

A Nation's Holiday. Madagascar's Independence Day in the Private Sphere.

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In the case of Madagascar, the 50th anniversary of Independence took place against the background of a political crisis. Governed by a highly contested transitory regime, politics were surprisingly absent. Nevertheless, this remarkable date was joyfully celebrated throughout the country. This was rendered possible by the fact that the principal national holiday is largely celebrated in the private sphere.

The Malagasy undertake immense organizations and preparations with the intention of commemorating the national holiday as it suits, such as saving money, travelling so as to spend the day with family living apart, decorating the house and equipping the family with new and adequate clothes. Frequent acts of charity transcend this intimate sphere of families and households to interactions in the wider social context. Individual initiatives and associations take this as an occasion to share with the ones in need, turning the national holiday into a day celebrating the people constituting the nation. Enhancing the citizens' emotional attachment to each other rather than to the state, the national holiday invites to commemorate and reenact the basic norms and values which constitute the Malagasy nation's identity, the family and *fihavanana* (solidarity).

It is noteworthy, that the national celebration's elements most valued by the Malagasy people are those that already existed during of the pre-colonial state and survived through the colonial times, thus branding a unique nation, adding to what appears to be a model national holiday (including presidential discourse, defile, public show business as well as elements of critical reflection like expositions or conferences) rather distinctive and inimitable elements deeply rooted in Malagasy history and culture.

Within the broader frame of the official celebrations of the Independence Day in Madagascar, this paper intends to reveal these festivities in the private sphere. Departing from an illustration of private celebrations during 25th and 26th of June 2010, it will embark some reflections on how this practice helps to consolidate the social constitution of the nation and is thus itself an integral part of the Nationbuilding process, more or less independent from any state intervention. Hence, 26 June 2010 was worth celebrating in Madagascar, notwithstanding current politics.

