

Return of a President After the coup in Madagascar

A feature documentary by Lotte Mik-Meyer

An acclaimed, intimate portrait of a President forced from his country

Brutally forced out of his country in a violent *coup'd'état*, enduring five years of exile despairing over failed negotiations, and jailed *incommunicado* and threatened with death on his return – that's the epic story of Madagascar's President Marc Ravalomanana told in a new documentary film by Danish film maker Lotte Mik-Meyer.

The film was nominated for a F:ACT AWARD at CPH:DOX, the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, the third largest in the world - where it had its world premiere to critical acclaim in March this year.

Filmmaker Lotte Mik-Meyer was granted unique access to Mr Ravalomanana and his advisors during his exile and return. She is present in private family and political gatherings and during confidential meetings; and observes the political processes - in daily life, over a cup of coffee, on the terrace, in the corridor where history is in the making.

The film chronicles the political intrigues and power plays around South African Development Community (SADC) led negotiations to return Madagascar to constitutional normalcy, and unashamedly tells the story of the coup from President Ravalomanana's experience.

The negotiations are tainted. President Ravalomanana - to his detriment - places utter faith in the Southern African Development Community (SADC); the body mandated by the international community to resolve the conflict.

He is forced to accept that he, the legal President, must remain in exile, while the coup leader; a 34-year-old former radio DJ turned politician, is appointed as President of the High Transitional Authority - seemingly at the behest of France, the former colonial power.

This violates the African Union's own Charter which says that perpetrators of an unconstitutional change of government shall not participate in elections to restore the democratic order or hold any position of responsibility in the political institutions of their State.

Mr Ravalomanana is also coerced by SADC into agreeing that neither he nor the coup leader will be allowed to contest the Presidential election in 2012.

He suffers political gerrymandering, which includes the seizure of his passport. His wife, Mrs Lalao Ravalomanana, and his daughter-in-law are physically manhandled out of the country and forced onto an aircraft bound for Singapore. His son, Tojo, has to seek asylum in the South African Embassy after threats from the coup leader.

The film documents the inside story of a man who, with his wife, Lalao, his family and his team of counsellors, fights to return to his country.

'Return of a President – after the coup in Madagascar' is produced by Kamoli Films, Magic Hour Films and Mikmeyer Film.

Watch the trailer here: <https://goo.gl/QDMD0z>

Press stills can be downloaded here: <https://goo.gl/bME5gB>

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Synopsis - 'Return of a President - After the coup in Madagascar'

A 78-minute feature documentary by Lotte Mik-Meyer | Produced by Kamoli Films, Magic Hour Films and Mikmeyer Film.

Brutally forced out of Madagascar by a military *coup'd'état*, now exiled in South Africa, Madagascar's democratically elected and president, Marc Ravalomanana, gathers a team of advisors to help solve the political crisis in his country.

The exiled president is determined, peacefully, to win back his homeland and office from coup leader Andry Rajoelina, who, illegally, is in control of the country, while much of the population is left to starve.

The president turns to the international community to help mediate a diplomatic solution, but finds himself navigating a political minefield.

There are many forces at play who are implacably opposed to his return and not interested in reinstating democracy in Madagascar – not least French interests, and the former colonial power seems to actively support the coup regime, making President Ravalomanana a virtual prisoner in South Africa for 5 years. He makes two legal attempts to return to Madagascar – both of which are blocked by the coup leader.

With unique access to the president and his confidential meetings with his advisors and to the international negotiations, **'Return of a President'** is the story of history in the making - told from Mr Ravalomanana's point of view -- as he struggles to go home and reinstate democracy in Madagascar.

'Return of a President' is almost a Shakespearian tragedy. It's a riveting, intimate portrait and, like Shakespeare's *Lear*, it shows a man who is more sinned against than sinning.

Director's Statement - by Lotte Mik-Meyer

'Return of a President - After the coup in Madagascar'

I invite my audience into a space to which we do not normally have access. A space where the story we have yet to experience will unfold.

The president of a country with 23 million inhabitants has been forced out of power and the country by a violent, military *coup'd état* orchestrated by local power elites and the military. France, the former colonial power, seems to have supported the coup. Threatened with death, the president has escaped into exile in South Africa. Now he wants to return to his country.

The country is called Madagascar.

This story puts me into a state of alert: An African president in exile. A rich Christian businessman who has gone into politics. He has made his way from nothing to the country's supreme office. He has been ousted by a coup – is he in any way to blame for this? Should I place myself at his side and try to get an insight into his world? How should my position be: critical, observing, participating?

I'm seeing a man of power, but a man who has been removed from power. A man who is supposed to hold the key to the solution of his country's problems. How should I place him? Should I do it at all?

I want to go beyond normal critical assumptions and dare to see with my own eyes what is happening. I want to see how political processes are experienced in the intimate sphere. In daily life, over a cup of coffee, on the terrace, in the corridor. I want to look at family life in order to understand how it's influenced by the current situation.

My method is anthropological. I set rules for myself: the rooms must be bedrooms, kitchens and dining rooms. The view must be close. My physical distance to those involved must be so close that I can reach out for them and vice versa. We must be able to sense each other in this space. I want to be in the middle of everything.

I move in and stay with the president or his advisers. It is unusual in a very usual way. Can we look at the president and experience how life appears from his perspective? Dare we rely on what we feel and sense? This is the question I ask myself during the five years of filming and the question I wish the viewers to ask themselves.

I hope the answer is yes.

About Marc Ravalomanana

President Marc Ravalomanana, entered politics to make Madagascar economically independent and to develop its democracy and economy.

Originally from a poor farming background, Marc Ravalomanana fought his way through the ranks of society. With his wife he started a small yoghurt factory in their home - selling yoghurt from the family bicycle.

From those humble beginnings he rose to prominence as the founder and CEO of the vast dairy conglomerate TIKO, later launching successful wholesaler MAGRO and several additional companies.

He entered politics in 1999 founding the *Tiako Iarivo* political party and was elected mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, holding the position from 1999 to 2001.

In August 2001 he announced his candidacy as an independent in the December 2001 presidential election. He took office as President in 2002 amidst a dispute over election results after he successfully pressed his claim to have won a majority in the first round. The political party *Tiako i Madagasikara (TIM)* was founded in 2002 and came to dominate legislative and local elections.

He was re-elected in December 2006, again with a (larger) majority in the first round.

During his presidency, Madagascar made significant advances toward development targets and experienced an average of 7% growth per year. His administration oversaw the construction of thousands of new schools and health clinics. Road rehabilitation aided in improving rural farmers' access to markets. The establishment of the independent anti-corruption agency *BIANCO*, and the adoption of diverse supporting policies resulted in a decline in government corruption. The acreage of natural areas under protection expanded in fulfilment of his *Madagascar Naturally* development program.

The 2007 release of Ravalomanana's comprehensive development strategy, the *Madagascar Action Plan*, set targets and goals for national development over his second term in the areas of governance, infrastructure, agriculture, health, economy, environment and national solidarity.

To globalise Madagascar's economy and opportunities, President Ravalomanana joined the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and instructed that Malagasy children be taught English as a third language at school.

About Madagascar

Madagascar is an island state in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Southeast Africa, with a population of about 23 million.

The size of France, the nation comprises the island of Madagascar (the fourth-largest island in the world), and numerous smaller peripheral islands.

Geology and nature

Following the prehistoric breakup of supercontinent Gondwana, Madagascar split from the Indian peninsula around 88 million years ago, allowing native plants and animals to evolve in relative isolation. Madagascar is a biodiversity hotspot; over 90% of its wildlife is found nowhere else on Earth.

The island's diverse ecosystems and unique wildlife are threatened by the encroachment of the rapidly growing human population and current lack of environmental controls. It is one of the 10 countries most at risk from global warming.

Human foraging on Madagascar dates to 2000 BC. Human settlement occurred between 350 BC and AD 550 by Austronesian peoples arriving on outrigger canoes from Borneo. They were joined around AD 1000 by Bantu migrants crossing the Mozambique Channel from East Africa. The Malagasy ethnic group comprises 18 or more sub-groups of which the largest are the Merina of the central highlands.

Society and economy

Until the late 18th century, Madagascar was ruled by fragmented, shifting socio political alliances. Beginning in the early 19th century, most of the island was united and ruled as the Kingdom of Madagascar by a series of Merina nobles. The monarchy collapsed in 1897 when the island was absorbed into the French colonial empire, from which it gained independence in 1960.

Madagascar has been a constitutional democracy since 1992. It is a member of the United Nations, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Malagasy and French are official languages. The majority of the population adheres to traditional beliefs, Christianity, or an amalgam of both.

Madagascar is one of the least developed countries in the world, according to the United Nations.

Ecotourism and agriculture, with greater investments in education, health, and private enterprise, are key elements of its development strategy. Under President Ravalomanana, these investments produced substantial 7% economic growth, but the benefits were not evenly spread, producing tension over the increasing cost of living and declining living standards among the poor and some segments of the middle class.

The economy has been weakened by the 2009-2013 political crisis, and quality of life remains low for the majority of the Malagasy population. Currently 70% of the population

live on less than US \$1 per day.

A January 2017 World Bank report says: “The Malagasy economy has been gradually improving and the medium-term outlook is encouraging. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth is expected to reach 4.1% in 2016, exceeding the average rate of 2.6% recorded over the past five years.

“In 2016, the economy was led by the expansion of the tertiary sector, public works programs, and the recovery in the primary sector, which was aided by favourable weather conditions and higher vanilla prices. Control over inflation and the improvement in the external balance owing to greater inflows of direct investment reinforced economic stability.”

“However, with an extreme poverty rate of 77.8% in 2012, Madagascar is ranked among the poorest countries in Africa. Although it made some progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the 2000s, the political crisis from 2009 to 2014 seriously undermined that progress.”

“Today Madagascar’s education, health, nutrition and water access outcomes are among the poorest in the world.”

“The country’s development challenges are immense: 90% of the population is poor; per capita GDP stands at \$420; one child in two under the age of five suffers from chronic malnutrition; and Madagascar was ranked 154th out of the 187 countries in the 2015 Human Development Index.”

The film's protagonists

Marc Ravalomanana:

Founder and CEO of the vast dairy conglomerate TIKO, successful wholesaler MAGRO, and several additional companies – all of which were destroyed in the 2009 coup.

Entered politics in 1999 and was elected mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, from 1999 to 2001.

Took office as President in 2002 amidst a dispute over election results in which he successfully pressed his claim to have won a majority in the first round.

Was re-elected in December 2006, again with a majority in the first round.

Deposed in a violent *coup'd état* in 2009.

Lalao Ravalomanana:

Wife of president Ravalomanana and elected first female mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, in 2015.

Peter Mann:

South African Public Relation specialist and strategist, former journalist and founder of consultancy, Meropa Communications.

He is a communications, strategy and media advisor to President Ravalomanana.

Brian Currin:

Advisor and special envoy to President Ravalomanana.

South African lawyer, and international mediator.

Was National Director of Lawyers for Human Rights in South Africa and Counsel for victims to the Truth & Reconciliation Commission.

Bakoly Rakotomalala:

Actively pursuing the promotion of democracy and anti-corruption in Madagascar.

Worked for Amnesty International in 2002 on their Reports on Madagascar.

In 2013 was asked by the current government to help prepare a Law on National Reconciliation in Madagascar.

Jens Thorsen:

Served as CEO of President Ravalomanana's businesses in Madagascar.

Moved to South Africa to help win the president's return to Madagascar.

Now working to reopen the vandalized factories in Madagascar – and has already increased employment from five people, while the factories were not able to produce, to over 800 people.

Behind the camera/narrator/Director

Lotte Mik-Meyer

Holds an MA in International Development Studies and Media Studies from Roskilde University Center and the University of Copenhagen, with studies at the University of Durham and Jussieu Paris VII.

For the past 15 years she has worked as a documentary director and as a teacher in documentary and television in Denmark, Europe, Vietnam, the Middle East and the United States.

Previously the leader of the Program Quality Project on DR TV.

Lotte has many years' experience filming alone in conflict areas like Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Madagascar.

Her film *The Arab Initiative* was about the difficult art of diplomacy during the "drawing crisis", shown at a number of Middle Eastern film festivals, and shortlisted for the Danish DOX Award, in the International Competition, *Docudays*, at the Beirut International Film Festival and in addition On TV 2.

Filmography:

Return of a President - After the coup in Madagascar (2017)

Feature Documentary, 78 min.

Arab Initiative (2008)

Feature Documentary, 58 min.

What We See (2006)

Documentary, 58 min.

Drawing (2006)

Educational tutorials, 90 min.

Tolerance and Participation (2006)

Educational film, 25 min.

A Meeting and a Kiss (2005)

Short documentary, 28 min.

Producers

Helle Ulsteen:

Established Kamoli Films in 2007, developed a solid network and produced many arthouse films in international artistic collaborations.

She was a member of European production networks such as EAVE and ACE.

International award winning films, included:

Lisandro Alonso's Argentine *Jauja* (2014) with Viggo Mortensen and Ghita Nørby; Helle Toft Jensen's *Moussa Diallo Man and Music* (2015);

Jon Bang Carlsens *In Love's Name* (2013);

Pernilla August's Swedish *Beyond* (2011);

Anne Gyrithe Bonnes *Aung San Suu Kyi - Lady of No Fear* (2010);

Arto Halonen Finnish *Shadow of the Holy Book* (2007); and

Simone Aaberg Kærn and Magnus Bejmar's *Smiling in a Warzone* (2006).

Ulsteen also produced a series of films related to Dogme and Lars von Trier.

Originally the producer of the film, she collaborated with Lise Lense-Møller, Magic Hour Films, on several projects, and assigned the project to Lise, when unfortunately she had to withdraw due to the illness.

Sadly, she died in July 2016.

Lise Lense-Møller

Founded Magic Hour Films in 1984 and has produced and co-produced a host of films -- both documentary, feature films and short fiction.

Is engaged in professional education at international level, as an expert and group leader for EAVE since 1993.

Magic Hour Films focuses on high-profile, creative documentary and art-house fiction with international potential.

Its work includes films such as The Oscar-nominated *Burma VJ* - about the monk resurrection in Burma by Anders Østergaard, which has received 52 international awards including: the Joris Ivens Award, CPH:DOX 2008; Robert and Bodil 2009, Cinema for Peace International Human Rights Film Award, Berlin; Vaclav Havel Award; Peabody Award; Grierson Award; and PUMA Impact Award.

In addition, *Into Eternity* by Michael Madsen, a film about the world's first permanent nuclear waste stock has received the Grand Prix, Nyon, IDFA Green Screen Award; the Nordic Panorama Grand Prix; and 15 other prizes. It has been distributed in cinemas in the UK, USA, Japan, France, Spain, Holland and Scandinavia.

Recent titles include:

1989 – A Stateman opens up - on the Iron Curtain's fall and Europe's reunification by Anders Østergaard and Erszébet Ràcz (2014);

The Visit – An alien Encounter by Michael Madsen - on space research and the meeting with the unknown (2015);

Mona Lisa Story (as co-producer) by Jessica Nesselblatt - A History of overcoming drug addiction and winning life and love (2016); and

Tutti a Casa - Power to the People? - by Lise Birk Pedersen about the Italian protest party, Movimento Cinque Stelle, populism and the difficult art of democracy (2017).

Credit List (a selection)

Director and cinematographer: Lotte Mik-Meyer

Producers: Helle Ulsteen and Lise Lense-Møller

Editors: Signe Rebekka Kaufmann and Stefan Sundlöf

Sound design / Mix: Bobby Salomon Hess and Gido Martis, CosmoTone

Composer: Halfdan E.

Visual post production: Edithouse

Contributors: Marc Ravalomanana, Lalao Ravalomanana, Jens Thorsen, Bakoly Rakotomalala, Brian Currin, Peter Mann and others.

Produced by: Kamoli Films, Magic Hour Films and MikMeyer Film

With the support of: The Danish Film Institute, film consultant Klara Grunning-Harris and Cecilia Lidin, and in collaboration with DR, Editor Mette Hoffmann Meyer

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