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# A Minority, Urban, and Cosmopolitan Group From an International Migration in Colonial Context: Spatialities and Identities of the Indians of Antananarivo, Madagascar

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## ABSTRACT

The Indians of Antananarivo, a tiny minority of the urban population of Madagascar's capital, are an original social group descending from a long-standing migration throughout the Indian Ocean in a colonial context. Although they have been living in the city for several generations and often occupy dominant social positions in terms of standard of living, they are still considered foreigners by local society and are subject to stigmatization. They form a heterogeneous group, connected to the outside world through an asserted Indian identity, as well as local and international links. Thinking in terms of cosmopolitanism allows us to consider both their urban spatial anchorage and their circulations in an open, globalized world. The presence of Indians in Antananarivo, here studied throughout leisure places and cultural venues run by Indians, contributes to the city's cosmopolitanism, albeit rarely recognized and often devalued. On an international scale, many of them develop multiple identities, ambiguously turned towards contemporary India, and above all towards France--due to the colonial past--and close islands, in a reticular manner. In their multiple and variable identities, the Indians of Antananarivo, though numerically very marginal, synthesize many conditions of the contemporary world: postcolonial, diasporic, minority, and cosmopolitan all at once.

**Keywords:** Indians of Madagascar, Antananarivo, everyday cosmopolitanism, urban minority, colonial migrations, postcolonial identities, international circulations, social and cultural geography

The notion and study of urban cosmopolitanism—that is, the existence of social interactions and appreciative or at least non-hostile representations of otherness in public or private space between people of diverse national or cultural origins—often bear on the cities of rich countries, characterized for centuries by the mobility and settlement of people from elsewhere. On the other hand, studies and representations which integrate this cosmopolitan dimension relating to cities in so-called Southern countries are rarer. Very often, these cities, even populated and open to the world for a long time, are considered homogeneous concerning their population, ignoring their diversity (Fournet-Guérin *L’Afrique cosmopolite* 16-17). Research on this subject since the 2000s leads me to formulate the hypothesis that the view marked by the colonial history of these cities, particularly in Africa, has let a number of researchers make invisible, or at least underestimate, the persons of foreign origin, made up of ethno-racial minorities, who settled there for more than a century. Such are the “Lebanese” in West and Central Africa (see Arsan *Interlopers of Empire*), Indians in East Africa (see Seindeberg *Mercantile Adventurers*) or the Greeks everywhere in Africa (see Métaxidès *Hellenic Diaspora*). In this article, I focus on one of these urban minorities, the Indians of Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, by examining their own practices and cosmopolitan group representations, as well as their contribution to the cosmopolitan nature—or not—of their home city.

### **MINORITIES OF INDIAN ORIGIN IN MADAGASCAR**

Madagascar, a large island in the southwest Indian Ocean, was the site of a rivalry between British and French colonial powers since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, ending with French domination from 1896 to 1960 (Randrianja and Ellis *Madagascar* 149-152). During this period, the Europeans encouraged or forced people living in other territories of their colonial empire to settle there. They were to contribute to major projects, to develop a sparsely populated territory or counter the Malagasy elites, hindering their commercial and industrial enterprises. This is how thousands of people from British India arrived in Madagascar, mainly as independent traders, through voluntary migrations (see Blanchy *Karana et Banians*). Most came from the same region, coastal Gujarat, in the northwest of present-day India, not far from Pakistan; 90% of them are Muslim—and of these, 80% are Shiites (the other 10% are

Hindus). Despite great internal heterogeneity, they are perceived in a homogenizing way by local society which designates them under the pejorative term Karana,<sup>1</sup> which constitutes an identity assignment, while they define themselves vis-à-vis the outside world as the “Indian community” of Madagascar (see Gandelot “Contribution”). The Indians of Madagascar thus form a social group resulting from an ancient migration in the colonial framework of the Indian Ocean (Clarke et al. *South Asians Overseas* 33-166). Today, demographically speaking, they remain a very small minority, since their number, difficult to quantify, is estimated at around twenty thousand people, or less than 0.1% of a total population of nearly thirty million (Gay *Les Bohra* 12). On the other hand, their visibility and their place in Malagasy society are important since they occupy dominant economic positions. Several Indians are among the largest professional fortunes in Madagascar. More than 80% of them are urban dwellers, their concentration in the country’s large cities having increased since the country’s independence.

The Indians of Madagascar are rarely present in the human sciences literature and, so to speak, absent from social and cultural geography studies. As for those in Antananarivo, no study has focused on them as city dwellers. Scientific literature, almost exclusively in French,<sup>2</sup> consists mainly of old studies (not mentioned here because they are too specialized), often dating from the time of French colonial domination, which consider the Indian presence in Madagascar a “problem” or a “question.”<sup>3</sup> By focusing on a very small but very visible minority, this article<sup>4</sup> aims to fill a gap in studies on the urban societies of Madagascar, which are much more diverse in terms of origins than they are often represented. It constitutes a contribution to the study of the cosmopolitanism of these societies partly constructed by migrations in a colonial context (see Van der Veer “Colonial Cosmopolitanism”).

### **URBAN COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE CITIES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY**

Beyond the mere co-presence in a space of people of different origins, sometimes described as “demographic cosmopolitanism,” the classic meaning of cosmopolitanism involves positive interactions between these people living or rubbing shoulders in the same place according to urban anthropologist Ulf Hannerz:

Cosmopolitanism [...] includes a stance toward diversity itself, toward the coexistence of cultures in the in-dividual experience. A more genuine cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity. (“Cosmopolitans” 239)

Within the limited framework of this article, I will adopt this meaning of cosmopolitanism, even if I recognize the importance of relations of hostility or indifference between foreigners and nationals, which will only be mentioned occasionally.

Using the notion of cosmopolitanism in geography means going beyond the descriptive notion of a “multicultural” situation, which simply refers to a co-presence in the city, carrying out an analysis of the emergence—or not—of interactions between populations of different origins living in the same place. This also allows us to reflect on the question of transcending the sole local level, to consider the urban condition on a global scale. In his book, *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai also refers to these forms of cosmopolitanism, defined as the set of representations of elsewhere and of otherness developed by individuals of diverse origins living in the metropolises of the world, including in the South (see Appadurai Ch. 2). Since the 2000s, a number of works in the human sciences have taken up this notion of cosmopolitanism to transpose it to the study of non-Western societies, showing that it was not only possible, but also legitimate to consider cosmopolitan the interactions that take place between foreigners and locals in spaces dominated economically, politically, and socially on a global scale, in other words in the countries of the South (see Lejeune et al. *Migration, Urbanity*). Geography has particularly taken up this approach, paying attention to the interactions between social groups of different origins in space, and this at different scales: national, urban, neighborhood, even micro-local, such as in a restaurant, a park or a street.

These researchers, of which I am one, seek to consider from a cosmopolitan point of view the practices of urban space, its representations by city dwellers, the mental representations of others, as well as the geographical imaginations of the spaces

they know and frequent. We want to examine whether these practices, representations, and imaginations include an interest in otherness, whether this otherness is experienced positively and considered beneficial by the people concerned. We can then speak of a cosmopolitan city (or not), through the study of spatial practices and places frequented by its inhabitants of diverse origins. The researcher is interested in so-called cosmopolitan practices that take on different forms, among them: incorporation of foreign elements into domestic city cuisine, presence of foreign restaurants and stores, existence of musical trends that mix different influences, venues where certain music is played for a specific audience, visibility in the city through architecture perceived as foreign or via spatial markings (so-called ethnic or foreign signs and symbols, visible foreign languages, commercial signs, etc.)... On a daily basis, in various situations, the Indians rub shoulders with the local population and exchange with them in various spaces: public spaces, work spaces, domestic spaces or even sociability spaces. These multiple daily interactions can be described as "cosmopolitan." More broadly, I formulate the hypothesis that the cosmopolitan city consists in places, shapes, and atmospheres. According to Racine and Marengo's project, it is a matter of "understanding how exchanges between communities, individuals and cultures interact in space, how this space is experienced and perceived, how this space can be possibly modified by the practices of immigrants and locals" ("Migrations et relations" 44).<sup>5</sup>

In the West, the term cosmopolitanism has long had an elitist connotation, referring to the practices and representations of the wealthiest, having easy access to different forms of social, cultural or economic capital to travel or open up to otherness. Critics have helped to extend this notion to disadvantaged groups. Works by German researchers have thus rethought the notion of cosmopolitanism by stripping it of its sole elitist meaning (Werbner "Global Pathways;" Hiebert "Cosmopolitanism"). The first studies the phenomenon of working-class cosmopolitanism and the creation of transnational ethnic worlds, showing that there is no contradiction between the two. The second is interested in "cosmopolitanism at the local level" where it identifies "the development of transnational neighborhoods" (Hiebert, quoting the title of his paper). The position developed by these researchers, joined by young geographers since the 2000s, is that the intensification of migratory movements

produces new cosmopolitanisms, described as “subaltern” (Gidwani “Subaltern”), “from below” (N’Diaye “Présences congolaises”) or “vernacular” (Diouf “The Mourid”), born from the simultaneous presence of heterogeneous groups in the urban space. However, all qualify this description, avoiding any idealism. Camille Schmoll shows for example that the “everyday cosmopolitanism” she studies among small traders in Naples is often motivated by a purely commercial context and that it does not stem from a humanist impulse of openness to others: “the cosmopolitanism that we have described is not necessarily heterophilic. It is linked to opportunities and is motivated by a need for dialogue with others. This is why it is an ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’” (Schmoll “Cosmopolitisme” 43). It simply exists, *de facto*, even if its motivation is interested. In the large cities of Africa, such practices have been identified in central neighborhoods, but also and above all working-class ones. I have described them as “neighborhood cosmopolitanism” (Fournet-Guérin “Être étranger”) in Maputo, where the phenomenon is very widespread.

The social group of Antananarivo Indians studied in this article places itself at the intersection of all these approaches. From a social point of view, it is a rather well-off group—even rich for some of its members—, but it is a minority in the political sense of the term and is stigmatized. This ambivalent situation justifies the relevance of analyses in terms of cosmopolitanism of globalized elites as well as those belonging to “subalternity,” for they are both dominant (in terms of standard of living and in economic capital) and dominated (considered as a devalued minority). This group will be studied here from the point of view of practices and cosmopolitical representations of geographical spaces and asserted identities. Approaching this group in terms of cosmopolitanism allows us to consider both their urban spatial anchoring and their international circulations in an open and globalized world.

## **THE INDIAN PRESENCE IN THE CITY OF ANTANANARIVO: COSMOPOLITAN PLACES OF LEISURE, CONSUMPTION, AND SOCIALIZING?**

### ***INDIANITY AND URBANITY: DAILY COSMOPOLITANISM IN PUBLIC SPACE***

One of the dimensions of urban cosmopolitanism is observable in public spaces, or in private places but with public access on condition of payment in which city dwellers



rub shoulders, at least in a “co-presence” (Lévy *Dictionnaire* 211-213), and in certain situations, interact, talk to each other, and associate for sociability practices. We can thus look at the spatial markers of the Indian presence in the city. Places of sociability opened or managed by Indians from Antananarivo are being created, accompanying the rise in the standard of living of a segment of the urban population since the 2000s, as elsewhere in urban East Africa (Stoll *The City*). These places explicitly refer to different cultures, the Indian Muslim origin privileging a reference to a fantasized and idealized Orient reflected in the urban landscape. Thus Lila, a man owning the tea-spa salon Médina Spa, which opened in the city center in 2009, develops the following argument (interview, July 2011):

My wife is a decorator, I am of Indian origin [from Madagascar]. I like everything oriental, oriental in the sense of North Africa to Asia, so there you go, we did that. The Medina, the name you mean? It's firstly because of the location, in the heart of Tana [Antananarivo]. This is the medina of Tana! The people who come, they like the decor, it's composite.

Such places are frequented by Indians, but also by Malagasy people, resident foreigners or others passing through the country's capital. Their attendance embodies a form of daily cosmopolitanism in space. A video posted in 2023 by a young Malagasy on the social network Instagram illustrates this well. He promotes the Little India restaurant and declares in French, while tasting the dishes: “Indian cuisine is also super good, really, even though we don't often think about it” (Tiakaly account).

Longer present in town, several restaurants run by Indians offer mixed cuisine, both Indian and Malagasy, which attracts both clienteles. Among Tananarivians of Malagasy origin, it is common to cook an Indian dish at home, such as kimo,<sup>6</sup> or to make sambos (the local name for samosas), the Indian origin of which is most often unknown. Sambos were fully indigenized by the Malagasy people.

Furthermore, Indians with high purchasing power frequent the same places of sociability as other wealthy Tananarivians: chic restaurants, top notch hotels hosting family parties, bars, selective access sports clubs, etc. This sociability of the rich elites thus transcends, in part, the assignment of identity and origin. These Indians develop



practices similar to those of wealthy Malagasy people, contributing to cosmopolitan interactions. Salim, a businessman, states: “My lifestyle is more linked to my social environment than to my origins” (interview, 2023). Although I cannot delve into this subject here, the places of residence of the Indians are an important question: apart from a closed residential complex on the outskirts of Antananarivo managed by the Bohra religious community, which houses a few hundred people, there is no residential concentration in Antananarivo, no “Indian quarter,” contrary to what is observed in African cities like Durban in South Africa (see Mainet-Valleix *Durban*) and in the metropolises of East Africa (Adam *L’Afrique indienne* 57). The fact of not seeking residential separation constitutes, in my opinion, an important point in connection with a cosmopolitan practice of urban space.

Since the 2010s, wealthy businessmen of Indian origin have also promoted a cultural policy of support for contemporary Malagasy art and have opened exhibition spaces for this purpose. This is the case of the H Foundation, financed by the businessman Hassanein Hiridjee. Long established on the far outskirts of the city, it moved to the city center in 2023, in a completely rehabilitated former post office of the colonial era. From the first days after the opening, the place was frequented by well-off Tananarivians, mainly of Malagasy origin. I was able to watch a fashion photography session and professional meetings in the courtyard which hosts a café and provides access to WiFi. On the website, the foundation presents itself as “a *Malagasy* contemporary art foundation” [my emphasis]. In the press, Mr. Hiridjee says “in my country” to refer to Madagascar. Another place, the Alhambra Gallery, located in the south of the city, in an industrial area, Ankadimbahoaka, has hosted a branch of the Alliance Française since 2023 as well as a contemporary art foundation, the Hakanto Gallery, financed by the Yavarhousen Fund. Thus, urban cosmopolitanism is embodied in places created and financed by Indian patrons but frequented by people of all origins, Malagasy or Indian city dwellers, foreigners passing through or residents. Through these artistic and sociable places, Indians contribute to local urbanity and its diversification within globalized logics.

Indianness is an integral part of the urbanity of Antananarivo, even if it is essentially a socially selective sociability, in its places of leisure or relaxation and in its artistic

places. This is indeed one of the characteristics of urban cosmopolitanism, namely the interactions between urban practices of different origins. Here we can speak of “cosmopolitan landscapes” following Ola Söderström’s terminology (“Studying”) in relation to the metropolises of South-East Asia or West Africa where similar processes are observable.

***BUT ALSO INTERCOMMUNITY TENSIONS: A DENIED COSMOPOLITANISM?***

However, despite urban practices that can be considered cosmopolitan, the Indians of Antananarivo are rejected by the Malagasy majority group. The issue is complex and cannot be explored in depth here (see on the subject *Blanchy Karana et Banians; Gay Les Bohra; Gandelot “Contribution;” Mahajan “Citizenship”*). To summarize, Malagasy society considers Indians as foreigners who refuse to mingle with them, denouncing in particular the endogamous practices—real, although to be qualified—characteristic of a social organization in community. The spectacular economic success of some Indians also arouses strong jealousy that borders on hatred. The vast majority of Tananarivians of Malagasy ancestry hardly like Indians, whom they refer to by the derogatory term *Karana*, or even openly hate them. Foreigners hear very frequently that Indians are dishonest, intolerant, closed in on themselves, contemptuous of the Malagasy, that they grow rich to their detriment, that they confiscate the national economy, that they falsify passports to acquire Malagasy nationality for those who have still not obtained it, and so on.<sup>7</sup>

From the Indian perspective, there is an acute awareness of this negative perception. All the people I met spoke of the fragility of their position in the majority Malagasy society, a perception confirmed by all the studies on Indians (see *Gandelot “Contribution;” Gay Les Bohra 329 -343*). They all mentioned it in interviews, most of the time spontaneously, sometimes in response to a question. Among the comments made: “People don’t see us as Malagasy,” “We, foreigners” says a student of French nationality who was born and raised in Madagascar; “We are still not accepted. [...] Whatever we do, we always remain strangers,” declares a woman. All spoke of their position in Tananarivian society as members of the “Indian community.” This is not an unfounded fear: all Indians in Madagascar have either experienced some form of

aggression, directly or against a member of their family, or “difficult times” (interview 2023) of tension, worry or verbal violence. Several have known people kidnapped, some killed. Everyone in the Indian community remembers the violent episodes of the 1980s and 1990s, locally called OPK (“Operation Karana”), which consisted of the looting or burning of Indian property, and even attacks on individuals (*Gay Les Bohra* 337-345). All without exception present their position as vulnerable, whatever their nationality (Malagasy or not) or their economic and social situation.

The Indians of Antananarivo also develop a particular relationship with space, marked by restrictions in terms of individual mobility, avoiding moving on foot, or alone in order not to be the subject of aggression or at least an unpleasant remark. The visibility of a person of Indian origin in the urban space, just like architectural elements identified as Indian, can provoke negative reactions, verbalized or not, from the Malagasy people, as I have often had the opportunity to observe in many situations.

In this context, it is clear that for the majority local society, Indians are not considered full-fledged city dwellers. Their contribution to urban life is not valued or even most often recognized, and the very idea that their city is cosmopolitan, particularly because of the presence of Indians, would certainly be rejected by a large majority of residents of Antananarivo. However, the Indians, for their part, inscribe their daily lives in the city and, by examining their practices, it is possible to speak of daily cosmopolitanism, even if this is not recognized by the majority of city dwellers.

### **LIVING IN ANTANANARIVO AS AN INDIAN FROM MADAGASCAR: MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND SPATIALITIES FOR EVERYDAY COSMOPOLITANISM**

#### ***COSMOPOLITAN DAILY PRACTICES: INTERIOR DECORATION, FOOD, AND LINGUISTIC PRACTICES***

Urban cosmopolitanism can also be appreciated through ordinary, everyday practices (see Fournet-Guérin “Everyday”). Since the 1980s, geographers have focused their attention on these practices, drawing inspiration from sociologists and anthropologists (de Certeau *The Practice*, Goffman *The Presentation*) particularly interested in domestic spaces long ignored in geographic studies. I was lucky enough

to be able to conduct interviews with Indians and thus observe their interiors. The decoration constitutes a rich source of analysis of identities as staged, both for the family and visitors. All the Indians I met included decorative elements referring both to India and Madagascar. Portraits of Nehru were seen on several occasions, and sometimes a small flag of the Indian Union. Very old family photos or portraits, going back several generations, all taken in India, were on display or taken out for me. Decorative objects made in Madagascar, very common among all city dwellers whatever their origin, were also present: objects in papier-mâché with dried flowers, in raffia, in carved wood, embroidered fabrics... It is a form of anchoring to the place which manifests a visible Malagasy identity.

In the same way, cosmopolitan practices can be noted in food consumption patterns. Among the Indians of Antananarivo, Malagasy, Indian, and French dishes are cooked (by the kitchen staff, always Malagasy). These different culinary origins were present during a meal to which I was invited. My host insisted on the Indian character of certain dishes, but not on the Malagasy character of others. The city dwellers of Indian origin I met spoke of the same culinary tastes as those of Malagasy origin, appreciating both identity dishes and others identified as coming from another community. This food cosmopolitanism is a process known everywhere in the world, as groups of diasporic origin very classically mix identity practices with others borrowed from the settlement society (see Ray & Tulasi *Curried Cultures*). Conversely, it is very common to observe that the local majority population integrates into its ordinary eating practices foods or dishes of foreign origin, especially Indian or Chinese, disseminated by minorities established in the territory concerned. These processes of food diffusion and creolization, developed in the colonial framework and based on the global circulation of populations, are fully part of cosmopolitan practices (Fournet-Guérin *L'Afrique* 75-77).

Linguistic practice, which varies depending on the times and places where a person or group of people is located, constitutes another element of appreciation of urban practices and specifically of the urban cosmopolitanism of the Indians of Antananarivo. Indeed, most of them—all those I met—are multilingual. They speak Gujarati with family or friends, French, a language of social distinction and a strong

marker of identity on multiple occasions, including in the domestic sphere, and often Malagasy, in interactions with the local majority society.<sup>8</sup> All those in professional contact with Malagasy people communicate with them in this language, particularly in businesses between employers and employees. In companies run by Indians, French is more often the common language because it is also the language of business, as is also, but to a lesser extent, English. French then plays the role of common vehicular language. For the Indians of Antananarivo, being able to express themselves in these different languages, depending on the context, is both obvious and a source of pride. In this sense, their linguistic situation is similar to that of the Indians of Mauritius or East Africa. But there is no reciprocity: I have never heard of Malagasy people having learned Gujarati.

Finally, the Indians of Antananarivo claim several identities, without hierarchy or rivalry between them. During the interviews I conducted, several people indicated in similar terms: "I am French, Indian, Malagasy," in varying order; a woman says "I am divided between Madagascar, India and France." A student I met in France who mentions during the interview that she is considered a foreigner in Madagascar by the majority society, wears a gold jewel around her neck representing the map of Madagascar. It is a manifestation of strong identity and territorial belonging, yet eminently ambiguous in view of the comments made.

***"WHERE ARE YOU FROM?:" ON THE DIFFICULT NEGOTIATION OF SPATIAL IDENTITIES FOR THE INDIANS OF ANTANANARIVO***

The ambiguity of identity positioning recurred in the comments of all the people I met. They all mention "the community," meaning the Indians of Madagascar in the broad sense, or their own, particularly religious, in the restricted sense.<sup>9</sup> In our conversations, people have used the designation "The Indian community" or said "we as Indians," thereby emphasizing their minority position. During a long interview (2023), Salim makes the following remarks, at various times, which clearly reflect the ambivalence of his position in society in Antananarivo:

I am Malagasy. I would like to idealize by saying that I am Malagasy, but the word Indian from Madagascar would be more accurate. We have a real identity

problem. (...) We have two strong identities, Muslim and Indian, which are sometimes contradictory, it's not easy. (...) Mada[agascar], it's my country, frankly! In India, there is the BJP,<sup>10</sup> in France, Le Pen, here, frankly, what are we? They don't bother us here. And at the same time, we still don't have our papers, we're still not Malagasy. We have no right to land.

At the same time, he claims a *de facto* cosmopolitanism, without using the word, by evoking his hobbies, his friends, of all origins and his international spatialities, including Madagascar, Mauritius, France, among others. In Mauritius, where his company is also established, he says he is considered Malagasy. To my question "Where are you from?," he responds in a lively manner: "From Tana [Antananarivo]! I love Tana, I'm a Tananarivian." The primary identity he puts forward is that of a local city dweller. A cosmopolitan individual identity would therefore be experienced as a state of affairs, sometimes valued, sometimes a source of tension, by the people concerned.

Depending on their current activities, their locations and their interlocutors, the origin highlighted differs. It can be geographical (Madagascar), community (the Indians of Madagascar), diasporic (overseas Indians), national (French or Malagasy) or even professional ("We Are Traders"). This plurality as well as the lability of the identities expressed by these people contribute to forming a very original group, both unique and at the same time similar to other groups existing around the world, resulting from colonial migratory movements, in a minority situation in a country which has become theirs, at least partially, and diasporic.

## **INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF THE INDIANS OF ANTANANARIVO: A COSMOPOLITANISM PRACTICED AND LIVED IN MULTIPLE SPACES ON A GLOBAL LEVEL**

### ***CONTEMPORARY INDIA: A KNOWN BUT LITTLE-INVESTED SPATIAL REFERENCE***

If all the Indians I met spoke to me spontaneously and extensively about India, very few were able to describe close and ongoing links with places and people there. Very often, disappointment seems to dominate when confronting the reality of the travel experience that many have had at least once, but rarely repeatedly. These are often

leisure and memorial trips, sometimes a bit of both, undertaken as adults, to a state they did not know at all. Several spoke of brief stays, usually including a stopover in Gujarat, “to see family” or to visit the grave of a well-identified ancestor. Thus, Denia, met in Paris, indicates she went there twice, the second time with a friend: “I am attached to India, I have family there.” Noor goes there more often, for religious reasons: she notably mentions a pilgrimage to the tomb of a saint. For others, curiosity, the desire to see where the ancestors who emigrated several generations ago came from motivates the trip.

However, for many, India or Gujarat are idealized territories, constructed in a family story but disconnected from their physical reality. The experience of India is therefore often disappointing, in terms of identity positioning. Leila says: “I went to India. But I don’t feel Indian. Nowhere are we at home. You realize, at the Taj Mahal, I had to pay the foreign rate, it’s incredible, right? (...) I speak Hindi, but I have an accent, they know straight away that we’re not from here.” Salim tells me that he is immediately perceived in India as not being a resident in the country and is assigned the status of a foreigner: “We are not Indian, for them we are tourists.” He also talks about the rapid failure of his brother’s plan to settle in Mumbai to develop a business there. After a few months or years, he preferred to return to Madagascar.

Nevertheless, certain individual trajectories reveal the construction of economic networks linking Madagascar, France, and India. This is the case of the founder of a famous French linen company created in the 1990s (Princess Tam Tam), Loumia Hiridjee, originally from Madagascar and having grown up in France since her adolescence. I have little information on her background, but this person of French nationality was in Bombay in 2008 during the attacks which left hundreds of victims, among them she and her husband. The press, at the time, mentioned that they were on business on Indian soil. Articles in the Malagasy press reported lively debates on the national origin and identity of this woman, Ms. Hiridjee being denied a cosmopolitan identity by some Malagasy people.

If links with contemporary India exist, they are tenuous and fragile. For Denis Gay, who studied the Bohra of Madagascar, one of the religious subgroups of the Indians,



this point contributes to questioning the categorization of the Indians of Madagascar as a diaspora because, according to him, a reference to a lost land of origin is needed to define a true diaspora (*Les Bohra* 32, 83). The Indians of Madagascar do not wish to one day live in Gujarat. What's more, as Muslims, some are aware that the political context has not been favorable to them since 2014, with a Hindu nationalist government in power. I share this analysis of the absence of a complete constitution as a diaspora because, for the Madagascar Indians I met, in terms of geographical anchorage, the central pole is indeed Madagascar and not India (Fig. 1). Unlike the diasporic functioning of other groups, for whom the central pole is that of the lost, or, at least, quitted place of emigration (see Quayson and Daswani *A Companion*), being Indian from Madagascar constitutes a powerful geographical reference, sufficient in themselves, and a self-sufficient identity.

The geographical spaces practiced by the Indians of Antananarivo : reticular spatialities

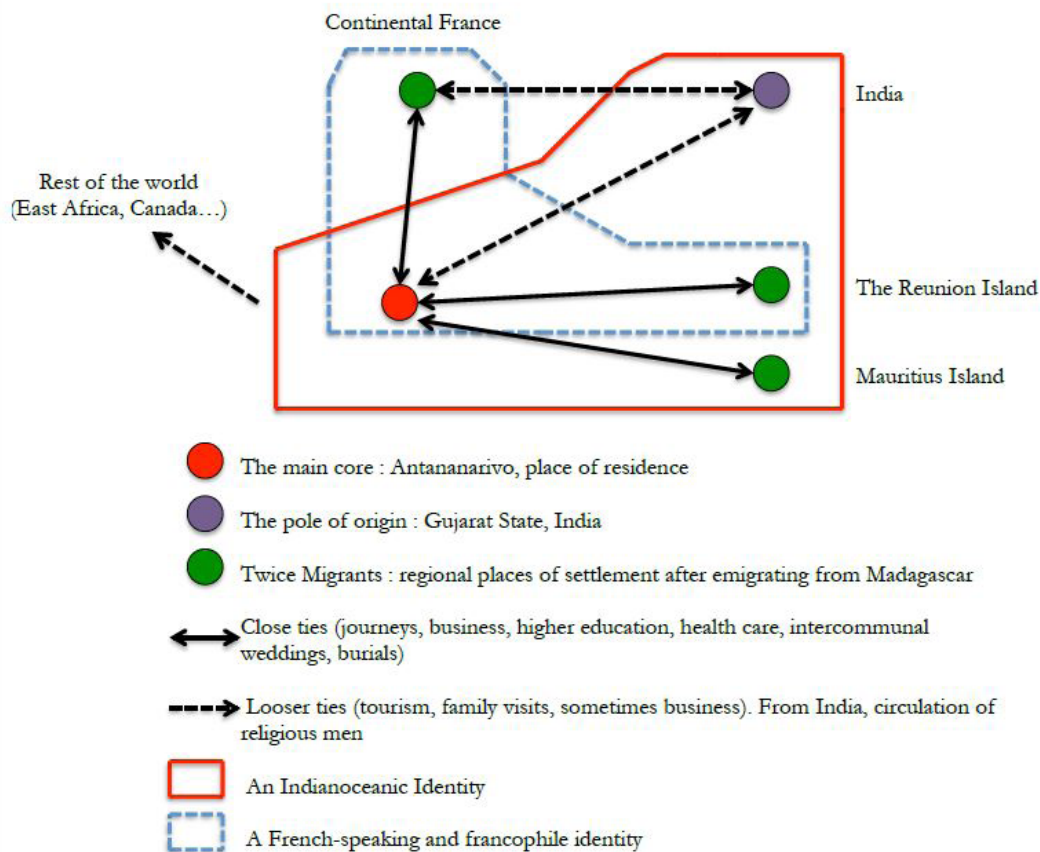


Fig. 1

India remains, however, an important religious center. In 2023, I had the opportunity to meet a mullah who manages the Bohra educational and confessional complex in Antananarivo. A Malagasy from a rural area, he went to train for years in Bombay, at the world center of the community. His telephone number bears the Indian Union country code.

***CLOSE LINKS WITH THE ISLANDS OF RÉUNION, MAURITIUS, AND MAYOTTE: A RETICULAR INDIAN-OCEANIC IDENTITY***

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Indians from Madagascar emigrated to Réunion or Mauritius, the islands in the western Indian Ocean whose population and history are entirely dependent on British and French colonization. Réunion and Madagascar were part of the French Empire; Réunion became a French department in 1946 while Madagascar became independent in 1960, and Mauritius, part of the British Empire, only acquired its independence in 1968. For the Indians of Madagascar, these two islands represent a place of possible settlement site after “re-emigrating” from Madagascar. Indeed, they are first thought of as alternatives to Madagascar as a main place of residence due to their geographical, but also historical and cultural proximity. Populations of Indian origin had settled there since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while being very different from those of Madagascar, particularly as they are mainly Hindus.

Réunion Islanders of Muslim Indian origin are, however, identified as a subgroup in their own right designated as “Zarab” (see Mourregeot “Ces Réunionnais”). In 1975, the date of a major political change in Madagascar (a socialist revolution led by a military officer), many Indians chose to leave the country, for fear of expropriation, expulsion or even massacres, like what happened in Uganda in 1972. The principal destination was mainland France, but some people fled to Réunion and Mauritius. Nowadays, many Indian families have part of their members settled there. The same goes for the French island of Mayotte in the Comoros archipelago, where Indians from Madagascar, sometimes after spending a long period in Réunion, settled and specialized in the baking sector. In the 1980s in Mayotte, one of them, Sabir, born in Madagascar, distributed a little brioche bread which was “the improvement of a Malagasy recipe that he remembered” (Denis “Du pain” 191). With the mobility of people, we find again the food cosmopolitanism mentioned above. Through these

scattered elements, it is possible to identify what Ludovic Gandelot designates as an “overseas Indianness” (Gandelot “Migrations” 107), which includes India and also contributes to the cosmopolitan character, practices, and spatial representations of the Indians of Madagascar.

### ***TOWARDS CONTINENTAL FRANCE: CLOSE POSTCOLONIAL TIES, A FRANCOPHILE COSMOPOLITANISM?***

Due to the colonial heritage and the difficult procedures for acquiring Malagasy nationality put in place at independence, after 1960, some Indians have French nationality, as the American journalist of Indian origin Karan Mahajan explains: “So Karanas had to look elsewhere—to France, to India—for citizenship. It made them more cosmopolitan. It also meant they belonged nowhere—and everywhere”<sup>11</sup> (“Citizenship”). Their mobility between France and Madagascar is therefore easy, much more so than for Malagasy citizens subject to the restrictive policy of issuing visas by France. The Indians of Madagascar have partly established themselves in France, notably after each wave of weakening of their position in Madagascar for political or economic reasons (in 1975, in the 1980s, recently in 2018). Some are permanently settled, others are coming and going between the two countries, depending on the seasons, their work or their family commitments. Several thousand Indians of Madagascar are believed to be residing in France (Gay *Les Bohra* 12).<sup>12</sup>

It is then another form of cosmopolitanism that unfolds with the promotion of a fully French identity for these people. On July 14, 2023, I received a message from one of my contacts wishing me a happy national holiday, which the French do not usually do with their compatriots. I interpret it as a way of enhancing his French identity. In the interviews, people often highlighted this part of their identity, emphasizing their attachment to France, one of their three countries according to them, with Madagascar and India, as already mentioned. This identity takes different forms, including food, clothing, culture and even politics, for people who are very familiar with French political life. Many have accommodation in France. The people interviewed in France have accommodation in Madagascar. This does not appear to be the case for India. Finally, this cultivated French identity involves the use of French as a very mastered and appreciated language. All the interviews I conducted took place in French.

Several people from the “Indian community” are married to French people who are not members of it, whether women or men, even if endogamy remains more frequent. At the death of the brother-in-law of a person investigated, who lives in Paris, she told me that he, a Catholic having no other family, was buried in the Muslim square of their family cemetery, in the Paris region: “Now Louis is integrated into our community. People from my community will pray at his grave,” the person wrote to me in a text message. This link with France is experienced in a free, emotional way, not at all marked by the memory of colonization, something never mentioned by the people concerned. Most often, the pride of navigating between several geographical spaces around the world emerged from the interviews, hence the proposal to characterize these links as “Francophile cosmopolitanism.” The rest of the world, outside of these three poles which structure the lived space of the Indians of Antananarivo (India, France and the islands of the Indian Ocean), was never mentioned by the persons I met, unlike East African Indians who have contacts in other African countries. Investigations seem to reveal that the Indians of Madagascar have few links with those of Africa. Only Canada was mentioned once as the place of residence of part of the family.

#### ***A RETICULAR IDENTITY BETWEEN THESE POLES, AN INTERNATIONAL COSMOPOLITANISM***

The Indians of Antananarivo move fluidly between the spaces mentioned above and integrate references to all of them into their daily lives, as we have seen.

This is also the case for the choice of burial places. In social and cultural geography, this is an interesting dimension to take into account because it informs the way in which individuals project themselves in time and space. A person’s planned burial site can be very informative about spatial identities. The Indians of Antananarivo, just like the Malagasy, circulate the bodies of their deceased for burial. In the Malagasy daily newspaper *Midi Madagasikara* of April 28, 2023, the following announcement appeared, in French: “The X family is sad to inform you of the death of Mr. Y on Réunion Island. The burial took place in the Thiais cemetery in Paris.” Three geographical spaces are mentioned in this announcement: the place of death, the French island of Réunion—not far from Madagascar—where we can assume that

the deceased resided, or at least was passing through; Antananarivo, where the ad was published (in at least two newspapers); and mainland France, where the body was moved by plane, which constitutes an atypical choice for Muslims, whose bodies must be buried as quickly as possible. The information is intended for Indians “from Madagascar,” but who reside in at least three geographically distant French-speaking places operating in a network. The cemetery of Thiais, a Parisian suburb, was also mentioned by Noor as the burial place of her parents, both born in Madagascar in the 1920s, during the colonial era.

The Indians of Antananarivo are aware of having multiple identities and claim to belong to several places at the same time. Some of these places are experienced in the mode of nostalgia, for example Madagascar being seen as a lost paradise for those who grew up in France (Gandelot “Migrations” 101-102), others in an idealized mode, like the India of the ancestors, very different from the disappointing reality of contemporary India, as we have seen. This is how, on an international scale, many of these people develop multiple identities, oriented ambiguously towards contemporary India, but more clearly towards France and the island of Réunion, and other places, all functioning in a reticular manner (see Fig 1 above).

### **WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM INDIANS FROM ANTANANARIVO?**

Urban cosmopolitanism takes various forms. For the well-off Indians of Antananarivo, it is embodied in public or domestic places of daily life in the city, in places of passage, whether it is the India of one’s origin or other spaces, such as France, in burial places forming a transnational system within which dead bodies circulate, and in the representations, marked in particular by nostalgia and idealization, of all these places. Geography can help us understand these multiple identities and these forms of cosmopolitanism by focusing on everyday practices in spaces, international circulations, whether short-term or migratory, and finally the representations and discourses of the people studied about the places they frequent and the multiple territorialities on which their identities are based. The Indians of Madagascar, although very marginal numerically, synthesize in their identities, multiple and variable according to places and temporalities, a number of situations which characterize the

contemporary world: postcolonial, diasporic, minority, and cosmopolitan all at the same time.

## NOTES

1. The exact origin of the meaning remains unknown. The French/Creole version is Karanes, coming either from Quran or from a Sanskrit word meaning “scribe” or “accountant” adopted in several languages.
2. By contrast, there are many publications in English on Indian diasporas.
3. For more references, see Fournet-Guérin “Les Indiens de Antananarivo.”
4. The data collected for this article are qualitative in nature. They were built between 2001 and 2023, as part of broader research carried out diachronically on the urban lives of the inhabitants of Antananarivo in Madagascar (Fournet-Guérin *L’Afrique cosmopolite*). Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, in French, in Antananarivo (in 2001, 2011 and 2023) as well as in the Paris region, with people identifying themselves as Indians from Madagascar and having lived or currently living in Antananarivo. These people were all met through interpersonal relationships, which allowed me to meet some of them several times and in different places and situations. I had in fact experienced numerous refusals when trying to chat with Indians from Madagascar in Antananarivo without being known or recommended, which therefore constitutes a bias in the information collected. These interviews are combined with observations carried out in public spaces in Antananarivo’s places of sociability (restaurants, shopping centers, public gardens in particular). News and comments collected in the French-speaking Malagasy press and on Internet sites complete the data.
5. All translations from the French are mine.
6. Called a “Malagasy dish” on French culinary web sites. [https://www.marmiton.org/recettes/recette\\_kimo\\_212692.aspx](https://www.marmiton.org/recettes/recette_kimo_212692.aspx)
7. The nationality of the Indians of Madagascar is a complex question. Their access to Malagasy citizenship is limited, as it is one of the most difficult to acquire in the world. Many people hold French nationality. A fraction remains stateless. See for more details Blanchy Karana and Banians and Gay Les Bohras de Madagascar 29.
8. Some can also speak additional languages such as English or Hindi.
9. The Indians of Madagascar are divided into several very structured ethno-confessional subgroups, with which they identify. These are mainly the Khodja, Bohra and Ismaili groups.
10. The Bharatiya Janata Party, a Hindu nationalist party, in power since 2014, holds a publicly hostile stance against the Muslims of India.
11. Note the use of the stigmatizing identity designation Karana; the speaker, an American of Indian origin, was clearly unaware of its pejorative charge.



12. It is impossible to count them because France does not allow census questions relating to the ethnic origin of French nationals.

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