

## ART, CARE-GIVING, AND THE ANCESTORS : GENDER ROLES AND ROLE "REVERSALS" IN HIGHLAND MADAGASCAR<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Women and men experience relative gender equality in Madagascar's central highlands<sup>2</sup>. Betsileo and Merina women and men hold high profile positions of authority in government and in large organizations and businesses. There are doctors, lawyers, teachers, and powerful merchant-*patrons* of both sexes. Moreover, some linguistic forms of address differentiate social rank but not gender<sup>3</sup> (Bloch, 1987 : 326). Yet, highland society is also divided into certain traditionally gender-specific roles, particularly in relation to ceremonial or ritual life, and especially in connection with the ancestors.

Highland Malagasy culture is permeated by the ancestors, who are believed to have originated all customs and traditions. Ancestors embody great power and can manipulate the lives of their descendants, and as such are integral to Malagasy life and identity. Thus, activities and objects having ancestral associations—funerals, reburials, the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based upon dissertation research conducted in highland Madagascar in 1990 and 1992-1993, and upon continued work in 1997. Research was funded by a Social Science Research Council Pre-dissertation Fellowship (1990), an Indiana University Women's Studies Program Grant (1990), and a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (1992-1993). I worked primarily in the regions of Arivonimamo (Imerina) and Sandrandahy (Betsileo). The writing of my dissertation was funded through an American Fellowship from the American Association of University Women (1995-1996). I would like to thank all of my friends in Madagascar, and Robert L. Thompson for his helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Although the literature makes clear that there are more than two genders, in this paper I focus on female and male gender roles in highland Madagascar.

<sup>3</sup> For example, *tampoko* is a common non-gendered title of respect.

family tomb, and burial shrouds—are all considered important cultural elements forming the essence of one's Malagasiness.

Interaction between the living and the ancestors occurs primarily during funerary practices that are specific to Madagascar's central highlands. Upon death, the living enshroud and inter their deceased relative in either the family tomb or a provisional burial. At this point, the deceased is thought to enter a liminal phase between the worlds of the living and the dead, in which he or she remains as long as his or her body is "wet" (*mando*). As soon as the body no longer contains moisture of any kind and the mortal remains consist only of the essential "eight bones" (*taolan-balo*), it is considered "dry" (*maina*). Once dry, the eight bones are wrapped in additional shrouds and reinterred into the family tomb during a *famadihana* or reburial ceremony. *Famadihana* are recurring ceremonies held one to twenty years after the initial funeral, during which the ancestors are united within the family tomb, given new shrouds, and honored. Once a deceased person has entered the family tomb, he or she is said to have joined the ranks of the ancestors. The world inhabited by the ancestors parallels that of the living, yet is not entirely separate from it. Actions performed in one world affect the inhabitants of the other. Thus, relationships between the two worlds are reciprocal. As long as the ancestors are cared for, and kept happy and warm, they will pronounce benedictions and blessings. Yet if the ancestors feel neglected, they may retaliate by rescinding benedictions or actively causing harm to those individuals they deem responsible.

Men and women serve indispensable roles in the ongoing ancestor-descendant relationship by performing certain gender-specific jobs for the good of the family and community. Some jobs relate to social mores observed by the living. For example, respect for the ancestors is demonstrated by following strict social rules governing gender separation during times of bodily exposure. Therefore, only individuals of like gender are present during, or participate in the dressing, enshrouding, or rewrapping of a deceased person or an ancestor during either initial burial or later reburial. Other gender specific jobs are more distinct, based upon roles and assumptions that are generally considered traditional due to their historic and complementary natures.

## Male Roles

Men generally serve as public figures in contexts considered traditional by highland Malagasy people. Men are the official orators, representatives of family and community, and leaders. As orators, men act as spokespersons of the group and speak to the assembled audience - which includes the physically present living and the

spiritually present ancestors<sup>1</sup>. Orators who successfully and eloquently perform *kabary*, the formal and stylized oratory speech used at all important occasions, are recognized and acknowledged as highly talented masters of an extremely difficult skill. A *kabary* by "someone who really knows how" (*tena mahay be*) is discussed, critiqued, and appreciated long after the event is over. Because of their ancestrally sanctioned role as official representatives and negotiators, men are considered to be protectors of the group. Important protective elements of Merina and Betsileo culture are diviners (*mpanandro*, *mpisikidy*, or *ombiasa*). Diviners, who communicate (and negotiate) with the ancestors on their clients' behalf, are generally male, and female diviners, while purported to exist, are rare<sup>2</sup>.

The protective role associated with men and maleness extends to roles exhibiting physical strength. For example, youths must prove their courage, strength, and wit during Betsileo circumcision ceremonies to ensure the operation's success. At night, young men must steal sugar cane (*fary*) and banana stalks (*akondro*) from their neighbors, and collect special or sacred water (*rano velona*), all of which are materials known for their attributes of strength and power. Once successfully captured, these objects symbolize the youths' valor as well. Strength and bravery may also be demonstrated at certain moments during circumcisions and reburials, when individuals - generally youths - leap onto the back of a zebu steer to wrestle with it (*tolon'omby*) by firmly grasping the animal around its neck or large shoulder hump and holding on for as long as physically possible<sup>3</sup>. Such impressive displays of power and control demonstrate the youths' strength and prowess. When performed as part of a circumcision ceremony, wrestling exhibitions and the successful capture and control of powerful materials transmit these attributes to the younger boys who are in the vulnerable position of being cut and

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<sup>1</sup> The most important part of the *famadihana* reburial ceremony, according to Bloch, is the point at which men stand on the ancestral tomb and make elaborate speeches (1982: 217).

<sup>2</sup> A *mpanandro* in the Imerina region of Betafo told me that one of his former students was a woman named Razanajato.

<sup>3</sup> During large scale wrestling tournaments, in which many individuals wrestle numerous steer during a series of rounds that may last an entire day, women are not allowed to sit in the path of the *mpitolon-omby* (wrestlers) as they parade towards the wrestling arena. Friends suggested that this taboo ensured that male wrestlers would not lose their strength before the dangerous and physically demanding match. Yet, women are not always seen as sapping male strength, for while rare, female wrestlers do exist. When I asked my friends why I only saw men participate, I was told that it is an extremely dangerous sport - I did see men trampled and gored - and women were "much too smart" for that.

at the uncertain threshold of adulthood. This pivotal time is a moment when the young patients are more prone to illness, disease, and sorcery than at any other. In essence, men are equated with those qualities and attributes which display strength and courage.

Male associations with strength, power, and durability also translate as an identification with hard (as opposed to soft) and durable materials<sup>1</sup> and jobs. Thus, men build, rebuild, and decorate tombs (figure 1). Highland Malagasy tombs vary in size and form from region to region, but the general interior layout is a basic square or cruciform stone vault with three walls of hierarchical shelves on which the ancestors sleep. Older tombs may be completely subterranean, located within a natural hillside, or capped with a ziggurat form of concentric, tiered squares of vertical stone faces and horizontal earthen steps. Most newer tombs constructed within the last few generations are semi-subterranean, angular structures, whose exteriors generally appear as stone cubes that may have elaborate super-structures, stairwells, archways, or sculpture. Additional embellishment, which also includes relief carving or painting, varies depending on region, family, and tomb builder. However, stone is consistently chosen as the preferred building material. When constructing a tomb, Malagasy tomb builders are creating a space in which the ancestors will reside eternally<sup>2</sup>, as opposed to the temporary residences of the living, who inhabit clay houses. Stone is essential in creating this eternal environment, the importance of which is underscored by the practice in many regions of painting the mortar (or the implied mortar of a solid cement tomb) in order to emphasize a tomb's "stone-ness". The idea of hardness is also extended to other areas of Malagasy conception, such as interpretations of liquids. For example, *toaka*, the strong local rum that is drunk to celebrate the birth of a Betsileo boy, is described as hard (*mafy*).

When men are not building or constructing in hard, durable materials, they are cutting, digging, and taking apart, exhibiting a different yet related show of strength. For instance, men act as butchers, as preparers and diggers of the earth (for farming or tomb construction), and as circumcision surgeons. During circumcision ceremonies—which follow the rule of gender-division in regards to bodily exposure, resulting in women being barred from the innermost surgery chamber—men hold and support the young patient(s), perform the surgery, and serve as witness to the event.

According to many Betsileo individuals, as a culture, Betsileo people prefer boys to girls because boys tend to remain in the family

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<sup>1</sup> See Feeley-Harnik (1989 : 103, 105).

<sup>2</sup> Many tombs are decorated with house-like elements such as painted or incised doors, windows, and structural beams—all integral components of a highland home.

while girls leave by marrying out of the family. This departure from family due to the patrilocal residence pattern can have far-reaching consequences, since women are frequently—if not most commonly—buried in their husbands' tombs. Significantly, if a family has daughters but no sons, it is possible that no additional family members will enter the tomb once the parents have passed away. Furthermore, if there are no direct descendants able or willing to care for the tomb, it will fall into disrepair and the ancestors within forgotten. While unfortunate, this circumstance does happen, especially once no living descendants with memories of the ancestors remain. When future generations neglect a tomb and its ancestors, it can trigger all the undesirable consequences and reprisals associated with ancestors who feel ignored or disrespected. For example, otherwise inexplicable sickness or misfortune may befall the living. This scenario may be avoided, however, even if a family has no sons, because women have options concerning their burial locations. After carefully taking into consideration a number of factors, including relations with her husband, the number of husbands she has had, the number of wives her husband has or has had, relations with her family, whether there are other family members who will enter her parent's tomb, or other family politics, a woman may, for example, opt to be included in her parents' tomb rather than her husband's. Thus, if one or more women from a family without sons decide to rest in their parents' tomb, the catastrophe of a broken tomb line may be prevented.

## Female Roles

Women customarily fill roles that are more discreet, individual, and personal as compared to men's roles. While women can perform formal oration, particularly if holding a governmental or other public office, female speech is generally more private<sup>1</sup>. This does not mean that women are considered to play subordinate roles within the community, nor that they do not work for the good of the group. But they work toward it on an individual, personal level. For example, while men officiate and ceremonially address the ancestors during formal occasions, women are more likely to quietly petition the ancestors privately. Thus, during a *famadihana*, while men speak formally to and for the group, it is generally women who hold the newly disinterred ancestors upon their laps and grieve over them (figure 2). As their grieving subsides or is overcome through direct

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<sup>1</sup> Both Graeber (1995) and Larson (1992) note instances where women are much more willing to speak openly and personally, as opposed to the formal rhetoric of male speech. For instance, Graeber notes that women "did not hesitate to express their opinions about the ancestors' behavior" (1995 : 265), which he contrasts to men who guard their speech.

physical and tactile interaction, the women quietly talk to the ancestors about personal and family news, and relate events that have occurred since the last reburial.

Women also participate on a more public level, however. When the need or desire arises, a woman who deems it necessary to contribute her expertise will join in an official discussion or debate, and men listen to and respect women's opinions. For example, it is not unusual during a *famadihana* reburial for a woman to challenge male directives or to take control of the enshrouding once the ancestors have left the tomb. She may argue over the ancestors' identities, the distribution and ordering of the new *lambamena* burial shrouds, or the ancestral hierarchy that will dictate the rewrapping sequence. I once saw a Betsileo woman emphatically denounce the men who had, in her opinion, incorrectly wrapped a male ancestor. Within a short time, the men complied with her demand that they undo their previous work and begin the rewrapping process anew<sup>1</sup>.

While men are associated with strength, hardness, durability, and cutting away or pulling apart, women are associated with softer and less durable materials, objects, and needs, and with putting together. Objects such as *lambamena* burial shrouds and *tsihy* matting, which are soft, impermanent, and periodic, are identified with women. Moreover, the general association of women with things that require constant attention and consideration due to their temporal or continually changing natures extends to interpersonal relationships. Thus, women are associated with jobs concerned with tending and caring for others, and with issues of fertility.

While men are frequently involved in child-rearing or tending, women are traditionally the primary care-givers of their families. Women's tasks include attending to the continual needs of their families, cooking and serving food, as well as bathing and clothing others—particularly children and elders. This role of care-giver extends beyond the immediate family and into the world of the deceased family. Thus, women also feed and tend the ancestors, and clothe them with shrouds, objects that are predominantly woven by women. By clothing and carrying the ancestors "rolled like infants in blanket-like *lamba[mena]*,"<sup>2</sup> the role of care-giver is further emphasized.

Women (and sometimes men) feed and provide for their ancestors by placing gifts inside the shrouds during reburials: money; gifts that produce heat (alcohol, ginger, and tobacco); and those that are considered sweet (perfume and candies) (figure 3). Because warmth is regarded as an important curative element, many "hot" ancestral gifts

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<sup>1</sup> Bertine Ramarovavy at a *famadihana* at Analomaina.

<sup>2</sup> Graeber (1995:271-272).

correspond to objects given to someone feeling ill<sup>1</sup>. As care-givers, women are associated with the curative properties of the heat-producing items, as well as with the ancestors and the reburials during which the items are used. The ancestral ties of women are similarly strengthened through their association with objects that are sweet, as demonstrated by celebrating the birth of a Betsileo girl with wine, a liquid considered both sweet and soft, rather than the *toaka* consumed for a boy. Finally, women are especially associated with the *lambamena* burial shroud, the ultimate provider of heat.

The protective role of women is not manifest in physical prowess, as is that exhibited by men. Instead, women as care-givers provide emotional and physical presence and support. Thus during a circumcision ceremony, women do not exhibit physical strength, but protect and support others through performances of song and gestures of praise and blessing. While men occupy the room in which the operation is taking place, women, children, and men with more distant ties to the sponsoring family fill the courtyard, spilling into the windows or door opening onto the operating room. The courtyard audience, including the boys' mothers, bless the boys by waiving reeds (called *ravin-dahasa*) towards them, and periodically shouting benedictions while singing to musical accompaniment. Women also splash or flick blessed water towards the boys using their hands or leaves (*ravin-tsara* or *ravina voasary*). The male musicians join men from inside the operating room in entreating the women to sing louder and well (*Mihira daholo ! Mihira tsara*), and to dance better. As the operation approaches the final, critical moments, the shouts of encouragement increase - the boys need the women's crucial protective blessings and songs to pull through the ordeal safely.

Women also bestow strength during other perilous or difficult phases of the life cycle. During a funeral, women support the grieving family by occupying a key position beside family members during the night-long watch over the deceased's body. Once again the role of singing is of utmost importance. Throughout the night, women close to the deceased's family hold a vigil over the body to protect it against possible nocturnal evil forces attracted by the death, to support the family by lending a physical presence, and to distract the mourners with continuous singing, thereby easing the pain of loss. As one song winds to a close, a new song is initiated, selected from a repertoire of Christian church hymns or local traditional songs (non-Christian). Elder women scold their younger counterparts for any momentary lapses in the continual singing, as this signifies an obvious and therefore dangerous break in the diligent funerary watch. As more guests arrive, the outer rooms and balconies fill with men and women who join the inner room in singing.

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<sup>1</sup> Graeber (Personal communication, July 1990).

## Women and Weaving

In contrast to men, who, as butchers, farmers, tomb-builders, and circumcision surgeons are associated with cutting, digging, and removing, women are linked with work that is temporary or periodic and with objects that are continually built-up, created, and re-created. Women plant young rice shoots (into ground that has been prepared by men), weave textiles and plait matting. Most highland Malagasy describe weaving as *the* archetypal female job (figure 4). In fact, the term *ampela* or *epela* (spindle), can also be applied to a woman<sup>1</sup> (Mack, 1987 : 88). Although men are currently involved in a few aspects of the weaving process, the identification of women with weaving begins at birth. During the airing of a newborn child (a ceremony during which the infant is introduced to the community), family members carry objects symbolic of the baby's gender - hunting objects or weapons for a boy, and weaving tools, such as a shuttle stick or spindle, for a girl (Molet, 1979 : 43). Many women begin weaving at about eight years of age, learning the skills from an elder female relative and continuing to weave throughout their lives. Not all women continue weaving, however. Some women are not sufficiently interested in this time-consuming occupation. Others are forced out of the practice due to economic or demographic difficulties. Weavers who move away from their families often find continuation difficult without the financial support or equipment and materials available at home, particularly if they have moved from a rural to an urban setting. For those women who continue weaving, this symbolic "women's work" often provides supplemental income. More rarely, weaving may become a full-time profession - a difficult step to make due to the prohibitively expensive raw materials.

As the principle practitioners of this art form, women are involved in every step of the weaving process, from gathering the cocoons, inverting and encasing them (a process also called *famadihana*), cooking, washing, and spinning the silk (figure 5), to weaving and sewing together the separately woven panels. Men are less frequently involved in the actual weaving, and are primarily drawn to the lucrative positions of intermediary vendors or *patrons* who commission cloth. However, it is not unheard of for men to collect cocoons, help prepare or spin the silk, sew the finished panels, or weave, particularly during the slow agricultural months or the winter reburial season with its accompanying high textile demand.

As an occupation, weaving empowers women socially, technically, monetarily, and spiritually. Although agriculture is the predominant

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<sup>1</sup> Mack (1987 : 88). See also Sibree, who notes that, "an old Malagasy name for girl is *zaza-ampela*, 'the child of the spindle,' or spinning child" (1870 :220).



occupation of highland Madagascar, most rural families participate in various additional cottage industries, including weaving. Moreover, I met a number of weavers who told me they began to weave when they became orphans. Sibree (1870 : 220) also notes that to use the term *epela* for a woman is similar to calling her a spinster. That women turn to weaving under such difficult situations - being an orphan or a spinster in a culture based upon a large family work force - suggests that weaving is a viable economic avenue available to women.

Weaving is one of the most prevalent female occupations in the Imerina and Betsileo regions. Anyone interested in learning to weave may either study with an elder family member (generally a mother or grandmother), or if not from a weaving family, may apprentice with such a woman. Once skilled, many weavers carry out various weaving stages in groups - among family members or neighbors - and in public settings. For example, it is not unusual for a wealthy family, with the means to purchase large quantities of silk, to hire groups of women to invert and encase the silk cocoons in preparation for the lengthy cooking process. Or, several women may gather together at a river to rinse their newly cooked cocoon masses. Probably the most evident example of weaving's public nature is found in the local outdoor market. Betsileo market women often sell their wares while simultaneously spinning their cooked, indigenous silk cocoons using drop spindles<sup>1</sup> in preparation for the upcoming reburial season.

Women are also empowered through recognition and acknowledgement of their technical and creative skills. Women who cultivate and expand upon their own expertise are regarded as highly motivated and serious individuals, and are therefore respected. Weavers recognized for their superior skills are sought as teachers by people wishing to learn and as experts by anyone wishing to commission cloth. Such recognition translates into financial empowerment, for it provides a source of income independent of that based on family farming. The implied motivation and economic savvy of a woman who is able to manipulate her usually meager resources to obtain the expensive materials necessary for weaving is appreciated within the community. Depending upon financial ability, weavers may purchase just enough materials to meet current demand, or may buy large quantities of the expensive raw materials in advance, during the less costly off-season and either prepare and weave the silk themselves or commission others to complete the various tasks. Conversely, weavers unable to procure the often prohibitively expensive cocoons may commission themselves out to someone of greater economic means.

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<sup>1</sup> Betsileo use drop spindles rather than rolling the silk across horizontal pieces of wet wood, the technique employed by the Merina.

Finally, weaving empowers women through its links with the ancestors, and thus the ultimate highland Malagasy identity. The life-long association of women with weaving continues beyond death, because the shrouds that are used to clothe the deceased and the ancestors are woven by women. As noted by Feeley-Harnik in discussing highland reburial practices, while men bury their ancestors through oration, "women bring them to renewed life in their shrouds" (Feeley-Harnik, 1989: 103). In fact, two of the three primary implements used in caring for the ancestors are created through weaving or plaiting, objects without which the ancestral ceremonies would be incomplete and impotent. Shrouds and matting are relatively impermanent, fragile, and inconspicuous, and therefore seemingly insignificant in comparison with the large, permanent, male-made familial tombs (*favana*) that house the ancestral remains and that cover the highland landscape. Tombs are critical expressions of family and one's rightful inclusion within it, and exclusion from the family tomb is the worst possible punishment and is reserved for only the most despicable of crimes or transgressions.

Yet, the female-made cotton or silk burial shrouds used to wrap and rewrap the ancestors, and the reed mats<sup>1</sup> on which the wrapping is performed and in which the ancestors are transported (see figures 2 and 3), are essential components of highland Malagasy ancestral obligations. When asked the meanings and reasons behind highland reburial practices, women and men invariably stress the need to provide complete and undamaged shrouds for the ancestors as the strongest impetus for performing a *famadihana*. For an ancestor to have a disintegrated shroud implies tremendous neglect and disrespect. This neglect means that one is not providing for one's ancestors, is allowing them to dress in rags, and is subjecting them to cold - whether symbolic or real - when not fully clothed. Moreover, I was consistently told that the primary reason for having shrouds at all was to provide a visual marker differentiating humans from animals, and Malagasy from non-Malagasy humans. Denying an ancestor his or her rightful burial shroud relegates that ancestor to the status of non-human and non-Malagasy. To do so would be unthinkable, and would make a powerful statement as to the character of that individual, who obviously (to a highland Malagasy) is no one of worth, someone not entitled to even the minimum of respect. Once the shroud is eliminated as an element of burial, no other burial conventions need be followed and the body could as easily be thrown into a pit or the woods like a dog. The moment a body is enshrouded, however, the shroud becomes a part of the deceased, whom it was made to honor. Thus, while tombs represent family identity, shrouds represent one's

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<sup>1</sup> Although raffia mats may also be plaited by men, the general occupation of weaving is, as mentioned above, inextricably related to women.

humanness, one's Malagasy identity, and one's entry into ancestor status.

Plaited matting is the third essential, tangible element in highland funerary practices. Rectangular reed mats, or *tsihy*, are predominately protective. Newly plaited mats are carried aloft by family members who dance along the reburial procession route. Upon arrival at the tomb, *tsihy* create a special, temporary environment that is spiritually powerful. They serve as slings by which the ancestors are conveyed from the tomb for re-enshrining, and ultimately form a protective ground covering upon which the ancestors are laid. They contain the ancestors' remains, keeping them from being scattered or dispersed, and shield them from possible dirt, filth, or other contamination. As spiritually powerful protective containers, mats are virtually the only objects the ancestors touch during the potentially vulnerable time while out of the familial tomb and waiting for their new shrouds. Once re-enshrined, the ancestors are again physically and spiritually protected and contained, and can enjoy more direct interaction with their descendants, who then lift their ancestors and dance (figure 6).

### Physical Interaction

If the ancestors are successfully kept happy and warm, they will bestow blessings. Objects intimately associated with the ancestors, including burial shrouds, beads from shrouds, and matting are all considered tangible repositories of the ancestors' blessing, and therefore vehicles of communication through which the blessings are bestowed. Funerary textiles, however, are thought to be particularly efficacious. Thus, although textiles visibly link the ancestors (as consumers) and women (as creators), consumption can also extend to all living individuals, regardless of gender, who use and manipulate textiles to their own advantage. For example, family heads may publicly display shrouds that will be used in an upcoming ceremony to tangibly display filial and familial piety. By using shrouds in this way, such individuals can negotiate an increased social status and position within family and community. Yet, the greatest ancestral benediction is that of fertility. As Ruud noted, "through contact with the dead and with the wrapping-sheets which are pure and not infected with death, power and fertility are transferred to the living" (Ruud 1960 : 186). While all individuals benefit from progeny, women are considered the source or victims of sterility, and therefore women, as mothers and care-givers, have the most to gain from the ancestors' greatest gift. Therefore, women are not only the primary creators of the ancestors' intimate environments, they are also the primary beneficiaries of physical contact with them. Thus it is women in particular who interact with their ancestors, via textiles, during reburials.

Women tend to manipulate textiles on a much more private and personal level than do men. One-on-one interaction between women and their ancestors can be seen on the road to the family tomb and upon arrival. A woman carrying a new burial shroud for use in a ceremony may drape the textile over one shoulder, across her breasts and womb, and looped around the opposite hip (figure 7). She may also drape the entire shroud over both shoulders, ends grasped in her raised, outstretched hands, and dance while waiting for the tomb door to be opened and the ancestors carried forth. Explanations of these activities always center on a woman's desire for children and her subsequent request for benedictions of fertility from the ancestors. To accomplish this she interacts with the shroud, the strongest possible symbol of the ancestors. The shroud relays her requests to the ancestors and acts as a repository for their blessings. In some instances, the shroud's symbolism is quite literal, as when a woman wears it draped across her breasts and womb. By wearing it in this manner, a woman visually indicates the physical area addressed in her request while simultaneously enabling the transfer of the ancestors' responding blessings of fertility. Thus, while an entire community may benefit from performing a *famadihana*, women, who are held responsible for infertility, are the most directly and profoundly affected.

Physical interaction can cause both positive and negative results. From their inception, burial shrouds and the implements used in their creation are considered powerful objects that must be treated with great respect. Their power is extremely volatile, even for women who are intimately associated with weaving and the ancestors, because although they are potentially beneficial, these objects may also cause tremendous harm if misused or abused. For example, many highland Malagasy believe that a young girl touched or hit with a *fanantana* (weaving sword) will never marry<sup>1</sup>. If a girl is unable to marry, it is implied that she will not bear children. If she does not bear children, she will not fulfill her role as mother and progenitor, nor as a fertile and productive member of society. Of course, other female roles or jobs are important. However, progeny - the brunt of which falls on the perceived fertility of women - is a significant personal concern, and "failure" in this arena would be devastating, particularly in regions where children provide valuable labor resources and social security, and are an essential factor in one's economic and social standing within the community. Moreover, an individual without descendants will have no one to tend the family tomb or care for his or her

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<sup>1</sup> This belief was related to me by many individuals, such as Miriam Razanadrabe, a weaver from Manankasina.

shrouds<sup>1</sup>. If this occurs, he or she will disappear and be forgotten before having attained the status of ancient and anonymous ancestor<sup>2</sup>, a fate similar to that of individuals barred from initial entry into the family tomb. Thus, fertility translates as immortality. One Betsileo woman explained the importance of fertility and children by noting that "if, for example, someone has not given birth...then there is no one to dance with that person. But if they have given birth, then there will be people to dance with them [during a *famadihana*]"<sup>3</sup>. This may explain why another Malagasy friend once told me that prior to giving birth she had been afraid of the ancestors and reburials. Once she had given birth, however, she was no longer afraid<sup>4</sup>. As McGeorge notes, "the soul of the deceased dies [when] none of the living makes sacrifices to the dead soul. Life beyond lasts as long as the relatives and their descendants commemorate the dead" (McGeorge 1974 : 34)<sup>5</sup>. Thus, while not immediately deadly, childlessness is still ultimately fatal.

All relations or interactions with the ancestors are potentially volatile because any ancestral neglect (or perceived neglect) can be dangerous for the living. If the living fail to perform timely reburials, if they do not provide qualitatively and quantitatively sufficient burial shrouds, or if they do not provide or maintain a proper tomb - in short, if they do not render the dead proper respect, then the living may expect to be visited, literally and figuratively, by the wrath of their ancestors.

It is therefore essential that the ancestors are cared for, a role primarily associated with women and with reburials, at which time the ancestors are given new shrouds and gifts. While gender-specific groups work together to rewrap corresponding ancestors or ancestral bundles, women (and sometimes men) circulate and distribute gifts for the ancestors, small tokens of their love and affection such as the perfume, tobacco, candy, and alcohol mentioned above. These gifts are placed or poured into the discrete ancestral bundles before the new shrouds are tightly tied shut. Then, re-enshrouded ancestors may

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<sup>1</sup> Feeley-Harnik (1991) notes the significance of genealogies and the unbroken line of descent that are so important in establishing ancestral ties, which is impossible without acknowledging individual biological birth histories.

<sup>2</sup> I contend that ancestors reach the ancient and anonymous state of Ancestor when they have received numerous *famadihana*, have been combined in ancestral bundles containing multiple ancestors, and have thus begun to lose their individual identities and needs.

<sup>3</sup> Bertine Ramarovy, a middle-aged merchant from Sandrandahy, who herself has borne no children (personal communication, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Rahelarisoa (personal communication, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> See also, Ruud (1960).

either be quickly lifted away, one by one, to the shoulders of family members and close friends who dance vigorously, or may remain upon the mats until all rewrapping is complete.

If the ancestors remain on the mats while waiting for the remaining ancestral bundles to be re-enshrouded, women continue holding and speaking to their ancestors, relating events and accomplishments that have occurred in the family since the last ceremony, until the ancestors are all carried aloft. Although some scholars suggest that the reason for this ancestral interaction is to force women to acknowledge the final death of a loved one<sup>1</sup>, I contend that this act is consistent with women's roles as care-givers. As noted by Mack, the fact that the ancestors are reinterred while "enveloped in an artefact woven by a woman's hands is crucial" in light of "the regenerative powers of women, the power to give birth and, in the case of the dead, the power to give rebirth...as an ancestor" (Mack, 1987 : 89).<sup>2</sup>

The intimate relationship of women with the ancestors (both their own and their husbands') begins with weaving the ancestors' burial shrouds and continues with clothing and reclothing the ancestors during their original burials and periodic reburials. Shrouds and items closely associated with them are often sought out by women (and sometimes men) looking for tangible objects as symbols of and gifts from the ancestors in exchange for their own gifts of goods, time, skill, and conversation. Therefore, people take small, white, glass and plastic beads (*vakana*) that are found on older, disintegrating shrouds, or in the layers of earth between the massive stone portals sealing some older Betsileo tombs.

The most sought after prizes for women, however, are the two fabrics instrumental in containing and protecting the ancestors - the *lambamena* burial shroud and the *tsihy* matting. Thus, while pieces of dirt and bone that accidentally fall out of excessively disintegrated shrouds as the ancestors are removed from the tomb are carefully collected and reinserted into the newly enshrouded bundle, women often discreetly remove small pieces of the old burial shroud before it is enclosed within the newer *lambamena*.<sup>3</sup> As fertility aids, women prefer obtaining the smaller cloth fragments over wearing or dancing with a new shroud because while a new shroud is empowered by its potential ancestral contact, fragments are permanent keepsakes that are

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Bloch (1994 [1971] : 168) and Graeber (1995 : 269).

<sup>2</sup> See also Bloch (1982) and Mack (1986).

<sup>3</sup> Ruud notes that sterile women bit off pieces of old shroud in order to cure their infertility, noting that "it is the ancestors' power which makes the women fertile and pregnant. Sexual intercourse is in this connection of minor importance" (1960 : 167).

significantly more powerful due to their previous intimate ancestral contact.

Women also prize the newly plaited *tsihy* matting used to convey and protect the ancestors, because their sole use is physically connected with the ancestors. Consequently, after the final ancestor has been lifted onto the family's waiting shoulders and danced away, women (and sometimes men) battle over the now empty matting, often to the cheers and encouragement of others. Superficially this tug-of-war is explained away jokingly and taken as a farce. Yet this event has serious repercussions. The victor of this struggle walks away with an invaluable souvenir, symbol, and tool through which she may derive ancestral blessings<sup>1</sup>.

As implements of fertility, ancestral mats are used quite literally. The ancestors once lay upon them, and so too will women who desire to be fertile. Beads and pieces of old shroud, on the other hand, are assumed to embody an all-encompassing power, and are therefore used in a variety of ways. They are said to aid in ancestral communication and interaction, whether placed in the northeast corner of one's home (a special location reserved for the ancestors), kept near one's bed, carried in a pocket, or worn as a bracelet or necklace. Beads or ancestral silk stored in one's house or pocket can also act as protective devices, because they are thought to transmit the ancestors' power against evil-doers. Thus certain *mpanandro* diviners use strips torn from ancient burial shrouds in creating protective devices or amulets called *famato*<sup>2</sup>. Although the contents of a *famato* are not publicly known (unless the diviner creating it decides to divulge his or her secret), those containing indigenous *landibe* silk are believed to have the greatest power, and may, for example, cause a night prowler to become frozen in place until the rightful owner arrives in the morning and catches the would-be thief<sup>3</sup>.

A shroud's protective properties may also extend into the medicinal realm. I was frequently told of people combating the terrible pain of a toothache by inserting a shroud fragment around the afflicted tooth. Moreover, *nato*, a tree bark that is closely associated with the ancestors due to its traditional use in dyeing shrouds red, is also used as a fertility drug, which further increases the shrouds' perceived power and significance. Whether or not a shroud is actually dyed red however, its implied "redness" intimates authority and an

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<sup>1</sup> The occurrence of women fighting over matting to ensure fertility is recorded as early as 1892 by Haile (1892 : 414). See also Molet (1979 : 27).

<sup>2</sup> Ratsizafy near the Merina town of Betafo.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

association with ruling classes<sup>1</sup>, as well as with past cloths, the ancestors, and fertility, thereby creating a powerful symbol.

## Role "Reversals"

Although maintaining traditional, gender-specific roles is essential to sustaining respectful and appropriate relations with the ancestors, symbolic and actual shifts do occur during certain Merina and Betsileo ancestral ceremonies<sup>2</sup>. Gendered behavior during burials and reburials follows this paradigm, resulting in an assumption of female roles by men, and a relinquishing of these same roles by women (with variations according to regional and family-based traditions). What at first glance appears to be a reversal of roles would, however, be more accurately described as a transference from women to men, with rare or no evident corresponding transference from men to women. For example, one northern Betsileo family requires men to fetch water during *famadihana*, a duty usually required of women and children<sup>3</sup>.

The most wide-spread role shift that I encountered - occurring at every *famadihana* I attended - involved food. Food preparation and distribution, from going to market, cooking, and serving the final product, is normally a woman's job. However, during reburial ceremonies, men from the sponsoring family cook the ceremonial meal and serve the numerous guests (figure 8). In particular, men prepare and serve the *laoka*, a noun that encompasses whatever one eats as a complement to rice, whether the complement is meat, poultry, or vegetable. The meal served during a *famadihana* is called *vary be menaka*, and generally consists of beef or pork in a heavy oil sauce that is served over rice. According to many highland Malagasy, eating *vary be menaka* is integral to claiming a highland Malagasy identity. When I queried the reason for this role shift, women, who cook the meals on all other occasions, claimed simply that men are more skilled when dealing in large quantities. This "fact" is easily dispelled upon attending any large event, funeral, or work party where women competently cook for large groups without male aid.

Men's appropriation of "women's" cooking role is further emphasized by the tendency at both funerals (*fahoriana*) and *famadihana* for men to not only take charge of preparing the *laoka*, but also to situate their cooking fires in or near the main house. This is in direct contrast to women, in charge of cooking the rice, who frequently set up in outer buildings or areas not normally designated

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<sup>1</sup> See Mack (1989a : 43-4).

<sup>2</sup> While I encountered gender role shifts during both Merina and Betsileo ceremonies, they were more common and obvious within the Betsileo contexts.

<sup>3</sup> In the Betsileo town of Iharana.



as kitchens<sup>1</sup>. The location of the women's temporary work spaces removes them from the main house as well as from much of the family and its activities. This organization may be due to the relative newcomer status of women who marry into a family, and to a corresponding desire to distance the family members less closely connected to the central family branch<sup>2</sup>. However, men marrying into a family are not treated in the same manner. Conversely, this dichotomy may simply arise from the skill levels and physical logistics required when cooking such large meals. As indicated by the saying "You have not eaten a meal if you have not eaten rice" (*ttsy tena haninao raha ttsy hinambarinao*), rice is the central element of all highland Malagasy meals. The importance of rice is further reflected by the array of vocabulary used to describe its various forms and preparations<sup>3</sup>. Diners are therefore highly critical of its preparation, which in turn requires a sureness in cooking skill. Also, rice is eaten in large enough quantities that it may not be possible to squeeze all the necessary cauldrons in or near the main house, whereas it would be possible to fit the smaller number of cauldrons necessary to cook the *laoka*. Moreover, male appropriation of the task of cooking the meat, as opposed to the rice, may arise from their intimate ties with cattle, for it is a man's job to tend, wrestle, and butcher them.

Women's roles are not as explicitly cross-gendered as men's, although they may adapt a few elements of male identity. For example, during a large *famadihanal* lasting three or four days, in which two competitive *hira gasy* singing troupes are hired, the sponsoring family participates in a *zana-drazana* (children of the ancestors) performance. During this event, family members parade around the performance area in gendered pairs and groups wearing matching outfits (figure 16), led by two female *hira gasy* singers who don the distinctively male, flat *hira gasy* hat. Use of this hat may have become popular due to its ability to differentiate the singers from the rest of the often-times chaotic parade, because the crowd can rapidly become a messy and confusing mass in the central arena as participants dance into the center to place money into hats held out by the reburial's primary sponsoring couple. Wearing the male *hira gasy*

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, this occurred at a burial in Tamaina : and a reburial in Fanorana.

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation would fit into Bloch's analysis of women as divisive elements within the family group (1987 :328-329).

<sup>3</sup> Examples of various types of rice include : *vary mena* (red rice), *vary fotsy* (white rice), *varim-bazaha* (foreign rice). Preparations include : *vary sosoa* (rice that is thick and soupy), *vary ampangoro* (rice cooked until it is dry). One of the most common drinks in the highland countryside is *rano vola* (gold water), water that is heated in a pot in which rice has been cooked and which still contains a layer of burnt rice coating its interior surface.

hats may also have been adopted in order to lend the women authority by visually linking them to the *hira gasy* tradition. The hats therefore serve as a symbol and beacon for the family members to recognize and follow, thus lending a sense of order to the apparent chaos. Female *hira gasy* singers cannot provide this symbol themselves since the traditional female costume does not include head gear, so they must therefore borrow from their male counterparts.

Following the gender-specific conventions of highland Madagascar, women and men are separated by like-gender associations (all women do X) and by collectively practiced role shifts (men appropriate women's role of X during reburials). The *zana-drazana*, however, seems at first to be inconsistent with this system of structured gender roles. In order to demonstrate the family's strong bond before the gathered community, men and women participate in a united, family-based performance of the *zana-drazana*. However, the inconsistency is more apparent than real. The very fact that the *zana-drazana* pairs are gender-based underscores the importance of gendered alliances. The participants' unity with family is based on participation; unity with one's own gender is based on strong visual associations of clothing and accessories, and on the motion and dance of partnered pairings.

In examining the contexts assumed or shifted gender roles, I find a direct correlation between shifts among the living and the perceived physical presence of the ancestors. Shifts *do not* occur when the ancestors are thought only generally present, as when they are called or spoken to. Role assumptions *do* occur when the ancestors are considered tangibly present with the direct and physical immediacy of an event such as a *famadihana*, during which the ancestors are actually touched. For example, ancestors are addressed directly during *lanònana* (feasts or ceremonial events that often precede reburials) or *fanasàna* (feasts that also frequently precede reburials), and are generally thought to be about "in spirit", but are not considered to be physically present. Without a physical presence, female and male attitudes towards their specified roles, such as serving the ceremonial meal, do not change - women serve the guests while men preside over the meal's proceedings. Similarly, people adhere to gender-specific roles during *lanònana* organized to raise *tsangam-bàto* (standing stones) or *vatolahy* ("male" stones), stone monuments erected as memorials to individuals who die far from the family tomb and whose relatives are unable to recover the body. Roles are not reversed during this type of ceremony - men raise the monument while women prepare and serve the meal. Maintenance of roles is again evident during circumcisions (*didi-pòtra* or *ankizy lahy*), where the ancestors are called to witness and bless the event, but are not physically present - men participate in the operating room while women sing and watch over the proceedings from the courtyard. Yet, when the ancestors are

both physically and spiritually present, as during a reburial, cross-assumptions of gender roles do occur.

## Conclusion

Because intelligent, socially active individuals are involved in creating and defining roles within a culture, numerous ideologies are brought to bear as many individuals negotiate categories of identity. I agree with Bloch's conclusion that no single Merina [or Betsileo] representation of gender exists, but several, and that these representations are part of a social process occurring within the production of ideology (Bloch, 1987 : 337). Within the ongoing negotiation of gender roles and identity in highland Madagascar, women and men enjoy relative equality, even though overt positions of power may often seem male-weighted to outsiders. This impression is due to the emphasis on public oration for men, who therefore become spokesmen for the group and are thus more readily visible and officially recognized. Women's roles, although often less evident to an outsider, complement men's official speech and are essential for the successful existence of the community. As weavers, women provide a tangible point of emotional and physical access to the ancestors. As care-givers, women form an important link with the ancestors and play a vital role in family and community political and social life<sup>1</sup>. Male adoption of female-specific roles while in the physical presence of the ancestors underscores the qualities of care-giver that are essential for successfully maintaining crucial ancestral relationships. When highland Malagasy men assume female roles, both men and women are in a position to care for their ancestors and thus receive benedictions vital not only to one's sense of identity, but to one's very survival.

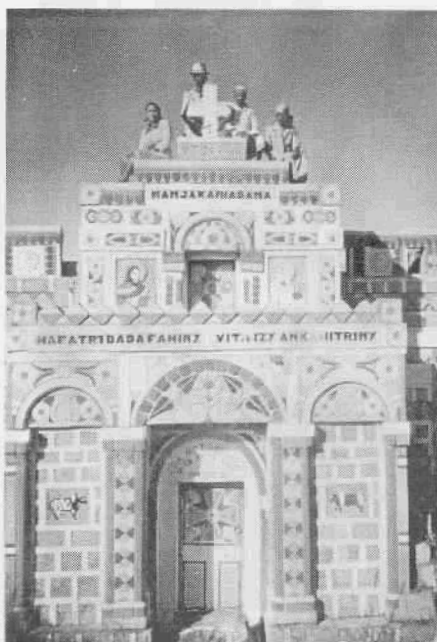
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<sup>1</sup> As noted by Schneider and Weiner, "in societies where women are the main producers of cloth and control its distribution at marriage and death, their contribution to social and political life is considerable" (1989 : 23).

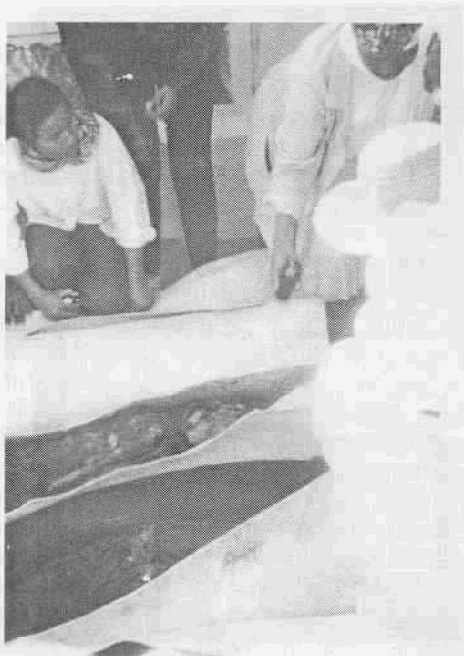
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1. Betsileo tomb and tomb owner. Near Sandrandahy, 1993.



2. Merina women holding an ancestor on their laps before re-enshrining the ancestor during a *famadihana*. Tsaravavahady. September 1993.



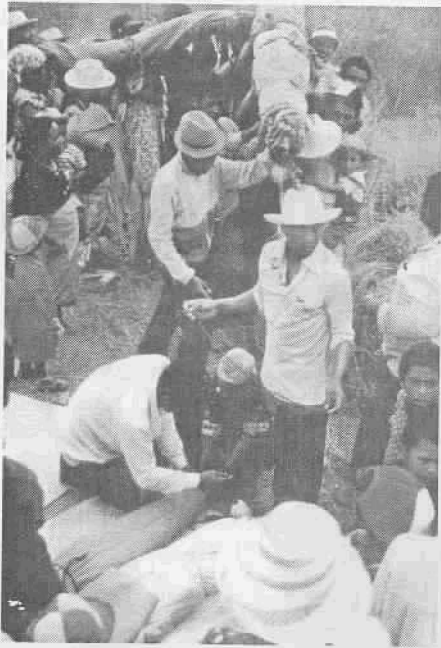
3. An elder Merina woman pouring honey, perfume, or local rum into the ancestors' shrouds as gifts before the news shrouds are tied shut. Ambohanana Arivonimamo, 1992.



4. Bebe Razanamioly, a Betsileo weaver, displaying a *lambavato* (stone cloth), a *lambamena* that she wove to be used as her own burial shroud when she dies. Mandiavato Arivonimamo, 1993.



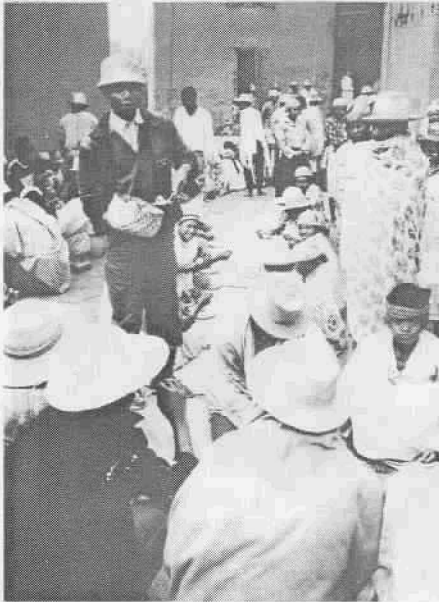
5. Hélène RAHELIARISOA, Betsileo weaver weaving indigenous *landibe* silk on *epela/ampela*. Near Sandrandahy, 1993.



6. Merina family members finish enshrouding their ancestors (bottom right). Once re-enshrouded, the ancestors are lifted onto the shoulders of waiting family members, who vigorously dance with them, Near Ambatofotsy, 1993.



7. Betsileo woman wearing a *lambamena* burial shroud on the walk to the tomb during her family's *famadihana*. Ambositra. July 1990.



8. Men serving the *laoka* during a Betsileo *famadihana* in Iharana. July 1993.



## ABSTRACT

Relative gender equality exists among women and men in Madagascar's central highlands. Yet, highland society is also divided into certain gender-specific roles, particularly in relation to ceremonial contexts, and especially in connection with the ancestors. Highland Malagasy culture is permeated by the ancestors, who are believed to have originated all customs and traditions, embody great power, and manipulate the lives of their descendants. Consequently, ancestors are integral to Malagasy life and identity. Thus, activities and objects having ancestral associations--funerals, reburials, the family tomb, and burial shrouds--are all considered important cultural elements forming the essence of one's Malagasiness.

The world inhabited by the ancestors parallels that of the living, yet is not entirely separate from it. Actions performed in one world affect the inhabitants of the other creating a reciprocal relationship. As long as the ancestors are cared for, and kept happy and warm, they will pronounce benedictions and blessings. Yet if the ancestors feel neglected, they may retaliate by rescinding benedictions or actively causing harm to those individuals they deem responsible. Men and women serve indispensable roles in the reciprocal relationship between the two worlds by performing certain gender-specific jobs for the good of the family and community.

Men generally serve as public figures. They are the official orators, and representatives and leaders of family and community. Men are also associated with strength, power, and durability, an association that also translates as an identification with hard and durable materials and jobs (such as building ancestral stone tombs). Women customarily fill roles that are more discreet, individual, and personal. Women are custodians of fertility and are the primary care-givers of the family. In highland Madagascar, as in many cultures, "family" includes both the living and the dead. As family-oriented care-givers, women are also associated with softer materials, objects, and needs that are frequently impermanent and periodic. Arguably the most important impermanent objects created and manipulated by women are the shrouds used in burials and reburials of the family's ancestors. In fact, highland Malagasy describe weaving as the archetypal female job. Weaving empowers women--socially, technically, monetarily, and spiritually. Moreover, weaving provides a strong link between women (and their families and communities) with the ancestors--because women weave the ancestors' shrouds, which they use to clothe and reclothe their ancestors during periodic reburials. Consequently, as care-givers and weavers, women provide a tangible point of emotional and physical access to the family's ancestors.

Although maintaining traditional, gender-specific roles is essential to sustaining respectful and appropriate relations with the ancestors, relations that are in themselves essential for the well-being and success of oneself and one's

family, symbolic and actual shifts can occur during certain Merina and Betsileo ancestral ceremonies. In particular, men adopt certain female-specific roles, an action that underscores the female qualities of care-giver that are essential for successfully maintaining positive ancestral relationships.

I find a direct correlation between gender-based role shifts and the perceived physical presence of the ancestors. Shifts do not occur when the ancestors are thought only generally present, as when they are called or spoken to. Without a physical presence, specified female and male roles, such as serving the ceremonial meal, do not change: women cook the meal and serve the guests while men preside over the meal's proceedings. Role assumptions do occur when the ancestors are considered tangibly present with the direct and physical immediacy of an event such as a *famadihana*, during which the ancestors are physically interacted with, as when they are actually touched and held by their descendants. During such events, men can adopt certain "female" roles. For example, men may fetch water during *famadihana*, a duty usually required of women and children, or more commonly, men from the family sponsoring a reburial will cook the ceremonial meal and serve the numerous guests. In particular, men prepare and serve the *laoka*, a noun that encompasses whatever one eats as a complement to rice, whether the complement is meat, poultry, or vegetable.

Men's appropriation of "women's" roles is further emphasized by the tendency at both funerals (*fahorianana*) and *famadihana* for men to not only take charge of preparing the *laoka*, but also to situate their cooking fires in or near the main house, while the women must cook rice in a location removed from the normally designated "cooking" areas.

Although male appropriation of cooking meat (as opposed to rice), may arise from their intimate ties with cattle (it is considered a man's job to tend, wrestle, and butcher cattle), male adoption of female-specific roles while in the physical presence of the ancestors underscores the qualities of care-giver that are essential for successfully maintaining crucial ancestral relationships. When highland Malagasy men assume female roles, both men and women are in a position to care for their ancestors and thus receive benedictions vital not only to one's sense of identity, but to one's very survival.

## RESUME

On peut dire que, sur le plan sociologique, il y a une certaine égalité entre les hommes et les femmes des Hautes Terres centrales de Madagascar. Même si dans ces sociétés les tâches quotidiennes, et surtout celles liées aux rites ancestraux, sont divisées selon le genre, la culture des Hautes Terres centrales est fondée sur les ancêtres qui sont à l'origine des toutes les traditions et qui continuent à exercer une grande influence sur la vie de leurs descendants. Par

conséquent, ils sont fondamentaux à la formation d'une identité malgache. Il s'en suit que les activités et les objets - tels les linceuls - liés aux rites ancestraux - les funérailles, les retournements - sont primordiaux dans la construction de cette identité "malgache".

L'univers des vivants et l'univers des ancêtres existent en parallèle, mais ces deux mondes se croisent à certaines occasions. Les actions effectuées dans l'un de ces univers peuvent avoir des conséquences pour l'autre. Pourvu que les ancêtres soient bien soignés, heureux, et bien "chauds", ils donnent leur bénédiction. Mais une fois négligés, ils peuvent se venger en retirant leurs bénédictions ou en punissant des coupables. Les hommes et les femmes ont chacun des rôles importants à jouer dans l'entretien des relations entre ces deux univers, des devoirs spécifiques qui contribuent au bienfait de la famille et de la communauté. Les hommes dominent les rôles publics. Ils servent comme orateurs et comme représentants de la famille et de la communauté. Les hommes sont aussi associés au pouvoir, à la force physique et à la durée. Ces associations se voient aussi au niveau de la culture matérielle: les hommes sont identifiés avec les substances et avec les objets durs et durables (par exemple, la construction des tombeaux en pierre). Des femmes, par contre, remplissent des rôles qui sont moins visibles, plus individuels et personnels, et des tâches qui sont pour la plupart ponctuelles et de nature temporaire. Les femmes sont des gardiennes de la fécondité et les responsables de la vie familiale, une vie qui sur les Hautes Terres centrales comprend aussi les ancêtres. On peut détecter aussi une association faite entre les femmes et les objets mous/doux. Les plus importants de ces objets "éphémères" créés et maniés par les femmes sont des linceuls qui jouent des rôles primordiaux lors des enterrements et des retournements. Pour les sociétés des Hautes Terres centrales, le tissage est l'activité féminine par excellence. Sur le plan social, spirituel et économique, le tissage donne des pouvoirs aux femmes. De plus, le tissage est le lien le plus important entre elles (et, par extension, entre leurs familles et leurs communautés) et les ancêtres: c'est avec les linceuls tissés par les femmes qu'on vêt et emballer les corps aux retournements. En conséquence, en tant que tisserandes et mères de familles, les femmes fournissent un contact physique, émotif entre le monde des vivants et celui des ancêtres.

L'ordre ancestral, les *fomban-drazana*, assignent des rôles spécifiques aux femmes et aux hommes et c'est en respectant et en accomplissant ces rôles que la bénédiction ancestrale est accordée. Néanmoins, on constate que, chez les Merina et les Betsileo, il existe aussi des moments où cette division sexuelle de travail est inversée. Lors des rites ancestraux, les hommes adoptent ce qui est normalement considéré comme le travail de femmes, une inversion qui met en relief l'importance de ces actes pour l'entretien de bonnes relations avec les ancêtres.

Si l'on regarde les contextes de ces inversions, on voit que c'est aux moments où les ancêtres sont censés avoir une présence physique. Dans les

occasions où les ancêtres sont seulement invoqués, les rôles ne changent pas: les femmes préparent le repas et servent les invités, tandis que les hommes agissent comme hôte. Mais les inversions de rôles arrivent quand les ancêtres sont censés avoir une présence physique, directe lors des événements tel le *famadihana* où les descendants ont un contact physique, touchant et portant les ancêtres. A ces moments, ce sont les hommes qui cherchent de l'eau, préparent le repas, y compris le *luoka* (mets qui accompagnent le riz), et servent les invités. L'appropriation masculine des tâches féminines se voient aussi dans le fait que lors des enterrements (*fahorianana*) et des retournements, les hommes situent leurs foyers à côté ou à l'intérieur de la maison centrale, tandis que les femmes sont obligées d'aller faire cuire le riz plus loin, à l'écart de leur endroit habituel.

On pouvait peut-être comprendre cette inversion dans laquelle les hommes préparent la viande (et non pas le riz) par le fait que ce sont eux qui sont le plus associés aux boeufs (ce sont des hommes qui cherchent les bois de chauffe et qui font la lutte à boeufs durant les fêtes). Mais le fait que ces inversions se passent seulement lors de la présence physique des ancêtres suggère une autre explication: les actes de nourrir et de soigner, qui sont à la base de la vie sociale des vivants, sert aussi comme modèle pour le comportement envers les ancêtres. Donc quand les hommes des Hautes Terres centrales accaparent des rôles féminins, ils soulignent la valeur et l'importance de ceux-ci. Et ainsi les hommes et les femmes ont chacun la possibilité de soigner les ancêtres et donc recevoir leurs bénédictions, qui sont nécessaires non seulement pour créer l'identité, mais aussi pour assurer la survie.

## FAMINTINANA

Azo lazaina, eo amin'ny lafiny ara-piarahamonina, fa misy fitoviana ihany eo amin'ny lehilahy sy ny vehivavy aty afovoan-tanin'i Madagasikara, na dia ohatra aza ka voatsinjara araka ny maha-lahy na maha-vavy ihany ireo lahasa fanao andavanandro ao amin'ireo fiaraha-monina ireo. Mifototra amin'ny razana ny kolontsain'ny olona ety afovoan-tany ka ireo razana ireo no loharano nipoiran'ny fomba amam-panao rehetra ka noho izany manana akony lehibe eo amin'ny fiainan'ny taranany. Noho izany manana anjara toerana lehibe izy ireo eo amin'ny fanatontosana ny maha-izy azy ny malagasy. Araka izany dia manana lanja lehibe eo amin'ny fanambarana ny maha-izy azy ny "Malagasy" ny asa sy zavatra (tahaka ny lambanena) izay mifandray amin'ireo fomban-drazana (fandevenana, famadihana).

Mifanindran-dalana ny tontolon'ny velona sy ny tontolon'ny razana kanefa mifanojo ihany ireo tontolo roa ireo amin'ny fotoana sasany. Mety banana fiantraikany eo amin'ny ankilany ny hetsika hatao amin'ny andaniny.

Raha toa voakarakara tsara, sambatra ary mafana tsara ireo razana, dia manome fitahiana izy ireo. Raha tsy izany kosa, dia mety manaly faty izy ireo

ka nanaisotra ny fitahiany na nampitahotra ireo diso.

Na ny lehilahy na ny vehivavy dia samy mitana andraikitra lehibe amin'ny fikojakojana ny fifandraisana ao amin'ireo tontolo roa ireo. Adidy manokana izay manome fahasovana ho an'ny fianakaviana sy ny fokonolona. Anjakan'ny lehilahy ny fiainam-bahoaka. Mpikabary izy ireo ary mpisoloto fena ny fianakaviana sy ny fokonolona.

Ny lehilahy koa dia ampiarahina amin'ny fahafana, ny herim-batana, ary ny fahatezana. Hita koa izany fiarahana izany eo amin'ny kolontsaina materialy : taratana amin'ny ventim-javatra sy ny zavatra mafy sady maharitra (tahaka ny fanononana fasam-bato). Ny vehivavy kosa dia misahana andraikitra tsy dia hita foatra, an'olon-tokana ary asa voasoratra sy mandalo ihany. Mpiantoka ny mahalonaka azy ireo sady tompon'andraikitra ny fiainam-pianakaviana izay mahafaoka ireo razana, ny vehivavy aty ampoavan-tany.

Hita ihany koa ny fampiarahana ny vehivavy amin'ny zavatra malemby. Ny zavatra lehibe indrindra amin'ireo zavatra tsy maharitra foronina sy kirakirain'ny vehivavy ireny dia ny lambamena izay manana anjara toerana lehibe amin'ny fahatezana sy ny famadihana. Amin'ny fiaraha-monina aly afvoantany dia ny tenona no asam-behivavy ifantohana indrindra. Manome fahafana ny vehivavy ny tenona eo amin'ny lafiny sosialy, ara-panahy ary ara-toekarena. Rohy lehibe amin'izy ireo koa ny tenona (raha ilaina, dia amin'ireo fianakaviana sy ireo fokonolona) ary ireo razana. Amin'ny famadihana dia fonosina amin'ireo lambamena notenomin'ny vehivavy ireo razana avadika. Araka izany, amin'ny maha-nipanenona sy amin'ny maha-tenim-pianakaviana azy ireo dia manana ny fifandraisana ara-batana, ara-pihetseham-po amin'ny tontolon'ny velona sy ny tontolon'ny razana izy ireo.

Mametraka toerana manokana sy mazava ho an'ny vehivavy sy ho an'ny lehilahy ny fombandrazana ka amin'ny fanajana sy fisakanana ireny anjara toeran'ny tsirairay ireny no ahazoana ny fitahian'ny razana. Hita ihany anefa any amin'ny Merina sy ny Betsileo, amin'ny fotoana sasany fa mifanadika ireo tsinjara toerana voatokana ho an'ny lahy sy ho an'ny vavy.

Amin'ireny lamonan-drazana ireny, dia raisin'ny lehilahy ho azy ireo an'izay heverina amin'ny andavamandro ho isam-behivavy ; izany fifamadihana izany dia mampanadino ny maha-zava-dehibe ireo asa atao mba hikarakarana ny hanazarana fifandraisana tsara amin'ireo razana.

Mitranga ireo fifamadihana ireo rehefa heverina fa miseho nivantana ireo razana. Amin'ny fotoana izay iantsoana fotsiny ireo razana ireo, dia tsy miova ny andraikitra ny tsirairay (ny lahy sy ny vavy), mikarakara ny sakafy ary mandroso izany ho an'ny vahiny ny vehivavy, ary ny lehilahy kosa mandray ny vahiny. Ny fifamadihan'andraikitra dia mitranga rehefa heverina fa miseho nivantana ireo razana, tahaka ny hita ao amin'ny famadihana izay ahitana ireo taranaka mikasika ary milanjia ireo razana. Amin'io fotoana io dia ny lehilahy no maka rano, mikarakara ny laoka ary nandroso izany ho an'ny vahiny. Hita koa

izany fisahanan'ny lehilahy ny asam-behivavy izay amin'ny famadihana amin'ny fanaovan'ny lehilahy ny afom-patana eo akaiky na ao anatin'ny trano fototra ary voatery mandeha lavidavitra, ivelan'ny toerana mahazatra azy ireo no ahandroan'ny vehivavy ny vary.

Izany fifamadihana izany izay abitana ny lehilahy mahandro ny laoka (fa tsy ny vary) dia mety ho azo an-tsaina ihany satria izy ireo dia mifandray amin'ny omby (ny lehilahy no mpaka kitay ary izy ireo no manao ny tolon'omby amin'ny lanonana toy ireny). Kanefa, noho io fifamadihana io tsy mitranga raha tsy miseho mivantana ny razana, dia mitaky fanazavana hafa. Ny asa fampihinana sy fikarakarana izay fototry ny fiainan'ny velona, dia atao modely ihany koa amin'ny fihetsika ifandraisana amin'ireo razana. Noho izany, raha misahana ny asam-behivavy ny lehilahy aty afovoan-tany, dia asongadin'izy ireo ny lanja sy hasarobidin'ireo asam-behivavy ireo. Araka izany dia samy afaka mikarakara ny razana na ny lehilahy na ny vehivavy ka afaka mandray ny fitahian'izy ireo izay ilaina tsy amin'ny famoronana ny maha izy ny tena ihany fa amin'ny fitohizan'ny aina koa.