a positive, even though it is not really structured and has primarily been used by ‘loose-cannon’ personalities who seize an opportunity for their own interests (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 231).

A population that is fragmented, though mobilised

Atomisation of the population, with no political or economic capture of rural people

The atomisation of the population is a determining factor shaping the workings of Malagasy society (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 149). Related to this, one major aspect of political economy is that **Malagasy peasants are captured “neither by the political system, nor by the economic system”** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 150).

Peasants can remain on their lands with nearly total self-sufficiency, because there is no real structural pressure on land and on livelihoods (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 150). This is enabled by a very low population density, at 42.8 inhabitants per square km in 2016²⁹, in a country without any desert areas that would prevent human settlement. The south of the country does often suffer droughts, cyclones, or plagues of locusts, which repeatedly trigger severe hardships for local people in getting food. However, these events have never led to massive displacements towards other areas in the country, whether rural or urban (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 150).

Indeed, one defining feature of the country is its **very low migration from rural areas, and low internal migration more generally**. The vast majority of migrants going to the capital city are educated people leaving secondary cities (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 150). In 2015, 15% of Malagasy were internal migrants, in that they were not born in the *fokontany* they currently resided in. However, 56% of these migrants had come from a *fokontany* in the same municipality, and 24% from another municipality in the same district. Migration between districts stood at 5.3%, and between provinces at 14.5%³⁰.

Rural residents are hardly captured by the political system because the State is present only superficially in much of the countryside. Public infrastructure in rural areas are often defective, or even absent. For example, in 2012, 28% of rural residents were illiterate, against 11% of urban ones (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 150).

²⁹ (United Nations [UN], n.d.)

³⁰ (Instat, 2013, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 150)

From 1972, the State progressively abandoned the countryside and disengaged from trying to 'capture' peasants, and has never turned back on this dynamic since (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 233). In 1972, the State abolished the minimum tax. This was formerly a poll tax (*impôt de capitation*), and weighed heavily on rural areas. Peasants associated it with memories of forced labour service (*corvée*) established by the French colonial power, and the associated violence. The population therefore welcomed the abolition of the tax with great relief. However, this tax also carried the symbolic meaning of the State (*fanjakana*), and the sacred character (*hasina*) of being a subject of ruling power. Peasants thus interpreted its abolition as the end of the State and of the rule of law. This immediately led to behaviours that had been forbidden until then, such as bushfires, with tragic consequences³¹.

Since then, decentralisation policies have not, in reality, connected local governments and central authorities much. For example, some laws granting new powers to *fokonolona*³², such as the 2001 on domestic security, have in fact fostered a remote organisation of the State, where *fokonolona* issue their own edicts (*dina*) on security and have violators pay financial or in-kind reparations to the victim and the *fokonolona*. As the State has become less and less organised around one dominant political party, whatever integration existed through this in rural areas has eroded over time (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 150).

As a consequence of all this, the legitimacy granted by rural people to rulers often translates only as a façade of support³³. Away from central power, rural people in fact take little interest in public affairs. In the 2013 Afrobarometer survey, 60% of rural people said they had little interest, or no interest, in public affairs – 29% and 31% respectively (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 151). In the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, 60% of all respondents said they never discussed political questions when they are with their friends or family. The rate was 63% among rural respondents (vs. 50% for urban ones), and 68% among women (vs. 52% among men). Conversely, a total of 9% of respondents said they frequently discussed politics with friends or family, with rates of just 8% in rural areas (vs. 12% in urban areas), and 4% among women (vs. 14% among men) (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 9).

Moreover, rural people are hardly captured by the economic system, because monetarisation remains weak in the countryside. The integration of the country's economy with rural areas is limited. Most of rural people's consumption is secured through what they themselves produce. This is reflected in the average income from activity in rural areas. In 2012, this income amounted to less than US\$ 0.5 per working person per day in agriculture – and given that households also comprise people who are not working, this is well below the poverty rate, even accounting for purchasing power parity (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 151).

Despite rural people's shared economic situation, they usually do not mobilise collectively, for two reasons. First, their aspirations are restrained by their limited knowledge of the world beyond their local level, which they can consider as beyond their reach. Such isolation is compounded by the weak availability of TVs for them (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 151). In the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, 86% of rural respondents reported never receiving information from TV, against 26% of urban respondents – the rates were similar for men and women, at respectively 72% and 75% of all replies (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 8). In this context, their

³¹ (Raison-Jourde & Roy, 2010, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 233)

³² Traditional village communities (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 55).

³³ (Fauroux, 1999; Raison-Jourde & Roy, 2010; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 150–151)

deprivation does not necessarily translate into dissatisfaction. Even when it does, they may respond more with fatalism than by thinking that the solution is political (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 151).

Second, their geographic fragmentation and isolation are not conducive to a social life that could grow their networks and give rise to awareness and collective mobilisation, although the spread of mobile phones might marginally be changing this. This situation is worsened by the low levels of interpersonal trust that prevail (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 151).

Low interpersonal trust

Mistrust against people other than close relatives is one factor explaining instability and the stalemate in Malagasy development. The lack, or loss, of trust feeds individualism, and the impossibility of building and successfully completing collective projects over the long term. Similarly, it could contribute to politicians' alliances being moving, short-term, and made out of convenience (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 155).

Afrobarometer surveys confirm this. In the 2008 survey, Malagasy respondents were around the average of the 18 countries surveyed in their trust towards the extended family – consistent with traditional societies that give much weight to family (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 155). In contrast, Madagascar was among the countries with the lowest trust towards those beyond close relatives (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 155):

- Just 39% of respondent trusted their acquaintances somewhat (39%) or entirely (13%) – against a 56% average in all surveyed countries;
- Only 23% trusted people they do not know somewhat or entirely – against a 40% average in all surveyed countries.

In 2013, with a greater number of African countries surveyed, the country's relative position improved somewhat. Still, this survey showed that trust towards acquaintances outside the family circle had become even lower. Only 35% of respondents said they trusted their acquaintances somewhat, and just 6% trusted them entirely (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 155).

This low level of interpersonal trust likely has roots in both older and more recent history. Looking at the long run, divisions created during colonial times, including during the 1947 violence, may have created resentments that are still latent³⁴. The recurring dysfunction of institutions also damage trust. Lastly, there seems to be a deterioration of interpersonal trust over the past decade too, possibly due to people's impoverishment, and to "a logic of survival in a context of insecurity and a weakened State" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 155)³⁵.

³⁴ (Wantchekon et al., 2011; Chadeaux, 2012; Lahiniriko, n.d.; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 155)

³⁵ On low trust, and mistrust, also see: (Desplat, 2018).

Persistence and growth of people's aspirations and capacities to mobilise

It is not just elites who count in Madagascar's political economy: the population does too.

Where dominant theories on non-developmental elites have an exclusive focus on elite factions, in-depth analysis of Malagasy political economy instead demonstrates that citizens – even the poorest ones – do play a role in the trajectory of the country. Citizens do have some autonomy and agency, they “are not just ‘acted on’” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 230).

Crucial role of popular discontent with economic and democratic realisations

“In all crises, popular discontent has been one of the bases for the movements: whether the population was manipulated, or the movements were spontaneous, popular dissatisfaction always features as a background” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 230).

In each crisis, a major aspect has been the combination of an unequal distribution of the produced wealth, and serious problems in governance. Despite being attached to social stability, the population seeks ways to make itself heard on its demands for improved wellbeing, and for democracy. The population thus plays a role, especially through its aspirations, even though it lives through states of fragility. Dissatisfaction may crystallise on the economy – particularly inequalities that become highlighted by extreme enrichment by those close to power –, on cases of grand corruption, or on case of bad governance that either become public or are directly political, such as electoral fraud (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 230). According to a 2018 survey, popular priorities were for example tackling crime, improving infrastructure, and solving food insecurity (Isbell, 2018).

This typically plays out in favourable economic conditions, when aspirations evolve faster than realisations. This happened for instance between 2000 and 2009. The gap between aspirations and realisations has historically been “a direct source of popular discontent and dissatisfaction, and hence fertile ground for crises” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 136). Ordinary citizens are thus not just manipulated by self-serving politicians into toppling the ruling regime, although they can be: they have a dynamic of their own too (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 136).

Unmet expectations in democratic governance play a central role in popular frustrations, maybe even more so than economic aspirations (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 138–139).

- First, **Malagasy people remain attached to democratic values**, without their poor material living conditions getting in the way of this, **and wish for basic freedoms**. This was on display for example in 2002, when a massive turnout was followed by protests against electoral frauds (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 139).
- Second, and again using 2002 as an example, **people reject “a distant and arrogant style of government, where the corruption of the highest levels of power – first among them the presidential family – intensif[ies] every day** while openly and shameless flaunting itself” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 139). Indeed, various surveys show that there has been a marked drop in people's positive assessment of administrative effectiveness since the late 1990s, along with a significant deterioration in perceptions of petty and grand corruption. This is despite real strides against corruption thanks to salary raises for civil servants (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 139).

Despite elections being held in 2013, signals about democratic discontent remain in the red. The various indicators available on governance keep deteriorating. For example, in one survey of respondents in the capital city (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 139–140):

- 58% said they were satisfied with democracy in 2006, but just 20% did by 2015;
- 64% trusted public administration in 2006, but only 35% by 2015.

At the same time, **elites' derailing of democratic processes may be creating doubt in the population about the effectiveness of democracy, and may contribute to lower voter turnout** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 237). Voter turnout has regularly been low, and decreasing overall. In presidential elections, it has gone from 37% in 1992, to 24% in 2006, and 17% in 2013 (Latek, 2018, p. 4), although it then went up again in 2018 at 48% (Haute Cour Constitutionnelle, n.d.). Low turnout also occurs in local elections. For example, in the 2015 municipal election in Antananarivo, turnout was a low 29%, despite one candidate being close to a prominent national figure (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 237). The loss of confidence in politicians and the political system erodes their legitimacy, and exacerbates the risk of crisis (Latek, 2018, p. 4).

Capacities for mobilisation that are hindered, but real

Social atomisation, and the dearth of intermediate bodies prevent popular expectations from being conveyed and from compelling authorities to respond to them. Riots then become the only possibilities for collective mobilisation, although they remain rare due to the dominant taboo on public violence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 230).

In addition, despite its democratic aspirations, **the population remains torn** between (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 146, 230–231):

- citizenship-based aspirations to democracy, meritocracy, and accountability that are partly imported, and partly drawn from Malagasy culture; and
- respect for real and symbolic hierarchies and power presented as sacred, which are another component of prevalent values inherited from the past.

Yet, the upside to elites' inability to create structured organisations is that **there remains open space for mobilisations in civil society to push towards people's aspirations**. This was visible for example in the number of people involved, and the duration, of the 2016 popular mobilisations in Soamahamanina against authorising a Chinese company to exploit a goldmine (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 237–238). In the course of Malagasy history, movements expressing popular dissatisfaction have always acted as a brake on governments' slide into autocratic abuse. While the movements could never sustainably lead to a more inclusive and democratic society, their role has been invaluable (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 146).

Indeed, **in the past few years, there has been a rise in collective organising**. Some civil society associations have taken on an important role in public debates (e.g. Sefafi, Justice et paix). Some associations in the diaspora have taken to citizenship-based mobilisations, such as the collective to defend Malagasy lands (Tany). More recently, the peaceful protest movement called Wake Up has emerged (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 237–238).

Simultaneously, **social media, and newspapers have been spaces where critical voices have been raised**. Even among elites, those who belong to civil society have developed a specific profile and specific values (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 238).

The mixed role of religious beliefs and Churches in political economy

Churches and religions have a decisive weight on the national scene, and are present at all levels and throughout Malagasy territory. Over 70% of the population self-identify as Christian, according to two nationwide surveys: 31% Catholics; 21% FJKM Protestants; and among remaining Protestants, 13% FLM; 1% Anglican; 1% Adventist; 5% other³⁶. In addition, 19% report worshipping ancestors (*fivavahana nentin-drazana*), while less than 2% self-identify as Muslims³⁷. Religiosity is not only a reality among common people; the preamble of the secular constitution of the country affirms belief in God (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166).

In the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, 44% of respondents said they trusted religious leaders a lot, and 31% trusted them partly, whereas only 14% trusted them 'just a little', and 8% not at all. Among those who trusted them a lot, the rate was similar among men and women, at respectively 44% and 45%, but it was distinctly higher among rural respondents (47%) than urban ones (35%), while (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 25).

Through its predominant place, **religion plays several major roles in political economy**³⁸. First, it acts as **a principle to regulate individual behaviours in daily life** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166).

Importantly, church bodies exert **influence over political life through their public interventions and stances**. "Depending on context and period, these interventions have been at times requested and approved (even applauded) by the population, and at other times been condemned by it" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166). The population does want religious authorities' participation in public life, especially to provide guidance on big social issues. However, it also considers that Churches must not directly meddle in politics³⁹. For example, in the 2009 crisis, support for A. Rajoelina by archbishop O. Razanakolona and by the bishops of the episcopal conference made believers very upset⁴⁰.

In addition, **politicians court Churches' favour and try to rely on them**, since the population considers Churches to be potential checks and balances on ruling powers, or at least to be moral authorities that guarantee principles of ethics and social justice. To attract popular support and legitimacy, rulers use strategies such as explicitly making religious references in their speeches, and having some church representatives directly or indirectly involved by their side in national matters (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166).

³⁶ (ENEMPSI, 2012, & Enquête emploi, 2015; Instat, 2013 & 2015; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164)

³⁷ (Instat, 2013 & 2015; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164)

³⁸ On Churches and politics, in addition to (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a), also see (Gingembre, 2011; Rafitson & Rafitson, 2014)..

³⁹ (Roubaud, 1999, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166)

⁴⁰ (Rafitson, 2014, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166)

The effects that Churches' roles have on political economy are ambivalent. On the one hand, **the population clearly views Churches as contributing to stability and development in the country**, particularly through the moral support they provide⁴¹, their contribution to education and popular awareness, and some of their stances that helped resolve crises at key moments in history⁴².

On the other hand, Churches play an equivocal role in the hierarchical structuring of society (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166).

First, **the weight of religion can be mobilised to reinforce the dominant political theology**, rather than promoting rulers' accountability to citizens. When manipulated, it can grant the president, as ultimate embodiment of secular power, a symbolic, quasi-divine dimension, for example presenting him as having *hasina*⁴³ or as being a providential man. As a large part of the population is "little informed, in search of guidance, and imbued with religious credulity", any reference to or link with Churches can grant rulers a status that places them outside any democratic control (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 167).

Second, **Churches themselves are shaped by inherited differentiation and ranking.** Different denominations are associated with different statuses. For example, on average, FJKM households occupy more advantaged positions in terms of wealth, income, employment etc.⁴⁴. In parallel, there is an implicit hierarchy between parishes depending on the status of attending families. While this can simply result from social reproduction, it nevertheless confirms a social structure that embeds hierarchies and enshrines the social pyramid, instead of placing the whole population on an equal footing (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 167).

The ambiguous role of foreign actors

The problematic role of aid donors

By the latest available figures from OECD on gross official development assistance (ODA), the top 10 donors in 2016-2017 were, in decreasing order: International Development Association (World Bank Group); the USA; the IMF (concessional trust fund); the EU; France; Germany; the African Development Fund; the Global Fund; the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation; and Korea (OECD, n.d.).

Aid donors have played both positive and negative roles in Madagascar's political economy⁴⁵.

Some of their actions have had some positive effects. For example, some donor policies posited export-led growth and competition on world markets would be the best way to pressure the economy towards greater effectiveness. This has played a positive role in specific economic areas (most notably free trade zones) in Madagascar. It did lead to a modernisation that pushed

⁴¹ (Wachsberger, 2009, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166)

⁴² (Urfer, 1993, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 166)

⁴³ *Hasina* refers to the invisible essence of power that monarchs were supposed endowed with, drew their political legitimacy from, and could supposedly transmit to their descendants (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 167).

⁴⁴ (Roubaud, 1999, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 167)

⁴⁵ On how development aid is part of donors' and elites' power games and strategies in the country, see, in addition to (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a): (Chartier & Rivière, 2018).

public authorities “to favour well-performing companies to the detriment of rentier companies, often associated with companies that had social connections or were willing to pay bribes” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 172).

However, external actors’ actions have also had **negative effects, which “are often gravely underestimated”** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 172). By promoting standardised orientations and good practices, external actors – foremost among them donors – have generated “adverse effects whose consequences can turn out to be more destructive than positive”, since “market and democracy cannot be decreed” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 172).

Before delving into this, it is worth noting that, according to country specialists, **the primary responsibility for the country’s situation and its use of aid lies with domestic actors**, even though donors have certainly contributed to the contraction of public services, and to the weakness of aid. Poor performance in these regards results foremost from domestic political and economic organisation, which itself arises from a consensus among elites who do not care about the common good, combined with the weakness of collective action for change in the population (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 181).

Shrinking the already undersized public sector

Past and present structural policies by donors have shrunk Madagascar’s already undersized public sector. Structural adjustment programmes were the backbone of all the economic policies donors applied to Madagascar for two decades, from the early 1980s to the late 1990s. Then, from the early 2000s, donors have supported poverty reduction strategies that still include some key aspects of structural adjustment programmes, linked to internal and external liberalisation, and privatisation (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 173).

Structural adjustment programmes and their legacy have had lasting harmful consequences. To begin, their record on generating growth has been poor. More fundamentally, their most harmful long-term impact has been to **render public institutions and action, and the civil servants implementing them, precarious, and to sap their credibility** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 173). This drive towards ‘less State’ under the guise of ‘a better State’ happened for economic, financial, and ideological reasons⁴⁶.

All components of public action, from staffing to budgets, have contracted. By now, Madagascar has “**one of the weakest public sectors in the world**”, regarding both its expenditures, and its revenues (internal and external)⁴⁷. Since 1980, public expenditures per capita have been reduced by two thirds. This loss was twice the rate of the decrease in GDP per capita. Similarly, public revenues, especially tax revenues, are extremely weak. Tax revenues are among the lowest in the world: the average tax rate has been around 10% over the long term, with variations between 8% and 12% over the last two decades - and the actual rates are probably even lower due to the underestimation of GDP in the country (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175).

⁴⁶ (Raffinot & Roubaud 2001, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 173)

⁴⁷ (Naudet & Rua, n.d., cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175)

Civil servants have thus suffered material and symbolic deteriorations. Hiring freezes, layoffs, and budget cuts “have led to a sometimes tragic fragilization of their social status” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 173). In addition, they have been stigmatised. They became widely decried by donors as “too numerous, too well-paid, too timid, privileged, unproductive, clientelistic, tribalist, corrupt etc.” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 173). They went from being presented as spearheading development “to parasites, scapegoats of the failure of adjustment policies” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 173).

Economically, these donor policies directly caused three consequences. First, **the number of civil servants dropped, when in fact more were (and remain) needed.** Whereas most donors posit overstaffing in the civil service, Madagascar has actually suffered from chronic under-administration⁴⁸. This was already true in the 1990s, when the share of civil servants in the working population stood at a paltry 2-3%. It is even more true today, as the situation has kept worsening: the rate of public-sector employment was halved between 1996 and 2010. The relative size of Malagasy administration is consequently one of the lowest in the world. Its administration rate (the ratio between the number of civil servants and total population in the country) was 7‰ by 2015. This is similar to many African countries, but it is the only one that keeps shrinking. It is also much lower than administration rates in e.g. European countries, where they stand at 50 to 100 ‰ (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 173–174).

Second, there was a **staggering fall in the purchasing power of civil servants’ salaries.** Between 1978 and 1996, civil servants’ salary average dropped by 74% in real terms. The trend has since reversed, but not undone the drop. By 2000 public salaries remained 46% below their 1978 level, and by 2010 they were at the same level as in 2000. In recent years, raises have brought salaries up, but this dynamic may not last, and civil servants’ salaries have still not recouped from their drop in the early 1980s (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175).

Third, **young people found themselves evicted from public sector jobs.** The contraction of public-sector hiring for the past three decades “has disproportionately affected young graduates” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175). Since the formal private sector has not picked up hiring them, these young people are the ones experiencing the most acute professional downgrading. Their downward mobility is both financial and social (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175). By the end of the 1990s, young civil servants’ salary at the time of hire had dropped 70% compared to 1975-1981⁴⁹. There are now reduced intra-generational differences between young people who completed their studies, and those who were excluded from school or dropped out early. This reduction in inequalities has occurred through a downward levelling for all concerned (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175).

Weakening the already weak public sector

In addition to shrinking Madagascar’s public sector, past and present policies by donors have weakened this already weak sector. Donors’ actions have effectively and persistently weakened the Malagasy State since the early 1980s, “with disastrous consequences” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175). Donors adopted a “naïve, dogmatic, and brutal approach” and applied it across the board (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176).

⁴⁸ (Razafindrakoto & Roubaud 2001, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 173)

⁴⁹ (Antoine et al. 2000, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 175)

Donors pushed for two waves of **privatisations**, in the 1980s and 1990s. Too often, this saw private monopolies attributed to actors who were close to power, to replace the old public monopolies, while the expected gains from the reform never decisively materialised. The State “took heavy financial losses by allowing public companies to be bought at heavily undervalued prices, while donors did not hesitate to grant loans to those ‘entrepreneurs’ whose first quality was their connections”⁵⁰.

One illustration is the rice sector. In the 1980s, donors applied to it their general strategy, based on the market and private sector. They took no account of local conditions, such as the weakness of farmer organisations, and the lack of a private sector that could lift the constraints on production growth (e.g. irrigation, popular education, regional isolation, and access to better seeds, inputs, and credits). The rice sector was liberalised, and the large irrigated perimeters were dismantled, to make up for the skyrocketing of imports. This policy was an unmitigated failure. Production and yields plummeted, and today they are among the lowest in the world, even though Madagascar was historically known to export luxury varieties (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 175–176).

More recently, donors have pushed for **decentralisation** while also ignoring local conditions. Attempts at decentralisation stalled after 2009, but they still illustrate recurring problems. Donors have promoted decentralisation in the name of greater proximity and accountability between constituents and local government. Yet, decentralisation, far from eradicating the mechanisms for rent capture, has shifted them from national to subnational authorities. This has fostered nepotism and the capture of local public services by local elites (Bardhan, 2006, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176).

Some far-reaching repercussions of major donors’ policies – especially in higher education – have hampered Madagascar’s medium- and long-term capacities and autonomy. In particular, from the 1970s to the early 2000s, the World Bank advocated reducing public allocations to higher education. This contributed to deteriorating the quality of higher education institutions, with consequences still visible today. Initially, Malagasy rulers did not agree with the World Bank’s position. However, as universities were often among the initiators of growing social and economic unrest, and increased protest, Malagasy governments eventually aligned with the World Bank. In the 1990s, the government froze hiring to reduce expenditures in higher education. Since then, the ratio of students to teacher has improved, but “the quality of education has suffered and the inefficiency of the entire education system has worsened (over 30% of the total budget goes to administration, referred to as ‘technical support’)” (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 8).

Universities’ reduced capacities have had profound negative consequences. One has been “the lack of locally produced’ expertise” (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 8). Another has been that national research institutions receive so little funding that they have to engage in international research projects led and driven by institutions that are mainly in Europe and the USA. This situation will impact Madagascar’s development for years to come, profoundly influencing the quality of education. In the meantime, the World Bank has recently begun to change its policy on higher education (Waeber et al., 2016, pp. 8–9).

⁵⁰ (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176, referring to Zafimahova, 1998; Jütersonke & Kartas, 2010)

Poor choices in how donors work

In addition to problems in *what* donors promote, **there are problems with *how* donors work, specifically in their dominant modes of interventions and in their implementation.** Donors fall short in two main regards (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176).

Short-termist disbursements and lack of country contextualisation

First, they have **failed to capitalise on successes they have achieved over time, however fragile and partial** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176).

This is largely because they **often fail to invest in programmes over longer time periods, even when a programme has demonstrably met some success.** What feeds this dominant culture in the major donors is a system of incentives for operational staff that pushes them to spend at all costs. Donors' systems of job rotation then lets staff offload any responsibility for their decisions, since individual staff will not be at their post by the time the impact of a project actually becomes known (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 176–177).

This leads to several problematic practices (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 176–177):

- **A “culture of disbursement”**, which had already been criticised over 20 years ago and has not abated since (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176, referring among others to Cling et al., 2013).
- **A short duration of the project cycles** – a mere few years.
- **Taking up “passing fads”, because of a wish to do something new at all costs** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176). For example, donors promoted requiring families to contribute to school fees in the mid-1990s as the definitive solution to improving the quality of education, before they brutally reversed course in the 2000s and promoted the suppression of such payments, as the solution to increasing poor children's school attendance.

Additionally, **donors' constant search for model countries** ('front runners' and other 'poster children') **leads them to downplay a number of dysfunctions in Madagascar.** In particular, donors tend to paper over matters of dysfunctional governance, regardless of their stated principles in this regard. The international community's indulgence towards Marc Ravalomanana in 2006-2009 was a case in point, though far from exceptional: high economic growth was used as a justification to ignore the dereliction of principles of democracy and market competition. Such a way of working on part of donors has repeatedly led to the exact opposite of what development agencies said they had wanted: “creating monopolies, to the detriment of a more open and competitive structure of production on one side; personalising power, to the detriment of strengthening institutions on the other side” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 177).

Problems with levels and conditions of aid

Second, **the principles donors use to allocate public development aid have had adverse effects** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 176).

In particular, **the targeting of aid towards countries that donors deem to have good governance has worsened the situation in the country, and deepened donors' inability to capitalise on their own experiences.** Since the late 1990s, many major donors have broadly embraced the idea that their aid should be targeted based on a mix of needs (poverty) and good governance (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 177–178). As shown in See: Figure 8 on the next page (p. 52), Aid to Madagascar has widely fluctuated with variations in the international economy – including the 2000-2001 financial crisis –, and with internal crises that have shaken the country's international credibility, leading to its isolation after the 2009 coup (Latek, 2018, p. 5).

However, this has had dubious human and systemic consequences (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 177–178). To begin, withholding aid during episodes of political crisis has ended up punishing the Malagasy for their rulers' misdeeds. For example, following the 2009 coup, donors drastically cut aid that was going to the poor in the country (cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 178).

Moreover, such policies have contributed to putting the country in a 'fragility trap'. A catastrophic form of negative resilience has arisen, meeting what Andrimihaja et al. (2011) call a "low-growth-poor-governance equilibrium trap" (cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 178). The freezing of aid following the 2009 coup fits this pattern, even though aid could have been very productive and could have played a decisive role in helping the country come out of its dead-end and avoid yet another socio-economic collapse (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 177–178).

See: Figure 8. Net public development aid per capita for Madagascar and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960-2017, source: OECD via World Bank, cited in Latek, 2018, p. 6, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628286/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)628286_FR.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628286/EPRS_BRI(2018)628286_FR.pdf)

Additionally, **donors' levels of aid to Madagascar are structurally too low** – one more way in which donors bear a share of responsibility for the country's regressive trajectory⁵¹. For example, a study showed that in 2013, among countries with comparable population sizes, Madagascar was the African country that received the second lowest amount of aid per capita, at US\$21 per person. Only Angola fared worse at the time (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 178). In terms of share of the GDP, the volume of aid was especially low, around 5% in 2013. This weak level of aid was not due solely to the crisis: between 2000 and 2011, the "ratio was even lower (4%), and the few African countries that received even less aid were all much richer" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 178). When accounting not only for population, but also for poverty and governance, Madagascar is also clearly an "under-aided" country. A 2013 OECD study examined this systematically, and concluded that, by all the criteria used, the country received insufficient aid (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 178–179).

⁵¹ (Naudet & Rua, n.d., cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 178)

The lack of demand for aid on the Malagasy side is the driving force behind the aid deficit. First and foremost, it is Malagasy rulers and political elites who implicitly do not wish to use external aid (all while clamouring that it is insufficient) – just as they do not wish to raise taxes or to invest in public goods. “But this arrangement seemingly satisfies the other elite groups, who exert no pressure to change this” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 179). Even beyond elites, the population at large believes that Madagascar is the African country receiving the most aid, according to opinion polls. In this context, elites do little to increase the country’s attractiveness for aid, to actively reach out to donors, and to improve the country’s weak capacity to absorb and disburse aid (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 179).

Secondarily, on the supply side, Northern donors do not see Madagascar as being a sensitive area or having geostrategic importance, which could be a source of instability for their countries. As a result, Madagascar does not attract aid. In addition, the country’s economic tragedy has been unfolding over a long period, without being spectacular and therefore without arousing public opinions in the way acute humanitarian crises or wars would (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 179).

The problematic role of foreign conservation organisations

Because Madagascar is a major host of biodiversity and tropical forests, **numerous foreign organisations working in environmental conservations have long been involved** in lobbying the country’s authorities, and in running a variety of projects (Corson, 2016; Neudert et al., 2017; Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 4). Indeed, this is part of a wider history where “[r]ural Malagasy have long been subject to networked pressures from abroad – whether via colonialism, market demands, or conservation efforts” (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 4).

The Northeast of the country offers a typical example of this. Western-based conservation organisations, e.g. from the USA, successfully lobbied the government to establish the protected areas of Masoala, in 1995, and Makira, in 2005, in order to avoid losing “the last remaining large humid forests along the northeast coast” (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 2). At the 2003 World Parks Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), then-president Marc Ravalomanana announced that the country would aim for protected areas to cover 10% of the national territory. In parallel, conservation and development organisations supported the intensification of smallholder agriculture – particularly irrigated rice – near the newly established parks. They hoped their projects “would make local land users quit shifting cultivation, thereby reducing deforestation” (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 2)⁵².

However, **their role in Malagasy political economy, and their impact on both environment and development, has been very mixed**. They have decidedly contributed to contradictions and tensions in environmental conservation and response to climate emergency, as detailed in Section 5 (p. 69).

⁵² Shifting cultivation is also known as ‘slash-and-burn agriculture’ or *tavy*. It entails cutting vegetation on a small plot, letting it dry, then burning it to fertilise the soil, cultivating it for a season or two, moving to another plot while leaving this one fallow for about five years, before returning to it (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 2).

For example, in the Northeast, Malagasy farmers and families have lost access to land and resource due to the vast protected areas, while fair compensation has remained contested. Local people have increased their production of irrigated rice, but without reducing shifting cultivation, because they keep relying on shifting cultivation to meet some of their subsistence needs for rice. Moreover, deforestation decreased in the conservation areas, but increased in the rest of the landscape. The deforestation rate increased when considered over a 16-year period. Importantly, the threatened fragments of forest provide habitats for different species and microclimates, allowing for “diverse benefits and opportunities to people and nature”, including diverse land uses (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 2). This is put at risk by the effects of conservation efforts (Zähringer et al., 2018, pp. 2–3).

An ambivalent role played by foreign companies

Foreign companies have played an ambivalent role. On the one hand, they have **contributed to the success of free trade zones**, with positive effects for development (see p. 64).

On the other hand, some large foreign companies have been involved in **extractive economies that have been challenged, but also sometimes accepted, by the population⁵³, and that have sometimes been abandoned by foreign companies.**

The best-known example is the question of ‘land grabs’, when foreign actors purchase large areas of land to grow agricultural produce for exports. In the 1990s, the World Bank imposed land reforms that introduced individual private property in the countryside, even though most peasant had no such concept, since customary land laws were based on collective ownership, without room for private transactions (Bouquet, 2020). Similar land reforms have been upheld by successive presidents since (Burnod et al., 2014).

The shift to the new system led to high-profile contestation. In particular, **in 2008, South Korean group Daewoo** had sought to acquire 1,300,000 hectares of arable lands. Peasants’ anger about this then led to the overthrow of then-president Marc Ravalomanana in March 2009, and to withdrawal by Daewoo (Bouquet, 2020; Burnod et al., 2014). Since then, transactions over agricultural lands have never been about such large surfaces, but they have kept going on (Bouquet, 2020).

However, **the issue of ‘land grabbing’ is not so clear-cut**. First, Bouquet (2020) looks at **the granting of lands rich in mineral sands to foreign private companies**: Rio Tinto in Fort-Dauphin for ilmenite from 1998⁵⁴; and Base Toliara, a branch of Australian group Base Resources, in Tulear in the south-west, for ilmenite, zircon, and rutile, from 2018. In both cases, there have been local popular contestations. But they eventually subsided in Fort-Dauphin. They may also not last in Tulear, as negotiations between the company and the population seem to have advanced – the company aims to offer local peasants employment as mine employees, and the mining zone is unlikely to displace villages or cultures. In the meantime, the Malagasy State suspended the activities of Base Toliara in November 2019, stating that it had to reform the mining code (Bouquet, 2020).

⁵³ On mostly positive interactions, see e.g. (Medernach & Burnod, 2013).

⁵⁴ On Rio Tinto, also see: (EJOLT, n.d.).

Second, Bouquet (2020) notes that **land grabbing has mostly been done by Malagasy elites**. He mentions the example of a former government Minister who has been challenging the right of 300 peasant families to occupy about 600 hectares of very fertile land west of Antananarivo. The peasant families concerned, often former agricultural labourers, had occupied these lands following nationalisations in 1975. They have grown crops on the lands ever since for subsistence. However, the former minister had the plot of land recorded for himself under the guise of nationalisation in 1988. He developed no agricultural activity on it until 2005, leading peasants to consider that the fields were theirs. The minister now wants to use the land for agribusiness. There has been a succession of trials, largely to the advantage of the former minister. At the same time, the author notes that peasants' current agricultural practices are too extensive and may not be sustainable in this location (Bouquet, 2020).

Third, Bouquet (2020) adds that **the Malagasy State has engaged in pre-empting land too, for public purposes**. For example, the State seeks to pre-emptively requisition 1,000 hectares of rice fields to the north-west of Antananarivo, in order to partially relocate the capital by building a new city called Tana Masoandro to relieve existing congestion and improve urban planning. The author notes that there are genuinely good reasons for this project. Rice field owners in the targeted area have mobilised, protested, and called for upholding their rights, "invoking their longstanding presence, the threat to their agricultural activity, and their ancestors' tombs" (Bouquet, 2020). However, the author observes that in reality, owners have dried up their rice fields and turned them into clay fields that are informally used to make baked bricks. Modern law and customary urban and rural laws are in contradiction, and the risk is that the State will just push people out with no compensation to hundreds of small peasants with a poor legal safety net (Bouquet, 2020).

In all three cases above, local people have organised protests, which were sometimes violent and met with imprisonment by the State. However, the cases also reveal significant differences, and the most problematic case – the former minister's appropriation – is mostly likely to be stifled to his advantage (Bouquet, 2020).

Fourth, **many foreign companies abandon their projects**. By 2014, 90% of the companies with projects to invest in agricultural lands had given up. While the effects of the 2009 political crisis were certainly one reason for this, the main reason is that most companies lacked experience in the agricultural sector. Those who have stayed on have drastically revised their project, from large-scale mechanised monocultures to smaller-scale diversified cultures. Moreover, they faced difficulties in actually getting access to land. They had to negotiate with a wide range of contacts – from customary authorities to elected officials, and civil servants –, at multiple levels – from local to national –, invoking various types of laws, and requesting manifold demands, fees, and corruption. Local land owners also often protested, and sometimes managed to get support from civil society organisations. For now, the remaining foreign-owned projects have generated little local economic development (Burnod et al., 2014)⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ Also see: (Burnod & Andriamanalina, 2017).

Secondary role played by the Malagasy diaspora

The Malagasy diaspora has two features that could be assets. First, it massively resides in rich countries: over 90% of its members are in an OECD country, and 85% are in France. Second, the diaspora is highly educated. One third are educated to higher degree, and over 40% of those who have emigrated to an OECD country practice a skilled profession. Consequently, the Malagasy diaspora's high purchasing power could have been a powerful factor in making it a major actor in the country (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 220)⁵⁶.

And yet, considered over a longer time period, the diaspora is not a central actor of the country's political economy, and has only played a secondary role in its dynamics, for several reasons (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 219).

One factor limiting the diaspora's influence is that it is small. The estimated emigration rate in Madagascar is 1%, making it the 28th Sub-Saharan country out of 48 countries on which data is available, well below the 1.7% average for all 48 countries (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 219–220). The number of people in the Malagasy diaspora is small – around 170,000 persons according to a 2015 estimate by the United Nations (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 220).

More importantly, the diaspora is weakly organised, and does not turn its attention much towards its country of origin. Unlike a number of other diasporas, the Malagasy one has embraced an individual logic of integration into its host societies (e.g. becoming naturalised citizens of the host countries much more frequently). It is also made up of a large proportion of women, “as marriage with nationals of the host country is a significant reason for migrating” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 220).

Moreover, there is a low density of Malagasy diaspora's associations. Further, these associations are used more to run activities for Malagasy communities abroad, particularly religious and sporting activities, than to invest back in Madagascar or to prepare any return migration. “[T]he potential to mobilise the diaspora is important, and initiatives have started emerging”, but these assets are hard to turn into actual realisations (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 220). In a sense, some of the characteristics of Malagasy society – individualisation, and difficulty turning proven assets into effective results – apply to its diaspora (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 220)⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 219, cite FORIM, 2016, and Razafindrakoto et al., 2017, as key studies on the diaspora)

⁵⁷ For additional studies on the Malagasy, also see: (Forum des Organisations de Solidarité Internationale issues des Migrations [FORIM], 2016; Razafindrakoto, Razafindratsima, et al., 2017).

5. Key dynamics: socioeconomic contradictions, democratic space, and institutional decay

This section focuses on the key dynamics of Malagasy political economy, marked by socioeconomic contradictions, democratic space, and institutional decay. It does so by bringing together some points set out in Sections 3 and 4, and by presenting complementary ones.

Malagasy political economy has a number of proven assets that have contributed to positive dynamics. This includes three structural assets (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 109):

- **control over public violence** (see p. 34);
- **real capacities on part of formal institutions** in the economic, political, and administrative fields (discussed p. 63); and
- **the population’s expression of democratic aspirations** (see pp. 44 and 62).

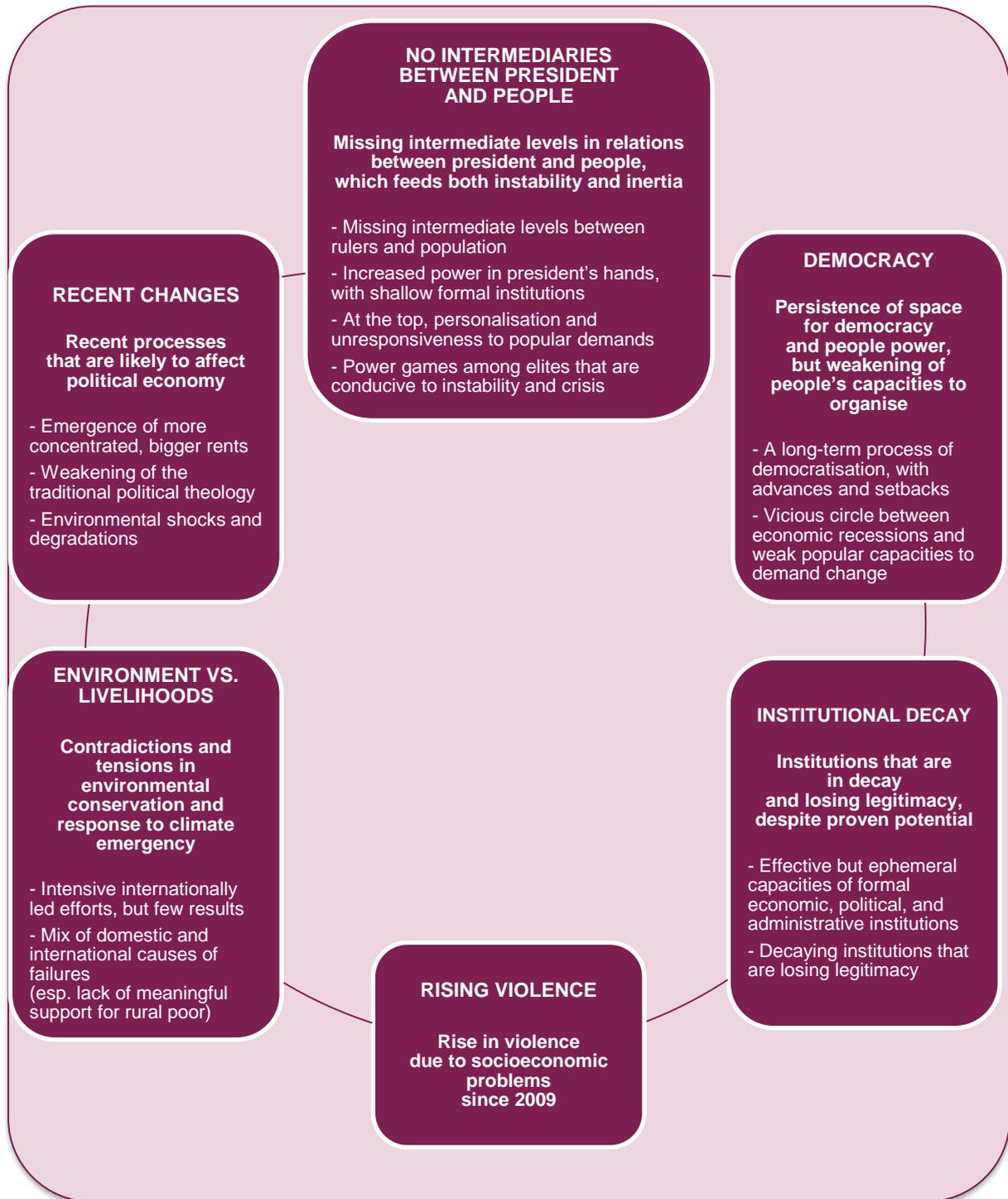
Yet, most dynamics in the country’s political economy have been negative for its development and environment. In particular, regardless of ruling elites’ discourses and stated ideologies, “the system and practices at the top of the State have changed little” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104). Since independence, no regime has actually asserted equity in order to reduce inequalities between status-based heirs and popular classes, between regions (especially highlands vs. coasts), and between urban and rural areas. Whether individuals in the elites inherited their positions through their social origins or through initial merit, they have chiefly used such positions for short-term gain by controlling and increasing their economic or political power. No regime since independence can claim to have enabled the country to take off (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 104–105).

Recent trends are particularly worrying. In fact, in 2014, the IMF shifted Madagascar into the category of ‘fragile States’, because of the combination of economic degradation, rising insecurity, and growing illicit activities, all in a context of political instability (IMF, 2014, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235). The 2013 elections have not structurally changed the political economy, and chaos is one possible scenario for the country (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235).

Many economic and political indicators converge to suggest that the **great resilience displayed by Madagascar following previous crises may have reached its limits.** Not only could a new crisis break out at any time, along the same lines as previous ones, but it would take place in an underlying situation that has become ever more fragile with each crisis (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235).

Figure 9 on the next page (p. 58) synthesises the key political economy dynamics affecting Madagascar’s development and environment, before the rest of this section details them.

Figure 9. Key political economy dynamics affecting Madagascar's development and environment



source: author's own

Missing intermediate levels in relations between president and people, which feeds both instability and inertia

Rural atomisation, weak intermediate bodies, absent elite organisation, and strong social segmentation have combined to reproduce the dominant political economy system across time, thus contributing both to recurring political instability, and to long-term social inertia (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 149).

Missing intermediate levels between rulers and population

Because of the weakness of intermediate bodies, **there is a lack of intermediate levels that could be intermediaries in negotiations between the rulers and the population**, particularly rural Malagasy and urban people in informal sectors (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 162). The population's atomisation limits interactions, and limits the possibilities to collectively express aspirations or dissatisfactions (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 149).

As popular classes are unable to defend their interests, they cannot represent themselves, and seek representation. In this context, rural people tend to seek representatives that appear to be a powerful higher authority. Indeed, rural people are always the ones deciding elections, by choosing the person who best dons the mantle of authority – whereas urban citizens are the ones 'undoing' the rulers (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 162). As peasants cannot represent themselves, and massively espouse the dominant political theology, they do feel represented politically by the leader who succeeds in taking on the character of traditional leader (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164).

See: Figure 10. The lack of intermediate levels between the population and the president: the missing vertical link. source: Razafindrakoto et al., 2017a, p. 163, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108770231>

The leadership of the country "is personalised by the president, surrounded by his family and a few henchmen who have entered ephemeral alliances with him" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 163). Outside his close family clan, the president chooses such personalities based on calculations that fit the circumstances, but his allies can turn on him at any time (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 163).

There is no network or system – not even clientelism – linking the interests of those at the top to the interests of those at the bottom, as See: Figure 10 to the left represents. Clientelism is limited in time (to a given period) and space (to a very restricted sliver of people). There were attempts to put a pyramid-shaped clientelism, e.g. through the Arema in the 1970s-1980s, and Tiko in the 2000s. But these systems could not last, since their existence hinged on the direct link with one single man, namely the ruling president (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 163).

Increased concentration of power into the president's hands, with shallow formal political institutions

A number of analyses characterise the **formal political institutions as superficial democracy**. Since the 1990s, Madagascar has gradually adopted institutions necessary to representative

democracy. However, even though its principles and formal structures are in place, the actual process has remained defective, leading authors to conclude that democracy is eroded of its substance (Marcus, 2016), or a façade of democracy (Andrianirina Rabemananoro, 2014, p. 67). In this context, State institutions may be consolidated – often with international donors’ aid –, but they remain pliable in rulers’ hands, and dominated by the executive (Latek, 2018, p. 4).

Madagascar has a semi-presidential regime, and multipartyism. However, **the president’s prerogatives have been widened with each successive constitutional reform**, in 1995, 1998, 2007, and 2010 (the country has experienced frequent constitutional changes, with four Constitutions and two major constitutional revisions since 1960). By now, the president names the Prime Minister (upon proposals from the majority parties in the National Assembly), and names one third of Senate members. Many observers decry the increases in presidential powers as self-interested manipulations that are harmful to political stability (Latek, 2018, p. 3).

The “President’s quasi-imperial position” in the formal system weakens institutional governance, impinging on judiciary and legislative autonomy (Latek, 2018, p. 3). Indeed, each president has enacted both constitutional and institutional reforms, among others on territorial structures and local government, to best serve their interests. In doing so, they have weakened the weight of the Constitution as a stable reference in political life. All this has strongly restricted political space within democratic institutions, leaving no real political competition⁵⁸.

The deficiency of formal institutions is made worse by the **failings of political parties**. The country’s numerous political parties hardly fulfil their role of taking on and aggregating interests. Instead, they are tools for elites’ patronage and rival networks (Latek, 2018, p. 4).

The **decisive predominance of elites’ informal networks** also undermines formal institutions. Leaders’ personal networks, their constant competition to capture and profit from ruling power, mean that “[p]ersonal relations and political games matter more than institutions and laws, which are often manipulated for instrumental gains, and changed” (Latek, 2018, p. 4).

At the top, personalisation and unresponsiveness to popular demands leading to instability

Such personalisation of power and excessive ‘presidentialisation’ of the system leave the president facing the population alone. This is amplified by the belief in the exceptional character of the *fanjakana* (the State) and in the *raiamandreny* status of those who embody it. This belief is still widespread both because it is part of Malagasy tradition, and because rulers have used it, and even contributed to revive it⁵⁹. Indeed, since the 1st Republic, nearly all individuals have become heads of State as providential men, which is considered to be the only alternative to the status quo when putting an end to a regime (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 105). The various heads of State have regularly held referenda for their own plebiscite, further consolidating this state of affairs (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164).

⁵⁸ (R. R. Marcus, 2016, cited in Latek, 2018, pp. 3–4)

⁵⁹ *Fanjakana* means the State, but its root is linked to *manjaka* (to reign) and *mpanjaka* (the king). In a sense, the president can consider himself the “King of the Republic”. A. Rajoelina and his wife illustrated this perfectly when, in December 2010, they put on royal colours and clothes, and went down the stairs of the Queen’s Palace during the ceremonies to usher in the 4th Republic (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164).

This unmediated configuration has two implications. First, there are **no guard rails on the president's actions, but also on people's relations to him** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164).

Second, **the president is extremely fragile. Any popular support the president claims to have**, particularly following a plebiscite, **is tenuous**. It relies only on a symbolic dimension which people may accept by choice (*raiamandreny*) or by constraint (due to the presidential party's administrative network in various places in the country), not on clientelism that would anchor people's affiliation to power (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164).

Conversely, the president "cannot count on structurally solid forces to organise, negotiate, [and] secure support and stability for his power" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164). As a result, when there is popular dissatisfaction, the president cannot know if it comes from a minority or a majority of the population. Any popular dissatisfaction can then be used by individuals with a modicum of capacity to mobilise people, in order to destabilise the regime (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164).

In return, each regime since independence, being aware of its fragility, has systematically sought to become reinforce its power. It has done so by concentrating and personalising it, "and by securing the support of a restricted group of influential actors (new 'coastal' elites, party cadre, Church representatives, etc.)" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 105). The president, well aware of the risks of losing his position, has tried to reinforce his power even more, leading him to slide towards autocracy (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 164).

No head of State has sought the support of the vast mass of the population by responding to popular aspiration, instead remaining locked in the above short-term logic. On the contrary, they have constantly neglected and excluded the majority, i.e. mainly rural people. And yet, every time, accumulated discontents have eventually given rise to mobilisations and to the overthrow of the regime in place, albeit this sometimes served politicians' manipulations (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 105).

Forms of power games among elites that are conducive to instability and crisis

The entire configuration of political power makes elites' fights over ruling power an **adversarial game where elites regularly destabilise each other past points of no return, leading to crises**. Each political crisis sees elites trade a series of strategic 'blows'. The incapacity to establish a dialogue between elites in power and in opposition inevitably heightens political tension. In turn, this transforms the fairly non-violent exchange of intimidation and bluff into an exchange of ever more violent escalations. In the process, some of the blows traded are irreversible, and are designed to be investments in order to change the political set-up. Such "irreversible investments" may produce results (positive or negative) in the short or medium term, but they also have long-term adverse effects that sustain fragility and foster the potential for a vicious circle of crises (Andrianirina Rabemananoro, 2014).

Four conditions typically converge to trigger a crisis (Andrianirina Rabemananoro, 2014, p. 59):

- The emergence of a leader who is charismatic in the eyes of a critical mass of public opinion;
- This leader's ability to rally the opposition around him;
- The presence of issues of shared interest that can catalyse the population's frustration, and that the opposition can manipulate to mobilise public protests;
- The opposition's free access to mass media in the capital city, especially to radios.

Two more conditions can exacerbate the potential for a crisis: when strife is visible within the dominant political party (this opens the door to individuals in it changing sides); and when forces of mediation or stabilisation, such as Churches or the army, lose their neutrality, or become fractious (Andrianirina Rabemananoro, 2014, p. 59).

The persistence of space for democracy and people power, but a weakening of people's capacities to organise

A long-term process of democratisation, with advances and setbacks

The spheres of power, and the political system are not locked. This is the counterpart to the dearth of non-State organisations and of real coalitions among elites (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169)

This is true in the world of Malagasy elites. Since the 18th century, the circle of political and economic elites has gradually broadened. The institutionalisation of the State (starting in the precolonial period), the abolition of slavery and, formally, of the status-based system, and the development of school attendance enabled a meritocratic elite to emerge. In a different aspect, political clientelism and the use of State rents have given rise to new political or economic actors (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104).

In parallel, this is true in ordinary people's political agency. Over the course of Malagasy history, democratic aspirations have taken shape and been voiced, to denounce the drifts towards authoritarianism of the various regimes, and to cause their downfall (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 104).

In fact, **considered dynamically over a long period, Madagascar has been going through "a process of democratisation, with advances and setbacks"** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 238). In this sense, political instability may be a manifestation of a crisis where transition and learning take place, embedded in a non-linear consolidation that includes the upheavals of the old order. After all, new rulers have nearly always assumed power on a democratic basis, seeking democratic legitimacy through elections, and seeking direct popular support through a significant number of referenda. There is no official challenge to democratic principles from elites, a few intellectuals excepted. Since building democracy is a long-term process, the 50 years since independence can be seen as a short time in the country's history (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 238).

Some of the norms and values present in Malagasy society (some endogenous, others imported and hybrid) also contribute to this. Malagasy ‘tradition’ has its own contradictions, with space for more democratic and egalitarian perspectives. Certainly, parts of the tradition are antidemocratic – e.g. dynasties, hierarchies, deference to sacred authority. However, other elements are akin to a universal understanding of democracy. Opposite *fanjakana* rooted in royal descent, is *fanjakan’ny madinika* (the society of equals). For every term underlining status-based order, there is an opposite one that can underpin democratic principles, such as *fihavanana*, *fokonolona*, *firaisan-kina*⁶⁰, and *soa iombonana*⁶¹. More deeply still, one concept can convey very different meanings depending the times and the social groups using it (Raison-Jourde & Roy, 2010, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 233).

Vicious circle between economic recessions and weak popular capacities to demand change

However, the country’s continued **economic recession since the 1970s contributes to “the population’s inability to react, organise, and mobilise”**, particularly by inhibiting aspirations during economic downturns (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 169).

Institutions that are in decay and losing legitimacy, despite their proven potential

Effective but ephemeral capacities of formal economic, political, and administrative institutions

A pattern of institutional successes that are real but not sustained

For all their current decay, **formal institutions in Madagascar have proven they can have effective capacities to operate well, and to generate regulation.** This is illustrated in (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 109, 146):

- the country’s economic transition in the 1980s and 1990s, when a class of new entrepreneurs come onto the scene;
- the country’s political transition during the 1990s wave of democratisation in Africa, when democratic changes of power followed two successive free elections 1993 and 1996;
- significant results in the bureaucratic field, particularly in the fight against corruption between 1995 and 2005.

However, there have been **no capacities to maintain the strengthening and consolidation of the above institutions over time.** In other words, the problem is not that some positive results are impossible to achieve, in local, temporary cases. The problem is that real institutional capacities could not be consolidated, and have even been undermined and undone as some institutions have been gradually falling into decay (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 123, 146).

⁶⁰ Solidarity (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 271).

⁶¹ Common good (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 273).

The exceptional, lasting success of free trade zones, and its positive impact on development

Still, there is **one example of sustained institutional performance: the country's exceptional success with free trade zones** since their introduction in 1990 (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 123). Industrial export processing zones are a sector where the requirements of global competitiveness are exacting, and "hardly compatible with a social order built on extracting unproductive rents" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 123).

Yet, **Madagascar has succeeded at this challenge, to a degree unseen elsewhere in Africa and in countries with similar levels of development** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 123). Even after the 2009, the levels of employment and export have been maintained overall, even though growth has stalled in companies operating in the free zones (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 124). The success of free zones was only interrupted twice by domestic reasons, with

socio-political violence. However, it is worth noting that these outbreaks were not led by an elite group or the ruling power in response to any exclusion from the benefits of free zone. In those two episodes, losses for the free zones were just a collateral effect of wider socio-political violence (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 126).

The success of Malagasy free zones means that companies in the Malagasy free zones benefited from a sufficiently developed institutional environment, with property rights, public services to businesses, "human capital", etc. (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 123). Without this, solely having a comparative advantage in labour costs is insufficient (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 123). The success of free zones also means that companies operating in them succeeded at having, and efficiently combining, production factors to maintain or increase their share on world markets where they compete with the best-performing companies worldwide (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 123).

The success of free zones shows that Madagascar "is capable of **generating a dynamic of enrichment that stems from a real creation of value (jobs, incomes)**, under the impetus of a class of new entrepreneurs (either national, or from abroad)" (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 124). This dynamic generates real development, not interests that benefit from their proximity to the dominant coalition in power to grow their rents.

Free trade zones have had multiple positive effects on economy and development (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 124):

- The share of free zones in the country's exports has massively increased, to reach nearly 50% in 2005-2006.
- Free zones structurally transformed the nature of Malagasy exports within a few years. Exports went from being largely made up of agricultural products in the early 1990 to nearly 50% of them being made up of manufacturing products by the mid-2000s.
- The growth of free-zone businesses translated into a boom in job creation. Between 1990 and 2001, "jobs created in free zones grew four times faster than those generated by the formal private sector or by the economy overall". Even though the 2002 crisis led to a collapse of employment, employment recovered extremely quickly.

- Importantly, all indicators on the quality of jobs created – such as labour standards, and labour protection – are in favour of businesses in the free zones. These businesses:
 - progressively formalised their labour relations;
 - have likely been the main driver in the spread of the new norms for contracting work to other businesses in the country, bringing them more in line with international standards.

Decaying institutions that are losing legitimacy

Institutions that are losing legitimacy

Although Malagasy institutions have demonstrated some operational or organisational capacity when there were enough will and enough resources allocated, there is today “a global failure of institutions” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 181). By now, **institutions are weak and dysfunctional, which in turn leads them to keep losing legitimacy and public trust.** This view is shared by both Malagasy elites and the population at large, as Afrobarometer surveys show (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 181–187).

The 2018 Afrobarometer survey shows that people have low trust in core public institutions (COEF Ressources, n.d., p. 24):

- On courts and tribunals: 35% of respondents report having no trust at all, 29% just a little trust, 25% some partial trust, and 8% a lot of trust.
- On police and gendarmerie: 32% of respondents report having no trust at all, 27% just a little trust, 29% some partial trust, and 11% a lot of trust.
- On the country’s defence forces: 26% report having no trust at all in them, 26% having just a little trust, 31% some partial trust, and 14% a lot of trust.

The 2018 Afrobarometer survey also shows that people challenge the right of public institutions to exercise their coercive powers (COEF Ressources, n.d., pp. 19–20)⁶²:

- On the statement that courts have the right to make decisions that people must always abide by: just 11% of respondents fully agreed that. 44% of respondents merely ‘agreed’, while 22% disagreed, and 13% totally disagreed.
- On the statement that police have the right to compel the population to abide by the law: just 22% fully agreed, and 53% agreed, while 13% disagreed, and 4% totally disagreed.
- On the statement that tax authorities always have the right to compel the population to pay their taxes: just 23% fully agreed, and 54% agreed, while 10% disagreed, and 6% totally disagreed (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 183).

Further, **many of the trends are negative over time** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184). For example, public trust in the army, justice, and police has deteriorated between 2005 and 2014 in Afrobarometer surveys (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184). Data focused on the population in the capital city shows the same trend towards “a marked deterioration of the situation between the early 2000s and 2015: fewer and fewer citizens think

⁶² On all bullet points below, rates for urban, rural, men, and women respondents are very similar.

that public administration is effective, and express confidence towards it” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 183).

Institutions that perform poorly

Citizens’ loss of confidence in public institutions results from the failing performance of these institutions, rather than from any specific feature in Malagasy culture (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 183–184). Policies of structural adjustment and of “less State”, and their legacies have singularly impaired the effectiveness of State institutions, which has undoubtedly undermined their legitimacy (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184).

A widespread loss of sense for the collective, the common good, and the responsibility to act

Further, **the failure of public institutions is also connected to “the loss of a sense for the collective, decried by the population”** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184). The population has progressively developed a strategy of circumvention or avoidance against public institutions, which has led to a vicious circle. A growing part of the population has adopted behaviours to bypass public institutions, which further compromises their effectiveness and legitimacy. “Faced with decaying institution, and with daily hardships that confine the population to survival strategies, each person, at their individual level, can only count on their own strength” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184). One consequence of people’s distrust towards institutions is also the low levels of interpersonal trust in the country (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184).

More broadly, “the loss of legitimacy affecting the very institutions that are supposed to guarantee common principles and rules seems to have **erased a common framework of reference**” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184). Such a state leaves it wide open for those who are in power or who wish to reach it to pursue any strategies to conquer or maintain power, while the population is left to adopt any individual survival strategies. This change in norms has shattered any shared sense of public interest and common good, and simultaneously damaged interpersonal trust. As individual actions and short-term alliances are uncontrollable, mistrust among individuals grows. In turn, this feeds another vicious circle, since distrust itself makes carrying out collective actions impossible (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 184).

These dynamics result from authorities’ inability to halt the process of deterioration of formal and informal institutions, not from a deliberate strategy to circumvent formal institutions in favour of applying informal rules. “Parts of the elites simply observe the situation and make their own arrangements to operate in this context of decay, while a very tiny group profits from this” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 186).

“No one really feels responsible” (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 186):

- “Economic operators consider that ‘handling the country’s affairs is not their mandate”.
- “The bourgeois elite, which acts through underhanded channels, claims to not be directly involved in political power”.
- The political leaders in power focus on their main objective, which is to establish their economic and political power, while getting themselves off the hook with claims that pressure from the economic groups, the major influential families, and the international community are to blame.

- The population is “dissatisfied but at its wits’ end”, and keeps relying on its leaders, or more broadly its elites, for solutions.

A significant gap between citizens’ expectations of who should act for the common good, and their observations of what actually happens, highlights the dramatic lack of involvement in public affairs on part of both elites and population. In a recent survey, when asked who should intervene for the common good, 93% of Malagasy respondents mentioned elected officials, with 75% stating this strongly. Being an elected official was the most cited criterion. Beyond it, respondents also strongly identified people with the most education (with 61% strongly stating this), people with the most wealth (56%), and people who have proven their capacities to work for the community in the past. These combined answers indicate what constitutes political expectation and legitimacy in Malagasy’s eyes⁶³.

However, in the same survey, respondents consider that actual interventions for the common good on part of the various categories elites and of citizens are insufficient. There is a gap of 20 to 40 percentage points between respondents’ expectations, and their assessment of whether the different categories actually intervene for the public good. For example, just over two thirds of respondents thought that elected officials intervened for the public good, and just 35% of respondents thought officials did so in a significant way. Only 23% of respondents said that the most educated actually intervened for the common good⁶⁴.

Dissatisfaction also applied to citizens’ own involvement: whereas two thirds of respondents thought that citizens should intervene for the public good, just 40% believed that citizens did so, and only 16% thought that citizens intervened significantly. This rift between expectations and stepping up to get involved reflects a generalised helpless dismay in society⁶⁵.

Rise in violence due to socioeconomic problems since 2009

While political violence has remained limited, in line with post-independence history, other public violence has noticeably increased. The general economic and social deterioration that followed the 2009 crisis, and its ongoing effects have seen criminality surge (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 102, 115)⁶⁶.

In cities, criminality has increased in ways never seen before, and in some rural areas where *dahalo* operate (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 102). Media regularly report thefts, burglaries, assaults that are sometimes deadly, and bank robberies (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 115)

Criminality has also escalate in rural areas where *dahalo* operate (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 102). In the South of the country and in isolated areas, *dahalo* descend on localities in groups of several dozen people, sometimes armed with guns, and they steal cattle herds and clash with villagers and law enforcement. Law enforcement forces “often react disproportionately, by burning harvests and homes, and by committing summary executions (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 115).

⁶³ (Wachsberger et al., 2016, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 186–187)

⁶⁴ (Wachsberger et al., 2016, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187)

⁶⁵ (Wachsberger et al., 2016, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 187)

⁶⁶ On insecurity, also see: (Pellerin, 2017).

As the social environment deteriorates and feelings of insecurity rise, **cases of “popular justice” multiply, leading to clashes with police or *gendarmerie*** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 102)⁶⁷. Examples include (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 102, footnote 151):

- The partial destruction of the Sucoma factory, with looting and clashes with *gendarmerie*, in Morondava during a conflict between the workers of the factory, owned by a Chinese company, and the factory management;
- Riots in Sambava in 2015, in Mampikony and Vatomandry in 2016;
- *Dahalo* killed by a mob in Betafo in 2016.

Similarly, **disputes about land, and other socio-political protests show there is socioeconomic discontent** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 102, 104)⁶⁸. Here are two examples typifying these dynamics:

- In a case representative of growing land disputes, the local population in Soamahamana organised violent demonstrations between May and October 2016 to protest the authorisation that had been granted to a Chinese company to exploit a goldmine. The demonstrations achieved their goal and made the company leave⁶⁹.
- There was a “micro” military insurrection in November 2016, when armed military surrounded the Antananarivo city hall for several hours, following the arrest of one of their own by the municipal police (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 104, footnotes 153).

In such a context, **remoteness has become a resource for some actors, while “insecurity and banditry are reshaping the relations between state authority and rural Malagasy regions”** (Gardini, 2019, p. 172). As one study about the highlands of Madagascar since 2013 notes, these regions may be perceived as ‘remote’, but they are increasingly connected with global “transnational – and often illegal – trade networks of natural resources” (Gardini, 2019, p. 172). They are often classified as dangerous because of the *dahalo*, “who combine cattle theft with attacks against villages, trucks and *taxi brousse*” (Gardini, 2019, p. 172). But more fundamentally, they have become crucial for local processes in which the State reaffirms and renegotiates its power in historically marginalised regions. In such settings, remoteness acquires different meanings depending on individuals’ power and economic positions, and reshapes social inequalities and power relations. These areas “are increasingly connected with neoliberal global markets, thanks to – and not in spite of – their supposed remoteness” (Gardini, 2019, p. 172).

⁶⁷ On ‘popular justice’, also see the Afrobarometer survey: (Razafindrakoto, Razafimamonjy, Ramanamandimby, et al., 2019).

⁶⁸ For a study of the different causes, actors, and dynamics of conflicts in different regions of the country, see: (Randriamandimbisoa, 2015).

⁶⁹ (Pigeaud, 2017, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, pp. 104, footnote 152)

Contradictions and tensions in environmental conservation and response to climate emergency

The country's political economy gives rise to multiple contradictions and tensions in environmental conservation and the response to climate emergency, as noted by nearly all references on these issues⁷⁰.

Intensive internationally led efforts, but few results

It is international donors who have driven an intricate mix of conservation and development efforts in Madagascar. Between 1993 and 2008, donors invested hundreds of millions of US dollars in over 500 environment-based projects over the course of three National Environmental Action Plans, and helped expand the network of protected areas more than threefold. In parallel, Madagascar became a party to international agreements such as the Convention on Biodiversity, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Waeber et al., 2016, pp. 1–2).

Yet, a review concludes that **donors' efforts over the past 30 years have achieved neither their goal of conserving biodiversity, nor their goals of development and poverty reduction** (Waeber et al., 2016, pp. 1–2). While the significant investments to address “the twin challenges of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation have had positive benefits, they have failed to reverse long-standing trends” (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 9). Loss of forests remains unchecked, with deforestation and illegal exploitation still impacting nearly all protected areas. Meanwhile, the Millennium Development Goals and successor Sustainable Development Goals have not been met, and are not on track to be, met (Waeber et al., 2016, pp. 1, 9).

International actors have made many adjustments to their policies so that they address conservation and development issues jointly. Nonetheless, **internationally supported efforts have barely reached – and reached out to – the very poor, rural people who are “profoundly altering the island's landscapes to meet their basic, daily needs, and in the process [having] the greatest overall impact on the country's ecosystems and biodiversity”** (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 9). In donors' numerous initiatives to incentivise rural households to support forest conservation, the “approaches to generating direct benefits deliver less value than expected for rural communities”⁷¹. The mechanisms to transfer benefits are insufficient, as other stakeholders capture the majority of benefits. Increased transfer of benefit is limited by: “structural and institutional limitations in local communities”; valuation chains; and governance failure at higher levels (Neudert et al., 2017, p. 1).

⁷⁰ In addition to references used in this subsection, readers are invited to look at the following general references on the topic, which converge with the conclusions presented here: (Baker-Medard, 2017; Bosc et al., 2010; Brimont & Leroy, 2018; Casse, 2012; Corson, 2016; Dhital et al., 2015; with 'Erratum', 2015; Evers et al., 2013; Horning, 2018; Kull, 2018; Osterhoudt, 2018; Poudyal et al., 2016; Rakoto Ramiarantsoa et al., 2015; Rasolofoson et al., 2017; Walsh, 2017; Weatherley-Singh & Gupta, 2017).

⁷¹ (Neudert et al., 2017, p. 1; also see Ramamonjisoa & Rabemananjara, 2012)

A mix of domestic and international causes of failures

Weak enforcement due to corruption

One immediate reason for these failures is that environmental “**enforcement remains weak and inconsistent, a reflection of Madagascar’s rampant corruption at all levels**” (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 9).

Counter-productive, contradictory donor policies

Donor policies that have undercut Malagasy capacities

Another reason is **donor policies in multiple sectors that have deepened the country’s dependency on external actors**, such as the World Bank, the IMF, and donor countries, **instead of enabling and catalysing Madagascar’s capacities**. The weakening of higher education that donors contributed to (see p. 49) is a major factor in this. As a result, the operators implementing donor-funded projects for conservation or development have imported from abroad technology, expertise, and staff, which uses up a considerable share of their aid money (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 8). Moreover, weak domestic research capacities prevent Malagasy from leading and driving research on their country, rather than following and being second-rank contributors in it. For example, of 3,942 publications on the biodiversity of vertebrates in Madagascar published from 1960 to 2015, just 8.9% of the lead authors were based at a Malagasy institution. Only recently has the higher education system been recently reorganised, with new bachelor and master courses now offered in sustainable development and environmental impact assessment (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 9).

Donor policies that have failed to support local people’s livelihoods as part of conservation

Another reason for donors’ failures is that their **policies and programmes have failed to improve the livelihoods and wellbeing of the rural poor** (Waeber et al., 2016).

In turn, this is related to two problems in how donors and national authorities have worked:

- **Poor, rural people have *de facto* been excluded from formulating policies** for conservation and development, **and from identifying strategies and actions** (Waeber et al., 2016, pp. 9–10).
- Decision-making on conservation has suffered from the **disconnects within and between**⁷²:
 - **adjusting national policy on biodiversity on the basis of global “economic principles and mechanisms** (which are likely to have little meaning at the local level)”; and
 - **setting sectoral or cross-sectoral development targets “which** are almost always driven by external donors and international operators but **fail to take into account the complex, front-line interactions between humans and the many other biodiversity elements** on which they so deeply depend”.

⁷² (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 10)

The **case of Northeast Madagascar** offers findings typical of this⁷³.

- In the biodiversity hotspot of the Northeast, the tropical forests and land are vital to people, both locally and worldwide. **Protected areas do seem necessary** to conserve this biodiversity.
- **However, local people depend on access to land in forested areas for their survival**, because they are extremely poor, have few agricultural inputs and little technology, and largely rely on small-scale agriculture.
 - Many of them practise shifting cultivation for their subsistence food, especially by growing rice. This is a well-adapted, rational use of land many Malagasy practise to grow staple crops (see e.g. Zähringer et al., 2017).
 - Many rely on cultivating commercial crops at a small scale, such as clove and vanilla, to earn some income (see e.g. Zähringer et al., 2017).
 - They rely on products from forests or fallows (e.g. firewood, medicinal plants, woody vines, wildlife) for various basic needs (see e.g. Urech et al., 2015).
- **Local people’s shifting cultivation is often blamed for deforestation.** Yet, under the right conditions, shifting cultivation is sustainable.
- **In fact, deforestation largely results from wider pressures on the system of land use**, including: demographic changes; political marginalisation; impacts from climate; volatility in cash crop markets; and even protected areas themselves.
- **In response to these pressures, “shifting cultivators are forced to expand their farming into remaining forests”** (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 1), causing soil degradation. This is because shifting cultivation has inherent strengths – foremost its protective function of keeping people fed –, as well as cultural meaning to people (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 3).
- **In turn, this situation causes conflict with actors who want to conserve** the forests and biodiversity as a global good.

To date, local, national, and international stakeholders in the region have reached no solutions that would be both equitable and environmentally just, to ensure conservation of biodiversity “while enabling local land users to escape poverty and food insecurity” (Zähringer et al., 2018, p. 1).

Recent processes that are likely to affect political economy

Malagasy social order has never been unchanging, and some ongoing processes have the potential to change political economy in the short term or beyond (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 234). Some of the processes have already been discussed earlier in the report. The following sections briefly highlight their implications for the dynamics of the country’s political economy.

⁷³ (in this paragraph and subsidiary bullet points, the source is Zähringer et al., 2018, unless otherwise noted)

Emergence of more concentrated, bigger rents

Madagascar had, until now, been quite spared by the 'natural resources curse'. However, with the emergence of more concentrated, bigger rents, there are early signs of it: **shift of economic activities into the illicit or criminal; environmental degradation; conflicts around land use** (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235).

Discoveries of new rare resources

Since 1993, artisanal and small-scale mining of **gemstones** has produced rushes comparable in magnitude to those in North America and Australia in the 19th century. For 20 years, the district of Ilakaka-Sakaraha has fuelled temporary gem rushes, and the associated nationwide migrations of miners, often in the forest region of Andilamena-Ambatondrazaka-Tamatave (Canavesio & Pardieu, 2019).

More crucially, **the discovery of new rare resources, associated with a boom in the price of raw materials, is reconfiguring political economy**. This can be an opportunity, due to the scale of the resources at play. But it is also a risk, for several reasons. Attempts at getting hold of, and monopolising, these resources can generate tensions. The resources also generate pressures on lands, and environmental risks associated with these⁷⁴.

There have been discoveries of **mineral sands** containing ilmenite and zircon close to Fort Dauphin, and containing nickel and cobalt in Ambatovy. This triggered a massive rush of foreign investments in 2007-2009. The influx has since slowed down due to political instability, to a global slowdown in the price of basic products, and to the companies involved moving on to the production phase. The gradual rise of mining exploitation has already brought a major inflow of foreign currencies (though the levels fluctuates with global prices), as well as tax revenues and jobs (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 234).

There are also large deposits of **bauxite**. The bauxite field in Manantenina could be one of the largest in the Indian Ocean. Madagascar also has significant onshore and offshore fields of **oil and gas**, which could be exploited in the longer term. In 2016, the Africa Oil & Power initiative had ranked Madagascar as the second-best African country for investments in oil and gas. All this could increase the importance of mineral rents in the future (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 234).

Moreover, Madagascar is a major country with **rare earths**, which are strategic for high-tech industries. In particular, the Ampasindava peninsula has tantalum (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 234).

Transformation of some historical rents

Gold, and rosewood are older rents, but they have subjected to attempts to exploit them on a larger scale. This is because global demand for them has increased, especially from China (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 234).

⁷⁴ (Raharinirina et al., n.d., cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 234)

Malagasy lands have become a resource for agricultural projects. For example, in 2013, contracts with foreign investors affected 3 million hectares⁷⁵.

Weakening of the political theology establishing non-violence and respect for hierarchies and leaders

The dominant political theology that had underpinned long-term social stability has tended to weaken over time. Already, in 2009, the crisis saw new manifestations of interpersonal violence, of looting – such as the *dahalo* in the southern countryside⁷⁶ –, and of challenges to social hierarchies⁷⁷.

In addition to a rise in socioeconomic violence, insecurity, and clashes with law enforcement forces, **there is a risk that State violence could become deregulated and disordered.** The army had historically been confined to the background of Malagasy political economy, and been rather law-abiding. But it is now showing signs of disintegration. This is evidenced by mutinies, which have been of low intensity, but growing in number. In a context of enduring instability, the possibility of a junta getting into power can probably not be ruled out⁷⁸.

Environmental and climate shocks and degradations

Like many other parts of the world, **Madagascar is exposed to risks stemming from global heating and climate crises:** increased tropical storms, droughts, floods, and insect infestations; a predicted higher intensity of cyclones, which intensifies pressure on forests and the biodiversity they host; and extended droughts (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 8).

In turn, **global heating, and extreme climatic events will harm humans and undermine development.** For example, Madagascar has experienced severe insect outbreaks, which threaten the food base of several million people in the southwest, and put even further pressure the natural ecosystems in the region (Waeber et al., 2016, p. 8).

Madagascar is thus particularly exposed to shocks caused by natural phenomena and climate change (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235). **Combined with the recent changes in political economy, such shocks could tip the country into a vicious circle** of institutional decay, economic regression, and impoverishment (Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235).

⁷⁵ (Raharinirina et al., n.d., cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235)

⁷⁶ (Pellerin, 2014; Tarabey, 2014; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235)

⁷⁷ (Vivier, 2010; Galibert, 2009; cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235)

⁷⁸ (Fremigacci, 2014, cited in Razafindrakoto, Roubaud, et al., 2017a, p. 235)

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