Accommodation to Poverty: The Case of the Malagasy Peasant Communities.
Monsieur Alphonse Gintzburger

Résumé
A. Ginizburger — Accommodation à la pauvreté: le cas des communautés paysannes malgaches.

Citer ce document / Cite this document:

Document généré le 02/06/2016
Accommodation to Poverty: The Case of the Malagasy Peasant Communities

The Psychological Background of Development and Accommodation to Poverty

J. K. Galbraith (1979: 44-75) has singled out a psychological factor, the peasants’ accommodation to poverty, as a significant cause of stagnation at subsistence levels. He questions the universal validity of the postulate that needs motivate efforts to meet them. Actually it seems wrong to assume that the poorer the people, the stronger their endeavor to increase their income. Self-interest as the prime mover of economic activity may be replaced by a more comprehensive set of concepts that should lead to testable hypotheses. To this end, psychoanalysis seems to offer a useful framework (Gintzburger 1973). If an individual feels a need, and if no good is available to meet it, he may take only two courses of action: either alter his environment to obtain the good, or change himself to abolish the need (Laplanche & Pontalis 1967: 45). Clearly, economic development belongs to the first possibility, while accommodation to poverty would involve the second. Now to alter one’s environment, some kind of effort must be exercised upon it. The pressure brought to bear on the environment to pry goods may be regarded as a manifestation of the subject’s aggressiveness. Economic development would thus call for aggressive personalities, that is, people prepared to display forceful energy and initiative in economic pursuits: the scarcity of economic goods relative to human needs fosters a chronic frustration, from which aggressiveness springs.1 If this approach holds true, one may wonder where accommodation to poverty might come from. Psychoanalysis suggests that aggressiveness might be repressed. Accommodation to poverty would mean an inhibition of aggressiveness in the economic sphere.


Cahiers d'Études africaines, 92, XXIII-4, 1983, pp. 419-442.
What might decide between development and accommodation to poverty—that is, between expression and repression of aggressiveness? I plan to formulate a testable hypothesis on this issue by studying the case of the Malagasy peasant communities. I shall start from a myth, common in Madagascar's rural areas, the story of the heart-thief.

The Myth

Foreigners (vazaha) are believed to be heart-thieves (mpakafo). For the Merina, Europeans are typical heart-thieves. At night, they suddenly steal the heart or blood of any person, preferably a child, to feed themselves [...] in this way the European increases his own power by dreadful means at the expense of the Merina (Bloch 1971: 32). The Betsimisaraka believe 'Europeans need, for mysterious ceremonies from which they derive their power, to feed some fabulous animals with hearts torn from young children; Malagasy civil servants rap the victims, and bring them to their foreign masters' (Althabe 1969: 49). A similar version was reported by my Merina informant: the French were said to feed the bityolona (literally the 'man-beast') with the hearts of children. In exchange, the bityolona gives them great power.

This belief is widespread in Madagascar. In the early 1970s I found it in the central highlands, in the midwest and along the east coast, but it is probably present in most of the country. It seems to fluctuate in intensity, or periodically revive after periods of dormancy. Then the rumor spreads that there are heart-thieves around. Such an epidemic of mpakafo fright occurred during World War II, when the French were said to pay high prices for children's hearts. The myth was ripe in June-July 1973, during one of my visits. In the Majunga area, people suspected taxi-drivers to be kidnappers. A young man had a narrow escape: he was courting a schoolmistress and his asking pupils about her looked like an attempt to abduct them; a mob gathered who would have lynched him but for the protection of the police. The rumor also spread in the central highlands that a number of children had been kidnapped; the Interior Ministry had to publish a list showing that all missing children went back home. Also the chief of the Tanaarive province went to Antsirabe to reiterate that rumors of abduction were groundless. During the same period, certain people in Antsotsorikahitra village (Itasy prefecture also in the central highlands) were accused to feed their pigs with human

flesh:6 by-products of heart-stealing had to be disposed of in the least conspicuous, and most profitable fashion.

The *mpakafo* myth explains economic dualism by a horror story. It features aggressiveness in its most destructive and repulsive form, and serves defensive purposes, insofar as getting power and wealth is figured to demand an oral-sadistic deed. The myth manifests a general tendency of the Malagasy peasant communities to ward off aggressiveness. This repression is motivated by an attitude of dependence vis-à-vis a series of powerful parental figures whose support is considered as vital, and by a fear over the loss of their love. This anxiety is traceable to an oral-sadistic fixation caused by a weaning trauma, and to a complementary regression arising from recurring food shortages. The myth can be interpreted as a fantasy springing from the repressed oral sadism. The analysis of the *mpakafo* belief suggests that the Malagasy peasants accommodate to poverty by inhibiting their aggressiveness. At one blow deprivation gives the peasants' aggressiveness an oral-sadistic imprint, and has them depend upon group solidarity for survival. At the same time, they feel urged to wrest from the other community members whatever they may possess and call upon them for support. Aggressiveness succumbs to an anxiety over losing the love of the tutelary community.

The Curbing of Aggressiveness

Foreign, Rich and Bad

To the peasants, the *mpakafo* is basically a *vazaha*, that is a foreigner. The colonial power, its people, goods, values were *vazaha*; so were other foreigners, such as the Asian traders. Moreover, certain Malagasy are regarded as *vazaha* and consequently as heart-thieves (Bloch 1971: 31-32). *Vazaha* have in common to partake in the high incomes of the modern sector of the economy. The Malagasy economy is markedly dualistic. In 1966, only 12% of active people were employed in the modern sector, but they received 72% of total income. Since then, dualism has persisted and so have huge inequalities in standards of living. The reputed *mpakafo* is often a rich Malagasy entrepreneur or progressive farmer who


7. INSEE 1970. In 1968-69, annual household consumption in rural areas ranged between US $85 and 179 while in Tananarive it ranged between US $611 (unskilled workers) and 4,036 (Malagasy executives) (Madagascar 1968-69b; 1968-69c; *World Bank* 1982).
has succeeded in emerging from his community of origin. In the village of Antsotsorikahitra, the rumor concerned an energetic small entrepreneur who owned a 'bush-taxi', and used to get up at 3 a.m. to be able to make two trips a day to Tananarive. He ran also a pigsty, with ten to fifteen 'large whites', which commanded a high price (Charmes 1972-73, II: 7; III: 58).

From a sociological viewpoint, the vazaha is an outsider vis-à-vis the peasant communities, which are based on kinship ties, the prototype of desirable social relationships. He is not a kinsman, or has given up the rights and obligations that pertain to kinship. Vazaha is thus strongly associated with its opposite, havana ('kinsman'), the concept of whom epitomizes the duties and the rights of man as a social being. A peasant community often defines itself as a group of descendants from a common ancestor, and even if it is not actually the case, still community relationships are expressed in terms of kinship (Bloch 1971: 59, 100-101, 201-202). A vazaha is motivated by self-interest, which is incompatible with kinship obligations (ibid.: 31).

To sum up, vazaha ('foreign') is closely associated with rich and bad; greed is the common denominator. The foreigner's lust for wealth is evil. The Malagasy who crave for goods, and manage to get more of them, alienate themselves from their community of origin.

A Theory of Economic Dualism

The mpakafo myth may be considered as a theory of economic dualism: 'The Europeans possess goods and power while the Malagasy do not. The ordinary man can see no apparent reason for this.' (Ibid.: 32.) The wealth of the vazaha is explained by their feeding the ibiholona. The underlying thoughts include relevant economic considerations. The fantasy that vazaha pay high prices for goods supposedly produced by criminal activities springs from exactly the opposite situation: the fact that vazaha, viz. colonial authorities in the past, and now government officials and traders, pay in effect low prices for peasants' produces. The Malagasy price system has been biased against agricultural activities to stimulate the growth of the modern manufacturing sector for import substitution, and maintain the standards of living of the urban elites.9

The mpakafo story meets a demand of the intellect for explaining an observed phenomenon. It also stems from a desire to acquire wealth: through sharing the belief, the peasants fantasy they enrich themselves.

8. By 1970, enterprises run by Malagasy represented 20% of modern industrial firms and accounted for 9% of the value added in the manufacturing sector. Malagasy participation in wholesale trade was quite minor, but 75% of the retailers were Malagasy (Madagascar 1968a; 1968-69a; 1970).

9. These policies contributed towards the sluggishness of agricultural activities and the deficits in foodstuff production experienced since the late 1960s.
However, the myth means that wealth calls for murder. It conveys that to become rich is fraught with danger, which suggests a curbing of the desire for wealth. The myth thus condenses the fulfillment of a wish and its repression. The fusion achieved between fulfillment and repression is typical of the primary process of thinking that produces dreams (Freud 1953-74, XVI: 360).

The Projection of Oral Sadism

Oral sadism is obvious in the *mpakafo* belief. The subjects vest their craving for human flesh in an outsider not bound by the community’s code. Projection is facilitated by the fact that * vazaha* actually display aggressiveness in the economic sphere (Freud 1953-74, XII: 63-66; Fenichel 1946: 146-147). Consequently, villagers tend to feel threatened by foreigners, and adopt a paranoid attitude in their relations with them (Bloch 1971: 59; Condominas 1960: 151-152).

The *mpakafo* belief is just one manifestation of the systematic curbing of aggressiveness, particularly in the economic sphere, others being witchcraft belief, the value put on hospitality, the social control of economic activities, restrictions on individual initiative, and a paralysis of collective decision-making on economic issues. All these traits reflect defenses against pervasive ‘envy, jealousy, wish to hurt, wish to rob, wish not to see others enjoy what you yourself do not have’ (Kardiner 1939: 336). Accommodation to poverty would thus appear to involve a complex with a large number of ramifications ranging from myths to customs and institutions.

Witchcraft Belief

The Malagasy are extremely concerned by oral-sadistic witchcraft involving a fear that one’s meals might be poisoned. However, meals could conceivably be poisoned only by relatives or neighbors; the Merina actually say ‘You should look for the witch among your own family’ (Bloch 1971: 66). As a result, to the Malagasy *mosavy* (‘witchcraft’) means the opposite of *havana* and is accordingly used to define antisocial behavior (ibid.: 65-66; Lavondès 1967: 79). Witchcraft belief seems to parallel the *mpakafo* myth: they both project oral sadism onto someone it is proper to fear and hate (Kluckhohn 1962). They differ in that the scapegoat belongs to the community in the case of witchcraft, while the *mpakafo* is an outsider. If lodging oral sadism in an outsider helps...
maintain the community, one may wonder why witchcraft belief persists. Insofar as foreigners look threatening as a result of projection, they may become a target for actual aggression. However, vazaha are powerful, and mete out severe punishments (Condominas 1960: 151-152). Fear of retaliation inhibits displaced aggression, which succumbs to repression. This interpretation is borne out by the high value peasants put on hospitality. It is inspired by a fear of strangers which can be accounted for only by an unconscious wish to attack them (Ruud 1970: 13). The celebrated Malagasy hospitality can be interpreted as a reaction formation against oral sadism.

The Malagasy ascribe witchcraft to envy, and particularly to jealousy stirred up by inequalities in standards of living (Bloch 1971: 114, 130-131; Faublée 1954: 6). The fear of witchcraft is exploited to enforce a social control of economic activities, a major concern in Malagasy peasant communities (Ruud 1970: 70; Dez 1966: 46-47).

The Social Control of Economic Activities

Aggressiveness is praiseworthy in a culture valuing achievement. A good manager or salesman is indeed expected to be aggressive. In Malagasy peasant communities, behavior prompted by greed is not tolerated. Consequently economic activities are subjected to a tight social control. Contractual monetary transactions tend to be excluded between members of the same community. This explains why in rural areas traders as a rule do not come from the village where they work. Salaried employment is an illegitimate relationship within a community, and wage-earners are generally alien to the people for whom they work: in order to become traders or wage-earners, Malagasy have to migrate to towns or to other rural areas. In as much as they stem from self-interest, contractual monetary transactions would lead to unacceptable conflicts between relatives.

Village communities try to prevent their members from increasing their income and achieving superior social status: enterprising individuals are deterred from introducing profitable innovations by a variety of means, including arson (Dez 1966: 46-47; Guérin 1972a; Bied-Charretton 1972: 282-283, 333B). Innovations are taxed insofar as their sponsors are expected to finance ceremonies to appease ancestors supposedly angered by departures from tradition (Araud 1969; Chavanes 1969: 81).

Enrichment is prevented by powerful equalization mechanisms that redistribute income between families. The community directs the use of monetary resources, which are held as particularly dangerous. For instance, among the Betsimisaraka and Antemoro, most of the monetary surplus is used for ceremonial exchange between lineages and is collectively consumed during feasts (Althabe 1969: 82, 145; 1968: 36; 1970b; Chandon-Moët 1969: 129). The importance and frequency of feasts to honor ancestors are indeed major features of the Malagasy culture. Ritual expenditures, including the building of tombs, absorb whatever surplus may appear. This compulsory spending tends to equalize socio-economic status. The office of mpanjaka, in several Antemoro clans, is effectual in curbing inequalities. The mpanjaka (clan ‘king’) is elected for one to three years among the lineage heads, who assume kingship in turn. He has got to meet with generosity a number of commitments, so that he and his lineage run very quickly out of resources.

Growing the traditional food-crops for home consumption is the only economic pursuit recognized as fully legitimate. This is reflected in behaviors implying a ‘target income’ (Laulanié 1969: 74-75). Few needs other than for subsistence seem to be felt. Whatever income level he achieves, the individual is bound by the standards of the community, which specify the type and level of permissible expenditure. Consumption is remarkably uniform, irrespective of wealth and seniority (Ottino 1963: 302, 306). Expenditure on tombs is the only field where lavishness may be indulged in (Bloch 1971: 114).

To sum up, the Malagasy peasant communities are uneasy about monetary incomes and associated individual enrichment, which are felt to threaten community ties. Money may be spent only for socially acceptable purposes. Equality in socio-economic status is seen as a prerequisite for solidarity, the paramount value (Guérin 1972a: 107). This attitude motivates curbing aggressiveness in the economic sphere.

The Suppression of Conflict in Collective Decision-Making

Peasant communities hardly display any drive in the economic sphere. Their prime concern is to foster firaisana (‘union’, from irai ‘one’). To this end, decisions on community matters are expected to be unanimous, the very split between a majority and a minority being regarded as fatal to the group.  


Unanimous decision-making, however, is hardly effective. Resolves on divisive issues may be dodged or even reversed for the sake of avoiding conflict (Guérin 1967: 9-10). On the other hand, unanimity may be purely fictitious. There are strong social pressures to keep up the appearance of *fira伊斯ana*, individuals feeling obliged to approve measures which they are not prepared to implement (Ottino 1963: 328-329). Malagasy villages seem paralyzed, and unable to respond to the challenge of increasing population pressure on resources (Bied-Charreton 1972: 240-241, 333).

The Tsiranana presidency undertook a considerable effort to turn peasant communities into development-orientated associations and have them evolve into groups that would promote a variety of cooperative activities. Results have been disappointing. Peasants were not prepared to sacrifice their *fira伊斯ana* for the sake of business-like associations with development objectives (Ramamonjisoa 1969: 116-118).

The *mpakafo* myth is a piece of wishful thinking on how to get the coveted position of *vazaha* owing to an oral-sadistic deed. It conveys a message of prohibition and belongs to a complex of systematic defenses against any display of aggressiveness in the economic sphere, which makes up accommodation to poverty. This accommodation complex may be traced to an oral-sadistic fixation and associated anxiety arising from deprivation.

The Spring of the Accommodation Complex

The Fear over Loss of Love

A feeling of anxiety pervades the Malagasy peasant culture (Razafimampahanana 1970: 94; Gendarme 1960: 118). This anxiety boils down to a fear over loss of love insofar as it springs from an attitude of dependence on omnipotent persons, whose support is felt as vital. Their abandonment would doom the individual irresponsible enough to arouse their resentment. A discontinuation of the tutelary supply of love would be fatal to the helpless individual.

The fear over loss of love, and the associated attitude of dependence, are explicit in the relationships with ancestors. They are regarded as omniscient, omnipotent beings interested in having their descendants observe the rules they laid down. Peasants interpret any misfortune as a vengeance of the ancestors angered by a disregard of their will. The fear of abandonment by ancestors underlies the compulsive systems which loom so large in the Malagasy peasant culture. These are defense

mechanisms involving a proliferation of prohibitions and rituals (Fénichel 1946: 284-286).

Prohibitions (fady ‘tabu’) are manifold but affect particularly work and eating. Rituals encompass a profusion of procedures, whose observance is mandatory to obtain the desired effect, for instance to get good conditions for rice growing (Ruud 1970: 73), or to have a medicine work (Kardiner 1939: 310). Rituals play a major part in the numerous collective ceremonies which village life centres on (Althabe 1969: 145; Bloch 1971: 138-171).

These compulsive systems fulfill several functions. They help specify group affiliation in concrete terms: an individual belongs to a group through sharing its distinctive set of prohibitions and rituals (Althabe 1969: 157; Ramamonjisoa 1969: 50-51). Compulsive systems are also part of the ego’s defenses against antisocial drives. By the same token they represent a display of submissiveness, an act of allegiance to the community’s guardians. Obedience to ancestors is expected to relieve from anxiety over loss of love. The virtue of a compulsive act lies in demonstrating people’s willingness to subject themselves to the ancestors’ will. This intention is clear in the case of the ceremonies of atonement, intended to get their forgiveness. The need felt for ingratiation springs from the interpretation of sickness, disasters and other ills as manifestations of the ancestors’ punishment for disobedience (see fn. 17). Atonement ceremonies represent an attempt at undoing disobedience by showing off subjection. Prohibitions and rituals would thus imply inordinate benefits from obedience.

The relationships between the Malagasy peasants and their ancestors reflect a life-long persistence of the child’s dependence on his parents. Then two equivalences reflecting ego’s helplessness and the parents’ omnipotence were established: ‘I am not well’ was equated to ‘They do not love me’, that is ‘They hate me’: ‘The human being’s first perceptions of being well are those of the easing of wishes and tensions by the mother, usually by feeding [. . .]. It is reasonable to assume that in a helpless state the individual revives these expectations. Hence, illness has the subjective meaning of not being loved and protected, but hated.’ (Kardiner 1939: 307-309; Freud 1953-74, XXI: 22-24.) And conversely obedience meant well being. The peasants’ interpretation of misfortune in terms of punishment, and the display of submissiveness inherent to their compulsive system suggest that these identities keep on directing their thought and behavior. This ‘animistic’ type of thinking implies an

19. ‘Everything that is done in a compulsive way is done as routine, according to a pre-arranged plan, from which the objectionable impulses are supposed to be excluded. As long as the rules are followed, nothing can go wrong’ (Fenichel 1946: 283).
The anthropomorphic world made up of 'good' and 'bad' intentions, in contrast to a mechanistic concept of nature. This purely human environment is that of infancy and early childhood, to which the child could successfully adjust by submissiveness and ingratiating.

The same attitude of dependence, and consequently the same fear over loss of love are experienced by the peasants vis-à-vis the community. The council of elders who run the community are referred to as ray amandreny (literally 'father and mother'). They have the power of excluding someone from the community, and this banishment is regarded as a dreadful punishment (Ottino 1963: 62-63, 332, 357; Chandon-Moët 1969: 54; Beaujard 1978: 455-460). The peasants' attitude of dependence on the community is made obvious by their efforts at group creation in immigration areas motivated by their fear to be alone (Bloch 1971: 85-86, 100-101, 201-207, 210-215; Ottino 1963: 48, 64, 69-70, 80-81; Lavondès 1967: 91-92).

The attitude of dependence displayed by the Malagasy peasant is far-reaching, and goes beyond their relations with their ancestors and community. The peasants' ingratiating submissiveness manifests itself vis-à-vis all figures of authority such as the government (fanjakana) and its representatives, also referred to as ray amandreny. The tromba possession rite calls for the same attitude vis-à-vis the cult-heroes. The participants enact their subjection to fantasied tutelary figures, and ask for their help, especially to cure diseases (Althabe 1969: 95-106).

The Oral-Sadistic Fixation

The data reviewed so far suggest that the Malagasy peasants are affected by both a general blocking of aggressiveness and an anxiety-ridden dependence on a series of omnipotent beings. The latter might well motivate the former (Fenichel 1946: 132-134). Any aggressive behavior is indeed regarded as rebellious. This conflict might spring from oral-sadistic strivings resulting from food scarcity.

At the oral stage, all drives including aggressiveness are centered upon feeding, and polarized by the aim of incorporation. On the other hand, the young child is unable to fend for himself. His mastery of the external world is but passive-receptive. He meets his requirements by influencing powerful external objects (ibid.: 41). As a result, the object relationship with the mother can become highly ambivalent: the helpless child is

---

20. Ancestors and elders make up one and the same group, since the community is defined in terms of kinship ties, and since the elders speak and rule for the ancestors (see Althabe 1969: 140, 164-165, 200-201; Lavondès 1967: 108-109; Ottino 1963: 38-40; Bare 1977: 101-102, 108; Clapier-Valladon 1972: 250-258).

entirely dependent upon her for his well-being, yet directs at her strong aggressive strivings which represent an urge to get satisfaction without consideration of the object. In certain circumstances these can take a highly destructive form (ibid.: 38, 64), with the oral drive becoming a fearful cannibalistic desire to tear out and devour the mother. Defenses against oral sadism are activated by the fear that the subject's own sadism might destroy her, or that she might retaliate by abandoning him (Nacht 1966: 55). Thus an anticipation of a fatal loss of love is associated with oral demands backed by violence. This could result in imprinting in the subject's mind an anxiety signal that would automatically warn him off an impending danger as soon as he feels urged to express aggressiveness. This early conditioning would explain why, in adults, aggressiveness might succumb to anxiety over loss of love.

This interpretation raises two questions. Firstly, in which circumstances does the child's aggressiveness become so destructive as to arouse an anxiety intense enough to block all aggressiveness? Secondly, how can the repression motivated by anxiety persist in adults? Both questions might find a tentative answer in the food shortages Malagasy rural communities experience. Food scarcity inflicts a weaning trauma to many children, who later in life suffer repeatedly from hunger. The weaning trauma would account for a fixation at the oral-sadistic stage, while the adults' experiences of food shortage would cause a regression to that stage (Freud 1953-74, XVI: 273-285, 339-357; Fenichel 1946: 65-66; Laplanche & Pontalis 1967: 160-163).

Weaning is traumatic because the weanlings' diet is insufficient in quantity and quality. They often receive but small portions of adult food that do not meet their needs in energy and proteins. Weaning is all the more traumatic as it takes place relatively early: a quarter of the children are weaned before eleven months, and half before fifteen. Moreover, abrupt weaning affects about 15% of the children, and only 7% of the abruptly weaned children receive an adequate diet (François 1968, II: 63-66, 78-84). Malnutrition severely affects children's health and accounts for a high mortality rate in the 1-4 age group.22


Food deprivation turns the child's oral strivings into destructive sadism addressed to his mother, which he gives up for fear she might retaliate. This fear is all the more intense as he projects his oral-sadistic demands onto her and feels threatened by his own violence bouncing back to him.

Food deprivation, and the subsequent diseases, cannot but be experienced as loss of love, and perceived as the mother's retaliation against oral sadism. Its repression would be strongly motivated by such a severe punishment so early in life.

To sum up, the weaning trauma is likely to have lasting consequences: food deprivation brands a constellation of infantile features centered upon oral sadism including an anxiety over loss of love. These features are interrelated: the aim of oral sadism is to obtain goods (that is income transfers) from persons, a process that calls for violent steps, and cannot but stir up anxiety. 'The conflict between the tendency to respond to disappointment by applying violent measures (to take by force what does not come automatically) and the simultaneous tendency toward ingratiating submissiveness is characteristic for oral fixations.' (Fenichel 1946: 489.)

The persistence in the adult peasants, of the oral-sadistic constellation would also result from the reactivation of the oral conflict by recurrent food shortages. The Malagasy peasants, on average, live on the brink of starvation. Pre-harvest hunger is rife in a normal year. In 1962, for instance, nearly 40% of the households report foodstuff-supply problems prior to harvest (François 1968, II: 70-105). Moreover, famines are frequent. Most of the South-West has erratic rainfalls: every three years is bad in the Bas-Mangoby area (Ottino 1963: 104-105, 135-138, 151-157). In many others and particularly on the east coast, hurricanes often destroy the rice crop (Chandon-Moët 1969: 74). Food scarcity would induce a regression to oral sadism, which reactivates the infantile fixation (Freud 1953-74, XVI: 273-285, 339-357; Fenichel 1946: 65-66; Laplanche & Pontalis 1967: 160-163), the whole traumatic sequence repeating itself. Dearth of food would both stir oral sadism and whet the need for support and protection (Fenichel 1946: 459, 491-492), waking up anxiety over loss of love, now a dread that the tutelary community disintegrate if covetousness were loosed. The fear that community support might fail reproduces the infantile anxiety vis-à-vis the mother: hence a new wave of aggressiveness repression. It looks as if the weaning trauma had decided once and for all that the individual were to reject the aggressive urge evoked by food scarcity, the stunted ego having become incapable of responding actively to hunger (Nacht 1966: 51).

The Genesis of the Heart-Thief Myth

The myth of the mpakafo might be interpreted as a manifestation of the oral-sadistic conflict. Its scenario would represent a return of the
repressed rousing anxiety and thus carrying a message of prohibition. It fits the concept of fantasy as a ‘mise en scène du désir où l’interdit est toujours présent’ (Laplanche & Pontalis 1967: 152-157). The myth may be broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Associated themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stranger (vazaha)</td>
<td>Feeding, sadistic deed, stealing, omnipotence, wealth, devouring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man-beast (bibyolona)</td>
<td>Omnipotence, devouring, being fed, exchange of omnipotence for food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Being ripped open, being eaten.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The foreigner (vazaha) would stand for the parent (mother) insofar as she feeds, wields omnipotence, and threatens with destruction. This transposition stems from the close associative links between havana (‘kin’, including parents) and vazaha which make up the two poles of Malagasy ethical thinking, and consequently can stand for one another in the primary process of thinking (Freud 1953-74, IV: 245-246, 312, 327; XI: 153-161). Moreover, the substitution of foreigner for mother helps solve the conflict between love and hate inherent to the ambivalent object relation-ship. The source of anxiety is displaced from the mother to the foreigner, who can be freely feared and hated. This mechanism is typical of anxiety hysteria (phobias) (Freud 1953-74, X: 5-149; Fenichel 1946: 198-199; Laplanche & Pontalis 1967: 117-120).

The man-beast (bibyolona) embodies the cravings projected by the subject, yet stands as his wishful opposite:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Man-beast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral sadism (cannibalism)</td>
<td>Oral sadism (cannibalism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td>Omnipotence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food deprivation (not being fed)</td>
<td>Oral demands met (being fed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The man-beast’s omnipotence, and his eating, are denials of the dependence, and of the deprivation experienced by the subject, with whom however he shares cannibalism and a passive-receptive mastery of the external world. Clearly, the man-beast represents the peasants’ attempt at getting rid of unacceptable yearnings by projection, while fantasizing their satisfaction. The child, who is ripped open and whose heart is torn out, stands for the subject, terrified by the violence of his own oral sadism, which tends to bounce back on him as a result of repression and projection.
The Malagasy peasant would identify himself in fantasy with both the man-beast and the child, while the foreigner would represent a parental, more precisely a maternal image. However, the subject identifies himself also with the foreigner, insofar as he wishes to win omnipotence and wealth. This is where prohibition creeps in: to become rich calls for punishable deeds.

**The Peasants’ Predicament**

Accommodation to Poverty as Neurosis

This tentative interpretation of the *mpakafo* myth throws some light on how the Malagasy peasants accommodate to poverty. They seem to suffer from a neurosis arising from deprivation, which turns them off from improving their lot. This would explain why they give priority to non-economic activities in spite of their dire poverty (Rouveyran 1972: 66; Laulanié 1969: 73; Clapier-Valladon 1972: 250-251).

They lack energy for economic undertakings. Once severed from the conscious, aggressiveness is no longer available to the ego for constructive tasks (Fenichel 1946: 178-179). Moreover repression itself consumes energy, in as much as warding off oral sadism is not done once and for all, but calls for a continuous struggle. The ego is impoverished by the efforts required to maintain repression permanently (ibid.: 13, 186; Freud 1953-74, XVI: 358; XIV: 151). Hence an inertia which has been regarded as a feature of the Malagasy national character (Marton 1948: 179-183; Clapier-Valladon 1972: 253). It was among the reasons that led the colonial authorities to establish a poll tax with a view to compelling the peasants to work (Galliéri 1928: 133). This lack of drive is consistent with the prevalence of attitude of dependence, and of a passive-receptive type of mastery (Kardiner 1939: 309; Fenichel 1946: 465). We can now further unravel the social control of economic activities, and the suppression of conflict in collective decision-making.

The control of economic activities aims at curbing oral sadism in all its manifestations. Monetary transactions, motivated as they are by self-interest, might lead to violent conflicts within the group: trade and salaried employment inevitably rouse hostile feelings between the parties to the contract, and ruin *firaisana*, the ‘community spirit’. While monetary transactions are virtually conflictual in any society, the oral-sadistic fixation here precludes anything like a peaceful clash of interest. Hence a well-founded fear that violence might erupt, and the community disintegrate. This dread reflects both the peasants’ attitude of dependence vis-à-vis the community, and the destructive character of aggressiveness. Similarly individual initiative in the economic sphere endangers the support peasants expect from the group. Malagasy village commu-
nities have no reserves: the meagre income of their active members is all what they can call upon to fulfill their social security function. Consequently an innovator is a potential liability whether he fails or succeeds. If he fails, he will ask the group for help (Dez 1966: 44-45). If he succeeds, his interest in mutual assistance is bound to slacken, as he becomes able to provide for his own security. From the community's standpoint, individual enrichment means the loss of an asset (Kardiner 1939: 275).

Dissent is ruled out in collective decision-making lest open conflicts might ruin the community spirit. Differences of opinion betray potentially violent clashes of interest that are better suppressed. As a result of the oral-sadistic fixation, relations between individuals are strained by mutual greed and hostility. However, the same fixation makes them dependent upon the group for support. Trying experiences of food shortages reinforce the attitude of dependence, and consequently strengthen the need felt for a strong community (Ottino 1963: 322; Guérin 1972a: 107; Dez 1966: 44-45). Efforts at maintaining the group are all the more energetic as the oral-sadistic tension between individuals is ever present, and cannot be allowed to manifest itself without threatening disaster. Hence a punctilious observance of the community rules and rituals, and an extreme concern for propriety in interpersonal relations (Lavondès 1967: 40; Althabe 1969: 151-154).

It looks as if the oral-sadistic fixation had far-reaching ramifications in the Malagasy peasant culture. It seems to permeate food production, the increase of which is hazardous according to some beliefs. Linton reports that for the Betsileo 'when a person dies at a moment of good harvest, he has been killed by his wealth' (Kardiner 1939: 289). Ruud's account (1970: 70) of another belief gives us a clue of the underlying concern: 'A man is thrifty and prepares his rice field before his neighbour, who will then envy him and become angry. It is easy to get hold of poisonous witch medicine. During the night the handle is smeared with this poison, and next morning when the farmer starts working again, he gets sick and will die if he does not get to the witch-doctor quick enough to be cured.' These beliefs manifest the deep-seated fear that a good crop, or an unusual amount of work may stir up envy, and lead to deadly witchcraft. The fear of inspiring envy pervades the Malagasy peasant culture. It is at work in the uniform pattern of expenditures and the ban upon conspicuous consumption already mentioned. It mirrors the destructiveness of oral sadism the individual perceives in himself and in his neighbors. As a result of the weaning trauma, and of subsequent regression, agricultural and associated activities seem to be infiltrated by oral sadism still active in the unconscious. Consequently, food production is perceived as an oral-sadistic undertaking liable to elicit reprisals, and to bring about a loss of love. An urge to produce more food or its anticipated results thus automatically triggers an anxiety signal.

These neurotic features may be observed to some extent in all Mala-
gasy peasant communities, but are more pronounced on the east coast and in the South. They tend to fade in the Merina highlands and in some areas of the West, where in-group monetary transactions are no longer blocked (Althabe 1970b: 164-173; Bloch 1971: 79-80). These differences seem to reflect disparities in standards of living. Income per capita is higher, and consequently nutrition indices better in the Merina highlands and in some areas of the West than in the rest of the country. The lowest income, and the most defective nutrition are precisely found on the east coast and in the South (François 1968, II: 93-99; III: 51-55; 1972). Similarly, it is conceivable that the intensity and/or the spread of the mpakafo belief may fluctuate according to changes in income and nutrition levels. The 1973 mpakafo fright might be related to severe food shortages. That year, the chronic deficit in rice production was made worse by a particularly bad crop, and the value added by agriculture declined by 3% in real terms.

If our deriving the mpakafo from a deprivation complex is correct, the Malagasy peasants would have responded to poverty by altering themselves instead of changing their environment, an adjustment involving curbing needs, and stifling the associated aggressiveness. Stagnation at a fairly low level should be expected to ensue. Actually income per head has steadily deteriorated: Madagascar's GNP per capita, estimated at US $240 in 1977, has been declining at 0.2% annually between 1960 and 1977. Per capita food production shrank by 5% between 1969-71 and 1975-77 (World Bank 1979: 120). There seems to be a 'vicious circle' at work, resulting in a cumulative downward movement, poverty breeding poverty (Myrdal 1968, III: 1843-1878).

Accommodation to poverty appears to have a major shortcoming as an adaptive mechanism: the repressed oral sadism cannot be eradicated. Once disconnected from the ego, it remains unchanged in the unconscious (Blum 1953: 20, 31) and, whetted by the enduring state of frustration, strives to find a permissible outlet. The mpakafo myth may be one, taking, as it does, the foreigner as a target. The belief would facilitate aggressiveness displacement by pointing to a potential foe outside of the group, i.e. someone whom it is proper to fight because of his wickedness. The myth paves the way to scapegoating. Furthermore it looks as if the cohesion of a community of people with an oral-sadistic fixation could

23. Collective decision-making in economic matters seems less constrained in Imerina than in other regions (see Condominas 1960: 139-152).

24. In 1968-69, average incomes per rural household were (in thousands of Malagasy francs): 26.5 at Maroantsetra (northeastern coast), 30.8 at Vohipeno (southeastern coast), 76.5 at Antanifotsy (Merina highlands), and 39.9 at Morondava (western coast) (Madagascar 1968-69). Separate estimates made for three villages of the southeastern coast confirm that Vohipeno's figure is fairly representative (see Bied-Charretton 1972: 214).

hardly be maintained without war. Organized fighting against a common enemy strengthens the community through venting aggression out. In Madagascar, tribal warfare was rife before the colonial period (Deschamps 1960). As suggested by Ottino (1963: 23-24), its suppression seems to have induced an increase in witchcraft practice, and a multiplication of ceremonies to ward it off. If oral sadism is denied expression outside the group, more repression is required to protect the community from witchcraft. This leads to the proliferation of compulsive systems, and to checking any individual initiative that might stir up envy.

* 

Many peasant communities display features comparable with those observed in Madagascar (see, for instance, Banfield 1958; Myrdal 1968, III: 1872). Foster (1973: 35-36) regards the ban upon innovation and enrichment as typical of peasants all over the world: ‘peasants in traditional communities have developed an egalitarian, shared-poverty equilibrium, status quo style of life, in which by means of overt behavior and symbolic action people are discouraged from attempting major changes in their economic and other statuses’. Similarly Rogers (1968) has defined a ‘subculture of peasantry’ which includes all the features met within the Malagasy case. On the other hand, child malnutrition, particularly at weaning, is a direct consequence of mass poverty in rural areas throughout the world.26 And there are indications in several African peasant communities that weaning inflicts a psychological trauma, which would explain the importance of oral-sadistic fantasies in dreams and folklore.27 Our analysis of a Maya myth brought out similar results (Gintzburger 1973).

However, to test this hypothesis, our conceptual framework needs to be refined. No positive correlation can be expected between deprivation and inhibition of aggressiveness: violence and crime are prominent features of the ‘culture of poverty’ (Lewis 1966: xxvi, xlvii-xlxi). The Freudian derivation of both perversion and neurosis from fixation might help clarify the impact of poverty (Freud 1953-74, XVI: 339-377).

We identified initially two possible avatars for man’s aggressiveness arising from scarcity: expression and repression, the former being the spring of development, and the latter representing accommodation to poverty. However, we have seen that aggressiveness undergoes repression lest it inspires violent behaviors bound to generate unbearable anxiety. These behaviors aim at income transfers by violent means and

achieve but a change in the users of a fixed supply of goods so that no additional means of satisfying needs are created. This may be termed prédation while development would consist of production. Predation is man's aggressiveness directed to man seen as the only provider of scarce goods. In production, man's aggressiveness is directed to the natural environment, regarded as a source of materials that can be wrought into goods. To sum up, aggressiveness spurred by needs may be used for predation or for production if not altogether repressed. Man would thus have three basic ways of coping with scarcity: to wrest existing goods from their present possessor (predation), to make extra goods by altering the physical environment (production), or to try to curb his needs and associated aggressiveness (asceticism). Cultures differ widely in their valuing each of these three approaches: the Comanche culture for instance was centered upon out-group predation, while peasant communities under the sway of accommodation to poverty stress asceticism (Kardiner 1945: 47-100).

Predation and accommodation to poverty would seem closely related in that they both spring from an oral-sadistic fixation. Predation belongs to infantile economics. As already stressed, the human offspring depends for a long time on income transfers from a human environment which he masters by expressing discomfort aggressively. Oral sadism as the first object relationship is inherently violent in that it aims at incorporating the mother. It can be considered as the prototype of predation. Culture rules out in-group predation, and sets a high value on work as the only acceptable means of meeting one's needs. Aggressiveness is thus displaced from man to the physical environment, the destruction of which results from this change of object. However, sublimation of oral sadism into production is not always successful. An adult may still expect to have his needs met by supplies from another person owing to an appropriate pressure brought to bear upon him, including violence if necessary. This attitude inherited from infancy is what fixation to oral sadism means. If it is ego-syntonic, the subject would seek an income from exactions. He may also repress it for fear of being abandoned by the community. To sum up, in fixating to oral sadism man may accept his streak of violence, and use it for gain, or be so scared as to drop all aggressiveness, and forsake economic progress.

Two opposite personality types might thus derive from a fixation to oral sadism: the predatory type and the inhibited type, that would fit Freud's concepts of perversion and neurosis respectively. To test this hypothesis, the personality profile of children having been admitted to a nutrition clinic for post-weaning malnourishment should be investigated by adequate methods, including projective tests. An appropriate sample would include children of different age groups drawn from both urban and rural areas.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALTHABE, G.

ARAUD, C.

AYKROYD, W. R.

BANFIELD, E.

BARÉ, J.-F.

BEAUJARD, P.

BERG, A.

BERKOWITZ, L.

BIED-CHARRETON, M.

BLOCH, M.
ALPHONSE GINTZBURGER

Blum, G. S.

Bureau pour le développement de la production agricole (BDPA)

Carothers, J. C.
1948 *A Study of Mental Derangement in Africans, and an Attempt to Explain its Peculiarities, More Especially in Relation to the African Attitude to Life*, *Psychiatry* XI: 47-86.

Chandon-Moët, B.

Charmes, J.
1972-73 *Les effets d'une action de vulgarisation dans une communauté villageoise en déstructuration: l'opération productivité-riz et le projet 'Tanety' de mise en valeur des collines à Antanimafaka (Manjakandriana)* (Tananarive: ORSTOM), 3 vol., 52 + 183 + 69 p. mimeo.

Chavanès, B.

Clapier-Valladon, S.

Condominas, G.

Coulaud, D.

Davidson, S., Passmore, R., Brock, J. F. & Truswell, A. S.

Deschamps, H.

Dez, J.
Dollard, J., Miller, N., Doob, L., Mowrer, O. & Sears, R.

Enry, P.

Faublée, J.

Fenichel, O.

Foster, G. M.

François, P. J.

Freud, S.
• 'Two Case Histories (Little Hans and the "Rat Man")', X: vi-342 p.
• 'Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia', XII: 1-82.
• 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes', XIV: 109-140.
• 'Repression', XIV: 141-158.
• 'Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis' (Part 3), XVI: 240-496.
• 'Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety', XX: 75-175.
• 'Civilization and its Discontents', XXI: 57-145.

Galbraith, J. K.

Gallieni, J. S.
GENDARME, R.

GENDREAU, X.

GINTZBURGER, A.

GUÉRIN, M.

HOVLAND, C. I. & SEARS, R. R.

INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA STATISTIQUE ET DES ÉTUDES ÉCONOMIQUES (INSEE)

JELLIFFE, D. B.

KARDINER, A.

KLUCKHOHN, C.

KNAPEN, M. T.

LAPLANCHE, J. & PONTALIS, J. B.
LAULANIÉ, H. de

LAVONDÉS, H.

LEWIS, O.

MADAGASCAR. Institut national de la statistique et de la recherche économique


MARTONNE, E. de

MOLET, L.


MYRDAL, G.

NACHT, S.

OMBREDANE, A.

OTTINO, P.

PUFFER, R. R. & SERRANO, C. V.

RAKOTONIRINA, M.
Ramamonjisoa, S.

Razafampahana, B.

Razanamparany, M.

Ritchie, J. F.

Rogers, E. M.

Rouveyran, J.-C.

Rouud, J.

Société d'études pour le développement économique et social (SEDES)

Wills, V. & Waterlow, J.
1958 'The Death-Rate in the Age-Group One to Four Years as an Index of Malnutrition', *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics and Environmental Child Health* III (4): 167-170.

World Bank