



## It's All Part of Growing Up

*Are Madagascar's political crises just stages it has to go through on its journey to greatness and maturity?*

*Raha zaza no tsy homam-bomanga,  
mitomboha ho lasa kilonga;  
Raha kilonga no tsy hitabataba,  
mandehana miala sakana;*

***Raha miala sakana ka tsy hitraotra, milatsaha haingana ho vatombatony;***

***Raha vatombatony no tsy hikorana, misondrota mba ho herotrerony;***

***Raha herotrerony no tsy hisarizoro, mijoroa ho olon-dehibe;***

***Raha olon-dehibe no tsy hitebiteby, mipetraha ho zoki-olona;***

***Raha zoki-olona no tsy hananatanatra, mivadiha ho isan'ny antitra;***

***Raha antitra tsy hitafasiry, modia ho lasan-ko razana;***

***Raha razana ka tsy hitahy, mifohaza hiady vomanga!***

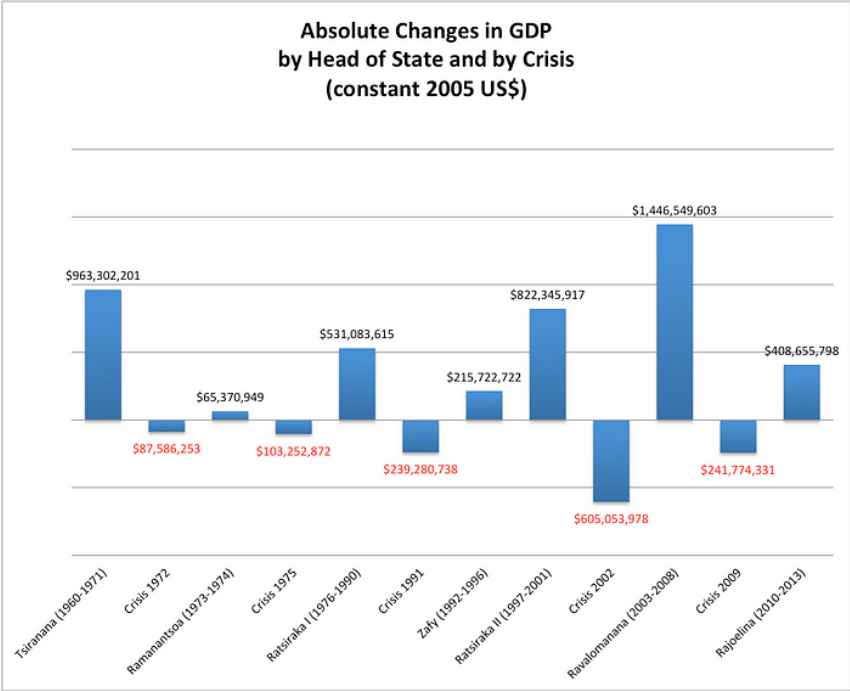
Our Malagasy ancestors (as well as psychologists like [Sigmund Freud](#) or [Erik Erikson](#)) have long understood that to live an emotionally fulfilling life, an individual has to go through a series of social stages. Each stage is characterized by a specific set of challenges, some of which can trigger stressful tensions and sometimes serious crises. If left unresolved, those crises can reappear with a vengeance at later stages of life.

Just like an individual, a country needs to go through a sequence of stages before it fully blossoms into a mature nation — into a great nation. Let us consider the case of

Madagascar which has been through several costly political crises over the last 55 years. Observing those crises from a psycho-social angle may seem simplistic and futile, but it is an interesting exercise and can provide useful insights, especially given that most of Madagascar’s problems seems to be driven by a certain lack of maturity.

“Born” on **June 26, 1960**, the Malagasy Republic had a relatively nice and sheltered childhood. Although it was officially an independent nation, France was still very much involved in most dimensions of its life. The *Reny Malala* (beloved mother) continued to control large parts of the Malagasy economy and to influence all major policy decisions.

Madagascar encountered its **first post-independence identity crisis in 1972**. Like most twelve year old pre-adolescents, it had *a strong desire for freedom and autonomy*. Malagasy people demanded more independence and challenged any form of imperialism. After widespread protests and revolts — which set the economy back by **US\$87 million** — President Tsiranana resigned from office, General Ramanantsoa took over, and ties with France were scaled down.



Computed using data from <http://databank.worldbank.org>

The next crisis occurred in **1975**. The republic was almost sixteen — an age when confused teenagers become preoccupied with existential questions like “*Who am I?*” and “*What can I be?*” For Madagascar, this was a period of self discovery, triggering violent confrontations between different ideological camps. By the end of this ***transformative identity crisis***, General Ramanantsoa stepped down, Colonel Ratsimandrava was assassinated, Commander Ratsiraka took over as the Nation’s leader. This crisis costed **US\$103 million**, but a *sense of national identity and common destiny emerged from it*: The republic adopted a new name (the “Democratic Republic of Madagascar”) and followed a socialist ideology which would affect the country’s prospects for many years to come.

In **1991**, the Republic was 31 year old. This is the age for young adults to make important decisions regarding long-term commitments (“*Should I get married?*” “*Should I marry my girl/boyfriend?*” or “*Should I start to have babies?*”). By then, President Ratsiraka had been in power for more than sixteen years. This longevity caused anxiety, and eventually an ***intimacy or commitment crisis***: *Should we stick to this guy? Can we do better than him?* Intensive soul-searching, accompanied by lengthy general strikes and protests costing the economy **US\$239 million**, ultimately led to a regime change: Ratsiraka was voted out of office and Professor Zafy became president.

In **2002**, the Republic was about to turn 43 — the middle of the adulthood stage for an individual. Someone in that stage often insecurely asks himself: “*Can I Make My Life Count?*” and “*Can I make a difference?*” Madagascar had nothing much to show for in terms of accomplishment: *GDP per capita was almost half of that of 1960*. In an ironic twist of fate, President Ratsiraka was back in charge now after President Zafy got impeached. Though nowhere near its midlife, Madagascar was showing the typical symptoms of a ***mid-life crisis***: *people grew increasingly frustrated, stressed and impatient to achieve something meaningful*. This impatience was personified by Marc

Ravalomanana, a successful businessman known for his fast-pace no-nonsense take-no-prisoner management style. After a lengthy post-electoral standoff that set the economy back a whopping **US\$605 million**, President Ratsiraka was once again kicked out of office, exiled himself in France, and Ravalomanana became president.

The Republic was almost 50 in **2009**— a symbolic age when most adults take a stock of their lives, sometimes experiencing frustration or depression because of unrealized goals or unsatisfactory achievements. The realization that “*Madagascar has been independent for half a century and it was still among the world’s poorest economies*” triggered a **second mid-life crisis**. In its haste to produce concrete results, the Ravalomanana regime made a number of serious governance faux-pas, which were quickly capitalized by a group of disgruntled politicians, led by the young mayor of Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina. This opened the door for them to take over: After violent street protests, President Ravalomanana fled to South Africa and Rajoelina was made head of state. For the year 2009, the political turmoil costed **US\$242 million** —Madagascar was subsequently subject to international sanctions and remained isolated until 2014 when Hery Rajaonarimampianina was elected president.

**Between 1960 and 2013, Madagascar went through five serious political crises costing an estimated total of US\$1.3 billion**, a significant chunk of its US\$10 billion economy. One reason for the unusually high frequency and costs of the crises is the *winner-takes-all attitude* of Malagasy politicians, which raises the stakes and causes extreme behaviors and intense bitterness among those that are left out. Another reason is that *Malagasy crises are never fully resolved*: rancor and resentment just accumulate and are carried over to the next stages. They resurface every time there is a bit of social tension, making the recurrence of crises almost inevitable. While going through crises is a key part of growing up, learning to better

resolve them and to reach more definitive closures is an even more important part of blossoming into a great nation.