

Gender and Social Structure in Madagascar

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African Systems of Thought

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Gender and Social Structure in Madagascar

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Indiana University Press

Bloomington and Indianapolis

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Huntington, Richard.

Gender and social structure in Madagascar.

(African systems of thought)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Bara (Malagasy people)—Social life and customs.
2. Kinship—Madagascar.
3. Sex role—Madagascar.

I. Title. II. Series.

DT469.M277B374 1988

306'.089993

86-46307

ISBN 0-253-32533-1

*To My Children,
Matthew and Sarah*

and

To My Parents

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Acknowledgments

Many people in Madagascar provided indispensable friendship and help. In Antananarivo, two families hosted us and helped us feel a part of modern Malagasy society. We still hold the warmest regards for "Andri" and Jacqueline Andrianjakamanantsoa and for Jean-Marc and Isaline de Commarmond.

A scholar's debts to his teachers are large and numerous. The best I can do in this small space is to acknowledge the "firsts." Christopher Crocker first inspired me to pursue a career of study in anthropology. Thomas Beidelman first interested me in African systems of thought and in the anthropology of religion. James Fox first encouraged my interest in Madagascar and served as arbiter for the Indonesian connection in Malagasy culture. John and the late Vina Buettner-Janusch first helped with the practical details for field research in Madagascar—everything from providing pre-fieldwork advice and encouragement to a graduate student and his wife to finding crucial bits of extra financial support. The late Monica Wilson first instilled a respect for clear, jargon-free English prose and set an example of a life-long commitment to understanding the complexities of the African situation and making what practical contribution a scholar can make.

Before the scholarly world becomes buried under floppy discs, a monument should be erected to the "unknown typists" who corrected our errors and gave our rough ideas a smooth and respectable appearance. I am pleased to acknowledge the first typist to bring order to my material on the Bara, Colleen Taylor of Cape Town; and the last person to smooth over my collage of scissored and pasted manuscript, Hekmat Tadros of Cairo. I wish to thank Matthew Huntington and Christopher Long for entering this material into an unruly word processor so that I could make the final changes and improvements.

The time is long overdue to acknowledge the contribution of my former wife, Linda, to this research

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among the Bara. The role of anthropologist's spouse is not an easy one. The physical hardships are many, and the feelings of isolation and insecurity can be intense. Linda was a full partner in the field research, learning excellent Malagasy and helping solve the cultural riddles that confronted us daily as we attended rituals, carried out practical tasks, and provided what minor medical help we could to our Bara neighbors.

Money is the root of all research. The Shell Foundation provided the field research grant, and Duke University provided additional help from its Biological Sciences Support Grants program. The First National Bank of New Jersey in combination with the state and federal government programs for student loans enabled me to borrow the additional funds needed to cover our expenses in Bara land. The amounts of these grants and loans were small, but my appreciation was, and is, great.

1

The Bara of Madagascar

Origins: Africa, Arabia, and Indonesia

Madagascar has a wonderful attraction for an anthropologist. Where else can one find a population with such diverse origins—Indonesia, Africa, and Arabia— all mixed together on one large island? Where in Africa or Indonesia (or New Guinea) can you find so many peoples who, despite their diverse origins, all share the same language and culture? A southern Malagasy villager can travel almost one thousand miles to the island's northern tip and, despite dialectical differences, manage to chat with a northern resident about aspects of their common culture. One reason they can do so is that for centuries their forebears have been migrating and moving all about this spacious island.

And then there is the diversity of ecology and lifestyles. Densely populated villages of the lush, tropical, and rainy east coast seem transplanted whole from some Asian outpost. Southwestern herders stand on one leg surveying their cattle on the seemingly empty and almost treeless flat savannahs. Surely this could be East Africa. Deep in the forests along the fall of the eastern escarpment nestle villages whose inhabitants practice swidden agriculture. In the highlands, irrigated rice culture is terraced up and down steep, treeless slopes— an Asian adaptation, but the villages resemble something out of medieval Europe. And one must not forget the fishing villages and the long-established plantations growing coffee, vanilla, and perfume ingredients for the world market.

Of more specifically anthropological interest, there are the Malagasy rituals of elaborate funerals, ex-

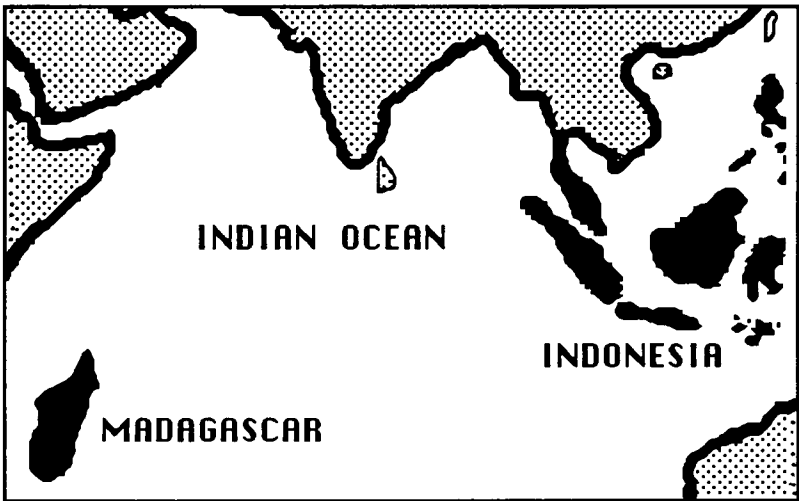
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humations, and secondary burials. Spirit-possession cults involving prolonged trance dancing are reported for all areas of the island, and they play important roles in both traditional and modern politics. Complex traditional centralized kingdoms exist side by side with egalitarian decentralized peoples. Both cognatic and patrilineal forms of social organization are manifest in a variety of ecological and institutional settings. All anthropologists tend to exaggerate the charms or importance of the land where they did their fieldwork. I have taught and done research for a total of six years in three other areas of Africa (South Africa, Sudan, Egypt). Each of those lands engages my mind and heart. But for a dazzling combination of diversity all wrapped up in a single cultural and linguistic package, few places can equal Madagascar.

To put the size of Madagascar in proper perspective, one must realize that it is considerably larger than the country of France and approaches the size of the State of Texas. In general, the island has been considered to be sparsely populated, and at the time of independence in 1960, its five million inhabitants seemed to have ample room for expansion. However, the population is estimated to have surpassed eight million by 1980, with thirty percent of the people inhabiting the narrow strip of land running the length of the east coast. The pattern of migration from that densely populated area to the dry savannah of the western plateau continues today as it has for centuries. The slow movement to the west is an important aspect of life in Madagascar, especially in the south, where everyone's grandfather seems to have come from slightly to the east of the present settlement.

The westward migration began about two thousand years ago on the other side of the Indian Ocean. Successive waves of Indonesian migrants followed the sea currents in their canoes and settled on the almost empty island of Madagascar. Despite Madagascar's proximity to Africa, the Indonesian element remains the most notable aspect of the island's culture. It is most apparent with regard to the Malagasy language, which is spoken with striking uniformity from one end of the island to the other and is, certain Bantu, Arabic, English, and French contributions notwithstanding, unquestionably a member of the Malayo-Polynesian language group.

The initial surprise of finding an Indonesian-type population and culture so far west should not, however, be allowed to obscure the important and more expected relationships between Madagascar and African-Arab populations. Much of the early writing about the origins and ethnic variations of the Malagasy took the form of a partisan debate, with each writer emphasizing the importance of one or another influence to the exclusion of others. That early research and speculation on Malagasy



Map 1. Indonesian language areas.

origins had an unfortunate influence on the study of the island's ethnography, in that variations in customs that might have been profitably related to ecological, political, or sociological factors were attributed to supposed differences in overseas points of origin. To compound the error, those attributions often led to explanations of a racist nature. Such attitudes particularly plagued the study of the Bara, who are often cited as the "most African" of the ethnic groups in Madagascar. The author of one study of the

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Bara cited the "fact" that Bara "skin is frankly black and impregnated with the strong odor characteristic of the Bantu" as evidence that the social and religious system of the Bara is essentially African (Michel 1957).

The simplest way to appreciate the roles of various groups in populating Madagascar is to remember that as an island its fortunes have been shaped largely by the shifting from one group to another of control over the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean (map 1). From about the beginning of the Christian Era until into the second millennium, Indonesian traders were active in the Indian Ocean, trading not only with Madagascar but with East Africa as well. During the early part of the second millennium, the trans-Indian Ocean connection became more tenuous and was finally severed by the increasing Arab settlements in northwest and southeast Madagascar. However, with the rise of Portuguese sea power early in the sixteenth century, the Arab settlements also became isolated from their overseas homelands, losing the two most important characteristics of their home culture: the Arabic language and the Islamic religion. Their main contribution to the culture of Madagascar stems from the fact that they devised a system of writing the Malagasy language in Arabic script and served for centuries as scribes and astrologers to most of the kings and chiefs on the island.

The African additions to Madagascar are not limited to a particular time or mode of arrival. First of all, the Indonesians traded among the islands and along the littoral of the Indian Ocean for centuries, and there is no reason to assume that all of those who finally settled in Madagascar arrived directly from Borneo. Linguistic and cultural evidence indicates that some of the "Indonesians" migrated to Madagascar from settlements on the African coast, and it is likely that some of the physical and cultural mixture of African and Indonesian traits took place outside Madagascar. Similarly, many of the "Arab" groups who settled in Madagascar seem to have first settled for some generations on the coast of Africa.

Finally, there is evidence that African influence in Madagascar goes beyond the "African passage" of Indonesians and Arabs or the occasional importation of slaves. Historian Raymond Kent (1971) presented materials that suggest connections between the early ruling dynasties of southern and western Madagascar and the Zimbabwe

political complex of southeastern Africa. Such precise connections are questionable and remain to be documented, but there is enough evidence to show that the Mozambique Channel can no longer be assumed to have been a barrier to significant African immigration to Madagascar.

The culture and population of Madagascar, like that of most other places, has diverse roots. However, this mixture of cultures and peoples is quite ancient, perhaps even antedating, to some extent, the major waves of immigration to Madagascar. Additionally, the movement of peoples to Madagascar has been equaled or perhaps exceeded by the continuous migration of peoples within the island. There appears to have been a continuous pattern of migration, assimilation, and more migration that worked quickly to spread immigrant peoples and new institutions over a large area. In southern Madagascar no major immigrations have taken place during the last 350 to 400 years. Fifteenth-century "Arabs" and Africans married there and produced children and grandchildren, but these grandchildren were already thoroughly "Malagasy." Fifteenth-century immigrants introduced systems of astrology and divination of Arabic and African origin, but these skills have long since been assimilated and transformed by the inhabitants of Madagascar.

All of the peoples of Madagascar (excluding the recently immigrated Chinese, Indian, European, and Comorian populations) have more in common with one another than does any one of them with any overseas population. Although important linguistic, cultural, and physical variations occur in Madagascar, they are more a product of local historical and ecological factors than results of different racial or geographical origins. African, Arabic, and Indonesian institutions have been thoroughly blended into a unique and variable culture on the island of Madagascar.

This blend of cultures is both a curse and a blessing to the anthropological study of Madagascar. Although Malagasy cultures cannot be meaningfully separated into African and Indonesian components, Madagascar's intermediate position is of interest and importance in other respects. Anthropologists working on different continents and areas tend to develop somewhat different theoretical approaches. In Africa one emphasis has been on unilineal descent, whereas in South Asia and Oceania it has been on

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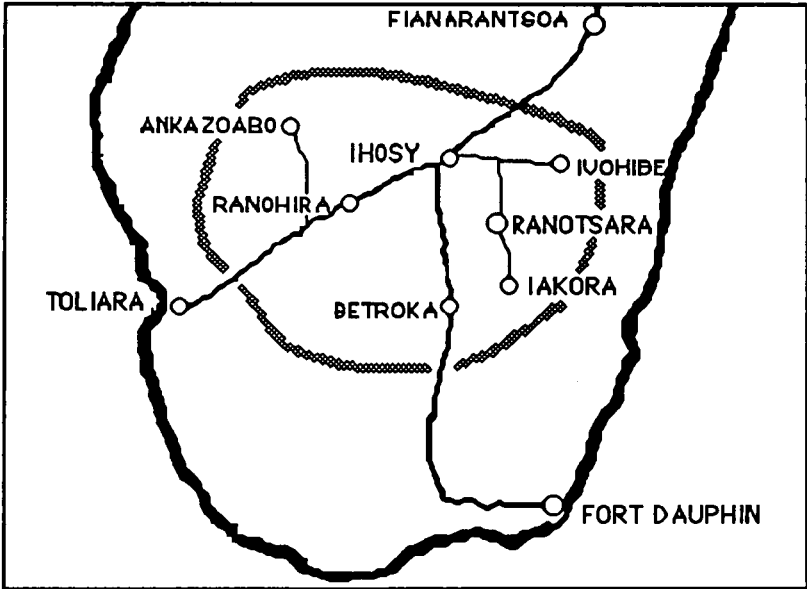
marriage alliance and bilateral social systems. Regarding such issues for social organization, research on a number of Malagasy groups has helped to put those approaches in better perspective and enabled anthropologists to transcend to some extent the regional biases. Here, too, is a curse. This intermediate position also means, as Southall has noted, that "Madagascar stands at a point of confusion where competing frames of reference confront one another without effective translation" (1971:145).

The Bara

The Bara, numbering about 250,000, occupy most of the interior of southern Madagascar (map 2). The eastern part of the Bara region centers on the fertile valley of the Ianaivo, Menarahaka, and Itomampy rivers: the Ranotsara Plain. This region is excellent for the Bara mixed economy of cattle herding and rice culture. The rivers provide adequate water for the extensive cultivation of rice, yet the area is spared the cold and dampness caused by the heavy rains farther east. Cattle thrive in this warm, dry, yet well-watered valley. The central part of the Bara region consists of the broad Horombe Plateau, rising to the west of the Ihosy Valley and stretching to the line of the Isalo Mountains. The ecological situation of the area, being warm and protected from rains, but containing permanent rivers, also supports a mixed rice-cattle economy. This area is larger than the eastern region, and the rivers are smaller and farther apart, with the consequence that the population is extremely sparse. Important Bara populations also live west of the Isalo Mountains in the interior of the Mangoky drainage basin.

Today the Bara region is traversed by the roads connecting the southern towns of Fort Dauphin and Toliara to the High Plateaus. The dirt road from the north splits just south of Ihosy in the directions of the two southern ports. Ihosy, with a population of about 6,000, is by far the largest and most important "urban" settlement in the Bara region. Its strategic location at the conjunction of the Horombe Plateau and the Ranotsara Plain made it a center for the French administration's attempts to maintain order in an often unruly area. In addition to Ihosy

are the towns of Ranohira and Betroka along the routes to Toliara and Fort Dauphin, respectively. From Ihosy another "road" runs east into the Ranotsara Plain and on to Ivohibe and the coast, weather permitting.



Map 2. Bara land today: Roads and towns.

Economics: Cattle and Rice

My research was carried out in the village of Anosibe by the Menarahaka River in the Ranotsara Plain. Anosibe is located almost in the center of the triangle formed by the towns of Ihosy, Ranotsara, and Ivohibe, several miles south of where the road to Ranotsara splits off from the road between Ihosy and Ivohibe.

The village of Anosibe consists of fourteen hamlets spread out over several miles. Five of the hamlets are grouped together at the center in what is called *tana-be*, or the big village. Three hamlets are spread out northeast of the central village, another is slightly west, and an

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additional five hamlets are to the south. From the southernmost hamlet to the northernmost is a distance of four miles. This general settlement pattern is largely determined by the ecology of the area. The rice fields spread out in a line almost two miles to the west of the hamlets; and the river, with many of the gardens along the banks, is one-half mile to the east. Important economic activities must be performed both in the rice fields and at the riverbank. Both of these areas are flooded during the rainy season (January-February), and the area by the rice fields is without adequate water in the dry season (August-November).

It is essential, then, that hamlets be constructed on high ground, west of the river (in the direction of the rice fields), and not too far from a constant water supply. The general dispersal of hamlets is partly related to herding activities, since those living in an isolated hamlet can conveniently keep watch on the grazing herd while performing tasks in the hamlet. The direction of dispersal is limited to a north-south line, since hamlets built too far east or west would be flooded during the rains or without water during the dry season.

There are sixty married men living in the village, three of whom have two wives each. In addition, there are twelve old women who are no longer married and eight unmarried men. Altogether, almost three hundred adults and children live in the hamlets of Anosibe and share a total of about one thousand head of cattle. The largest hamlets contain about thirty-five people, and the smallest consists of a childless couple. The largest single herd of cattle at Anosibe numbers over one hundred twenty-five, although most herds contain about forty cattle. There are also several individuals who have no claims to cattle, and in neighboring villages there are herds of three hundred and even one containing over one thousand head of cattle.

Cattle. Cattle herding at Anosibe is a time-consuming activity that must be shared by two or three males. Each day one of them must *miarakandro*, "accompany the sun," as he takes the herd out on the savannah before sunrise and returns after dusk. All of the males (over about eight years old) of the family share equally in this task, alternating the daylong activity among themselves. To "accompany the sun" is the proper activity of a man whether he is sixteen or

sixty years of age. During the dry season the task is even greater since the herd must often be divided, with one of the men taking special care with five or six of the thinnest cattle. This small herd can be safely led to the grasses that grow close to hamlets and gardens. For most of the year the average man of Anosibe spends two to four days per week alone with his herd. When the land is parched and the survival of the calves and yearlings is doubtful, herding is a constant and very demanding activity.

Cattle are the basis of economic security for the Bara, and herds are managed very conservatively. The size of a herd increases by about ten percent each year, but there are many obligations to be covered. The Bara never slaughter cattle simply to obtain beef, but each year there are funerals, marriages, circumcisions, and curings requiring either the slaughter or the gift of cattle. Additionally, the government head tax on cattle must be covered by the sale of one cow either at the Ranotsara cattle market or to buyers' agents who come out from Ihosy. At the same time, another cow may be sold to obtain cash for purchasing a limited range of European goods that the Bara consider to be necessities: cloth, ready-made shorts and shirts, shovel blades, knives, ax heads, and cooking pots and utensils. In general, the obligatory sale, slaughter, and giving of cattle just about equal the rate of natural increase.

Cattle provide security against crop failures and other misfortunes. In general, each Bara family produces enough rice for its own consumption, but often premature flooding or excess drought reduces the harvest below the necessary level. Then one must trade cattle for rice. These exchanges generally take place between affinally linked families, with the needy family receiving ten sacks of rice for each yearling. One year a family may have to trade yearling for rice and the next year be able to trade surplus rice for yearlings. Things even out in a sense, but the temporary loss of yearlings is costly nonetheless. The young cattle are of least worth in a trade or sale but have the greatest potential for rapid increase in value since the price of the animal doubles between its first and second year.

In general, the Bara attempt to maintain or to increase the number of yearlings in the herd through the production of an adequate supply of rice and through intensified cattle tending during the dry season. Fertile cows approaching the

end of their reproductivity are generally chosen for

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slaughter at rituals. The beef from such rituals is widely distributed and forms an important addition to the Bara diet. For sale at the cattle market, excess bulls are castrated and fattened. After several years these oxen bring over 25,000 Malagasy francs (\$100). Through judicious husbandry, a herd will increase gradually over the years while simultaneously providing for a family's various social and economic activities and serving as security against periods of misfortune. Foolishly administered, even a large herd can be utterly dissipated within the short span of one or two years.

Rice. Although the Bara view cattle as the ultimate item of social and economic value, rice is of crucial importance in providing food and protecting the size of bovine holdings. Although the rice lands are corporately held by the "lineage" (*tariky*), each nuclear family or single adult has an individual rice field and is the proprietor of that field's harvest. Children are obliged to contribute labor in the fields of their paternal family as well as to work in the husband's fields. For major activities such as harvesting and threshing, the owner of the rice field may invite all the members of the community, whose morning labors are then rewarded with an afternoon of feasting and drinking. Labor is meticulously exchanged and shared, but each man remains sole master of the produce from his paddy.

The rice is first sown in temporary paddies near the river to the east of the village when the rice fields to the west are still dry from the lack of rain. The Bara have no plow but turn over the earth by stampeding the cattle through the shallow water of these initial paddies. The men drive the herd while the women and children follow, exuberantly scooping up the dazed and dying fish. After the January rains and the threat of additional flooding have passed, the difficult job of transplanting begins. Transplanting is women's work, especially the removal of the seedlings from the initial paddy. The men help by transporting the heavy bundles of seedlings out to the western rice fields and by repairing these paddies from the damages of the floods.

The ability of the women in transplanting is seen as the limiting factor in the production of rice at Anosibe. One can construct almost unlimited paddies, sow any amount of rice, and have almost any amount of rice harvested and threshed by offering food and rum in exchange for labor.

But the time for transplanting is severely limited, and only that rice which the women move before the middle of March will have time to ripen properly before the drought.

Compared with the rest of the year, when most herding and agriculture are pursued on an individual basis, harvest time (June-July) is a riot of social activity. The cutting and threshing of rice is hard work, but much of it is accomplished through the harvesting parties that many of the families hold for the community at large. Whenever a Bara asks others to help him with a task, he is obliged to provide food or rum, or both, for his helpers, even if they are merely some in-laws who are obliged to come. Although rum is generally quite expensive for the Bara, for these harvesting parties the cost is more than offset by the sale of some of the rice that would not otherwise have been harvested.

Specialists. Although Bara economic life revolves largely around cattle herding and rice production, there are other important economic activities. At harvest time rum is less expensive than usual because of the efforts of village specialists in distilling. The making of rum is a highly skilled and risky endeavor, which, because it is illegal, must be performed in semisecrecy. Many batches of rum turn out terribly, and only the most skilled distillers are consistently successful. Rum making is the one Bara activity that presents the tantalizing prospect of making a quick and generous profit. A skilled distiller will purchase one oxcartful of sugar cane and two large bunches of bananas, all for about 1,000 Malagasy francs (\$4.00) and sell the resultant forty liters of rum for five times the amount of his investment. A number of people try their hand at making rum each year and fail, but the most competent distillers repeat the process several times during the harvest season and reap fabulous sums of cash equal to the annual wage of a laborer in Ihosy. Unlike most other Bara specialists, the rum maker is a well-respected man. This high regard is based not only on the value of his product but also on the fact that, at the well-known "secret location" of his still on the river bank, he is a generous host who allows buyers and onlookers to test and to sample the newly made rum.

The rum maker is only one of several kinds of **semiprofessional specialists**. Four men in Anosibe own

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oxcarts which they hire out (in exchange for rice) to bring the rice from the fields to the village. Other men specialize in carpentry, making simple wooden doors and an occasional bed or bench. Carpentry demands considerable skill since planks must be cut from tree trunks before any real construction can begin. The best carpenters construct oxcarts, which are sold for as much as 25,000 Malagasy francs (\$100) or traded for one ox. One of the rarest specialists is the ironsmith, whose practice is based largely on the sale of spears. In all of the Ranotsara Plain, there are perhaps only three such smiths, who, since every Bara man needs at least one spear, are kept quite busy. Several women in the village own hand-crank sewing machines, on which they turn out simple clothes for relatives or friends in exchange for small sums of money. Other individuals specialize in the preparation of simple medicines, such as oil for the soft spot of babies' heads or teas to cure running noses. There are also accordianists who perform at major ceremonies and shamans who are experts in certain rituals. All of these specialists, however, spend a very small proportion of their time engaged in their particular activity. Like others, they are generally busy herding cattle and working in the rice fields.

Almost all the residents of Anosibe do some gardening in addition to rice production, and keep some fowl. Manioc and sweet potatoes are an important supplement to rice and are considered a necessity by the Bara. The leaves of the sweet potato are of particular importance as they are mashed and boiled to be served over rice almost daily. The Bara do not like gardening, and they are generally rather haphazard and pessimistic about it. Except for those gardens planted inside old cattle pens, many planted areas get inadvertently trampled by the herds of careless cattle attendants. A few people (mainly non-Bara affines) take gardens somewhat seriously, however, and for a brief period each year corn, red beans, green onions, tomatoes, and pineapples are available, but not in abundance. During years of drought and poor rice harvests, the gardening sector is essential to survival. Chickens are also raised in a relaxed fashion to be slaughtered for guests, given as live prestations to strangers, and eaten during illness.

Markets. That the road connecting Ranotsara with Ihosy passes by the hamlets of Anosibe is largely coincidental.

The village was there long before the road. Two privately owned *taxis-brousses* provide daily service between Ihozy and Ranotsara, but they seldom need to pause at Anosibe. From time to time people in the village give the driver money to bring them some small item needed from town: a few nails, some rum for a social function, a bit of coffee, and so on. From time to time the driver remembers the item. Most members of the village ride into town at least once or twice a year to look around, to make some purchases, and to have some fun. One important aspect of the road is that it facilitates local travel among hamlets and villages, since it is much easier to walk on than are the narrow paths, especially at night, during the rains, or while one is intoxicated.

Without the road there would be no market. For ten weeks during the harvest season the Ihozy merchants would drive out in trucks and station wagons to all the accessible villages in the Ranotsara Plain. The practice was forbidden by the government in 1974 in its pursuit of a more socialist economy. Until that date the merchants came out to Anosibe for a few hours on Thursday mornings before moving on to another village. Each villager would sell a small amount of rice each week and use the money to buy cloth, clothes, and minute quantities of such harvest-time luxuries as sugar and manufactured cigarettes.

The market was not of great practical importance to the more successful members of the community, who, because of their success, were largely self-sufficient. But for those whose harvest was small and for those temporary residents with no secure position, the market provided a means of survival. The merchants bought only rice that had been pounded in the mortar and winnowed. A number of people bought one sack of rice from a friend, pounded it, and sold it at the market for twice the original price. The process would be repeated each week, constantly doubling the labor, until by the end of the harvest season a person possessed enough rice for the coming year. A number of outsiders from the densely populated east coast came to Anosibe for the harvest. They labored in the fields in exchange for rice, which they pounded and sold in the market. With their earnings they would buy cattle, which bring a considerably higher price when sold on the east coast.

Sexual Behavior and Sexual Categories

Having provided the minimal information needed to locate and describe the Bara, I focus now on the main topic of this book—gender and social structure. Patterns of sexual experience, categories of gender definition, world view, and the forms of social institutions are all wrapped up in each other in every society. Or, more poignantly, individuals are caught in the contradictory web of the cultural aspects of sex as they try to negotiate their personal paths through their changing lives. One lesson from the women's and gay liberation movements of the 1970s is that personal sexual roles are closely linked to the larger structure of society, even in a complex industrial society such as the United States. Tracing these relationships in any society is a difficult task, leading the student into one of the most delicate and ambiguous realms of human behavior. The task is an important one, however, for it directly reveals much about basic anthropological issues such as how systems of thought relate to modes of action and how biology relates to culture and society. My aim is to explore these linkages in this one society, the Bara of Madagascar.

The topic of this book is neither accidental nor the result of any special preoccupation of mine with issues of sexuality or gender. Such topics have in recent years come to interest a great many anthropologists as a result, it seems, of changing sexual mores and gender roles in the West. The focus of this study derives more from Malagasy culture and from my desire to present the outlines of Bara society in the most economical way possible.

Sexual Behavior. Bara mores and Malagasy mores in general are perhaps as relaxed as any in the world with regard to sexual activity. Bara boys and girls begin experimenting with sex before puberty, and most have experienced intercourse by the age of fourteen. Personalities differ, of course, and the Bara are almost as tolerant of those few who abstain as they are of those who indulge. Adolescent girls and youths lead an active amorous life, and girls often give birth at a young age, usually before marriage.

After marriage, adultery is frowned on. But a frown never stopped anyone. Discretion is considered polite and

proper, however. A friend of mine was enthusiastically preparing for a night's lovemaking with a girl in the hamlet just to the north of his. My wife asked him about his wife's feelings. He said she had gone away "on a journey." My wife was surprised to hear this for she had been washing clothes in the stream with her just that afternoon. Where had she gone? Oh, she has gone home to visit her mother, he responded with a smile. Her mother lives in a hamlet not five hundred yards south of his! We further inquired what he would think if she were receiving lovers during this "journey." He responded lightly that she probably does, from hamlets just to the south of hers, but that it is not wise for spouses to be too inquisitive.

Life goes on, and few Bara ever became too dignified for sexual adventure, even at an advanced age. One memorable evening the village was in an uproar. An elderly couple and a male companion, all septuagenarians, had been drinking rum together. The husband went out to buy another bottle and came back to catch the other two *flagrante delicto*. The husband flew into a rage, tried to hit the man with a shovel while he was attempting his awkward and hasty exit. The old wife ran and hid whimpering in another hut while the husband stormed around the village shouting hilariously earthy insults at her. After a week things were patched up, and it was the husband who had to offer a gift (the shovel) to the other man and to apologize to his wife. For he had done two terrible things: He had tried to kill the man and had publicly insulted his wife. The other two rascals had been understandably foolish but had committed no real wrong. These characteristic Malagasy patterns of sexual behavior and attitudes are of fundamental importance to a traditional kin-based society. Yet rarely have these data found their way into the chapters on kinship in the studies of Malagasy peoples.

Researchers working in Madagascar come under a certain amount of "sexual pressure." Those of us with our spouses and children in the field were shielded somewhat (although it was a lame excuse by Bara standards). When I alone returned to the village for a brief visit, I could no more refuse sex than refuse to share their food or drink. I have no wish to tell tales, but fellow researchers working in regions of Madagascar far from the Bara confidentially report similar sexual modalities, and similar complexities in the participant-observer research methodology.

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There is a great danger here of painting the Bara as being everything the Western world once wrongly fantasized about the Samoans. However, sexual activity among the Bara, as matter-of-fact and casual as it may be in some respects, does not take place in a vacuum. It is part of an overall construction of gender oppositions that permeates the structure of Bara society. Bara too have their fears and uncertainties regarding the complex issues of human sexuality. Incest (prohibition of, atonement for) is one such problematic area for the Bara. This is not, I repeat, a study of Bara sexuality *per se* (my field research was inadequate for that), but a study of the nexus between sexual behavior, cultural categories of gender, and social structure.

Gender Categories. For the Bara, female and male are the primary categories of human existence, not individual and group, body and mind, or institutional categories such as politics, economics, religion, and kinship. Gender forms the major division of a simultaneously physical, moral, and social humanity. Each chapter of this study considers the gender opposition from a wider sociological perspective, and each chapter contains information that might otherwise be classified under separate headings such as those mentioned above (politics, kinship, and so on). I start with the person and gradually widen the inquiry to look at how persons fit into groups, how groups relate with each other, how local groups are transcended by broader social categories and larger inclusive groups, and, finally, how trance goes beyond all social distinction.

Chapter two examines the Bara concept of *the person* as revealed in symbols, institutions, and practical actions. The individual is created out of bone from the father and blood from the mother. I begin with these beliefs about conception and end with the funeral rituals, in which sexuality is mobilized in fact and in symbol to re-create the person as an ancestor. Chapter three examines the shared values of "male order" and "female vitality" as they participate in the constitution of *corporate kin groups*, groups that have the characteristics of persons and are composed of individuals possessed of the qualities of the group. Chapter four uses case studies to examine individual actions within the framework of the dynamics of group formation and dissolution, especially *women's actions*. The first cases stress women's pivotal position within a

"patrilineal" structure. Additional cases show how women as sisters, mothers, wives, and persons operate "politically" to create kin groups around themselves and influence the decisions of others. Chapters five and six form the heart of this study of sexual categories and social structure, for they focus on *marriage and incest* as the Bara try to control this sexual balance for harmony, unity, and biological and social reproduction. Chapter five looks at marriage values through consideration of three Bara folktales. Chapter six explores the economic and social institutions of endogamous marriage alliance, cattle exchange, and incest prohibition. Chapter seven analyzes the essentially feminine values and powers represented in *trance dancing*, which is modeled on sexual ecstasy and ultimately transcends narrow social divisions and structural oppositions.

Choices. This is also a study of the relationship among ideas, institutions, and behavior, an issue that revolves around the role of choice in human affairs. Many anthropologists see Malayo-Polynesian societies, because they frequently allow choices regarding residence and group affiliation, as having something illogically referred to as "loose structure," which seems as though the society has something akin to bad posture. Wilson (1977) goes so far as to declare in an article entitled "The Problem with Simple Folk" that the reason he has not published his material on Madagascar is that the Malagasy he studied have too much free choice, that they are too simple, too ordinary, and too pragmatic in their behavior and attitudes to provide enough grist for the anthropological theory mill. Such a stance is an understandable reaction to the long trend in anthropology of presenting such cogent analyses of the customs of traditional societies that one could hardly believe their inhabitants are anything but primitive automatons.

By viewing both the person and the institutions in terms of the Bara categories of gender, applied to ever-wider social fields, we avoid some of those difficulties. The Bara are certainly free to make choices about minor and major issues of their lives, choices of casual sexmates or permanent tombmates. However, this latitude of choice does not avoid the fact that every decision has its implications for future action, its costs, and its opportunity costs. **Most important, it has meaning and creates**

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constraints within the Bara categories of thought and value. The most profound Bara philosophical insights and their most playful escapades participate alike in this cultural construction of a reality that is replete with options and sexually oriented in its categories and dynamics.

This is a theoretical and ethnographic essay on sexuality and the social order using the Bara material as a vehicle for demonstrating important universal features of human social life. In this sense the style of exposition and organization is modeled after some of the famous essays of the *Année sociologique* on issues such as bodily polarity, secondary burial, and seasonal variations, all of which drew on limited ethnographic material to pursue general features of humanity. The reader may be put off by my grand claims of theoretical ancestry. But in fact I am laying claim to a modest style of anthropological study in which one simple idea, or general human feature, such as bodily polarity or seasonal variations in climate, is explored through a limited set of ethnographic material. Those early essays of Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Henri Beuchat, and others among Durkheim's students displayed a sense of restraint and proportion in the relation of ethnographic material to general theory. It is that spirit which I am trying to recapture in this study.

2

The Person

Mauss and Malinowski

The concept of the person has two important anthropological roots—two works, profoundly different from each other, which form a challenge and inspiration to this study. One is Marcel Mauss's famous Huxley Memorial Lecture of 1938 on the person. The other is Bronislaw Malinowski's ambitious account, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*.

Mauss considers the problem of the seemingly fundamental and natural category of person, of "me," of self. This is part of the Durkheimian school's long empirical investigation into the social histories and ethnographic distribution of primary Kantian categories such as time, space, and causality. Although many years earlier Mauss and Durkheim had erroneously attempted to demonstrate the origins of the human capacity to classify, in this essay Mauss is concerned, not with ancient origins, but with recent developments. Mauss wishes to show how our category of the human person, an idea that seems to us basic and universal, has in fact only recently assumed the form which we take for granted.

Mauss traces the development of our category of person from its origins in the Latin concept of *persona*. But before he considers that long historical process in the West, he briefly summarizes some of the concepts of person in several non-Western cultures. For one example he returns to the Zuni material that had misled Durkheim and him in *Primitive Classification* in 1903.

Mauss emphasizes that in every culture there is the idea of human individuation; however, the Zuni idea of person is obviously quite different from our own. A complex series of naming rituals for each individual creates an

identity through which one participates in the sixfold division of the universe, clans, totemic species, and village. The entire cosmos is refracted through each individual. Additionally, there are the gods and spirits represented by masks and costumes at the great calendrical ceremonies. Individuals gradually receive the privilege of participating in those sacred personages. The parameters that define Zuni individuation are rooted in a system of religious and dramatic role playing that seems quite foreign to the Western concept of the individual.

And yet, in the West also, the concept of person has its roots in ritual drama—in the masked representation of ancestral spirits. The etymology of the word *persona* is, according to Mauss, a subject of some controversy, but the word seems to have entered Latin from ancient Etruscan, where it referred somehow to the masked roles played in ancient rituals of Etruscan ancestral cults. As Roman society expanded and became institutionally more complex, the notion of *persona* took on certain social and legal connotations. According to one's social status, one had rights and privileges regarding the important dramatic ritual representations that constituted one's social identity. The broadest distinction was that between freeborn citizens of Rome who had *personae*, and slaves and foreigners who did not. The concept of *persona* developed into a statement about the bundle of rights and obligations that make up a person's status within a kin-based social and political system.

Mauss charts a number of additions to the ritual-legal-social concept of the person. What is striking about these additions is the way each points up the earlier lack of an aspect of the notion of person that we would today consider intrinsic. For instance, Mauss discusses the contributions of the Stoic philosophers who added the notion of morality, the concept of the person as an autonomous, independent, and therefore responsible being. Mauss speaks of an *être conscient*, thereby suggesting the idea of an individual *conscience* (consciousness and conscience) that parallels Durkheim's earlier concept of the *conscience collective*.

But the Stoic philosophers made only a beginning. A decisive addition was made by Christian theologians during the waning of the Roman Empire. Christian ideology completed the shift from the notion of "*persona*, a man clothed in a social state, to the notion of MAN, the human

person." This new dimension of the concept of person is evidenced in the theological debates of the early Christian Era, especially in the difficult midwifery of the Trinitarian position culminating in the Nicene Creed. Combined with the notion that Divinity could equally and simultaneously take the form of three persons was the notion that one of those persons, Christ, was of two natures, simultaneously human and divine. These theological gymnastics (over which much blood was shed) were all aimed at expressing something of a shared quality of humanness—a quality that transcends one's ascribed position in a particular social and political system. The doctrinal wranglings slowly evolved a firm epistemological basis and official form of that spirit which had been so eloquently expressed by Paul in his last letter to the Galatians: "There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus."

Our modern category of person remains rooted in the notion that took form during the early Christian Era, although it was significantly refined and sharpened during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The concept was profoundly modified by the Enlightenment philosophers. Whereas the Christian notion had been intertwined with the uncertain definition of the soul, the philosophers transformed the person into a psychological being. Hume and others stressed that the essence of the person is a state of consciousness, founded on the ability to perceive, to reason, and to be aware. Mauss points out that the Enlightenment philosophers worked very hard to construct the modern person. This category of person was far from being natural and fundamental. It was a self-consciously constructed philosophical position (which always had important contemporary political implications). Not until well into the nineteenth century did Western thinkers begin to consider the individual, autonomous person as a natural and primary locus of motivation and morality.

The modern Western concept of person is still undergoing change. Mauss invites the members of his audience to consider for themselves what effect the twentieth-century investigations of psychology and sociology may be having on our cultural category of the moral, independent, and rational person. Not only is our **seemingly natural and fundamental category of person**

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absent as such in other cultures and during much of our own history, but it may even now be subtly slipping, like sifting sand, out from under the social-scientific theories constructed on it.

In this lecture Mauss seems to have been twitting his English colleagues for their inveterate hankerings after a naive individualism in their social theories and anthropological analyses. One of the leaders of English anthropology at that time was Malinowski, who strongly emphasized the primacy of the individual in his analyses of Trobriand society. In his first three books, Malinowski had made great use of "the individual," of the rational, but not always fully knowledgeable, "Trobriand Man." Following that, he was then led in his fourth book to question just what it means ultimately to be an individual Trobriander. Malinowski proceeded to lay out in splendid detail the Trobriand "theory of bodily and spiritual identity."

The Trobriand theory and all the attendant behavior and institutions are rooted in the Trobrianders' concept of procreation and sexual conception, one part of which states that young women bathing in the warm sea water become impregnated by and with the reincarnated spirits of the ancestors. The role of the male in reproduction is understood in only a vague way. Some say that intercourse is necessary for conception because the action of the penis helps to open the woman's passage for the aquatic entry of the spirit of new life. This concept of procreation is as far removed from modern knowledge of embryology as the Trobriand understanding of the stars is from post-Einsteinian physics. But right or wrong, the complex and subtle Trobriand notion of sexual conception provides the starting point for their appreciation of the human essence of each person.

Malinowski describes, within the framework of these ideas of procreation, the Trobriand search for adolescent identity through sexuality, the mature fulfillment of marriage, the end of marriage through the death of a spouse. Malinowski presents a description of the life cycle, a map of the individual's search for personal social and sexual identity. He provides a shimmering and sensual Trobriand cultural score for the creation (pro-creation, re-creation), fulfillment, and final dissolution of the human essence of each individual. He demonstrates how in one society

human identity and motivation are simultaneously deeply religious, keenly esthetic, and coolly rational.

Bara Idioms of Procreation

As among the Trobrianders, the Bara understanding of the nature of the human person rests squarely on their appreciation of the nature of procreation. A number of anthropologists in recent years have used the indigenous notions of sexual conception as a starting point in ethnographic analysis. The stimulus for much of this work comes from Lévi-Strauss's and Leach's (Maussian and Malinowskian, respectively) highlighting of the widespread notion that flesh comes from a child's mother and bone from the father. The difficulty with this approach is that because the ethnographer makes a more general and systematic use of the idioms than the people themselves, one doesn't know where native usage leaves off and the anthropologist's model begins. This is an inevitable part of transcultural analysis and translation. But we must understand that the corruption goes both ways. On one hand, the anthropologist gives to the native ideology a false concreteness. In this way the idiom gets robbed of the very flexibility that gives it vitality. Of more concern is what happens at the other end of the process. A native idiom from some small and unique culture, thus reduced, passes into the anthropological lexicon posing as an analytical hypothesis, as a social theory.

These problems can be reduced in two classic anthropological ways. First, we explore such idioms fully in their own realm before transforming the indigenous metaphors into an external model. Second, in addition to describing the "native theory" and borrowing its wisdom for analytical purposes, we must uncover something of the formal or logical structure within the metaphorical atom of social essence.

It is extremely important when investigating beliefs about procreation to consider fully the roles of both the male and the female. For even though some cultures, including the Trobriand and the Bara, give far more emphasis to the role of the mother, it remains to be demonstrated that any population ignores the fact that both female and male are important in mammalian reproduction. In many cultures (including the Malagasy) the

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emphasis is so heavily weighted on the side of the female that the temptation for the anthropologist to ignore the male side of the equation is great. Hence we get controversies about Trobriand "virgin birth." The Trobriand, Bara, Kachin, and many other cultures hold a view of human procreation stressing that only the female transfers essential physical substance to the offspring; whereas the male is responsible, in some way, for merely creating form in the fetus.

The distinction between substance and form is crucial, for it means that not only do the male and the female contribute different materials in procreation, but also that they do so in qualitatively different ways. This provides the basis for the logically different types of tropes associated with each parent, a differentiation that among the Bara has important implications at all levels of social identity and organization. We shall return to these ramifications shortly, but first let us look at those Bara beliefs and idioms that bear most directly on the biological aspects of procreation.

The Bara view can be summed up by saying that the semen of the father orders (*mamboatsy*) the blood (*ra*) of the mother. The Bara are explicit about the fact that it is the blood of the mother that becomes (*manjary*) the fetus and then the child. It would be absurd to transfer our idioms of "blood relationship" to the Bara situation and say that they recognize this as passing in the female line only. Although it would technically be a true characterization of Bara notions, it is misleading because such an idiom is not particularly important to the Bara. They do not go around saying that so and so is or is not a "blood relation." Nonetheless, the mother's blood is cited by virtually all Bara as the substantial physical element from which the fetus develops. And, given the observable facts of menstruation and childbirth, it is not surprising that beliefs of this general nature are common throughout much of the world.

Furthermore, the Bara see blood to be the crucial life-essence, and this importance is indicated by the many metaphors focusing on the heart and the liver, the two reddest and bloodiest organs in the body. The Bara expression for suicide is to "kill the heart" (*mamono fo*), and the feared European sorcerers are thought of as "heart stealers" (*mpake fo*) or "liver thieves" (*pangalan'aty*). These

foreign invaders and their native assistants are believed to steal the very lifeblood of the Malagasy people.

The most common and important expressions pertaining to the female contribution to the child are those denoting uterine siblings. Children who have the same mother (but not necessarily the same father) are called *tampo raiky*, which means literally "of one heart" (*fo*=heart). Because of the strong figurative uses of the word *fo*, heart, this connection has its mystical aspects of life-essence as well as the substantial connection. Another common expression for uterine siblings is *troky raiky*, "one womb" or "one stomach." This expression is used interchangeably with "of one heart" but refers more to the common and very physical source of the children than to a communally shared and received substance. Lavondès cites similar statements for the Masikoro people of Madagascar, who state the uterine siblings are of "one blood" (*ra raiky*) and of "the same entrails" (*tray tinainy*). The contrast is strong between the attitude toward uterine siblings who are of the same heart, blood, womb, and life-essence and, on the other hand, that toward children who share a father but have different mothers. These latter half-siblings, despite their shared lineage membership and common hamlet residence, are called merely "almost siblings" (*anaka piolotsy*).

Children are of their mother's blood, heart, womb, and entrails, but none of the common Bara expressions directly associates the child's flesh (*nofy*) with the mother. Although "flesh and blood" are closely allied substances in our own kinship idiom, and beliefs about transformation of the mother's blood into the child's flesh are prominent in the anthropological literature for other parts of the world, the Bara deny such a direct physiological link. "Food makes flesh" is the customary Bara expression. But the emphasis on nurture also highlights the intimate and physical bond that the Bara associate with the mother-child link, for the young child's food consists largely of its mother's milk, and the connection of blood between mother and fetus is continued after birth by a physical tie of milk. Milk completes what blood began.

The father is said to order (*mamboatsy*) the vital blood of the mother's womb during sexual intercourse. Without the potent male ordering, the vitality of the woman's womb remains unformed and is voided each month. The father

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does contribute some substance to the child, since it is specifically the semen that is responsible for conception, not merely the mechanical action of the penis. Also, the ordering effect of semen is cumulative during the early months of pregnancy. A Bara man does not fear that his wife's child may have been "accidentally" sired by another, for he knows that the frequency of his own intercourse with her dilutes the slight contribution of a lover. Although the accumulation of semen in the woman's womb is seen as one immediate factor in the conception and growth of the fetus, this material link between father and child receives little emphasis in Bara idiom. It is the formative action of the semen that is emphasized, not the transfer or transformation of material from father to child.

In comparison with the female links, the view of the male contribution to the conception scheme is decidedly incorporeal. In discussing the male role, the Bara use a rather vague and common verb, *mamboatsy*. One hears this word every day in reference to the building or repairing of some object such as a house or a dike in the rice paddies. The word's connotations are more specific than the verb *manao*, which means simply "to make or do" (much like the French verb *faire*). And the use of the word is more general than other verbs denoting construction such as *mangady*, "to shovel," *mitasa*, "to do physical labor", or *mamboly*, "to plant." Although *mamboatsy* is used in a number of general senses, it seems to refer primarily to the creation and reparation of the mud walls of a house or a paddy dike, when a soft substance is shaped and then allowed to dry and harden. In trying to indicate the range of referents for this word, I must emphasize again, however, that the verb used by the Bara to describe the role of semen is rather open-ended. The semen of the father, in some manner, gives form and structure to the otherwise formless blood of the mother, and this process of formation seems to be largely one of active hardening, solidifying, and drying.

Because the notion of the male role is somewhat vague, it follows that people's views on the subject are less uniform than are their views of the female tie. Beyond stating that semen "orders" the blood, explanations vary in the degree to which they impute an actual relationship of physical substance between father and child. Some people maintain that semen probably solidifies into bone, hence provides shape for the fetus. These explanations vary, not according

to the age, position, or sex of the speaker, but according to the speaker's native inclination toward speculative thought. The precise mechanism by which the semen arranges the female blood to create a child is considered to be a mystery. Bara attempt in various ways to elucidate the mystery with comparisons drawn from the way the male ancestors order their social world.

Consider how Bara idioms about biology are related to certain aspects of social organization. Whereas the notions about the mother's role have a primary, observable, and biological locus, notions about the elusive male contribution derive largely from comparisons with customary social aggregations. Bara corporate kin groups, *tariky*, are ideally, although not exclusively, patrilineal and patri-

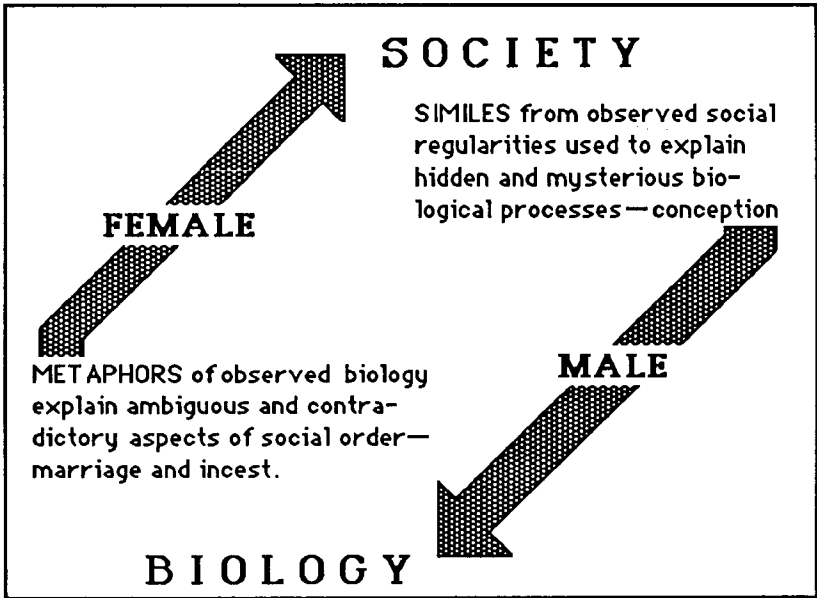


Fig. 1. Male and female tropes linking society and biology.

local. Furthermore, these groups are ordered on the uniquely agnatic relationship between the living and their immediate ancestors in the group's tomb. The Bara practice

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of secondary burial means that the tomb of the kin group contains only the cleaned and dried bones of agnates, carefully and lineally arranged. It is this tomb of permanent male bones that provides the structure of the descendent social group. Many Bara draw a simile from this in their explanation of the male role in procreation when they associate the child's bones with the father. The father's semen is said to order the fetus (*tahaka*, as, like, similar to) the way the bones of ancestors order social life.

And so the Bara provide an interesting ethnographic example of the widely reported pattern of beliefs about the female source of a child's flesh and the essentially male association of its bones. However, the Bara idioms are rather complex. As stated earlier, the tropes involved are of different types; and, in the connection between biology and society, the idioms for the male and the female aspects extend in opposite directions. For instance, observed aspects of the physical relationships between mother and child are metaphorically extended to have far-reaching implications for the structure of Bara society. The social bond between the child and its maternal kin is therefore a derivative of the natural biological tie with the mother. Sexual prohibitions and marriage preferences (to be discussed in chapters five and six) derive primarily from the Bara understanding of the substantial physical link between mother and child. On the other hand, the unknown physiological process of insemination is illuminated by similes drawn from social reality, and the child's ties to the father are largely a socially derived ordering, the ideal form of which is the tomb of agnatic bones.

From Mother's Womb

The Bara view kinship ties through females as ties of biological substance relating to the event of birth. Kinship through males is seen largely as a tie of social form based on the ancestral order and oriented toward the event of death. The ideal trajectory of Bara personal experience is a long journey from one's mother's womb to the ancestral tomb of one's father and paternal grandfather. There are significant differences in the way this ideal is realized by males and by females; however, important aspects of the ideal relate to

both sexes. Just as each person has both male and female components, both sexes are drawn away from mother and toward the paternal order; away from birth, ever toward death, and beyond death to ancestorhood.

Although certain events serve as markers along the way, the process is continuous and gradual. Rites of passage definitively altering one's social status are largely absent, and the Bara, unlike many anthropologically famous African societies, have no initiation rites for males or females. There is little ritual pinpointing of a precise moment when a boy becomes a man, a woman a wife, or anyone a certain member of the corporate kin group. Instead of formal rituals that add to or transform one's status, important natural and ritual events early in life serve to thrust one away from maternal origins.

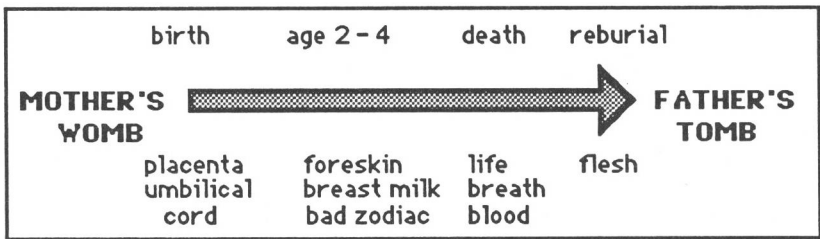


Fig. 2. Feminine attributes discarded during the journey through life toward ancestorhood.

A child, especially a boy, leaves behind certain feminine attributes (fig.2). Placenta, umbilical cord, breast milk, and foreskin are jettisoned during the early stages of the journey to adulthood. Also, if the child had had the misfortune to be born on an inauspicious day according to the zodiac system, then sometime between the age of two and four years the ritual to remove such birth-derived danger is performed under the auspices of the father's family. Finally, at the end of life, the feminine attributes of breath, blood, and flesh must be left behind as one continues on the way to ancestorhood.

Parallel to the jettisoning of female attributes is a gradual process of physical and social hardening as one is

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drawn toward the paternal order of lineage and tomb (fig.3). First, the child's bones harden (most noticeably, the fontanel); then, with circumcision, his penis. Gradually through adulthood one's social position becomes firm through long residence in the hamlet and an ever closer relationship to the dead. Finally, after burial, exhumation, and reburial, one reaches the pure state of a fixed, dry, and hard skeleton in the paternal tomb.

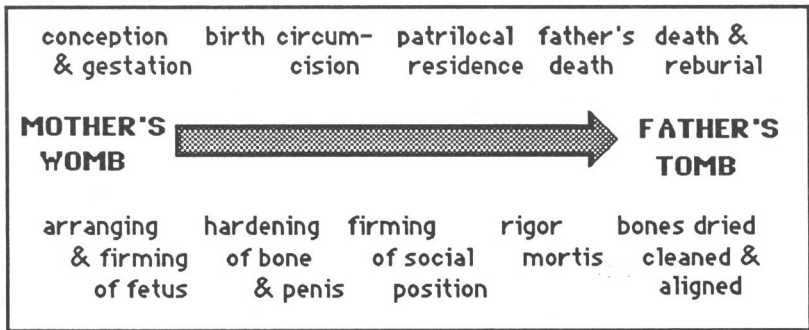


Fig. 3. Hardening of masculine attributes.

The concomitant processes of shedding female attributes and solidifying male elements are long and complex. They constitute the entire life experience of the person, and we should explore them in some detail. At the beginning of life is motherhood and birth. A young woman keeps her pregnancy a secret until the fact is extremely obvious. At that point she informs her husband, who prepares a special potion (*bokory*) of fermented honey (*tantely*) and leaves of the *rotsy* tree. The husband and wife take the potion to her family and all drink it together in acknowledgment of the pregnancy. Honey, the *rotsy* tree, and intoxication are all associated with the wild fertility of nature, and all three appear again with this association in various and numerous Bara rituals and legends.

A woman leaves her husband's hamlet and returns to her natal village approximately two months before the birth is due. Attended by her mother and sisters, she gives birth in her family's house. The placenta (*raza*) is buried

beneath the doorway of the house in which the child is born. The umbilical cord (*foetsy*) is also given special treatment. About half of the families in the village of Anosibe save the umbilical cord for years so that it can be thrown into a certain whirlpool (*rano mthery*) in a stream near their homeland of Ivohibe. Other families bury the umbilical cord in the cattle pen. As we shall see, cattle are strongly associated with the maternal line, and whirlpools and water generally are associated with female sexuality and fertility.

A child is born in the hamlet and in the house of his or her mother's brother (or mother's father). At this stage the child's relationship to his or her father is extremely tenuous. Bara fathers often complain at how they must fetch and carry for their in-laws during the period immediately following the birth of a child. If a very young child (*zaza mena*, "red child") dies, there is no funeral or burial in the paternal tomb, nor can the father give the body to his in-laws for burial in their tomb as he might with an older child. The child is not yet part of the social order connected to the father and the ancestors, and the bodies of such babies are simply abandoned in "a wet place" (*tany le*).

The mother and child remain in the maternal hamlet for yet another two months after birth. The source and origin of a child is with his or her mother and the mother's brother, but the father begins to gain some measure of authority over the child after the move back to his hamlet. However, the bone in the baby's head remains soft and must be kept continually moist with honey or oil made from the berries of the wild *kinagna* bush. The baby is fed exclusively for a long time on its mother's milk, which is important in light of the Bara belief that physical resemblance is not transmitted from parents but determined by the food consumed.

The important mystical and physical tie to the maternal family is expressed by the location of birth, the symbolic deposition of the placenta and umbilical cord, the continued softness and moistness of the child's bones and skull, and its dependence on the mother's milk. It is easy to see why it is that should a break occur in the relationship between the maternal and the paternal families during the early years, the father is quite likely to lose any jural authority over the child. Compared with the force of the

mystical and biological connection between mother and

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child, the ancestral sanctions transmitted through the male line are still weak.

Father-right for the Bara is not really a natural right but must be gradually established against the biological, mystical, and (later) economic (bovine) influence of the mother and her brother. They say that a person is "really related" (*tena hava*) to the mother but that they are always trying to get children related to the father. Patrification is "La Marckian" in that it results, not from birth, but from a constant straining toward a male ordering. There is no particular time when it can be said that the child comes definitively under the authority of the father. The transfer is a gradual process, two early events of which are the move back to the father's hamlet and weaning.

Circumcision (*forazaza*), which is performed at about the same age as weaning, is an important point in the gradual process toward maleness. The operation takes place in the boy's father's hamlet, but the attendance of the mother and especially the mother's brother is required. The little boy is set on an overturned rice mortar where he is held by his father and must be kept apart from his mother during the moments just before and after the actual cutting. The women of the father's family dance, running to and fro, carrying aloft stalks of sugar cane, singing songs comparing the circumcised male to a hard tree. The mother of the child puts her hair up in a special hairdo of six puffs, a feminine symbol of joy and fertility that we shall see again in rituals of spirit possession, and she dances for joy. When the wound has healed, the child is seated between the horns of one of his father's bulls, and there is a special invocation to the paternal ancestors followed by a feast.

A circumcised boy is largely under the moral authority of his father. Shortly after circumcision the father will arrange for a shaman (*ombiasy*) to perform the complicated and somewhat bizarre rituals to neutralize any adverse zodiacal traits resulting from the timing of the child's birth. A bad birth sign that is not neutralized would endanger the gradual assimilation of the child into the male order.

To Father's Tomb

The Bara emphasis on the male line is inseparable from the most fundamental aspect of Malagasy culture: the society of

ancestors. The Bara believe absolutely that the mystical connection between a person and his or her ancestors is traced uniquely through the father; and should one become ill, then only his father (father's brother or father's father) can perform the necessary ritual to secure ancestral blessings and renewed health. It is unthinkable to have one's mother's brother propitiate the maternal ancestors on behalf of his sister's child. Except for some very specific and limited situations, neither good nor ill is expected from the maternal ancestors.

The ancestors sanction all aspects of paternal order, especially the patrilocal residence of adult men. It is uniformly believed by the Bara that in cases of nonpatrilocal residence, the ancestors will send misfortune and illness as a warning, and eventually death as a punishment. Virtually every illness and death of a man residing away from his paternal home is attributed to the wrath of his agnatic ancestors. One recently deceased resident of the village of Anosibe is said to have become ill for the first time several years ago. The diviner told him to go home and he agreed. After recovering his health, he kept delaying his return. He became ill again, and again the diviner's seeds urged him to return home. Again he recovered and put off his return. After another year he died, and the saga of his unfortunate opposition to the will of the ancestors is told in the village as a warning. The fact that he lived healthfully away from his paternal village for twenty years prior to his illness and death at a ripe age does not, in the eyes of the Bara, detract from the lesson of the story.

A more fortunate man lived for a number of years in the distant village of his wife. When he developed a malady in one of his legs and the divination indicated that he should move back home, he returned. He still limps, but he is alive and his herd prospers. There is no way to avoid the wishes of the ancestors in this matter. Every man who moves away from his paternal village returns, either voluntarily or by being killed by his angry ancestors so that his bones may be carried back to the tomb. Eventually the ancestors will out, and in the meantime the wayward man can rationalize his situation. I have met many men who are at their mother's village, "just visiting" (*mamangy avao*), for decades. Other men claim that their absence from the paternal village was cleared in advance with their ancestors in a propitiatory ritual, and they cite their continued good

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health as evidence of ancestral ratification. The norm of patrilocal residence, enforced by the agnatic ancestors, is absolute. For a man residing elsewhere, either temporarily or with supposed ancestral permission, each slight illness, which might pass unnoticed at home, is a cause of anxiety.

The norms regarding jural authority over children are also explicit. When the parents separate, the mother returns home and the children remain in the hamlet of the father. The exception is the nursing child, who may remain with its mother, but only until weaned. Bara marriages are often of short duration, and many Bara are thus separated from their mothers during much of childhood. It is said that should the mother's family not give the child to his or her legitimate father, the child's paternal ancestors will be angry and cause the child illness and even death. If, on the other hand, there is the slightest question about the completeness of the original marriage tie, then the mother's family can rationalize making further demands on the child's father's family. When those impossible demands are not met, the mother's family can rationalize keeping the child.

The importance of the mother's brother does not cease despite the ever-increasing solidity of the child's position in the paternal family. The mother's brother is expected to give cattle periodically and to provide significant material and social support to his sister's son. The degree to which a young man can maintain his position vis-à-vis collateral lines in his paternal kin group depends partially on this support from the mother's brother.

Ideally the bones of a Bara should rest in the tomb of his or her father. Just as under various circumstances one might reside during life in one's mother's hamlet, one might also be buried in one's mother's paternal tomb. As in almost all aspects of Bara life, an individual has a certain degree of choice. A woman or a young child might under many circumstances be entombed with the mother's ancestors. A woman is never placed in the tomb of her husband's family. Should an adult male be buried in his mother's paternal tomb, it signals a crucial change in his relationship both to the world of the living and to that of the dead. Freedom of choice does not exempt a person from the consequences of such choices.

The burial mountain juts roughly up and looms a thousand feet above the river, savannah, and hamlets of

Anosibe. It is always there, peering down, always in view while villagers work in their gardens or paddies or herd their cattle. Throughout this region of Madagascar, the jutting rocky outcrops are the abode of the dead, the lineal past and personal future for every individual.

The Bara family tombs are large caves hidden on the sides of a mountain that juts up over the surrounding savannah. Inside the tomb are numerous large, decorated, communal caskets, each containing the dried bones of perhaps ten persons. The number of caskets varies, but the tomb of a well-established family may contain as many as fifteen. To the north are lined up the caskets containing the bones of all the male ancestors. Each skeleton is placed in its rightful position with that of its father. At the south end of the tomb, near the door, are grouped the caskets holding the bones of female agnates. The bones of a woman are grouped with those of her sister, father's sister, and brother's daughter. Also in the female caskets are the bones of young children of female agnates. These skeletons properly belong to the tomb of the father but are sometimes given to their mother's family as a gesture of reciprocity.

In summary, it is assumed that a male child will be placed under the authority of his father, will, as an adult, reside patrilocally, and will eventually have his bones placed with his father's in the paternal tomb. Deviation from this pattern occurs, but it lowers a man's esteem, narrows his range of social options in arranging marriages and settling divorces, and endangers his health and prosperity by creating ambiguity in his relationship to the world of the dead.

Within the social system of complementary male and female principles is a kin group that is essentially discrete in its membership, unambiguous in its claims of allegiance on its members, and corporate in its social, religious, and economic functions. Anthropologists used to worry that such kin groups cannot exist in the absence of a clear unilineal rule or within a framework of opposed principles. The structure of this corporate kin group is the topic of the next chapter, but here we must notice some of the pertinent factors relating to the recruitment of individuals. One might question whether group affiliation of a Bara is really unambiguous, since it is not definitively established at birth as in classic unilineal systems. Bara group membership, quite the contrary, is definitively established

only by death and by incorporation into the society of ancestors. In judging the degree of ambiguity, one must remember that it is greatly reduced during early adulthood. Also, in Madagascar, it is death and the dead, after all, who order the living.

Idioms of Death

Life and living is an ever-changing balancing act between female vitality and male order. We have seen that as a biological being, a person is formed when the blood of the mother's womb is ordered and arranged by the semen of the father. To be socially and economically successful, an individual must balance out his or her relationships with the mother's and the father's families. Life is the gradual journey from mother's womb to father's tomb. As members of kin groups, the Bara (as we shall see) must balance their desires for agnatic solidarity against the need to maintain affinal alliances. Dying, tombs, ancestors, father, and social order are all explicitly linked together. Bara death can be viewed as an overdose of order upsetting the life-sustaining balance. Much of the funeral ritual action is an attempt to redress the imbalance through a symbolic increase in vitality.

By formalizing these Bara notions of order and vitality into a table of oppositions and extensions, it is possible to begin to understand how such conceptions articulate with ritual behavior (fig.4). Such a two-column list is deceptive, for it hides the fact that such oppositions include relationships of different natures. For instance, oppositions between colors such as black and white are not at all like the oppositions between odd and even whole numbers. The first pair admits intermediates such as gray and other colors. But all whole numbers must be either odd or even (Lloyd 1966:87). Additionally, some terms admit only one opposition whereas others may be opposed to several terms. Male can be opposed only to female; but father can be as easily opposed to son or mother's brother or mother, depending on the context. There is a certain logical dynamic to such constellations of oppositions and extensions, a dynamic that is the core of their power to evoke strong images and to affect peoples' behavior. This

power results from the fact that the oppositions in such a grouping are of different natures: complementary and antagonistic.

ORDER	VITALITY
male	<i>female</i>
father	<i>mother</i>
semen	<i>blood</i>
bone	<i>flesh</i>
sterility	<i>fecundity</i>
dying	<i>birth</i>
tomb	<i>womb</i>

Fig. 4. Order and vitality.

As one moves down the columns, the relationships of oppositions change, becoming more and more extreme. The upper pairs are complementary, with the two poles combining to produce viable existence (male/female, father/mother, semen/ blood, bone/flesh). For the last three pairs, complementarity is replaced by a profound antagonism. In fact, the antagonism is so pronounced as to be almost inexpressible because one column progresses toward maximal order of the tomb, the other moves toward maximal vitality and chaos. I use the terms *fecundity*, *birth*, and *womb* to indicate the sorts of attributes the Bara place in opposition to death. But actually, the opposite of pure order cannot be expressed in an orderly fashion. It must be creatively worked out in a ritual context. The table of symbolic oppositions and extensions shows two types of opposition: complementary and antagonistic. The pair flesh/bone, the corpse, partakes of both forms of opposition. Bone and flesh are complementary in the

human body but become antagonistic when breath has ceased. The corpse occupies a "liminal" state between that conjunction of bone and flesh which is considered "life" and that separation of these substances which is considered "death". The consequence of this liminality is that dead, sterile, order of bone is taking dominion over the ebbing vitality of the decomposing flesh (fig.5). Reality has moved from a state of mediated equilibrium between order and vitality to a state of pure, fatal order. This extreme aspect of order cannot be mediated, but can only be opposed by the most extreme aspects of vitality. Sex and sex-related activities of the funeral nights are the symbolic ammunition in the open warfare between the extreme ends of the polar continuum of the human condition.

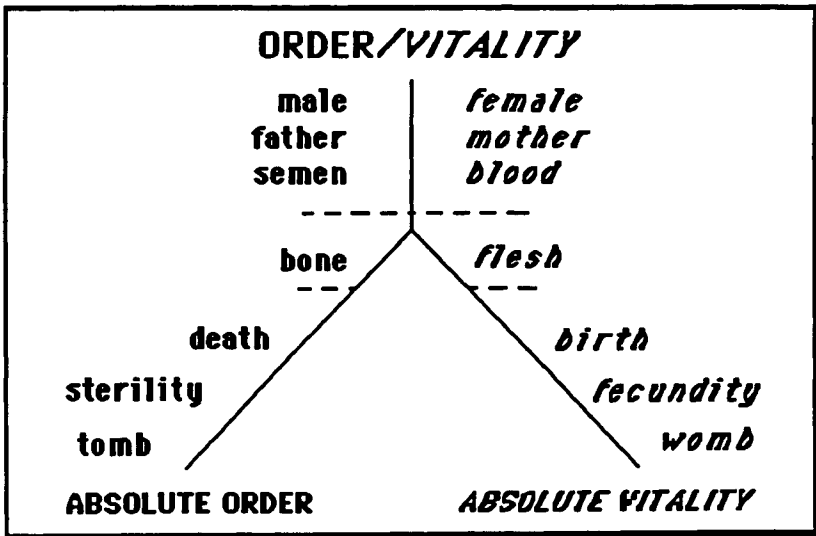


Fig. 5. Death and the balance of order and vitality.

The radical separation of the male and the female components of the person is dramatically established in the first few moments after breath has ceased. The death is not immediately acknowledged or announced, but the preparation of the body and houses is quickly and silently

begun. A male house and a female house are selected. The corpse will rest in the female house for three days. Here women will gather and keep a long vigil punctuated with periods of loud ritual weeping. For this reason, the female house is also called "the house of many tears" (*trano be rano maso*). In the male house (*trano dahy*), the men of the stricken family receive male visitors from whom they accept stylized expressions of condolence. The formality in the male house is striking with regard to both seating patterns and verbal exchanges. Here also the men will keep a vigil and organize the logistics of burial.

At first, while the two houses are being cleared and arranged, all are enjoined to silence, and weeping is strictly forbidden. The first task is the preparation of the body. The eyelids and jaw are closed. The limbs are straightened, and the body is placed on its back. The jaw and limbs must be tied in place while the postmortem stiffening sets in. Quickly, after the last breath, while the body is still warm and soft, the personality is divided in two, as it were. The male aspect, deriving from the soon-to-be-joined ancestors, is represented in one house from which the burial is directed. Yet the corpse remains with the living, with the women, for a little longer.

The rigid separation of males and females is broken during the nighttime festivities. Girls must leave the "house of many tears" to sing and dance in the courtyard, where the young men come out to watch and gradually join in. Rum, beef, and rice are served, a musician is hired, and the funeral nights generate a lively party. It is at such funeral parties that most Bara children gain their first sexual experience. These festivities exhibit a close, almost licentious, relationship between males and females that is most unlike the normal public cross-sex behavior patterns.

Burial takes place on the third day. The funeral procession stretches out over the countryside, with the youths and young girls quickly leading the way with the coffin, followed at a distance by adult men, then women and children, and finally the family cattle herded at the rear. The young people with the coffin pull farther and farther in advance, running all the way. Only those youths who have had sexual experiences can take part in this episode, which is essentially a sexual contest between the girls and boys for possession of the corpse.

The procession halts and regroupes at a place about

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halfway to the mountain of the dead. The cattle are brought up and stampeded around and around the coffin while the young men vie with one another in the somewhat risky sport of cattle wrestling, which consists of leaping onto the hump of the stampeding beast and holding on as long as possible. Then the young men and girls go on with the coffin up to the burial cave, accompanied by two or three older men to perform proper burial.

At the tomb, an elder acting as "owner of the death" (*tompon'paty*) sprinkles rum on the entrance and announces their presence to the ancestors. The rocks are taken away from the cave-tomb, the coffin is taken inside, and then the entrance is carefully closed. The elder addresses the ancestors within:

Here is your grandchild, born here.
Do not push him away,
Even from here.

The extreme and fatal dominion of "male" order must be countered by a radical increase of "female" vitality. Vitality is represented in songs, dances, and contests that express the interrelated themes of sex, birth, life, disorder, incest, danger, war, and fertility.

Sex and Childbirth. One of the most prominent aspects of the funeral nights is the singing by the girls. Most of the themes are explicitly sexual, and their performance is part of a public courtship to intercourse from the girls to the boys (the reverse of the usually private proposition of a girl by a boy).

Now hide it
Now hide it, boys
Now hide it because there is a death.
Together let us copulate,
Together let us copulate, boys
Now hide it
Now hide it because there is a death.

"Brroo" flies the quail
To perch at the head of the *sely* tree
The eye wants to sleep
The eye wants to copulate.

"Brroo" flies the quail
To perch on a knob of the *sakoa* tree
The eye wants to copulate
The eye wants to climax.

"Brroo" flies the quail
To perch at the head of the mud
Hide it!
Now hide it!
Because there is a death.

Together let us copulate
Together let us copulate
Whether big, whether little
Now hide it.

The onomatopoeic "brroo" of the quail is an expression commonly used to refer to ejaculation in sexual intercourse the word for quail (*kibo*) is also the word for belly. The word for eye (*maso*) also refers generally to any center, hole, circle, or vortex, in this case, the vagina. The vagina is also suggested by the word for mud (*fotaky*), which refers generally to any wet slime or slipperiness. And the quail, according to the Bara, is quite incapable of perching either at the head or on the knob of a tree. There is the suggestive image of the quivering quail looking for the appropriate place to hide. First it tries the head of a tree, then a lower knob, and finally settles in and hides itself in the stickiness below.

Another popular Bara funeral song takes up the related theme of childbirth:

Oh bright red
Oh I am hurting now
Oh bright red
My breasts have swollen
Oh I hurt, mother
Massage my belly
Make it easier

Energy. When referring to participation in these nighttime festivities, the Bara say they are going to await *faha*. This word is difficult to translate, but its various usages and con-

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notations include nourishment, ration, a live prestation to a visitor, a rifle cartridge, the winding of a clock, elasticity, rebound, resiliency, and energy. Bara most commonly use the word when referring to a thin cow (lacks *faha*) and as a name for those curing rituals that aim to strengthen one who has been weakened by illness. In general, *faha* signifies vitality, but the emphasis is on a potential, stored vitality rather than on the dissipation of energy in activity.

The concept of storing vitality is best evident in the mode of dancing associated with funeral activities. The meaning of a dance style is less explicit than that of the lyrics of a song and perhaps less amenable to analysis. However, there is a definite contrast in style between funeral dancing and all other Bara dancing. In addition to the three funeral ceremonies, Bara also dance at circumcision and spirit-possession ceremonies. On these occasions the dancing is wild and unrestrained, with dancers individually showing off their skills. At funerals the girls dance in a slow, tight circle in front of the "house of many tears." One by one the boys join so that there are often two or three circles, one inside another. The dancers in the innermost circle move very slowly forward in a dense double time while those in the larger outer ring come down hard on the beat. Often one or two preadolescent boys dance at a languid half-rhythm very quickly around the outside of the other circles. Each succeeding circle (from outside) is tighter, faster rhythmized, and slower moving. The dance gives the appearance of the winding up of a human clock spring. One is also reminded of the whirlpool (*rano mihery*) that is such a part of Bara feminine symbolism. The Bara do not explicitly make such connections. But it is this dancing and the related activity of the girls running (while singing) around and around the hut containing the body that are stated to be the epitome of *faha*, vitality.

Cattle. Cattle play important roles in Bara funeral events in two respects. First, there is the cattle wrestling at funeral rituals. The sport of stampeding the herd around and around resembles a bovine version of the funeral dances. When describing the event, Bara boys always emphasize the snorting, panting, and bucking of the cattle as signs in intense vitality. The sport is practiced at only one other occasion and that is at the sowing of the rice fields when the **trampling hooves perform a plowlike function.** The second

role of cattle in the funeral events is to be slaughtered and eaten. A Bara legend recounts how God was once about to give all the animals a potion of life so that death would be eradicated. The cow accidentally drank the entire supply. Because there was no more, God advised the other animals to kill the cow during times of danger and to eat its flesh, which contains the force of life.

Chaos: Incest and War. An important aspect of the representation of vitality is the idea that it is chaotic as opposed to the order of the ancestor cult. In one of the songs, the girls call on the boys to act crazy, unrestrained, and shameless during the funeral fete. It is in this regard that rum takes on special significance. Rum is served not merely because intoxication is pleasant, but because disorderly conduct is essential.

The most important mode of generating a sense of disorder is through incest. For the neighboring Betsileo funerals, Dubois (1938:665), the Jesuit missionary to the Betsileo, describes what he considers "the moment of horrors" when everyone couples incognito with an assiduous disregard for incest regulations. The Bara do not tolerate unexpiated incestuous intercourse, not even at funerals; but the songs, dances, and bawdy remarks exchanged among kin at a funeral would at any other time require the sacrifice of a cow in expiation. An actual attempt of intercourse with a relative at a funeral celebration constitutes a wrong and must be expiated. But the attitude of the Bara toward such incest is that it is an inevitable part of the funeral fetes and the offender should pay the penalty with good humor. The incestuous behavior of the participants in funeral rituals is in opposition to the fundamental Bara principles of social and moral order.

Professional dancers (*ser*y) are hired for major funeral events. They are viewed as possessing dangerous and social qualities. They dress outrageously, with their hair (the men's) in long braids entwined with coins and bells. They are explicitly dressed in the symbols of warriorhood, and no dancer ever dances without his elaborate spear. The dancing is wild, aggressive, and sexual, with particularly energetic dances being done to entice more money from members of the audience.

Idioms of Rebirth

During the time following death, extreme vitality is generated through the various excesses of the funeral celebration in an effort to counterbalance the extreme order of death. But this unstable situation cannot persist, and the funeral activities become directed toward effecting a return to normalcy. Because the instability of the situation derives from the antagonism between the bone and the flesh of the corpse, the resolution depends on removing the corpse from the world of the living. For as long as the corpse in which bone (order) is taking dominion over flesh (vitality) remains, then the life-giving balance of order and vitality is impossible. In another Bara legend, a man with ten cows asks the king for advice because his cows are barren. The king says it is because the man did not bury his father properly at his death when the man was yet a youth. The man then holds a funeral, builds a tomb, kills cattle, and buries his father. Soon there are many new calves, and his wife also gives birth.

The actual burial takes the form of a double metaphor of sexual intercourse and birth. First the competition between order and vitality is intensified during the removal of the corpse from the village to the tomb on the mountain. This funeral procession resembles a "burial by capture" as the men enter (for the first time) the "house of many tears" and take away the coffin against the tearful protests of the women. The young men then run, carrying the coffin in relays, toward the mountain of the ancestors. A group of young girls, often with their hair and clothes disheveled, run and catch up to the coffin bearers to distract and detain them from their task. Often the girls intervene physically to stop the journey to the tomb, and there ensues a tug-of-war over the coffin as the girls try to pull it back to the village. When that fails, the girls may run ahead and line up across the boys' path. The boys charge, using the coffin as a battering ram to penetrate the female barrier, and continue toward the tomb.

The sexual symbolism is continued at the tomb itself as the coffin is poked headfirst into the small hole at the mouth of the cave. But the symbolism shifts as attention focuses on the arrival of the deceased among his ancestors. The dominant theme becomes that of birth, with the deceased entering the world of the ancestors, headfirst, like

a fetus. When asked to comment on the meaning of burial, the Bara invariably use the metaphor of birth. This theme is evident as well in the song cited earlier and in the tombstone address to the ancestors: "Here is your grandchild, born here. Do not push him away, even from here." Just as one must be born into the world of the living, so must one be born out of it and into the world of the dead.

Bara burial is indeed a rite of passage from the world of the living to the realm of the dead. Furthermore, the Bara recognize only one mode of transition that is powerful enough to change the state of being for a human: sexual intercourse and birth. Not unexpectedly, the process of being born into the world of the dead is the reverse of the process of entering the world of the living. Biological conception begins with the chaotic fecundity of the mother's womb and menstrual blood to which must be added the ordering power of the father's semen. Order is added to fertile vitality. Entering the tomb, however, is quite the reverse. Vitality is added to sterile order. It is not enough merely to bury someone, merely to dispose of the body. The survivors must bring about the successful conception and rebirth of their deceased relative into the world of the ancestors. This process, like the conception and birth of an infant, is a difficult and risky endeavor for both the deceased and the survivors.

Because the notions of bone and flesh are closely associated with ideas of male and female, father's line and mother's line, ancestors and affines, and the ultimate human problem of reconciling unchanging order with the disruption of necessary renewal, the corpse threatens the balance of the same components of the Bara social and moral universe. It is only through the symbolic manipulation of these essentially sexual components that the corpse with its inherent imbalance can be removed. Should the transition fail, the consequence is nothing short of catastrophic infertility, with the deceased remaining like a dead fetus in the womb of his or her survivors' world.

The philosophical foundations of Bara "individualism" are profoundly different from the bases of Western individualism. For the Bara, freedom and obligation to choose among options of residence and affiliation relate, not to an idea of the autonomy of the individual, but to the symbolic identification of the person with the enduring community. Each person must make

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himself or herself into a link between past and future, between ancestors and grandchildren. The force that traverses the generations, providing continuity and identity, is a sexual force, hence the emphasis on femaleness and maleness, always in a dynamic balance, informing one's personal identity, social actions, and moral obligations.

3

Residence and Corporation: Shared Values

Small Groups and Freedom of Individuality

Where to reside is perhaps the greatest moral issue in Bara life. A Bara will agonize and rationalize for years about his or her residence pattern if it is slightly ambiguous; or, conversely, take extraordinary pride in the fact that his or her family's huts are in a certain arrangement. To the outsider, it is amazing that people get so deeply concerned about whether they live in one group of tumbledown mud huts or in another such collection of hovels less than five hundred yards away. It is this choice, this ongoing, repeated affirmation of place, that is the major source and expression of a person's identity and moral worth, of one's social and sexual self-image.

A Bara lives in the midst of a small kinship group whose structure and ideology are imbued with the same characteristics that define the person—a matrix of maleness and femaleness. In chapter two I followed the dynamic shifting of the male-order/female-vitality balance of the person through conception, growth, fulfillment, and dissolution with death. Here and in chapter four, I shall, in much the same way, trace the dynamics of group formation and dissolution. Most important, this brings us to the issue of how individuals participate in the society of which they are a part. Classical sociological perspectives tend to emphasize the role of society and culture as actively determining the place of individuals within the collectivity. My approach is a softer and more humanist view of how individuals, given the ambiguities of cultural values, and the many emotional levels of such values, search for ways,

sometimes clear and easy but often clear only in retrospect, to live their lives in concert with those close to them.

Simmel long ago put forth the thesis that the smaller the social unit surrounding the individual, the less "freedom of individuality" exists for each member. However, Simmel stressed that "the leveling of individual differences corresponds not only to the relative smallness and narrowness of the collectivity, but also— or above all— to its own individualistic coloring" (Simmel 1971[1908]: 257). And as Mauss and others (Fortes and Maine, most notably) have pointed out, the "person" was a corporation long before its gradual Western transformation and devolution to the individual. So we are prepared to find that the personality of the Bara individual and the personality of his or her local kin group are tightly enmeshed. Most important, as Simmel stressed, is the fact that in such small social units, a member achieves freedom of individuality through the group rather than in opposition (p.261).

The Bara House

Abstract principles must by their nature be wrapped and molded into something substantial in order to have palpable form. In chapter two we saw that Bara principles of order and vitality are powerfully represented in the substances of the human body: semen and blood, bone and flesh, infant and corpse. The corporate dimensions of these principles are embodied in the Bara house and in the arrangement of houses in the village.

The student of Malagasy culture finds the diagram of the house and the map of the houses of the village in almost every ethnographic account in the library, from the old descriptions of travelers, soldiers, and missionaries to the most recent scientific studies of Malagasy social structure. My first days in the Bara village were spent wearily listening to lectures on house form and house nomenclature. As I was visiting the village to check on the repairs that were to make a tumbledown hut livable for my family, I assumed the endless "house talk" stemmed from my business at hand. In retrospect, I realized that the house

talk was the only idiom through which the Bara could try to

fit me into their community.

It is fashionable to admire "vernacular architecture," or what Rudofsky (1964) calls "architecture without architects," for the way in which its forms relate so well to the nature of the available building materials, to the needs of the local climate, and to the human requirements of the particular culture. In other words, in the post-Wrightian age we cannot help but admire the way the "form follows function." However, the Bara house relates to these matters only tangentially and secondarily. Primarily, the house is a vehicle for the expression of Bara social and moral ideas in their most abstract, formal, indeed almost mathematical formulation. I shall describe the architectural representation of Bara values and then consider the correlation between these values and the characteristic Bara neglect of the house.

House Alignment. Bara houses are rectangular and oriented north to south with the door at the southern end of the west wall (fig. 6). Often there are no windows in the west wall, but there is never an opening in the east wall. The direction east is associated with the ancestors in general and with the particular ancestral origins of the Bara. There is a general trend toward westward migration for most Bara clans, so that the association of east with ancestors has a historical as well as a symbolic basis. The west is associated with women and affines, in contrast to the patrilineal ancestors. The north is seen as superior, light and warm; the south as inferior and cold. The symbolic associations also have their practical associations, given the northerly trajectory of the sun and the southerly source of the rains and winds of the wet season. When one asks the Bara why the house is oriented north to south, with the door in the west and no opening in the east, one receives that response which anthropologists detest: "We have always done it this way."

The Bara see the rectangular shape of their house as an important sign of their being civilized people. A long time ago, they say, the Bara were rough and rude folk who built round huts, devoid of corners, huts incapable of being demarcated within or aligned with the world without. The house plan is a model that is explicitly used by the Bara to express the order of social relationships; and all Bara can and do explicitly comment on the moral attributes of the

four directions, and all can diagram the seating arrangements. The directional attributes guide the seating arrangements of people within the hut. The most senior men sit along the east wall in order of seniority, with the elder (*) to the north. Younger men sit along the south wall, with the elder to the east.

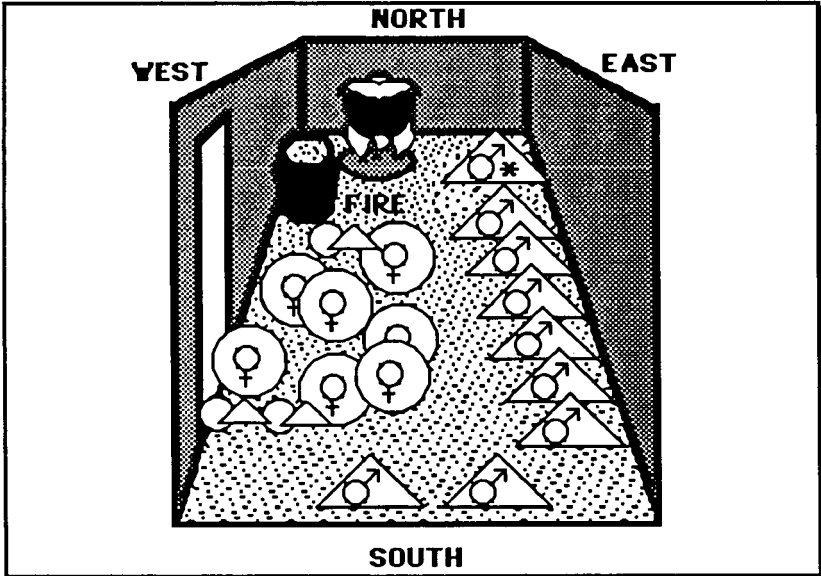


Fig. 6. Seating of women and men in a Bara house.

The seating of women and children is less orderly. They are allotted the north and the west walls, but since much of the space along those walls is taken up with the fire and the doorway (as well as the storage of large objects), women must sit in an uncomfortable jumble in the middle of the hut and in front of the door. And they are generally in the way of anyone wishing to enter or to leave. The older women do sit farther north, but, still, women cannot be ordered to the same extent as men since most of the women are unrelated to one another, being wives of the hamlet

residents.

Several huts in the village where I did research are oriented differently. One of these is, significantly, that of a man of a different ethnic group who was married to a village woman of slave descent. The door of this hut is at the northern rather than the southern end of the west wall. At a feast held in this hut, there was evident confusion about the seating arrangements. The elders felt that their rightful place at the northernmost part of the east wall put them improperly close to the confusion at the doorway. In a hasty compromise they sat in the usual north-to-south order of seniority, but beginning at the midpoint of the eastern wall. The rest of the people, all men, just sat anywhere, with apologies to those sitting close by who might have cause for offense.

Space/Time and the Zodiac. The Bara also use the hut to represent the personalities of individuals according to the day of birth, and as a revolving perpetual calendar. Briefly, each of the twelve signs of the zodiac is associated with a position along the interior walls of the hut, with one sign at each corner and two along each wall (fig.7). All Bara know the locations of the signs; they are never actually indicated by house decoration.

The cycle of twelve signs repeats each month while simultaneously revolving around the interior of the hut. Each month begins and ends with its own sign. The first sign is at the northeast corner, and the last is at the eastern part of the north wall. Each of the corner signs lasts for three days; the wall signs each last for two days; all for a total of thirty or thirty-one days each month. (Eight months have thirty days. The four "corner months" have thirty-one.) Essentially it is a complex means of expressing certain aspects of spatial, temporal, and moral dimensions of life in a single, unified system. In a sense one can say that the Bara do not view time as we do, as stretching out in a sequence before us. They think of themselves as surrounded by time, surrounded by space/time. Time and space revolve around the walls of their hut. Rarely do two astrologers agree as to what sign a particular day is. But they are not disturbed by such discrepancies. For as one explained to me, time is like a wheel going around, and not everyone is at the same spoke.

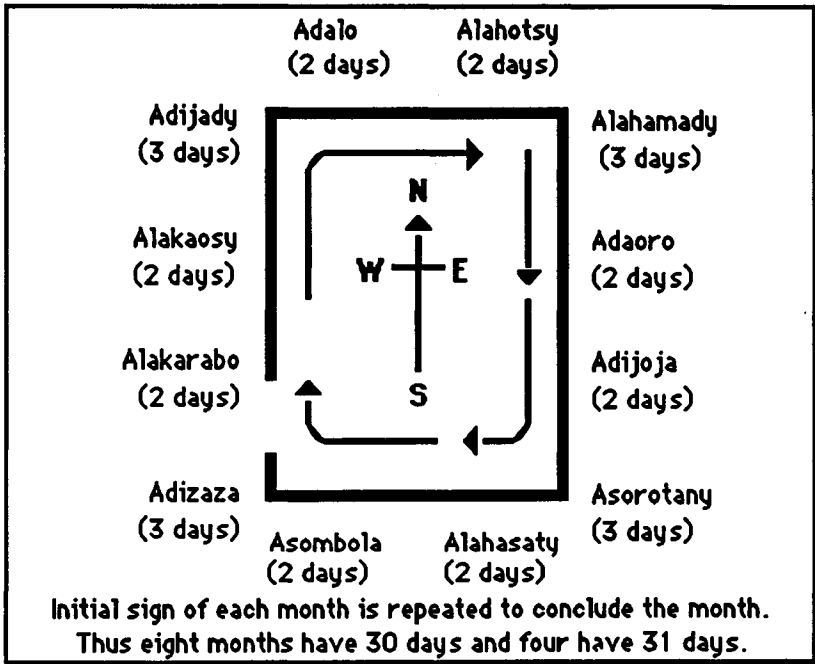


Fig. 7. House and zodiac cycle.

Each sign is associated with certain qualities of personality or fortune such as wealth, power, or intelligence. The signs themselves are not inherently good or evil. But in conjunction with a certain day of the week, each sign can become dangerously strong. Being born on a strong day causes a person to exert influence that dangerously transcends his or her fixed place in the social order. For a child born under one of the strong signs, the father must arrange for a shaman to alleviate the danger so as to protect the child's kin.

In summary, one is born into two systems of moral space/time: the social system of patrilineal ancestral seniority, and the astrological system of cyclical

movement. For people born on a strong day, the influence of the latter system predominates and threatens the social order unless the effects of the birth sign are ritually neutralized.

The interior of a properly oriented hut is an explicit model of the human dilemma as seen by the Bara. The social order of men descended patrilineally from a common ancestor is compromised on two sides: by the fertile disorder of women and children, on one hand, and by the cyclical astrological system of individual personalities on the other. Notice that the arrangement of the hut does not develop naturally from the style of daily social intercourse. It does nothing to express or to facilitate the cooperative patterns of work and leisure that typify the Bara extended family. Nor does it, in any but a rudimentary sense, exemplify the exigencies of the climate or the potentialities of the building materials. House form is slave to a complex philosophical abstraction. In the house is represented an idea; and when a Bara builds a house and sits in a house he or she participates in that abstraction and, in so doing, defines his or her proper place in human society and in the wider physical universe of earth, heavens, and seasons.

It is largely through those spatial representations that the Bara express, perceive, and judge individual social actions. The placement of a hut expresses the owner's position or lack of position in the community. The orientation of the hut demonstrates the degree of one's acceptance of Bara values. As a result, a man living in his father's hamlet is constantly reaffirming his own place in the lineally ordered organization of the living and the dead. The Bara house, despite its meanness, performs that function for which the best of modern Western architecture strives. It creates an emotional and affective bond between the individual and his surroundings, and it expresses a meaningful framework that guides him in practical and important decisions. In this sense the form provides a positive and esthetic motivation toward normative behavior and social integration.

Morality and Disrepair. The Bara house is a lowly object for analysis. It takes a young man a month or so to cut the saplings and frame beams, construct the frame, cut and split the bamboo to be woven between the upright saplings.

Then water must be hauled some distance, bucket by bucket, and the heavy earth and water must be turned and mixed over and over to become smooth. After the mud is applied roughly in and over the frame, the exterior coat (mixed with the protective dung) must be smoothed over it. The construction is often quite solid; and the proper mixture of Malagasy red lateritic mud with cow dung produces a marvelous building substance that is hard like cement but slightly flexible like plastic. Also, due to its heat conductivity, the surface is never cold and clammy like cement in cool weather or scorching like cement under the sun. The interior walls also get a smooth finishing coat. Thatching the roof requires additional cutting, hauling, and tedious skilled labor.

When new, the Bara hut is solid and the surface is smooth; yet it is a fairly minimal achievement in human-dwelling construction. Additionally, virtually no effort is made to decorate either inside or out, either the mud walls or the wooden frames and posts, either the door or the window. Nothing is painted, colored, or carved. Although the new house is sturdy, the annual rains take their inevitable toll. And little is done about preventative repair or resurfacing as the seasons go by. Walls are repaired, but only sometime after they have fallen down in the midst of a tropical rainstorm. Even then, straw mats are often stuck up "temporarily," only to remain, providing feeble protection through several rainy seasons. Roofs are rethatched, but only after they have long been leaking by the gourdful. After one rainstorm that forced a number of villagers to scurry out and do desperate repairs, a young Bara friend of mine observed with an ironic smile: "We Bara are so industrious; we do house maintenance every day." In short, relatively little attention is given to house construction, even less to maintenance, and none to decoration. The impression the Bara house gives to an observer is one of unadorned disrepair.

The characteristic neglect of the house relates to Bara values in three ways. First, the house of earth has a natural quality that is valued. It is seen as an ordered part of a natural environment rather than as the technological addition. Second, because the values are represented in an abstract (almost mathematical) manner, decoration and smooth maintenance are irrelevant. Third, the values thus represented emphasize a passive attitude of the individual

toward the wider world. Let us examine the third instance, for it is important in regard to how the Bara view the integration of the individual into his or her social group.

The Bara say if you whitewash the hut or plant flowers around it, then you will be forced to move. It is not just that they dislike moving their hamlets, but they do so only as a result of grave and fatal misfortune due to the intervention of bad spirits or a negative astrological conjunction. In other words, it is neither modest nor wise to draw unnecessary attention to oneself. This goes along with other Bara and general Malagasy customs, such as giving beloved young children insulting names such as "Little Nothing," "Dog," or even "Rectum" so that they will not attract any special attention from supernatural forces.

All aspects of human morality represented by the house extol a kind of passivity in which the decent Bara helps to maintain the moral order by unobtrusively establishing his proper place and maintaining his link in the chain. Male and female, senior and junior, and the relentless cycle of time and fortune all provide the principles of life and continuity toward which the individual accommodates himself or herself. This is a keystone of Bara philosophy, and it receives its most thorough and systematic expression through the medium of the house. To build, decorate, or maintain ostentatiously the very symbol of humility would be a ridiculous contradiction, like Polonius's explaining at great length how "brevity is the soul of all wit." Such an act, for a Bara, would not merely be out of place; it would isolate one and one's children from their place in the life-giving social and moral order. Troublesome people are dangerous people. Cleverness and entrepreneurship are looked down on as undignified and ultimately self-defeating. When the Bara voice their approval of a person, the highest praise is that the person is "no trouble" (*tsy magnay*).

Male Ideology of Local Kin Groups

The basic unit of organization for modern Bara society is the local, corporate kin group, the *tariky*. Although the structure of this unit rests in important ways on a balance of maleness and femaleness, the expressed ideology is

agnatic, deriving from the crucial links between the living and the dead. The system of agnatic order is expressed primarily through three institutions:

- Location of huts
- Ritual of first fruits
- Sacrifice to ancestors

Hut Location. The system of agnatic order is concretely expressed in the physical placement of huts in the hamlet. Each time a hut is erected, its location reflects the position of its owner in the system of agnatic organization. In general, the custom is for a person's hut to be south, west, or both, of the huts of his immediate seniors (fig.8). For various reasons, the distribution of huts is seldom a perfect replication of the hamlet's genealogy, for it is a custom

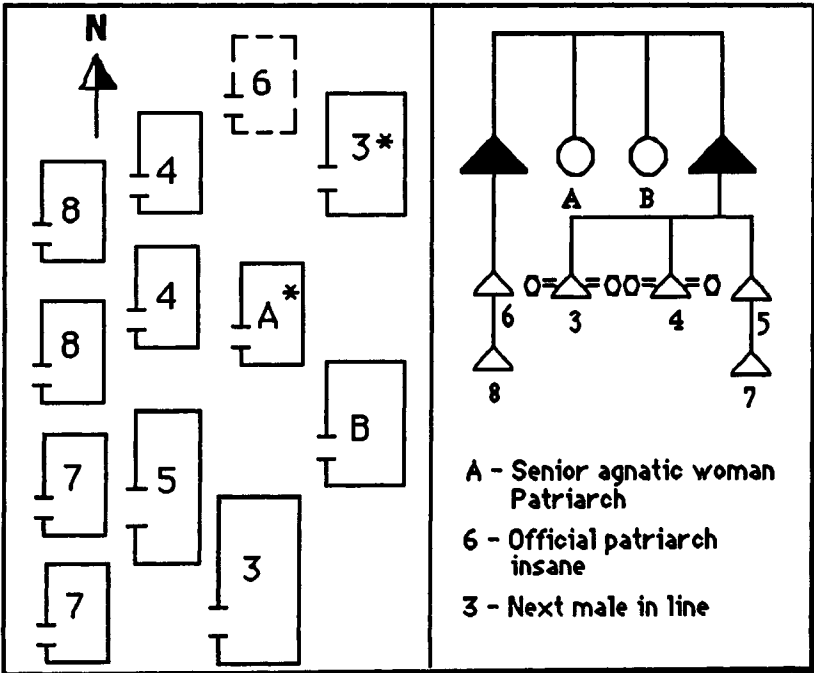


Fig. 8. Residence and genealogy.

pertaining to hut construction rather than a village plan. Bara hamlets seem always in the process of almost achieving an arrangement coincident with their social relationships.

Usually one builds to the south of an older brother and to the west of a father, so that the senior generation is most easterly, with the patriarch to the northeast. People related to the *tariky* through women are usually placed farthest south. One cannot accurately estimate the relationships among members of a hamlet merely from studying the placement of their huts; nor can one predict exactly where their huts will be from a knowledge of their kinship relations. But when a new hut is to be built, its proper location is obvious and seldom needs to be discussed. The arrangement of each hamlet expresses its genealogy combined with historical factors such as who predeceased whom or who is too lazy to rebuild an old hut.

Ritual of First Fruits. This system of agnatic seniority is expressed in the annual rites of presenting the first fruits of the harvest (*manantsy loha voly*). Each person must present the first of his harvest to his immediate senior within the *tariky*. These are private ceremonies recognizing the particular relationships of senior and junior between individual kinsmen. Brothers usually present directly to their father if he is alive, but to the eldest sibling if the father is dead. The senior living agnate is the final recipient of all these presentations, and he (sometimes she) must present the first fruits of their harvest to his seniors, the ancestors. This last is not a private ritual between an individual and his senior, but a larger family ritual in which all members of the *tariky* join in the sharing of rice with the ancestors.

The most important aspect of this system of agnatic seniority is that it is for the Bara the complete embodiment of moral order and jural authority. Only because of his or her place in this organization is a Bara in any real sense a responsible member of society. The most obvious way in which this is true is that through this *tariky* relationship one is linked to the ancestors. Since the ancestors are the source and the sanction of Bara custom, the link ties a person to the moral order. Within the system each individual is directly responsible to his or her immediate senior for his or her own actions and for the actions of his

or her immediate juniors.

Sacrifice to Ancestors. The ancestral sacrifice (the *tata* ritual) is performed on all occasions that call for propitiation of the gods and ancestors, most particularly for a girl's marriage, a boy's circumcision, or in case of illness or misfortune. It is a simple ritual in which one of the family cows is tied up, with its head facing east and its feet to the south, at the family's traditional place of sacrifice (*hazomanga*, the blue tree). The patriarch stands facing east and addresses the gods and ancestors. When the petition is done the cow is killed with the sacrificial knife and the patriarch blesses the assembled kin with a sprinkle of the cow's blood mixed with water.

Only by participating in this ceremony can one reaffirm that direct relationship to the ancestors which makes one worthy of their benevolence. For each individual Bara there is one and only one patriarch who can intercede with the ancestors: the patriarch of the father's *tariky*. There are two necessary exceptions: (1) An illegitimate child (by no means rare among the Bara) obviously must look to the mother's patriarch since the child has no father's family. Such children do not become members of the family of a subsequent husband of their mother. (2) A man whose elder agnatic kin are dead celebrates the *tata* for himself. It is clearly forbidden (*fady*) to perform the *tata* as long as one's father (or his brother) is still alive. In certain situations an agnatic female of the senior generation may fulfill the office if there are no males of that generation and particularly if she is childless. A *tariky* consists of all those people who are dependent on the same patriarch for the performance of the ancestral invocation. The patriarch is the oldest member of the *tariky* whose father is buried in the common tomb, and ritual dependence on this individual is the defining factor of *tariky* membership.

Within the *tariky*, individuals are ordered according to a system of agnatic seniority that transcends the division between the living and the dead. Each person is born into a fixed position in this genealogical sequence. This system of close agnates is a permanent ordering of individuals. If a person's agnatic senior dies, it may change his or her material circumstances and social obligations, but it does not alter his or her position in the fixed agnatic order, whose ultimate expression is found in the neatly arranged

bones in the common tomb. All senior agnates have certain mystical authority over their juniors, and a father's curse is not less devastating just because the father is still alive. Only through membership in a *tariky* does one have a place in an eternal social order.

The most important ancestors are the most recently dead who are thoroughly familiar with the modern situation. The ancestors are not merely kinsmen who lived at an earlier time but, most important, they are beings whose social role is fully rooted in the present. In order to understand Bara corporate groups, we must examine the cult of the dead. The traditional religion of the Malagasy, including the Bara, is generally classified as a system of "ancestor worship" in which the dead are the omnipotent source of all blessing or misfortune. Yet, evidence to support this view of "ancestor worship" as a central concern of the Bara is difficult to find if the investigation is restricted to religious institutions. It is true that Bara mortuary rites are elaborate and expensive, but if that fact alone were a sufficient indication of the presence of ancestor worship, few cultures could be exempted. Furthermore, a tabulation of Bara "religious" ideas must give an important place to notions about gods, nature spirits, witchcraft, magic, astrology, omens, and animals with special powers. The cult of the dead, if analyzed separately from social structure, drastically loses its significance. One of the major problems in Malagasy ethnology has been that once social structure and "religion" have been analytically separated, it is difficult to demonstrate the importance that the field researcher senses to pertain to the ancestor cult.

The Bara address their ancestors as "grandfather" (*ray-be*). Although they euphemistically refer to ancestors in general as *fahasivy* (the "ninths," from the ninth row of Bara seed divination), they would not dare address them in this way during ritual. Another Bara word for ancestor, *raza*, can also be used to refer to living grandparents and named ancestries—"clans." When a Bara speaks of his *tanindraza* (land of *raza*), he is referring to the land of his ancestors, grandparents, and "clan." The linguistic evidence, then, points to a consideration of the Bara cult of the dead and social organization as a single system (see Kopytoff 1971 and Brain 1973 for discussion of this issue in East Africa).

Although relationships within the *tariky* are ordered

according to a system of relative age and generation that includes the ancestors, it would be misleading to follow Kopytoff's suggestion and cease altogether in speaking of "ancestor cults." There are, after all, important implications of being dead, even in Madagascar. The link between the oldest living member of the *tariky* and his agnatic seniors is essentially of the same nature as it was during their lifetimes. But because this particular link now crosses the boundary between the living and the dead, it becomes the focal relationship for expressing the unity and limits of the corporate group. In chapter four we shall see how individuals put these shared values and their moral responsibilities into action in cases pertaining to the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of these local kin groups.

Is Bara "freedom of individuality" limited by the small size of their groups and by the uniformity of their shared values, as Simmel suggested? Simmel's observation hints at important contrasts between human action in small, rather than complex, social structures. His point that in small groups people seek to expand their scope of action by identifying with the group rather than by setting themselves up in opposition is important, although difficult to push too far. Individuals in all societies pay a price for alienating themselves from politically sanctioned values. But Simmel's notion is wrong inasmuch as it suggests any absolute diminution of individual action. In a small group slight actions take on a greater social weight and complexity. Anyone who has ever lived in a small town or read the pained novels by the exiles from village narrowness, knows that, nonetheless, ambiguity, contradiction, and variation are the potent forces in village life, all the more potent because everyone knows and remembers, although much remains unacknowledged. However, the grist of the Western small-town hypocrisy mill—sexual activity—rarely raises eyebrows in a Bara village. Their issues revolve around residence choices, group affiliation, and relations to the ancestors.

4

Residence and Corporation: Individual Actions

Women and Men in the Local Kin Group

This chapter raises that enduring anthropological problem of the relationship between culture and social action. How is it that an essentially uniform system of values, beliefs, and norms shared by all members of the population can form the basis for a range of often contradictory individual actions and group arrangements? Although Bara kinship ideology, residence norms, and jural obligations are explicitly and uniformly stated, the composition of specific kin groups varies greatly. This chapter aims at a more precise understanding of the sociological nature of that ambiguity and variety. The ambiguity and variety provide the matrix for action, for difficult decisions, for attempts by individuals to influence the actions of others. In turn, those actions spawn continued variety and ambiguity in people's lives and in the rules by which they live.

Presented here are four case studies that show the critical roles of women in the transformation of kin groups with the passage of genealogical time. In chapter three we saw how Bara local kin groups stress an essentially agnatic ideology. Evans-Pritchard has demonstrated that for patrilineal descent systems recruitment is paradoxically traced through women (1951:122). Although Bara social organization is quite different from that of Evans-Pritchard's Nuer, his strategy is sound. For one thing, women are the most important aspect of reality by which a masculine ideal must be compromised to form a viable society. Equally important, women as mothers, wives, sisters, and persons occupy particularly pivotal positions in a social structure

defined by masculine lines. A thorough consideration of the roles and actions of women provides the most precise understanding of how an essentially agnatic organization is constituted and limited. Also, considering both men and women within a single framework helps to lessen the gap between uniform ideal and varietal reality by incorporating some of the contradictions of social life into the "model."

I have written at length on the opposition between maleness and femaleness in Bara thought; now I shall examine, not merely Bara concepts of gender, but the ways in which the men and women of Anosibe act and interact to form empirical social groups. Men are almost always firmly rooted to a particular place and group for their entire lives. The same cannot be said for women, who circulate through the male world at what strikes the ethnographer as a dizzying pace. A woman lives with her present husband but spends much of her time visiting her father's village, her mother's village, her mother's present husband's village, and villages where she has children by her former husbands. The contrast between the fixity of a man's life and the fluidity of a woman's is significant.

A Bara village, and for that matter, most of the vast expanse of Bara territory, is dotted with small hamlets whose cores consist of close male agnates who share corporate rights over the hamlet, herd, rice fields, and tomb and who generally manage affairs such as marriage, circumcision, curing, funerals, and reburials as group enterprises. At first observation and in a very general sense, this notion of Bara society as a collection of shallow patrilineal descent groups is accurate. If one knows who a man's father is, then one knows where he lives, what cattle he is herding, where his rice field is, and whose authority he is under. For most purposes and at almost any time, he can be located physically, socially, and economically.

Many aspects of Bara kin-group composition and recruitment seem to provide considerable option with regard to the paternal and maternal lines. Bara view the *tariky* primarily as a group of individuals related patrilineally to a common tomb. A precise referent for the word *tariky*, "local kin group," is difficult to locate. This is because although it refers mainly to a group of people who are all agnatically related to the dead of one tomb (that is, a descent group), it is also used to refer to residence groups and hamlets that may not be entirely patrilineal in their

structure. Because descent groups and residence groups do not always coincide, the word *tariky* is used by the Bara with some ambiguity.

However, the Bara quite explicitly state that one has the right to be buried in the tomb of either parent. Also, the kinship terminology makes few lineal distinctions, and the Bara have membership, at least potentially, in two families. They say that everyone has two families, the father's and the mother's, and that one's father's family is hard (*mahery*) and the mother's is soft (*malemy*). Despite the undifferentiated nature of this level of kinship ideology, the *tariky* is essentially what anthropologists call a "discrete and corporate" kin group, and very few people can be said to belong to more than one such group. The discreteness and corporateness are related to the institution of the patriarch (*pitata*), who alone is empowered to celebrate the necessary familial rites of sacrifice (*tata*).

Women and the Fission of Kin Groups

The ideology of agnatic relations and of the corporate group stresses a permanent, unchanging order whose clearest representation is the ordered skeletons of the dead in the tomb. Although the tomb and the system of agnatic relationships may theoretically go unchanged forever, the groupings of the living cannot and do not. The group divides, and the factors determining the frequency and genealogical loci of division are the subject of the first two case studies. The first study demonstrates the inherent conflict between the sons of brothers, and the second case investigates the various modifications of this conflict that result from half-siblingship. The sons of brothers have different, and often opposed, maternal families. Half-siblings, who share the same father but have different mothers, similarly have different maternal families.

In this sense the Bara exhibit a classic patrilineal situation in which the in-marrying women seem to be the seed of group disunity. But in other instances Bara women unite patrilineal groups through their roles as sisters and mothers. In particular, these cases cover the situation of half-siblingship in which two brothers have children by the same woman as a result of the inheritance of a young

widow by a surviving brother. These female roles are set in the structure of the local kin group and its ideology, but women, just as men, creatively expand and use the potentialities of the situations dealt them.

Split between the Sons of Brothers. Miny's "daughter" (sister's illegitimate daughter) was to marry a distant kinsman who lived in another hamlet of Anosibe. The marriage was canceled at the last moment because of a dispute within Miny's lineage. This small lineage derived from two brothers, Miny's father and Satraha, his late father's younger brother. After the death of Miny's father, Satraha and his sons moved and set up an independent hamlet, but Miny chose to remain at the site of his deceased father's hamlet. The proposed marriage was quite advantageous to Miny, who was without brothers, without children, and, since he was married to an outsider, without local affines. He was in an isolated position with regard to the village of Anosibe and would have liked to strengthen his relationship to the prospective groom and family (fig.9).

The marriage was not however, advantageous to Satraha and his sons. The groom already had a wife from the same local kin group as Satraha's mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and these women were not pleased about the proposed marriage. Satraha was not about to anger his affines in order to please his dead brother's son. In fact, Satraha stated that he had hoped to marry Miny's "daughter" off to one of the boys in his mother-in-law's local kin group in order to help his affines.

The marriage ritual with its *tata* sacrifice must be performed by the patriarch of the bride's local kin group, who in this case was Satraha. He had no intention of performing the ritual and refused in a typically Bara fashion: He agreed in a way that he knew would be unacceptable to Miny. Satraha agreed to perform the ceremony only if Miny and the bride came out to the place of sacrifice (*hazomanga*) at the new hamlet. Miny insisted that the sacrifice must be performed at the old sacrificial spot of his father in order to be legitimate. Miny feared an ancestral sacrifice that might anger the very ancestor who was most important to him and the girl. Miny had to insist that certain lineal prerogatives take precedence over the more generalized agnatic ideology, and he considered Satraha's intransigence an abuse of the patriarchal office.

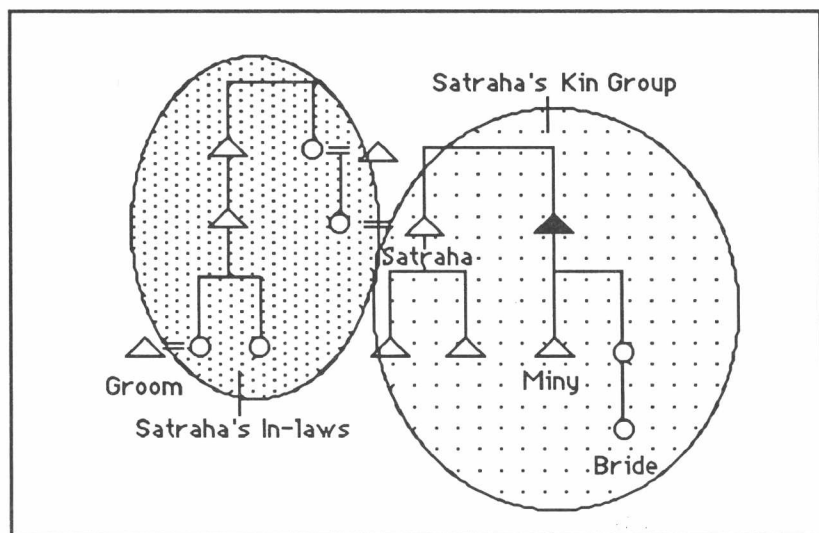


Fig. 9. Genealogy of an unlikely match.

It was not the fact that Satraha was *pitata* (patriarch) that gave him a special veto power over his marriage. Any senior relative of a girl's mother's or father's *tariky* has that right. But if he were not patriarch, Satraha would have had to refuse outright, clearly pushing the interests of his affines and threatening the harmony of his own *tariky*. Being the patriarch enabled him to pursue the interests of his particular line, please his affines, and at the same time affirm the ideals of *tariky* unity inherent in his office.

Given the situation, the dispute over the proposed marriage was inevitable, so inevitable that it is hard to imagine how the marriage plans proceeded so far as to give the dispute a public character. Usually such an obviously difficult marriage would not even be proposed. Miny might have discussed it informally with Satraha and then quietly let it drop. Such disputes and schisms exist in almost every *tariky*, and their nature is so well understood by the participants that they rarely become public. But there were

special attributes of this situation that allowed the dispute to surface and to demonstrate certain problems inherent in the structure of Bara kin groups. The person most responsible for the development of the open split between Miny and Satraha was the prospective bridegroom. He took advantage of the fact that Miny and Satraha lived some distance apart, and in his negotiations he led each of them to believe that the other was more intent on the marriage than was the case. It was suggested by some that the prospective groom was not really interested in acquiring another wife but wanted to persuade the wife he already had to resume living with him. She did.

At a more general level, three aspects of the dispute demand consideration: First, the focus of the disagreement was on the allocation of a girl in marriage. Women are a scarce resource for the Bara, not because there are fewer marriageable women than men, but because marriage is the most common way to create and to maintain necessary social alliances. Often, as in this case, there are more alliances in need of maintenance (or creation) than there are available young women to allocate in marriage (more about this in chapter five). Second, there are not merely too many relationships to be maintained, but those affinal obligations split according to lineal segments within the *tariky*. A major cause of *tariky* division at the first-cousins level is that the sons of brothers have different sets of social obligations resulting from the simple fact that they have different mothers. Third, it is not just the fact that Miny and Satraha's sons have different mothers that will cause the *tariky* to divide on Satraha's death. It is also important that the first cousins have different fathers. Much of Miny's predicament centers on the fact that the obligations he feels toward his dead father are very different from the obligations Satraha feels toward a dead elder brother. However, it is not merely the proliferation of agnatic lines in each generation that causes an automatic split in the *tariky*. That the in-marrying women are the crucial factor defining the locus of *tariky* division will be clear in the next case, in which men with different fathers maintain a unified *tariky*.

Split between Half-Brothers (Different Mothers). Our second case of group fission provides an example in which the conflicts between paternal cousins and among agnates in

general are mitigated or, conversely, exacerbated by two kinds of half-siblingship. Children with the same father but different mothers are called *anaka piolotsy*, "almost siblings." "Almost siblings" are not rare since Bara men often have a number of wives in the course of a life. One man in the village of Anosibe has had twenty-one wives, and another man, nine; but such extreme cases are unusual.

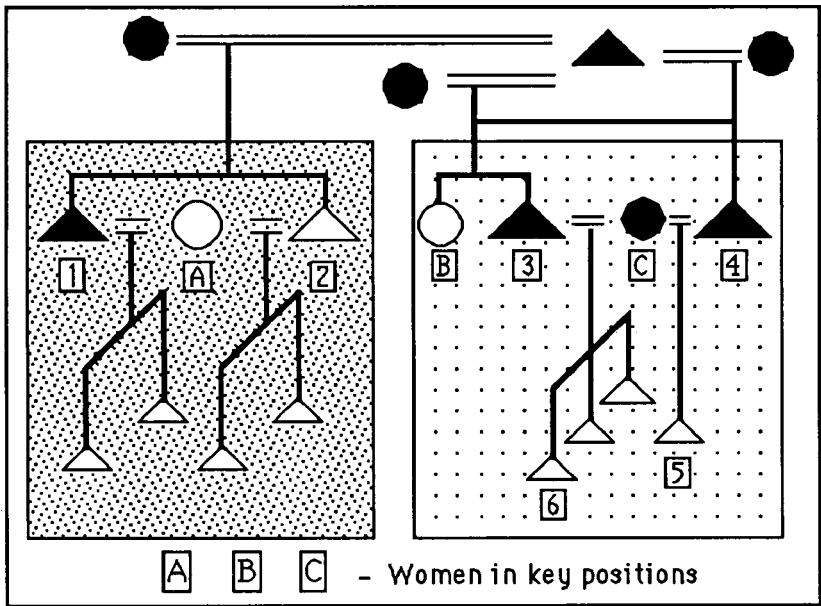


Fig. 10. Half-brothers and key women.

They are the somewhat desperate attempts of a sterile man to produce offspring. Other than such Henry VIII situations, it is normal for a man to have children by two wives, or by three at most. The relationship between the "almost siblings" is much more like that between paternal cousins than between brothers. Although they have the same father, the fact that they have different mothers leads to cousin-like disputes. Not one of the *tarikys* in Anosibe includes male "almost siblings" at the level of the senior generation.

As illustrated in figure 10, men 2, 3, and 4 are three

half-brothers; each had a different mother but the same father. The only one surviving, 2, feels that he should be the sole patriarch (*pitata*) for the entire group since he is the only living male of the senior generation of people who are all direct patrilineal descendants of his father. But the children of his half-brothers do not recognize this claim because he is the son of the junior wife. This dispute between the two branches of this *tariky* is of long standing, and, in fact, this group has not really operated as a unit since the half-brothers became the senior living generation.

In the present case, man 2 and his family separated from the other branch of the *tariky* shortly after the death of the last member of his father's generation. They moved in with relatives in a village near the town of Ivohibe, the homeland from which all the Bara of Anosibe originally emigrated. After many years of residence there, their cattle all died of disease resulting from the more severe climate of Ivohibe, and 2 and his family returned to Anosibe, setting up their own hamlet. Relations remain very strained, and it is rare for anyone from either hamlet to enter even the clearing of the other.

A Fragile Unity among the Children of Widow Inheritance (Same Mother, Different Fathers). If the relationship between "almost siblings" has the same structural significance as the divisive relationship between patrilineal cousins, then one must explain why in this case the children of the other half-brothers, 3 and 4, continue to operate as a single social unit. Man 5 has been recognized as patriarch for many years, but he is now unable to perform the rituals. He has suffered for five years from a terrible illness that has left him a half-crazy and half-paralyzed prisoner in his hut. A senior woman, B, acts as patriarch in order to maintain the unity of the group. It was explained to me that for the man next in line, 6, to perform the rites while the official patriarch remains alive would suggest a schism in the *tariky*. As was stated earlier, women sometimes fulfill a patriarchal role, but often, as in this case, it is for the purpose of maintaining the rules of agnatic succession.

Men 5 and 6 and their descendants would normally be separated into two *tarikys* since they had different fathers. But they remain together because they are the product of a widow inheritance marriage. When a man dies, his wife

may become the wife of his brother, provided that both she and the brother agree. Although the woman theoretically has a free choice in the matter, certain pressures can be brought to bear on a reluctant young widow.

At the end of the husband's burial ceremony, his family makes an announcement that she is no longer married to the dead man and that if any man in the village wishes to have sex with her, his approaches will not be considered adulterous. However, she is not free to remarry until her husband's body has been definitively placed in a ceremony of secondary burial. During the interim period, which can be prolonged for many years, a reluctant young widow is a baby-producing hostage of her dead husband's *tariky*. The widow is usually quite willing to marry her husband's brother, for to bear children for two brothers is as secure a position as possible for a woman in Bara society. The man also is seldom reluctant to take on his dead brother's wife since he does not have to give any additional cattle to the woman's family, nor does he have to compensate his existing wife as he would when taking a second wife under normal circumstances. Also, his brother's sons become his sons in more than name only, whereas without the widow-inheritance marriage his interests and theirs would be opposed.

In the example above, both the children of 1 and 2 and the children of 3 and 4 are products of such marriages. In their fathers' lines they are first cousins, but they are of the same womb and are therefore considered full siblings in all respects. Although the ideology that legitimizes the *tariky* is the agnatic lineage uniting the living with the ancestors, it is the in-marrying women that define the limits of *tariky* unity. For the most part this means that wives are seen as a force disruptive of the harmony of agnatic relations. Arrangements such as widow inheritance serve to minimize conflict and to postpone division and are explicitly made for that reason. Sororal polygyny and to a lesser extent endogamous marriage in general have the same effect of reducing intra-*tariky* conflict. The examples of two kinds of half-siblingship in this case study demonstrate that disputes develop between male agnates of the same generation if they have different mothers, and that their having different fathers (of the same *tariky*) is the factor of secondary importance.

One must note three important women in these

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families. All of the sons and their families in kin group number one are the descendants of woman A, who effectively guards their interests. All of the members of kin group two are descendants of the late woman, C. And this group stays together largely because of the effective patriarchal role played by the childless woman, B.

Women's Actions and Men's Matrifiliation

A significant minority of Bara men reside in their mother's or wife's hamlet, putting themselves in a position of social dependence or clientship. The ideology of the agnatic relationship between the living and the ancestors is so important that it is necessary to explain why certain individuals choose an alternate mode of residence or affiliation. Women play important roles in this regard, not just as a structural "locus for group fission" in an agnatic system, but as active participants competing for the well-being of their children and themselves.

Kamity Is Squeezed Out of His Father's Kin Group by His Uncles' Wife. Let us follow the fortunes of one young man as he is squeezed out of his father's hamlet and then joins that of his mother. It was suggested earlier that widow inheritance by a brother is one strategy for maintaining the unity of the corporate kin group. However, the strategy is not limited to situations involving death, for in this case a woman succeeded in shifting her marriage from the elder brother to the younger brother while the first husband was still living. As a result, this *tariky* contains three full brothers; two of whom have children by the same woman, and a third who has recently died, leaving a wife, two sons, and two daughters.

A woman who has children by two brothers is in a very strong position in that she has a clear and lasting relationship to a particular *tariky*. In Bara society there are a number of wandering postmenopausal woman who are of no further use to their former husbands and who are of equally little use to their brothers and brothers' sons. These women have children, two here and three there, who will eventually be the senior generations of two separate *tarikys*. But the mother will most likely be dead by then, and in the meantime the children are small parts of other

people's *tarikys*, which she can, at most, visit from time to time.

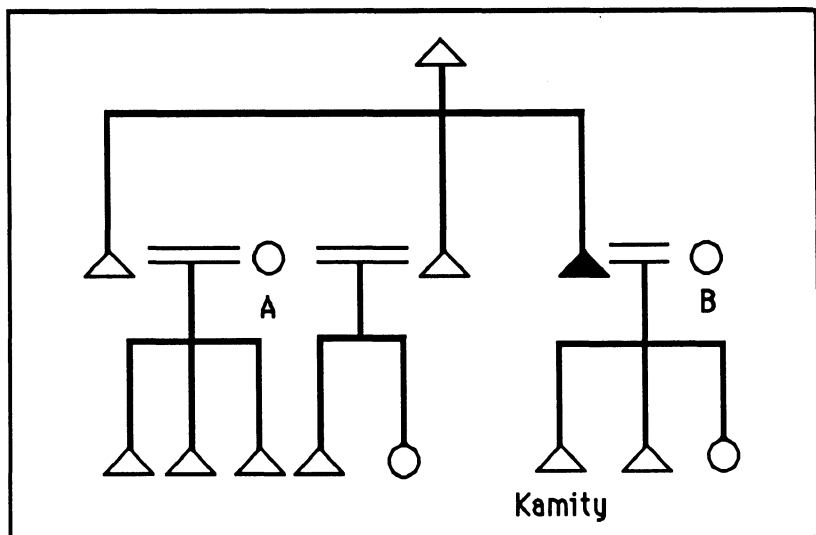


Fig. 11. A woman (A) drives Kamity from his hamlet.

The woman (A) in the present case, her children, and their two fathers dominate this *tariky* (fig. 11). Her husbands and sons give her a free hand in arranging the group's affairs because her interest in maintaining the unity and well-being of her children coincides with theirs. If she had children by only one of the three brothers, her interests would be opposed to those of too many members of the *tariky*, and even her husband would have to resist her efforts on behalf of her children so as not to appear to favor his in-laws rather than his brothers.

Kamity, the son of the deceased third brother, is getting squeezed out of his own agnatic kin group. The affairs of the *tariky* revolve around the interests of this woman to whom he is not related but who is the mother of all of his patrilateral parallel cousins. As long as Kamity's father was alive there was little problem. The three brothers deferred to one another, and their father worked to maintain the unity of his sons. As was seen earlier, a man whose father is dead finds himself in conflict with his

father's brothers. They deferred to their brother alive, but the interests of their brother's sons are inimical to their own. And if, as in this case, the children of two remaining brothers are united through a common mother, the conflict of interest is all the more decisive.

Kamity's father and father's brothers are not half-brothers but full brothers. Although Kamity is estranged from the interests that dominate his father's *tariky*, he is not free to separate and found his own. Not only are his father's brothers still alive but so is his father's father, and Kamity will not have the right to celebrate the *tata* sacrifice for many years.

Kamity Joins His Mother's Kin Group. Shortly after the death of her husband, Kamity's mother returned to her brother's hamlet, which is in the same village. Kamity and his siblings went with her. At first he was "visiting" his mother's brother, and if his father's father had requested his return, he most likely would have done so and remained at least until the old man died. But no such request came, and Kamity and his mother's *tariky* gradually consolidated their relationship (fig. 12). The most important factor involved in Kamity's opting for matrifiliation is that his mother is exercising her rights as an agnate in her father's group.

The case of Kamity shows that Bara men do not choose matrilineal residence or matrifiliation because the ideology of patrilineality is weak. Almost twenty percent of the male residents of Anosibe are residing other than patrilocally; precisely the sort of statistic that has led some to conclude that patrilineality is not very important as an organizing principle in Bara society. Kamity's dilemma results partly from circumstances, but most importantly from the way two relatively strong women have operated those circumstances to their benefit. The most important factor involved in his being squeezed out of his late father's group is the effective way an in-marrying woman has expanded her structural position as wife and mother. The most important factor involved in Kamity's opting for matrifiliation is that his mother is exercising her rights as an agnate in her father's group.

Whereas the previous cases have dealt largely with the factors involved in the dissolution of Bara kin groups, the final case focuses on the process of *tariky* formation as

evidenced by the hamlet formed by Kamity and his brother, Sojalava, his wife, two sons, and daughter. After an initial period of visiting, Kamity and Sojalava consolidated their relationship in several ways. First, they combined their two herds into one herd of about eighty head of cattle. Second, Kamity and Sojalava's oldest son exchanged sisters in marriage, giving Kamity a multiple relationship to the *tariky*. It is now simultaneously the *tariky* of his mother, wife, and sister's husband. In the previous examples it was often the women who were the factors most responsible for the division of the agnatic *tariky*. The women in this hamlet serve especially to unite the group. For the mother of Kamity, both her brother and her son are now living in the same hamlet. For the sisters exchanged in marriage, their husbands and brothers are all of the same hamlet. After about two years of residence, Kamity and his brothers built new huts for themselves at the south end of the hamlet.

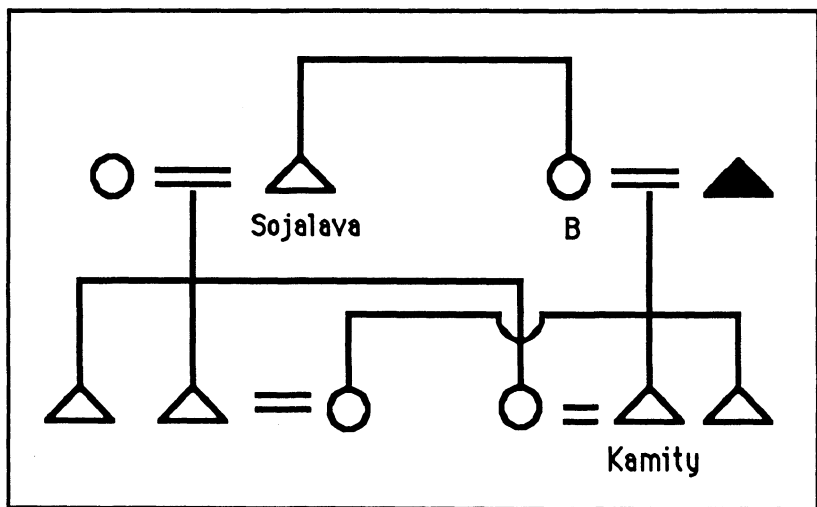


Fig. 12. A Woman (B) attaches her children to her father's kin group.

To what extent is this female-focused hamlet a *tariky* in the eyes of the Bara? To what extent do they, despite their

male-oriented ideology regarding local kin groups, view this group as legitimate? A *tariky* is a group of kin who reside together and share a common tomb. Because of the strong norms of partilocality and patrification to the tomb, all of those factors are usually combined in an agnatic group. However, the word *tariky* is used by the Bara to refer to groups that possess fewer than all of those attributes. Two branches of an agnatic *tariky* that no longer reside or herd cattle together but still recognize the same *pitata* are referred to by the Bara as one *tariky* since they potentially could all be buried in the same tomb. Whether Kamity will choose to be buried in his mother's or his father's tomb need not be decided yet. When asked, Kamity was quite equivocal, saying that it did not really matter, since "the mountain of the ancestors is all one and the same mountain." But clearly it does matter, since most other Bara men, including some who reside with their mother's group, are quite adamant about being buried in their father's tomb.

Kamity is considered a full member of his mother's *tariky* with the same rights and obligations that one has in a father's *tariky*. However, since he is linked to the *tariky* through female kin, he will never be able to perform the *tata* sacrifice for himself and his children. He is ritually dependent on his mother's brother's line and will remain so for some time to come. If Kamity is buried in his mother's tomb, his sons will eventually be agnatic members of this *tariky*, able to sacrifice to their patrilineal ancestor in the common tomb. By the next generation, the *tariky* will be in the process of dividing into separate patrilineal lines as in the previous examples. But for the next twenty-five years, Kamity's choice is between being dependent on a patrilineal line whose interests are opposed to his and being dependent on a matrilineal line that, because of the multiplicity of marriage ties, is more congenial to his needs.

The variation in patterns of residence and filiation in Bara kin groups is not so much due to the failure of the Bara to make a significant distinction between matrilineal and patrilineal principles as it is due to the fact that different people (men and women, old and young, legitimate and fatherless, longtime residents and immigrants) operate the same principles to different results. Kamity's mother is **clearly exercising the same patrilineal prerogatives as**

would a man; she is attaching her children to her father's kin group, just as her brother is attaching his children to the same father's kin group. Paradoxically, Kamity is forced into matrifiliation in order to maintain some degree of autonomy for his father's patriline. The relationship between kinship ideology, group composition and residence choice is a bit complex. The composition of this hamlet is very different from the composition of the three kin groups previously discussed. Although the guiding principles of Bara social organization remain the same, not everyone is equally successful in working them to his or her advantage.

Values, Structure, and Motivation

Bara local organization is an ongoing attempt to establish a fixed ancestral system of social and moral order in the face of the inevitable and necessary process of biological change. Bara beliefs and values are imbedded in the hard stuff of social action and institutions. Even though this study lays great emphasis on the importance of Bara beliefs and the metaphors through which the Bara perceive their world, values are not primary determinants of social factors. As we have seen in the case-study material, Bara values are also partly derived from social regularities and manipulated by individuals through action.

This chapter, it is important to remember, deals with only one level of Bara society. Every level of Bara society, from the individual to the clan, is predicated on a balance of competing principles that find their basic form in the distinction of gender. However, the local "lineage" (*tariky*) and the larger, dispersed clan (*raza*) are in a structural opposition in that the male principle dominates the one, and the female principle, the other. The lineal principle associated with males predominates at the local level, and the cognatic principle associated with females and motherhood predominates the values and organization of the wider clan. Consider each of these principles.

The lineal, differentiated mode is traced through males and forms the basis for the local corporate group. Men (and to a lesser extent women) use these values to validate their ascribed place in the fixed lineal system that derives moral authority from the direct connection with the

ancestors. Seniors in this system receive important gestures of respect and honor and possess a certain moral authority because they are closer to the ancestor than are their direct lineal descendants. Such respect, however, does not necessarily confer wealth, power, or influence. The son, in one sense, is not dependent on his father, but both have an interest in maintaining the agnatic system on which they are equally dependent.

The cognatic and undifferentiated mode (as we shall see in chapters five and six) is traced through females and forms the basis of the large Bara clan. This mode validates allegiance and ethnic identity and is associated with power, influence, wealth, and political organization. It is rooted in both affinal and maternal institutions, both of which stress an unequal, patron-client, giver-receiver type of relationship. This type of relationship is based on exchange, and its widest extension is seen in the fluid political organization of the nineteenth century when weaker Bara clans exchanged allegiance for the protection of stronger clans. These relationships of exchange, competition, and collaboration are guided to some extent by the norms and values of common kinship, clanship, and humanity that are associated with the undifferentiated and transcendent mode. The opposition of the "maleness" of local group ideology and the "femaleness" of clan ideology is an important component of the motivation of individuals' actions and of the rationalizations they present for their actions when the actions are questionable.

In this study I avoid attribution of motivational priority or predominance to either values, norms, or actions. If the necessities of exposition force an emphasis on certain aspects at different places and sometimes give an impression of causality, the true picture is, nonetheless, one of a unitary continuum including values, norms, and actions. For instance, "male order" partakes simultaneously of the metaphysics of conception, the super-naturally sanctioned norm of patrilineal residence, and the observed regularities of social groupings.

Bara individuals make choices, and the motivation for such actions is rooted in the simultaneity of this formulation of value/norms/action. The choice of a man to reside in his father's hamlet is motivated simultaneously by the values-derived esthetic of being hard, male, and strong; the norm-derived constraint of not angering the

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ancestors, and the action-derived maximization of self-interest of gaining agnatic support in affinal relations, and so on. Different aspects of this motivational unity may be verbalized in different situations by different people. But these three levels are inseparable even, as seen in the case studies, when a man chooses to leave his father's hamlet, or when a woman acts as *de Jure* "patriarch" or as *de facto* leader of a kin group.

5

The Marriage of a Brother and Sister

Bara Folktales

It is not surprising that the Bara mine the rich veins of gender symbolism in their concepts of the institution of marriage and its relationship to sexuality and fertility. The topic of marriage emphasizes a different aspect of the gender opposition. It is not "mother/father," but "sister/brother" that provides the model opposition that animates Bara thought and institutions about marriage and sex. Because of this, the topics of incest and its prohibition loom large in Bara culture.

Bara society is strongly endogamous, with the overwhelming majority of marriages taking place between close kin—first and second cousins. In these two chapters on marriage, I repeat somewhat the pattern of exposition followed in the preceding two chapters on the corporate group. First, I will explore the shared values regarding endogamous marriage, and then, examine the social and economic institutions and actions related to marriage alliance and incest prohibition.

I begin our exploration of marriage through the medium of folktales, which provides the most natural expression of Bara attitudes toward marriage with close kin. By "natural" I mean simply that this is the medium through which the Bara express the wisdom of their own understanding and bafflement regarding key aspects of their society. My aim is not to uncover secret desires or repulsions but to follow the Bara as they reflect on the complexities and ambiguities of their own sexual regulations. Most important, I wish to indicate something about the ambivalence of such notions and related

actions. For when the topic is sex, the tone and style of a people's customs are surely as important as their place in the symbolic structure or in the system of functional relationships.

Folktales are the most important form of oral literature for the Bara and are a regular part of daily life. Unlike some other Malagasy peoples, the Bara show little interest in proverbs or in formal ritual text. And like most other groups in Madagascar, they have no long, sacred, formal myth of creation. And so it is these amusing, short, and almost casual stories (*tapastry*) that represent the major and almost exclusive form of Bara oral tradition. This is extremely apt since the tone and style of the tales fit the image the Bara have of themselves as simple folk, who even take some delight in construing their ethnic name (especially the reduplicative diminutive *barabara*) to mean "rude and simple." For they are a proud people who value the ability to mask cleverness and wisdom in a cloak of simplicity and modest humor.

Bara folktales rely heavily on the irony to communicate various levels of meaning to the listeners. If I may be permitted a personal note, my first reading of Faublée's *Récits Bara* left me disappointed. I had not yet visited Madagascar and, unaware of the ironic character of the tales, I despaired of ever learning anything from them. Faublée himself seems poorly attuned to irony, and although he states in his preface that the tales are by definition amusing, the source and nature of the humor does not always survive his translation and explication. Later, while I was with the Bara, I saw how during each recitation men, women, and children smile; their eyes sparkle; they giggle and guffaw. And at the end of each story, the teller repeats the stock closing, "It is not I who lies, but this lie comes from olden times." (*Tsy aho no mavandy, fa taloha.*)

Unless we begin to sense the source of humor for the Bara, any analysis of the tales is likely to lead us astray. And so I asked about the closing caveat, for I needed some indication of how they regard the stories. Everyone agreed (grinning) that the stories are "Lies! Great lies! All Lies!" (*Mavandy. Vandt-be. Vandy aby.*) "But nonetheless true!" (*Ka nafa marina.*) More than anything else it is the juxtaposition of truth and falsehood, probable and im-

narrative framework that is the source of humor and enlightenment in these folktales. As my knowledge of Bara social conventions grew, I began to find amusement in the topsy-turvy world of the storytellers and to realize that the tales are indispensable aids toward an understanding of Bara customs, especially those dealing with the difficult but important matter of sex with relatives.

Our texts are the first three tales in Faublée's *Récits Bara*. I shall recount each tale in English; however, the reader is referred to Faublée (1947:23-32) for a very beautiful, narrow transcription in the Bara dialect of Malagasy and for a literal and accurate translation into French. The first tale (the second in Faublée's collection) is entitled "The Origin of Marriage" (*Ny Boahany Fanabadia*), and it is about the courtship and marriage of a brother and sister.

The Marriage of a Brother and Sister

There were people who had children, three boys and one girl. The three boys did not have wives. The middle son went to God and requested "something he could marry to give him life." God had him carry a shaped and flattened club.

"Do not ever leave this behind. When herding the cattle, take it with you."

One day he left his club at home. His older sister saw it and she lay on top of it. He remembered it and returned to the village.

"Where is my 'thing'?"

His sister was lying on her stomach. He tried to roll this child, but she would not. Finally, he rolled her and saw his club.

[At this point the storyteller has the brother speak a triple entendre, *vadiko hanao*, meaning "I have rolled you," "I have had sex with you," "You are my wife." The sister responds to the third.]

"Yes, I am your wife."

He went to visit God.

"That thing which you made me carry, I forgot it and my older sister saw it and she lay on it. When I returned she said she is my wife."

Perfrom the andra ritual for she is your wife."

They got married, those two, and they had children. And that is the root [*fotoany*] of marriage. Even those who are forbidden [*fady*] can marry if they perform the *tandra* ritual.

It is not I who lies, but this lie comes from olden times.

Because the playfully erotic aspects of the tale are not entirely obvious in translation, a preliminary explication of some of the wordplay may help establish the tone of the story. To begin with, the storyteller plays with the word *velo* (alive) which can refer to a range of states of vital well-being as fertility, health, and sexual arousal. The young man is commanded to take his "club" when herding cattle. Although it is usual for herders to carry a club, by this point in the story the club is clearly taking on phallic connotations. The idea of a young man leaving his "club" behind is ludicrous. All of this wordplay leads to his "rolling" the girl (his older sister), who has been lying on his "thing."

Since the couple are brother and sister, however, this normally common courtship scene becomes preposterous. Bara siblings are forbidden not only sex and marriage but also any act or word that is even vaguely preparatory or analogous to sex. One is forbidden to step over a sleeping sibling or even over a sibling's empty sleeping mat. Furthermore, such language as exhibited in this story, the playful and erotic euphemism, is certainly forbidden between siblings. It is clear that this combination of the natural and impossible might be a source of amusement, but how is it that such a scene is also presented as the foundation of the institution of marriage?

Certain explanations come to mind readily. If this is supposed to be the original family group, then sibling mating must occur to populate the world. Indeed, Faublée (1947:28) offers this explanation for the tale. However, this common theme of creation stories receives little emphasis in the Bara version. When the Bara reflect on the origins of society, they show little concern for the logical restraints of the primal situation. Additionally, it might be surmised that the story appeals to some sublimated attraction between brothers and sisters. This possibility can be neither demonstrated nor excluded, but there is no evidence that such is the major appeal of the story. There is, however the usual ambiguity as to whether the story applies to actual

siblings or to a distantly related pair. The storyteller has made it clear that they are actual siblings, but the scene described is reminiscent of the sort of seduction that can take place between distant cousins.

Except for the fact that the relationship is highly incestuous, the tale of the brother and sister describes an ideal marriage, based on sexual attraction and happiness, maintaining family unity, having God's blessing, and producing children. The absurdity at one level reveals ultimate values at a higher level. In the real world such an ideal union is unattainable, for marriages often ignore the personal feelings of the partners, create some family conflict, and lose the children (at least partially) to the affines. The ideal can be approximated, however, with God's permission and the ancestors' blessing, through the marriage of the children of the brother and sister in the next generation. That this is by far the most favored form of union among the Bara brings us to the next story, which opens with such a cross-cousin marriage.

The Children of a Brother and Sister

Once upon a time the children of a brother and sister got married without performing the *tandra* ritual. They had a difficult marriage and often fought. The woman became heavy with child, but the pregnancy went badly. The man said:

"I don't know what is causing this trouble with your stomach, perhaps there is a rule made by God for the married children of a brother and sister, perhaps the elders will know of it."

"I ask you, elders, the pregnancy of my wife is going badly, is there perhaps a rule given by God to the people of olden days?"

"We have not heard and do not know of any rule."

His wife aborted, and after a few days she died.

"Let us bury the dead," said her father, "for we do not know what interdiction made her die."

The burial was over and the mourners were returning to the village.

"How can we find out the cause of her death? There is a

diviner nearby, let us find him."

They sent for the diviner and he arrived.

"We have called you because we wish to know what killed our child."

"That will be difficult since you have waited until the patient is already dead before calling me, but I will do the divination anyway and perhaps we will discover what transgression killed her."

He dealt the divination seeds and saw the form *Alebeavo* alone in its family.

"There is some interdiction that you failed to remove with the sacrifice of a cow."

The father of the deceased answered, "I had my daughter marry the son of my sister and I did not remove any interdiction."

"Quickly, save those who are still alive, for there will be more deaths if you do not kill a cow. Place on the forehead of each some blood from the cow and the danger will be avoided and there will be no more deaths."

"But what should we do if we have more children to marry to one another?"

"Kill a cow. The patriarch shall sprinkle water on those who wish to marry. And they shall mark themselves with the blood. There will be no more deaths and the woman will have children, for the danger will be avoided."

There were two brothers, one had a son, and the other had a daughter.

"Let us attempt to marry our children. You, eldest, with the son, sprinkle the water, and I'll donate a cow, and the children will do this *tandra* ritual."

"We will see if this diviner speaks the truth. If our children die," said the eldest, "what shall we do?"

"We shall weep," said the youngest.

"Choose a lucky day for us to do the rite."

They performed the invocation and the sacrifice. The young couple performed the *tandra* with the blood of the cow. They were married. The wife gave birth, and the husband remained in good health.

"That diviner spoke truth," they said, "let us keep this custom just as if it were a custom from the ancestors."

And the *tandra* became one of our ancestral customs that we keep even today.

It is not I who lies, but this lie comes from olden times.

This story clarifies certain basic principles of Bara marriage: close kin, especially paternal cousins and cross-cousins, may marry if they first perform a ritual to remove the taboo. But the Bara listeners already know this, and so we must look elsewhere for the source of their enjoyment of the tale. There are humorous lines such as when the diviner/curer suggests dryly that they are a bit late in requesting his services. And there are poignant lines such as when the younger brother answers "We shall weep." Furthermore, there is considerable humor in the contrast between the characters' experimenting to discover customs that the listeners, on the other hand, know very well. These characters, seemingly normal and intelligent Bara, bumble along in ignorance of the most basic rules of social and moral life.

They test the diviner's word by attempting to marry the children of brothers. This is for the Bara a permitted but rare marriage arrangement. It is a true test of the diviner's advice since it is more anomalous than cross-cousin marriage because both parents belong to the same patrilocal group.

Indeed, as a result of this, the normal marriage arrangements are all reversed in the story. It is the father of the bride who proposes and provides the cow, both of which are the obligations of the groom's family. And the father of the groom, rather than the father of the bride, performs the ritual. At one level, the reversals are the logical result of the fact that the parties are of the same patrilocal group and that the groom's father happens to be the elder. Again, important situations are simultaneously the epitome of normality and the height of absurdity. Yet, with everything wrong, this marriage of paternal parallel cousins is successful.

What is this *tandra* ritual that is emphasized in all of these stories and seems to be at the very heart of Bara marriage customs? From the tales, it is clear that the manifest function of the rite is to remove the general sexual taboo between kin and therefore permit a marriage between particular cousins. Most commentators have adopted this explanation for their analyses of Malagasy marriage, and such is certainly Faublée's position regarding the Bara (1953: 34-36).

These two tales, however, present a more complex picture than that of a simple dispensation from a general

prohibition, for the general prohibition of close marriage (with its corollary of marriage to outsiders) is certainly not given any logical priority over the custom of cousin marriage. All of these stories stress the custom of cousin marriage as a primary feature of Bara social organization, and they all ignore (as being of no relevance to Bara values) the possibility of out-marriage. Normal practice among the Bara is to celebrate the *tandra* (or *fafy*) ritual only for marriages between first cousins. Essentially, the *tandra* consists of doubling the usual ritual, with one sacrifice and invocation performed by the bride's patriarch, and another, by the groom's patriarch. Marriage with more distant kin rarely entails an additional ritual, unless, of course, the couple have been intimate before the marriage, in which case an atonement ritual will be celebrated.

In light of these folktales, one must go beyond a mere restatement of the manifest purpose of the ritual in order to account for the *tandra* and its implications for Bara marriage customs. The sexual prohibition and the marriage preference are two aspects of a single system, and the general prohibition of sex between kin does not extend to the *tandra* marriage of cousins. For the Bara, the notion that such preferred marriages might not be allowed exists only in the topsy-turvy world of folktales, not in reality. Rakoto (1966:7-22; 1971:45-100) argued perceptively that the *tandra* ritual not only provides dispensation but more importantly, also celebrates and reaffirms the positive virtue of marriage between a "brother" and a "sister." This extra ritual serves to set the ideal marriage apart from all other forms of sexual relationship. The *tandra* marriage ritual defines the ultimate inner limits of preferred endogamy and reaffirms the kinship ties that otherwise would be compromised by random sexual association. This double aspect of dispensation and celebration, of positive and negative emphasis on these relations with close kin, is familiar to us as the very essence of ritual taboo and social avoidance behavior. One can do no better than to quote from Steiner's *Taboo*:

. . . we can see that positive and negative transmission are not merely contemporaneous by accident; they are interdependent. Any ritual or practice embodying belief in negative transmission strengthens attitudes toward

positive transmission. What is remarkable about the two kinds of transmission, surely, is the way they combine to create a universe of properties. . . Only by conceiving these properties as active, human relationships can one conceive structured social life in terms of them. (1967: 65)

Lest the reader conclude that there is no limit to Bara compromise regarding familial sex, let me describe the ultimate line between, on one hand, the most valued marriages and, on the other, the most abhorred incest. This line is not where a Westerner might expect, for it is firmly drawn, not merely around siblings and other primary kin, but around the children of sisters as well. Regarding the incest taboo, matrilineal parallel cousins (for several generations) are, in a sense, classed with siblings. This taboo against marriage and sex between individuals related through the uterine line is the most absolute, most important, and most emphasized of all Bara sexual prohibitions. Its ramifications permeate the entire social system. In recognition of this, Faublée placed the relevant folktale first in his collection of over three hundred. So once again, we turn to the storyteller for our opening clues to the meaning of this taboo.

The Children of Sisters

There were two sisters who each had a child. One had a boy and one a girl. There was famine. They went out to find food, these two, leaving their children in the village. When the mothers returned, they heard their babies crying. The mother of the girl went over and picked up the boy and began to breast-feed him. The other called out:

"That one is not yours, but mine. For yours is the girl, mine is the boy. Let us go and ask the old women who look after the children, for you don't even know your own child, whereas I certainly know to whom I gave birth."

"Fine, let us not fight. Let us go and ask the old women."

"We have been disputing over our children. She does not recognize her own. Perhaps you who care for the children can distinguish hers from mine, for I have no wish to argue with her."

"It is the elder who has the boy and the younger who has the girl. So don't argue any longer."

"I cannot agree," said the younger sister. "I am going wherever I must to retain my rightful child."

"Fine, go," said the old women.

She went to the king.

"Greetings, King, I come here because the old women who care for our children, my sister's and mine, switched them while we were away. I know which is mine because he is a boy, and my sister has a girl."

"Tell these old women, and your husbands, to come here before me."

"You have arrived," said the king.

"Yes," replied the old women.

"I've brought you here because a woman complains that you have switched her child."

"She is wrong," said the old women, "hers is the girl, that of her sister is the boy."

"That is not true," replied the woman.

"You men, what are your thoughts? You, husband of the woman complaining, tell us, does your wife speak the truth?"

"Not at all," he replied, "ours is a girl, not a boy."

"There, woman, agree, for your spouse speaks the truth. For you did not give birth to a male, but you gave birth to a female."

"I don't agree, anyway it is not the man who gives birth, but the woman."

"Bring me the children. I shall find out the truth."

They brought the babies to the king.

"Go far away and when you return, let each pick her child. If they do not cry you can each take your own."

The woman who insisted she was mother to the boy picked him up and he cried.

"There," said the king, "he is not your child. Take your daughter."

"Oh, I am unhappy, King, give us permission to marry these two children together."

"I don't know of any such custom. Go ask God."

So they arrived before God.

"We have come here because our children were exchanged. Mine, a boy, was taken by my sister, who has a girl. The king wished me to give him to my sister, but I

"That is not true," said the other sister, "however, we asked the king for an enabling custom, but the king refused and sent us here to you, because you will know what custom to give us."

"I will give you the custom. Since your children have been exchanged, I don't know which of you gave birth to the girl and which to the boy. Go home and I'll send someone to announce the custom."

"Go, messenger, and tell the sisters whose children have been exchanged that the children of sisters cannot marry for they are exchanged."

And it is for that reason that the children of two sisters cannot marry.

It is not I who lies, but this lie comes from olden times.

Again, let us ease into this tale by first considering some of the manifest sources of humor for the Bara. One small point of humor is the complaining woman's dismissal of her husband's evidence. Of course, a man knows the sex of his child, yet behind her absurd obstinacy is the fact that women do ultimately have priority over men in all that concerns birth and children. The complaining woman keeps taking her case to higher authorities, each of whom is less competent than the preceding one since each is less familiar with the case.

The order of witnesses called by the king is likewise absurd. Having heard the impartial view of the old women and the word of the woman's husband, the king relies on the crying of a baby to decide the case. This silly sequence of higher authorities upholds an important Bara axiom that family matters should be settled at home. Only the party in error has anything to gain by appeal to higher authorities who are distant and ignorant of the facts. The highest authority, God, is the most ignorant of all. Whereas everyone else is certain that the younger sister is wrong, God is unable to separate the two children properly.

And so, ironically, the most important law of society, the prohibition of both sex and marriage between the children of sisters, results from the peculiar obstinacy, cupidity, and stupidity of a woman combined with the sublime ignorance of God. In the face of this female tenacity, the elders, husband, and kings (with all their evidence and logical proof) are helpless. The reason for this

sexual prohibition is unknown, but it is rooted in the unique and mysterious qualities of the female. God forbids marriage because the children were exchanged, but beneath this *non sequitur* are suggestions about the nature of the female attributes that are ultimately responsible. The children cannot be separated one from the other; therefore, they cannot be reunited. Not only are the children of sisters inseparable, but their unity is based on confusion and disorder.

Taken together, this and the other two stories map out the range of marriage options in Bara custom. The Bara make sharp distinctions among the three categories of cousins that to the Western mind seem to embody equally close relationships. The children of sisters are absolutely forbidden as marriage partners, whereas the children of brothers are allowed to marry (if they perform the correct ritual). The third category, the children of a brother and sister, is not only permitted but even preferred among all possibilities.

The reasons for these sharp distinctions are not given except that each is somewhat arbitrarily announced by some authority. Yet, as we have seen, there are suggestions in the stories of the sorts of mysterious attributes differentially associated with the connection of potential spouses exclusively through females, through males, and through a male-female combination. Children of sisters have, in a sense, a single life essence that makes them inseparable or so interchangeable that one is just like the other. The children of two brothers may belong to the same corporate group, and their marriage may create awkward role reversals. However, their closeness (through males) is thought to be largely a social rather than a biological tie.

In these tales the favored cross-cousin marriage is four times highlighted through various negative and alternative examples: The relationship is neither (1) prohibited because of physical closeness like that through women, or (2) absurd because of social closeness like that through men. It (3) approaches the utopian qualities of the forbidden brother-sister marriage, provided that the partners (4) remember, as those cross-cousins in the story did not, to celebrate the *tandra* ritual.

This strong contrast between views of male-relatedness, on one hand, and those of female-relatedness, on the other hand, is an important theme in Bara culture

and a major structural feature of Bara society. In order to appreciate its implications for Bara conventions of sexual activity and marriage choice, we must follow the obvious path from marriage and sex to conception and birth. Although Bara marriage preferences and prohibitions are largely arbitrary social conventions, they are also part and parcel of Bara notions of biology and of the nature of the person, for one thing that often makes incest different from, say, adultery, is that it is seen to have automatic physical repercussions.

The Bara viewpoint is that incest causes infertility in the partners or in their offspring. The purely social ambiguities of improper sexual liaisons are of quite secondary importance compared with the resultant imbalance and deficiency in the sexual basis of life. Furthermore, the physical consequences of incest are not distributed equally between the man and the woman. In the folktale it is the woman who dies shortly after aborting, whereas the husband is in little danger. Bara uniformly state that illicit sex (rather than marriage) causes the death of the girl as a result of her stomach's swelling unnaturally, and informants agree that the boy is rarely harmed. We must remember the Bara notions of reproduction to understand why the physical consequences of incest are so much more grave for women than for men, and so much worse if the persons are related purely through females rather than through the intervention of at least one male.

The collection of notions about procreation relates, not only to this prohibition, but also to the strong preference for arranging marriages between the children of a brother and sister. Such marriages can be assigned a number of social functions, not the least of which is the one cited by Lévi-Strauss (1969), the maintenance of an existing affinal exchange relationship. Accordingly, the Bara consider such marriages to be socially stable since they take place within an already well-established pattern of relationships. Also, patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is the slightly preferred version because of its tendency to balance relations between allied families. But most important, the Bara consider both types of cross-cousin marriage to be safer in terms of incest than that with the prohibited matrilineal parallel cousin or tolerated patrilateral parallel cousin.

The cross-cousins, although the immediate offspring of full siblings, share neither the same maternal life essence nor the same male association of bone, ancestor, and corporate-group membership. The Bara give a number of reasons for shying away from marriage with father's brother's child, reflecting their uncertainty as to whether the father-child relationship has an organic as well as a social component. Although they generally emphasize the custom against the common hamlet residence of brothers-in-law, the Bara also recount some fear that marriages to parallel cousins are a bit too close (*marikitsy*) in terms of incest. In light of Bara notions of embryology, the cross-cousin union provides the ideal marriage, which is safe from dangers of incest but surrounded by established family relations that in turn are strengthened by the marriage.

6

Incest, Marriage, and Society

Incest, Atonement, and Social Categories

Bara marriage rests on an intriguing sexual paradox: sex between kin is sharply forbidden, and marriage between the same kin is strongly encouraged. How do we reconcile rules of incest prohibition with rules of endogamy? More to the point, how do the Bara reconcile these contradictory pressures within a social and sexual culture that is otherwise approving of casual sexual liaison? Bloch confronted the issue for the Merina people of Madagascar by asserting that the contradictory factors are of different orders: the injunction against incest is a moral and community value, whereas endogamous marriage is an individual (or narrow family) economic tactic (1971a:171; 1971d: 52-54).

Bloch's solution does not work for the Bara inasmuch as the two issues cannot be separated so neatly into different orders of community value versus individual advantage. Both incest prohibition and endogamy are moral injunctions, and both have implications for individuals' interests depending on the details of particular social situations. The incest and endogamy conundrum is the fundamental definitional axiom of Bara marriage deriving directly from their deeply held notions of maleness and femaleness and sexual conception.

In an important sense, however, Bloch is correct in stressing that the paradox gets worked out through the self-interested decisions and actions of individuals and families. This chapter is in three sections. I shall explore first

the topic of incest and the way incestuous acts define the border between kin and non-kin. Then I shall examine how the economic exchanges of cattle in marriage set up a complex system of interlocking liens that can be used as leverage to influence the decisions and behavior of others. Finally, I relate Bara institutions of incest and endogamy to classic anthropological theories of incest.

A distinction of great importance to Bara social relations is that drawn between kin (*hava*) and non-kin (*tsy-hava*). Individuals count among their kin all those related to them through their mother and father. It is this grouping of kin (*hava*) that relates most directly to the topic of incest, for it defines the category of forbidden sexual partners. All premarital or extramarital sexual relations with kin are prohibited. In addition to physical intercourse, any approach, proposition, or act that is vaguely preparatory or analogous to sex, such as stepping over the corner of a sister's sleeping mat, is considered a breach of the incest prohibition. This strict prohibition against sex with kin contrasts sharply with the otherwise rather tolerant Bara attitude toward casual sexual liaisons. Since young (and old) Bara generally have an active and varied sex life and since the category of kin includes the great majority of nearby members of the opposite sex, this incest rule is seen as a constraint.

A case that illuminates the importance the Bara attach to incest prohibition as a defining factor in social relations is that of a young Bara who had been born female but changed sexual identity to male. In order to carry on the normal comradeship he/she desired with his/her brothers, a special ritual was performed before the ancestors, declaring him male. The sexual deviancy itself was not seen as threatening the social and cosmological order, as has sometimes been the case in Western cultures. What was problematic for the Bara was the disorder in relations with close kin of both genders.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of Bara emotions regarding sex with kin, I wish simply to stress here that the incest taboo among the Bara is not one of those so-called rules that no one is really likely to break. The

consequences of breaking this incest prohibition can be severe. It is said that the girl will likely die from an unnatural and fatal swelling of her stomach. This description appears to resemble some bizarre sort of false pregnancy, although I cannot say to what extent the Bara make that association. Interestingly, men also are said to die from similar stomach swelling as a result of sorcerous medicine that a woman may place in her vagina before intercourse. Although the Bara, unlike some Malagasy groups, have different terms for incest (*mila fady*) and sorcery (*mamoriky*, *mamosavy*), there is a strong parallel between the two because incest and sorcery are both seen as forms of murder. Still, there is an important difference, for whereas sex-related sorcery supposedly can be prevented and cured by a shaman's (*ombiasy*) charms and medicines, the dangers of incest can be averted only through recourse to the ancestors.

Should a girl be propositioned by a related youth, she must report it immediately to her parents to avoid the risk of losing her life. Her parents then demand a cow from his parents for sacrifice to the gods and ancestors in the ritual of atonement (*mangala togn*). The girl's parents are irate that the boy should be so callous as to risk her life for the sake of his own pleasure, and they must kill one of his cows that their daughter may live.

Generally, the boy's parents readily agree to see that he brings one of his cows for the atonement ritual, for it is a moral duty to help kin in difficulty or danger. A boy may be so egotistical or lustful as to risk the death of his kinswoman, and even an adult man might in a brief lapse give in to temptation, but afterward his parents and patriarch have no such excuses. To refuse to provide the expiatory cow would be a breach of the all-important obligations of kinship, a breach as serious as the incest itself.

The relationship of kinship (*fihava*) is one of the most important values in Bara social life. In general, one is obligated to treat all kin fairly, to come to their aid, and to avoid even the hint of violence toward them, and these obligations are codified and hedged by numerous minor and

major taboos (*fady*). Although Bara would not deny disliking certain individuals of their kin, they nonetheless maintain a significant attitude of trust and affection toward kin in general. A man can trust his kin because he knows them, probably likes them, perhaps has experience in dealing with them, and because they respect the wrath of their common ancestors should trust be betrayed.

Thus when arranging the most difficult enterprise of all, the marriage of one's child, the Bara prefer a match with kin. Experience has shown them that when trusting others with the well-being of children, future grandchildren, and cattle, it is prudent to deal with kin. When asked about their marriage customs, the Bara always say that there are two kinds, marriage with kin (*fanabady hava*) and marriage with others (*fanabady amin'olo*). The great preference is for the former, and more than sixty percent of the present marriages in the village where I did research are between people classified as kin (usually first and second cousins by "Western" reckoning). Over seventy-five percent of the individuals have been married at one time to such a relative.

Young women often resent such arranged marriages, and afterward they are taunted privately by their former boyfriends about having incestuous relations with their "brothers." With the exception of the brides, however, the Bara place great value on these family marriages. And so the Bara category of *hava* (which in anthropological jargon is an ego-centered kindred that, as a result of the high rate of endogamy, is largely isomorphic for closely related individuals) defines, on one hand, the category of forbidden sexual partners and, on the other hand, the category of preferred spouses.

Despite the sanctions, people do occasionally break the taboo against premarital sex with kin. It is difficult to say how often, but it seems that a sizable minority of people have been involved in at least one case of incest accusation and atonement. The Bara term for incest, *mila fady*, means "to seek the forbidden" and is generally applied to the male. Almost all cases involve somewhat distant cousins, and it is this outer border of Bara sexual prohibitions that

concerns us here. Men "seek the forbidden"; women are sought.

It is an amatory accomplishment of sorts for a young man to seduce an attractive and distantly related girl. Usually she reports his first proposition, and his attempt and failure become public. But there is also the slim chance that she will not report him, or that she will be willing to make love before reporting. Youths soon learn that it is a loser's gamble. Obviously, it takes two to get involved in such an affair, and some girls seem to get satisfaction from leading a boy on to risk one of his beloved cattle for her sake. For some young Bara men and women, this sort of sex play with distant kin is the rare and risky but exciting boundary of the normal game of sexual conquest.

I have not specified exactly where that boundary lies, or to what degree of consanguinity the sexual prohibition extends. This is because the Bara make no such rigid specification; they state simply that one should not have sex with anyone with whom a kinship relationship can be traced. Indeed, it is these cases of incest and atonement that help to establish in practical terms the operational limits of the *hava*. For if, as sometimes occurs, the boy's family refuses to provide the sacrificial beast, then the girl's family angrily announces that there has been no incest, since those crude people are obviously no kin of theirs. Amid bitterness and dispute, the kinship relationship between two families is thus terminated, and sexual relations are henceforth permitted.

Conversely, acceptance of the ritual of atonement is a public affirmation of the continued relationship between the two families. Years afterward, the event will be cited as proof of kinship. When a Bara wants to demonstrate that his family is related to another, he often makes a statement to the effect that a certain old man of his family once "gave up a cow" after seducing a now ancient lady of the other family.

Incest was a topic I learned a bit more about during my second field trip to the Bara when I was traveling without spouse and sleeping in the bachelor hut of my blood brother's hamlet. One night an attractive young woman

came to the hut wanting to have sex with me. As she was closely related to my blood brother, I politely refused on the grounds that it would be incest. She then tried to persuade any of the other young men to have sex with her, and they also demurred on the grounds of incest. It was quite certain that she wanted sex and was not interested in making a case for a cow, but these guys were taking no chance despite the fact that they had just been complaining about their "horniness." They all agreed that although it was not really incestuous for me to have sex with my blood brother's kinswoman, I had acted prudently. If her father made a case (and surely he would have heard of the incident), I would have had to choose between purchasing and sacrificing an expensive cow in affirmation of my tenuous status as kinsman and denying my status as "kin."

Actual genealogical ties may be forgotten or not be particularly relevant, but the ritual affirmation of direct responsibility of a girl's life and fertility is the most meaningful proof of common kinship between two families. We must examine this ritual closely, for it plays an important role in resolving, at one level, the supposed contradiction between prohibition and preference toward the same category of sexual and marriage partners.

The ritual of atonement for sex with kin takes the form of the usual Bara invocation and sacrifice that is also the central act of rituals of circumcision, curing, and marriage. The patriarch of the girl's patriline explains the reason for the sacrifice (*tata*) in a simple speech to the gods and ancestors; the young man involved kills the cow with the patriarch's knife; and the patriarch then sprinkles those involved and those observing with a mixture of water and a bit of blood from the sacrifice. As in marriage, the sacrifice should be performed by the patriarch, with a cow provided by the boy. The stated purpose of the rite (according to all informants, following the text of the patriarch's invocation, and embodied in the name of the ritual, *mangala tognò*) is to "remove the transgression" that has been committed.

This ritual clearly has social implications in addition to the efficacious intervention with the supernatural. As

stated earlier, the performance of the ritual is also an affirmation of kinship, of a continuing relationship between families. This is important to the Bara, for with the passage of genealogical time, such ties weaken and become questionable. Although the usual way to shore up such links is through arranging endogamous marriages between children and grandchildren of the different lines, there are always more relationships to be maintained than there are children to marry. So incest and atonement between distant cousins can and often do function as a sort of bargain-basement means of alliance maintenance. And whereas incest in general is abhorred, specific transgressions, properly atoned for, often are accepted with amused tolerance.

In the three cases of incest involving people I knew well, complicated social circumstances made the atonement ritual's implied affirmation of kinship advantageous to one or both parties. One case can stand as an example. It is typically complex, and I apologize if the following simplified version remains difficult to follow. However, since the complexity and ambiguity of the social situation provide the necessary leeway for action, oversimplification would obscure the sense.

A young friend came to my hut one day in a state of great excitement and told me confidentially that he was soon going to commit incest. Several days later he arrived in a more serious mood to inform me that the patriarch of his lineage (his grandmother) had invited me to view a ritual that I had never seen—incest atonement.

At his hamlet, the family was joking and discussing his sexual transgression with mock seriousness. His grandmother donated her skinniest young cow for the ritual, mumbling sarcastically to the amusement of all about how the way this boy carries on she will be lucky to have any cattle left for her own funeral. Part of the levity resulted from the fact that this incest atonement ritual was convenient for them because of a complicated social situation. My friend's brother had a long-standing dispute with a man distantly related to the girl in question, a dispute that had recently been violent, with my friend's

brother in the wrong. The girl's guardian (Miny from the first case study of chapter four) was also involved in a bitter disagreement with his patriarch, the father of my friend's brother's adversary. The incest-atonement ritual forced the girl's guardian to affirm his kinship with my friend's family while simultaneously widening his dispute with his patriarch.

Interestingly, since his dispute with his patriarch centered on the latter's supposed misuse of his patriarchal office, the girl's guardian was loath to have his patriarch celebrate the atonement ritual according to custom. As he dared not celebrate the ritual himself, he was forced to suggest that in this incest case the patriarch/grandmother of the transgressing male perform the sacrifice. My friend's family and grandmother had the enviable task of sacrificing (and eating) their own cow in placation of their own ancestors while creating havoc among the ranks of their adversary. It could not have worked out better for them, unless, of course, the young man had also succeeded in what was to him the most important goal, making love to his pretty cousin.

In certain respects, an all too familiar sort of functional explanation presents itself here. Incest avoidance and the ritual of incest atonement not only please the ancestors and avoid "supernaturally" caused physical illness, but they also help maintain an important social category. This appears to hark back to many of the studies of African unilineal systems in which avoidance was seen to maintain the entire system of societal order. But there is an important difference. Bara incest regulations relate, not to corporate unilineal groups, but to a general social and moral category, *hava*, which is essentially a cognatic kindred. Since this category amounts to little other than who is and who is not related to one, and is not a corporate or political group, there is no direct way the incest prohibition and atonement ritual can be viewed as supporting societal integration.

Still, we need to examine carefully certain functional aspects of these Bara institutions: (a) The avowed purpose and necessary reason for the atonement ritual is to placate

the ancestors and to avoid illness and death for the girl. Other aspects must be viewed as additions to, rather than reductions of, this manifest purpose of the incest atonement ritual. (b) By its nature the atonement ritual is also an affirmation of kinship, hence is a perfect vehicle for stressing particular social links and for indirectly pressuring others to affirm such ties and act accordingly. As we have seen, Bara participants are well aware of this specific function of the ritual. (c) Finally, the fact that the ritual allows for the affirmation of social ties has implications in relation to the systematic aspects of Bara kinship. Since, as we have seen, the category of kin (*hava*) has no definite genealogical boundaries, the rituals function to maintain the categorical distinction between kin and non-kin. The natural expansion over genealogical time of the networks of kinship is thus periodically checked, defining the limits of kinship and matching the ideal category to the current demographic reality.

There is, however, a catch in the last clause, and that is the well-known tautology of such explanations. Sexual regulation may be said to maintain the category of kinship, but more than that, it is itself the most important aspect, almost the very essence, of the Bara definition of kinship (*fihava*). Since other obligations of common kinship (mutual aid, and so on) are secondary to (or, at least, no more important than) the ancestral regulation of sexuality between kin, it would be absurd to view the latter as maintaining anything other than itself. We have seen that at a certain normative level, sex with kin is absolutely forbidden and carries strong sanctions. Yet it occurs and if atoned for properly in ancestral sacrifice is acceptable and even, in some circumstances, welcome. Marriage between kin is common and strongly preferred despite the strong norm against sex with kin. It is only by viewing all aspects of sexual regulations and preference that the seeming contradiction between sexual prohibition and marriage preference is minimized. Sex between unrelated individuals is largely their own affair. Sex with kin is important and should take place within marriage so as to contribute to the

one's family.

Marriage and Cattle Exchange

Bara men always comment on how difficult it is to find a wife. These difficulties, however, do not derive from any inherent shortage of women or from the need to provide a large gift of cattle in exchange for a wife. The sacrifice of only one cow establishes the marriage, and the later transfer of another cow strengthens the relationship. For most Bara men, with their herds of thirty to one hundred cattle, this marriage transfer imposes no hardship.

Generally, there are three ways men acquire a wife. Either the union is prearranged by a grandparent while the future spouses are quite young, or the marriage is arranged by the families when the children come of age, or, finally, two unrelated people have a love affair, set up house together, and eventually formalize the arrangement. The last method is extremely rare for a first marriage.

The marriage of my blood brother (*fatidra*) to his patrilineal cross-cousin was arranged by their grandmother—his father's mother, her mother's mother. Shortly before she died the grandmother called in her son, daughter, and son-in-law and told them that their two children must marry when they come of age. This command was never made public, and neither the boy nor the girl was told until several days prior to the marriage. Such marriages must be performed to avoid the wrath of an angry ancestor, and it is interesting that such a marriage is one of the few aspects of Bara life over which a maternal ancestor is seen as having powers of sanction.

For most young men such advance arrangements have not been made, and the search for a wife begins as the boy approaches maturity. The boy's family has implicit claims on certain girls, and those possibilities are considered first. The father's sister's daughter and other girls of that family are the most likely marriage prospects. When a man requests that one of his sister's daughters be married to his son, the request can hardly be refused. An outright refusal

would be an insult, and one does not insult the wife's brother. Among other things, the girl's mother's brother, if angry, can veto any future marriage plans for her. One also has claims, to a lesser extent, on daughters of matrilineal relatives and those of more distant patrilineal kin. But such claims do not automatically assure one of finding a wife, for there are numerous claims on each eligible girl.

The boy's father makes a formal call on the family of the girl and presents his proposition. Every adult relative of the girl's mother's and father's families must agree to the proposed marriage. Marriage negotiations take place not so much between the bride's and groom's families as between segments of the girl's family. Those members of her family most closely related to the suitor must persuade members of collateral lines to accept the marriage. Since marriage is almost the only means of maintaining social relationships between groups, and since there are generally more relationships in need of maintenance than there are marriageable girls, each marriage strengthens one relationship only at the expense of weakening others.

If the proposal is accepted, an astrologer is consulted (several times) and a date is set. The acceptance of a marriage proposal is always rather tentative, and it is not all that rare for a member of the girl's family to raise an objection moments before the ceremony is to take place. There is generally one last council (*kabaro*) of the girl's family in the presence of the boy and his father at which each member expresses (in reverse order of seniority) his or her view of the proposal. Finally, everyone looks to the patriarch for the verdict, and if it is positive he or she announces, "Let us eat meat."

The marriage ritual itself is seldom very elaborate or festive. It consists mainly of the killing of a cow in a *tata* or *tandra* sacrifice to the ancestors. Young girls are generally quite unhappy about the marriage arrangement, and they often express their feelings quite openly. In one case the girl sobbed and shouted throughout the ritual that she wished that the boy would be struck by lightning. Older brides bring their children by other men, and they often nurse the

youngest during the marriage ritual.

Despite the distractions, the groom's cow is tied in the proper fashion, and the patriarch of the girl's family makes his addresses to the gods and ancestors announcing the marriage of the two young people. The groom then kills the cow and presents the bloody knife to the patriarch, who then asperses all assembled with a mixture of the blood and water. If the bride and groom are closely related, then the patriarchs of both families will address the gods and ancestors. If the bride and groom are first cousins, then two separate *tata* rituals must be performed, one at the place of sacrifice of each family, in order to "lift" the incest taboo. Both cows are provided by the groom. At the end of the ritual, the bride returns to her hamlet, the men butcher the cow and divide the meat, and the groom and his father return home with a small amount of meat.

Several weeks after the ritual is performed, the bride moves to the hamlet of the husband and the marriage is consummated. The timing of the move is subject to some negotiation, and the bride's family often repeatedly postpones the move. Sometime after the couple has set up house, the girl's father will visit and demand the gift of a live cow (*tongarondra*) to ratify the marriage. On this matter it is the husband who often stalls, not wishing to part with the cow unless he feels certain that the girl will remain with him. Generally the *tongarondra* is not reclaimable should she leave.

The transfer of the *tongarondra*, generally a yearling and always female, more than anything else establishes a lasting affinal relationship between the husband and his new father-in-law (*rafoza*) and brothers-in-law (*valy lahy*, "male spouse"). The cow remains in the herd of the wife's father and brothers and is held in trust for the future children. Although the husband has given only one small cow, the result is that long-term control over a number of his cattle has been passed to his wife's family. The cows multiply, and after a decade as many as ten of the husband's son's cattle are controlled by the female-linked relatives.

The mother's brother periodically returns some, but never all, of the cattle to his sister's son. And so the original transfer of the *tongarondra* sets up a permanent giver-

receiver relationship between the two families. The father has received a woman from his affines, and the son receives cattle from his mother's family. Because women and cattle are the two most highly prized items, this debt can never really be repaid. In transferring the *tongarondra* to the wife's family, the father increases his chance of gaining jural authority over his child. But at the same time, the transfer of this cow provides for future *de facto* influence of the mother's brother over his sister's son, influence that counters the authority of the father. Whenever the mother's brother wishes to assert his influence, he may do so either by giving or by withholding cattle from his sister's son, depending on the circumstances.

The system of cattle exchange makes the whole question of cattle ownership quite complex. The oldest male of the household has control over the family herd and generally makes the decisions regarding the care of the cattle. However, his rights to many of the animals in their herd are limited to some degree, since many of the cattle have claims on them from female-linked relatives. One man's herd includes many cattle that he has in trust for various sisters' sons, cattle that his sons have received from their mothers' brothers, cattle from his own mother's brother (or the offspring of such cattle), and cattle that he inherited from his father. The composition of every herd is a reflection of all the marriages of all the males and females of that family that have taken place over several generations. Just as there are multiple claims on every marriageable girl, there are also multiple claims on every animal in the herd. (The Bara used the ambiguity of cattle ownership to their advantage when reporting their bovine holdings for payment of the cattle head tax of 140 Malagasy francs [approximately U.S.\$0.60]. They would attribute ownership of many animals to various hard-to-locate female kin. This was offset, however, by their tendency to list animals long dead to avoid paying the slaughter tax of 400 Malagasy francs).

The system of interlocking cattle liens functions to some extent as a mechanism for social control. For example, a young man named Boba took over the family

herd of ninety cattle on the death of his father. During the first year he sold fifteen yearlings and spent the proceeds on women and rum. His father's sisters became nervous about the safety of their children's cattle that were in Boba's herd, and with the blessings of their remaining brothers, they took their shares to their husbands' villages for safekeeping. Boba continued to care for the herd in a reckless manner, and his father's sisters claimed more cattle. In slightly over a year, his herd decreased in number from ninety to thirty-five. At that stage he went to visit his mother and mother's brother who gave him ten cattle to take back to his village. However, shortly thereafter his half-brother and even his own son grew tired of his shenanigans, and each took his share of the herd and joined with one of his father's brothers. Whereas he began with a herd of ninety cattle and two assistant herdboys, Boba soon had a herd of only about thirty cattle, which he had to herd by himself for twelve hours a day, every day. In such a situation, it is difficult to perform necessary chores such as rice cultivating and hut repair or to participate in social events.

Boba's case is extreme, but it illustrates the sort of influence the system of interlocking cattle liens grants to kin of certain categories. Marriage, the Bara say, is an exchange (*raha fanakalo ny fanabady*). On the most general level, it is an exchange of trust. The man is trusted by his affines with the fertility of a woman. The size of a man's herd reflects, among other things, the degree to which he is able to maintain relationships of mutual respect with his relatives. This Boba failed to do, and the decreasing size of his herd registers his loss of moral stature in the community.

Society and Biology

Before leaving the topic of incest prohibition and endogamous marriage, I want to take some time to consider the Bara customs in relation to classic anthropological theory. The topic of incest is at the center of the Bara notion

of the nature of their society, just as it is at the heart of anthropological theorizing about the origins and elementary structures of human society. It is the intellectual ground where sexuality mingles with social structure and political power. To conclude this chapter on rules of incest and marriage, let us review the general anthropological issues involved and then review the Bara attitudes toward incest and marriage. I go to this trouble because the topic of incest is so commonly used to shore up Western theoretical perspectives on society that it could easily lead us away from a proper understanding of the dynamic relationship between biology and society that animates the social and sexual experiences of Bara individuals, and the structure of gender relations in many societies.

It is paradoxical that despite the long-standing prominence of the topic of incest taboo in studies of kinship, there are rather few detailed ethnographic accounts. This has been attributed to the sensitive nature of the topic, which makes it difficult to collect data or to discuss it freely in the field situation. Certainly this is often the case with this and the other topics that concern the anthropologist. But it seems as if there may be an additional impediment to the study of incest prohibitions, and that is the rather bizarre importance given to the topic in the structure of anthropological theory.

A number of influential writers have presented the incest taboo in terms of either the origins of human culture or the definition of the essence of human society. Although today we associate this grand approach with the theories of Lévi-Strauss, it hardly originates in his work; and it is no detraction to note, with Needham (1971:24), that Lévi-Strauss's approach to the incest taboo was in a sense a culmination of a long trend in anthropological thought.

Many approaches, despite their diversity of explanation, focus on the problem of the integration of the variable complexity of human cultural forms with some more uniform biological imperative. It would be tedious to rehearse all the differences among the approaches to the issue, and for the present it is sufficient to note that the concept of incest prohibition as a rule regulating mating

(whatever its supposed source and function) serves as an important link between the organic and superorganic aspects of various Western perspectives on the nature of social man. Such theoretical weight adds an inevitable distortion to the analysis of sexual taboos, a distortion that is less of a problem in, say, the analysis of food taboos. For at the root of the many anthropological approaches to incest prohibition lurks a rather vague notion that it is some sort of key to the very nature of human society.

Clearly, there is a certain mythical quality about the various social anthropological theories of incest prohibition. After all, those theories of incest prohibition that stress origins cannot be supported empirically since the archaeological record of sexual restraint is minimal. (It is amazing how the idiom of "origins" persists regarding incest taboo long after it has ceased to be considered useful in the analysis of any other basic cultural phenomenon.) And those theories that postulate the universality of the taboo flounder in the sticky problem of cross-cultural definition. Although "incest theories" provide powerful intellectual devices for ordering theories of society, they do not reasonably invite empirical proof or disproof. As Needham recognized, there can be no general theory of incest since it is "a mistaken sociological concept and not a universal" (1971:29). Given this theoretical legacy, what directions might an ethnographic investigation of incest prohibitions usefully take? Why raise the topic at all?

I raise it because, despite the evanescence of the analytical category of incest and the falsity of the problem of its taboo, complex formulations relating to sex with close kin remain extremely important components of social life and values in many parts of the world. Certainly for the Bara, incest and its prohibition provide a real symbolic connection between essentially social constructs and the natural, biological essence of human beings. The Bara, somewhat like the Western theorists, seem to use the notion of incest as a central device in their concept of society.

The social anthropologist's goal in the study of incest is the same as for any other topic: to make intelligible to us **important aspects of life in a foreign culture.** Furthermore,

it is the often related experience of anthropology that this ethnographic concern gives us an important and necessary perspective on the ethnocentric roots of our own explanatory systems. An additional aim, and one that is sometimes forgotten by anthropologists rushing to construct models and hypotheses, is that we humbly hope to learn valuable lessons from the wisdom of other peoples. This is particularly striking regarding the present topic, for the world's folk theories regarding incest prohibition are as consistent and accurate as the various hypotheses that Western social science has paraded out over the past one hundred years (Burton 1973: 504–13).

Given the problems with anthropological approaches to incest prohibition, problems bequeathed to us by an emphasis on the origin and definition of social man, what can we usefully conclude from this analysis of Bara institutions of sexual prohibition and marriage preference? The fact that the Bara situation differs from those postulated in most general theories can neither prove nor disprove those theories. For the Bara cannot represent primal man, nor do their particular customs negate the usefulness of the postulated incest taboo as a heuristic device in Western social thought. Nonetheless, it is well to note the most salient contrasts between incest theory in its grand forms and customs relating to incest in this one ethnographic context.

The most striking contrast is in terms of the complexity, subtlety and ambiguity of incest prohibitions *in vivo* in comparison with the logical simplicity of incest in most grand theory. This comes as no surprise, for one could hardly expect society to have its earliest beginnings in anything as complex as Bara customs of sexual regulations. Also, theories of incest, postulating origins or used as axioms, must by definition be simple and unambiguous. This contrast is worth emphasizing since the legacy of incest theory tends to lead us falsely in search of simplicity in just that area of human behavior that is most problematic and complex: the relationship between sexuality and morality.

The contrast between the complexity of a specific

cultural institution of incest prohibition and the simplicity of general theory may be explored briefly along the two dimensions of "biology" and "society," parallel to Goody's (1956) point that there are separate incest rules deriving from each realm. It will, however, be quickly apparent that Goody's separation is heuristic, and in reality the two realms are closely entwined. The contrast between the grand theories and the Bara example is quite clear along the "social" dimension. Grand theory (Lévi-Strauss 1969:43; Murdock 1949:284-313) would lead one to expect a simple logical relation between sexual prohibition, on one hand, and marriage prescriptions, preferences, or tendencies, on the other. If one category of partners is sexually forbidden, it is expected that marriages will generally take place elsewhere. Fox (1967:55), Leach (1970:103), and others have noted that this relationship must be demonstrated rather than assumed.

The first jolt the Bara provide to our theoretical expectations is the combination of strong incest regulations with endogamous marriage traditions. This seeming illogicality soon passes, however, as we adjust our categories from unilineal to cognatic kinship systems and remind ourselves that "endogamy" and "exogamy" are but two crude glosses for a variety of forms of the same phenomenon (Lévi-Strauss 1969:47). Yet, even after making this adjustment in our analytical categories, we are left with a certain overlap between prohibitions and preferences, and an apparent contradiction in indigenous principles of action.

General approaches lead us to expect a particular mode of decision making regarding incest prohibition and marriage. At least those sociological theories that view the taboo as a jural and moral rule constraining individual action for the sake of some wider social welfare (Lévi-Strauss 1969:43) predispose us to emphasize those choices that fall along the axis of altruism versus self-interest (Bloch's "moral and tactical"). After all, this has been part of the compelling mystery of the taboo: Why have people instituted a taboo serving the broader and longer welfare when this welfare was not perceptible as such and when

narrower and shorter-term considerations would seem to recommend a more *laissez-faire* attitude? Regardless of the particular solutions that have been proposed, this formulation of the problem has led anthropologists to grant incorrectly a certain logical and motivational primacy to the distinction between altruistic action and interested action.

To a limited extent, the Bara do view certain aspects of incest prohibition according to distinctions between altruism and self-interest, between broad moral concerns and narrow practical goals. For instance, many Bara state that the former royal clan (the *Zafimanely*) greedily married too incestuously too often; and for compromising this moral value, they paid the inevitable price of demographic decline. Similarly, this sort of self-interested fiddling with the general moral injunction characterizes much of the hanky-panky between distantly related adolescents leading to the performance of atonement rituals.

However, this mode of guiding and judging such acts is absent from the complicated scheme of marrying close cousins. Here, as we noted earlier, both the taboo against and the preference for such close unions are equally rooted in general moral values and in the tactical interests of the parties involved. Although general theories of incest taboo as the primary jural rule of society lead us to consider the altruistic versus interested mode of action as the most plausible, this mode of action is but one among many and has no necessary priority regarding incest and marriage.

The "biological" dimension of classical incest theories rests partly on whether or not primal man (or his supposed counterpart in societies lacking our scientific knowledge) is capable of perceiving the deleterious prohibition. It has been held that the genetic consequences of incest could not be apprehended inductively and therefore some other cause or function must be found to explain the seeming universality of the incest taboo. However, Burton (1973) suggests that the possibility of the ill results of mating primary kin being apprehended as such is by no means ruled out. He cites the fact that people in many societies

maintain that incest produces "bad stock," and he argues that under certain demographic conditions, incestuous mating would produce a high enough percentage of physically or mentally feeble children for the causal link to be recognized and remembered.

As we have seen, the Bara maintain staunchly that the result of incest is fewer and weaker offspring. But Burton's concern whether this indigenous notion is arrived at empirically seems a bit naive in the face of the complexity of the issue. For if the Bara, or any other people, are to perceive the causal genetic connections between incest and bad offspring, they can do so only through their own culturally specific sets of categories. The Bara, for instance, may have noted that incest produces bad offspring, but even so, this scientific fact can be apprehended only through a complex set of notions about blood and bone, female and male, substance and form, spirits and ancestors that relates somewhat remotely to the genetic situation.

The problem of whether peoples recognize the result of incest is subordinate to the complicated issue of how peoples understand the connection between intercourse and pregnancy (the "virgin birth" controversy regarding Trobriand sexual conception). Notions of embryology are based, not on genetic operations, but largely on the observable regularity of physical processes. If certain aspects of sexual prohibition seem rather similar throughout the world, surely it is because they are in part a property of the uniformity of the observable biology and the logical limitations of reasonable interpretations. In this sense incest prohibition resembles another classic anthropological issue, the nearly universal use of left-right symbolism for the expression of moral and social values. The ethnographic investigation of a society's sexual prohibitions leads, on the "biological" dimension, ironically, but directly, to the Hertzian problem of body symbolism, an issue notably absent from the grand approaches to the incest taboo.

The ultimate grand contrast between Western analytical approaches and the Bara concern with incest is that between the ways the relation between society and

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biology are conceptualized. Despite the differences among theorists, their approaches reflect to varying degrees the often noted separation of mind from body that is so pervasive in Western thought. For these theories, forging links between biology and society, between nature and culture, between biological family and social alliance seems to be highly problematical. By contrast, the Bara see these aspects through unitary formulations that hardly admit the possibility of distinguishing the purely biological from the sociobiological from the purely social. "Male" and "Female" form the primary categories of a simultaneously physical, moral, and social humanity. Admittedly, the Bara view is not very effective from either a medical or an analytical perspective, but it displays a striking wisdom toward delicate human issues regarding social sexuality.

To consider further the Bara understanding of the relationships between society and biology (nature), body and mind, sexuality and social identity, we shall explore the meanings of the frequent Bara rituals of trance and spirit possession.

7

Trance and Feminine Power

Ritual of Spirit Possession

Trance is the arena where the symbolism of feminine vitality receives its most unhindered expression as it is mobilized to cure women of problems that are inseparably biological and social. Although such ritual is ostensibly aimed at the "cure" of an individual woman, the very definition of illness as both social and biological means that the "cure" not only is an individual female matter but also involves the readjustment of a whole network of relations. In the Bara village trance rituals are regular community events, during which the public joins in the drama of releasing and then reintegrating the dynamics of feminine power.

One student of the Bara (Faublée 1954), describing the trance rituals as the women's counterpart of the men's ancestral rituals, contrasted these "spirits of life" with the spirits of the dead. The contrast between these spirits and those of specific ancestors is correct, and the contrast between the feminine ideology of the trance spirits and the agnatic and masculine ideology of the ancestors is also correct. However, the trance ritual strongly resembles the funeral ritual in that both rituals manipulate the balance between male order and female vitality, purposely creating an excess of feminine vitality as a means of combating death, weakness, or barrenness.

Bilo spirit possession is, with the exception of certain funeral rites, the most frequent, elaborate, and costly social event in Bara village life. (I observed five *bilo* rituals and four closely related rituals of spirit possession during my time at Anosibe. Additional information was collected on cases that had taken place prior to my field residence.) A

bilo ritual generally lasts for two weeks, with hundreds of people attending and participating at certain phases and at least a dozen people involved almost constantly for the entire period. In addition to this expenditure of time, a *bilo* involves the slaughter of a cow, payment to a shaman (*ombiasy*), prolonged feeding of the principal assistants, and often the provision of rum for the hundreds attending one of the major phases of the ritual. Like the funeral rites, and in contrast to most other rituals, the *bilo* is a public event, and every Bara attends numerous *bilo* rituals every year. This sort of spirit possession is not a strange, frightening, or rare intrusion into social life but, rather, a common, boisterous, and happy event greeted with considerable pleasure by the village residents.

Because the term "spirit possession" can refer to a variety of situations, it is necessary to distinguish the *bilo* from other forms of Bara spirit possession. Almost any illness can be viewed by the Bara as resulting partly from an intrusion of some sort of malevolent spirit into the patient's body. In particular, the Bara recognize several categories of spirits of the bush (*helo*, *raharaha*, *arakaraky*) as being capable of causing illness and even death, and there are appropriate rituals for the exorcism of such spirits. More concretely, illnesses are also attributed to a certain snake that enters the mouth or anus of its sleeping victim; for this, too, there exists the necessary remedy. Additionally, there are rituals in which a person is put into a trance in order to serve as a medium of communication with the spirits of the dead. The *bilo*, however, differs from all other types of Bara spirit possession and curing rites in that the patient dances in a trance for two weeks. It is the Bara version of the "choreomania," which under various names and forms has often been reported throughout Madagascar. Despite the unique association of the *bilo* with "dancing mania," however, other aspects of *bilo* spirit possession are quite similar to certain attributes of possession by bush spirits so that one must guard against too rigid a distinction. We are dealing with a pool of associated and potent symbols. When faced with illness, anxious people dip in hopefully and scoop up changing configurations.

Bilo spirit possession is a "rite of spring," coming at the end of the hot dry period (*afasoa*), just on the verge of the new rains at the beginning of the year (*loha tao*). The level of

the river rises slightly as a result of rains in the mountains, and the parched and fire-burned land begins to turn green. New shoots of grass, poking through the ashes, provide food for the diminished herds of thin cattle, and small, young leaves sprout on the barren trees. *Bilo* spirit possession may occur at other times of the year, but it is with the season of new life that the *bilo* is mainly associated, and it is during this season that the majority of *bilo* rites occur. Many people state that as the new green leaves are inadvertently broken, the *bilo* spirit escapes into the world. The *bilo* spirit is said to be thirsty for the blood of the fattening cattle, thus lodging itself in a woman and causing a feeling of general malaise and weakness.

When a woman feels afflicted she complains to her family, and they call in a shaman (*ombiasy*) who determines the appropriate remedy, a *bilo* or some other curing rite. Because certain shamans are known as *bilo* specialists, the family and the patient indicate their wishes by the choice of a shaman. When the shaman decides to perform the *bilo*, a date is astrologically chosen for the opening rite, "awakening," or "bringing forth the *bilo* spirit" (*mamoha bilo*). The *bilo* spirit must be brought forth from within the woman so that it possesses her completely and she and the *bilo* become one. This is the stated purpose of the first phase of the ritual.

On the appointed day the patient, her kin (especially female kin), and the shaman gather in the house of her father while many observers crowd around outside. Chanting, clapping, drumming, shamanistic recitations, medicines, and incense all conspire to bring the woman into a trancelike state until she falls on the ground, seemingly unconscious. There is utter silence and then the shaman shouts in her ear to call forth the spirit. The woman arises in an apparently altered psychic state, the chanting and drumming resume, and she and the *bilo* are one. From this moment on, the *bilo* is surrounded by the various symbols of her state.

The woman carries in one hand a charm (*mohara*), which is a decorated cow horn filled with the shavings of medicinal trees blended in a mixture of wild honey and oil from the wild *kinagna* bush (the same elements that figure in the pregnancy rite and that serve as applications to a baby's fontanel). The mixture also contains coins and cow tail hairs. In her other hand she carries a stick to which is

attached a tiny bell called the "awakener" (*famoha mandry*). She does not speak, but her assistants constantly sound the conch shell (*atsiva*) and this sound is said to represent breath and life. Her hair is done in six puffs, the hairstyle also used by the mother in circumcision rites. It is said to represent sexual vitality and joy. And throughout the ritual the *bilo* spirit/woman dances and bathes repeatedly in the river.

The spirit does not always dance alone, for she chooses a partner and constant companion for the duration of the ritual, the "*bilo's* lover" (*tiam-bilony*). This lover is generally another woman who is a former *bilo*, but sometimes a man or even a cow is chosen. When a cow is chosen, it is bathed, and the young men often wrestle with it as in the funeral ceremonies and as at planting time. When the *bilo's* lover tires of dancing, she chooses another, and no one can refuse, not even the ethnographer. The dancing, especially by the spirit's lover, is lascivious.

This brief description does not nearly exhaust the many symbolic items and actions associated with the early phases of the rite, but it serves to demonstrate how all the elements of the rite conspire to express vitality, sexuality, breath, life, cattle, and wild nature. The woman's place in the mute, wild, fertile world of nature is emphasized, and her social characteristics are reduced to a minimum. She follows no social regulations or conventions, and her mimed commands are obeyed by all. She is, the Bara say, simultaneously "like a child and like a lord": beneath, above, and outside normal social rules. She eats after her juniors and before her elders, is utterly capricious and seemingly mad, loves dancing, and is attracted to the river. She recognizes no one and frequently gets lost. But everyone loves the *bilo* because she is so full of the spirit of life (*tena velo ny bilo*).

The craziness continues and increases for several days or, more often, a week, until the ritual becomes ripe (*masaky*) and the spirit/woman is particularly wild and shameless (*mandavo*). Then the participants perform the second major event, "putting the *bilo* up" (*manandratsy bilo*). Hundreds of people arrive to observe this rite and to drink rum. The spirit/woman is symbolically separated from the earth as inside her hut a hanging bed and a raised hearth are constructed to cater to her needs. The earth is associated with the ancestors, and the floor space with male

seating order, but the *bilo* is now removed from all that and placed above. Until the end of the ritual, she must sleep in her special bed and eat only food cooked on her raised hearth.

At this time an even number of male and female assistants are chosen by the *bilo* family to join her for the remainder of the rite. It must be an even number because such numbers are fertile and female, especially the numbers two, four, and six. (The number eight represents witchcraft, rebellion, and murder, that is, excessive vitality.) Odd numbers, especially one (God), seven (death), and nine (ancestors) are said to be sterile and male. The assistants who join the spirit/woman are called *mahavatsy* ("capable of being patient and fearless"). They must do everything in pairs and observe numerous taboos against any behavior analogous to discord.

The activities continue almost constantly for another week, leading to the closing event, "making the *bilo* drink" (*mampino bilo*), which climaxes with the spirit/woman drinking the blood of a slaughtered cow and bathing one last time in the river so that the woman and spirit are again separate. This last rite is extremely complex and loaded with symbolic paraphernalia. There is a raised altar (for the sacrifice) connected to a *rotsy* tree (which figures in pregnancy rites) by a "thread of life" (which must be made of white native cotton). On the tree hang six miniature winnowing baskets and an empty wooden window frame, the "doorway to the sky." On the ground are placed two obscene statues of a sexually aroused man and woman, and six miniature spears. Often there is also a miniature raised altar connected by a "thread of life" to a small "soft wet" plant such as the banana. Additionally, the many symbolic items and activities of the earlier phases—dancing, chanting, drumming; hair style, conch shell, cow horn charm, "awakener" bell—continue so that there is an accumulation and intensification of related symbols.

The closing of the ritual involves both the release of the spirit and the reintroduction of male sexuality and social order. A cow, chosen by the woman from her father's herd, is bound and lifted onto the altar. At this point the woman's paternal patriarch addresses the gods and ancestors as in a normal ancestral invocation ritual (*tata*). The spirit/woman and her assistants line up and circle

around the altar six times to the quickening beat of the

male drum. One of the male assistants then begins rhythmic spear feints at the cow's jugular vein, up and back, up and back, with increasing momentum in imitation of the sex act. At each thrust he looks at the *bilô*, who negatively shakes her head, not yet. Finally she nods, and he thrusts the spear deep into the cow's flesh. The *bilô* ecstatically drinks the blood directly as it spurts from the wound, and then, followed by her joyously shouting assistants, she runs wildly and blood-spattered to the river.

The blood of the cow is then boiled with a mixture that includes little pieces of every edible part of the cow, plus bits of every sort of domesticated crop. The woman (who is again sapient) and her assistants eat the mixture (*barobaro*) and are then free to return to their normal activities. The *bilô* spirit has left the woman. It has returned via the "thread of life" to the leaves of the *rotsy* tree; it has escaped through the "doorway to the sky" and vanished into the flowing river.

Bara spirit possession expresses the role of woman as the link between nature and the social world. Women, because of this role, do not make a sharp distinction between the social and the natural but see them as two necessary aspects of a single reality. Bara men largely agree with their women on this matter. As I have repeatedly shown throughout this study, the Bara (male and female) do not have a "bounded model of society" (Ardener 1972). They view society as a tenuous balance between opposed qualities of maleness and femaleness. Furthermore, Bara women clearly understand and appreciate the importance of the masculine ancestral rites, and Bara men understand and accept the curative and symbolic attributes of the feminine *bilô* rite. For both are seen by all Bara to be necessary for all people.

Marriage and the Status of Bara Women

The participation of women in spirit-possession rites relates to an inherent ambiguity in Bara female social roles. In particular, a man generally resides in one hamlet throughout his life and thus through the placement of his hut and his seating position within a hut constantly reaffirms his status in the fixed lineal order derived from the ancestors. A woman, on the other hand, resides in several hamlets during the course of her life, rarely has a

properly placed hut of her own in her paternal hamlet, and never has a fixed seating position comparable to that of a man. Neither her status as an agnate nor her role as a mother receives daily symbolic affirmation as does the status of a man. In this section, I shall consider further aspects of women's status that derive directly from the nature of Bara marriage arrangements.

In certain respects Bara marriage is notable for what it fails to do in regard to the jural status of women. Most important, neither the marriage *tata* ritual, the later transfer of the *tongarondra* cow, nor the birth of a child serves to incorporate a woman into her husband's local kin group. Throughout her life she, like her brothers, remains ritually dependent on the patriarch of her father's kin group in her relationship with the ancestors. Should she become ill, involved in incest, or have other reason to propitiate the ancestors, she must return home to her own patriarch. The sole exception to this derives from the closeness of the tie between mother and child. In matters relating to pregnancy and the welfare of young children, she is indirectly, through the child, dependent on her husband's patriarch.

A woman is almost never buried in the tomb of her husband's kin group. Some Bara state that they feel that if an old woman had many children and grandchildren in her husband's kin group, it would not be inappropriate for her to be buried in their tomb. However, my Bara friends could not name a specific instance of such having taken place; and none of the many women I questioned about tomb choice ever stated that she intended to be buried in her husband's tomb. Whereas men are generally adamant about their intention to be buried in the father's tomb, women often choose to be buried with the mother. Although both men and women are free to choose the tomb of either parent, there are important social implications in a man's decision but generally not in the decision of a woman. Her tomb choice rarely affects her group membership or that of her children.

Often a woman has one or more children who were born before her marriage. These children are members of her father's kin group and do not ever come under the authority of her husband, and except for a child who is still nursing, they remain behind when a woman moves to the village of her husband. There is no shame attached to giving birth to such "illegitimate" children, and they are welcomed

by the mother and her family partly because they provide an important and lasting tie between the woman and her paternal kin group.

After marriage a woman continues to have a direct interest in the cattle herd of her father and brothers. To a certain extent her influence with regard to her brother's herd increases as a result of her marriage, since the transfer of the *tongarondra* cow means that cattle ultimately belonging to her children are in his herd. Although the brother is nominally in charge of the herd, she has an obligation to safeguard her children's cattle. Also, a woman may have cattle of her own, given by or inherited from either parent, which remain with her brother's herd. A man is under strong obligation not to dispose of cattle belonging to his sister in any way in which he would be sole beneficiary, and the mishandling of a sister's cattle is said to be punishable by the ancestors (maternal or paternal, depending on the source of the cattle involved).

Marriage does transfer the bulk of a woman's labor obligations from her father's household to that of her husband. In addition to performing housekeeping chores such as carrying water, cooking, cleaning, providing straw mats, and sewing, she is expected to provide the "female" labor in her husband's gardens and rice fields. In particular, much of the burden of transplanting the rice seedlings is her responsibility. She is by no means excluded from the decision-making process with regard to crucial resources, however, since labor in the rice fields entitles her to a major share in the control and ownership of the harvest. Even if the couple separates or the husband dies before the final harvest, the wife is entitled to a significant portion (one-third) of the couple's rice.

With regard to her labor, however, a woman continues to have significant obligations toward her father's household. The woman (and to a lesser extent her husband and children) is expected to return periodically to her father's hamlet to help during critical periods such as transplanting. Also, whenever her mother or sisters give birth at her father's hamlet, she is expected to return home to help with the routine chores and those special problems caused by birth and convalescence. All women are expected to converge on their father's hamlet to aid in the singing and dancing for a *bilo* spirit-possession ritual. The result of all these labor obligations is that a married woman is often

absent from her husband's household for days (transplanting), weeks (*bilo* ritual), or months (a birth) at a time.

To what extent, then, can one conclude that the position of women in Bara society is ambiguous? First, marriage creates a new set of obligations for a woman while simultaneously increasing the intensity of her relationship with her paternal family. This is most obvious regarding the exchange of the *tongarondra* cow, which gives her a significant role pertaining to an ever-increasing share of her brothers' herds. Second, the birth of children also increases her ties with both her husband's and her father's kin groups, and children are often the source of conflict between the two kin groups. If, additionally, a woman also has "illegitimate" children in her paternal village or children by previous marriages in their fathers' villages, then her loyalties are further divided. In short, since Bara marriage does not legally transfer the woman to her husband's kin group, she continues to have social and emotional ties and obligations regarding children, cattle, and agriculture toward two or more kin groups.

One might well question whether there is anything especially ambiguous about the position of a married woman, since a man also must balance conflicting interests among paternal, affinal, and maternal kin. If the prevalence of women in *bilo* spirit possession is to be explained by the ambiguity of their culturally determined roles, then it is necessary to establish that their position does indeed involve more ambiguity than that of men.

First, although both men and women must balance their relationships between mother's and father's kin groups, many more women than men state a preference for eventual burial in the tomb of the mother, indicating that women generally have more significant and lasting ties to their maternal kin groups. Second, although both men and women must balance the conflicting interests of agnates and affines, women generally reside with their affines, and their children "belong" to their affinal kin. Here too, then, women more than men have close social and emotional ties to their affines. These factors, combined with the norm of patrilocal residence, with its spatial symbolism of hut placement and seating pattern, indicate that there is significantly more ambiguity in the social position of women than in that of men. By ambiguity I mean simply

that women generally have allegiances of essentially the same types to more than one kin group whereas do few Bara men.

Although a woman has conflicting ties—based on children, cattle, and agricultural productivity—to two families, this positive sort of social ambiguity is generally manageable. The ambiguity of her position becomes desperate and even tragic, however, when ties to both groups atrophy as a result of her infertility. Two classes of women appear most frequently as *bilo* participants: the recently married woman who is late conceiving for her new husband, and the woman approaching menopause. The *bilo* ritual reaffirms their rightful place in both families by its symbolic emphasis on agricultural, human, and bovine fertility; and through their families' expenditures of concern, time, and resources on their behalf.

The ambiguity of women's social roles relates, not only to the status of married women, but also to the childhood experiences of girls that may help explain their later receptivity to trance states. In his study of trance among the Malagasy speakers in the Comoro Islands, Lambek (1981) reviews some of the studies of the physiology of trance and the incidence of hypnotism in Western society. Evidence suggests a correlation between receptivity to hypnotism and childhood experiences of dealing with contradictory commands (Haley 1963:39; cited in Lambek 1981). It was Lambek's impression that young Malagasy girls in the village where he lived were regularly subjected to ambiguous and contradictory demands from their mothers, older sisters, and grandmothers. Among the pastoral Bara the contrast between girls and boys in that regard is even stronger. A ten-year-old boy is alone all day (but not every day) with the family herd, whereas his sister is at home being treated sometimes as a child, sometimes as a slave, and sometimes as a young woman with heavy responsibilities (regarding the care of infant and toddler siblings, for instance). Bara females may not have greatly inferior status, but from an early age they are caught in a bind.

The rare involvement of men as *bilo* "patients" also seems directly related to status ambiguity. I know of only two men in the area surrounding the village of Anosibe who have been possessed by the *bilo*. One is an effeminate outsider with no patrinal kin. He is married to the middle-

aged sister of the richest man (1,000 cattle) in the area, and they are childless. The lack of children makes his dependent, affinal status quite awkward, and he and his wife have both been *bilo*. The other male *bilo* is the only avowed homosexual in the area. He is an only son, married and childless. Additionally, the men who serve as *bilo* shamans are all strangers to the community or belong to families who have immigrated only within the last generation.

The Bara do not form a strongly male-dominated society. Bara women may, and generally do, inherit and own cattle, and they also exercise significant influence over the management of their brothers' and (in later life) their sons' herds. Husbands and wives share in the management of the household, so that women have an important voice regarding all purchases and stewardship of the produce of gardens and rice fields. Women sometimes hold the office of "patriarch" of the agnatic kin group and thus officiate at ancestral rites. Additionally, there are female as well as male shamans and dance specialists. A mature woman, just like a man, can veto a proposed marriage of any closely related girl of a descending generation. In summary, there is no activity or office from which women are excluded simply because of gender, and women generally partake fully in many important aspects of Bara social life.

That does not prevent individual Bara women from feeling resentful toward their men under certain circumstances. Furthermore, the *bilo* ritual can be used by women as a means of influencing the behavior of others. Divorced women nearing menopause seem to use the *bilo* as a means of persuading their reluctant or unconcerned brothers to reaffirm their important role as agnatic kinswomen. The recently married wife whose husband's attentions are straying can use the *bilo* to refocus his interest in her potential fertility and perhaps to avoid an early divorce. Also, the decision to perform the ritual is shared by the woman's family, and sometimes the family uses the *bilo* to display its wealth and to bring pressure on sons-in-law, who must allow their wives to return home for the duration. Bara occasionally comment with some cynicism about such purely instrumental uses of the rituals. However, the instrumental aspect is respected, for within the *bilo* symbolism of nature and fertility is a powerful potential for social and political action. It is not surprising that related

cults among other Malagasy groups have in past centuries aided the rise of dynasties and the murder of kings and, in modern times, have served simultaneously to undermine the authority of government officials (the French colonial administrators and then, later, the Malagasy national authorities) and patriarchal elders (Sibree 1870; Rusillon 1912; Althabe 1969; Feeley-Harnik n.d.).

Beyond Local Divisions: The Cognatic Clan

The feminine values expressed in trance rituals are in important ways an ultimate negation of the validity of local, tomb-based, social divisions. *Bilo* transcends the petty oppositions among lineages and among segments of lineages. *Bilo* transcends the death-centered, past-centered ideologies of local groups and looks forward to the birth of new generations of children and to the life and unity they will bring.

In a fine study of femaleness and maleness among the Trobriand Islanders, Weiner stresses that Trobriand women, "innately tied to the continuity of life, remain the locus for the means by which human survival transcends itself" (1976:234). That such is the case is more than a reflection of the fact that women bear the children; in Trobriand society it is also related to the "womanness" of their matrilineal clans and to the actual roles of women in maintaining aspects of clan identity. For the Bara also, feminine powers and values of regeneration are concretely realized in the social formation of the clan (*raza*). The structure of the Bara clan is fundamentally different from that of the Bara lineage (*tariky*), and from the unilineal clans discussed in most anthropology kinship studies. The Bara clan is a large, cognatic kin group with a descent ideology that is traced through females and predicated on marriage and the resultant exchange of cattle. The Bara word for clan, *raza*, also refers to the ancestors in general, but not to the ancestor of this or that local faction. Indeed, the essence of the clan is that of a large and growing inclusive group as opposed to the ever-fissioning exclusiveness of the agnatic lineage.

The clan level of Bara social organization is represented by the brands cut into the ears of the cattle. Every

cow and every male castrate receives a brand associated with a clan. Bulls (entire) are not branded and do not have identity. Furthermore, a calf receives the same ear brand as its mother, so that cattle "membership" in the clan is transmitted matrilineally. There is a certain contrast between human and bovine social identity. The operations of cattle castration and ear branding are done together, and they are done in the cool season (*asotry*). Significantly, this is also the season for a young boy's circumcision, an important step in establishing his membership in the tomb-based, agnatic lineage. Boys have their femaleness removed from their sex in order to become members of their father's agnatic lineage. Bulls have their maleness removed in order to become "members" of their mother's clan.

There is no comparable ritual or operation for girls to mark their social membership. However, through marriage and childbearing a woman becomes the link between the bovine world of the clan (*raza*) and the human organization of the lineage (*tariky*), between the future and the past. The *tongarondra* cow given by the groom after marriage is marked with the wife's clan's ear brand. It can be marked with the brand of any of her grandparents, should they not all be of the same clan. All of the offspring of this cow will inherit the brand. Should a brand be omitted or forgotten, the maternal ancestor whose marriage is represented by that brand will become angry and bring misfortune upon the herd. Thus marriage sets up an exchange whereby cattle are passed from mother's brother to sister's son, and these cattle are branded with membership in the mother's cognatic clan. Although they are held in trust by the agnatic lineage, they are not in any way identified with it .

Not only does each clan possess its ear brands, but the reverse is equally true: the common ear brands define the limits of the clan. People with claims to the same ear brands consider themselves to belong to a single clan. Obviously, the boundaries of the clan change with the passage of genealogical time. The collection of ear brands changes as result of shifting patterns of marriage, for clan endogamy is not prescribed, and one is permitted to marry a person of another clan.

When members of separate clans repeatedly intermarry, after a few generations their families possess the same collection of ear brands indicating that they are all interrelated through women. A name develops for the group,

and they consider themselves to belong to a single clan that includes all the bilateral kin, affines, and potential affines of each of its members. The people in the area of Anosibe used to belong to a number of separate clans associated with different areas in the region of Ivohibe whence they migrated several generations ago. These differences have since been partially abrogated through intermarriage, so that today a patriarch can announce to the ancestors: "Manovo, Lalangy, Menatara, Andrasatria are all finished now, done. We are all Tevohibe now, one *raza* now." It is possible to marry individuals not of one's clan, but all who intermarry will become one clan eventually. The Bara say of a girl who has married an outsider that she has "collected a new clan" (*nangala raza vaovao*).

The clan, like the local lineage, is always changing, always in the process of becoming. The clan is also the essential political unit of Bara society, since a person is identified first and foremost by clan name. It is (was) the unit of political organization, and the nineteenth-century kingdoms of the Bara were formed when one clan, the Zafimanely, gained hegemony over many others. With individual and group identity predicated on this fluid institution, it is no wonder that the problem of discerning ethnic boundaries (raised at the beginning of this study) is acute in southern Madagascar. This Bara study focuses on the nature of the social person, because a study predicated on named social units would founder on the shifting sands of the boundaries of "tribe," "kingdom," "clan," and "lineage."

Trance and the Person

This study ends as it began, with mother. For the Bara see the widest unit of society, the clan (*raza*), as a natural, biological unit rather than as a purely social division, and all clan members are biologically related to one another through females, and see themselves as people of the same kind. The clan ancestors form an undifferentiated, general category of ancestral spirits called *raza*, which are seen to be closely related to the spirit of *bilo* trance ritual. It is not surprising, then, that a single word, *raza*, should be used to express clan ancestry, spirits, species, and even placenta.

The Bara see themselves as participating in an essentially female, undifferentiated, natural environment within which death and the father's tomb establish the necessary but all too narrow order of social and moral distinction.

With trance, we also return to the issue of the "person" and to the question of how the constellation of the human body is for the Bara a participatory symbol for human society. Just as the ideology of *bilò* transcends social units, trance also transcends the body of the individual. The phrase "spirit possession" is misleading, for it obscures the fact that trance is a profoundly physiological event. Bateson (1976), with his characteristic insight, suggested that in Bali trance is related to specifically Balinese cultural ideas about body and balance. How might Bara trance relate to their own cultural concepts of the person as the dynamic intersection of female and male substances?

Bara trance, unlike trance in a number of other societies, is explicitly modeled on sexual ecstasy. The dancer arches her back and moves her arms and legs up and down while rotating her head more slowly from side to side. This characteristic movement is perhaps pan Malagasy. We see it in Fejos's 1937 film of a Bara *bilò*, and we find it in Davidson's medical account of the famous outbreak of "dancing mania" in the capital of Antananarivo in 1863, which brought down the missionary-supported government of King Radama II:

They [mostly young women] moved the head from side to side with a monotonous motion, and the hands in the same way, alternately up and down. The dancers never joined in the singing, but uttered frequently a deep sighing sound. The eyes were wild, and the whole countenance assumed an indescribable abstracted expression. . . . The dancing was regulated by the music which was always the quickest possible—it never seemed quick enough They thus danced with almost super human endurance—exhausting the patience of the musicians, who often relieved each other by turns—then fell down suddenly, as if dead. . . . The tombs were also favourite places of resort for these dancers. They met in the evenings, and danced by moonlight for half the night, or

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longer, amongst the graves. Many of them professed to have intercourse with the departed, and more particularly with the late queen. (Davidson 1889:18-27)

The Bara *bilo* trance celebrates, as we have seen, a kind of liberation from the limitations of one's person and one's "person-ality." Significant transformation of the state of human being (into a person, into an ancestor, into a *bilo* spirit) can be accomplished only as a kind of sexual transformation. This was evident in the analysis of the funeral-ritual symbolism. The sexual symbolism of the funeral ritual is instrumental, and its purpose is to push the dead out of the world of the living and toward its incorporation with the ancestors. Trance is somewhat different. Although there are undeniable purposes to the *bilo* ritual (curing and power), it is also a *sui generis* celebration of the joy and the power of sexuality to create and, most wonderfully, to transcend its own creation—a celebration of life.

Caveats and Conclusions

Caveats

Another culture is an infinity of information, and even the trained visitor's capacity to observe, to absorb, and to understand is limited. The preceding exposition is deficient in a number of important respects. Important limitations derive from the cultural and intellectual background of the researcher, others are the "opportunity costs" of strategic research choices, and others are due to chance. A young male American anthropologist in the 1970s has a legitimately different view from that of a middle-aged French civil servant in the 1950s or of a young female Malagasy researcher in the 1980s. None of these kinds of limitations need be lamented. They are the source of the ongoing freshness and variety of the anthropological endeavor. Nonetheless, it is well to consider such limitations to an anthropological task as a way of completing and concluding. A look at the boundaries and limits of a work may help clarify that which is within and that which might usefully follow as research efforts of subsequent students.

Fieldwork Choices and Situations. I chose to study an "average" Bara village through the vague anthropological technique of "participant observation." Different situations produce very different blends of participation and observation. I did fieldwork with a wife and an infant son. We spent twenty months in Bara land between January 1970 and August 1971, the last eighteen months of which we were basically in continuous residence at Anosibe. We had no vehicle and, like our Bara hosts, we traveled around the area on foot and by *taxi-brousse* into town. The loan of a **Land Rover during our last month at Anosibe helped us put a**

bit of perspective on our hitherto confined investigations.

We set up our own household in our own centrally located hamlet of the spread-out village of Anosibe. Fourteen small hamlets constituted the village. We formed the fifteenth. We did so to avoid being "captured" by a single household. The problem as I saw it was that the type of people who were willing to take us in at the beginning were likely to be marginal to the community. Events and growing knowledge proved that to be correct. The price of this necessary independence was that our observations on the more private and domestic aspects of people's lives within their huts were limited. How much so I realized on two brief revisits to Anosibe when I (alone in one instance) and my wife and child were houseguests of my blood brother and much more intimately absorbed into daily events of the household and nighttime events planned from the young men's hut.

Two years of field research seems like such a long time to the researcher (and to his or her funding agency), but it is such a small slice out of the experience of a village or group of villages. Random events do much to shape the data base, especially in a sparsely populated pastoral society. For instance, because only one village boy was circumcised during my stay in Anosibe, my information on that topic is lean. And it is potentially such a mine of data on gender construction. On the other hand, the funerals and spirit possessions were numerous enough to show a rich mix of variety and continuity, and my study relies heavily on that material.

By choosing an "average" village, the gain in representativeness was balanced by a loss of data on special situations. Sacrificed was the chance to collect important material on "royal" symbolism and on the traditional political dimensions of Bara sexual symbolism. Whether such material is available in Bara land I do not know, but it is certainly not to be found in a commoner village only four generations old. The study of the so-called average village precluded other kinds of extensions and insights as well, such as socialization into town values regarding sexuality and overt prostitution. The research was largely village-bound, hence incomplete regarding the wider Bara society, traditional and modern.

The Ethnographer's Theoretical Predilections. Almost two

decades have passed since I carried out the bulk of the field research among the Bara. During this period my own patience with minute ethnographic details of specific village facts and personalities has decreased. If this be true for me, then how much less must be the patience of the reader who has never visited Madagascar nor spoken Malagasy? One result of the elapsed time has been an insistent pruning of the ethnographic shrubbery.

The delay in presenting this material affects the exposition in another way. During the interim I have had the good fortune to carry out field research with another African pastoral people, the Dinka of Sudan. I can now regard the Bara, not from the perspective of my one and only encounter with an alien culture, but within a more balanced experiential framework. A certain amount of the romance is gone, and good riddance.

It is also significant that the other culture I have since studied is a Nilotic society. Through the work of Evans-Pritchard, the social structure of the Nuer/Dinka has had an overwhelming effect on anthropological theory, and was, as well, the single most important influence on the young ethnographer who set out to study the Bara of Madagascar in 1970. My subsequent experience with the Dinka has helped put this theoretical debt into balance. If the Nuer/Dinka have served anthropology as a model for acephalous, minimally organized pastoral society, they are none the less institutionally complex when compared with the Bara. Nuer/Dinka have a formal system of named age sets, plus a complicated system of named, dispersed patrilineal clans, plus an arrangement of named territorial tribal subdivisions, plus a hereditary priesthood. By comparison, the Bara have only unnamed, shallow patrilineal and vaguely territorial, named, endogamous clans, and membership in even these entities is optative and alterable. I am no longer tempted to see the pastoral Bara as "the Nuer of Madagascar."

This account puts a large emphasis on women's roles, attitudes, and actions. With hindsight, I wish I had gathered more information on women's songs, everyday medicinal remedies, attitudes toward child rearing, and women's work patterns. I now want to know more about the "socialization" of young girls. I wish I had pushed harder to have a better relationship with certain powerful older women. The **hindsight wish list of the field researcher is a long one.** This

wish list tells us much about how far anthropology has progressed in the last two decades.

The anthropological bibliography on women is very slim before 1970, and I am proud to have collected as much information from and about women as I did. That I did so is due to two factors. First, that we were in the field as a family, husband, wife, and one-year-old son, provided a natural access to the concerns and activities of at least some women's aspects that would otherwise have been closed to me or that I would not have been forced by circumstances to pursue. Second, my teachers, especially Thomas Beidelman, Christopher Crocker, and James Fox, had instilled in me a concern for looking at the complex ambiguities of human experience in small traditional cultures, worlds defined by women and men, femaleness and maleness.

Conclusions

It was not my original intention to study women or sexuality; nor is such the intention of this book. My desire was to find the most economical and cogent means to present a general analysis of the broad outlines of Bara culture and society. I aimed to produce an outline faithful to Bara concerns and relevant to Western concerns, a study that also links and places the Bara within the context of other Malagasy cultures and thus contributes to clarifying the nature of cultural variation and continuity in Madagascar.

The study of gender categories is a means to that end. The fact that such an approach largely succeeds in accomplishing the three tasks tells us much about the importance of examining gender in human experience. To understand the full potential of an analytical approach to society through gender, let us consider four more or less obvious but important aspects of the gender distinction:

Universality
Logical priority
Dynamism
Complexity

In considering each of the four aspects, I will draw some broad and general contrasts to what might be called

classical anthropological studies. My intention is not the flogging of dead theoretical horses or sniveling criticism of our professional parents but just to put the present study within a longer perspective.

Universality. All societies have male and female, women and men, and problematic relations between the two. A focus on gender provides a superb bridge for transcultural translation. Pedagogically, topics such as unilineal descent groups, kinship terminologies, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, and many of the other standard subjects for introductory kinship and anthropology courses are difficult to introduce to students. The approach through gender relations and categories is easier and more effective. It starts on familiar conceptual ground and provides a framework within which exotic but widespread customs of marrying certain cousins, using exceedingly precise kinship nomenclature, and showing intense commitment to a narrow paternal lineage begin to make sense to a student and to broaden his or her understanding of the human condition. The universality of gender presents its own risks. Are we to look at all the complex and subtle social systems of the world through only the eyes of our own current, media-hyped, sexual limitations and concerns? This was in part the limitation of Margaret Mead's early approach, and a trap to many writing under the pressure of the sexual and women's "liberation" movements of the 1970s.

Logical Priority. In the theoretical analysis of the social systems of small, kin-based, traditional societies, taking the gender distinction as a starting point has a logical priority over other strategies. The great legacy of Lévi-Strauss is our appreciation that kinship systems can be profitably viewed as logical systems built on a binary opposition between male and female. That this binary opposition is also used by societies to form closed corporate groups or to construct systems of genealogical reckoning is not denied. But those are second-order constructs following from the basic division of society into male and female. Anthropology long focused its "kinship" attention on those secondary constructs, corporate groups and genealogies, learning much about both, but paying a high price in terms of the social approach could not comprehend.

Until quite recently we knew relatively little about women because they tended to fall out of genealogies over time, and they were not central aspects of corporate groups. The reasons why anthropology chose to look at male-centered corporate groups and genealogies rather than at the more basic logic of a dual male/female system are being explored with vigor these days, and the fact that past scholars dedicated to logical analysis and "cultural relativism" could to so large a degree focus on the male side of the social equation attests to the historical force of the male emphasis in Western society.

The other price was that the anthropological understanding of cognatic (bilateral) kinship systems was notably weak, an embarrassing situation for a universal science inasmuch as such systems characterize the majority of the world's societies. Cognatic societies, as I mentioned earlier, were seen to have "loose structure," weak corporations and fuzzy genealogies. Even the arrival of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, better fitted for the analysis of cognatic systems, was for a generation largely applied to corporate unilineal systems, focusing on the structure of alliances among such groups.

What a fix. Anthropology was largely blind to half the population of every society, and unable to get a theoretical handle on the structure of the world's most prevalent type of social system. This could not have happened had the kinship specialists put their original emphasis on the logical priority of the gender distinction, male *and* female.

Dynamism. A focus on gender is of necessity dynamic because it deals with a relationship, with an opposition that runs the gamut from antagonism to the ultimate sexual complementarity. The focus of study is not a fixed category, boundary, or social institution as such, but a matrix containing inherent tensions and power, a fulcrum that is defined by humanness and that goes directly to the core of people's being. The relationship of each person to the gender distinction is direct but changing during the surprisingly quick course of life. People are always needing to readjust to the gender-related biological and social changes within themselves and within others close to them. Little girls become adolescents, young mothers, matriarchs, old women, and ancestors. There is a similar chain on the male side. The view of society from the perspective of gender sees

a collection of people all pulling at their own current gender-related identity.

If we take gender as our starting point in a cultural analysis, our view of the social system is naturally and inevitably a dynamic one. The great criticism of the classic "theories" of anthropology was that they were "static." It took a great deal of work to add change and variety to the anthropological studies of corporate groups, tribes, and marriage alliance systems. The anthropologists who finally managed to breathe some clanky movement and life into those models were hailed as intellectual giants for their accomplishment (Leach 1954; Turner 1957). The focus on gender, on the other hand, *starts* from a perspective that is naturally dynamic. The challenge for the anthropologist is not to lose this natural dynamism during the task of exposition.

Complexity. By complexity I mean that the approach to society through gender naturally invites an analysis that cuts across the various levels of the social system. This entire study has emphasized the point by its presentation of material beginning with the person, then by looking at the integration of the person into the group, the life cycle of the group, the relations among groups, the kin categories that cut across local group divisions, endogamous clans, and wider Bara society, and finally the transcendence of all social units through rituals of trance and possession.

This seems straightforward and simple enough, and indeed it is. However, we should remind ourselves that classic approaches to the analysis of traditional societies had some difficulty in relating the different levels of even relatively simple societies like the Bara. The great African ethnographic analyses of the Nuer, the Nyakyusa, and the Tallensi appeared in several volumes each: one covering the broad political structure of the society, one focusing on kinship and domestic organization, and one analyzing religion. In the generations following those seminal works, a whole academic industry has sprung up largely trying to re-create the connections between different levels of the societies presented in the original works. (See Karp and Maynard 1983 for an excellent review of the many reanalyses of *The Nuer*.) Despite treatment in separate volumes, the great ethnographers and theoreticians contributed immensely to our understanding of how wider

"political" systems related to local corporate and domestic residence groups. However, between the study of the individual, on one hand, and the society, on the other, a gulf formed and persisted in the intellectual warfare between psychologically oriented and sociologically oriented anthropologists, between, to a large degree, British "social" anthropologists and American "cultural" anthropologists.

When we look at a society in terms of all the manifestations of maleness and femaleness, large social formations, intermediate groups, and individual persons fall within a single framework. Relating different levels of society presents no theoretical or analytical barrier. The largest barrier results from the limitations of fieldwork mentioned above. A researcher just cannot credibly establish himself or herself intimately within one family and at the same time maintain an even view of the wider village relations and the overall historical political system.

The caveats and conclusions go hand in hand. The approach to Bara society through the gender distinction invites more information on topics at the "extremes" of the social system. To complete this study, one wants a deft and sensitive analysis of the socialization of young Bara girls, on one hand, and a historical and comparative analysis of the ritual sources of power of the former Bara kings, on the other hand. Both topics go directly to the important issue of trance. And the study of trance pushes us more deeply into the individual and simultaneously toward wider universal issues, demanding a clearer and more detailed knowledge of the relationship between body and mind, self and other, chemistry and consciousness.

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