Plants and plant names reflect this history. Bananas, for instance, are generally called by the East African name akondro (from Bantu kondo and variants), but also by the Malayo-Polynesian word fontsy, including a variant ontsy that comes from a south Sulawesi language (see p. 164 and the map on p. 158). Sometimes the latter names are used as modifiers of akondro, to name varieties. The term kida, from India, is found in Madagascar; the Bahasa Indonesia word pisang gives rise to a couple of local descendants, and Arabic terms have also gotten into the banana vocabulary.

Rice, the staple food, has an even more complicated linguistic history. The standard word vary for rice (plant and grain) comes from south Kalimantan, but may be Dravidian originally. Other words associated with rice come from other Indonesian languages. Fary, a local word, looks like a form of vary, but is actually a derivative of the Proto-Austronesian word pajey for the rice plant (p. 89). Various African sources provide terms for rice varieties, cultivation practices, and other rice-related matters. Trematrema for a swidden field (in northeast Madagascar), for instance, is Swahili tematema, “to cut down, clear.” Conversely, the Swahili word wari for cooked rice is Indonesian, possibly via Madagascar (p. 92).

Sugarcane is also generally called fary, “rice (plant),” for obscure reasons. It provides us this beautiful bit of folk poetry—just enjoy the sounds (Fox 1990:318–319):

Hianao fary manga filalaon-jaza
Izabo fary fontsy fanala betabeta
You are the blue sugarcane, plaything
of children;
  I am the white sugarcane, the slaker
  of thirst.

Yams, especially *Dioscorea alata*, are *ovi*, the reflex
of the standard Indonesian *ubi* (“o” represents /u/ in
Malagasy). An apparently mysterious word *kambary* is
used for some yams and locally for sweet potatoes. Garlic has an African name, *tongolo*, from a Bantu
word for a root or bulb (p. 187–188). It is now
sometimes *tongologasy* “Malagasy bulb” to distinguish it
from the *tongolovazaha*, “bulb brought by the white
people,” the ball onion. These are only a few names
from the dozens of names and 55 plant species
covered in the book. Garden domesticates include
obscurey such as *Plectranthus rotundifolius* (an African
root crop known as country potato) and *Calophyllum
inophyllum* (a widespread timber tree known as the
Alexandrian laurel balltree with medicinal uses).

Dr. Beaujard provides thorough and up-to-date
accounts of the origins, genetics, and uses of these
plants, making this book often the most current
general work on the botany of African and south
Asian crops. Thorough details on local medical uses
make an otherwise almost unretrievable local lore
available to the world. Dr. Beaujard’s ability to
command an incredible amount of detail is excelled
only by his ability to synthesize the material with style
and brilliance.

Madagascar is currently suffering an
eccosystem as bad as any in the world. A rapidly
expanding population, a weak government, and a
worldwide market for precious woods, vanilla, and
other commodities is reducing the country to ruin.
Lemurs are endemic to Madagascar; there are over 80
species; all are threatened or endangered. Similar
diversity and threat characterize the chameleons. The
unique dry-forests of the southwest, rich in endemic
species, are disappearing. Madagascar’s population
only recently became dense, so intensive land use has
not been the rule. Roving cattle-herding dominates
much of the island. Swiddening is rarely as carefully
controlled and managed as it is in Mexico or
Southeast Asia. Dooryard gardens, though they are
the home to many domesticates, are spottily
developed. For further thoughts see “Madagascar on
My Mind” and “The Tropical Food Security Garden”
on my website (www.krazykioti.com). These and Dr.
Beaujard’s book reference much of the relevant
literature. Indonesia’s intensive dooryard garden
culture, with its layered tree canopies and highly
diverse crops, has taken root in Africa only in
Zanzibar, where one can imagine oneself in Java or
Sumatera. It could easily be developed in Madagascar.

Dr. Beaujard’s book could be an important
resource for future improvement. It would allow
Madagascar to develop an intensive horticulture that
would greatly increase food production while releasing
land for nature reserves. The book is so good that
readers are advised to dust off their high-school
French and dig in.

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