

Once there were rice-fields... Life away from the ancestral land **Study on the impact of rural-urban migration in Antananarivo**

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Abstract:

As a shortage of fertile land in the rural areas of Madagascar is an important incentive for rural-urban migration, villagers move to Antananarivo mainly because they hope to improve their standard of living there. This article examines the positive and negative impact of migration on the living conditions of migrants in the Antetazanavoany neighbourhood and resulting changes in attitudes towards ancestral and funerary customs. The evolution of these customs mirrors processes of social change within society.

¹⁹ The fieldwork for this research was conducted by M. van den Heuvel in the context of her master studies at VU University Amsterdam. She graduated in September 2006. S.J.T.M. Evers co-authors this article in her capacity as supervisor of the research and thesis of M. van den Heuvel.

'Tsy tany mandeha, fô olon belo (it is not land that moves, but people), one of the most cited of proverbs, means, in part, that, unlike the constancy of land, people do not remain the same when they move. They do not give up those aspects of their identities constituted by the movements, in turn, of their ancestors, but they also accede to the customs of the new place. Continuity is anchored in the land and the marks that the ancestors leave on it; history is made by movement across it.' (Lambek and Walsh 1999: 156)

Introduction of the Research

Due to city-oriented migration and demographic pressure, an ongoing process of urbanisation has taken place in Madagascar in the last decades, slowly but structurally changing the rural-urban ratio in the country (United Nations Population Division 2006). Research indicates that urban living conditions are slightly better than rural standards as regards poverty levels and access to basic services such as electricity and clean water (Paternostro et al. 2001: 6, 22-24), however, there is little information available to substantiate this assumption. Since material prosperity does not always result in emotional well-being, our study on rural-urban migration was not only directed towards poverty, land and livelihood, but was also focused on drawing attention to how traditional values may undergo changes or even be eradicated by city life. Data was collected to better understand the various elements that tend to improve or worsen the conditions in which migrants have to live after their move, such as work and income, the nature of migration and also the question of access to land. Additional information was gathered that focuses on the values and customs that are connected to the ancestors and the ancestral homeland. This direction was chosen because ceremonies concerning death 'cast an instructive light on a society's attitude to the relation between the individual and the society as a whole' (Cohen 1985: 82). In the Highlands of Madagascar, tombs and ancestors are particularly important parameters of human interaction and social alignment (Evers 1999: 257). During the fieldwork the *famadibana* (reburial ceremony) was chosen as the focal point in identifying transformation processes within certain traditions, when embedded into an urban environment.

This research project was part of a collaboration which was initiated in 2005 between VU University Amsterdam and l'Université d'Antananarivo (ICMAA: Institut de Civilisations / Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie), which was made possible by the financial support of the Dutch NGO ICCO (Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation). The central aim of this collaboration was to gather more information on natural resource management and poverty in

Madagascar, as well as the impact of new laws for land registration on local attitudes towards land ownership and other existing social structures. The central research query of this article is twofold and wonders what the socio-economic consequences of city-towards migration may be for migrants living in the poor neighbourhood of Antetazanavoany, and what the impact of migration may be on the way they experience and perform funerary customs?

The ongoing program initiates partnerships between Dutch and Malagasy students for a three month period of fieldwork. Ramiarimanana Netisoa collaborated with Van den Heuvel during the phase of empirical data collection in June-Augustus 2005, and her cultural and linguistic interpretations have not only been of tremendous value but her contribution made it possible to gather a substantial amount of data in a relatively short time. Research methods that were used include participant observation, oral-history interviews with migrants, topic interviews with governmental representatives or other involved organisations²⁰, visits to some of the surrounding villages, attendance at a *famadibana*, and also secondary data analysis. The in-depth conversations with the residents of Antetazanavoany form the kernel of the data presented in this article, but all other methods have been essential to better interpret their answers. For the purpose of gaining clearer insight into the dynamics of migration, the interviewees were divided into three categories that were equally represented in the sample. The first category consisted 1st generation migrants that have recently arrived in the capital (within the last ten years), the second of 1st generation migrants who already live for a long period in Antananarivo (more than ten years) and the third of 2nd generation migrants who are people that were born in Antananarivo or arrived as minors.

Urbanisation Processes in Madagascar and Antananarivo

The total population of Madagascar comprised of 18.6 million inhabitants in 2005 (World Bank 2006), of which an increasing proportion is now living in the urban areas. Since the 1960's the urban annual growth rate has been substantially higher than the rural annual growth rate, with the result that the urban population percentage in Madagascar has increased from 10,6% during the year of independence (1960) to 26.8% in 2005, the year this fieldwork was conducted. Prognoses indicate that the share of the urban population will grow even further to 39,3% in 2030 (United Nations Population Division 2006). This means that in Madagascar, traditionally a rural country, a trend of structural increasing urbanisation is manifesting itself. Much of the urban growth is

²⁰ Interviews were held with representatives of the NGO's Red Cross and CARE International, and with CECAM, a cooperative agricultural financial institution providing credit.

concentrated in and around the capital of Antananarivo, and has resulted in high levels of urban poverty (Cities Alliances Annual Report 2001).

Antananarivo, located in the centre of the Highlands, has a long history as a human settlement. Although the site is reputed to have been inhabited from the 14th century, it was only in the 17th and 18th century that the former peasant settlement grew into the decision-making centre of political, economical and military power that it is today. Both the Merina kingdom and the French colonial regime decided to rule from Antananarivo, making the city's development run parallel with Malagasy history²¹ (Andrianaivoarivony 1998: 14-18). Under French occupation the city expanded from 50.000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 20th century to 200.000 in 1960 when Madagascar became independent (Ramamanjisoa 1998: 113). In the past four decades the population has augmented further to almost 1.6 million people (United Nations Population Division 2006). Because of the city's continuous expansion there are an accumulating number of problems such as an increasing demand for housing, the insufficiency of the electric power and water supply, and the deficiency of water drainage and garbage collection (Rabemanantsoa 1998: 163).

With a population not reaching more than an approximate hundred thousand inhabitants, the secondary cities in Madagascar are substantially smaller than the capital (Ramamanjisoa 1998: 173)²². This tendency is in conformity with the African continent, where the population in the largest cities is often huge and ever on the increase, while the other urban areas tend to be underdeveloped (Rakodi 1997: 34). However, classifications of rural and urban areas often tend to be fairly artificial: variations in the criteria for deciding the population size that defines whether a community is a city or a village can change the national percentages of urbanisation tremendously (Tacoli 1998: 4). There are also other, less rigid, ways of distinguishing the difference between rural and urban areas such as examining the structure of socio-economic networks and investigating the interdependent relations between urban centres and the rural hinterland. Antananarivo for example, is surrounded by suburbs and villages which, as they spread, gradually transform the metropolis from an urban environment into a largely rural area.

²¹ In the beginning of human residence in Madagascar the political structure was characterised by battle and conflict as several competing rival kingdoms fought over territory and tenure of land. By the end of the 18th century, the power balance existing between the various native groups was tipped by the Merina kingdom. Under leadership of Andrianampoinimerina the Merina soon prevailed over the island (Healy and Ratsimbarison 1998: 287-288, Larson 1996: 544). The Merina domination came to an end when the French conquered the island at the end of the 19th century. Madagascar was colonised by the French from 1896 till 1960.

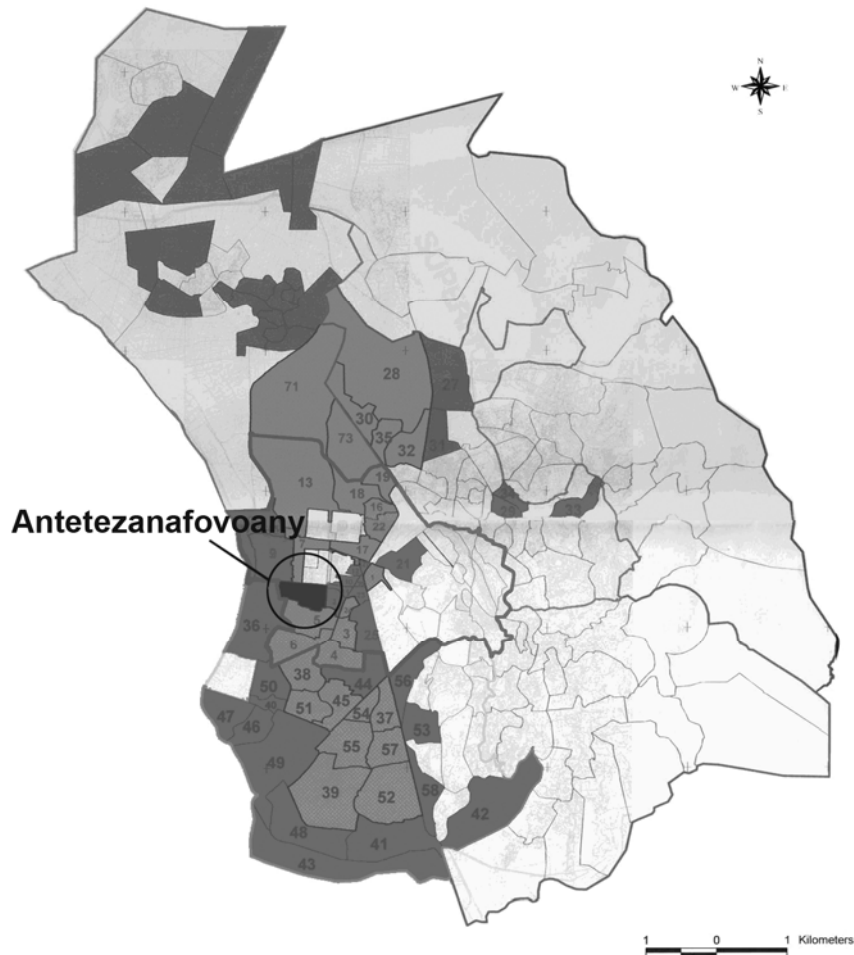
²² Van den Heuvel decided to conduct the fieldwork in Antananarivo because of the size of the capital and the high concentration of migrants.

Location of Research: Antetezanafovoany

Antananarivo is built in the midst of twelve mountains, which gives the city its distinctive appearance, for the hillsides are covered with houses and the valleys are mainly occupied by rice-fields. Within Antananarivo there exists a vertical social stratification, as it is a commonly held ideal to live on the highest slopes as opposed to the valleys. A person's location of residency often symbolises his or her status. Many of the most deprived, often migrants from rural areas, live in the so-called *bas-quartiers*, a flat area on the west side of the city which is characterised by random and unplanned settlements.

Map: most deprived neighbourhoods of Antananarivo

'les 80 Fokontany d'intervention du Programme MAHAVITA (D.A.P. II) CARE International' (source: CARE International) The dark grey zones show the poor neighbourhoods in which CARE International is active



Antetezanafovoany, the neighbourhood that served as the basis for this research, is part of the *bas-quartiers*. It has a dual appearance, since towards the south-west the density of the

population is high and houses are small and closely packed together, whereas to the north-eastside, the neighbourhood is as spacious as a village. The area used to contain numerous rice fields but due to an onslaught of problems caused by tornados, floods and pollution, it has been permanently transformed into marshes which are now overgrown with useless water-hyacinths. In the 'fields' people cut the plants for cattle-fodder, while various animals are scattered around. Although Antetezanafovoany may appear to be slightly rural, this is deceptive, as there is hardly any agricultural use of the land and people are economically dependent on the city. Due to the low position of the area there are numerous problems with water. In the summer, the already high groundwater level rises because of abundant rainfall and canals are often known to flood. The combination of floods and pollution causes great hygienic problems which are exacerbated not only by the lack of sewage but also by the unsanitary conditions in this neighbourhood. During the rainy season many families have to leave the area to find shelter elsewhere in the city and many of them do not return when the water level drops again. Those who own land and houses tend to come back, but a number of those who rent property often stay away afterwards. This creates an annual circulation of inhabitants in the area, as new arrivals from the countryside can avail of the opportunity to fill the abandoned places of residence in Antetezanafovoany.

During this fieldwork project it was difficult to find reliable factual evidence relating to the development of this neighbourhood. The *fokontany*²³ publishes reports at regular intervals that describe the demographic distribution of the population, but only the report from the year 2000 was actually traceable. More recent statistics of the population of Antetezanafovoany in 2004 were available at the 1st Arrondissement of Antananarivo, but unfortunately they could not provide any relevant data for years prior to that. According to the 1st Arrondissement the population count in that year was the figure of 6546 residents spread over 1406 households. A comparison of the demographic data in the research area with national statistics shows that age distribution is positioned between the average of Antananarivo and the average of the countryside, which would indicate that there is a relatively large number of young children below the age of nine in Antetezanafovoany when compared to the rest of the capital.

²³ *Fokontany*: the smallest administrative unit in Madagascar, also a term for community. Within Antananarivo this word refers to a neighbourhood.

Table: Age Distribution Madagascar

	Antananarivo	rural areas	Antetезanafovoany	average Madagascar
0-9:	21.4 %	32.1 %	26.9 %	30.7 %
10-19:	21.5 %	23.1 %	21.9 %	23.4 %
20-29:	17.9 %	15.3 %	17.9 %	15.4 %
30-39:	13.3 %	11.5 %	14.1 %	11.5 %
40-49:	13.0 %	9.3 %	10.8 %	9.6 %
50-59:	7.3 %	4.5 %	6.8 %	4.8 %
60+:	5.6 %	4.5 %	1.6 %	4.6 %

(sources: enquête auprès des ménages 2002, rapport principal 2003: 15, and Nombre de Population, Monographie 1 Arrondissement, 2004)

This may be explained by the fact that many of the residents come from a rural background where a typical household tends to consist of more children than is common in the city. Furthermore, there is a slightly larger number of people between the ages of 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 resident there. According to the Malagasy Institut National de la Statistique (INSTAT) this is the age at which most people choose to migrate (INSTAT 2002: 22-23). The age group of 60 and older seems to be underrepresented in the neighbourhood, which may perhaps indicate that people tend to move back to their village when they have reached old age. Other possible explanations may be that they move to other areas in Antananarivo, or that their life expectancy is lower, or perhaps it is simply that the figures are not correct.

Since the researchers were barely able to find statistics about Antetезanafovoany, it is difficult to know how the population has developed over the years. In the 1960's and 1970's there were probably only a few thousand people living in that neighbourhood, which amounts to one third of the present population. This assumption is made both on the basis of the memories of migrants who arrived in those decades and on the recollection of several former presidents of the neighbourhood. A substantial portion of the families who arrived during this early period were in the position to buy property, but for the newcomers it is more difficult, though not impossible, to obtain land due to the increased density of the population and the transformation of valuable ground into less useful swamps.

Rural-Urban Poverty, Dimensions of Migration and Livelihood

Madagascar is currently not only one of the least developed countries in the world but also has an extremely high poverty level. According to the World Bank the GNI per capita was US\$290 in 2005, while 68.7% of the population was living in poverty (World Bank 2006). In the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Madagascar the poverty line is defined as follows: 'Income necessary for buying in addition to indispensable non-food elements, a food ration of 2.133 calories per day' (PRSP 2003: 17). The amount of people living below the poverty line in Madagascar is so high that it affects both the rural and the urban areas. However, there is still a rural-urban income gap, since 77% of the rural population is living in poverty as opposed to the 52% among the urban population (USAID 2002). In the past decades urban poverty levels have gone up, although data suggests that migration between rural and urban areas have served to mitigate the rise in national poverty. Those who migrated from deteriorating situations in rural areas tended to settle in less deprived circumstances in urban areas (Paternostro et al. 2001: 15-17). Life in a village is often marked by a lack of basic needs, and in the city there are often better services available such as access to electricity, water and sanitation. Even when migrants remain as poor as they were before their move, their quality of life has potentially increased. In the case of drinking water, research done in the 1990's shows that within the urban areas of Madagascar the percentage of the population that had access to clean water was 60% as opposed to 10% of the rural population (Paternostro et al. 2001: 23).

Rural-urban migration can be seen as an important livelihood strategy. According to INSTAT the main reasons for migration are for education purposes, family reasons and the prospect of improving living standards (INSTAT 2002: 26-27). The results of the empirical research done in Antetazanavoany would largely corroborate this and migrants themselves cited the possibility of receiving better medical treatment in the capital as a further incentive. It is noteworthy that in almost all life histories that were recorded in the research area, the shortage of land in the village was given as a key incentive for migration- an aspect that is not specifically discussed by INSTAT. Since the family's land is not large enough to divide among all the children, some of them have to leave home and try to make a living elsewhere. Often temporary migration is triggered by other factors such as health or education, but most migrants declare that they would not have moved permanently if there had been an opportunity to stay in the village. There appears to be no distinction in motivation for migration between the first generation who arrived decades ago and the present generation of new arrivals.

Since a migrant's life is often characterized by severe struggle, it may lead to the notion

that migration is often instigated by false hopes shattered by the reality of becoming trapped in an urban environment. However, research done in numerous development countries would indicate that most migrants have a fairly realistic idea of what is to be expected and that in general they are satisfied with their decision to move (Gilbert and Gugler 1992: 68-69). People only decide to migrate when they believe they have a fair chance of improving their access to employment opportunities and assets (Tacoli 1998: 5, Tacoli 1999: 1-2). Encouraged by inequalities in resources and income, migrants take financial and psychological risks by leaving their former villages, and therefore expect material rewards and better prospects in return (Gilbert and Gugler 1992: 67-69). It is generally within the household that it is determined who is fit enough to migrate to the city so that certain members of the family can be sent first while others remain in the village or follow later. This well-used strategy is of a judicious nature since it are usually the young, physically fit and better educated ones who already have access to urban based social networks that have the best chance to succeed (Gilbert and Gugler 1992: 69-70, Tacoli 1998: 6-10). The extended family can be of great benefit for the newly arrived by offering temporary shelter, food and also assistance in finding work. However, the fieldwork conducted in Antetazanavoany indicates that these options for support are often limited not only by the fact that urban family members may have limited resources themselves, but also partly because there is a strong focus on the nuclear family. For even though they may wish to help, they may decide to prioritize their own interests.

One of the characteristics of the rural-urban migration process is that it moves in both directions. Although for some time it was assumed that people mainly move towards the city, more up to date research indicates that migration is far more dynamic (Tacoli 1998: 5). In many African cities an opposite trend, *return-migration*, has been recorded in which migrants move from urban areas back to the villages due to for instance, a decrease in formal urban job opportunities while at the same time access to education and health care have been improved in the rural areas (Tacoli 1999: 2, Gilbert and Gugler 1992: 79-86). Another development is *temporary* or *seasonal out-migration*, because many young and healthy people have undertaken the move to the city, there is a shortage of agricultural labour in the countryside. It is therefore not uncommon for families to ask for help from their urban based relatives (Gilbert and Gugler 1992: 79-86). Ramamanjisoa describes *seasonal out-migration* in Madagascar from the perspective of villagers who go to urban areas in the quiet period after harvest in order to work as day labourers with their older children for the few months before they need to return to continue their agricultural activities (Ramamanjisoa 1998: 142). Temporary migration can be a steppingstone towards permanent

migration, although, as Ramamanjisoa points out, many members of this group of rural-urban migrants hedge their bets by reinvesting a substantial part of their earnings back into the village (ibid.)

Our empirical research conducted in Antetazanavoany endorses the variety of migration trajectories prevalent. There are migrants who reconsider over and over again whether they have made the right decision, or whether they would become more prosperous if they moved elsewhere. Some of them are truly flexible and can manage to change location regularly either within the city, or back and forth from the city to the suburbs or countryside. However, most migrants aim to earn enough money to be able to return to their village of origin on a permanent basis, but it seems that only very few people succeed in accumulating sufficient savings to actually be able to return. The majority of the respondents will probably have to remain in Antananarivo, as they have neither money to purchase land in the village nor any other assets - financial or otherwise- to support them in their place of origin.

After arriving in Antetazanavoany it is not easy to find a steady, well paid job, since someone arriving from a rural area generally only has agriculturally related work experience, a limited social network and a low level of education. Therefore most people rely on various ways of income gathering. Potts (1995: 250) recalls three types of income strategies for urban households outside the formal job sector: the informal market, agricultural activity within and around the urban area, and strengthening and adaptation of the rural-urban linkages. All of these are to a certain extent relevant for the migrants involved in this research. Due to limited opportunities for finding a steady job people often have to perform day labour, which does not provide them with a structural income. Typical jobs for women are of a domestic nature such as doing laundry, collecting water and nursing, while men often work in construction and generally seem to generate higher revenues. However, because of the great fluctuation of their job opportunities, the household often depends structurally on the lower but more regular income of the women. There is also quite a large group of entrepreneurs in the area, who have useful skills and/or have a small sum of money at their disposal who have been able to start their own informal business. Some of them are migrants who were able to open a small grocery or workshop with the money they obtained from selling their share of inherited land.

Whenever possible, residents cultivate small patches of land in the surroundings of Antananarivo in order to supplement their earnings, however, only very few have access to land within travelling distance. Unfortunately, there are hardly any possibilities for cultivating food

within the confines of the neighbourhood due to a degradation process by which previously fertile land was turned into marshes. Some migrants invest money in small-scale animal breeding, which enables them to occasionally provide the household with meat, or generate extra money through vending the animals.

The situation in Antetazanavoany is characterised by poignant poverty, but even so, most migrants do not regret their choice to migrate for economical reasons, since compared to the life they had in the village of origin, they have managed to improve their standard of living and therefore have a slightly higher income, more food and often more opportunities to educate their children. Life in Antanveanarivo is however, regarded as very difficult, and most people make just enough money to survive from day to day. In general, the migrants had expected to acquire more prosperity and are therefore disillusioned that they can not generate more income. At the same time they miss their life and the family in the countryside tremendously. Many of them are permanently split between the village and the capital as although rationally they are in the city, emotionally they are still in the countryside. This is illustrated by the following response from a couple in Antetazanavoany – both have lived in the capital for six years – to the question whether they miss their former life in the village:

Man (41): *‘C’est difficile de répondre à cette question. Je ne peux rien espérer à la campagne mais je ne peux pas l’oublier.’*

Woman (39): *‘Si je dis que la vie à la campagne me manque, je dois reconnaître d’autre part que la vie y était difficile... Mais, si je dis que la vie à la campagne ne me manque pas, je dois quand même reconnaître que c’est le lieu de naissance.’*

Among the respondents lingers a collectively held ideal of the village life. It is the place that anchors their identity as it represents their ancestral land and family history²⁴. It is also the location where for most a large part of the family resides. It is not that the migrants idealise their former life, they do acknowledge the difficulties attached to it, but they deeply regret that they had no other options than to leave. The idea of moving back when it becomes too difficult in the capital, or after retirement, holds a strong appeal. However, not all migrants desire to go back. Some of them have a clear preference for staying permanently in Antananarivo, fuelled by the

²⁴ In the Highlands of Madagascar lives a substantial group of slave-descendants – called *andevo* – (Bloch 1971: 3-4, 68, Evers 1999: 260 and 2002: 40-41), many of whom up till today live in a marginal position in society. Only a small group of them have managed in the past to obtain land, and with this a chance to work their own fields and an opportunity to establish a family history by building a tomb and create their own line of ancestors (Graeber 1999). Van den Heuvel did not study the influence of former slavery particularly, because of the taboos that still exist on discussing a persons descent. However, it is believed that a part of the migrants in Antetazanavoany probably are *andevo* and they possible did not leave the countryside because of shortage of inherited land, but because of a total lack of property.

wish to be close to their children and grandchildren who live in the capital as well. Others do not have a place to return to as the whole family in the meantime is scattered over the island.

For the next generation, returning to the village is an abstract concept. They may wish to repeat the ideals of their parents, but at the same time they are already much more connected to the city. Their lack of agricultural knowledge and experience of rice cultivation for example, would make it very difficult for them to survive in the countryside. And so, the connection with the economical use of inherited land in the village becomes weakened with every new generation. Ironically, it is mainly because of their children that many migrants want to maintain relations with their native village and thus protect their claim to the land in order to secure a way back for the next generation.

Significance of (Ancestral) Land

Since 1996²⁵ the government of Madagascar has tried to accelerate economic reform by implementing various procedures such as tightening the monetary policy and liberating the exchange rate (Paternostro et al. 2001: 2-3). Another strategy it employed, is based on implementing changes in the national laws for land registration in order to not only create more clarity on ownership but also to attract potential investors and receive tax revenues. The year 2000 saw the launching of the '*Programme National Foncier*', an initiative that aims to increase the registration of land titles, particularly in rural areas, while mitigating between local land claims and judicial procedure (Teyssier 2004:3). The impact of this yet to be fully implemented policy, on a society in which 80% of the population is dependent on the agricultural sector, is likely to be enormous. (European Union 2006). In a situation where shortage of fertile land is common and the revenues from cultivating land are often barely enough to feed a family - let alone employ other labourers - the degree of poverty seems to be highly correlated with access to land. At the same time, extra insecurity is not only created by factors such as demographic pressure, inequality between people and migration movements, but also by poor mobilisation of capital for agriculture and sub-standard technical improvements (Healy and Ratsimbarison 1998: 296-297). There is a possibility that these new land laws will create a certain tension within the rural areas (cf. Evers et al 2006), and may even have an impact on the number of migrants leaving the village to move to the city.

²⁵ In 1996 a three-year economic and financial program was implemented, supported by the IMF, the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

Land has dual importance in the Highlands of Madagascar, as although people often live in the place that offers the best economic and political prospects, they are still strongly attached to their ancestral land, whose significance is deeply entwined with identity and traditions (Graeber 1999: 322). In his ethnography, Maurice Bloch explains that for generations large groups of Merina spread²⁶ over Madagascar, living away from what they consider their *tanindrazana*, 'the land of the ancestors' (Bloch 1971: 105-108). The constant migration of people who want to seize opportunities for a better life elsewhere, has shaped a fluid system around established localities. To finally return to the family tomb after death in order to be united with their ancestors is a major preoccupation for most Merina.

Tombs are a primordial condition for the *tanindrazana*, as is evident from the Highland landscape, which is characterized by solid cement buildings dotted everywhere, some of them ancient and dilapidated, others recently built or freshly painted. The tombs often seem of better quality than the houses in the villages, which has prompted several anthropologists to state that generally, more money is spent on the tombs than on the dwellings of the living (Bloch 1971: 113, Middleton 1999: 7-8). It is already early in life, usually shortly after marriage, that the Malagasy have to decide in which tomb they wish to be buried, as there are often several options available for both men and women (cf. Graeber 1995: 263). From that moment onwards, one is expected to share the cost of the tomb's maintenance (cf. Bloch 1971: 115-119).

In general there are two different kinds of land, 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). During the interviews held with informants in Antetazanavoany, there were three situations which were frequently referred to in connection with what happened to the inherited land after migration. Fragmented after being divided among many siblings, the land was often still owned by the migrant while other family members cultivated it, sometimes in return for part of the harvest. In some cases the land was sold to either the family or to other interested parties so that the migrants could buy property in the city, or start a small business. However, there were also instances in which the status of the land at the time of interview was surrounded by obscurity, as no immediate family members appeared to be keeping an eye on the property, it was suspected that the land was being used by other villagers, but without any financial compensation for the actual owner. In this situation, the

²⁶ The Merina are the largest ethnic group, representing 26.2% of the Malagasy population. Their main habitat is the Highlands surrounding Antananarivo. The second largest group are the Betsileo, settled in the southern parts of the Highlands, making up for 12.1% of the population (Library of Congress Country Studies 1994). Within our research most people being interviewed said to be Merina, a minority claimed to be Betsileo

question as to what had happened to the all important family tomb was also left in doubt or unanswered. Although losing access to the ancestral tomb is considered a serious defeat, it is often mitigated by the fact that the respondents, many of whom are women, had already been subscribed to another tomb.

Although possession of land in the village symbolizes the possibility of return, the problem still remains that because the migrants were forced to leave due to the lack of revenue gained from the land, in the meantime other family members have taken over its cultivation in order to supplement their own meagre income. So by staying away too long, their entitlement to the inherited land, though still legitimate, becomes more difficult to reclaim (cf. Tacoli 1998: 6). The opposing interests of villagers and urban dwellers are likely to create a conflict situation when migrants leave with the idea that ownership of land and assets will serve as an insurance when life in the city becomes too hard. In order to gauge the seriousness of the claim migrants in Antezanafovoany still have, we asked them whether they received either money or a part of the harvest every year. Most of the migrants receive nothing either because the yield is insufficient to be divided, or because distant relatives or people from the village are cultivating the land and there is no longer any direct contact. There is however, a small minority of the respondents that does obtain a part of the yield, sometimes in cash but mostly in products. This group seems to have a more serious chance of retrieving the inherited land and therefore their wish to return to the countryside after retirement appears to have more credibility. There was no substantial difference in this group between the recently arrived migrants and the long term ones, and none of the second generation migrants received agricultural products from land in the village of origin.

Both in rural and urban settings, obtaining and maintaining ownership of land and housing, is an important preoccupation for most migrants who were interviewed. Property is seen as an important economic asset and respondents were very much interested in purchasing land in Antananarivo, as they are convinced that owning property in the city would not only reduce daily spending, but would also provide more security since they would no longer have to depend on the capricious behaviour of landlords and may even generate income when rented to others. Perhaps there is a gap between what people say they would do if they had money, and what they would actually do when financial resources are available. However, there is a group of migrants in Antezanafovoany that have gained possession of land in this neighbourhood²⁷. In our findings preference for a certain location is based on the moment of possible purchase as is shown by the

²⁷ In the research sample, one third of the respondents bought land in the capital.

fact that in the short term, migrants usually want to invest in the city where their present life is based, in the long term they would prefer the village. The prevalent attitude towards possession of land in the city seems to be that it is merely a financial concern whereas the attitude towards owning land in the countryside is embedded in cultural values concerning the ancestors but also has to do with a feeling of belonging there.

***Famadihana* and Burials**

In the previous section reference is made to the importance of both ancestral land and the role of the tomb. This section will further discuss the preoccupation of migrants wanting to be buried on ancestral land so that they will become reunited with their dead relatives. Both funerals and *famadihana* (exhumations) are important events associated with the tombs, the latter of which will be taken as a focal point not only in discussing the relationship between rural and urban relatives, but also in reviewing some of the transformation processes put into motion by migration. The choice to concentrate on the *famadihana* was determined both by the duration of the fieldwork project and the period in which it was conducted, which was from June to September. This is the dry season and as it is the time just after the land has been harvested, it is also when most *famadihana* take place. It was therefore, an important topic in Anteteanafovoany during the field work project, as most residents were invited to one or more of the ceremonies taking place in the villages in the Highlands.

It may be interesting to note that the *famadihana* has been subject to change throughout Malagasy history. Larson argues that reburial ceremonies date back to at least the 18th century, and possibly earlier. Even so, the ceremonies involved were the domain of innovation and alteration during both the Merina expansion and the French occupation (Larson 2000: 125-126, 149-150). In the early days emphasis was put on rituals around primary burials, but there are also various accounts that refer to not only the repatriation of bodies, but also to their transferral from old tombs to newly constructed ones. It was during the 19th century, that the practice of reburial developed due to the number of Merina soldiers who died far from their ancestral land and needed to be brought back home. The transport of remains from places of temporary burial to a permanent resting place in family tombs was what stimulated the creation of new rituals for secondary burial that finally led to the form of the ritual that is now in use (ibid.: 150). In addition, Harper views the early period of Merina domination, when king Andrianampoinimerina ruled the island, as a period in which ancestral tombs and ancestral land were popularized in order to forge Merina ethnicity (Harper 2002: 104). Both scholars exemplify that the burial

customs of the Highlands are by no means static but are continually shaped by both local and national history. The assumption could therefore be made that *famadibana* rituals will more than likely continue to evolve and change again, or may even become obsolete when exposed to the influences of poverty and an urban life-style.

During the *famadibana* ceremony, which is held by the kinsmen of the dead, the dispersed family comes to gather around the direct family and generally hundreds of people – family, neighbours and special guests – attend the rituals for two consecutive days. These rituals are different from those performed at the first burial, as they involve already ‘dry’ bodies as opposed to the ‘wet’ bodies of the recently dead. Every so many years²⁸, depending on the family, the bodies are taken out of the tomb and tightly wrapped in numerous layers of textiles named *lambamena*.

Every answer given to the question as to why the dead need to be reburied, will contain a series of phrases describing the ancestors as being cold and in need of new "clothes". Satisfying their demands is very important because of the belief in the ancestors' power to intervene in human life and relationships. When the ancestors are kept happy and content, they give blessings and ensure fertility, but if they are displeased with their descendants, they can become choleric and violent, bringing misfortune to the village (Larson 2000: 124, cf. Bloch 1971: 162-163). Another interpretation for the purpose of *famadibana* is given by Bloch in his book ‘Placing the dead’. He situates the ritual in the Merina's universal desire to be reunited with their family, as opposed to having to suffer their greatest fear, which is to be left alone in a single grave. By giving the dead a place in the tomb they become part of a continuing social structure. In the past, the ideal was for families to live under one roof and be buried in one tomb. But nowadays, having to live far away from each other in real life, the *famadibana* is a way of bringing kinsmen together after death, accomplishing the ideal at last (Bloch 1971: 161-166). Exhumation does not only involve the wrapping of bodies that are already in the tomb but is also an occasion for reuniting the dead who were temporarily buried elsewhere. Provisional burial is quite common because tombs cannot be opened for a certain period after a recently deceased person has been placed there, so another solution must be found when people of the same family have died in quick succession. It is also often not possible for family members that live far away from the family tomb, such as the migrants in Antetazanavoany, to return the corpse immediately after death, as it is a difficult and expensive journey to organize. This makes the *famadibana* a continuing process of grouping and regrouping kinsmen (ibid.: 161-166).

²⁸ In oral accounts during the fieldwork 5 or 7 years was most often mentioned.

In contemporary society exhumation is an ubiquitous ritual but attendance is no longer self-evident for everyone. Some people have abandoned the planned exhumation, or extended the years between the ceremonies because of the high costs involved. In past decades the population of Madagascar has become so impoverished that it is now seen as a great burden to organize and attend the various exhumations. Every year there is the dilemma of deciding whether or not to accept invitations received from extended family members to attend their ceremonies. Due to the costs of the *taxi-brousse* and the contributions that need to be paid to the host family, it is an expensive journey and would mean a substantial loss in daily income. At the same time however, it is an important family gathering and being there also helps to maintain a relationship with relatives in the village.

Furthermore, the migrants have to decide whether they still wish to be involved in organizing the *famadibana* for those relatives who are in their own family tomb, a question which also indirectly relates to the choice they have to make as to whether they wish to be exhumed themselves. In the past it was important to satisfy the ancestors in order to receive blessings and achieve prosperity in life. Being more removed from the atmosphere of the family, the migrants now prefer to spend the little money they have on the kind of investments that will yield direct results, such as land and housing. One of the women interviewed, has already lived in Antananarivo for forty one years and expressed her reluctance as follows:

Woman (55): *‘Les gens disent que les morts ont froid et ont besoin de couverture. C’est pourquoi nous faisons l’exhumation, par respect des ancêtres. Le problème pour moi, c’est que ma vie est très difficile et je n’ai pas d’argent pour nourrir ma famille. S’il y a une exhumation, je suis obligée de payer une somme importante pour financer la fête. Je ne veux plus faire de cette pratique. Je voudrai avoir une vie meilleure et je ne veux plus gaspiller mon argent pour les morts.’*

Another reason for rethinking the *famadibana* is the growing impact of Christianity. Even though most Highlanders had already been converted to Christianity before and during colonisation, the church seems to have gained a firmer grip on the religious community within the city. Some migrants simply become more religious after their move, or get involved in different religious movements or sects and now feel that a belief in the ancestors and the ceremonies that derive from this belief, including asking the ancestors for blessings, has no place alongside the doctrines of Christianity. A couple who lived in Anteteanafovoany for 6 years, and who became Jehovah's Witnesses after their move to the capital, commented on the *famadibana*:

The man (41) and his wife (39): *‘Oui, [l’exhumation], c’est important pour la famille. C’est une occasion pour tous les membres de famille de se connaître et de se réunir. C’est important pour les descendants des ancêtres à*

exhumer.

Mais nous deux, nous ne faisons pas de l'exhumation parce que nous avons une religion qui n'accepte pas l'exhumation. (..) Nous sommes obligés de nous présenter à l'exhumation parce que ce sont nos ancêtres. Mais c'est la famille qui fait la pratique.'

When they die they do want to be buried in the husband's family tomb, which may indeed be possible without having to be exhumed themselves. Even so, the family does not agree with their religious views, which is creating friction between the rural and urban family members.

All these points of consideration do not necessarily imply that the migrants are turning their back on the traditional funerary customs, it is more that they have become less evident. Although many respondents say that they try to attend the *famadibana* in the countryside, the majority expressed the wish to either not be exhumed themselves, or leave the decision to their children. It seems that the migrants now merely see the *famadibana* as a social event, or more of a family reunion than something they would like to actively organize themselves.

Even though the *famadibana* is now being practised less frequently by the inhabitants of Antetazanavoany, being buried in the family tomb is still a major concern. People's motivation for wishing to return to their ancestral land after death may be rooted in the way they give meaning to both localities; the city is seen as a place to gain prosperity but not as a location for finding peace after death. This is illustrated by the following answer given to a question asked on the significance of the family tomb:

Man (28): *'C'est important d'être enterré au tombeau familial à la campagne; il n'est pas possible d'être enterré à Tana. Le tombeau familial à la campagne est la terre des ancêtres. Nous habitons à Tana pour le travail et la subsistance mais il faut revenir à la campagne à la mort.'*

A more practical reason for migrants wanting to be buried in the village, is that it is quite difficult to get a decent burial in the capital, as there are not many graveyards in Antananarivo and building a tomb there would be very expensive. Unfortunately, it is also quite costly to bring the corpses back to the village, so each family member has to make a small contribution in order to be able to return the deceased to the tomb, and if that is not sufficient, relations in the neighbourhood are also asked for financial assistance. In the worst case, people are often willing to provide loans and sometimes money is donated. However, if it is still not financially possible to return the dead person, the family may choose to temporarily bury the corpse in the city

graveyard, or may prefer to do so in a related family tomb if there is one close by. Funds permitting, the bodies will then be reburied in the family tomb at a later date.

It is remarkable that even the second generation of migrants born in Antananarivo wish to be buried in the family tomb in the village of origin.

Conclusions

Throughout this article the reasons for rural-urban migration and the resulting consequences were discussed in order to better understand its impact on the lives of migrants residing in the Antetazanavoany neighbourhood. A majority of them left the village of origin due to a shortage of land with the result that they were rendered incapable of feeding their families. Although their situation in the capital is characterized by poignant poverty, most migrants do not regret their choice to move for economic reasons, because compared to the life they had in the village, they succeeded in improving their standard of life.

In general, the respondents consulted in this research aim to achieve a successful life in the city, while at the same time aspiring to protect their interests in the village in order to secure their return either in their old age or in death. This way of thinking tends to create contradictory priorities on both an economic and a social level, and with concern to both the present- and the afterlife, which is illustrated by the way migrants consider their financial expenditure. For the present, they prefer to improve their daily life in the capital by obtaining better housing, purchasing land if possible and spending their small income in order to meet the household's basic needs. However, for the future many still consider, and dream about, purchasing land in the village to be able to retire there. In order to achieve this, they would need to save money, but this is almost an impossibility for most migrants, as under the circumstances described above, it is extremely difficult for them to create enough surplus to do so. Therefore, it is difficult to escape the present status quo and migration often becomes a long-term or even permanent phenomenon. At the same time, the hardships suffered due to city life keep the respondents preoccupied with trying to maintain entitlement to their share of inherited ancestral land as an insurance for both themselves and their children.

In order to better understand the dual situation migrants find themselves in, this research has concentrated on the function of funerary customs, paying particular attention to burials and exhumations. With regard to the *famadihana*, we have observed an ambivalent attitude, since the high costs involved, most migrants are no longer willing to actively organize the occasion. This reluctance is re-enforced not only by the strong influence Christianity has gained in the city, but

also by the Church's general disapproval of exhumation. Mixed feelings were observed with regard to even attending, never mind organising, the *famadibana*. Although many of the migrants have a number of reasons for wishing to travel to the village for this event, it is often too expensive to do so due to the high cost of the journey and the money that needs to be donated to the organizing family. Those people who manage to go, either attend because they still believe in *famadibana*'s purpose of satisfying the ancestors, or because it is a social gathering. The *famadibana* may also be seen to function as a family reunion, as it affords the migrants an opportunity of seeing their rural relatives - whom they often miss tremendously - , and discussing family affairs such as the state of the inherited land.

During our fieldwork in Anteteanafovoany we observed a decline in prominence of the ritual practice of exhumation, while at the same time the importance of being buried in the family tomb remained unchanged. Although extreme poverty, and being further away from the social influence of the village has made migrants less willing to spend their income in ways that do not yield immediate profit, they continue to remain subscribed to a family tomb in order to be buried in their native village. This is not only because they wish to be reunited with their relatives after death, but also because they have little chance of ever being able to afford the construction of a new tomb in the capital. The results of this research would suggest that for migrants, the family tomb seems to be the longest lasting connection with the village of origin and the ancestral land.

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