

'Unexploited' Labour: Social Transition in Madagascar

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From the Child as Wealth ...

It is no exaggeration to say that ancestor worship occupies a crucial place in the lives, preoccupations and decision-making of Madagascan people, the like of which is found in few other societies. Madagascans might even be said to regard securing their succession as a matter of supreme importance. It is not so much in order to have someone to care for them when they grow old (albeit not an unimportant goal), but above all to ensure that there will be somebody there to take proper charge of performing their burial ceremony: the rites of passage allowing the deceased access to the ranks of their forebears. They therefore depend upon their children for their very survival or, in other words, the quality of their ancestral afterlife. Sterility, being heirless, is the greatest fear of men and women alike. Orally transmitted folklore frequently employs the notions of fertility and sterility in an extremely eloquent system of binary opposition. Fertility is seen as a blessing, a gift from the gods and ancestors, bestowed only upon those who have managed to earn their generosity. Fertility incarnates happiness, life. Sterility, on the other hand, is regarded as among the worst of all possible curses and translates into a feeling of anxiety, fear.¹ It is associated with the image of death. So it is common to find the family at a wedding wishing future husbands and wives 'seven sons and seven daughters' (on such occasions, the figure seven, which is sometimes believed to be dangerous, signifies plenitude).

These days, however, perceptions are somewhat different. Making these sorts of wishes is now liable to be taken badly: as an ironic barb or even a curse. The fact is that the devastating economic crisis has affected the ideal of fertility, although it nevertheless remains deeply rooted in Madagascan culture and has doubtlessly helped people to cushion the potential impact of the recession.

... to the Child as a Burden

In rural and urban areas alike, households are now anxious to have as few children as possible so that they can be sure to provide them with medical care in the event of illness and to feed them and find them work, if at all possible, when they reach adulthood. But a large number of families can no longer even feed their children, never mind clothe them. If households cannot, as once they could, count on relatives to adopt or lodge one or more of their children, their last resort now is to place offspring in friends' or acquaintances' homes where they will be put to work. According to a Malagasy saying, 'children are wealth': yet these former gifts from heaven are now becoming a burden, and a burden that is sometimes far too heavy to bear.

My name's Theo and I'm fourteen years old. I am the second of my parents' six children; the oldest boy. Dad died three years ago. Mum sells yams and peanuts on the roadside in Fianarantsoa. My big sister has gone to work as a housemaid in Antananarivo; because mum couldn't look after my younger brothers and sisters and I any more, she sent me to my grandmother's house in this small town so I could go to school and carry on studying. I had to stop school in fourth year primary. It was too expensive for my grandmother (text-books, exercise books, pens). She's old and can't afford to buy clothes and food for both of us any more. So she's asked Mamy's mum and dad (Mamy's a one-year-old baby) to employ me. I've been working for six months.

So in 1991 Theo became a domestic at the couple's house in his grandmother's town.² Only they do not have a lot of money coming in either. Mamy's mother is a seamstress but she has too few customers. She makes barely ten dresses a month selling at 2000 Malagasy francs apiece.³ Her husband owns a broken-down old van given to him by his father, and he uses the little money he earns to buy new or second-hand spare parts to repair it for eventual sale in the hope that it will fetch him enough to be able to open a small shopkeeping business. He keeps the family alive with his carpentry work. Even then, not many of the townsfolk ever place an order and he only just manages to sell two chairs, a couple of footstools and a table per month. But because Theo's grandmother (seventy years) came and begged them to take on her grandson (in return for food, lodgings, clothes or, better still, a wage), the couple took pity and agreed, despite already having enough trouble of their own.

Theo does odd jobs around the house, looks after Mamy when the mother is sewing or preparing meals. If the opportunity arises, he helps the father planing wood for the furniture. That is where he works most. But his biggest dream is to become a driver. Every time Mamy's father goes to work on the van, he does his best to advertise his availability. He is especially keen to learn mechanics: drivers in Madagascar need to know how to repair their own vehicles because there are not that many garages there. And since Theo

likes cars so much, he says he offered to join Ravony (a fifteen-year-old who also works as a domestic for Mamy's grandparents) sleeping in the van at night. In winter as in summer, the boys act as night watchmen guarding the van from burglars.

As for Ravony, he is the second oldest boy in a five-child family. His elder brother (sixteen years) is a hired hand working for a town shopkeeper. Ravony's parents sent him out to look for work when they found themselves no longer able to feed all their children. Dressed in rags, he did not dare approach anybody to ask for a job. And since his younger brothers and sisters had hardly a thing to eat, he preferred to rummage through the bins instead of begging. In 1989, he had been scouring the streets for days, when Mamy's grandmother⁴ saw him and took him some food. She kept this up for a week before eventually offering him a job. Ravony has been her domestic ever since.

Theo and Ravony both earn 5000 Malagasy francs a month. Their employers buy them new clothes twice a year and they receive family cast-offs at other times. They eat at their employers' house. As for their pay, almost all of it goes to their families: Ravony's to his parents and Theo's to his grandmother who forwards the money to her daughter, now living in Fianarantsoa.

A Disastrous Economic Situation

The economic crisis which has hit the whole world, above all the weakest countries, has been particularly devastating in Madagascar (see Schlemmer 1995). Up until 1971, Madagascar was producing enough food to satisfy local consumption needs and even exporting premium rice. Today, it is counted as one of the world's 'least advanced countries', unable to afford to import all of its required foodstuffs. The whole country has become greatly impoverished: if one relates GNP to population growth, at national level Madagascans lost more than 50 per cent of their earnings between 1972 and 1992. The very poorest parts of the population – around 40 per cent of the total – also saw their share of national income shrink by half, meaning they now receive only 10 per cent compared to the previous 20 per cent and have slipped well below the 'poverty line'.

Another indicator of this erosion: certain endemic diseases linked to extreme poverty have resurfaced. Meanwhile, 'the structural adjustment policies [...] are [without doubt] the chief cause of cutbacks in social spending. In real terms, per capita social expenditure in Madagascar has been reduced by about half (with a 40 percent fall between 1980 and 1984)' (Chasteland et al.: 131). There is an abundance of evidence we could mention, but for the purposes of this discussion, let us settle for the point that

the situation in the education sector is characterized by widespread decline in qualitative and quantitative terms. Children, boys and girls, are now becoming the main family wage-earners. Their work, in cities and rural areas alike, is

necessary, not to say vital, for the family's material stability. In the survival strategies that have become essential during this period of growing impoverishment, school has been relegated to second place in the priorities of young Madagascans who need to contribute the family budget before all else. (UNICEF 1993: 6)

As the rot sets in, the decay of the state and the corruption and 'de-regulation' carried in its wake to the benefit of the few combined with the accelerated impoverishment of the rest of the population, have together given rise to the development of economic activities which are increasingly evading state control. There has been a proliferation of various forms of undeclared labour, small businesses, more or less clandestine and illicit activities: so many 'forms of cut-and-run social practices adopted by, or imposed upon, an increasing number of young boys and girls' (UNICEF 1993: 187). The poor population bear the brunt of this, but it offers the poorest people – the unemployed, the dispossessed countryfolk, the displaced new arrivals in the city – their only possible solution.

To be Cared for – but by Whom?

If the case of children like Ravony scavenging for food in refuse bins is still rather exceptional in small provincial Malagasy towns, that of Theo is more common.⁵ Recently, village children have been going from door to door asking for food, a situation which always used to seem unacceptable, unthinkable, in this agriculture-based society, particularly in what is regarded as the rice loft of the Betsileo region. Nowadays, however, when parents have no rice, corn or manioc to give their children, they beseech their slightly better off neighbours or acquaintances to lodge one of them in their homes, mostly the eldest boy or girl. This is how children from the age of twelve come to be placed in various different homes with the town's traders and functionaries.

Some parents have told us that if they had to choose, they would put their children into the home of a teacher (primary school, secondary school or college), but many teachers with two or three children to take care of, which is usually the case, have trouble enough of their own making ends meet. In placing their children with teachers, parents hope that while performing their domestic duties, their offspring will be well educated and instructed. They believe contact with teachers offers prospects of a good education and advancement for their children. The manager of the 'ATD-quart monde' NGO also stresses the huge demand for children to attend school, adolescents included. Madagascan education standards are relatively well developed compared to those of other countries of comparable or even higher income; the majority of parents have been school-educated and regard illiteracy as a form of degeneration. Naturally, they can send their children to school only if there is guaranteed free education, but we should not underestimate the fact that allowing a child to go to school is already

something of a sacrifice, given the lower earnings stemming from the loss of extra income, no matter how minimal, generated by that child's labour.

Meanwhile, there has been a discernible change in the relationship between the employer and placed child over the past few years. Host families do not call placed children *mpiasa* or 'workers' but *mpanampy*, 'assistants'. For their part, the children in question do not call their 'employers' 'Madam' or 'Sir' as would be the case with bosses with whom they should keep a respectful distance. They always use the structure 'so-and-so's father' or 'so-and-so's mother', sometimes even calling them 'Father' or 'Mother' if their 'employers' have children of about their own age. So there seems to be a sense of understanding and affectivity between the host family and placed child worker. Can we take this development to be a conscious effort to tone down the difference in status between employer and employed, and has it been initiated in order to respond to the need for mutual aid in a society which, despite its hardships, still wishes to maintain cohesion? Or does it suggest the already ongoing transition towards a paternalist type relationship which will provide the basis for a specific exploitation of this new labour force with its urgent need to work?

Perhaps we can find the makings of an answer by comparing the situations from traditional rural areas with the large conurbations (Antananarivo, Antsirabe) via the small provincial town. Indeed, there really is an evolution taking place whereby people whose roots in the village are now threatened have been sucked into an accelerated migration towards the big cities where social ties no longer correspond to the intimate logic of the family. The big city, despite the crisis, effectively remains a place that offers a wide range of incomes and apparently more ample possibilities and opportunities to earn a living, if not to 'strike it rich'; it has, incidentally, had the chance to prove it, and that (along with the growing and justified fear of rampaging gangs of looters in the countryside) explains why it has remained a centre of attraction for migrants, even when there is scarcely any more work there for the displaced. The city outskirts are overflowing with such people who arrived in the vain hope of finding success as they know others have succeeded before them, only to end up living in abject poverty.

Children in Rural Areas

Many stockbreeders and farmers living in isolated hamlets (who have sometimes had their cattle rustled and crops stolen by armed gangs with no qualms about killing villagers) want to move to the city. Those who stay in the village to farm their fields cannot always afford to pay hired farm hands and day labourers to help them. It used to be customary practice in the Betsileo region to call in relatives, neighbours and villagers to participate in the various stages of the rice-growing cycle.⁶ If adult members of the extended family do not respond to this call for solidarity, which is still issued

yet increasingly less frequently, child workers are used. They find themselves having to take time out from school for the paddy work period, or even give up their studies altogether to assist their parents full-time.

For their part, families with neither the financial nor human resources rent out their land on three- to five-year leases for a lump-sum payment paid at the time of signing. If landowners ask for an advance on forthcoming leases, they fall into debt and end up having to sign their fields or rice paddies over to their tenants. Thus dispossessed of their wealth, they resign themselves to packing their eldest children off to the city as soon as they are old enough (about twelve), so that they might work and give them some or all of their earnings to help them survive and feed younger brothers and sisters.

But in village society, even the slackest solidarity networks still continue to secure a certain degree of redistribution; while in the city the family-type networks are giving up and hardly fulfil the role any longer and the specifically urbanization-linked (endogenous or NGO) networks are as yet unable to cope.

Children Placed in the City ...

If, in their exodus to the towns, adults do not find enough work to feed their families, it is once again up to the children to replace them, primarily as daytime car attendants on the streets or parking lots.

The most common form of employment – the only one not seen as a serious setback – is placement in private homes where the children perform various domestic duties. Their condition can be either advantageous or tragic, depending on the family. The majority, though, are at least fed and housed, generally just as well, or badly, as in their own homes; meanwhile, they are more often than not expected to work far harder. As a rule, the parents are given a sum of money when the child leaves home, after which neither child nor employer is under any further obligation towards them. On average, children are paid 5 to 7000 Malagasy francs a month in the country and up to twice that in the capital (where the cost of living is far higher); yet there are cases where they receive no wages at all.

There do not seem to be any existing placement networks as such;⁷ generally speaking, an exchange takes place between families who know one another and (as in the case of Theo) the families taking charge of a child do not necessarily feel happy about capitalizing on cheap labour; it really could be a matter of somebody doing somebody else a favour, which can end up costing more than it yields. Particularly orphans – girls or boys, for both can work as domestics, even if it is a more common feature among girls – are in many cases taken care of by the extended family. Sometimes, in the capital at least, girls seek to be placed of their own accord at the suggestion of a friend already working as a maid.

We also occasionally find more comfortably-off employers who go out in search of children ready to be placed and, of course, they take full advantage of it. In the majority of cases, however, exploitation is held at bay by the fact that the families know one another or, if they have gone through an 'intermediary' family, that the latter acts as a moral guarantor. Once again, we heard no mention of any placement 'channels'; all the field-workers we questioned were adamant on this point. However, wages are not always paid, the work is sometimes too hard for such young children and girls are often sent packing without notice as soon as they reach an age where their employers fear they might become pregnant. But we think it important to stress the following: there are adult maids too and their living conditions, and above all pay, are not necessarily any better; children are paid as well, or as badly, as adults, a point quite rightly made by the manager of the WFP (the UN World Food Program); which means to say – and this is worth underlining, for it is quite peculiar to the case of Madagascar⁸ – that it is the work itself that is being exploited and not specifically the vulnerable under-aged worker.

... and the Others

Most of the children who remain in the small towns and are unable to find domestic work, peddle home-made foodstuffs (yogurts, doughnuts, biscuits or other cooked dishes). From the early hours of the morning, they walk the streets carrying huge trays of cakes on their heads or ice-boxes full of yogurt pots. Since these children do not generally have enough money to buy meat, flour, oil, milk and sugar, every day they must therefore find suppliers to give them ready-to-eat food to consume. Each evening, the employer gives them 5 Malagasy francs per doughnut sold and 10 Malagasy francs per pot of yogurt (a tenth of the retail price). So at the end of the day, anyone who has managed to sell fifty cakes and fifty pots will receive 750 Malagasy francs, i.e. the equivalent of a kilo of rice at harvest time or 750 grammes during periods when supplies are low: at any rate, not enough for the daily ration needed to feed a family of three, and this in a country where rice is sacred, the main staple of people's diet. What is more, being able to sell fifty cakes and fifty yogurts a day can be regarded as quite a feat, for there are at least twenty children in the town doing this kind of work. Children with nobody to supply them with such merchandise sell fruit, vegetables and cooked foods of rather mediocre quality on pavement stalls, taking only a very meagre sum home with them in the evenings, and sometimes even ending up having to feed themselves with left-over spoiled merchandise.

Apart from peddling food, some children also hawk *sandrebitra* (lit.: lighting stuffs), going from door to door selling the kindling households use to save on petrol for lighting charcoal or firewood. Some of these children have told

us that they can sell up to twenty small bundles a day at 50 Malagasy francs a bundle. This sort of work causes problems because the children, and their families, who hack away at the trunks of upright pine trees are regarded as forest despoilers and thus risk the penalties stipulated by the new environmental protection laws.

To add to that, there are also young boys of between twelve and fourteen years old hauling sacks of rice, sugar, flour and so on across town in carts (*baramba*) loaded with merchandise weighing as much as 300kgs. Working in teams of four, they end up with about 2000 Malagasy francs to share out between them on regular weekdays and from 4000 to 5000 Malagasy francs on market days. This exhausting and occasionally hazardous work has the children making up for the absence of small-town taxi services. They tend to be overly keen, overstretching themselves in their efforts to attract customers and prove that they are the strongest. And in view of their age, they are not always in full control of their vehicles, which thus leads to accidents. Whenever a fight breaks out, adults have to intervene to sort them out and restore order.

Working Conditions in the Big City

The kinds of work on offer to children here are similar to those in the small provincial towns (or the countryside), although begging is far more prevalent, second only to being placed with a foster family. We find as many girl beggars as boys aged from three or four; girls of twelve and over are largely looking for domestic work. Most of these children still have parents to whom they hand over a share of their earnings. They are relatively well organized, with well-defined territories. Yet racketeering has not become customary practice, even if it is true that, among those who sleep rough, the younger ones often have their money confiscated by their elders. This, though, has more to do with a form of initiation: the manager of 'NRJ', an NGO which has become particularly well established among young Antananarivo marginals, explained that the 'elders' take care of those whose money they have taken if the latter fail to make any earnings during the day. And, in cahoots with secondhand goods dealers, they sometimes find them occasional earnings by teaching them how to steal. Meanwhile, the NRJ adds that parents push their children to work because the income represents a much appreciated supplement. In the poorest circles (especially in the case of adopted children) it is now even accepted practice for the child to pay for the right to sleep in their parents' – i.e. their own – home.

Notwithstanding that, UNICEF points out that

all [these] children support their families even if they are no longer living with them, or have been rejected by one of their parents. In the latter case, they will hand a share of their earnings over to a single parent, generally the father, or the remarried mother whose partner refuses to have them in the house.

The child is aware of the family's difficulties and the *fibavanana* (feeling of solidarity) is very much present. (UNICEF 1993: 194)

In less dramatically disadvantaged circles, the children are at least working in a proper job. In the provinces, for instance, they work as water-bearers (paid 50 Malagasy francs per 20-litre bucket, thus earning 500 to 1000 Malagasy francs a day); or brick carriers (the youngest being six to eight years old; the wages being about 5 Malagasy francs per brick, depending on the distance covered with a load of six to eight bricks a trip); or else shop or car attendants; or even 'carry your bags, ma'am?', etc. They see themselves in a far less degrading light. To these children, having been brought up in a society where the notion of 'failure' is omnipresent, this is particularly important.

On average, they all earn between 500 and 1000 Malagasy francs a day and have to go out and find work each and every day. Whereas the children placed with families for their part earn only between 5000 and 10,000 Malagasy francs a month, albeit including bed and board.

What about the Future?

Even if they manage to resolve the matter of material survival, the children who have migrated to the capital have other problems hanging over them. Devoid of family ties, and sometimes even friends, the young worker is often subject to a lack of affection. And if they offset this emptiness in the various types of entertainment on offer in every capital city, they will be tempted to take the initiative of cutting all contact with their family back in the village. They may even come to regard their financial contribution to the family as a burden, a shackle. When that happens, the young worker will cease to see the point of family cohesion.

What is more, if the child counting on returning to the home region at some later stage has not managed to make any savings and if, on top of that, he or she has not gained a training during his or her early working life, it will be hard to pluck up the courage to re-establish contact with the family. In such cases, boys might slip into a shifty life of wheeling and dealing on the city streets, while the girls might deliver themselves into prostitution. Situations like these remain rather rare, because the majority of young workers coming to the city stay in touch with their parents. Their time away from the family can be experienced as a temporary expatriation rather than being uprooted from their place of birth. Hence, at the age of twenty or twenty-five, those who have managed to help their families and save some money will return to set up home in the midst of their loved ones. And those who have managed to buy themselves a few head of cattle,⁹ some land and rice paddies to farm will have made the biggest successes of their lives. They will be held in high esteem by their families.

Faced with the economic hardships of his or her elders, the working child thus assumes responsibility as an active member of the household from a very early age. Before the parents have reached old age, adolescents find themselves obliged to ease their family's difficulties through the fruits of their labour. Still youngsters, their behaviour is that of real adults, especially when they have to come to the assistance of parents and young collaterals. But what will become of these children when they actually do enter adulthood? How will they flower if they for ever remain unskilled labourers? And if, miraculously, they are given an apprenticeship, will they one day be able to turn their training to their advantage? Will they still have the option of returning to the land to raise livestock and cultivate crops?

Child Labour, a Vital Necessity; not yet a Specific System of Exploitation

Many families have no choice but to arrange for their children to contribute to family income simply to survive, or else to provide for their own subsistence; the sheer scale and speed of the deterioration in living standards for the majority of the population has, of course, gone hand in hand with worse conditions at work and on the labour market.

Also, it is hardly surprising that so many passing observers are struck by the desperate circumstances of some of these children: the three- or four-year-old beggars; the swarms of kids competing for the privilege of carrying your shopping bags for you or watching your car; the small children knee-high to a grasshopper carrying piles of bricks on their heads or breaking stones on building sites for days on end; not to mention the sickening spectacle of children scavenging through dustbins and refuse tips and devouring foul-looking scraps for which they sometimes have to fight with adults.

For all that, when we put the issue to more in-depth analysis, we are on the contrary struck by the fact that, despite the truly catastrophic scale of the economic situation and the speed at which it has deteriorated, child labour is actually not worse than it is; i.e. that it is still more or less spontaneous and not yet organized, rationalized or cultivated by adults who might have been expected to capitalize on these children's real need for cash and maximize economic exploitation of their labour power.

This analysis might well cause offence; rightly shocked by the desperate living conditions of children who are basically forced to work instead of going to school, to support their families instead of being supported by them, our duty as observers is of course to denounce this scandalous wrong. We could, here as elsewhere, analyse the machinery whose central explanatory role is known (see Meillassoux 1993: 69-70) and be satisfied. By going the other way and bringing subtle shading into the analysis of the situation, we might be in danger of appearing to lend it support. We should therefore provide some clear explanation.

1. As seen, the type of work most commonly undertaken by children is domestic employment in other families' homes. What we wanted to underline, however, was that at the time of our survey there was still no organized recruitment network whose economic activity might have been geared towards exploiting this 'market' for its own financial gains. This obviously does not mean to say that there is no one capitalizing on the situation (one of the managers of the 'Sentinelles'¹⁰ NGO, whose aim it is to reintegrate child prisoners into society, explains how the gaols are overpopulated with 'little maids' sentenced for theft, most of whom would have otherwise found it impossible to survive had they not 'stolen' food from their employers; and there are some people who have acted as middlemen between parents and employers on so many occasions that they have made a name for themselves and are now in a position to demand a percentage on the transaction). But nobody is actually making a career of it or helping to maintain and consolidate the system, as is the case in certain other countries in a comparable economic position.

2. Similarly, despite the fact that many children are making a living as beggars, there is (to our knowledge) no racketeering here; and if, as the same Sentinelles manager claims, parents with disabled children refuse to have them fitted with artificial limbs free of charge because handicapped beggars bring in higher earnings, we did not see any cases of self-mutilation; there are children employed as assistants, usually by parents who could not otherwise cope, but they are paid at the 'going rate', i.e. the same as an adult doing the same tasks (on the other hand, they are for ever doing the same elementary work, with no apprenticeship and, if they are in an envious position in terms of having secure jobs and income, their future still remains just as uncertain; the new ILO manager for Madagascar is, we feel, quite right to have put the issue in the following terms: it is not a matter of *eradicating* child labour, but of ensuring that it remains consistent with their physical and mental age and gives them a training.

2. A final example: there are underage prostitutes (young girls, as reported by a Médecins Sans Frontières volunteer, agree to sleep with people without asking for money, in order to have a bed for the night free of charge; for, as we mentioned earlier, the most disadvantaged children are made to pay for a place to sleep), but there is no 'child prostitution' as such. ASA was the only NGO to talk about procurers, but there is nothing to suggest that very much organized procurement goes on, or that a child prostitution ring exists to service the sex-tourism industry.¹¹

Compared to the worst of what we know about other places – and what we might have expected here too – this situation remains relatively favourable. Can it continue or is it heading relentlessly towards the kinds of models being developed in the countries of the Third World where industrialization is more advanced and capitalism more deeply rooted? Those countries have developed a market-driven logic which, in a situation of sustained economic

tension, tends ever more systematically to override the protective duty that every society undoubtedly feels *vis-à-vis* its children, but which, in Madagascar, still seems to prevail.

The problem is all the more apparent when we see how economic needs have already come to transform Malagasy mentalities in the city, the picture they hold of the child. Children here still remain sufficiently highly valued to have so far contained any spread in the temptation to exploit their labour. But the fact remains that the idea of making children pay for the right to sleep at home already exists in the milieux worst hit by the recession, which is proof enough that no ideological barrier can remain standing for ever when faced with the ordeal of a reality with which it has become far too incompatible.

For the time being, the temptation of a rational exploitation of this potential source of income remains confined to the realms of fantasy: there is talk of stolen children whose vital organs are sold to private French clinics, of foreign networks purchasing children for adoption-hungry couples, of child-sex-tourism via Nossy-be for the benefit of wealthy Réunion people and so on. But notice how foreigners are involved in every one of these rumours. They are also the ones often found spreading them. Does that mean to say that the danger comes from them alone? Obviously not, alas.

The future of Malagasy children is no longer any better protected than that of other exploited children in the Third World. But we think it is important to stress the following: throughout the whole world, aggravated poverty naturally leads to deteriorating working and living conditions which tends to lead to a call for the participation of every available hand, including children; but no matter what its scale, via who knows what rational thinking within the 'Economy', economic crisis alone is not enough to result in child labour being exploited *any differently* than is the case with adults. We are not questioning 'economic rationality' here; it is just that the perverse effects of market logic (or that of profits, which amounts to the same) are developed all the more thanks to the fact that this logic can supplant any other form of reasoning and impose itself upon any other wills – as it seems to be able to do whenever the vital interests of capitalism are at stake.

Such is the case of Madagascar, which is of scarcely any real interest to international capitalism. By the same token, we see that when free-market economics do not totally dominate the collective representation of a social system or the day-to-day activities of its members, the alleged 'inevitability' disappears. As anywhere else, minority status opens Malagasy children to domination-based relations in addition to the production- and exploitation-based relationships linking the labourers of the dominated classes to their employers. However, it is free-market economics alone that compel employers to cash in on it. So it is not *economically* impossible to suppress child labour, but that would require quite another economic world order.

Notes

1. For more on the comparison between fertility and sterility as well as the child's place in Madagascan society, see Ravololomanga (1992).
2. Most of our study (B.R.) was undertaken between 1992 and 1993 in the Fivondranana district of Ambohimahasoia, a small town of 9000 inhabitants, about 50km from Fianarantsoa and 450km from Antananarivo.
3. 1000 Malagasy francs = more or less US\$ 0.50 (1994 rates).
4. Mamy's grandmother (fifty-four years) and grandfather (a retired middle-ranking civil servant) still have three of their own children living at home. Apart from Ravony, they also lodge two other children whose respective parents had been seeking to find them a place to work.
5. At least one in three homes in that small town is lodging one or two children placed there for work.
6. Ploughing, sowing, bedding rice plants, weeding, harvesting and transporting sheaves to the threshing area. Whoever receives the *haono* (lit.: 'call' or 'request') must either come (or at least send a replacement) or supply rice, salt or meat. Generally, they are not paid cash, but offered the *tamby*, the biggest sheaf of rice they can carry unaided on their head or back (this is just a one-off when the work is over). Whoever calls for help should also feed whoever comes to work (this can sometimes be very expensive because, on top of the rice, they have to kill a pig for the meal). And they in turn should answer a call from those who came to their assistance, this duty being called *valin-tanana* (lit.: 'the answer of the hands').
7. None, at least, that was visible at the time of the survey – conducted in Antananarivo in 1994 – and this was a point which I was particularly keen on investigating (B.S.).
8. At the time of our study which, it should be remembered, dates back to 1992–93 for rural areas (B.R.) and to 1994 for the capital (B.S.); if we were able to draw these sorts of conclusions, they are plainly dated; anyone wishing to use them today should have them carefully checked via another survey.
9. The *zebu*, the chief element of family wealth, is equally vested with symbolic value. It is the sacrificial beast *par excellence* in traditional ceremonies, also representing strength and virility.
10. Lit.: Sentries.
11. In 1994, I have to insist (see note 8, above), since the situation has worsened, according to Nasseem Ackbarally, a journalist quoted in *Courrier international*, 430, 28 January–3 February 1999, p. 29.

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