

## RISK AND VULNERABILITY, by Tom Reynolds

**Summary:** *Contrasting the face value of statistics with reality, we compare a disinterested reporter's callous attitude to a natural disaster, with the community spirit of villagers and researchers on the ground.*

**Characters:**

**REPORTER (m), British, 30s.**

**COLLEAGUE (m), a Malagasy immigrant, 30s.**

**RESEARCHER (-), late 50s.**

**TRANSLATOR (-), 30s.**

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### *In a newspaper office*

**REPORTER:** Another natural disaster story. This is such a waste of my time... It was a big one, though: fifty thousand homes destroyed. Maybe if I can come up with a name for it... **(Opens a document, reads)** What have we got...? University press release: "if you live in this part of Madagascar you have a one in five hundred, or naught point two percent chance you lose your home to cyclone each year..." this will do! All this aid money we're sending and it's only that tiny chance. Stop sending all this money abroad. Nought point two percent! I've got more chance of winning big on the scratch cards!

**COLLEAGUE:** It happened to me.

**REPORTER:** I didn't have you down as a gambler...

**COLLEAGUE:** We lost our home.

**REPORTER:** What?

**COLLEAGUE:** I was born in Madagascar.

**REPORTER:** Oh right, is there a part where they speak like that?

**COLLEAGUE:** I was young when it happened. and anyway, you met my mum last year: you must have noticed her accent.

**REPORTER:** Oh, I thought she was an asylum seeker you'd taken in, I know how you are with the charities.

**COLLEAGUE (astonished):** You ...? - my family is split down the middle because we had to move. My mum had a bit of luck and a lot of hard work to get me here, but we lost people. We lost my dad.

**REPORTER:** Oh sorry, I really didn't know. Well, you were pretty unlucky there -

**COLLEAGUE:** You know if people have a 0.2 percent chance of losing their home every year, that's going to add up over a couple of decades.

**REPORTER:** Yes, well, we've got enough to worry about over here before we save everyone else in the world.

**COLLEAGUE:** It makes a difference, what you write. You should really make sure you understand this before you submit it.

**REPORTER:** Look, I know you've got an interest in this place, but this isn't about Madagascar: this is about spending billions in aid when there are children in poverty here. And this is coming from a university press release: what more do you want?

**Overheard:** *Trano atsimo sy avaratra, izay tsy mahalena ialofana*

**In the village; sounds gradually reveal the setting [maybe houses being built, woodworking etc]**

**RESEARCHER:** So based on the last decade of cyclones each person here has a one in 500 chance they lose their home to natural disaster this year. Do you know what we design for in the Global North? About one in a million. So that's what we put in our press release.

**TRANSLATOR:** yes, but I'm not sure your average man or woman in the street, or more importantly your average reporter, is going to get the picture from those numbers. I think for most people one in five hundred, one in a million... it's all the same.

**RESEARCHER:** oh that's a neat joint: how do they work such dense wood with hand tools?... If we can work out where the weak points are, we can model that risk, and suggest really effective changes. I really think that's the best way to get aid agencies and communities funded to improve things.

**overheard voices**

**RESEARCHER (cont'd):** what were they saying? seemed quite urgent.

**TRANSLATOR:** the warden has been in contact: there's a big cyclone on the way

**RESEARCHER:** I thought we were clear of cyclone season?

**TRANSLATOR:** you're the one who models climate change!

**RESEARCHER:** oh no, no, no, no. what do we do? can we get out?

**TRANSLATOR:** walking for six hours to get to the car now would be a really bad idea. I've been through this once before. Stay calm, listen and help when you're asked.

*time passes*

*Some noise of rain, lots of chatter (in Malagasy?) this part takes a while and should convey a strenuous effort. A montage:*

**TRANSLATOR:** Over here, we're lifting the roof off

**RESEARCHER:** Off the house?... okay... tell me where to hold...

**TRANSLATOR:** That side.

**RESEARCHER:** what? It's far too heavy!

**TRANSLATOR:** Everyone, together. Ready?

**RESEARCHER:** Wait, wait... okay.

*strains, lots of background noise, we generally get the idea that the whole village is working on this together*

**RESEARCHER (cont'd):** it's off! Wow. I can't believe we did that, all in one piece... ..

**TRANSLATOR:** we have to carry it up the hill ...

**RESEARCHER:** oh of course, the storm surge could swamp all of this down here ...

*Some time passes as they move the roof up the hill*

**TRANSLATOR:** Then we attach it to the ground.

**RESEARCHER:** This looks solid: it will be really tight for all of us to shelter, though... it's only palm leaf and eucalyptus ...

*Under the roof, removed and put on the floor, cramped noisy: cyclone noises, banging of doors and windows, flying debris, sound of wind*

**RESEARCHER:** Come this way a bit, I know we're all on the floor, but don't be cramped in a muddy corner to make room for me.

...

Why are they going out? It sounds terrible out there.

*Time passes, we hear people coming back into the shelter*

**(overheard)** *Trano atsimo sy avaratra, izay tsy mahalena ialofana*

**RESEARCHER:** who are they?

**TRANSLATOR:** Some fishermen from down the coast: they brought their boat up on the beach - couldn't get to anywhere else

**RESEARCHER:** What were the elders saying then?

**TRANSLATOR:** It's an old saying. It basically means: if one neighbour's house lets the rain in, the other will shelter them.

***Transition back from the noise of the cyclone to the newspaper office***

**COLLEAGUE:** If you could hear the noise of a cyclone, just have bamboo walls and a palm leaf roof between you and that force of the wind and the sea...

**REPORTER:** I've got troubles of my own, friend: deadlines to meet, newspapers to sell... Are you playing five-a-side tonight?

***Transition back to the noise of the cyclone.***

**RESEARCHER:** the water sounds close. It's wet enough in here anyway, but we could drown if the sea water comes in, and that's if a landslide doesn't come down the hill.

***A huge crashing sound, sound of splintering wood, generally terrifying***

**RESEARCHER: at the top of their voice:** A tree! Are you alright? Can you hear me? Can you hear me? Somebody help!

***Another crash.***

**END**

**NOTES**

Traditional sayings from Harinaivo:

"Trano atsimo sy avaratra, izay tsy mahalena ialofana": Between two neighboring houses, the one which does not let the water (rain) in will serve as shelter for the occupants of both houses. It is a very old saying that reflects the solidarity within the community, neighbors or inhabitants of the same village. Traditionally, Malagasy people used to have leaks in their roofs or have their roofs blown away by the wind during rainy seasons and the occupants of the damaged house are welcome to take shelter in the neighboring house. This proverb is

still accurate nowadays but flooded houses are more common than leaking roofs in the highlands and people in the regions continue to have their roofs off or their entire houses blown away during cyclones. People usually get help from their neighbors or relatives rather than wait for the authorities to provide temporary shelter.

"Mampakatra feta tsy marihitra ka avy ny orana dia akipany". If you use bad mortar when building your house, the rain will blow it away. This one is a less familiar proverb and it is inviting build their houses correctly in view of the bad weather. In more general way, it is telling people to work hard enough in normal times to be prepared for future hard times.

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