Contest for Land in Madagascar

Environment, Ancestors and Development

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BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON

2013

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LAND COMPETITION AND HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT
RELATIONS IN MADAGASCAR

Sandra J.T.M. Evers, Gwyn Campbell, and Michael Lambek¹

Ny tany vadiben-Janahary: mihary ny velona, manotrana ny maty
("The earth is God's chief wife: she maintains the living and guards the dead")
Malagasy proverb (Houlder 1929, pt.1: 6).

On 17 March 2009, after a bitter three-month power struggle, a military-backed coup toppled the incumbent Marc Ravalomanana and replaced him with a hitherto unknown 34-year-old ex-disc jockey named Andry Rajoelina as President of Madagascar. Rajoelina, during his prior two year tenure as mayor of Antananarivo, claimed that Ravalomanana had put up Madagascar "for sale" on the international market, pointing to a purported land deal with Daewoo Logistics which would have earmarked approximately 1.3 million hectares of land to palm oil and maize (Teyssier et al. 2009/2010, Vinciguerra in this volume). He sensed that the land issue was a tinder box he could ignite through a populist campaign which could serve as justification for a seizure of power. He further charged that Ravalomanana's one-dimensional economic development agenda failed to offer a social plan likely to improve the lot of the population (Burnod 2009; Randrianja 2012), over 70 per cent of whom live below the poverty threshold (World Bank 2012; Sarrasin 2006: 389).

Rajoelina's meteoric rise to power and politicisation of the land issue marked a fundamental turning point in Madagascar's history. Despite being a home-brewed revolution, the Daewoo affair dragged the country into the ideological arena of 'land-grab' politics, which already involved

¹ This work results from research and a conference generously funded by the Canada Research Chairs Fund, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Beatty Memorial Lectures Committee (McGill University), the Maxwell Cummings Distinguished Lectureship Committee, the Provost's Office (McGill University), the Dean, Faculty of Medicine (McGill University), Department of Human Genetics (McGill University), the International Institute for Advanced Studies (McGill University), and the Indian Ocean World Centre (McGill University). We also thank the authors and peer-reviewers of this volume for their valuable feedback. We are grateful to Natalja Laurey for her assistance in formatting this manuscript.

investors ranging from Wall Street, China and India to international conservationist groups. Whether Rajoelina's intentions were local or wider in scope, his campaign ensured that Madagascar would henceforth be front and centre of international debates on land and environmental issues that highlighted the island as variously a biodiversity hot-spot, zone of neo-colonialism, and 'green grab' victim. In the swirl of this hot political debate, there was a real risk that polemic would gain the ascendancy over discussion.

These events underscore the significance of this volume, which aims to examine land as a subjective, ontological reality for Malagasy people within the context of the historical, economic and cultural factors influencing the way they view land. For the Malagasy, large land acquisitions, endemic poverty, health and sovereignty loom large, as they do for many other peoples, notably on the African continent. However, land for the Malagasy is of particular importance as it also straddles the boundaries between the here and now, and the hereafter. This is what makes Madagascar significant as a terrain to understand the extent to which international and local treatments of land can be problematic. The assessment of multinational mining companies, state corporations acting as proxies for their respective governments, hedge fund companies or conservation groups is very much rooted in *realpolitik* and the achievement of policy aims over clear timelines. It is the aim of this book then to examine a more comprehensive range of human-environment interactions within the increasingly fierce climate of competition for land.

This book tracks key aspects of human-environment interactions, particularly focusing on the contemporary dynamics of World Bank-inspired land titling and other land projects. By 2009, over three million hectares of Madagascar's arable land was subject to foreign direct investment (FDI) aimed at promoting tourist, mining, infrastructural and agricultural projects (Uellenberg 2009). The 1999 enactment of new mining legislation has opened Madagascar to large-scale mineral investment (Sarrasin 2006). Despite Rajoelina's rhetoric and the abandonment of Daewoo's agricultural venture, the number of high-impact land projects in the country, particularly in mining (Andrianirina – Ratsialonana et al., 2011; Evers et al. 2011) have grown. Such developments were accelerated by the de-regulation of the Malagasy economy, guided by World Bank policies to open up the Malagasy economy for foreign investment while simultaneously offering Malagasy rural dwellers incentives to invest in land through offering them 'tenure security' (see Evers and Middleton chapters). NGOs started up and funded land titling projects throughout

Madagascar. In this volume, we discuss mining investments (including their partnerships with conservation NGOs) and land titling for local Malagasy, which have been at the core of land issue debates and policies in Madagascar over the past few decades.

Nature conservation and climate mitigation schemes can also be viewed as large-scale land acquisitions (Cotula et al. 2009; Smaller and Mann 2009; IIED 2009). These acquisitions are often characterized as 'green grabbing', or the appropriation of land and resources for environmental purposes (Fairhead et al. 2012). Conservation zones in the island have increased in size following Ravalomanana's 2003 pledge to triple the size of protected areas to six million hectares. Simultaneously, climate mitigation in the form of forest protection (referred to as REDD: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests) has been on the rise in the island (Ferguson 2009). Forest management is becoming increasingly subject to external pressures due to the active engagement of conservation NGOs imposing restrictive access policies in forest areas (c.f. Duffy 2006, Harper 2002, Horning 2008, Walsh 2005, Ferguson 2010). However, many Malagasy depend on forest products like wood and food items (GISC 2009), pitching them against these NGOs and foreign mining companies interested in exploiting the subsoil minerals of forestland.

We also re-examine whether and to what extent human-environment interactions have impacted on Malagasy ontology as a result of these developments. Swyngedouw (2004) and Whatmore (2002) observe that human relations are embedded in the environment or landscape, where land underlies and conditions the entire belief system. Samuels (1979), has observed that landscapes are formed in constant dialogue with social, cultural and economic factors and expressions, Roymans et al. (2009) developed the concept of 'landscape biography' in order to consider how landscapes are shaped as an outcome of a long-term and "complex interplay between the history of mentalities and values, institutional and governmental changes, social and economic developments and ecological dynamics (p. 339)." Landscapes are always transformed over time, re-shaped, re-used and re-moulded according to changing conditions. As landscapes or features of landscapes change, the social space – meaning imbued in a landscape – changes as well.

World Bank policies, foreign investments and conservation projects have wrought major changes in Malagasy relations to their land and social and natural environment. Conventional dichotomies pitting 'local' against 'foreign', or 'traditional' versus 'modern' mores have proved insufficient as tools to analyse how the Malagasy position themselves when competing for land. In order to properly identify the key issues of

human-environment interactions in the island's history, we propose commencing by a review of the meaning of land and forests for the Malagasy against the backdrop of World Bank policies concerning land titling and the stimulation of land investment.

The Merging of the Local and Foreign in Malagasy History

The origin of the first settlers of Madagascar has been a subject of considerable speculation, some of it scholarly, and some framed in terms of racial and Orientalist bias. European commentators from the sixteenth century noted the presence of two main groups in Madagascar, whom they distinguished as 'Negroid' and lighter-skinned—described variously as Malay or even Chinese. The 1614 Peter Kaerius map refers to 'white' natives of Madagascar: "supposed to have been transplanted out of China" (Wheatley 1975: 76). Scholars have also proposed that Arabs, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and Jews may have visited and possibly settled in the island in ancient or historical times (Grandidier 1902: 3; Vérin 1986: 26, 28). Indigenous traditions are generally vague: while the 'Islamic' dynasties on the southeast coast whose origins go back to the fourteenth century, claimed an origin in Mecca (Vérin 1986: 80–9), and some Bara groups point to an African heritage (Campbell, unpublished fieldwork 1993), other Malagasy simply provide the explanation that their forefathers came from "overseas". Given the prevalence of bilateral descent, such accounts of foreign ancestry could also refer to a handful of in-marrying individuals rather than of whole groups (Lambek 2002).

The dual 'African' (e.g. zebu cattle) and 'Southeast Asian' (e.g. rice terraces) material culture affords some credence to the theory of mixed African and Southeast Asian origins for the Malagasy population. However, it is generally accepted that by the 1880s all Malagasy, regardless of their physiognomy and culture, spoke variants of an Austronesian language (from the Indonesia-Melanesia-Australasia-Polynesia region). This singular fact formed the basis for the theory expounded by the father and son team of Alfred and Guillaume Grandidier that all Malagasy originated from the 'Malayo-Polynesian' region, the ancestors of 'Negroid' peoples being dark-skinned 'Negritos' from Melanesia. The Grandidiere argued that from about the mid-first millennium BCE successive groups of these adventurous mariners sailed their outrigger canoes directly across the Indian Ocean to Madagascar – a distance of about 4,800 km – as contemporaneously their kin were colonising the Pacific (Grandidier 1908;

see also Kobishchanow 1965: 137). Unfortunately, such theories did not yet recognize the point subsequently established by Franz Boas that biological traits, language, and material culture are not intrinsically connected to each other and can travel or diffuse independently of one another (Boas 1966).

The Grandidiere's viewpoint became widely accepted so that the conventional French and consequently Malagasy intellectual view was that the Malagasy were of Malayo-Polynesian (Austronesian) 'stock'. However, as the chapter in this volume by Himla Soodyall, Bharti Morar, and Trefor Jenkins shows, recent advances in DNA analysis, and their application to the Malagasy, clearly demonstrate that the first settlers of the island were of both Austronesian and African origin (see the second chapter of this volume).

We have intentionally opened our discussion with an inquiry into the origins of the Malagasy, to recall the fact that the Malagasy roots originate outside the island which considerably muddies distinctions between 'local' and 'foreign'. Among others, Anna Tsing cautions against oversimplifications of 'local' and 'foreign' – which (in the same vein as Mosse 2005 and Appandurai, 1996) she glosses as 'global'. She even notes this tendency in her own work: "I find myself doing it. Yet we know that these dichotomies are unhelpful" (2005: 58). She calls this process 'scale-making' and warns that concepts like 'local' and 'global' should not be taken at face-value:

I argue that scale is not just a neutral frame for viewing the world; scale must be brought into being: proposed, practiced, and evaded, as well as, taken for granted. Scales are claimed and contested in cultural and political projects (ibid.).

Homogenization processes of the 'local' and 'global' risk masking the diversity of practical strategies deployed by the Malagasy in the defence and negotiation of their land claims. The characterisation of such land projects as simply capitalist schemes crushing Malagasy land users overlooks the active roles played by the Malagasy in the construction of socio-economic configurations that shape their interactions with migrants and other perceived outsiders.

The History of the Environment and Land Competition

When the ancient continent of Gondwanaland broke up, Madagascar became detached from the east coast of Africa and remained in isolation

from human contact until around the BCE/CE changeover. This isolation resulted in the development of a significant number of unique species (Madagascar has been termed a ‘floating museum’ because of its rich biodiversity). The island currently possesses what may be the world’s greatest concentration of unique flora and fauna: 98 percent of Madagascar’s land mammals, 92 percent of its reptiles, 68 percent of its plants, and 41 percent of its indigenous bird species are found nowhere else. Discoveries are still being made of new species on the island—615 between 1999 and 2010 alone (Mustain 2011).

Publications on Madagascar’s environmental history often fail to mention that the protection of Malagasy forests dates further back than the colonial period. In 1794, King Andrianampoinimerina implemented the first national decree against “slash and burn” forestry (Wright, 1997: 384). In 1881, Queen Ranaivalona II imposed the “code of the 305 articles” prohibiting tree burning or cutting in order to prioritise forest conservation. Such policies were implemented to develop an economy based on permanent rice fields rather than shifting horticulture and livestock production – which was seen as harmful to the environment (Goedefroit 2007: 17). Human-environment relations were clearly of concern in pre-colonial times, although during the French colonial period a more systemic environmental legislation appeared.

The academic consensus is that in the pre-1800 era, climate probably had a greater impact than humans on the Malagasy environment but that with increased European intervention in the island, notably during the commercial boom that accompanied the development of the international economy in the nineteenth century, and under the French colonial regime from 1895, human activity had a dramatically increased impact (Esoavelomandroso 1979; Vérin 1990; Brown 2000; Campbell 2005). In his chapter, Tom Anderson describes how, during the nineteenth century, Madagascar became ‘orientalised’ in the eyes of Europeans, as they made the discovery of its unique natural habitats. He also notes how Madagascar, once feared as a strange and dangerous enclave, evolved into an environment that could be mastered by science. Anderson charts the process by which science became a tool for control of land and resources, and culminated in the introduction of the first nature reserves (*Réserves Naturelles Intégrales*, *RNI*’s) into the country during the 1920s.

European reports of the island’s unique flora and fauna did little to slow down the exploitation of its forests and other natural resources (*infra*). Thus, under Radama I (r. 1810–28) and Ranaivalona I (r. 1828–61), Europeans such as Marius Arnaud / Arnoux (1809–29), Julien Gaultier de Rontaunay

(1783–1863), and Napoléon de Lastelle (1802–56) established plantations and negotiated export monopolies on the east coast; while the American commercial agent William Marks acquired similar monopoly prerogatives for exports on the west coast (Campbell 2005: 99–101, 166, 170–1).

However, these foreigners were heavily regulated by the imperial Merina regime, the policies of which, as Gwyn Campbell shows in his chapter, resulted in the destruction of far more woodland and primary forest than that caused by either foreigners or peasant farmers. The imperial Merina era, 1790–1895, was characterised by the adoption of policies designed to promote autarkic economic modernization, notably in the production of armaments, in order to deter European political intervention. Campbell examines how, in the absence of domestic capital formation, the Merina court exploited Madagascar's human and natural resources: Merina subjects, as well as peoples conquered by Merina armies, were conscripted into *fanompoana*, a system of unremunerated and compulsory forced labour for the state, and the island's natural resources were exploited in attempts to promote both a domestic industrial revolution and exports of raw, semi-processed and manufactured goods. However, the human and environmental consequences of such policies contributed towards undermining the Merina regime, and have indelibly marked the subsequent history of Madagascar (ibid. and Campbell's chapter in this volume).

Possibly the main human impact upon the environment prior to the eighteenth century was the extinction of the island's largest animals (pygmy hippopotamus, giant tortoise, giant lemurs, and Aepyornis – a giant flightless bird); and destruction by fire of savannah belts, bush and woodlands in the centre and east to create agricultural plots and in the south and west to create pasture. Although the causes of these transformations remain undetermined, there is increasing evidence that climatic rather than anthropogenic factors may have been the primary factors leading to reduced woodland (Dewar 1997; 2007). Over time, the primary human impact on the environment has unquestionably been due to rice cultivation. Rice growing predominated on the fertile mud flats and riverside marshes on the east, southeast and west coasts, where seeds were scattered. It also dominated agriculture in the central highlands. There, seeds were initially scattered in marshland, but from the early eighteenth century were increasingly planted, and nursery shoots replanted. Rice was also the primary crop along the eastern escarpment, where swidden ('slash-and-burn') was practised. Secondary crops included sweet potatoes, manioc (cassava), maize, haricot, sugar cane,

saonjo and *tavo* (edible arums), banana, plantain, sorghum, and *voanemba* (a species of bean) (Campbell 2005: 23–9). The development of terraced and irrigated rice fields in Imerina and Betsileo necessitated enormous inputs of labour, but with two harvests annually resulted in heightened output, and an increase in population growth and concentration by the late eighteenth century that led to extensive forest clearance on the plateau for firewood and, increasingly, for pasture (Dubois 1938: 429; see also Campbell's chapter).

During the French colonial era, policy from Paris was predicated upon the idea that the colony should pay its own way and provide tropical products for the metropolis. As of 1896, the French colonial administration offered liberal land grants to French metropolitan and Mascarene Creole settlers and companies to establish cash crop plantations, and exploit the island's cattle, mineral, and forest resources (de Coppet 1947; Cros 1923; Deschamps 1972: 248–52, 256–8, 281–96). In 1904, the French company Suberbie, which from 1886 had obtained from the Imperial Merina court a gold mining concession at Maevatanana, also moved into graphite mining – which boomed during the First World War (Campbell 2005: 103–5; Deschamps 1972: 292). The colonial administration invested in a transport and communications network: 14,500 km of road by 1933; 876 km of rail by 1936 designed to enhance the extraction and exportation of resources (Deschamps 1972: 283). Both private and public concerns were responsible for the substantial elimination of the eastern tropical rainforest where the main transport lines transected, connecting the highland interior to the main east coast ports; and where the plantation frontier notably for coffee, the main export cash crop, continued to expand (de Coppet 1947. vol.2: 124–44; Campbell 2006: 67–99). Thus, paradoxically, policies and practices leading to both the destruction and conservation of Malagasy forests were evident in the colonial period. Hence contemporary developments in mining and in conservation partnership projects (see Seagle in this volume) were well anchored in the history of the island.

Population growth is another factor to be considered when contemplating human-environment relations. While Madagascar experienced largely stagnant demographic growth for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century when the population fluctuated between two and three million people, it started to expand rapidly from the mid-1920s. The population increased from 3.4 million in 1921 to 3.7 million a decade later, to reach 4.1 million in 1941 (Campbell 2005: 137; de Coppet 1947. vol.2: 75), which in turn would become a factor in increased competition over land.

Contemporary Perceptions of the Environment and Competition for Land

Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona's contribution to this volume contains an essential discussion of the meaning of *ny tany*. *Ny tany* in its primary sense is 'land, soil, the earth', but can also be used to designate '*pays, contrée, royaume*' (1955, 673 dictionary of Abinal and Malzac), terms that carry connotations of empire and state involvement in land issues. The 'land, the earth' is a powerful metaphor for leadership in Merina kingdoms in which "harvest and famine become indexes of governance". As witnessed by the events of 2009, land continues to play a powerful role in contemporary political dynamics in the island. Rajoelina's portrait of Ravalomanana as having put Madagascar's land up "for sale" implied both treason and a condemnation of Ravalomanana's poor governance (cf. Vinciguerra's chapter).

For many Malagasy, the human (*olona*) includes both the living and the dead (the ancestors), the relations between whom is anchored by land. Land inevitably mediates cultural meanings, knowledge complexes, symbols and ontologies, but also involves labour systems, human health and human relations (cf. Evers & Seagle 2012). Such perspectives provide insight into how, theoretically, one might approach Malagasy perceptions of the environment and the 'ethos' of life itself (Keller 2008) – wherein dichotomies between nature and culture are somewhat artificial. The Malagasy possess a profound religious, socio-political and economic attachment to land. Firstly, land anchors not only the individual, but also entire kinship groups to their history, for it connects the living with the dead via the family tombs on the ancestral land (see Bloch 1971; Feeley-Harnik 1991; Middleton 1999). It thus lies at the heart of Malagasy cultural life. Malagasy people revere the ancestors, whom they believe to be possessed of powers that they use to exert influence over the lives of the living. Consequently, the Malagasy take considerable pains to remain on good terms with the ancestors. This desire is expressed in a multitude of practices concerning the building and renewal of tombs and the care of corpses, including, in some regions, festive practices of reburial or rewrapping of corpses, and in others of maintaining relics from important ancestors (see e.g. Bloch 1971; Feeley-Harnik 1991; Middleton 1999; Ballarin 2000; Baré 1980; Lambek 2002). The tomb is the portal to the hereafter, the world of the ancestors, serving as the passage through which the deceased undergo 'ancestralization'. In this ritual process, the deceased are transformed into ancestors and become a source of renewed life. Moreover, it is the ancestors who legitimize rulers, so that throughout Malagasy history,

monarchs and leaders had to reckon with ancestral traditions (see Raharijaona and Kus chapter). Simultaneously, one should be cautious not to exoticise Malagasy relations with land and the wider environment as, in the quest for survival, some Malagasy engage in activities that deviate from such perspectives. Reports of poaching and trafficking in unique species and rosewood are frequently reported in national and international news media. It is likely that one local group's sacred ancestral land is viewed as subject to exploitation by another group or members of a different class.

Such reports fuel conservationist concerns that one of the world's "biodiversity hotspots" – an expression term first coined by Conservation International ecologist Norman Myers – is under threat. Myers' wish was to identify places rich in biodiversity but increasingly threatened by environmental degradation and, ultimately, species extinction. In *Biodiversity Hotspots for Conservation Priorities* (2000: 853), Myers et al. ten tropical forest regions were identified as biodiversity hotspots – a term now applied to 34 regions worldwide. In total, those hotspots account for 16 percent of the planet's surface area and 50 percent of the world's endemic species (Neimark and Schroeder 2009). Madagascar, one of the top priority zones, is discussed by Thomas Anderson in this volume who notes that, because of its unique ecosystem, Madagascar has been central to some of the most important scientific debates, from Darwinism to biogeography and human origins (see also Feeley-Harnik 2001).

The declaration of Madagascar as environmental hotspot certainly opens the gates to increased environmental intervention in Madagascar. Building from Richard Grove's work (1995), Tsing (2000) provides an explanation for the construction of global environmental science (see also Anderson's chapter) and how the latter shaped what is today known as a "universal environmental knowledge":

...the imperial placement of scientists in botanical gardens and research stations across the European colonies inspired continent-crossing correspondence in the late 18th century. Through this correspondence, informed by widespread fears of climate change caused by colonial deforestation, colonial scientists formulated notions of a 'global' climate. This commitment to planet-wide environmental process allowed further developments in imagining both science and policy on a global scale (Tsing 2000: 348).

Conservation NGOs commonly express widespread fears of climate change and call for urgent measures in response. Many articles, images, graphs and statistics about land clearance on the "Red Island" indeed look alarming: 90 percent of Madagascar's forest cover is gone, 200,000 ha of its primary forest are disappearing each year, and its endemic species, which

represent 80 percent of all mammals, reptiles, plants and amphibians on the island, are living on “borrowed time” (Harper et al., 2007: 325; Hannah et al. 2008). Marion Desmurget (2012) observes the fact that while Madagascar is on the one hand presented as “unique and threatened”, on the other conservationists posit it as a place that needs to be saved for the sake of universal conservation. This has the direct consequence that “... playing with space in such a way that Madagascar is both ‘localised’ and ‘globalised’ can lead to a situation whereby the environment becomes detached from the cultural and the spatial, that is, from people and land” (p. 103). So, Malagasy issues on the ground become ‘global’ concerns and through ‘scale-making’ of Malagasy as destructors of the ‘global commons’ conservationist intervention is legitimised.

The growing impact of human activity has widened the debate on how best to protect Madagascar’s unique natural environment; the Malagasy government has come under increasing international pressure to restrict human infringement on remaining areas of natural forest and other habitats rich in indigenous flora and fauna, notably from agencies such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Lemur Conservation Foundation, Primate Conservation Inc., Madagascar Fauna Group, Wildlife Trust, Conservation International, Missouri Botanical Garden, Wildlife Conservation Society, US Peace Corps, and World Bank, which in 2000, for example, inaugurated a programme to increase the planting of pine and eucalyptus to satisfy fuel needs. Such programmes increasingly go under the banner of REDD – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (Angelsen 2009). Kanowski et al. (2011) stress that REDD+ (including benefit sharing) has the potential to help reduce poverty and improve rural livelihoods. REDD+ is said to enhance previous Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes, limited to small geographical areas, by its nationwide scope (Tomimura 2012). Madagascar was among the first 14 countries to benefit from the World Bank’s REDD+ policies (World-Bank 2008), with an estimated 1.75 million ha of forest projects being targeted for REDD projects (Rakotoarijaona 2010). These projects were initiated before the *coup d’état* but continued after the take-over by Rajoelina. Conservationists promoting such land schemes commonly start from the premise that poverty is a major reason for infringement on forest land and other areas rich in natural life. However, whether poverty alleviation has been achieved by such conservation programmes in Madagascar is far from certain (See e.g. Hanson 2007, Harper 2002, Walsh 2005).

Madagascar is also the setting for the acquisition by international companies of large tracts of land, like elsewhere in Africa, for industrial-scale

cultivation. This phenomenon is frequently labelled as ‘land grabbing’, or as a neo-colonial manifestation of capitalist forces intent on subjecting Africa to their economic and political interests. South African farmers have been acquiring land in Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania for decades, but on a relatively small scale. By contrast, recent acquisitions have been large-scale, in the form of 50 to 99 year leases negotiated by externally based organizations and governments. Some of these acquisitions are by Western investors: for example, in 2008, the UK company CAMS acquired 45,000 ha in Tanzania to cultivate sorghum for biofuels; and in 2009 the US company Jarch Capital acquired 400,000 ha of farmland in South Sudan. Other external investors come from lands across the Indian Ocean, notably India, China and the Middle East. In December 2008, Varun Agriculture, an offshoot of Varun Industries, a global conglomerate based in India, acquired 231,912 ha in Madagascar for food production. This new “scramble for Africa” has been sparked chiefly by growing food security problems in investor countries, concerning insufficient domestic food supply due to limited availability of water and arable land; higher production costs; bottlenecks in storage and distribution; expansion of biofuel production (a competing land and crop use); increasing urbanisation; and changing diets (Cotula et al 2009).

Most countries affected are poor and located in Sub-Saharan Africa. These foreign land investments therefore are often promoted as a “development opportunity”. The question however remains as to what kind of development they would facilitate and who stands to benefit from them. While governments tend to welcome this foreign direct investment (FDI) in land, such contracts have been widely censured on a number of grounds. Firstly, the leases create considerable local tension as they conflict with customary tenure (only 2–10 percent of land in Africa is held under formal land tenure) and usage, and are for periods of up to 99 years. Secondly, they frequently result in the forcible eviction and displacement of small-scale cultivators, often without promised compensation or permanent paid employment by the foreign investor on the same land (Rice 2010; Vidal 2010). Certainly, the Malagasy government has found it difficult to effectively regulate large international concerns. Among other factors, long-term leases allow them considerable flexibility for land exploitation without a high level of accountability. In the example of the Varun’s project, of the four crops to be grown – rice, wheat, maize and pulses – only in the case of rice (60 percent) did the Malagasy government stipulate that more than 50 percent of output go to the domestic market; while 100 percent of pulses were designated for export (Anon 2009).

The emphyteotic (50–99 years) leases granted to foreign concerns mean that, in a country with an average life expectancy of 63.6 years (Index Mundi 2011), few dispossessed cultivators can aspire to reclaim their land within their lifetime. The spectre of renewal amounts to exclusion of successors and heirs to ancestral lands. Demographic pressures on land is increasing at a rapid rate: whereas average population density in Madagascar was 7 per km² in 1950, it reached 26 per km² in 2000, and is estimated to rise to 73 per km² by 2050 (Cotula et al 2009: 60). Some commentators consider that FDI could liberate the African cultivator from the crushing poverty caused by customary tenure and traditional land use (See e.g. Sanders 2010). However, that prognostic is of little solace to small Malagasy farmers for whom land is the major source of livelihood but also much more than an economic consideration.

Many environmentalists and politicians view security of tenure as an important incentive to small-scale farmers to invest in a long-term and sustainable use of land. For example, conservationists who identify ‘slash-and-burn’ agriculture in Madagascar, within the context of rapid demographic growth, as a major contributory factor to biodiversity loss, have long argued for formal codification of land rights. Those who reject the premise of Malthusian population-induced degradation in favour of the ‘Boserupian’ hypothesis of agricultural intensification driven by increasing land scarcity, also consider secure land title to be a contributing factor for such intensification (See e.g. Goldman 1993).²

In 2004, the Malagasy government under Ravalomanana launched the *Programme National Foncier* (PNF) creating a national land registration system which was to serve as a platform for further land investments and forest conservation measures. In 2005, the Malagasy government signed a Foundation for Protected Areas and Biodiversity, supported by co-signatories Conservation International and the World Wildlife Fund; and in December 2005, the first extra 10,000 km² of the new Protected Areas System of Madagascar were granted protection status. However, as Sandra Evers discusses in her chapter, registration has proven to be problematic due to the competing notions posited by customary law, anchored in the ancestral concepts of land, and positive law, inspired by the French Civil Code. Land registration has placed Malagasy customary land access arrangements and *vazaha* (foreign) economic and cultural values on a collision course, further exacerbated by existing and emerging social

² Karen Middleton, written communication 14 April 2009.

hierarchies within Madagascar. The Malagasy draw upon both customary law (*lex loci*) and positive law (*lex fori*) to secure their land access. Sandra Evers and Karen Middleton argue in their chapters that the focus on such opposing concepts should not ignore the hierarchical structure of Malagasy social configurations and unequal land access arrangements which are antipathetical to the notion that land registration could provide tenure security.

In her chapter, Middleton adds that a dualistic understanding of land tenure ('modern' versus 'traditional') obscures the true complexity of issues in the region she studies – Karembola (dryland Madagascar). Noting that the notion that peasant farmers automatically invest in their land once they secure title – a cornerstone of World Bank-endorsed titling schemes – does not always hold in the Malagasy context (cf. Jacoby & Minten 2007), she argues for a more nuanced understanding of land tenure in Madagascar. From her longitudinal ethnographic research carried out between 1991 and 2003 she demonstrates that individuals often have overlapping but unequal access rights to land, and suggests that, rather than phrase the problem in terms of competing jurisdictions, it is relevant to examine local constructs of 'traditional' or 'customary' law and 'modern' state law as co-evolutionary over time. In one community, interactions between local practices of cactus-planting to claim ownership and state legislation on tree planting and land tenure, combined with perceptions of climate change and growing pressure on land, have led many small farmers to clear more indigenous forest than was needed for subsistence production in order to plant exotic prickly pears. In the second case study, tenure rules and practices, while equally contested within local communities, have been shaped by other factors, including exclusions relating to Cap Sainte Marie Special Reserve and community disputes around an invasive prickly pear. Highlighting the complex factors to be considered when modelling correlations between agricultural intensification, biodiversity conservation, and land titling, Middleton argues that land titling and the 'one-size-fits-all' approach may not be the panacea for Madagascar's problems that some assume.

Land pressure at the local level and competing claims from outsiders is indeed a leitmotif that appears throughout our discussion of contemporary land issues in Madagascar. Andrew Walsh in his study of a northern Madagascar region demonstrates how tenure relations are also affected by changed restrictions in access to land due to the establishment of a local national park. He shows how exclusively focussing on park policies risks ignoring village dynamics of land access. In a fascinating

ethnographic account, he relates how social relations are affected when migrants come to the villages in the context of a sapphire rush (small-scale artisanal mining). Initial migrants (*vahiny*, 'visitors') follow customary practices of gaining land access, privileges granted in exchange for reciprocity relations of deference to small town leaders (*lehibe*), seen as 'fathers' of the place, and adhering to cultural requirements. However, as immigration increases, such rules erode and relations between village leaders and migrants degenerate. This is particularly the case of young immigrant miners who ignore the *lehibe*'s status as founding fathers and, when raising children, follow cultural practices that deviate from ideals of the *lehibe*. Through his study, Walsh emphasises that 'local' Malagasy are not a homogeneous group, demonstrating the heterogeneous nature of the *lehibe*, and the variety in their reflections and practices over time, which underlines the importance of examining the historical component of land issues in Madagascar.

Caroline Seagle in her contribution on mining-conservation partnerships in South East Madagascar also highlights the point that Malagasy assessments and practices of land are indeed closely tied in with social relations. Analysing the way in which two large-scale mining companies, Rio Tinto/QMM and Sherritt/Ambatovy, engage with biodiversity conservation and "offsetting" strategies, she builds the argument that "green" mining in Madagascar may not adequately account for complex, "illegible" land-based livelihoods, and may in turn uphold the nature/culture dialectic. Drawing upon theoretical approaches to embodiment and the materiality of human-environment interactions, she goes on to show how mining-conservation engagements create a "representational space" (Lefebvre 1991) wherein only some aspects of the social-environmental reality are mediated, while others are not. In doing so, she analyzes both the BBOP (Business and Biodiversity Offset Programme), of which Sherritt/Ambatovy is part, and Rio Tinto's "biodiversity book" – a synthesis of research carried out on the rare and biodiverse littoral forest set aside for strip mining, but which omits the company's own impacts while drawing upon degradation narratives to focus on local misuse of the environment. As "green" mining must reconcile the need for land both for mineral extraction and environmental protection (through "biodiversity offsetting" mechanisms), the risk remains for local Malagasy people to lose access to crucial natural resources.

These ethnographic accounts of competition for land help us to establish the background for the events of late 2008 and early 2009. In one of the world's largest land deals, the Malagasy government purportedly was

on the verge of concluding an agreement to rent 1.3 million ha of land – roughly half of Madagascar’s current arable land – on a 99-year lease to Daewoo Logistics Corporation of South Korea to cultivate maize and palm oil for export. This forms the theme of Venusia Vinciguerra’s contribution in this volume (see the final chapter). Most external commentators have viewed popular Malagasy reactions to this deal as a protest against a neo-colonial system that would make them a “South Korean colony” (Ryall and Pflanz 2009). However, this was not the only factor feeding discontent. Many Malagasy, in addition to concerns they have due to increasing land competition, still have deep-rooted attachments to land as ‘ancestral’ that, as Middleton and Evers show, are highly rational even if (or precisely because) they are incompatible with capitalist systems and modalities.

It is within this context that one must view the current highly charged political and economic climate in Madagascar in which the dynamics of land are skewed by a multitude of stakeholders competing for access to and acquisition of land. For the Malagasy, self-identity, historical continuity, life, and value are anchored in the ancestral soil. To place a uniquely monetary value on land, and offer it for sale or lease, notably to foreigners, is seen as the ultimate sign of disrespect towards the living and the dead (the ancestors). As Lambek was frequently informed in Mahajanga, “the ancestors are not for sale.” Given growing impoverishment, and a lack of investment in sectors of the economy that might afford them alternative employment opportunities, access to land is for many Malagasy their sole prospect of survival. Any consideration of the relations of Malagasy people to the land and their wider environment needs to take into account the conjunction of ecological, historical, political, economic, cultural, and religious contexts within which such relations have been formed and developed. Through exploring the past and present relations of Malagasy people to land, the essays in this volume lay the basis for understanding the complex issues that lie at the core of the current political and economic crisis in Madagascar.

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