

*Fortunat Miarintsoa Andrianimanana*<sup>1</sup>

*Carles Roca Cuberes*<sup>2</sup>

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Original scientific paper

Received: 07.10.2019.

UDK: 004.738.5:316.454.5–054.7(=691)

004.738:316.472.4–054.7(691)



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2298/SOC1904631M>

## ONLINE WEAK TIES, A SIGN OF A DIASPORA IN-THE-MAKING? THE CASE OF THE MALAGASY ABROAD

### Slabe onlajn veze, pokazatelj dijaspore u nastajanju? Studija slučaja Madagaskaraca koji žive u inostranstvu

**ABSTRACT:** *Internet 2.0 fosters the emergence, connection and association of a geographically dispersed community such as Malagasy migrants. This exploratory study analyses Malagasy online practices as a means to understanding the social dynamics and community-building in their host countries. The method employed relies on a parallel analysis of 121 websites and 82 Facebook public pages and groups created and/or managed by Malagasy migrants. The websites are classified according to the category of their activity and the networks they form, based on method used in the e-Diasporas Atlas project (Diminescu, 2012). Findings reveal that Malagasy overseas have the same geographical distribution both online and offline, but Facebook pages and groups are present in more countries than the websites what suggests a potential inverse correlation between belonging to a larger community and the need to be connected online. The network analysis of the websites uncovers that the Malagasy migrants' websites maintain a very weak connection among them and are split into several satellite networks around an interconnected group of political blogs. We conclude this significant weak connection among the MGWEB as a sign of a diaspora in-the making.*

**KEY WORDS:** diaspora, incipient diasporas, Malagasy diaspora, connected diaspora; transnational identity

**APSTRAKT:** *Internet 2.0 podstiče nastajanje, povezivanje i udruživanje geografski rasutih zajednica poput madagarskih migranata. U ovoj eksplorativnoj studiji se kroz analizu onlajn praksi Madagaskaraca objašnjava društvena dinamika i građenje zajednice u okviru njihovih zemalja domaćina. Metodologija rada se oslanja na paralelnu analizu 121 veb stranice i 82 javne Fejsbuk stranice i grupa kreiranih i/ili administriranih od strane madagaskarskih migranata. Na temelju*

<sup>1</sup> fortunatmiarintsoa.andrianimanana01@estudiant.upf.edu

<sup>2</sup> carles.roca@upf.edu

*pristupa korišćenog u projektu e-Diasporas Atlas (Diminescu, 2012) veb stranice su klasifikovane u kategorije prema aktivnostima i mrežama koje formiraju. Rezultati su pokazali da Madagaskarci koji žive u inostranstvu imaju istu geografsku distribuciju onlajn i oflajn, s tim da su Fejsbuk stranice i grupe prisutnije u više zemalja u odnosu na veb stranice što ukazuje na potencijalnu negativnu korelaciju između pripadnosti većoj zajednici i potrebe za onlajn povezanošću. Mrežna analiza veb sajtova je pokazala da madagaskarski migranti putem svojih veb sajtova održavaju veoma slabe veze kao i da su raspodeljeni u nekoliko satelitskih mreža okupljenih oko medusobno povezane grupe političkih blogova. Zaključak naše studije je da je ustanovljena povezanost putem slabih veza među MGWEB znak dijaspore u nastajanju.*

**KLJUČNE REČI:** dijaspora, dijaspora u nastajanju, dijaspora Madagaskaraca, povezana dijaspora, transnacionalni identitet

## The Malagasy migrants

The existing studies and official documents reveal no quantifiable and exact data about Malagasy migrants<sup>3</sup>. In 2017, however, Razafindrakoto (2017: 10) estimate approximately 170.000 individuals worldwide, with 145.000 of them in France<sup>4</sup>. It is the most relevant Malagasy migrants community and for this reason, current studies attempting to understand the phenomenon related to Malagasy migrants focuses mostly on the Malagasy in France. Given this number, the Malagasy form the largest sub-Saharan migrants community in France (Razafindrakoto et al., 2017: 12).

The research on Malagasy migrants, largely qualitative, focuses on how overseas Malagasy deal with their social settlement, adaptation and integration, on Malagasy cultural practices within their receiving countries (Claverie, 2011; Claverie & Combeau-Mari, 2011; Rakotoary, 2017; Rasoloniaina, 2013), and on their relationship to their country of origin, thereby attempting to describe their profile (Kotlok, 2016; M. (Institut de R. pour le D. Razafindrakoto et al., 2017).

First observed in Claverie's research (2011: 72) and confirmed by the report of the International Organisation for Migration (Kotlok, 2016: 19), Malagasy transnational migration is grouped into three periods. The first is from 1880 to 1970, which historically covers the period before independence<sup>5</sup>. This first group 'gone-to-come-back', is mainly composed of soldiers who joined the French army during world wars, along with skilled workers and scholars willing to continue their studies abroad because of the lack of a structure for research in

3 The current data is based on international databases (like OECD's...) or the migrants statistics in the France (as mentioned in the most recent research on Malagasy migrants lead Razafindrakoto et al.,). The lack of an exact and updated database at the Malagasy government and the poor statistical data at the consular and embassies are its most plausible cause.

4 Including French overseas territories such as La Réunion.

5 The independence of Madagascar was officially declared on 1960.

Madagascar during this period. The second wave occurred from 1975 to 1990 and was mostly composed of students. Both Claverie (2011) and Kotlok (2016) consider this second wave as a ‘one-way migration’. From 1990, the migrants’ motivation is diversified and is still under-studied. Claverie describes this third generation as a “generation of student-workers [who is] attached to its culture and its values and is maintaining it fiercely. It is a generation who no longer sees the western countries (particularly France) as an intellectual ideal (destination) but as a potential employment area” (Claverie, 2011: 72). This generation is characterised by its struggle for the ‘real independence of Madagascar (from France)’ and freedom from French interference both politically and socially. Even more, “it is also known for its political role and its remote participation in all the emancipation struggles of the country, from the quest for independence to the search for current political stabilisation (in Madagascar)” (Claverie, 2011: 73).

Rasoloniaina (2013: 02) and Razafindrakoto et al., (2017: 30) state that the Malagasy migrants are first characterised by their attachment to the religious practice they had in their country of origin. Christian churches being the most dominant religious communities in Madagascar, the Malagasy practise these religions in France as well. The parishes are therefore considered as their most significant meeting points. Understood as migrant religious-practitioners, their attachment to the religion ‘acquired’ in their country of origin and ‘practised’ in their host country is a means of maintaining their cultural references and identity in parallel with social integration in the host country.

Only few studies investigated the use of internet by Malagasy migrants and they share the hypothesis that internet complements the physical gathering places. It is a place where the community’s members share information regarding their country of origin and host country; a place for strengthening the offline events organized in the host country (Claverie, 2011: 76; Kotlok, 2016: 32); a complement to the gathering places in the host country (Claverie & Combeau-Mari, 2011: 117); a space for debate and the emergence of new figures in the community who lack the means to become known in offline space (Kotlok, 2016: 32); and a space of mass mobilization for engagement in charitable and solidarity actions to be carried out in the country of origin (Kotlok, 2016; Rakotoary, 2017). The internet is thus a place of meeting and exchange in a horizontal and barrier-free way between the members of a community that is geographically dispersed and discreet in comparison to other sub-Saharan diasporas (M. Razafindrakoto & Razindratsima, 2017) at the offline level.

## The concept of “diaspora”

The concept of “diaspora” has been comprehensively debated by scholars for decades. Although, the “Malagasy diaspora” only emerged in the Malagasy social debate lately after 2015<sup>6</sup>. In 2017, “Malagasy diaspora” was cited for first time by Razafindrakoto et al. (2017). In 2018, Rakotoary mentions the “connected

6 A plausible cause is the establishment of the *Direction de la Diaspora* (Office for the diaspora) within the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Madagascar, as the Malagasy government officially launched a politics towards its migrants community.

Malagasy diaspora” for first time in her PhD thesis (Rakotoary, 2018). Remarkably, as the Malagasy public agenda stressed the notion of “diaspora”, scholars also tended to switch from “migrants” to “diaspora”.

It is clear that the concept of “diaspora” has developed over the course of its use in different disciplines. In this paper, it is understood as a group of migrants spread around the world and whose members share the feeling of belonging to an (imagined) homeland, culture, and origin, while being settled, and mostly integrated, within their respective host countries. The members of a diasporic community maintain and nurture a close relationship with and actions towards their country of “origin” (Safran, 1991: 83). While most of the criteria Safran outlines refer to the attraction of the homeland, Cohen, extends the concept by adding that the members of diasporic community also acknowledge that diasporic communities not only form a collective identity in the place of settlement or with their homeland, but also share a common identity with members of the same ethnic communities in other countries (Cohen, 1997). Brubaker emphasises the importance of the homeland in his description and characterises diaspora with the concepts of ‘dispersion’, ‘homeland orientation’, and ‘boundary-maintenance’ (Brubaker, 2005). His definition also considers the cause of the immigration: “this (the dispersion) is today the most widely accepted criterion, and also the most straightforward. It can be interpreted strictly as forced or otherwise traumatic dispersion” (Brubaker, 2005. 05).

The most recent understanding of a “diasporic community” takes into account two other concepts related to the personal practices and social dynamics of a diaspora: mobility and connectivity (Tsagarousianou, 2004; Diminescu, 2008).

- Mobility. While the act of migration has been commonly practised by humankind since the beginning of its history, the way it is done has changed considerably. With improvements in transport technology, migration flows have become easier and so people can travel from one territory to another with ease. The significant change in the difficulty of mobility has led current scholars to insist on the irrelevance of long-term “settlement”.
- (Inter)connectivity. ICTs eliminated boundaries: the members of a diasporic community are not limited to the blurred line of geographical boundaries. Settled in their host country they are instantly and continuously connected with their “homeland”, but also and above all, they are interconnected with one another. Considering this context, we understand and adhere to the idea that diaspora communities are connected in a significant way despite being physically and geographically disconnected.

The members of a diasporic community, share a common religion, culture or homeland, maintain a vivid and permanent relationship with their countries of origin and among them, with the internet and the technologies as the medium, and are foremost integrated into their host country. “It is their readiness and willingness to engage themselves with the building of a transnational imagination

and connections that constitutes the ‘threshold’ from ethnic to diasporic identification.” (Tsagarousianou, 2004: 59).

## Purposes, methods and data

This paper aims at understanding and mapping the online presence, practices, dynamics, and activities of the Malagasy migrant community on the internet. The internet is undoubtedly a space in which Malagasy living abroad gather and demonstrate their personal and social dynamics, and their online activities and practices can be understood as a metric of their relationship with their “homeland”. We seek to analyse the online activities of Malagasy migrants by carefully examining Malagasy diasporic websites (MGWEB) and Malagasy diasporic public pages or groups on Facebook.

The MGWEB are here understood as those websites created and/or managed by a non-official individual or collective members of the Malagasy migrant community that deal with them (Diminescu, 2012). The profiles of the webmasters and the contents of their websites are the main criteria used in selecting the websites. While the profile of the webmasters allows us to see who are the connected Malagasy behind each website, their content shows what they (the webmasters) are saying about the Malagasy migrants. The end-users of the websites are not an essential element, as the websites are open access and not limited to the Malagasy migrants. We excluded the websites: (i) created and/or managed by Malagasy nationals abroad representing any Malagasy institution or state (e.g. embassies and consulates); (ii) dealing with the Malagasy migrants but created/or managed by non-Malagasy nationals; and (iii) of a political party.

The methods used in this paper are those used in the successful e-Diasporas Atlas project, a research project focused on the analysis of diaspora communities and their online presence (Diminescu, 2012), as defined in the following steps. Step 1: Web exploration and corpus building. Malagasy migrants websites were queried on Google using several keywords related to the Malagasy migrants’ community in the Malagasy, French and English languages. We analysed the most salient websites depending on their content and according to our personal knowledge of the websites whose contents are related to Malagasy migrants.

Step 2: Data enrichment. The second step is a manual sequence of selecting/filtering the most salient websites retained for the analysis in Step 1. The 121 websites retained were classified according to their geographical location, category, and language. Their geographical location was made possible by analysis of their WHOIS addresses and the three other categories were determined by their contents. Step 3: Network analysis. This last step was aimed at discovering and manipulating the existing networks between the selected websites. In this step, those MGWEB that maintain any relationships between themselves were detected using the Gephi websites network analysis program developed by the e-Diaspora Atlas project. The network visualisation consists of the intensity and the frequency of the external links that MGWEB share.

## Findings

The geographical distribution analysis<sup>7</sup> reveals that more than half of the Malagasy migrants websites are concentrated in France 60.33% (n=73). Canada and Switzerland host the second largest concentration of websites with 11.57% (n=14) and 9.91% (n=12) of the total. Several websites are located in the following European countries and regions: Italy (8.13%, n=10), Germany (3.25%, n=4) and Benelux (1.62%, n=2). The remaining websites are located in Egypt, the UK, the USA and the Philippines. The most important part of Malagasy migrants websites are, therefore, located in Central and North-Western Europe: 84.29% (n=102). North America is the second most important host continent of MGWEB as 13.22% (n=16) of them are located in Canada and the USA. Geographical distribution shows that most of the Malagasy migrant websites are concentrated in western and economically wealthier countries, and there are almost no MGWEB in South America, Russia, Oceania, Middle East, Africa (except Egypt), and Asia (except the Philippines).

This first result matches with the existing offline mapping distribution of Malagasy migrants, as shown in the previous studies on the Malagasy migrants. Without any exact quantitative data on the dispersion of the Malagasy migrants around the world, due to several causes, the existing studies confirmed that there are mostly Malagasy migrants in western and economically wealthier countries (Kotlok, 2016; Razafindrakoto et al., 2017).

### *The language used in Malagasy migrants websites*

The diasporic studies carried out to date demonstrate the significance of the language used in a diasporic community's offline everyday life in their host countries as well as in their websites. The distribution of languages reflects, above all, social integration and attachment to the homeland (Diminescu, 2012: 456).

The MGWEB in France, Germany, Benelux and Canada –which are the regions with the most websites– mainly use the host country's official language(s) (see Table 1). This language distribution is particularly interesting in France and Canada, where most of the MGWEB use French as the main language. This might be because French is a co-official language in Madagascar<sup>8</sup> and thus the webmasters of these websites have no problem in writing in French. However, as the same phenomenon occurs in Germany (where MGWEB use German), we consider it as an evidence of full integration into the host country's language system, and therefore society. Also, this means that it is inaccessible by the non-German-speaking Malagasy. The case of the websites in Italy seems to confirm this: there are as many Italian as Malagasy-speaking websites. Only the case of the websites located in Egypt is an exception as they are written in French and Malagasy. This might be due to the significant difference between Arabic, Malagasy, and French.

7 Depended on the availability of the WHOIS and IP address of the websites.

8 As a matter of fact, Malagasy and French are co-official languages in Madagascar. While Malagasy is used in everyday life, French is more commonly used for institutional and higher education purposes. Therefore, not every Malagasy in Madagascar speaks French; in general, the higher the educational level of someone is, the better he/she speaks French.

Table 1: The language used in the MGWEB per country

	Language distributions of the websites (%)				
	Host country's official language(s) <sup>9</sup>	Madagascar's co-official language(s)	Host country's +Madagascar's co-official language(s)	English	
Geographical locations	<b>FR (n=73)</b>	50.68	43.83	-	5.47
	<b>CA (n=14)</b>	71.42	28.58	-	-
	<b>CH (n=12)</b>	58.33	41.66	-	-
	<b>IT (n=10)</b>	20	60	20	-
	<b>DE (n=4)</b>	75	-	25	-
	<b>EGY (n=2)</b>	-	100	-	-
	<b>BENELUX (n=2)</b>	100	-	-	-
	<b>USA (n=2)</b>	50	50	-	-
	<b>PH (n=1)</b>	100	-	-	-
	<b>UK (n=1)</b>	-	100	-	-

Source: Author's own data

### *Malagasy migrants' websites according to their activities*

The contents analysis shows the activities of each website. We then distinguish those websites whose activities are oriented towards Malagasy migrants in the host country, be they for their social or personal needs, and those oriented towards the homeland. This is to highlight the importance of the connection to the homeland. Still, this raises the question of the "link to the homeland" that can be seen in doing homeland's practices in the host country or a direct implication for the homeland. Here we took as the main criteria the activities oriented towards the homeland as the most visible link to the homeland.

The first category, websites oriented to the activities run by and for Malagasy migrants in their country of residence lead in the landscape of MGWEB. The websites encompass the cultural and social practices of the Malagasy people in their country of origin and that are performed in their country of residence.

Table 2: Activities distribution of the websites

	Type of activities									
	Assoc - NGOs	Portal - Forum	Blog	Politics	Education	Religious	Media	Corporate	Leisure	Others
Number	21	11	34	1	1	37	10	1	4	1
%	17.35	9.09	28.09	0.82	0.82	30.57	8.26	0.82	3.30	0.82

Sources: Authors own data

Particularly, the predominant websites are those of Christian churches, as they represent 30.57% (n=37) of the total. France is the dominant host of the

<sup>9</sup> Are included in this category those websites located in part or full French-speaking countries (France, Switzerland, Benelux and Canada) and whose contents are entirely written in French even though it is a co-official language in Madagascar.

religious websites, with 66% of the total, followed by Switzerland and then Canada. Therefore, the number of the religious websites in these countries amounts proportionally to the number of Malagasy migrants in residence there. They represent the Roman Catholic church, and various protestant churches, which are the most practiced religion in Madagascar. The websites are used as an information channel for these communities, with information about the schedule of their meeting, their local organisation, and a place where the religious text scheduled for each season of the year are shared periodically. Assuming that religion does not represent the Malagasy culture, it still has a lot to do with the social organisation and dynamics of the Malagasy people as guiding their moral values and social life. These websites show evidence of very expanded and organised church institutions run by Malagasy migrants in their host countries.

Table 3: Percent of the MGWEB per activities and geographical locations

		Websites per activities (%)									Total (%)	
		Assoc - NGOs	Portal - Forum	Blog	Political websites	Education	Religious	Media	Corporate	Leisure		
Geographical locations	<b>FR (n=73)</b>	13.70	2.74	<b>34.24</b>	1.37	-	<b>34.24</b>	9.59	-	4.11	-	100
	<b>CA (n=14)</b>	14.29	14.29	<b>28.57</b>	-	7.14	<b>21.42</b>	7.14	-	7.14	-	100
	<b>CH (n=12)</b>	25	-	25	-	-	<b>41.66</b>	8.33	-	-	-	100
	<b>IT (n=10)</b>	<b>30</b>	20	20	-	-	20	-	10	-	-	100
	<b>DE (n=4)</b>	<b>50</b>	25	-	-	-	-	25	-	-	-	100
	<b>EGY (n=2)</b>	-	<b>100</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
	<b>BENELUX (n=2)</b>	50	-	-	-	-	<b>50</b>	-	-	-	-	100
	<b>USA (n=2)</b>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>50</b>	-	-	-	50	100
	<b>PH (n=1)</b>	-	<b>100</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
	<b>UK (n=1)</b>	-	<b>100</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100

Sources: Authors own data

### Interconnected political blogs: the most powerful websites

Blogs are the second most prevalent category of websites, covering 28.09% (n=34) of the whole. Yet, even if they are written and run by Malagasy migrants, they are not oriented only to Malagasy migrants, as blogs are open access and tackle universal topics. A large majority of these blogs address, most or entirely, political issues like elections or critiques of the governing government in Madagascar. Results show that among the most influential and active blogs are *gttinternational.blogspot.com*<sup>10</sup>, *pakysse.wordpress.com*<sup>11</sup>, *madagoravox.wordpress.com*<sup>12</sup>, and *mcmparis.wordpress.com*<sup>13</sup>. Their descriptions (as shown in their content) reveal some common characteristics: they were all launched after the 2009 coup in Madagascar, to which they all express opposition.

10 A political blog against other countries' interference in the Malagasy political sphere and of the 2009 coup.

11 A blog tackling Malagasy environmental and political issues.

12 A political blog launched after the 2009 coup in Madagascar.

13 A Malagasy citizen movement launched after the events of 2009.

### Associations by and for Malagasy migrants and/or Madagascar

A significant number (17.35%, n=21) of the corpus represent non-profit/charitable initiatives (see “Associations” in Table 3). These websites were divided into two main groups according to the target of the initiatives: those targeting the Malagasy migrants, and those targeting the Malagasy in Madagascar. Approximately two-thirds (67%) of them have as their final target the Malagasy living in Madagascar. These are mostly NGOs working in the areas of education, infrastructure, and child adoption initiatives in the host countries with projects based in Madagascar. The remaining websites (33%) are those built by and for Malagasy migrants in their country of residence, but whose actions are nonetheless indirectly oriented towards Madagascar. They are mostly designed for entertainment purpose, and as a communication channel for the Malagasy migrants in a given territory. They represent the most recent and developing entrepreneurial associations. Unlike the first category, these websites are mostly located in France (e.g., *zama-diaspora.com* aiming at gathering Malagasy migrants; *fact-madagascar.org* that federates the Europe-based NGOs working for Madagascar, and *juniors-pour-madagascar.com*, which is a point of convergence of Malagasy junior migrants-entrepreneurs willing to invest in Madagascar). These websites show emergent initiatives led by and for Malagasy migrants in their host countries but still oriented towards Madagascar.

This brief overview clearly shows the dominance of websites made by and for Malagasy migrants, such as association websites, websites for leisure, religious purposes, and so on. This reveals no well-structured social organisation of Malagasy migrants in their countries of residence, mostly in France, Switzerland and Canada. In contrast, the websites representing the activities oriented towards Madagascar carried out by a collective of Malagasy migrants is a very small and recent group, such as some NGOs.

### *Malagasy migrants website networks: a weak tie*

The notion of “ties” has been comprehensively used in networks analysis and was successfully used in diasporic studies to uncover the interconnection of the websites of a corpus (Bruslé, 2012; Kumar, 2012; Severo & Zuolo, 2012; Westbrook & Saad, 2016). It refers to the intensity and the density of the inbound and outbound links that connect the websites. The “ties” have to do with the relation that maintain a website (or a node) of the corpus to another. A node is not necessarily connected to another; if it is, it is linked by an “edge”. The websites that maintain the most inbound and outbound links and that gather a lot of websites around itself are named the “authorities”. A group of nodes and edges gathered around an authority and related to another group refers to a “cluster”.

Beyond their technical aspect, the “ties” are here assumed to represent also and foremost the relationship that interconnects the webmasters of these websites. The webmasters are interconnected and cite each other as they share various topics or causes. In fact, this is a benefit of ICTs in diasporic community-building: the act of sharing the same values, customs, culture of an imagined/claimed origin homeland. The intensity of the interlinking is then understood also as a mark of the intensity of the relationship.

The networks graph of the MGWEB below shows that there is no singular authority or node<sup>14</sup> among them. Instead, they are split into two core groups: an interconnected and powerful network of political blogs in the middle, with a group of satellite and disconnected websites surrounding this central network.

The network of the most prominent categories of Malagasy migrant websites (i.e. blogs and religious websites) are totally different. The interconnected blogs in the middle of the graph are the most powerful category (see Graph) and they exclude the other type of websites at the edge of the network. In fact, every blog is connected to at least one other blog. They also tend to have the same potentials. The satellite websites, composed mainly of religious, corporate and entertainment websites, have no interconnection between them and have clearly the weakest links. These are also split into smallest interconnected groups around the blogs: the entrepreneurial, entertainment, and a small group of religious websites.

Here, we assume that the very weak ties and connection between the MGWEB, with the exception of the blogs, represents their offline dynamics of their webmasters, and therefore the Malagasy migrants' community. This raises a fundamental question: why the very small number of MGWEB are so disconnected? Three main assumptions might be considered as elements of an answer: the fact that they are few, as was observed in the case of Egyptian diasporic websites (Severo & Zuolo, 2012: 17); the successful integration of Malagasy into their country of residence, as stated in previous studies (M. (Institut de R. pour le D. Razafindrakoto et al., 2017); or the difference of the subjects addressed on the websites.

### Graph: Malagasy diaspora website networks.



Source: Author's own data

14 A website attracting most of the links and which the other websites are related to.

### *Mapping the Malagasy diasporic groups and pages on Facebook*

Some public groups and pages<sup>15</sup> of Malagasy migrants communities on Facebook were also accessed and analysed in order to complete the mapping of the MGWEB. These groups and pages were created by members of the Malagasy community in a given territory or place for multiples purposes:

*'Ity Pejy ity dia natokana ho an'ny rehetra izay liana amin'ireo hetsika maro samihafa tanterahan'ireo mpianatra malagasy eto Rosia.' (This page is dedicated to those interested in the several activities of the Malagasy students in Russia) (Russia, page, 3,724 followers).*

*'Nous avons quitté notre pays pour y préparer un avenir différent, nos enfants sont nés ici. Nous resterons toujours Malagasy.' (We left our homeland to prepare there a better future, our children are born in France. We will always be Malagasy) (France, page, 10,962 followers).*

*'this page is to help people in Madagascar to know more about America or help them to live in this country. In the future, I want to have a Malagasy organization in America.' (USA, page, 6,170 followers).*

The data gathered from the Facebook pages and groups match, once again, the pattern of the offline distribution of the Malagasy migrants' community, and also the geographical distribution of MGWEB. France is the country with most of the Malagasy Facebook pages and groups (n=11), and with the largest number of followers. It is followed by Canada (n=4), and several countries such as Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK, China, Dubai, Japan, Korea, Mauritius, Philippines, Russia, Seychelles, Turkey, and the USA.

Despite this pattern, the most significant finding is that the Facebook pages and groups exist in more countries than the websites. The geographical mapping of the Malagasy migrants' pages and groups on Facebook shows there is also a significant number of connected Malagasy migrants in Asia and Russia. This means that Facebook is an online meeting point for the invisible and discrete Malagasy migrants spread over the world, and especially of those individuals not active on websites or blogs.

### Conclusion

This paper analysed the online activities and practices of the Malagasy migrants, reflecting their offline social dynamics. The findings show phenomena related to the dynamics of the Malagasy, but also lead us to reflect on the online dynamics of a specific diaspora in the digital sphere.

The most surprising result is the lack of an authority and predominance of the notable strong ties of the individual blogs mostly related to political issues

---

15 Data accessed according to their "public" access. The privacy policy of Facebook was respected in data collection. Facebook has recently made some information (i.e. the date of creation and the number of followers/members) of each page and group accessible. Data accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

in Madagascar. This demonstrates the importance of the bloggers' group and politically influential persons within the Malagasy migrant community that act, at the very least, as a watchdog group. This is an evidence of what the existing studies on the Malagasy migrants defines as a "potential elite group, geographically decentralized, but likely to influence the national trajectory (of Madagascar)." (M. (Institut de R. pour le D. Razafindrakoto et al., 2017).

The results also demonstrated the lack of online ties of Malagasy migrant religious websites, which is the most important category of the MGWEB. This is contradictory to the fact that the *fiangonana* (church) is a meeting point for Malagasy abroad (Rasoloniaina, 2013). It could be that the more frequented institutions in a given geographical space have a reduced need to make themselves visible and interconnected online, in contrast to the wide and recent initiatives, such as the entrepreneurs, who have a greater need to make themselves visible.

Finally, the remarkable predominance of the websites and also the Facebook groups built by and for Malagasy migrants (in other words, the few initiatives oriented towards the homeland) is also a significant result. A large number of websites are dedicated to providing the address of local Malagasy churches in the host countries or ethnic leisure centres (pubs, restaurants, etc.). We understand this as a desire of the Malagasy living abroad to live like at "home", while being integrated, at least geographically speaking. This, added to the lack of connection between the websites, shows the Malagasy migrant collective as a diaspora in-the-making or 'incipient diaspora' (Scheffer, 2003: 131).

## Bibliography and references

- Brubaker, R. (2005). The 'diaspora' diaspora. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997>
- Bruslé, T. (2012). Nepalese diasporic websites: Signs and conditions of a diaspora in the making? *Social Science Information*, 51(4), 593–610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018412456916>
- Claverie, É. (2011). Trente-cinq ans de Rencontres nationales sportives. Unité et identité malgaches. *Hommes & Migrations*, (1289), 70–79. <https://doi.org/10.4000/hommesmigrations.799>
- Claverie, É., & Combeau-Mari, É. (2011). La rencontre nationale sportive malgache et sa revue: Trait d'union. *Migrations Société*, 137(5), 111. <https://doi.org/10.3917/migra.137.0111>
- Cohen, R. (1997). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. EUA.
- Diminescu, D. (2008). The connected migrant: An epistemological manifesto. *Social Science Information*, 47(4), 565–579. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018408096447>
- Diminescu, D. (2012). Introduction: Digital methods for the exploration, analysis and mapping of e-diasporas. *Social Science Information*, 51(4), 451–458. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018412456918>

- Kotlok, N. (2016). *Étude du profil de la diaspora malagasy en France*. Retrieved from [https://www.forim.net/sites/default/files/Etude sur le Profil de la diaspora Malagasy en France\\_FINAL.PDF](https://www.forim.net/sites/default/files/Etude sur le Profil de la diaspora Malagasy en France_FINAL.PDF)
- Kumar, P. (2012). Transnational Tamil networks: Mapping engagement opportunities on the Web. *Social Science Information*, 51(4), 578–592. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018412456770>
- Rakotoary, S. (2017). Les pratiques sociales de la diaspora connectée malgache sur le réseau socionumérique Facebook. *Les Doctorales de La SFSIC*.
- Rakotoary, S. (2018). Les pratiques sociales de la diaspora connectée malgache sur le réseau socionumérique Facebook. *Journées Doctorales de La SFSIC 2017*. Retrieved from <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01696451>
- Rasoloniaina, B. (2013). Représentations et pratiques du malgache des jeunes de France : le malgache « d'ici ». *Études Océan Indien*, 48, 0–15. <https://doi.org/10.4000/oceanindien.1546>
- Razafindrakoto, M. (Institut de R. pour le D., Razafindratsima, N. (Institut de R. pour le D., Razakamanana, N. (Institut de R. pour le D., & Roubaud, F. (Institut de R. pour le D. (2017). *La diaspora malagasy en France et dans le monde : une communauté invisible ?*
- Razafindrakoto, M., & Razindratsima, N. (2017). *La diaspora malagasy en France et dans le monde : une communauté invisible ?* Retrieved from <http://www.documentation.ird.fr/hor/fdi:010072515>
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1(1), 83–99. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1991.0004>
- Scheffer, G. (2003). *Diaspora Politics. At Home Abroad*. Retrieved from [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)
- Severo, M., & Zuolo, E. (2012). Egyptian e-diaspora: Migrant websites without a network? *Social Science Information*, 51(4), 521–533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018412456772>
- Tsagarousianou, R. (2004). Rethinking the concept of diaspora: mobility, connectivity, and communication in a globalised world. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 1(1), 52–65. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Westbrook, D. A., & Saad, S. M. (2016). Religious Identity and Borderless Territoriality in the Coptic e-Diaspora. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-016-0479-8>