



How the Daewoo Attempted Land Acquisition Contributed to Madagascar's Political Crisis in 2009

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HOW THE DAEWOO ATTEMPTED LAND ACQUISITION CONTRIBUTED TO MADAGASCAR'S POLITICAL CRISIS IN 2009

(temporary title)

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“Tsy amidy ny Tanindrazana”
Ancestral land is not for sale

1. Introduction

*Large-scale land acquisitions*²

The acquisition or leasing of extended areas of land in developing countries by private firms is a growing phenomenon (Cotula et al. 2009:4-5; Shepard and Anuradha 2009). Some trigger factors for this are: food security issues tied to food prices, energy crops to respond to the growing demand for agrofuel, financial benefits, carbon markets and search for water (Grain 2009; Smaller and Mann 2009:4-6). Countries with limited access to land and water constraints need to find alternatives to ensure food security for the domestic market. Moreover, one of the consequences of the rise in food prices is the increased value of arable land, making investments in the sector lucrative.³

Developing countries have a pressing need for investments; they need economic growth and foreign trade. Consequently foreign companies have a strong bargaining position while farmers, peasants and smallholders have little leverage (Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009:2). In addition, in many places locals tend to access land under customary arrangements and the lack of formal land titles worsens their bargaining position. As pointed out by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), “land leases are often justified on the basis that the land being acquired by the foreign investor is ‘unproductive’ or ‘underutilized’ (Ibid.). However, land is often used for some activity, such as grazing animals or gathering of wood for fuel. Nevertheless, “these uses tend to be undervalued in official assessments because they are not marketable, but they can provide valuable livelihood sources to the poor” (Ibid.). IFPRI also highlights that further studies are needed to shed light on land deals. Documented information is scarce, resulting in a lack of transparency that limits the possibilities of the various local stakeholders.

A political crisis

In January 2009, a political crisis erupted in Madagascar. In the capital Antananarivo, groups of town dwellers, led by the young former mayor Andry Rajoelina, gathered to protest against Marc Ravalomanana's government. There were three main causes for the demonstrations: (i) the purchase of a new presidential Boeing; (ii) the closure of Viva TV and radio broadcasting, owned by Rajoelina;⁴ (iii) and South Korean Daewoo's plan to lease a large portion of land in the country (Pellerin 2009; Teyssier, Ramarjohn and Ratsialonana 2010:5). These were accompanied by a broad sense of frustration among Antananarivo's urban poor and among the Malagasy business elites who had suffered from Ravalomanana's increasing dominance of domestic commerce.

The ‘Daewoo case’ is the focus of this chapter. Given the importance of transparency in land deals, and the general lack of analysis of this type of transactions, the aim here is to outline the proposed Daewoo project in Madagascar; how the Malagasy government handled it; and in particular, how it became one of the causes of a *coup d'état* (Ploch 2009:4).⁵

The academic literature on large-scale land acquisition is limited, while there is a considerable amount of information from the media. This chapter is based mostly on media sources, publically available documents and studies and information from key informants in Madagascar. The analysis was conducted at the same time of the events, thus semi-structured interviews were used to support and comprehend the dynamics reported by the media. Discourses, defined by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:1) as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)”, were analysed to carry out this work. Discourse analysis is a widely used approach under the umbrella of “social constructionism” useful to explore social domains in different disciplines (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002:4). The starting point is that reality is subject to change and people make choices to present their reality: people mould and edit their understanding, memories, stories and experiences into subjective discourses (Jørgensen and Phillips

2002:145). Discourse analysis was a relevant framework for this research, as it highlights that different understandings of the world lead to different social actions. By looking at the discourses related to the Daewoo deal, it was possible to get an overview of the different reactions to it. Critics point out that if everything is subject to change, then there is no control in social life (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002:6). Nevertheless, even though structures are socially created, they are hard to change, at least for dominated groups (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002:6-7). This introduces the concept of power relations. According to discourse analysis, different discourses struggle for hegemony, understood by Gramsci as social consensus, in order to be at least temporarily unquestioned. The space for this struggle is identified as ‘order of discourse’: a social space in which discourses compete to infuse issues with meaning, to gain hegemony and power.⁶ The order of discourse is a central concept here, as it defines the analytical space in which competing ideas related to access to land and foreign investment struggle to gain dominance. Furthermore, Dijk shows that discourses featuring people’s beliefs are more persuasive, as they match their mental models. For instance when a social value is implicit in a message this can be taken for granted by the recipients and be understood without being openly stated (2001:358). In this chapter various, often competing, discourses are represented concerning Daewoo’s attempted land lease and the power struggle between Ravalomanana and Rajoelina. This approach revealed to be valuable in a study where the way stakeholders perceived and spoke about the land lease deal was central to understand their reaction to it.

Finding news and information sources in Madagascar during the unrests was at times challenging. Some of the media interrupted their broadcasts and distribution during the turmoil. It also should be noted that many of the sources used: newspapers, blogs and websites are not neutral. However, as they are often very explicit about it, it was possible to track down the different discourses they advocated. On key topics, I followed discourses put forward by the media with different political views. This made it possible to follow how competing discourses were promoted. In addition, the professors at the University of Toliara were very helpful in explaining complex social mechanisms.⁷ Finally, the rich ethnographic literature on Madagascar greatly assisted me in grasping relevant aspects of the social dynamics.

One step back

Before delving into the Daewoo case it is useful to recap some background information of Marc Ravalomanana and Andry Rajoelina. This section is based on interpretation of events based on academic works, newspaper articles, interviews and other sources.

Marc Ravalomanana was born in 1949 into a dairy farmer family, from the Merina middle class.⁸ After a brief period in Europe, he obtained financing from the World Bank to establish his own dairy enterprise: TIKO. In 1999, Ravalomanana started an American-style campaign to become the capital’s mayor; distributing t-shirts, TIKO products and offering free pop music concerts (Bornschein 2008). As mayor he introduced several innovations in the city, as well as several TIKO employers in the city’s key posts (the “TIKO boys”) (Bornschein 2008). Ravalomanana decided to run for presidential election in 2001 as part of *Tiako I Madagasikara* (the ‘I love Madagascar’ party). Electoral results were contested by Ravalomanana and culminated in an intense power struggle between him and the other candidate, Didier Ratsiraka (Fournet-Guérin 2009). This lasted until May 6th 2002 when Ravalomanana was appointed president of Madagascar (Cornwell 2003:6).⁹ Ravalomanana’s presidency is acknowledged for improving the country’s infrastructure, the educational and health systems and despite criticism for the lack of progress in alleviating poverty, he was re-elected in December 2006 (IRIN 2006).

Andry Nirina Rajoelina was born into the *andriana* (Merina) social class in 1974.¹⁰ By 20, he had become a well-known disc jockey, and later set up a pop radio station (VIVA) as well as a successful advertising company (Injet). Rajoelina’s profile began to rise with his increasing public appeal (Corbett 2009) and in 2007 he became the mayor of Antananarivo (Hogg 2009) through the movement *Tanora malaGasy Vonona* (Determined Malagasy Youth), and to some extent, by using the same successful campaign strategies as Ravalomanana. Rajoelina is nicknamed “TGV”, as a reference to his movement’s acronym, and to the French high-speed train: an expression of his energetic nature (Corbett 2009). Indeed, he offered a trendsetting alternative to the stuffy, older politicians (Hogg 2009). Rajoelina became one of the most determined critics of the president, setting an anti-government agenda (Corbett 2009).

The relationship between Rajoelina and the government further deteriorated at the end of 2008 when the Ravalomanana government closed Rajoelina’s TV channel VIVA after the broadcasting of an interview with the former president, Didier Ratsiraka (Vinciguerra 2009). When Rajoelina’s radio station was also shut down a month later, he convened a general strike in Antananarivo, accusing President Ravalomanana of corruption, authoritarianism and of selling ancestral land to foreigners (Ploch 2009). 40,000 people are reported to have attended the rally. On January 26th the demonstrations turned violent and the public TV station, Ravalomanana’s Madagascar Broadcasting System (MBS) and several department stores (including

those of the president's TIKO and Magro) were looted and destroyed (CPJ 2009; Vinciguerra 2009). The following days the same happened in other cities of the country, with several deaths reported. On January 31st, Rajoelina proclaimed himself president of the High Authority of Transition, a parallel cabinet, requesting the President's immediate resignation (M.R. and E.R. 2009; *Rajoelina demande* 2009). Ravalomanana refused, removing Rajoelina from office on February 3rd, when he also lost his bid to impeach the elected president through the High Constitutional Court (Ploch 2009). Rajoelina, who saw a reduced attendance at his rallies, called for another gathering to announce his government on February 7th.¹¹ Demonstrators marched toward the presidential palace, where the guards killed 28 people and injured several others (Vinciguerra 2009). The next weeks the two opponents called for different demonstrations, and attempted negotiations with the assistance of Council of Christian Churches (FFKM) failed (Vinciguerra 2009). Rajoelina's ministers tried to take their posts, with limited success, but the situation escalated when on March 16th the Malagasy Army took over the Presidential palace.¹² Ravalomanana, who later declared that he was forced to hand power to the military on March 17th, left for an undisclosed location.¹³ Vice Admiral Ramaroson was pressured to transfer his power to Rajoelina on March 18th, who suspended both chambers of Parliament the following day (Troops Out 2009; Madagascar Leader 2009; Ploch 2009).¹⁴ The international community defined it a *coup d'état* (US Calls 2009) and several donors froze their cooperation with the country. Madagascar was also suspended from the African Union (AU) and from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), (McGreal 2009; SADC does not, cannot recognize 2009).¹⁵

2. The Daewoo Case

On November 19th 2008, the Financial Times published an article describing a land leasing deal between Daewoo Logistic Corporation (hereafter Daewoo) and the government of Madagascar. The company was apparently planning to lease 1.3 million hectares to farm maize (1m hectares in the western region), and palm oil (300,000 hectares in the eastern region) for a period of 99 years (Jung-a, Oliver and Burgis 2008). The Financial Times reported that Daewoo signed a memorandum of understanding in May 2008, and a final contract in July 2008, as stated by Hong Jong-wan, manager at Daewoo. The "bulk of the harvest" was to be shipped back to South Korea to boost the country's food security. It seemed that Daewoo would have to pay nothing for the lease, however Madagascar would benefit with employment opportunities and infrastructure (Jung-a, Oliver and Burgis 2008).

How was Daewoo planning to implement the investment?

Despite the substantial amount of articles, acquiring a precise idea of what Daewoo was going to do in Madagascar, and how they were planning to do it, is not simple. Most news was an echo of the Financial Times article. However, on November 21st 2008, *Le Monde* reported that Panja Ramanoelina, Minister of Agriculture, Farming and Fishery, and Marius Ratolojanahary, from the Ministry of Land Management and Reform, insisted that Daewoo's project was still in the evaluation phase (Tuquoi, Messmer and Hervieu 2008). While President Ravalomanana only one week earlier denied any knowledge of the existence of the project, the local press reported that land requests were deposited at the offices of Toamasina and Brickaville (east Madagascar), and Besalamby (west Madagascar), (*Investissement Agricole* 2008). By the end of December, the government had again denied any advanced phase of the project, but a web source revealed that from October 6th 2008, portions of land were already leased with the authorization of decentralised state authorities (*Foncier la Presse* 2008). The position of the government was however backed up by Daewoo, who accused the Financial Times' article of being riddled with errors (Navalona 2009; Daewoo Logistic Corporation 2008).

The government never shifted its position from saying that Daewoo filed an investment request that was in its evaluation phase as normal procedure. However, the deal with Daewoo became one of the "battle horses" of Rajoelina's protest against the regime (*Madagascar: l'Affaire* 2009). Rajoelina declared that Ravalomanana was selling the country to foreigners, while according to him in Malagasy tradition, land cannot be sold or leased to non-Malagasy (Carayol 2009; *Madagascar: l'Affaire* 2009). The same day he took power (March 18th), Rajoelina cancelled the deal with Daewoo as "in the constitution it is stipulated that Madagascar's land is neither for sale nor for rent, so the agreement with Daewoo is cancelled" (Madagascar Leaders 2009). "We are not against the idea of working with investors, but if we want to sell or rent out land, we have to change the constitution, you have to consult the people" (Madagascar Leaders 2009). Daewoo declared that they had not received official communication of the investment cancellation (Ramaro and Sguazzin 2009), however, on April 10th the news website Orange Madagascar, published a

press release from the company notifying the end of Daewoo's project in Madagascar (*Communiqué de Presse* 2009).

The company Madagascar Future Enterprise (MFE) managed the deal from the capital, Antananarivo. According to sources who wish to remain anonymous, the company organized survey flights in October 2008, both with a helicopter rented from a company called Madhelico, and a private plane provided by a company called Aeromarine.¹⁶ The helicopter was used to scrutinise the eastern part of the country: from Antalaha (north east) to Mananjary (central east). The plane was employed more than once, to take aerial photos for agricultural evaluations, and to transport "important people from the South Korean company to the sites".¹⁷ According to the sources, the South Korean financial director of MFE first covered the east coast: from Toamasina to Anstiranana, passing over Antalaha and Samabava and then from Toamasina to the south until the area around Manakara. Then the plane was used to fly west of Antananarivo, over the Melaky region, where a test farm was implemented. One of the informants claimed to have seen pictures of corn cultivations in Melaky in autumn 2008, and had a conversation with a Daewoo executive about the test plantation. This person stated that South Koreans as well as Malagasy people from Daewoo went to the Melaky region, to check on the project. The informants added that negotiations in the area were done with the chief of region in Maintirano (Melaky), and that the field workers were local Malagasy. At the end of December, the media reported that land from the east side of the country had already been leased on October 6th, and that the papers had been signed by the chief of region and district together with authorities from the decentralized service and the state (*Fonicer. La Presse* 2008). Another article reported that after the political unrests and constant press attention, Daewoo's project changed name from "Madagascar Future Enterprise" to "Madagascar Tsako SARLU" but kept its office in Antananarivo (Land Grabbing 2009). Under this new name, according to the article, Daewoo made plans to achieve the lease of 10,000 ha in the SAVA region to grow maize. I personally went to the supposedly closed office of MFE in Antananarivo on the 18th August 2009, and saw pictures of a test farm. The office, with no nameplate on the door or elsewhere, seemed empty. However, after walking through some vacant rooms, I reached some employers working silently. I asked for an interview there and later via e-mail to hear directly from MFE about the land leasing projects, but I received no response.

Information on when and where Daewoo through MFE was planning to lease land differs. However, most discourses shared the following notions: (i) the company had plans to lease a large area of land in the country, and (ii) the terms of this lease were not clear.

3. *How did the government manage Daewoo's application?*

Legal basis

Statute n. 2007-036 of 14 January 2008 regulates land investments in Madagascar. Foreign investors (with an investor visa) can buy Malagasy land under the following conditions:

1. the land must be used for professional exploitation. The government can withdraw the title if this condition is not respected;
2. the foreign investor needs to apply for the "authorization for land acquisition" to the EDBM (Economic Development Board Madagascar): a formal approval to legally purchase land;
3. the foreign investor needs to submit a business plan to the EDBM, to illustrate in detail the proposed investment (equal to or more than 500, 000 US dollars), (Malagasy Land 2008).

Moreover, to access this procedure the foreign investor needs to act through a Malagasy legal entity.

According to Ravalomana's government, this procedure was being followed. No land had been sold or leased to Daewoo or to its Malagasy legal entity, and a request was deposited to the EDBM, following procedures. The minister of Estate and Land Management, Marius Ratolojanahary, specified that the evaluation of Daewoo's request pertained his ministry, the ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fishery and the EDBM.¹⁸ An inter-ministerial committee was going to be established to evaluate Daewoo's business plan; however, the final decision was to be taken by the council of the ministers. The minister added that the chiefs of regions play the role of facilitators in this type of investment and citizens can express their opinions. He also specified that no land expropriations were expected (Felana 2009).

The representatives of Daewoo backed up the position of the government. However, in January 2009, Shyn Dong Hyun, the financial director of the company, declared that the project was suspended due to the political situation in Madagascar and to the financial crisis (Ramiakajato and Ravelomanantsoa 2009:16).

How the deal was handled, according to the press

In mid-November, the press signalled that despite the declarations of the ministers, land requests were already deposited in Toamasina and Brickaville (east of Madagascar) and Besalampy (western part of the country) in October (*Investissement Agricole* 2008). According to an article, Madagascar Future Enterprise filed land requests at the estate office of Toamasina (file n° 24 294 TAM), Brickaville (n° 24 293 BRICKA) Vatomandry and Melaky proof for the tabloid that Daewoo's request was no longer in the evaluation phase (Maka 2008). Moreover, the *Fokontany* and the municipalities were not informed, therefore no one could express an opinion (Maka 2008).¹⁹ The newspaper reported that the officials at the regional office of Toamasina refused to answer any questions on the matter; while an "informed but anonymous source" said the chief of region had already approved the land requests (Maka 2008). The legal journal, *La Revue de MCI*, presented a legal analysis of the Daewoo case under the assumption that what the government had declared was genuine (Ramiakajato and Ravelomanantsoa 2009). The investigation showed the procedure imposed was correct, as no legal provision was violated. Nonetheless, the journal denoted the possibility of a verbal contract between the parties, a suspicion reinforced by the lack of transparency (Ramiakajato and Ravelomanantsoa 2009:16-17).

Once more, information from the press, from the government and from the opposition did not always correspond. The whole case was not clear and transparent to the public, contributing to the civil and political instability that occurred.

4. How did Malagasy react?

The reactions regarding the land lease requested by Daewoo have been various. Some discourses stressed people's concerns and fears, while others were open and optimistic about the investment. To try to gauge the different opinions I analysed discourses through newspaper articles and websites, as well as readers' comments appearing in articles and blogs. I took into consideration the fact that media in Madagascar are mostly politically aligned and that only a limited amount of Malagasy have access to the Internet or other media. Many Malagasy are illiterate or do not speak French and newspapers are not distributed everywhere or arrive with some days' delay. Despite a large number of TV channels accessible in the capital, most of the island receives one or two channels, if any. The ethnographic literature was of help in trying to fill the gaps in discourses.

Global Voices Online reported that "reactions to news of the land deal were heated and diverse in the Malagasy blogosphere"; the Malagasy website, Sobika wrote about the deal quickly after the Financial Times asking their readers to comment on it (Rakotomalala 2009). Not long after, more than 100 comments were posted. Two main discourses were identified: a "traditional" discourse where concerns were expressed about the possibility of ceding land to foreigners; and an economic discourse, which focussed on the benefits for Madagascar (Rakotomalala 2009). However, Müller and Evers (2007) highlighted that "just as in many other African countries, land in Madagascar holds great emotional value, thus giving land a deeper meaning than that of purely being economic property". People leaving comments on websites and blogs recurrently used the word *sacred* when referring to land. Expressions like *mpivarotra tanindrazana* respectively meaning "sellers of homeland" and "ancestors land", are frequently found to communicate that "land is sacred for all Malagasy" or that "real Malagasy would never give away their land to foreigners" as "land is the sacred place of the ancestors" and "selling land is an irreversible treason of the sacred for Malagasy".²⁰ On January 27th a group of citizens attacked the Japanese company Dahio Corporation throwing stones and screaming "you're land thieves, you want our land!" because they had mistaken the name Dahio for Daewoo.²¹

Following the protests in front of the Malagasy embassy in Paris, most of the Malagasy opposition parties worked together to present an official complaint against Daewoo to the President of the *Conseil d'État (L'Opposition Porte* 2008). In the same period an association was founded in Paris, the *Collectif pour la défense des terres Malgaches* with the goal of "contributing to defend Malagasy land and to sustain Malagasy citizens and peasants in their fight for to defend their land and their development".²² This group planned to defend Malagasy land by spreading information about large land deals and by creating a network between countries "victim of similar land grabs" (*Terres Malgaches*). The collective prepared a letter of complaint to Daewoo's CEO, to ask to "suspend the ongoing actions and land survey", to ask for transparency and to respect the farmers' rights to use land (*Terres Malgaches*). For the group, the elements making the deal unacceptable were: the size of the land which would necessarily involve sacred ancestral land; the dangers for the farmers dependant on this land; the fact that the procedures followed by Daewoo

were given priority over those of small farmers; the fact that the products of the cultivations would be exported; and finally the danger that the cultivation would spoil the terrain, destroying the biodiversity.

According to the international press, there is no doubt that Daewoo's investment plan in Madagascar played a role in the country's power shift. It is thus of great interest to analyse what aspects of Malagasy society were used in discourses and specifically contributed to make people feel menaced by the deal.

*Why did many Malagasy react so strongly?*²³

Certainly the reasons for Malagasy to oppose the Daewoo deal were diverse and nuanced. The historical background might have played a role, as well as people's culture, and general political interests. A systematization of the background and causes that lead to such opposition is needed. To do so, the following section is organised in six parts outlining: Malagasy's attachment to land; their fear of a return to colonialism; the general problem of land management; the sense of distrust of the Ravalomanana's administration; as well as the economic and political reasons to oppose the deal.

A) Strong attachment to land

"Earth is the first wife of the Creator. She amasses the living people and wraps the dead ones" (Jaovelodzao 1996:15 in Aliderson). Land for Malagasy is a place to live as well as the link between the living and the ancestors (Fournet-Guérin 2009). The word "*tany* or land has about 11 equivalents in English varying from land to earth, country, soil, field, place or environment, world, native land, estate, ground or life" (Aliderson). According to Fournet-Guérin (2009), the notion of *tanindrazana* is an element of national unity, also expressed by the start of the national anthem: "*Ry tanindrazanay malala ô!*", "oh, beloved ancestor's land". Two types of land can be distinguished in Madagascar "that of the ancestors which has 'always' belonged to the family and contains the tomb, and that which was purchased later to increase agricultural production. In theory the first can only be transferred to the heirs, whereas the latter can also be sold to other parties if necessary" (Bloch 1971: 127-130 in Van den Heuvel and Evers 2007). "The importance, in all Malagasy societies, of having a strong link to one's *tanindrazana*, can be hardly exaggerated", notes Keller (2008:652), adding that the importance of this element is shared throughout Madagascar. The ancestors are the authorities that need to be addressed when asking for fortification, protection and approval. They are always evoked together with the creator, in both family and political speeches (Aliderson 2004; Rakotoarivony and Ratriamoarivony 2006). The ancestors are interrelated with the idea of land: Malagasy take a handful of the native-land soil when going abroad for a long time as an "embodiment of the support and blessing from the whole family dead or alive and a protection from the ancestors as well as a hint of their presence" (Aliderson 2004). For the similar reasons some bury the umbilical cord of newborns in the land of their origin (Rakotoarivony and Ratriamoarivony 2006:4), the same land that will host the body after life, an affiliation that stands even if the person has lived far away from the family tomb. A study on migration to Antananarivo shows that "even the second generation of migrants born in Antananarivo wish to be buried in the family tomb in the village of origin" (Van den Heuvel and Evers 2007). Those are more than simple signs of nostalgia, they are signs of a feeling of belonging that Malagasy have to their *tanindrazana* (Rakotoarivony and Ratriamoarivony 2006:4). In everyday life, land became a mythical element interrelated to both the past (creator and ancestors) present and the future: owning land is symbol of wealth as well as of being alive. This concept is well outlined by Keller: people not only need land for their present survival, but they need it in order for their descendants to create *tanindrazana* (2008:656). People without *tanindrazana*, cannot receive ancestral blessing, and will possibly "stop being a full person" (Bloch 1994 in Keller 2008:659). In her study in the southern highlands of Madagascar, Evers (2006:417) points out that those who are unable to claim ancestral homeland "do not have history", which is a cause of marginalisation.²⁴ Tombs and ancestors are a way to establish and perpetuate control over land, and labourers lacking *tanindrazana*, cannot claim property rights (Ibid.). Accordingly, owning land gives the assurance of having a say in any communitarian decision and in social conflict (Aliderson 2004).

A deal involving 1,5 millions of hectares of land naturally caught people's attention, and the concept of *tanindrazana* was central in discourses used to oppose the Daewoo investment. We have seen that land is considered ancestral when tombs are on it; nevertheless in some discourses this concept was used more generally, even to designate Madagascar in general. *Tanindrazana* was to a certain extent manipulated in discourse to trigger emotions. The ancestors are believed to have an influence in people's lives, and problems such as misfortune and illness, are believed to be sign of ancestral discontent (Astuti and Harris 2008:715-718). People feared that leasing part of their ancestral land to foreigners would show disrespect towards the ancestors, with negative consequences. We should not think that those matters involve only "superstitious people". The notions of ancestors and land are so interrelated that disrespecting them would

be for many Malagasy like betraying their understanding of social identity. Discourses used by Rajoelina and his supporters, but also by some media and exponents of the Malagasy diaspora, made considerable use of concepts related to the ancestors and ancestral land. In the same way such notions were powerful tools in Rajoelina discourses, awakening fears related to the colonial period.

B) Fear of neo-colonialism

“Land is here a sensitive topic [...]. People are not willing to live once again the ordeal of colonisation, when their fields were confiscated for revenue cultivations which brought great advantages to the colons but no nourishment to Malagasy” (Carayol 2009). This sentence expresses the feelings of those fearing a neo-colonial era in the country. Madagascar regained independence in 1960 after French domination since 1895 (it became a French colony in 1896) and a revolt in 1947, which caused thousands of deaths and is still a powerful memory for many Malagasy.²⁵ Some thought that leasing or selling land to non-Malagasy would be an act of colonialism “made by Daewoo”. It would be like neglecting the bloodshed of the martyrs who fought against the colonial oppression (Andriamananoro 2009). Western discourses denouncing the deal as an act of neo-colonialism, were also numerous in the international press (Jung-a, Oliver and Burgis 2008; C'est du Colonialisme 2009; Ryall and Pflanz 2009); and included Jacques Diouf, the head of the FAO, who welcomed long term agricultural investments, but worried about the fact that many of those deals looked more profitable for the investors than for the hosting countries (Ryall and Pflanz 2009). Some argued that the preoccupation with denouncing Asian investors for their neo-colonialism was in reality concealing Europe's own interests in Africa (Rakotomalala 2008).

Another historical episode, preceding colonialism, shows Malagasy's resistance to ceding land to foreigners. Prior to the French domination, which began in the late 19th century, various kingdoms ruled different areas of Madagascar. In the beginning of the 19th century, the Merina rulers extended their domain from the highlands to much of the island. King Radama II came to power in 1861 showing clemency towards foreigners, who had been persecuted by his mother, Queen Ranavalona (1828-1861). He reopened the Malagasy kingdom to foreigners, and signed documents according the settlers the right to exploit land (Dahl 2008:82-95). Despite the clear discontent of the population, the king refused to renege, persisting with his openness toward foreigners. In 1863 his close counsellors strangled him. Giving land to foreigners: an act of treason to be punished exemplarily, to the extent that his name was expunged from the official list of the country's royals (Délivré 1974:373). The successor to the throne, Queen Rasoaherina, put back into place the interdiction to lease land to foreigners, a decision that none of the following rulers, until Marc Ravalomanana, tried to change (Ramambazafy 2009). According to journalist and agricultural consultant Chido Makunike (2009), “paying attention to the recent political history of Africa should have warned all parties concerned in this deal that strong opposition to it was not only predictable but almost guaranteed”. There are two main reasons for this: (i) the general association, following the colonial times, made between large plantations, usurpations and plunder of resources; (ii) many African countries have not yet found an adequate land tenure system (Makunike 2009; Smith 2003; Marc Ravalomanana 2009). Madagascar is no exception, and many feared for the future of those working the fields without official land titles.

C) Problems with land management

Lack of land security is a widespread problem in Africa (De Shutter 2009:7). Customary law permits users to access land without legal titles while legal practices can be source of uncertainty as land users have limited access to legal instruments. The absence of legal titles gives land users little chance to be fairly compensated if land is expropriated, or leased (Ibid.). Activities like grazing, or beekeeping, are often neglected by compensation, despite their importance for people's livelihood and culture, as anthropologist Marco Bassi of Oxford University points out (Bassi in Mackenzie 2008 and Cotula 2007:76). In addition, fallowing practices used by nomadic cultivators, can make land left fallow appear unused to potential investors (FAO 2009:2; De Shutter 2009:12; Mackenzie 2008). Nevertheless, as pointed out by the International Land Coalition “seemingly unoccupied land is probably used for at least part of the year by someone” (Mackenzie 2008). In addition, seasonal workers or people renting and not owning the fields formally could be left out of the negotiations, losing the fields they cultivate without holding rights to compensation.²⁶ Finally, IFPR highlights that “Many tropical soils are unsuited for intensive cultivation (one reason for long-fallow cultivation cycles in many tropical areas that are considered ‘unused’), or there is insufficient water for intensive cultivation” (Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009:3). The danger is that after intensive exploitation land and water are left exhausted, instead of enhanced for further use (Mackenzie 2008).

In Madagascar both the “control and maintenance of land access has been a complex policy issue for years” (Pronk and Evers 2007). The French Civil Code introduced during colonization, brought with it

rules contradicting the traditional customs of land management. Malagasy customary law has roots that are deeply linked to the respect of the ancestors (Razafiarijaona 2009:65,77,90; Evers 2006; Keller 2008; Graeber 2007; Bloch 1971) and land is perceived as a common resource to the extent that private ownership of *tanindrazana* is considered inappropriate, as it is traditionally protected by kinship relations.²⁷ At the same time, there is a growing individualism that sees land as a commodity (Teyssier, Raharison and Ravelomanatsoa 2007:36). Over the years Malagasy governments have faced challenges due to the contradictions between traditional land tenure and legal rules, most of which remained unsolved, resulting in a sort of legal pluralism that boosts land access insecurity (Pronk and Evers 2007). As Pronk and Evers (2007) report in their study on the complexity of land access in southeast Madagascar, only about the 10% of land was registered in 2005, while at the time of writing about 70% of the fields in rural areas belonged to communities according to customary rules, and not to individuals (Razafiarijaona 2009:78).

In 2005 Ravalomanana's government, pressured by the International Monetary Fund, started the National Land Tenure Program to increase the number of land titles (Madagascar Action Plan 2007-12 and Evers 2006). In the previous century only 330,000 titles were issued, while the Madagascar Action Plan set the goal of 75% of the farmers obtaining land titles or certificates by 2012 (Madagascar Action Plan 2007-12:64). In 2008 48,58% of farmers still had no knowledge about the procedures to follow (*Foncier: l'Affaire* 2008). The government also introduced another land category: the non-titled-property (land occupied by customary law for no less than thirty years or recognized as ancestral land), limiting the presumption of State property of non-titled territories (Razafiarijaona 2009:70). Nevertheless, obtaining a title can be still too costly for poor farmers or too complicated for illiterate people.²⁸ Not having a land title scares those conscious of the fact that the new laws allow the sale of land to investors (Pronk and Evers 2007); while others believe that to follow customary rules is enough as the land belongs to their ancestors, furthermore this will avoid the costs of registration and taxes (Evers 2002; Müller and Evers 2007; Razafiarijaona 2009). Given the lack of land titles and the amount of land unofficially occupied, it seemed questionable when the government declared that the land requested by Daewoo was unoccupied and that no farmer would be displaced. Particularly considering that, according to the same government representatives, Daewoo was still at an early phase of prospection (Navalona 2009; Felana 2009).

Several researchers have pointed out that uncertainty around access to land is a growing source of conflicts (Teyssier, Raharison and Ravelomanatsoa 2007; Evers et al. 2006; Müller and Evers 2007). Pronk and Evers (2007) signal that the statement of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP): "access to land is one of the main determinants of poverty", applies to "large parts of the Malagasy population". In the same article they report: "In an interview, a representative of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) argued that in the whole of Madagascar there is almost no fertile land to be found that has not already been cultivated. Since the population of Madagascar is rapidly increasing" (Pronk and Evers 2007).

Another problem is the unbalanced access to land, with consequential tensions between different social groups. Functionaries have reportedly used their leverage to access land. In Menabe, one of the areas under Daewoo interest, people with access to local power commonly managed to settle land disputes to their advantage (Teyssier, Raharison and Ravelomanatsoa 2007:39). For instance, in 2004 the municipality of Ankilivalo (Menabe), interdicted the intervention of the state topography teams in the area, as they did not trust their evaluations (Ibid.:15). This example confirms that Malagasy farmers live with a feeling of uncertainty when it comes to land (*Foncier: l'Affaire* 2008), and shows that farmers develop a sense of distrust toward the authorities, a constant fear of power abuses.²⁹

D) Distrust

"Laws were made that the stronger might not in all things have his own way" (Ovid, in Cotula 2007). A population accustomed to corruption is not new to feelings of suspicion toward the authorities and powerful people. Even those in charge of fighting corruption were looked at with a certain amount of distrust.³⁰ Malagasy people had a lot of hope placed in Ravalomanana. Nevertheless in his presidency he largely mixed state affairs with private business: several TIKO employees worked in public office, and through the removal of taxes, control of market prices, etc., TIKO's profits quadrupled since 2002 (Pellerin 2009); "The presidential airplane is registered under TIKO's name. Asa Lalana Malagasy, a TIKO sub-corporation, has become the de facto public roads company [...]" (Marcus 2004).³¹ According to Christine Razanamahaso, justice minister of the HAT, Ravalomanana "mixed public interests with his personal interests", and soon after the power shift he was sentenced for "alleged abuse of office" (Madagascar Sentences 2009). Many think he was governing the country as if it was his personal enterprise instead of a constitutional republic (Adriamananoro 2009).

Lack of transparency boosted sentiment of distrust. In this direction moved a particular kind of discourse used by professionals and educated Malagasy, the lack of transparency favours corruption and

“fuelled the suspicions that the businessman-president Ravalomanana manages the country like it is private property. Land included” (Carayol 2009).³²

Farm Radio, an organisation helping and informing farmers in developing countries, made a list of questions one should ask when a government is dealing with farmland: “Who are the potential buyers or lease holders?- What crops would be grown on the land?- What would happen to the crop? [...] - At what stage are the negotiations?- If an agreement has been reached or proposed, what are the proposed terms of the agreement?- What may happen to farmers or herders who live on or use the area?- Are there any proposed benefits to locals (such as new roads or employment opportunities)?- Are any groups advocating on behalf of locals in the negotiation process?” (Notes to Broadcaster 2008). These questions were on the minds of several Malagasy citizens and journalists after the Financial Times published its first article on the Daewoo deal. The answers from the government came late and were lacking transparency.

E) Economic reasons

“Malagasy already sold land to others in the past. Land here is a myth. A myth that allows to sell it more expensively”, says a jurist from the MCI office for legal council (Carayol 2009). According to him, in Madagascar there is a political will to perpetuate the idea that ceding land to foreigners is not a normal market procedure, so prices can be raised in negotiations with international companies.

The economic factors play a central role in a land deal and economic discourses are given great attention. Profit is the primary goal of the investors, as well as a great concern for the hosting countries. The articles about the Daewoo land deal stressed the fact that apparently Madagascar would get very little out of the deal. This alerted Malagasy and fuelled the suspicions that only a few sitting in high positions were gaining personal advantages. A suspicion that given the past of the president’s mixing of public and private affairs, was easy to sell to the public.

Nevertheless, economic reasons can go beyond the country’s boundaries. Many articles supported the discourse that international interests were behind the large land deal: by denouncing Asian land grabbing some European countries, for instance, France, were protecting their own interests in Africa (Plasse 2009; Rakotomalala 2008). This was a discourse especially used by Ravalomanana and his followers (Plasse 2009).

F) Political interests

The deal with Daewoo became a rallying point for Rajoelina in late 2008 (Ploch 2009:8). The media gave a great amount of coverage to the deal, while government denial never had the same attention. This gap was proficiently used by Rajoelina in his campaign against Ravalomanana (Rakotomalala 2008).

Rajoelina used the possible land transaction as a trigger to wake traditional feelings of attachment to land, through the large employment of populist discourses. In his speeches he preferred to use the word *tanindrazana*, which is a culturally meaningful concept; in the same way the term *selling* was a term preferred to the more exact leasing or rental; terms like neo- or new-colonialism were also largely used by Rajoelina and other exponents of his movement. During the analysis of the articles appearing in the press and my interviews it became clear that there was little discussion of the deal in terms of advantage/disadvantages, while a lot of coverage was given to the sin of ceding land to foreigners and to the lack of transparency showed by the government.

Nevertheless, after the shift of power and the official cancellation of the deal with Daewoo, Rajoelina’s temporary government (High Authority of Transition), offered possibilities to other investments and welcomed farm ventures (Ramaro and Sguazzin 2009).³³

5. Conclusion

We have seen that discourses struggle for the production of meaning, which is a key to stabilising power relations (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002:32). In other words, discourses are used to establish consensus and gain power. The analysis of the Daewoo deal shows how different stakeholders use discourses to establish meaning in their struggle to secure power. Through the analysis of the different discourses it is possible to understand the relevant points of a debate that was one of the main causes of Madagascar abrupt power shift.

As reported in the above paragraphs, discourses used by the political opposition as well as some newspapers presented land as ancestral. This is something many Malagasy are protective and sensitive about and as Dijk illustrates discourses are more persuasive if they use established beliefs (2001:358). Some representatives of the Malagasy diaspora and bloggers largely used these discourses to express some of their concerns related to the deal.

Discourses developed by international organisations and NGOs showed concerns about the amount of land Daewoo tried to lease. This aspect was largely reported by international and Malagasy press, and was emphasised by the opposition to increase grievance toward the Ravalomanana government. International organisations and NGOs stressed in their discourses that leasing 1.5 million hectares of land to a foreign company could be seen as the beginning of neo-colonialism. The size was also too big to convince people that no evictions would be made to those lacking land titles. The extent of land at stake in the deal made the case very appealing for the media and exploitable by political forces in their discourses. Instead, lack of transparency of the deal helped fuel suspicions and disbelief, and served the political opposition campaign.

The real terms of the deal were never officially disclosed and the general impression was that the land would be leased in exchange for no payment.³⁴ All the negative aspects mentioned in relation to the size of the land and lack of transparency were reinforced by the absence of compensation. NGOs, bloggers, as well as international and local press largely used this aspect in their discourses. In addition, the political opposition also stressed this point, awakening a sense of distrust toward the institutions. All these aspects were used to oppose the deal and the Ravalomanana government.

Above all, the bulk of the harvest was to be exported (Jung-a, Oliver and Burgis 2008). For countries like Madagascar, dependent on foreign aid to survive periods of food shortage, it is difficult to understand that food is to be exported.³⁵ The destination of the crops is one of the most striking aspects of this kind of deal (Notes to Broadcaster 2008), and this was largely used in discourses to oppose it.

Daewoo and Marc Ravalomanana's government underestimated a number of aspects when negotiating the lease of 1.3 million hectares of land in Madagascar. The economic discourses employed by supporters of the deal, together with the lack of transparency struggled against discourses featuring notions anchored to people's emotional concepts and traditional beliefs. The final outcome was a fierce protest that contributed to the country's power shift through what is internationally recognized as a *coup d'état*. The deal, as it was structured and marketed, had in fact little chance of success.

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* This research was carried out for *Senter for Interkulturell Kommunikasjon* (Norway) in the framework of partnership with the University of Toliara (Madagascar). My collaboration had a length of sixteen months, fourteen of which were spent in Madagascar (October 2008-December 2009).

² There are various ways to define this phenomenon. Academics prefer terms as “commercial pressure on land”, “investment deals” or “large-scale land acquisitions”; while media and NGO’s use less prudent terms like ‘land grab’ or ‘land rush’. However, despite the feeling of “appropriation” that some of these deals recall, as pointed out by Etienne Leroy (*Journée foncier* 3.10.2009), these deals follow a legal path. Therefore, I will use ‘large-scale land acquisition’, as it better reflects the case analysed.

³ “In 2007 alone, farmland prices jumped by 16 percent in Brazil, by 31 percent in Poland, and by 15 percent in the Midwestern United States” (Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009:1); Furthermore, several banks have set up agricultural investment funds, as for instance Deutsche Bank (Germany) or BlackRock (US), (Smaller and Mann 2009).

⁴ The official announcement at: <http://www.madagate.com/politique/784-fermeture-de-la-television-viva-le-pouvoir-ravalomanana-a-visage-decouvert-html> (accessed: 10.02.2009)

⁵ Most of the international community defined the power shift as *coup d’état*, however in Madagascar itself people still fiercely debate whether the change of government was in fact a *coup d’état*.

⁶ Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory operate with two concepts: ‘discourse’ which is the partial fixation of the meaning, and the ‘field of discursivity’, which encompasses all the other potential meanings. Jørgensen and Phillips add to this the concept of ‘order of discourse’ from Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, to delineate an analytical area in which not all the possible discourses, but only the competing ones are included (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002:55-56)

⁷ Particularly Barthélémy Manjakahery, Lucien David and Pietro Lupo.

⁸ Marcus (2004) uses the more radical term ‘caste’: the “Merina society is historically caste based, divided into four groups: *andriana* (nobles), *hova* (commoners), and *mainy* and *andevo* (slave groups). The caste system has diminished significantly in importance, however it continues to permeate key Merina political constituencies. Ravalomanana is from the *hova* intermediate caste. The aristocratic caste (Andriana) [of which Rajoelina is part] supported him in 2002 because he is Merina. However, when in power Tiko profited at the expense of many Merina-owned businesses, and a number of Andriana in positions of authority have suffered through his attempts to reconcile other groups”. For a comprehensive study on the Merina grouping and social classes see: (Bloch 1971; Graeber 2007); and for the Betsileo living to the South of the Merina see: (Evers 2006).

⁹ Marc Ravalomanana had auto-proclaimed himself president on February 22nd 2002, without the recognition of the international community.

¹⁰ See note 8.

¹¹ As reported by Agence France-Presse the audience at the 4th of February rally was of 1,500 (Hundreds Protest 2009)

¹² In the previous weeks the army witnessed a mutiny: the pro-opposition soldiers from CAPSAT (Army Corps of Personnel and Administrative and Technical Services), stormed the Army’s headquarter and forced General Rasolomahandry to resign. (Civil War 2009; Madagascar President 2009)

¹³ The location was Swaziland (Speech of His 2009).

¹⁴ On legal aspects of the power shift: (Veum 2010)

¹⁵ The European Community recently suspended their aid programme, due to lack of democratic progress (EU to keep 2010)

¹⁶ The people disclosing information work for three different companies. The information was crosschecked. The informants want to keep their identities anonymous so as not to damage the companies they work for, of which Madagascar Future Enterprise was a client. Furthermore, given the unstable political situation in Madagascar at the moment, the informants also prefer to stay anonymous.

¹⁷ Those are the exact words in English of one of the informants interviewed.

¹⁸ My translation of : Ministère des domaines et de l’aménagement du terroire and of Ministère de l’Agriculture, de l’Elevage et de la Pêche. (Felana 2009).

¹⁹ The *Fokontany* is the smallest administrative unit in Madagascar.

²⁰ My translation from comments appeared on: (Démenti de Daewoo 2009) See also: (Razafiarjaona 2009)

²¹ My translation from: (Andriamanana 2009)

²² My translations from www.terresmalgaches.info (accessed 10.10.2009)

²³ Not all the Malagasy were in the position to participate in the debate about the land lease. However, although the Malagasy generally are quite reserved and indirect in expressing their opinions, when it comes to land issues many seem to be willing to protest openly. When I refer to Malagasy here, I refer to those who were able to access the debate about Daewoo’s investment and/or those participating in the protests. The point here is to identify what kind of discourses were used in the debate, and why some of them functioned as trigger in the protests.

²⁴ A marginalization that in certain situations is equivalent to being put in the slave, impure, category. Thus, *tanindrazana* becomes important also to change this and overcome the slave status. (Evers 2006; Keller 2008; Graeber 2007).

²⁵ For more information about the colonial period in Madagascar, and the land politics of the period see: (Ellis 1985). For the relevance of the 1947 Malagasy Uprising see: (Hanson 2007).

²⁶ Renting here refers to people receiving the right to use of land in exchange for money or part of their crop.

²⁷ Also in the opinion of Professor P. Lupo (personal communication in Toliara) according to Malagasy custom land belongs to the collective, which manages it through the *Fokolona*. An opinion confirmed in: (Razafiarjaona 2009) See also: (Pronk and Evers 2007).

²⁸ The costs are equivalent to \$500, and the procedure lasts an average of six years (Teyssier, Ramarojohn and Ratsialonana 2010:10).

²⁹ In relation to this it is relevant to mention what Bloch (1971) reports: *vazaha* (Europeans or foreigners) are seen with a mixed sense of scepticism, fear and envy, the same applies to the Malagasy who adopted western modes and wealth; a type of wealth, which is perceived as acquired by trickery rather than honest toil.

³⁰ During my stay in the country, I heard several comments about the anticorruption office BIANCO: how they could potentially decide whom to persecute or not persecute, upon their own judgment or advantage, and people should be thus careful.

³¹ See Marcus (2004) for more examples.

³² My translation from French to English.

³³ In Madagascar, other companies are trying to lease land, as for example the Indian Varun, as reported in Teyssier, Ramarojohn and Ratsialonana (2010).

³⁴ Nevertheless, by employing 1.500 people, as prospected by Daewoo, the people obtaining a job would be one every 155 hectares, while the same amount of land could sustain a larger number than this (0.8 hectares/family), (Teyssier, Ramarojohn and Ratsialonana 2010:7).

³⁵ WFP aids more than 500.000 people each year in Madagascar: Programme Alimentaire Mondial des Nations Unies - <http://www.wfp.org/countries/madagascar>

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