

GENDER AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN MERINA RURAL SOCIETY

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This article is based on a study of the Merina people of the Vakinankaratra region in the highlands of Madagascar¹. In this region there has been a gradual transition from subsistence economy to market integrated economy during the last decades. My hypothesis is that economic differentiation processes, provoked by an increasing shortage of land, and the introduction of new cultivation practices and new technology in agriculture have created changes in gender relations, which have led to a gradual decrease of many women's power and influence in Merina society.

The economic changes in the region are determined by a number of factors. A rapidly growing population has led to a division of land into smaller units, resulting in an increasing shortage of land. This in turn has generated a migration flow from rural areas to towns, contributing to an accelerated process of urbanization. At the national level the perhaps most significant changes of the 1980's have been produced by the influence of The World Bank on economic policy. Madagascar has received substantial loans from The World Bank on the condition that the country accepts the implementation of the economic structural adjustments deemed necessary by the bank to strengthen the country's infrastructure and small scale industry, to stimulate food production and to stabilize market prices. A major aim is that the price of agricultural products should be regulated by the market without restrictions or subsidies. The implementation of The Bank measures has had dramatic effects on the economic situation in

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the area. It has been detrimental to the economic conditions of vulnerable groups that in fact includes the majority of the farmers. Due to falling prices of agricultural products, devaluation of the local currency and the resulting elevation of prices on agricultural inputs, small farmers are the losers, also when compared to city dwellers.

A number of development agencies are present in the region, and cooperate with different national organizations and local agencies particularly within the agricultural sector. The government of Madagascar has sought to improve the general standard of living in rural areas through increasing agricultural production. Special attention has been paid to the cultivation of rice, which is the most important staple food. The goal is to reach national self-sufficiency. However, efforts are also made to develop new crops and to introduce high yielding milk-cows imported from Europe. Thus, a diversity of agricultural innovations are promoted simultaneously.

Socio-economic processes of transformation that have taken place in Merina rural society have affected the organization of the family farms, the sexual division of labour and the inheritance system of land. The households have different access to land and other means of production. The impact of the changes therefore may vary from one household to another and various responses and strategies to cope with the new circumstances can be observed.

In agriculture, development activities can be described as processes of innovation, where some households participate more actively than others. What are the reasons why some farmers make use of new technology while others seem to prefer traditional solution? The new production system creates new agricultural tasks to be carried out. How are these tasks being divided between men and women, and what are the consequences of the changes in agriculture for the living conditions and status of women and men? These are questions that emerge when analyzing the processes of socio-economic change in Merina rural society. The main object here is to analyse the ways in which men and women adapt to the new conditions: scarcity of land, new technology and forms of production, and what are the consequences of the economic differentiation processes between households for the relations between women and men and for the internal organization of the households.

Gender and social change

Just as women are part of men's world, men are part of women's world. An analysis of women's life conditions should therefore include both men and women and the relationship between them. Gender relations are socially created. What men and women do and how they relate to each other will therefore vary from country to country and from culture to culture, and change over time. This implies that in

order to understand the complexity of the impact of social change on gender relations it is necessary to analyse specific societies, and to explore gender relations as part of a wider social and cultural context.

It has been argued that gender subordination is embedded in the sexual division of labour. Mackintosh suggests that changes in the division of labour, following from the spreading of cash economy, tends to act to the detriment of women (Mackintosh, 1981). Other researchers have argued that in the transition from subsistence to a market integrated economy men tend to be integrated and "developed", while women tend to be marginalized because they are "misunderstood", ignored and not taken into account in the planning and implementation of development policies (Boserup, 1970, Kelly, 1981, Rogers, 1980).

I believe that the outcomes of such processes of change are more ambiguous than these authors suggest. They do not necessarily lead to the improvement of the conditions of men while women experience the opposite. The processes of impoverishment that is taking place in many Third World countries often lead to the marginalization of both women and men, but in different ways.

There has been a tendency in the literature on women in development to treat women as a homogenous category and thereby overlook the class dimension. We should not forget that women as well as men are members of social classes, and that their class affiliation to a large extent determines the impact of processes of social transformation (Moore, 1988). The transition to a market integrated economy is thus often accompanied by a differentiation process with winners and losers of both sexes.

Methods and data

From July 1985 till June 1988, I lived in Vakinankaratra, and during that period I performed 12-13 months of fieldwork among the Merina peasants in the area. The intensive part of the data-collection, was concentrated on three villages: Tritriva in the west, Ambohimiarivo in the east and Antsoatany in the north, where I made a socio-economic survey in selected households, 48, 62 and 59 respectively. The survey was supplemented by qualitative interviews, informal conversations and participant observation in the villages. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the political leadership in the communities, as well as among extension workers and officials of the different agricultural agencies. Finally, my own findings were compared with other sources, such as agricultural studies of the region, statistical material, and other studies on related themes. The data thus acquired formed the background on which I have tried to formulate assumptions on central key factors governing the transformation of gender relations. I found that the same socio-

economic processes of change were taking place in all the three villages. In the present paper I shall therefore refer to them as a unit.

The villages

The three villages are situated in the countryside of Vakinankaratra and each of them consists of one or several larger kinship groups. The means of subsistence for the inhabitants, is mainly cultivation of rice, or a combination of agriculture and animal husbandry. A household usually has its own land (wet rice land and dry land) that it cultivates and harvests. The aim for the household is self-sufficiency with regard to rice and other agricultural products. Today only a minority of households reach this aim due to the acute scarcity of land. Access to land was traditionally gained exclusively through membership in a kinship group. Ancestral land was not brought into the market sphere, and this land was an important element in Merina economy of self-subsistence (Bloch, 1971). The integration of Merina farmers into the market economy, has had the implication that today land is also bought and sold. Still, many farmers do not approve of the selling of land, particularly ancestral land, which is considered the most important to preserve within the family. Selling of land seems to be more acceptable if the buyer is a neighbour than if he is a stranger, for example a public servant in town. The reason for selling land is also of importance. Those who seem to sell land as an easy way to feed their family, are harshly condemned. If it seems to be the only solution to an acute crisis, such as illness, or crop failure, it is considered more acceptable.

Shortage of land

According to Malagasy law, all legitimate children have equal rights to inherit land from their parents. A woman may inherit from her father as well as her mother, and the same is true for a man. According to my informants, in earlier days, when land was abundant, both male and female offspring actually received their inheritance according to law and tradition. Shortage of land, the elders in the villages argue, is a recent phenomenon. Today, the scarcity of land generates incongruity between the legal, bilateral norm system and the tendency towards a patrilineal practice, which is becoming prevalent in the actual transfer of land. One finds considerable variations between families regarding the distribution of land among their offspring, both in the quantity of land transferred and the time of the transfer. This reflects different strategies, which are motivated by variations in the economic conditions of the households.

While a few households have abundant land, others do not have sufficient land to cover their own subsistence needs and therefore

depend on additional incomes in order to make ends meet. On the average, a household has 0,7 hectares of land and according to their own judgement, the majority of the farmers in the three villages do not have sufficient land to feed the members of their households (Skjortnes, 1990). This applies especially to the irrigated land for rice cultivation. My informants distinguish between vulnerable and non-vulnerable households. By vulnerable households they refer to units that define themselves and that are defined by the neighbours as not having sufficient land or other sources of income to meet their members' subsistence needs. By subsistence needs they mean basic needs such as food, clothes, money to buy medicines and school fees. I consider this categorization by the informants themselves as the best option, since "sufficiency" is culturally determined; it is a standard generally agreed upon in the local community. I will use this categorization in my analysis of the processes of social change below.

Women generally move to their husbands upon marriage (Southall, 1971). The opposite, when the husband settles with his wife's relatives, is scorned upon and considered shameful, *manara-bady* (i.e. follow the wife), and the reason for making such a step must therefore be pressing, such as securing their children's possibilities for attending school. Traditionally, marriage between relatives, especially between children of cross-cousins was preferred as a strategy for keeping land within the kinship group. In this way rice fields were preserved undivided within the family, and the transfer of land to "strangers" avoided. Nowadays shortage of land is one of the factors motivating young people to leave their home-village. Daughters leave upon marriage, while the younger sons leave in search for alternative occupations in town. Parents strive to give higher education for some of their children – primarily for sons, but given the economic possibilities, also for daughters – hoping that this will secure extra incomes through paid jobs in industry, public administration or other activities. Many farmers expect that children who have received an education, in turn will provide for some of their younger siblings, and, in this way, ease the economic burdens of the household.

Scarcity of land has thus led to an exodus of surplus population from the rural areas to the towns. It has also created a new "ethic of inheritance" according to which women gradually accept as normal that their brothers have prime access to the family land, since the economic future of women is secured through marriage which gives them accesses to their husbands' inheritance. If a household possesses so much land that both sons and daughters inherit, daughters who marry and settle at some distance will generally not have the opportunity to farm their land. In most such cases the land will be cultivated by their brothers, who give part of the harvest to their sisters. Even when the household has shortage of land and a daughter does not inherit, a piece of land will be reserved for her should she return

widowed or divorced. Land that is reserved in this manner is called *tanim-behivavy* or woman's land.

All who inherit land are obliged to contribute economically to the funeral rites of their kinship group, called *famadihana*, the turning over of the dead. Lack of economic resources is the main reason why women lately tend to renounce their inheritance and allow their brothers to divide the land between them. Through marriage, women have obligations tied to the land inherited by their husbands, and in order to avoid the strain of having to contribute in two places, they often choose to abstain from their own inheritance. The "woman's land" that awaits them should they return to their village, is not tied to any *famadihana* obligations.

Thus, shortage of land and deteriorating economic conditions, tend to reduce women's participation and role in the rites, and they become more marginal. By marginalization I refer to women's decreasing participation and influence on decision making in the preparation and performance of the rites. As women gradually have accepted that their brothers have prime access to the family land, they no longer participate in their own right as heirs to the family land, and as responsible for the *famadihana* of their kinship group. On the contrary, they achieve their rights and duties through their husbands, fathers, or brothers. Their status and social prestige associated with the responsibility for the celebration activities is reduced correspondingly. Women still participate in the practical tasks that have to be carried out, such as cooking, serving food, as well as in the practical preparations for the gathering, but they are no longer hosts and therefore do not enjoy the honour and prestige that is achieved through participation in the management group.

Agricultural change

The traditional agricultural sector was mainly occupied with production of rice. This sector was characterized by subsistence farming. The units of production were to a considerable degree based on family labour. A rapidly growing population made it necessary to import rice and also other foodstuffs. Self-sufficiency in rice was first made a political aim in the 1970's, and as a consequence, the government initiated structural changes in the economy.

The processes of transformation of agriculture started primarily in the highland region of Central Madagascar, and has basically been associated with the introduction of a new "agricultural package", consisting of various elements, such as double cropping, new agricultural tools, improved seeds, and agro-chemicals. Through research, a number of new varieties of rice, potatoes and cereals have been developed. These new varieties give considerably higher yields, and have a period of growth that is much shorter than the traditional

crops. This makes it possible to exploit the farmland more intensively than before by allowing two or more harvests every year. The use of fertilizers and pesticides have also contributed to increase the yields. In order to achieve such improvements the new varieties must be accompanied by suitable amounts of fertilizers, water and pesticides at the right time in the cycle of growth. They also require new methods of cultivation, such as sowing on lines with a certain distance between the grains instead of the traditional method of spreading the seeds more or less haphazardly on the field. The new varieties are imported from abroad, and sold to the farmers. Since they are less resistant to diseases than the traditional ones, the dependency on agro-chemicals is increasing. The use of fertilizers also increases the vitality of the weeds, and thus require the application of herbicides.

The more intensive utilization of the farmland by double cropping also requires more labour input from the household members. In earlier days, farming took a pause when the rice harvest was over in April/May, until the new season started in September. Today the soil of the rice fields is turned over to be ready for a new crop as soon as the rice has been harvested. Since water is generally the greatest constraint, the rice-fields that can be irrigated even in the dry seasons, are most highly valued.

Tools such as sowing staff, marker, rotating weeder for rice and wheat fields, and portable spray-pumps for agro-chemicals have been introduced. Traditionally, sowing and weeding were considered women's work. With the introduction of the new tools, these tasks are increasingly being carried out by men. Women seem thus little by little to be excluded from their previous tasks when new and more effective tools were introduced. Changes have also taken place within animal husbandry, especially in cattle breeding. Improvement of the cattle stock, the growing of fodder in order to increase milk production, has created new sources of income for the farmers' households.

The agricultural innovations are promoted through various institutional arrangements. The national authorities have cooperated with national and international agricultural organizations to promote agricultural development. Credit schemes have been started to stimulate agricultural production. Loans are mainly canalized through The Farmer's Bank, BTM, and are offered partly in cash, partly in input factors. There have been problems in making the farmers repay the loans according to the payment plans, and conditions for receiving such loans are becoming increasingly more difficult. Another way to promote transformation of agriculture has been to provide extension services, through the use of extension workers who make contractual agreements with farmers by giving credit on input factors to agricultural production.

The individual farmer has to choose whether to adopt the new agricultural package or to stick to traditional ways of cultivation. The new varieties are more demanding and the new methods and technology more complex than the old ones, and certainly make the farmers dependent on factors beyond their control. At the same time the new system of production opens for a potential increase in production and in incomes.

Household and sexual division of labour

It has often been argued that women in Madagascar have a relatively high status compared with women in other countries in Africa. Their high status has often been associated with their active role in the household, in agriculture and in the economy. Traditionally women contributed decisively to the economy of the household. In addition to their domestic responsibilities they controlled the storing, processing and distribution of certain products, such as harvested rice and the incomes they acquired from market sales. This granted them considerable influence in the decision making on the farm. Besides that, women were responsible for some external relations, such as agricultural cooperation with female neighbours. Women's traditional rights to inherit land and to hold an office in the funeral rites enhanced their position. This altogether gave women power and influence and contributed to their relatively high status in society.

Gender relations in Merina rural society today are best understood when looked at through the household organization. The household is the organizational basis for the gender specific division of labour, and it is the arena where women and men cooperate to cope with their daily tasks.

The households in the three villages are units of production composed of nuclear families or parts of extended families. The productive adults of a household share the responsibility for the non-productive members (the old and the children). The household can also be characterized as a unit of redistribution. Products and services produced within the household or brought in from the outside by one or more of its members, are made accessible to the whole group, including those who have not contributed to get it. There are, however, great variations in the amount of land and the amount of rice and other products controlled by the households.

The households strive to achieve autonomy, but whether or not this goal will be reached depends on the personnel and resources at the household's disposition. The degree of autonomy is reflected in the household's dependence/independence on other more comprehensive units. A household that lacks male or female labour required to carry out the gender-specific tasks for instance in the

production of rice, will to a great extent depend on services from the extended family in order to function properly according to culturally defined standards. A common way to meet the household's labour needs is to activate and exploit kinship ties.

Gradually, access to land has become the most critical factor limiting production and therefore also seems to limit the options women have within the framework of the household economy. Differences between households regarding access to land thus leads to great variations regarding women's participation in agricultural work and income earning activities.

As the division of labour is gender based, both men and women are needed to constitute a viable unit. Traditionally both women and men were productive but in different areas. However, it is important to note that the gender-specific division of labour is not a rigid and invariable norm. If a man for example has taken a paid job for a while, his wife often carries out his agricultural tasks and vice versa. When women are pregnant, have recently given birth or are away visiting relatives, it is not uncommon to see men perform women's tasks in the household or in agriculture. Furthermore, the lack of hands, whether feminine or masculine, will often compel husband and wife to cooperate in the different tasks whether they are defined as men's or women's work. Households with small economic resources cannot hire labour. In such cases the different tasks are often carried out by the household members, almost irrespective of gender.

Scarcity of land also means that the household members are obliged to seek alternative incomes. The income potential of a household is an important factor in determining its ability to function properly. Income is here understood as all goods or money made available to the household through the activities of its different members. These incomes are normally administered by the women. If a woman acquires additional incomes for example from selling rice cakes or coffee, the money is considered to belong to her. Such personal money increases her influence in the household, and her influence on her own life and her options. At the same time it balances her position in relation to the husband.

A woman's life in Merina is determined by the economic position of the household and her position within the household. A household's access to land, means of production and incomes are factors that strongly influence women's working and living conditions. Rural households are not harmonic, egalitarian social units, but rather hierarchically structured in relations of subordination and dominance based on sex and age. The husband is considered the head of the household's external relations, *loham-pianakaviana*, and represents the household externally. The wife is the head internally, *tompon-trano*, and is responsible for the day to day running of the household and for the organization of domestic work. Her workload is generally

extensive and includes taking care of children and elders, cooking, housework, farming and trade. Due to their important domestic roles women are always influential, but to a varying degree depending on the size and composition by age and sex of the household and its economic conditions.

Subordination and dominance

An ideology of male dominance prevails in the cognitive structure of Merina culture. Male dominance is inherent in the social structure and organization of the society. It is expressed in a number of ways, for instance in the residence pattern, in the inheritance practices, the educational opportunities and in the different rituals associated with the tombs. Furthermore, it is demonstrated in everyday rituals. Men are for example given the best part of the chicken, they are reserved the most honourable seat in the house, towards the ancestors' and the gods' direction to the east, and it is the men who give the various greetings and speeches required at different occasions. Male dominance is also expressed in the gender division of labour where the more prestigious tasks, such as public offices are usually held by men while the lower ranged tasks, such as housework and looking after children and old people is performed by women. At the same time as women are defined as subordinated to men, they have strong influence particularly on the internal affairs of the household.

My findings show that there is a certain discrepancy between gender ideology and practice in Vakinankaratra. The first impression of male dominance becomes less convincing when we look more closely into the actual distribution of power and influence between men and women. We then see that women often have the ability to achieve their objectives even at the expense of the will and interests of others. Women execute power through their control over food and other naturalia of the household. They also control the labour of the children, who may represent an important resource. Their own agricultural work and trade is also a potential source of power. Women's contribution to the maintenance of the household is as we have noted considerable, and not in accordance with the dominant gender ideology.

Gender and economic differentiation

Differentiation processes are often caused by an interplay between internal processes in a given community and the dynamics of the larger system. When analyzing the processes of economic change in Merina rural society, it is necessary to identify this interaction more precisely.

The differentiation between households in Vakinankaratra is primarily determined by the unequal access to land, the types of land

rights and how much land is available. Whether the farmer owns the land, or borrows or hires it, is of crucial importance. All households covered by my study own some land, but approximately half of them hire additional land from neighbours or relatives, on a share-cropping basis. The size of the farms vary considerably. According to a study of land division in Vakinankaratra, only 6 % of the households own 4-6 ha of land, 60-70 % of them 0,5-1 ha, and the rest, 25-35 %, less than 0,5 ha (Randriamarolaza, 1985).

There have always been certain differences regarding access to land in this region. Today these differences are increasing as a result of the introduction of the new agricultural package, since it is normally the "land rich" households that are in a condition to adopt the innovations. The poor and more vulnerable households continue to produce in the traditional way, and supplement their incomes from agriculture with day-work on the larger farms. Thus, the introduction of new technology and the generally hardened economic situation have accelerated the process whereby a few households experience an economic growth while the rest endure an economic decline.

Whether the farmers adopt the agricultural innovations or not depends on a number of factors. The traditional varieties are well adapted to the ecological conditions through natural selection. This is not the case of the new varieties of seeds. They require a higher control of the agro-ecological environment, which in turn demands new knowledge. In Vakinankaratra, agricultural inputs have been available locally, and knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation. Inherent in the adoption of new techniques is an acceptance of new ideas and values that may prove to be more dramatic than the changes of production as such. This may in itself explain the reluctance with which these techniques are received by many farmers.

The farmers' judgement of the risks certainly also affect their level of acceptance. They have to choose between the traditional methods with low yields and few risks, and the new ones that promise much higher yields, but also involve the risk of total crop failure. Besides, the adoption of new techniques requires purchased inputs, thus creating dependency on merchants. The consequences of a crop failure, are dramatic especially for vulnerable households. An important element in such household's choice of strategy, will be to minimize risks. Poverty therefore reduces the willingness to embrace the agricultural innovations.

The farmers who adopt the innovations are normally the best off regarding productive resources, education and external contacts. Their experiences with the innovations are generally positive and have a motivating effect on their less well off neighbours. However, because of limited resources, the majority of the farmers are not able to assimilate the new agricultural package and thereby increase their

production and incomes. The new technology requires agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers, which the majority of the farmers simply cannot afford to buy. This has been reinforced by the implementation of economic structural adjustment by The World Bank, which has meant devaluation of the local currency and the resulting elevation of prices on agricultural inputs. Vulnerable households are therefore not able to enjoy the economic progress promoted through the transformation of agriculture.

Socio-economic change means that the opportunities of women and men are altered. When women accept that their brothers have prime access to family land, it is because they consider it favourable for themselves and their households. Many Merina women express satisfaction at not inheriting land. They are alleviated from the heavy burden of contributing to the funeral rite *famadihana*. The question however, is whether this in fact is favourable to women or not. By renouncing their inheritance they alleviate the economic burdens of the household, but at the same time the position of women as independent individuals is weakened since their access to land and duties regarding funeral rites, now are tied to their husbands. Besides, it also means that the household gives up the potential resource represented by the land that traditionally was inherited and cultivated by women. Since control of land is an important source of power, and this control to an increasing degree is concentrated in the hands of men, women become more dependent on men, be it their fathers, husbands or brothers. At the same time, women's ties to their lineage is weakened by having a secondary role in the *famadihana*.

The introduction of the new agricultural package also alters women's participation in agricultural work and transforms the gender-specific division of labour. New technology and more intensive exploitation of the farm land have created a greater demand for hired labour in the peak seasons. However, the need for wage labour has increased even more since the economic situation of poor households is gradually deteriorating. Such households often depend on both women's and men's additional incomes to make ends meet. Admittedly, the expansion of the local labour market thus has provided new income opportunities. However, the wages in agriculture do not rise at the same scale as the incomes of the resourceful farmers.

The competition for jobs as day-workers becomes harder, due to the fact that a growing number of households depend on additional incomes to feed their members. Thus, a growing number of male and female labourers compete for jobs. Besides the planting of rice, sowing and weeding are the most important tasks women seek as day-workers. Due to the introduction of new tools in agriculture, sowing and weeding is to an increasing degree being carried out by men in the market of day-workers, specially in the cultivating of potatoes and

cereals. This means that women are forced to seek incomes also from other sources than agriculture. The possibilities are limited. The agricultural development therefore makes women gradually marginal in tasks connected to sowing and weeding. As the demand for rice cakes and coffee is limited, women's chances to find alternative sources of income are restricted.

The production of rice is never the less rather conservative in relation to maintaining traditional gender division of labour, partly because the introduction of new tools is limited in cultivation of rice. Also, the cultural understanding of women's and men's roles in their respective tasks of cultivation of rice are maintained as fundamental in creating gender identity and a source of blessing to society.

Some women expressed that they were pleased that weeding, due to the introduction of the rotating weeder, now is taken over by men. This is regarded as favourable for both women and men, since women already have a heavy workload. The new division of labour is therefore looked upon as satisfactory by many women. Studies I made on time-use indicate that women work 12-16 hours a day while men work only 10-12 hours, depending on specific household conditions. Nonetheless, I will argue that the transfer of tasks from women to men will weaken women's position in the long run. Women are deprived of important areas of responsibility and influence in the household while men through the introduction of technical devices, gain influence and new knowledge. However, this does not mean that all men are affected in the same way.

My findings show that the vulnerable households, where scarce resources prevent the use of hired labour, develop a high degree of equality and interchangeability with regard to the sexual division of labour in agriculture. At the same time I observed that women's influence on decision making concerning farm activities is being reduced. This can be explained by the fact that male household members are the ones who have the contacts outside the farm and the local community. Both women and men still partake in the production of milk and agricultural products, but men tend to monopolize external relations, through which they gain information about issues such as prices, policies regarding cattle, production techniques, and agricultural tools. Through men's monopolizing of information, of crucial importance for the planning and implementation of farm activities under the new circumstances, women lose their previous influence on production and sale.

The new tools in agriculture also strengthen men's control of new knowledge. These tools are introduced and demonstrated in the rural areas mostly by male extension workers, which may be one of the reasons why the application of the new tools is associated with men. Moreover, men are leaders in society and are expected to try out the new equipment. The ideology of male dominance is here an

underlying assumption. It can be argued that since the tasks and responsibilities placed on women are extensive and demanding, the changes promoted by the modernization process should in fact lighten their burdens, and, that it is only reasonable that certain tasks are transferred to men. However, I will argue that over time this may lead to a marginalization of women in agricultural production in general. Men gradually take over the planning and organization of agricultural work, including the tasks that previously were initiated and run by women. Furthermore, the externally initiated activities are directed primarily towards men, and also reinforce their interaction with the public sphere, at the expense of women. The result is that the household's decision-making regarding these new areas associated with the socio-economic transformation of society, is undertaken by men.

Concluding remarks

The theme of this paper has been gender and processes of social change. My aim has been to explore changes in gender relations in view of the processes of socio-economic change that is taking place in Merina rural society.

Traditionally the most important basis of power and influence for both women and men has been land and income. The economic contributions of women to the household, be it through land, her agricultural production or other sources of income, secured her influence. This contribution counteracted the male dominance in the decision making of the household. By renouncing their rights to land, women lose their main basis of power and influence. Thereby they weaken their position in negotiations with men. Women in vulnerable households who renounce their land rights, are compelled to periodically seek paid work as day labourers. As competition for these jobs hardens, women's ability to bring in extra income is reduced. Women of non-vulnerable households however, control resources that enable them to enter into market trade. Through these activities, they may further increase the incomes of their households.

The result of this complex process is twofold. In vulnerable households the male dominant structure of authority is enhanced through men's taking over the job market and controlling the new knowledge. The economic influence of women is reduced correspondingly. In non-vulnerable households however, women's incomes balance their position in relation to their husbands. Decision making concerning the household and its agricultural work, is therefore more equalitarian.

The transition from subsistence to market integrated economy, seems only to have limited impact on Merina funeral rites as one of the most important elements protecting life. Women's and men's

priorities are still to a great extent determined by their duties and relations to the dead. This, however, must be understood in light of the fact that funeral rites play a principal part in creating and maintaining social and cultural identity. The behaviour of the farmers is still to a large extent determined by their understanding of how daily life is maintained. Their economic contributions in *famadihana* are to be seen as long term investments in dead and living relatives. These type of investments are given priority to purely economic calculations. Funeral rites contribute to the continuity in the cultural perception of reality, even when social processes cause considerable changes in society. However, women's decreasing ability to partake and influence on decision making in the funeral rites, leads to a marginalization of women in the preparation and performance of the rites, - which in turn weakens her position in society.

Processes of impoverishment apply to both women and men, and different groups of women are affected in diverse ways. The same is true regarding men. Some women have, no doubt, improved their situation through the increased supply of resources to the household, and through reduced workloads. But the majority are forced into a situation where they gradually lose authority and influence both within the household and in the community.

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on a study of the Merina people of Vakinankaratra region in the highlands of Madagascar. In this region there has been a gradual transition from subsistence economy to market integrated economy during the last decades. My hypothesis is that economic differentiation processes, provoked by an increasing shortage of land, and the introduction of new cultivation practices and new technology in agriculture have created changes in gender relations, which have led to a gradual decrease of most women's power and influence in Merina society.

There has been a tendency in the literature on women indevelopment to treat women as a homogenous category and thereby overlook the class dimension. We should not forget that women as well as men are members of social classes, and that their class affiliation to a large extent determines the impact of processes of social transformation (Moore, 1988). The transition to a market integrated economy is thus often accompanied by a differentiation process with winners and losers of both sexes.

Gender relations in Merina rural society are best understood when looked at through the household organization. The household is the organizational basis for the gender specific division of labour, and it is the arena where women and men cooperate to cope with their daily tasks.

Women's lives in Merina is determined by the economic position of the household and her position within the household. A household's access to land, means of production and incomes are factors that strongly influence women's working and living conditions. Her workload is generally extensive and includes taking care of children and elders, cooking, housework, farming and trade. Due to their important domestic roles women are always influential, but to a varying degree depending on the size and composition by age and sex of the household and its economic conditions.

The differentiation between households in Vakinankaratra is primarily determined by the unequal access to land, the types of land rights and how much land is available. Whether the farmer owns the land, or borrows or hires it, is of crucial importance.

Socio-economic change means that the opportunities of women and men are altered. The introduction of new agricultural technology alters women's participation in agricultural work and transforms the gender-specific division of labour. I will argue that over time this may lead to a marginalization of women in agricultural production in general. Men gradually take over the planning and organization of agricultural work, including the tasks that previously were initiated and run by women. Furthermore, the externally initiated activities are directed primarily towards men. The result is that the household's decision-

making regarding these new areas associated with the socio-economic transformation of society, is undertaken by men.

Processes of impoverishment apply to both women and men, and different groups of women are affected in diverse ways. The same is true regarding men. Some women have, no doubt, improved their situation through the increased supply of resources to the household, and through reduced workloads. But the majority are forced into a situation where they gradually lose authority and influence both within the household and in the community.

RESUME

Cet article est basé sur les études de terrain effectuées dans la région du Vakinankaratra des Hauts Plateaux malgaches. Dans cette région, ces dernières décennies, on peut constater une évolution progressive de l'économie de subsistance vers une économie de marché. L'hypothèse présentée ici c'est que les processus de la diversification économique, combinés avec le manque progressif de terres et avec l'introduction de nouvelles techniques et technologies agricoles, ont changé les relations entre hommes et femmes. Tous ces changements ont servi à diminuer progressivement le pouvoir et l'influence des femmes dans la société merina.

Dans la littérature sur les femmes et le développement, il y avait jusqu'ici tendance à présenter les femmes comme une catégorie homogène; par conséquent, cette littérature néglige la plupart du temps les divisions de classes. Il faut rappeler que les femmes, autant que les hommes, sont membres de classes sociales différentes et que la classe détermine en grande partie les effets que portent les transformations sociales (Moore, 1988). La transition vers une économie de marché est donc souvent accompagnée par un processus de différenciation, avec des gagnants et des perdants des deux sexes.

Les rapports de genre dans la société rurale merina sont mieux saisis à travers une étude de l'organisation de la maisonnée. La maisonnée est la base pour la coordination de la division sexuelle du travail, et c'est aussi le lieu où les hommes et les femmes coopèrent pour accomplir les tâches quotidiennes.

La vie d'une femme en Imerina est déterminée par la position économique de la maisonnée et par la position de la femme dans la maisonnée. L'accès à la terre et aux moyens de production, et les revenus sont tous des facteurs qui exercent une influence majeure sur les conditions féminines de travail et de vie. Le travail traditionnellement dévolu aux femmes est, en général, énorme et comprend le soin des enfants et des vieillards, la cuisine, les tâches ménagères, les travaux agricoles et le commerce. A cause de tous ces rôles importants sur le plan domestique, les femmes ont toujours de l'influence au niveau de la maisonnée, mais le degré dépendrait du nombre d'occupants et de la composition par âge et par sexe de la maisonnée, et de ses possibilités économiques.

La différenciation entre maisonnées dans le Vakinankaratra est déterminée surtout par l'accès à la terre : selon les droits différents à la terre, selon la quantité disponible, selon que le paysan est propriétaire de la terre, ou s'il est locataire et métayer, tout cela revêt importance déterminante.

Les changements socio-économiques modifient les possibilités des femmes et des hommes. L'introduction de nouvelles technologies agricoles change les tâches féminines et transforme la division sexuelle du travail. Mes enquêtes suggèrent qu'au cours des années, ces changements ont pour effet de marginaliser les femmes de la production agricole. Les hommes remplacent progressivement des femmes dans les tâches que celles-ci ont initié et coordonné auparavant. De surcroît, les projets de développement agissent le plus souvent en faveur des hommes. Par conséquent, ce sont eux qui prennent des décisions concernant ces nouveautés et les transformations socio-économiques. L'appauvrissement touche les hommes et les femmes, mais ses effets sont différents selon les femmes. Quelques-unes sans doute ont bénéficié de l'accroissement de ressources et de la réduction des tâches. Mais la majorité se trouve dans une situation telle qu'elles perdent leur autorité et leur influence, non seulement au niveau de la communauté, mais aussi au niveau de la maisonnée.

FAMINTINANA

Mifototra amin'ny fikarohana natao tany amin'ny faritr'i Vakinankaratra ity lahatsoratra ity. Tao anatin'ireo folo taona faramparany dia tsapa fa mivoatra tsikelikely mankany amin'ny toe-karena mifototra amin'ny fifanakalozana arabarotra sy amin'ny fiveloman-tena teo aloha. Araka ny petra-kevitra aseho eto, dia ny fiovana miandalana eo amin'ny toe-karena miaraka amin'ny tsy fahampian'ny tany hovolena ary ny fidiran'ireo teknika sy fitaovam-pamokarana vaovao no nanova ny fifandraisan'ny lahy sy ny vavy. Ireo fiovana rehetra ireo no nampihena miandalana ny fahefana sy ny lanjan'ny vehivavy teo amin'ny fiaraha-monina merina.

Amin'ireo asa soratra momba ny vehivavy sy ny asa fampanandroana dia naseho hatramin'izao ho toy ny sokajy miray volo ny vehivavy ; noho izany dia hadino mandrakariva ny fisian'ny fizarazarana ara-tsaranga. Tokony hampatsiahivina fa na ireo lehilahy na ireo vehivavy, dia samy ao anatin'ny saranga samihafa, ary ny saranga no mamaritra amin'ny ankapobeny ny vokatra entin'ny fivoaran'ny fiaraha-monina (Moore, 1988). Ny fiampitana amin'ny toe-karena mifototra amin'ny tsena dia matetika arahin'ny fanavahana, izay ahitana ny mpandresy sy ny resy eo amin'ny roa tonta, ny lahy sy ny vavy.

Azo tsaratsara kokoa eo amin'ny fandinihana ny firafitry ny tokantrano ny fifandraisan'ny lahy sy ny vavy eo amin'ny fiaraha-monina ambanivohitra merina. Fototry ny fandrindrana sy fitsinjarana ny asa araka ny maha-lahy sy ny

vavy ny tokantrano ary toerana ihany koa iarahan'ny lehilahy sy vehivavy hanatanterahany ny asa andavanandro.

Voafaritry ny harenan'ny tokantrano sy ny anjara toerana misy azy ao an-tokantrano ny fiainan'ny vehivavy eto Imerina. Zava-dehibe manome lanja amin'ny toe-piainan'ny vehivavy sy ny asany ny fananana tany, fananana fitaovam-pamokarana, ary fananana loharanom-bola. Ny fikarakarana ny ankizy, ny antitra, ny fanomanana sakafo, ny asa ao an-tokantrano, eny an-tsaha ary ny varotra dia andraikitra ny vehivavy daholo. Noho ireo andraikitra lehibe ireo, dia manana lanja lehibe ny vehivavy ao amin'ny tokantrano, kanefa miankina ihany koa amin'ny isan'ny olona ao an-tokantrano izany, ny fitsinjaran'izy ireo araka ny taona sy araka ny hoe lahy na vavy, ary araka ny fananana eo ampelatanan'ny tokantrano.

Faritan'ny fananan-tany (zo samihafa amin'ny tany sy ny hamaroany) indrindra ny fiavahan'ny tokantrano any Vakinankaratra. Misy dikany lehibe ny maha tompony, na maha mpanofa, na maha mpikarama an'ilay tantsaha.

Mampiova ny fiainan'ny vehivavy sy lehilahy ny fiovana eo amin'ny lafiny sosialy sy ekonomika. Mampiova ny asam-behivavy ny manova ny fitsinjarana ny asa araka ny maha-lahy sy ny vavy ny fidiran'ireo fomba fambolena vaovao. Ny fanadihadiana izay natao dia mampiseho fa araka ny firoson'ny taona dia nanjary ankilabao ny vehivavy eo amin'ny asam-pamokarana. Soloin'ny lehilahy tsikelikely ny vehivavy eo amin'ny asa nataony sy narindrany teo aloha. Ankoatra izany, ny tetik'asa fampandrosoana dia tsy mijery afa-tsy ny lehilahy. Noho izany, ny lehilahy no manapa-kevitra eo amin'ireo sehatra vaovao miaraka amin'ny fiovany ny fiaraha-monina amin'ny lafiny sosialy sy ny toekarena. Mihamahantra hatrany na ny lehilahy na ny vehivavy. Nefa misy ihany vehivavy sasantsasany nanatsara ny fari-pianany ary nampitombo ny fidiram-bolan'ny tokantrano, amin'ny fampihenana ny asa natao. Ny ankabeazany anefa dia tafiditra anatina toe-javatra izay tsy ananany fahefana sy lanja firy intsony ao amin'ny tokantrano sy ao amin'ny fokonolona.