

## Seminar Studies in Anthropology

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# Placing the Dead

Tombs, Ancestral Villages, and Kinship  
Organization in Madagascar

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# Funeral and *Famadihana*

In the last two chapters we saw how the peasant is part of a practical organization adapted to the economy and ecology of the place where he lives, but how, on the other hand, he identifies himself through his tomb and his tomb group with a quite different organization which is believed to have been that of the past. We saw how "real" kinship links and their transformation enabled the peasant to mediate between the practical and the ideal organization. This mediation was achieved by associating the living man with the anonymous dead within the tomb. My purpose in this chapter is to examine the *rites de passage* by which the passage of the living to the dead is ritualized. This is a universal function of funerary *rites de passage* but in this case these rites have an added significance in that they act out the relation between the ideal unchanging society and the flux of the actual society.<sup>1</sup>

There are two kinds of funerary *rites de passage* in Imerina. The funeral, which occurs very soon after death, and the ceremony called *famadihana*, which occurs at least two years afterwards. The funeral is the concern of the society in which a man lives, the *famadihana* is the concern of the dispersed family. This contrast is partly forced on the actors by the necessity of the situation. Merina funerals must be carried out within the three days following death but, since the exact day of death cannot be forecast and since preparations for the funeral must under no circumstances be initiated before the actual death (to do this would be tantamount to witchcraft), it follows that there is no time to gather together the dispersed family for the funeral. The local family has therefore to

<sup>1</sup> A. van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage*, 1909.

rely on the cooperation of neighbours for the participation traditionally required at funerals. Indeed, for the Merina, death is the time when the solidarity of the local community, *fokon'olona*, should be most manifest. Of the great mass of writing which praises the community spirit of the *fokon'olona* all emphasize what happens when a death occurs.<sup>1</sup> The description of the funeral which follows will also show clearly this spirit of mutual help.

The funeral is a less important ceremony than the *famadihana*, but it has several rituals in common with it. These will be discussed more fully when the *famadihana* is dealt with. The smaller size of the funeral as a ceremony is due to two factors. First, there is very little time to gather much money; second, the short notice means that only the local family and neighbours can be present, while the larger dispersed family cannot be gathered in time. A funeral can be fairly expensive, but it is always much cheaper than a *famadihana*. My estimates for those funerals I witnessed varied from approximately 5000 FMG to 30000 FMG. In all these cases, however, a large amount, if not all, the expenditure was recovered from monetary gifts and presents of measures of rice from neighbours. These presents came in part from mourning gifts, and in part from an organized village levy. For example, in the village where I worked a *dinampokon'olona*, "act of the fokon'olona", required that 5 francs and a measure of rice (approximately 275 grammes) per adult should be given at every death to the bereaved family.

### Funerals

The funeral usually occurs on the day after death. Three possible courses can be followed. The corpse can be buried in the big ancestral tombs, it can be buried temporarily in the earth or, more rarely, in another tomb.<sup>2</sup> Burial in the tomb is preferred but for a number of reasons it occurs less often than temporary burial.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons why people are buried temporarily are several. First of all, no children below the age of four or five can "enter" the tomb by themselves. They are called *Zazarano*, "children of water". They are said not to be strong enough to open the heavy stone door of the tomb and

<sup>1</sup> The Nationalist Journal *Fokon'olona*, edited by Ch. Razafindraibe, which advocates a re-valuation of the *fokon'olona* provides many good examples of this kind of writing.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> This would not be true of people living in Tananarive or its immediate vicinity.

are brought into the tomb only when it is opened for an adult. Secondly, the tomb may not be opened twice within a year which means that, in the case of rapidly succeeding deaths, the second corpse cannot be buried directly in the tomb. Thirdly, people who die of certain highly contagious diseases, like plague, cannot be buried in the tomb until the flesh has disintegrated.

Much more important than such prohibitions is the question of practicability. A funeral in the family tomb is more expensive than one in a temporary grave. This is because more *lamba mena*<sup>1</sup> must be given when the body is placed in the family tomb as it is a definitive placing of the dead in the proper place. Since a funeral outside the tomb is a temporary matter, a poor funeral of this kind can be made good at a later date. If not much money is available—and this is the normal state of affairs—a temporary burial will be carried out.

When the family in which the death occurs lives a certain distance from its *tanindrazana*, there are also problems of transport and communications to consider. The body must be brought back to the tomb and the person in charge of the tomb, the head of the tomb group, must be contacted. The transport of the body on a *taxi-brousse* (converted delivery van) is again a major expense. In a certain number of cases the problems of communication may be completely insurmountable in the time available. In remote areas the distance to be covered, perhaps largely on foot, makes it impossible to bring the corpse back in time for burial.

For these reasons Merina living away from their *tanindrazana* tend to be first buried in temporary graves. It is difficult to give figures for this since the accessibility of the village where the death occurs is a major factor, as well as the wealth of the bereaved family. All these variables mean that only a very large number of cases would give a true idea of the frequency of temporary burial. For the Ambatomanoïna area the proportion was almost half and half. This figure, however, is based on only very few cases.<sup>2</sup>

Generally it is true to say that temporary burial is typical of the *voanjo*. The very idea of a temporary burial from which one will later be

<sup>1</sup> These are silk shrouds. They are described more fully on page 145.

<sup>2</sup> Of the people who live near or in Tananarive a higher proportion are directly buried in the family tomb, since these people are usually in much closer contact with their *tanindrazana*. The position in Tananarive is different in a number of ways as other factors resulting from urban life affect all the concepts discussed here.

taken to the *tanindrazana* reflects admirably the position of the *voanjo*, since it is necessary to practice temporary burial because one is *away* from the *tanindrazana*, and *separated* from all one's kinsmen.

When a death occurs within a family the house is immediately prepared as it would be for any ceremony. The main room is tidied up or cleared completely and the clean papyrus mats, which are always kept ready for ceremonies, are spread on the floor. Then the north-east corner of the room, the most valued corner,<sup>1</sup> is curtained off with mats so as to form a small enclosure where the body will be placed after it has been prepared and wrapped in a plain cotton cloth. All this is done by members of the household before any indication of the death is given to the outside world. Afterwards the close local kin, especially the women and children, go inside and sit around the enclosure where the body has been placed and mourn. The women undo their elaborate plaits and allow their hair to fall loosely about their shoulders as a sign of sorrow. Only when these preparations are complete is the death announced to the other co-villagers, usually by means of a village crier. This is when the most dramatic demonstration of local solidarity occurs. As soon as the announcement is made the women of the neighbouring houses go to fill a pitcher of water from their big storage pots to the east of the hearth and carry it to the bereaved house. Then they bring the firewood which they had probably prepared for themselves for their evening meal and, abandoning whatever they were doing, go and prepare the funeral meal in the house of the dead man. They roast and pound coffee, husk, winnow and cook rice, and light fires. If the family of the person who has died is rich enough the neighbouring men go out to capture a bull. They chase and tease it until it is exhausted, and then kill and prepare it for the funeral meal. What is particularly striking in all this is the way in which the preparations are taken over, without even a question being asked, by neighbours who have been given no previous notice. The bereaved family has hardly any decisions to take and seems to be carried by the tide of their neighbours' help. This is characteristic of the whole proceeding.

Once the preparations are under way there is usually a short period when the neighbours retire to prepare and eat their supper. Later on, usually around eight or nine in the evening, they gather again. Some of the men have perhaps already fortified themselves for the night with

<sup>1</sup> J.-C. Hebert, "La cosmographie ancienne Malgache suivie de l'énumération des points cardinaux et l'importance du Nord-Est", *Taloha*, I, 1965.

liquor. When they have all gathered there may be a short prayer and hymn singing led by any senior man or by a pastor if there is one present. Once this is over everybody settles for the night. The local family sit inside the house around the corpse and mourn. The women neighbours carry on with the preparation of the meal. The men sit all around the house but especially on the side where the windows and doors are, namely the west. There they pass the night playing dominoes or *fandroana*,<sup>1</sup> or betting, or whiling away the time as best they can. From time to time they sing and generally have as good a time as possible. Admittedly the songs are often Church hymns, but they are sung in a boisterous way which contrasts with the way they are sung in church. Hymns are the accompaniment of all social gatherings.

The scene presented during the night is therefore of the corpse in the north-east corner of the house behind its screen of mats, immediately surrounded by mourning and often weeping relatives, who are themselves surrounded by what, as the night goes on, becomes very like a party. Late in the evening the meal which has been prepared is at last served and eaten by all present.

The meat given on such occasions is called *hena ratsy*, or "bad meat". A name which also applies to the remainder of this meat which is taken home by those present. It is the subject of two taboos. It is forbidden to pregnant women, and also it should not be salted in case it is thought too good.<sup>2</sup>

As the night proceeds the neighbours are blessed and thanked at regular intervals by the head of the bereaved family.

The express purpose of this large gathering of apparently unconcerned people is the fear of witches (*mpamosavy*), for witches, it is believed, steal corpses, rejoice in death and try to frighten or otherwise harm mourners.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore the purpose of this outer ring of neighbours to protect the inner ring of kinsmen against the *mpamosavy*.

More subjectively, this protecting crowd gives the mourners the feeling of being surrounded by trustworthy people, *havana mpifankatia*, which is especially welcome at a time of uncertainty and danger. It is interesting to note that this practice marks off very clearly kinsmen from neigh-

<sup>1</sup> A traditional game somewhat similar to draughts.

<sup>2</sup> This topic has been much discussed by L. Molet in *Le Bain Royal à Madagascar*, 1956. I have found no evidence to support this author's theory relating to *hena ratsy*. Also on this subject, R. Decary, *La Mort et les Coutumes Funéraires à Madagascar*, 1962, pp. 31-32.

<sup>3</sup> M. Danielli, "The witches of Madagascar", in *Folk-Lore*, No. 58, June 1947.

bours, but in spite of this the fiction that neighbours are kinsmen is stressed most emphatically of all on this occasion. The blessings and thanks addressed to the neighbours are to "*Ry Havako*", "my kinsmen". This is sometimes pushed even further and the neighbours are called "*tena iray tampo*", "really children of one womb". This is a pretence and is known as such. It is another example of the notion of artificial kinship already described.

By morning the neighbours disperse once again and prepare for more formal visits of condolence. Representatives from all the nearby households go to the house where the body is lying. They are received by the immediate family who are, as before, sitting or leaning around the funeral screen. The women are still showing recognizable outward signs of mourning, with their hair undone and their *lambas*<sup>1</sup> tucked under their arms. They utter from time to time expressions of grief of a traditional kind. The visitors file in quietly and for a moment sit in silence; then, in a low respectful tone and missing out the usual greetings, they explain the purpose of their visit and give a small amount of money towards the expenses. This money is called "the fringes of the *lamba mena*". The sum normally varies from 5 to 50 FMG. In certain cases the group of neighbours supplies the entire sum to be spent on the funeral. This contribution is the most explicit obligation which goes with membership of the *fokon'olona*. It is a great sin to allow a member of the village to be buried without at least one *lamba mena* and, if the local family of the dead cannot supply it, the *fokon'olona* must. There is no question of asking the dispersed kinsmen as there is no time.

On the morning of the burial the body is placed in a rough coffin which has also been made spontaneously by the neighbours. Later it is possible that the body will be taken to a church, Catholic or Protestant as the case may be, where a funeral service will be held. From this point the ceremony is somewhat different according to whether the body is to be buried in the family tomb or temporarily in the earth. In the Ambatomanoina area this means that the body will either be taken, usually by *taxi-brousse*, to its *tanindrazana* or will be buried in the earth in the village where the death occurred. When the body is taken back to the ancestral tomb it is first loaded on to a *taxi-brousse* and as many neighbours as can possibly afford it accompany the local family. On arrival the party may be joined by relatives, if any live in the *tanindrazana*,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1.

and by other inhabitants of the village. After a short meal they go in procession to the tomb. First of all a number of speeches are made, the most notable being by the head of the local family. This is a formal address which includes reference to God, the ancestors and the President of the Republic, but the main body of the speech is a eulogy on the dead man.<sup>1</sup> After this it is possible that if many children and relatives have given shrouds for the dead man they will be displayed and the names and villages of the donors will be announced.<sup>2</sup> This is now becoming rarer at funerals because usually only one or two silk shrouds are given. It is possible that there will also be a short graveside sermon and hymn-singing, sometimes led by a pastor. The general atmosphere of a funeral is one of sadness and mourning, and it is usually a quiet occasion. Once the ceremonies are over the body is placed in the most honoured position in the tomb, i.e. the upper shelf on the northern side.<sup>3</sup> After the body has been placed it is customary for the other members of the family to descend into the tomb and see where the dead man has been put.

The ceremony for a temporary burial is similar. The corpse is taken out of the village in a procession to a place on a hill-side, where the grave is dug by neighbours using old worn out spades. The bottom of the grave is covered with charcoal as this is said to keep the corpse dry. Then the rough wooden coffin is lowered into place. The coffin itself is carefully sealed with clay, and heavy stones are placed on top of it. Then the grave is filled and the place marked. The job of covering over the coffin as well as of digging the grave is, as we have noted, done with old spades. This is because traditionally the spades, together with the pole on which the coffin was slung, should be thrown away and abandoned. The spades are still duly thrown away but as the men leave they surreptitiously pick them up again. I was told that spades were too expensive to be thrown away completely. The return from the grave is a formal affair. Unlike in the procession going to the tomb, men and

<sup>1</sup> Such a speech is given and discussed by R. Decary, in *La Mort et les Coutumes Funéraires à Madagascar*, 1962, pp. 26–28. The funeral speeches I heard were similar to this though usually shorter and containing biblical references as well as proverbs.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of this practice and others touched on here see the discussion of the *Famadihana*.

<sup>3</sup> K. Falck, "L'ancien village au Vakinankaratra", *Historisk-Antikvarisk Rekke*, University of Bergen, 1958. Also see p. 232. There is, however, another possibility—the corpse may be placed in the centre of the tomb on the earth. This is a kind of temporary burial within the tomb. A *famadihana* will later be necessary to place the skeleton in its proper place.

women return separately. The women are led by the chief woman mourner, usually a senior woman in the bereaved household. When the party of women returns a short rite of decontamination takes place. A small fire is lit on the threshold and those returning from the graveside have to step over it. A ritual with a similar purpose occurs the next day. All the people living in the house of the dead man go out and wash themselves, their clothes and all clothing and blankets in the house, in a nearby stream. This again is said to remove contamination with death.<sup>1</sup>

This short description of the funeral has shown how it is a ceremony which is the concern of neighbours, of the *fokon'olona*. Nevertheless, it is not just as neighbourhood cooperation that this help is conceptualized. It is spoken of as "help between kinsmen". Clearly, the notion that neighbours should be kinsmen is relevant here. The neighbours are acting in lieu of kinsmen, they are acting as *havana mpifankatia* and during the whole proceeding they all stress this by addressing one another as "kinsmen". At the same time it is general knowledge that they are not really kinsmen and the important ceremony is deferred until the real kinsmen can be there. This is the *famadihana*, which, in contrast to the funeral, always takes place in the *tanindrazana*.

### *Famadihanas*

The word *famadihana* is the relative substantive of the verb *mamadika* which means "to turn over". In common speech the phrase *mamadika drazana*, "turning over the dead", is often used.<sup>2</sup> Turning over is used metaphorically in this context since at no stage is the turning over of the dead body a significant part of the ceremony. To say that the word *famadihana* refers to one ceremony is misleading. There are a number of easily distinguishable ceremonies which go under this name, but all these ceremonies share a common basis. They all involve firstly the exhumation of the body of a near relative after the flesh has completely decayed, secondly, wrapping the corpse in very fine, highly-coloured, decorated silk sheets called *lamba mena*, and thirdly, rewrapping the corpse and placing it in the family tomb.

<sup>1</sup> For numerous examples of similar practices see J. Rudd, *Taboo*, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Note 3, p. 516, of the French translation of the *Tantaran'ny Andriana* by G. S. Chapus and E. Ratsimba states that the proper translation of the phrase is "transferring the dead" not "turning over the dead". Although "transferring the dead" does better convey what is involved, it does not seem to me to be a valid translation of the word *mamadika*. See *vadika* in *Dictionnaire Malgache-Français*, 1888 and subsequent editions.

*Lamba mena* literally means "red cloth", although the shrouds are not necessarily red, but this idea distinguishes them from the more common plain white *lamba* worn by the living. The *lamba mena* are composed of stripes of many bright colours. They may be decorated at either end with silver or lead beads. The adjective "red" refers to their importance rather than their appearance. The use of colours in this way, for their symbolic value, is common throughout Madagascar. Some *lamba mena* are white as some groups, such as certain *Andrianamboninolona*, have an ancestral prohibition against the use of colours. In these cases the fringes are left unknotted to distinguish them from the ordinary *lamba*.

In spite of the basic similarity between all *famadihanas* certain different kinds are clearly distinguishable. Firstly, there are the ceremonies where the corpse is taken out of a temporary burial place and then taken to be buried in its ancestral tomb. This kind of *famadihana* is probably the most common and I shall call it the "return *famadihana*". Secondly, there are the ceremonies where the corpse, or a number of corpses, are taken out of the ancestral tomb and returned to it. Thirdly, there are ceremonies where the corpses may be taken out of an old tomb and placed in a new one. Finally, there are ceremonies where the corpses may be moved from one tomb to another, but this is very rare.

These ceremonies immediately bring to mind other ceremonies from other parts of the world. The most obvious of these are the second funerals which have long arrested the attention of anthropologists. The differences between most second funerals and *famadihanas* is clear. In the words of Sidney Hartland: "Among a very large number of peoples who practice earth burial in one form or another, the ceremonies are not completed until the bones have been taken up, cleaned and put in a place of final deposit. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Apart from the very obvious aspects which the *famadihana* has in common with these ceremonies, two fundamental differences must be noted. The *famadihana* is not an essential part of the funeral if the body is originally buried in the tomb. *Famadihanas* need not be, and indeed are not, performed for everyone. In no sense, therefore, can it be said that the funeral is not completed without a *famadihana*. Furthermore, it is quite common for one particular corpse

<sup>1</sup> "Death . . ." in Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1911. On secondary burial there is of course the work of R. Hertz, "Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort", *Année Sociologique*, 1907. I shall discuss this work later. Other recent discussions of secondary burials include: T. Harrison, "Borneo death", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-landen Volkerkunde*, 1962; W. Stöhr, "Des todesritual der Dayak", *Ethnologica*, New Series I, 1959.

to be exhumed a number of times. This again is not the case for most second funerals.

Another comparison which springs to mind is between certain aspects of ancestor worship ceremonies, such as sacrifices etc. Again this is somewhat misleading since the *famadihana* is not a regular ceremony dealing with "the active participation of the dead in mundane affairs".<sup>1</sup>

*Famadihanas* are the most important ceremonies in which the Merina peasant participates and this very importance marks off *famadihanas* from other ceremonies linked with the passage through life. Their place is made clearer if we contrast them again with funerals.

*Famadihanas* can take place only a certain length of time after death. This period is usually of at least two years, but may be considerably longer. The law only allows *famadihanas* to take place during the months from July to September inclusive. This is, in fact, the period of least agricultural work and also the period when the peasants are likely to have most money. The first contrast with funerals is therefore that the ceremony can occur on a day chosen by the participants. This has two effects. Firstly, it is possible to save up for a *famadihana*. Indeed, once it has been decided to hold one it is delayed until enough money has been accumulated. This means that it is possible to spend much more money and have a much bigger ceremony than is usually possible for the funeral.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, it is possible to gather the dispersed family of the dead on the arranged day.

The relative importance of the ceremony is a generally acknowledged fact. Of the eight such ceremonies I attended the smallest involved 165

<sup>1</sup> J. Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, 1962, p. 379. The Betsileo are the people most closely associated with the Merina and it is interesting to note that H. Dubois, in his monumental work, *Monographie des Betsileo*, also stresses that it is the funerary rites which are important, and not the minor sacrifices which occur at the tombs (Chapter 4). It is tempting to see the *famadihana* as an ancient ancestor worship ceremony transformed by Christianity. However, it seems that the *famadihana* had comparatively less importance in the past and never had any connection with the propitiation of ancestors.<sup>(a)</sup> Other ceremonies which have now practically disappeared may have been much more concerned with this, but it is difficult to assess their significance now. See the chapter on *Fatidra* by W. E. Cousins in *Fomba Malagasy*, 1963 edition (edited by H. Randzavola), and A. and G. Grandidier, *Ethnographie*, Vol. III.

<sup>(a)</sup> R. F. Callet, *Tantaran'ny Andriana*, Footnote 311, Vol. I, of French translation (Chapus and Ratsimba).

<sup>2</sup> A similar point is made by D. Miles in his criticisms of Hertz's theories on secondary burial in "Socio-economic aspects of secondary burial", *Oceania*, Vol XXXV, No. 3, 1965. In this case, however, it is impossible to explain *famadihanas* as being simply caused by shortage of money at death.

people and the largest, as far as I could judge, at least 500. Even this was not apparently a very large *famadihana*.

These ceremonies involve very great expense. The cost is always difficult to estimate as there is also a large-scale consumption of already owned goods such as cattle and rice. The expenses involved for the *famadihana* I attended varied greatly. This, and the fact that I was able to observe only a few, gives very little value to the figures obtained. However, the lowest figure was around 123 000 FMG and the highest 270 000 FMG.<sup>1</sup> The average was 169 000 FMG. For all these ceremonies the people directly involved had to sell cattle and, if they did not possess enough cattle, land. The expenses involved at a *famadihana* are second only to those of building a new tomb. They come under various headings. First of all food for the guests, which includes mainly rice, meat, sugar, salt and coffee. Many guests may be given meat to take home. Food is the biggest expense. Secondly, there is the expense involved in buying *lamba mena*. These may cost up to 3000 FMG each. Thirdly, there are expenses in getting the numerous government permits necessary for holding the ceremony, killing the cattle, etc. Fourthly, there are expenses involved in preparing the tomb. This may well involve major repairs like recementing the top, repainting, or even renewing the whole structure. Finally, there are a large number of other minor expenses which involve such things as transport, feeding helpers etc.

As I have noted, a second concomitant of the fact that a *famadihana* is planned in advance is that a different group of people is involved than is the case for a funeral. For the funeral the responsibility for the ceremony both in terms of money and organization rests on the neighbours. For the *famadihana* it rests clearly on the kinsmen of the dead. Throughout the ceremony the dispersed family of the dead is the group immediately involved. For the purpose of the ceremony this special position is recognized by the fact that the dispersed family are referred to by the phrase *zana'drazana*, which distinguishes them from mere neighbours. *Zana'drazana* means "the children of the dead", "children" here being used in the widest sense meaning relatives of some kind. At the climax of the ceremony it is the *zana'drazana* who stand near the tomb while the neighbours form an outer circle. The relation of the *zana'drazana* to the dead is shown in Fig. 9.

<sup>1</sup> This includes not only the goods bought for the occasion but all the goods consumed valued at their selling price.

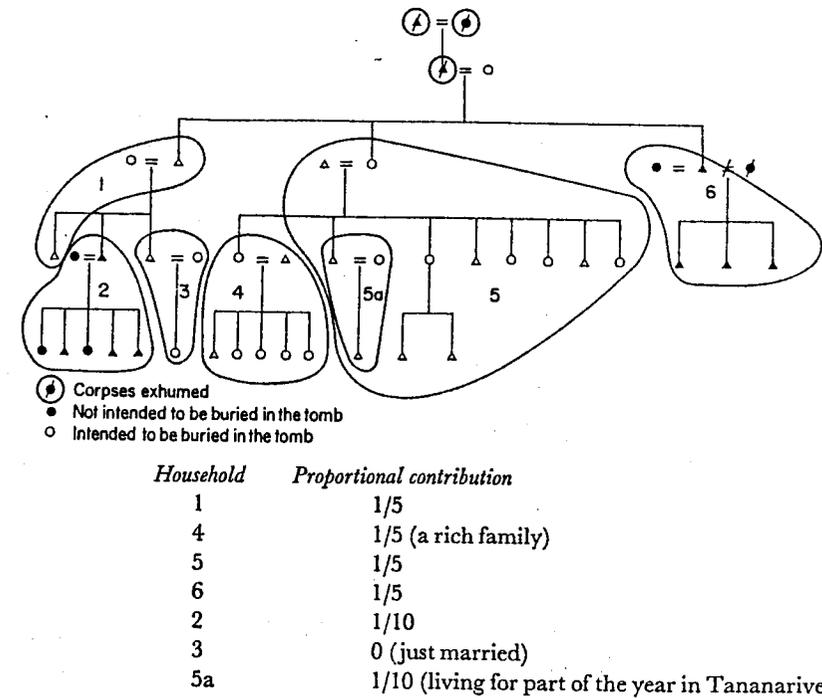


Fig. 8. Division of expenses among the households of the *tompon'jama*. (*Famadihana* at Talata Volon'ondry, 1966.)

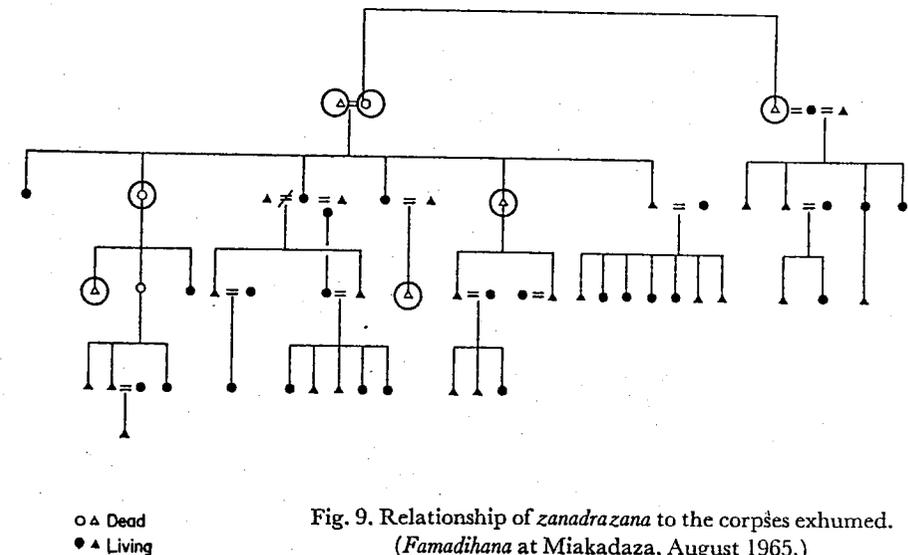


Fig. 9. Relationship of *zana'drazana* to the corpses exhumed. (*Famadihana* at Miakadaza, August 1965.)

Within the circle of *zana'drazana* is a smaller group of people who are directly responsible for the ceremony. They are the dead's closest kin, usually his own siblings and children. These are the initiators of the ceremony and they meet together to decide whether to hold the ceremony and how and when it will be carried out. The group of initiators are referred to as the *tompon'jama*, the "owners of the feast". They have a head who obtains his office by virtue of his genealogical position and he is responsible for coordinating the initiators. The role of the initiators of a *famadihana* is to organize the ceremony and make the money available. They, of course, receive contributions from more remote kinsmen as they also do from all those who attend the feast. These are voluntary gifts to the initiators and are shared out among them after the ceremony in the proportion in which the initiators have contributed.<sup>1</sup> Figure 8 shows the relation of the *tompon'jama* to the dead and how the expenses are divided among them. It is clear from this instance that the allocation of expenses is in terms of genealogical attachment to the dead. Thus if a man who had three children is to be exhumed, each of the children will contribute a third of the expenses irrespective of sex. If, however, one of the children is dead but is survived by two of *his* children, then they will each contribute one sixth.

The *tompon'jama* must be clearly distinguished from the tomb group. It is clear that participation in a *famadihana* is a demonstration of kinship links to the dead and is not a demonstration of attachment to a permanent group. We have already seen in the last chapter how on the one hand an individual's close kinsmen, and on the other his tomb group, are different (in other words, how an individual's dispersed family and the owners of his tomb are different). At all the *famadihanas* I attended many *zana'drazana* did not intend to be buried either in the *tanindrazana* or the tomb of the dead person, and this was even true for the *tompon'jama*, as Fig. 8 shows.<sup>2</sup>

Any description of a *famadihana* runs up against the difficulties involved in the fact that there are not one but several forms. Furthermore, each form varies in different instances. This is indeed character-

<sup>1</sup> In some cases gifts which have come early, whether of rice or money, are incorporated in the pool for the *famadihana*.

<sup>2</sup> There is one exception to this. When a new tomb is built some of the dead are brought from the old one. These are usually ancestors which link together the tomb group of the new tomb. The *tompon'jama* corresponds in such a case to the tomb group and it is possible that some relatives of the dead who do not intend to be buried in the tomb will join the initiators.

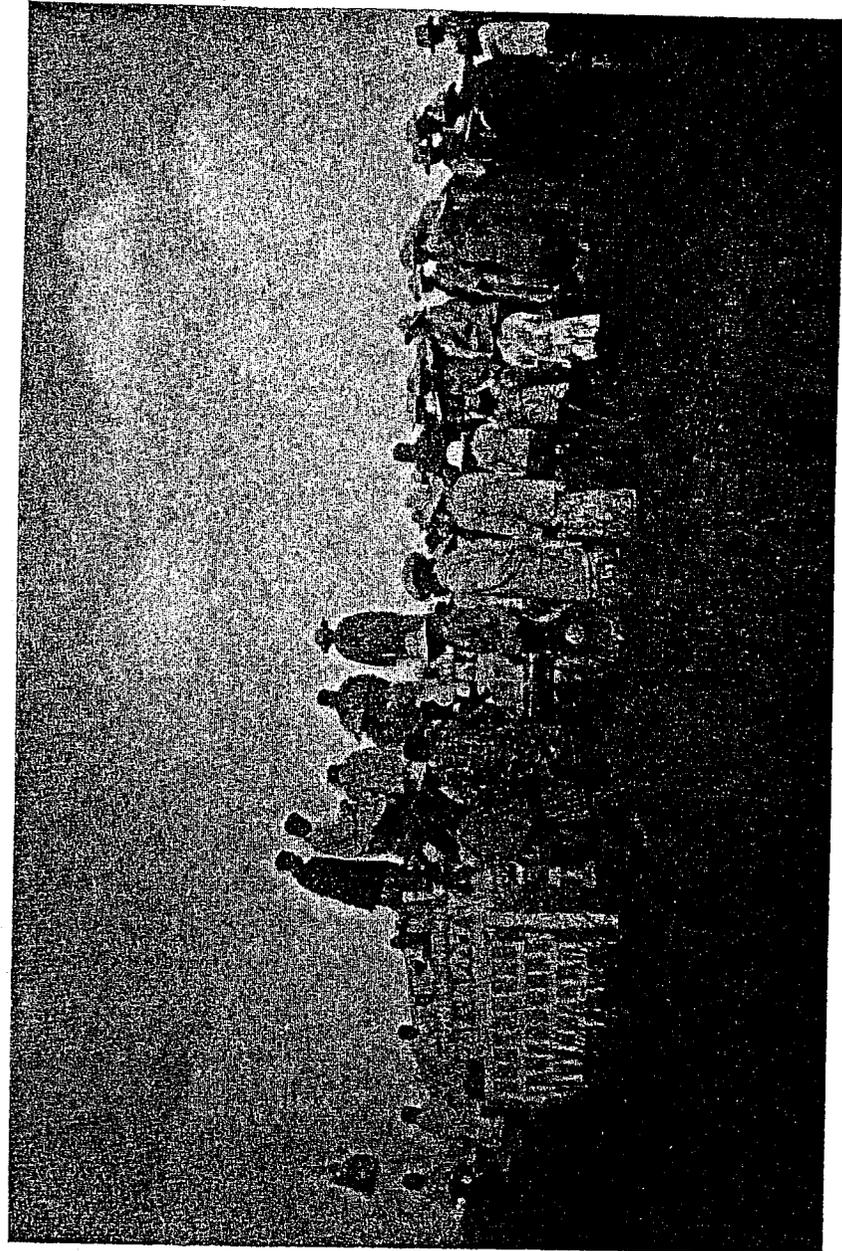


Plate 4a. *Famadihana*. The crowd gathers as the tomb is opened.



Plate 4b. *Famadihana*. Wrapping a corpse in a new *lamba mena*: the corpse is inside the old decayed *lamba mena*.

istic of all Merina institutions and reflects the absorption of many peoples into Merina society and the variable influence of Tananarive.

This variation cannot be dealt with here. The basic ritual of all *famadihanas* is the same. For the purposes of description we need only distinguish between return *famadihanas*, when the first part of the ceremony occurs at a place of temporary burial, and those *famadihanas* where the whole ceremony occurs at the tomb. The ceremonies I shall describe are ones where the principal actors are villagers and not Tananarivians. Minor variations are ignored.<sup>1</sup>

Since even the difference between return *famadihanas* and others is only partial, I shall describe in full a *famadihana* which occurs entirely at the tomb and then note briefly the different characteristics of return *famadihanas*.

Although a *famadihana* is often planned about a year before it is to take place, the actual preparations usually start a month before the ceremony when an astrologer is consulted to determine the right day. Once this is fixed, or at least when the astrologer has given an idea of the approximate date, the local families of the *tompon'jama* gather on days which they arrange among themselves. They start to cut and gather the great quantity of firewood which will be needed. Sometimes they repair their houses. Once these early preliminaries are finished the family go to their astrologer to ask for definite instructions on the conduct of the *famadihana*. They want to know the times and days when the various stages of the ceremony must be performed, and also the colour of the coats of the cattle to be slaughtered and the exact time when the first bull should be killed. They must know also the colour of the *lamba mena* to be given to the dead. As to the ceremony itself, every detail has to be specified and a complete programme is made, setting out such things as how the tomb is to be approached, where the party will stop on the way, etc. All this will be indicated, although in many cases the astrologer will himself lead and direct the proceedings on the day. The astrologer discovers all this according to various means of divination. In all cases he requires quite a stiff fee, around 5000 FMG. This is on top of the regular payments made to him during the year.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This description differs in many respects from the one given by R. Decary in *Moeurs et Coutumes des Malgaches*, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> A full discussion of the place of astrology in Merina thought and society is impossible here but it can be noted, as a generalization, that the help of an astrologer is required for all enterprises thought to involve danger. It is noticeable that at no time is the knowledge of the astrologer thought more necessary than at a *famadihana*. Each family has its astrologer who is paid regularly as well as for extra or exceptional occasions (see Bloch, 1968).

A week or so before the day those who are to be invited are visited by the head of the *famadihana* and asked to come, or, in some cases when the family are more sophisticated, a letter is sent. Two days before the appointed time the whole dispersed family of the dead gathers, bringing with them new clothes and jewellery, and preparations start in earnest. They gather together the cattle which are to be killed and the *lamba mena* which are to be given. The village in which the ceremony is to take place bustles with activity, carried on in high spirits. Some men chop wood, others prepare the temporary house which will receive the guests. This is a rough building, the walls of which are made up of blades of an aloe-like plant,<sup>1</sup> bound together by bamboos. The roof is normally made up of banana fronds. Inside, planks, branches and bamboos are lashed together to make tables and benches. The women are usually occupied in husking rice and roasting coffee as well as preparing snacks for all the helpers. Later in the day the men prepare to kill the first bull. Before this is done a rope is tied to one of its back legs and to its horns. Five or six young men then hang on to the ends. The men tease the animal and make it charge them while they rush out of the way. Sometimes they jump on its back and attempt to hold on while it tries to throw them. This kind of highly dangerous game is always engaged in before killing bulls for a ceremony. When the animal is completely exhausted it is tied up, and then the head of the family asks a blessing from God, the dead, the holy earth, the spirits of land and water, etc. After the speech asking for the blessing has been made, the head of the *famadihana* family ritually sprinkles the bull with water in which an *ariary tsy vaky*, a silver coin which has not been broken,<sup>2</sup> has been placed. He then asperges himself and the attendants and finally the water is passed around and everyone takes a drink. This, like all Merina blessings, is said to give those who are blessed many children, a long life and great wealth. The bull is then killed, though the actual killing is not ceremonial.

Killing cattle for a ceremony is for the Merina always a dangerous occasion and I have often been told of stories where the wrong cattle were killed or cattle were killed at the wrong time and, as a consequence, people participating in the ceremony had died immediately afterwards.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fincrea longavea*.

<sup>2</sup> In the past the Merina used to cut up Maria Theresa Thalers to obtain smaller coinage. Now a coin which has not been cut up is a symbol of purity.

<sup>3</sup> It does, in fact, seem that a surprising number of people do die at ceremonies. Probably this is due to excess tiredness and over-indulgence.

This was attributed to the lack of knowledge of the astrologer who had given a wrong decision on the day for the *famadihana* and the kind of bull to be killed. This fear reflects the general anxiety at such ceremonies. The astrologer may be wrong on a number of points and any mistake is said to have fatal results. The informants did not suggest that this was due to any supernatural agents. The causation is much vaguer. It seems that killing such a large living thing as a bull is dangerous as its death might be contagious.<sup>1</sup> Once death, in any form, has been introduced, only the greatest precautions can control it. After the first bull is dead the others are killed without any ceremony, but each is teased in the same way, as a chance to do this is never missed.

This preparatory period usually lasts until the morning of the day before the ceremony, when cattle are still being killed and prepared. Then the cooking is started out in the open in big iron pots and disused petrol drums. This is carried out exclusively by men and contrasts with everyday cooking, which is done indoors by women. The food is the usual food for feasts: rice, stewed beef and very sweet coffee.

The day preceding the actual ceremony is said to be the day of the dispersed family, while the day of the ceremony is said to be the day of the *fokon'olona* because only then are people who are not related expected to arrive. In fact this is not so clear-cut, but the distinction is characteristic of *famadihanas* since they are the time when the real kinsmen of the dead, the *zana'drazana*, are clearly marked off from the others in all activities.

As the evening draws on more and more guests arrive. As soon as they appear they are welcomed by a mixed band of flutes and drums and some of the *zana'drazana* who go out to meet them, dancing to the music. As they arrive, the guests may join in a short dance or perhaps just follow the band and those who have come to welcome them. They are led to the house of the head of the ceremony or another suitable spot where the leader of the party of guests which has just arrived sits down and listens to a short speech of welcome and thanks. He answers with a fairly similar speech, also of thanks, saying that the guests have come to rejoice with them because their kinsman has come home or because they have a new tomb, or whatever the case may be. He then goes on to say that as a blessing he gives a small contribution of money which he

<sup>1</sup> The idea of "contagious magic" in the sense Frazer used the term is ubiquitous in Madagascar. (see J. Rudd, *Taboo*, 1960).

points out is tiny, but is a mark of *mpifakatiavana*, their love as kinsmen for each other. These contributions are carefully noted down in a book with the name of the donor. The book will later be used as a guide for how much the recipient will give the donor when he is invited to his *famadihana*.<sup>1</sup> After being thanked for their contribution the guests are given a meal.

Whether the first half of the ceremony takes place at the tomb or away from it, it is always preceded by an observance on the evening before. The *zana'drazana* go to the burial place and stand on the tomb or grave and, looking towards the north-east, "call" the dead. In fact, they address the spirits (*Ambiroa*)<sup>2</sup> of those whose bodies they will exhume. The senior person present calls the spirits, addressing the hills with the traditional far-carrying "cough".<sup>3</sup> He calls their names inviting them to rejoin their bodies, for tomorrow their kinsmen will come and take their bodies home. They should be present because they will be made happy. After this small offerings are made to encourage the *ambiroa* to be present. These are usually rum and honey. Then the tomb or grave is left until the time of the main ceremony.

The *zana'drazana* then return to the village and rejoin the other guests. Throughout the evening and the night dancing and singing, sometimes accompanied by bands, sometimes by a simple double-headed drum, continues in the temporary house. Much the same thing goes on the next morning, when more and more guests arrive and another meal is eaten. The *zana'drazana* then dress in their best clothes and jewellery.

Around midday the *zana'drazana* gather and are blessed by an elder of the family who wishes them various benefits and asperges them in the traditional manner. He also anoints the back of the neck or the head of those who will be immediately concerned with medicine supplied by the family astrologer. This protects them from danger which is generally associated with the dead and death.

Once this has been done the *zana'drazana*, carrying the *lamba mena*, spades and other things which will be necessary, gather, dancing, in the temporary house. This dance is different in spirit from the preceding ones. It is both excited and tense—excited in that dancing is always a sign of joy and high spirits and tense in that the *zana'drazana*, and especially the close relatives, children, parents or spouses of the dead, are obviously

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frightened and deeply moved in apprehension of what is going to happen. This feeling persists throughout the main part of the ceremony.

The behaviour from then on only becomes clear if we bear in mind the fact that the ritual in a *famadihana* is very frightening to the Merina. Normally the dead and everything associated with them are studiously avoided. People who are alone always try not to have to go near tombs and there are endless stories of ghosts and how frightening they are. Coming into contact with the dead is always frightening, and the *famadihana* is in this sense a breaking of one of the basic precepts of society, which is respect and avoidance of the dead. Even pointing at a tomb may cause the offending finger to fall off. Not only does it involve coming into contact with the dead, but also with the skeletons of those with whom there once were the closest emotional ties. The desire of the close relatives to weep or run away is clearly apparent throughout the first part of the ceremony. The others on the contrary continually exhort the main participants not to weep, not to be afraid, to be happy and dance, as the dead are happy. The exhortations during this part of the ceremony show how the close relatives are being *forced* by the others to do a terrible, frightening thing. The women give themselves courage by dancing frenziedly on the way to the tomb—and this is acknowledged by the participants themselves. The men drink rum to achieve the same effect.

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earth that they remove they find certain charms—usually bits of wood and odd-shaped pieces of metal—which they pick out carefully so that they can be replaced later when the hole is filled in again. There is also always a locked padlock buried in the earth which, as it was explained to me, is a way of stopping ghosts from coming out. As soon as the trap-doors have been cleared they are opened (see Fig. 7). The men who have been digging rush away, which is one more illustration of the very real terror with which the whole operation of opening the grave is viewed.

The women are recommended during the whole proceeding to dance harder and harder. This has the effect of a drug and they become exhausted in the heat of the afternoon sun.

When the trap-doors are opened, the massive stone door of the tomb is revealed. The head of the *famadihana* family throws a stone down the stone staircase which leads to it. Immediately after, he rushes down and opens the door. He enters the tomb and in the doorway asks for the blessing of the dead in a formal prayer. He then sprinkles the skeletons with medicine and rum as a token offering. The medicine is said to be both a protection for the living and a gift to the dead. The first person in is followed by other members of the family and, with a certain amount of Dutch courage, they choose which skeleton or skeletons they will honour by taking out.

Once the corpses are identified, they are wrapped up in linen cloths, since the old *lamba mena* are most probably decayed by the decomposition of the body and the damp. Safely wrapped, the bodies are taken out of the tomb and immediately each bundle is again wrapped in a fine papyrus mat, usually specially prepared for the purpose.

Once these bodies have been taken out, they are placed in the custody of the women closely related to the dead. They hoist the body on their shoulders and start to dance with it in an anxious manner, going backwards and forwards.

The touching of the bodies by the women is the turning point of the ceremony. The bodies are touched by the people who are expected to have the strongest emotional links with the dead. They are touched by as close kinsmen of the dead as possible: parents, children and sisters. The reason why it is important that *women* should touch them is that women are the recognized vessels of kinship emotions. They, it is supposed, have the strongest tie to their kinsmen, and their emotional attachment is what is thought to keep the kinship links strong.

Here, however, an important distinction must be made. The very obvious emotion and fear aroused by the dead is really only very marked for the recently dead who have not been touched before—those for whom the *famadihana* is principally being held. The others are extras and much less attention is paid to them. This first contact with the recently dead is—obviously to the observer—a time when terror and revulsion are strong. The younger women have to be forced to touch the skeletons. Once actual contact has been made, the fear visibly diminishes and this continues till the end of the ceremony. In the end the fear is replaced by joyous excitement which often turns to Bacchanalian high spirits and by this time the recently dead are treated in much the same way as the long dead.

While this has been happening the crowd divides itself very clearly: the neighbours and more remote friends sit or stand at a certain distance, while the actual *zana'drazana* and the tomb family remain near the corpses and the tomb, many of them standing on the tomb.<sup>1</sup>

After a time the skeletons are laid on the laps of the women who sit on the ground, and then a short funeral-like service may be carried out by the local pastor or, in the case of Catholics and Anglicans, by a catechist. Once this is over the oldest man of the family makes a speech recalling the life of the person or persons whom they are principally honouring, describing all their achievements in a traditional manner. After this, he will start to pick out the *lamba mena* which are to be given to the dead from the pile on the tomb. There are often many *lamba mena* for each corpse, as usually all the children or all the siblings are under an obligation to bring one. Other relatives may also do so. This means that in some cases 10 or 12 *lamba mena* are wrapped around one skeleton.

The number of dead honoured at a *famadihana* varies and they are not all given the same treatment. This is most clearly seen by the number of *lamba mena* given.

Most *famadihana* are principally for one man or woman. The person specifically honoured is always someone who has not been touched since their funeral. This usually means that they have died fairly recently and are personally remembered by a number of people present—parents, children, etc. It is the exhumation of these people which arouses the greatest emotion. It is they who receive the greatest number of *lamba*

<sup>1</sup> This would normally be an act of extreme disrespect—something which only witches would do.

*mena*. Quite explicitly it is for them that the ceremony is performed. These are the people who are given the most honoured treatment.

After them there is a second category. These are the bodies which are taken out of the tomb, like those of the first category, and danced with. They are not, however, the people for whom the ceremony is specifically held and they normally receive from 1 to 3 *lamba mena*. A *famadihana* may already have been performed for them. If it has not it usually means that they have very few, if any, close relatives or that those they have do not have much money. These people may have been dead a considerable time—20 to 30 years.

A third category includes those who are given a *lamba mena* each but whose bodies are not taken out of the tomb. Their corpses are wrapped surreptitiously by relatives who go quickly into the tomb while the main ceremony is taking place. This is done to avoid the tax normally levied by the government for each body exhumed by people who either do not wish the treatment afforded to the second category or who cannot afford to pay for it.

Finally there is a fourth category which is different from the first three in that the dead are not remembered personally. All skeletons visible in the tomb are wrapped irrespective of who they are and in this way the tomb is generally tidied up. These are mainly the skeletons of people who may have died a considerable time ago. They may be wrapped up in bundles of two, three or more in relatively cheap or small *lamba mena*. The differential treatment reflects the way the Merina considers the dead of his family. Those who have been dead a long time are not much taken into account.<sup>1</sup> Their names and personalities are forgotten. Informants told me proudly that there were dead from a very long time ago in their tomb, but they neither knew nor cared who they were. Those who are remembered are more important, but the recently dead are clearly the most important of all and are always mentioned with reverence. This is reflected in the tomb where the most recently dead are placed in the most honoured positions and the longest dead in the least honoured positions. Thus *famadihanans* and funerals are times of reorganization of the tomb, since when new corpses are brought the old ones must be moved to less favoured places.

Once all the bodies have been wrapped in their *lamba mena* the women

<sup>1</sup> An exception to this are certain mythical ancestors of demes who have importance. This is, however, a different kind of importance.

put them on their shoulders a second time and dance with them, going backwards and forwards, but ultimately going three times round the tomb in a clockwise direction. Their dancing becomes more and more frenzied. The skeletons are thrown in the air with shouts. Some of the women start to run and tug and pull. The joking relatives of the dead, brothers-in-law, start to play tricks on the dead and attempt to stop them returning to the tomb. At this stage, the element of ritual sacrilege which has already been mentioned becomes clearly apparent. Some of the corpses whose very contact involves a tremendous emotional strain at the beginning of the ceremony are now, along with the others, thrown up and down and the bones can be heard to crush. There is an extraordinary transformation of mood.

Finally, they are replaced in the tomb much in the same riotous spirit. The men who have replaced the bodies throw out the mats in which they were wrapped during the ceremony. Immediately the women outside fight each other for them, as the possession of these mats which wrapped the dead is greatly valued. Sleeping on them helps fertility.

This is yet another element which runs right through the ceremony. Dancing during the *famadihana* and especially with the corpses is also good for fertility. It is difficult to know, however, to what extent this is believed, and whether or not it is only said to encourage the women to dance.

Once all the corpses have been returned to the tomb the relatives go in and note the position of the dead to which they are related. They are urged to remember where they are placed for another occasion.

I now want to turn to a short description of the return *famadihana*. This becomes necessary when a *voanjo* has died away from his *tanindrazana* and has been buried temporarily. In such a case the first part of the ceremony takes place at the place of temporary burial, normally where the dead man lived.

Usually the first part of the ceremony which occurs at the place of temporary burial is a smaller affair than the tomb ceremony. This is for practical reasons. Only a small party of the *zana'drazana* can normally manage to go and fetch the corpse. The number of these "fetchers" is affected by the distance to be travelled and the price of the fare. They are joined by kinsmen who live at the place of temporary burial who in turn invite their neighbours. These people may only see this part of the ceremony. Quite clearly, therefore, a number of factors affect the size

of this first part of the ceremony. It is significant that if the family of the dead man has settled in any number and for a considerable length of time at the place of temporary burial, which is normally the place of abode of the dead man, the ceremony will be more important than if this is not the case. In fact, the respective importance of the ceremony at the place of temporary burial and that at the place of the family tomb is a measure of the relative attachment of the family of the dead man to the two places. If the ceremony at the place of burial is a big affair it means that the relatives of the dead man feel that they have obligations to many people there and must invite them. If the ceremony at the place of temporary burial is small, the reverse is true. The same applies to the size of the ceremony at the tomb. We can therefore see the relative size as an indicator of the detachment or otherwise of the bereaved family from the *tanindrazana*.

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When a *famadihana* is held to transfer a corpse from one tomb to another the purpose is clearly stated. This is a very rare ceremony but of great interest. It is normally carried out for women, and only very occasionally for men, who have been buried in the tomb of their still living spouse, and who are later returned by *famadihana* to one of their

*mena*. Quite explicitly it is for them that the ceremony is performed. These are the people who are given the most honoured treatment.

After them there is a second category. These are the bodies which are taken out of the tomb, like those of the first category, and danced with. They are not, however, the people for whom the ceremony is specifically held and they normally receive from 1 to 3 *lamba mena*. A *famadihana* may already have been performed for them. If it has not it usually means that they have very few, if any, close relatives or that those they have do not have much money. These people may have been dead a considerable time—20 to 30 years.

A third category includes those who are given a *lamba mena* each but whose bodies are not taken out of the tomb. Their corpses are wrapped surreptitiously by relatives who go quickly into the tomb while the main ceremony is taking place. This is done to avoid the tax normally levied by the government for each body exhumed by people who either do not wish the treatment afforded to the second category or who cannot afford to pay for it.

Finally there is a fourth category which is different from the first three in that the dead are not remembered personally. All skeletons visible in the tomb are wrapped irrespective of who they are and in this way the tomb is generally tidied up. These are mainly the skeletons of people who may have died a considerable time ago. They may be wrapped up in bundles of two, three or more in relatively cheap or small *lamba mena*. The differential treatment reflects the way the Merina considers the dead of his family. Those who have been dead a long time are not much taken into account.<sup>1</sup> Their names and personalities are forgotten. Informants told me proudly that there were dead from a very long time ago in their tomb, but they neither knew nor cared who they were. Those who are remembered are more important, but the recently dead are clearly the most important of all and are always mentioned with reverence. This is reflected in the tomb where the most recently dead are placed in the most honoured positions and the longest dead in the least honoured positions. Thus *famadihanas* and funerals are times of reorganization of the tomb, since when new corpses are brought the old ones must be moved to less favoured places.

Once all the bodies have been wrapped in their *lamba mena* the women

<sup>1</sup> An exception to this are certain mythical ancestors of demes who have importance. This is, however, a different kind of importance.

put them on their shoulders a second time and dance with them, going backwards and forwards, but ultimately going three times round the tomb in a clockwise direction. Their dancing becomes more and more frenzied. The skeletons are thrown in the air with shouts. Some of the women start to run and tug and pull. The joking relatives of the dead, brothers-in-law, start to play tricks on the dead and attempt to stop them returning to the tomb. At this stage, the element of ritual sacrilege which has already been mentioned becomes clearly apparent. Some of the corpses whose very contact involves a tremendous emotional strain at the beginning of the ceremony are now, along with the others, thrown up and down and the bones can be heard to crush. There is an extraordinary transformation of mood.

Finally, they are replaced in the tomb much in the same riotous spirit. The men who have replaced the bodies throw out the mats in which they were wrapped during the ceremony. Immediately the women outside fight each other for them, as the possession of these mats which wrapped the dead is greatly valued. Sleeping on them helps fertility.

This is yet another element which runs right through the ceremony. Dancing during the *famadihana* and especially with the corpses is also good for fertility. It is difficult to know, however, to what extent this is believed, and whether or not it is only said to encourage the women to dance.

Once all the corpses have been returned to the tomb the relatives go in and note the position of the dead to which they are related. They are urged to remember where they are placed for another occasion.

I now want to turn to a short description of the return *famadihana*. This becomes necessary when a *voanjo* has died away from his *tanindrazana* and has been buried temporarily. In such a case the first part of the ceremony takes place at the place of temporary burial, normally where the dead man lived.

Usually the first part of the ceremony which occurs at the place of temporary burial is a smaller affair than the tomb ceremony. This is for practical reasons. Only a small party of the *zana'drazana* can normally manage to go and fetch the corpse. The number of these "fetchers" is affected by the distance to be travelled and the price of the fare. They are joined by kinsmen who live at the place of temporary burial who in turn invite their neighbours. These people may only see this part of the ceremony. Quite clearly, therefore, a number of factors affect the size

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parental tombs. The reason given for this transfer is that the living spouse may not marry again so long as his dead wife is in his family tomb. To free himself he transfers his dead wife to her parents' tomb.

For the very much more common return *famadihana* the reason given is also fairly explicit. It is assumed that it is the deepest wish of everyone to be buried with other people, and especially with their kinsmen. The terror of being buried alone is a major obsession, and those few individuals who fear this might be their fate are continually bringing the conversation back to this topic as if obsessed by the thought. I often tried to push the point further and discover what specific unpleasantness awaited the person who was permanently buried alone, or what special pleasures awaited those buried in the family tomb. Here again one meets with no very definite ideas about what actually happens to the dead. The point implied is simply that the dead are thought to enjoy some kind of life, and no sort of life can be enjoyed without being surrounded by kinsmen.

For those *famadihanas* which only involve taking the corpses out of the tomb and returning them the reasons behind them were almost never formulated. I was told such things as, "They have not been touched for a long time". Even more general answers were obtained such as, "The neighbours will think us wicked to have money while the dead do not have new *lamba mena*". One rather cynical shopkeeper with whom I discussed the matter said that the neighbours were putting pressure on him to hold a *famadihana* as they did not want him to accumulate too much money. In this particular instance the neighbours won in spite of his cynicism. As I was about to leave the village he was planning one.

At a more general level informants told me that the *famadihanas* are performed to make the dead happy. In some cases I was told that a *famadihana* was held after a dead relative had appeared in a dream to one of the initiators and had actually asked for a *famadihana*, either because he was buried away from the ancestral tomb and wanted to return or simply because he was cold.

The ceremony is not thought to change the nature of the soul or its state as the theories of Hertz and Van Gennep might lead us to expect.<sup>1</sup> Nor is a *famadihana* thought to bring specific benefits to the living, such as the removal of diseases.<sup>2</sup>

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Plate 5a. *Famadihana*. Young woman listening to a eulogy of the dead with the skeleton of her father-in-law on her lap.

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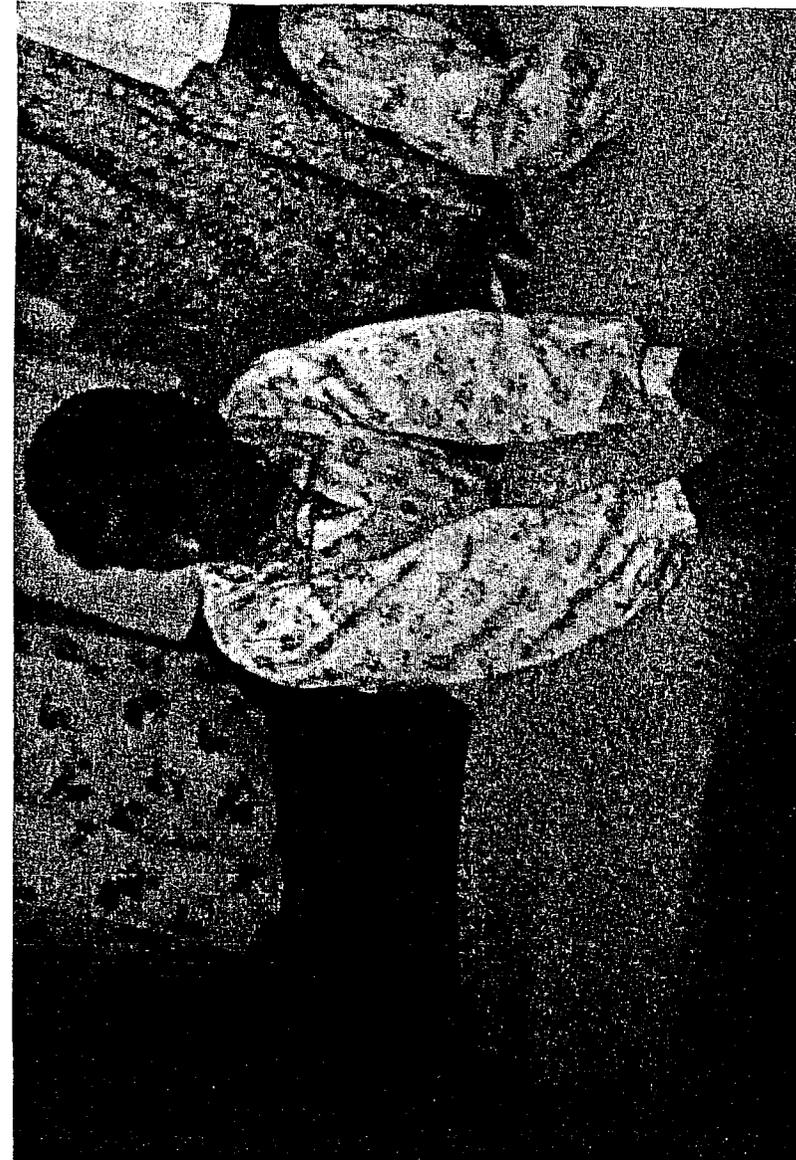


Plate 5a. *Famadihana*. Young woman listening to a eulogy of the dead with the skeleton of her father-in-law on her lap.

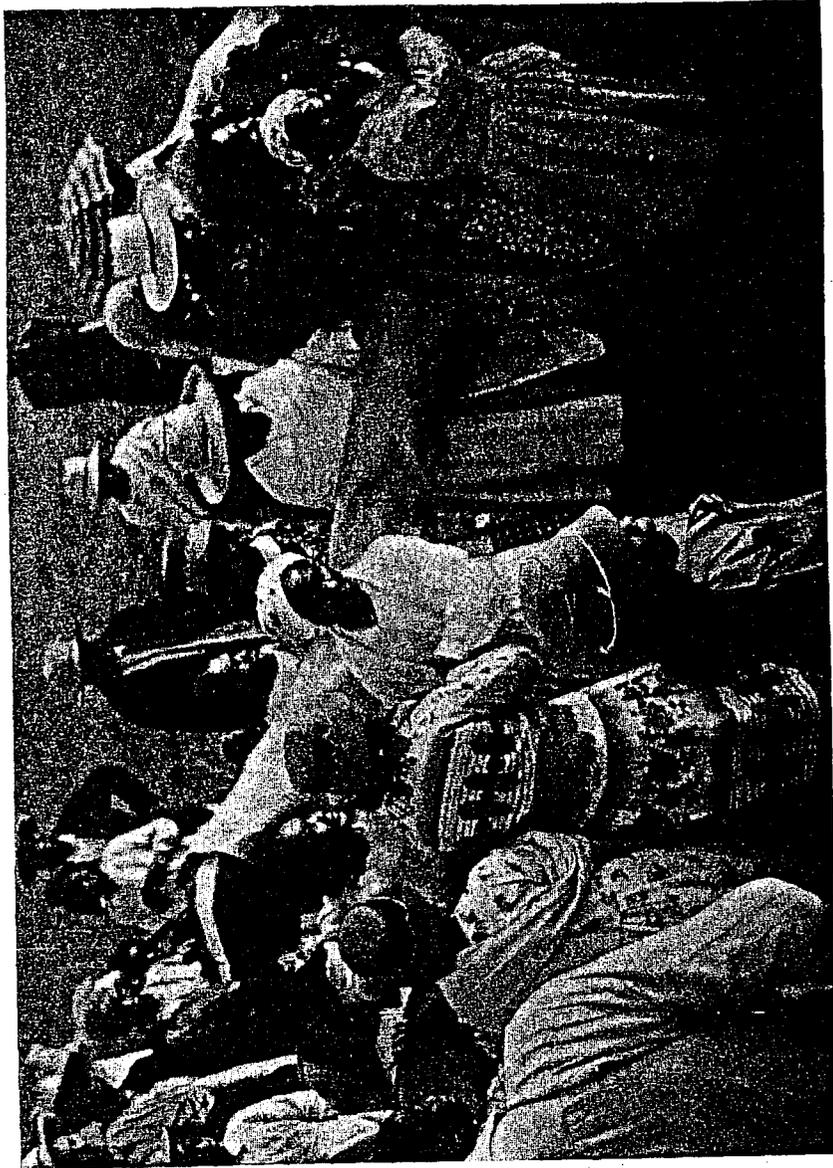


Plate 5b. *Famadihana*. Dancing with the corpses towards the end of the ceremony in a near Bacchalian spirit.

It is true, however, that since the dead are happy the living take the occasion to ask for a blessing, or more exactly a *tsodrano*. The word *tsodrano* means "blowing on water" and this is what a living person does when giving a *tsodrana*. After having wished the recipient a long life, many children, etc., he blows over water in which an *ariary tsy vaky* has been placed. Today this is often modified into spraying the water with the hand in a manner clearly derived from the practice of baptism. A *tsodrana* is normally given either by a person who is very old—often in return for a small present—in which case the nearness to death is thought to give special power, or it is given by the head of a family. It may also be asked from the dead by the gift of a small libation at the tomb. At a *famadihana* it is understood that all those directly concerned are by their action asking for a *tsodrano*. Sometimes some of the dances while the corpse is visible are mimes requesting a *tsodrano*. The actual effect of receiving a *tsodrano* is again not clear. It makes the object of the blessing more prosperous, but above all it removes *tsiny* (approximately "guilt").

The removal of *tsiny* and its relation to the *famadihana* is one of the most abstract expressions of the purpose of the ceremony. This is a topic usually only approached by those renowned for their knowledge of "custom", mainly senior men who carry a great deal of authority, or astrologers. The notions about *tsiny* are therefore not general knowledge in the same way as the ideas discussed above.

The nature of *tsiny* for the Merina has been discussed at length and in great depth by Andriamanjato.<sup>1</sup> I can only summarize his argument by saying that *tsiny* is believed to be the guilt incurred by wrong actions, especially those against kinsmen, although there is no specific idea that a particular action is the cause of one man's *tsiny*. The incurring of *tsiny* is almost unavoidable in that one is continually failing to fulfil one's duties completely, especially towards one's kinsmen. As one goes through life one is weighed down by the inevitable accumulation of *tsiny*, and as a result all one undertakes is thwarted. The *famadihana* lightens the burden of *tsiny*. This means that it does not positively cause anything good to happen, but it removes possible unspecified future misfortunes.

Conversely, failure to carry out a *famadihana* when one is financially able to do so may increase *tsiny*. Here a clear distinction is always made between return *famadihanas* and other kinds of *famadihanas*. In the case of

<sup>1</sup> R. Andriamanjato, *Le Tsiny et le Tody dans la Pensée Malgache*, 1957.

non-return *famadihanas* there is only *tsiny* if the ceremony is not carried out while the living are getting rich. For return *famadihanas* the obligation is much more definite. I have often been told that as soon as a relative has been buried temporarily his kinsmen must start saving up to carry out the *famadihana* at the earliest possible date. If they cannot manage otherwise they must sell whatever they have, even if it means disposing of the land which is their means of livelihood, if they want to escape *tsiny*. I know of several cases in which this was done. It shows the very special place of the return *famadihana* in the Merina mind. This is my starting point for a wider discussion of the ceremony.

Let us turn now from the specific explanations given to me by informants to a more general explanation of the ceremony, which is based partly on informants' statements, partly on direct observation, and partly on general considerations of Merina society.

When we ask what the essence of the *famadihana* is and what it is that all *famadihanas* have in common the answers we obtain are not very illuminating, but a hint of what the actors think on this subject can be found in the assumptions they make when talking about *famadihanas*. All discussion of *famadihanas* in general by the peasants only refers to return *famadihanas*. As soon as the subject is raised generally, descriptions or explanations are given which only take into account the return *famadihana*. This can go to extraordinary lengths. In one particular case I remember questioning an important informant during a *famadihana*. This *famadihana* was of the type in which the bodies are taken out of the family tomb and then replaced and was not a return *famadihana*. I started to discuss the subject in general with him. Not only was what I was told applicable only to return *famadihanas*, but it was firmly denied that any other kind ever occurred. It seems to me that this attitude can only be explained by the fact that the intellectual concept of a *famadihana* is that of the return *famadihana*. Other factors, including the clearly stated fear of incurring *tsiny* if the return *famadihana* is not carried out, strongly support this assumption. There is also the fact that when the Merina feel they should defend their customs against non-Merina they are always willing to rise to the defence of the return *famadihana*, but feel a little uncomfortable when the other forms are mentioned.

The defence given on such occasions is in itself very interesting. The main point they make is that it is essential to bring together the dead of one family. The universality of this desire is taken for granted. As has already been noted, it is a basic fear of the Merina to be buried away

from their kinsmen. The very strength of this feeling makes it quite clear that it involves many factors. The point is that to be without a tomb to go into really means to have no kinsmen and no family while alive or, in other words, to have no place in the continuing social structure. It means to have no kinsmen while alive, because the group of closest kinsmen is conceptually associated with the tomb group. It means to have no place in the continuing social structure because a man only has such a place in relation to a tomb. As we saw, there are no descent groups of the living, but there is a notion of descent groups in relation to the dead in the tomb. In the ideal past, the family is believed to have been a quasi corporate localized group with its tomb on its territory. Now the only thing that allows this picture to continue to live is the fact that although the family is not there any more and not a corporate group any more, it is known that when dead it will be such a group again.

Here we can look again at the concept of *tsiny*. Andriamanjato has stressed first, how *tsiny* is linked with failing to fulfil duties to Ego's kinsmen, and second, how the Merina feels it cannot possibly be escaped. It seems to me that an important aspect of this failure is that the actor feels himself continually forced for reasons of practicability to have close relations with people who are not his kinsmen. It is clearly felt that such relations should exist only between kinsmen. This is shown by the way people with whom one has contractual relationships are said to be kinsmen, even when it is obvious they are not. This means that the actor feels that by entering into non-kinship relations he deprives his kinsmen of what really should be theirs: this is *tsiny*. Therefore the dispersal of the family inevitably leads to *tsiny*. The actor makes up for the fall from kinship grace, which is due to the dispersal of the living, by spending large sums on the ritual regrouping of the dead. He thus avoids the maximum *tsiny* which would be the acceptance of the definitive break with the *tanindrazana* and his family.

The idea of the rightness of being together with kinsmen during life and death is clearly expressed in what is, without doubt, the most commonly quoted Merina proverb, which is always given as an explanation for the return *famadihana*: "*Velona iray trano, maty iray fasana*", which can be translated as "Those who live in one house should be buried in one tomb". It is interesting that this aspect was noted by Hertz in his essay on death. Most of his thesis is not applicable to the *famadihana* since he is dealing with somewhat different secondary funerals, but it is interesting to note that many of his points are relevant. He states:

La réunion des ossements du mort à ceux des ancêtres . . . constitue . . . en général, l'un des actes essentiels de la cérémonie finale. Les ossuaires dont l'existence nous est attestée par de nombreux ethnographes, appartiennent le plus souvent à la famille ou au clan. "Vivant, une seule maison, mort, une seule Tombe", dit un proverbe Malgache qui semble exprimer un sentiment profond.<sup>1</sup>

This proverb implies that those who live together while alive should be buried together. It refers to the traditional society when neighbours were kinsmen and it amounts to saying that kinsmen should be buried together. This is why it is quoted in justification of bringing back those who have been buried away. When applied to the present it involves an interesting paradox. Although in the past this formulation may have corresponded to an actual state of affairs, nowadays, as likely as not, the people who will be buried together probably never lived together. Instead of the tomb being a continuation of the state of affairs of the living it is an ideal of corporateness and family unity which is striven for during life, but is never achieved. The return *famadihana* is therefore a ritual regrouping. It is often described as bringing back those who have gone away. But it is not a question of bringing *back* since there is no pre-existing group, descent group or local group from which the living could have separated themselves. What really happens at a return *famadihana* is the *making* of a group which, as we saw, is an ideal model for the living.

The notion of a descent group which is associated with the tomb is also clearly to be seen in the *famadihanans* which accompany the making of a new tomb. There we saw how it is necessary to take some of the dead out of the old tomb in order to place them in the new tomb. This action obviously stresses the importance of continuity of a kinship group through time. The aspect of the *famadihana* which stresses fertility also seems to fall into place here because of its obvious link with the continuity of the group.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of reforming the family as a permanent group is only one aspect of the *famadihana*. It is, as we have seen, the aspect which is foremost in the minds of the actors. The other basic element is the emotion aroused in the individual by the relation of the recently dead. This

<sup>1</sup> R. Hertz, "Contribution à une étude sur la représentation de la mort", *L'Année Sociologique*, 1907, p. 113. Much of what Hertz has to say of the Malagasy is not relevant here as it refers to the funeral ceremonies of the Betsileo kings.

<sup>2</sup> Also relevant to this argument is the rare type of *famadihana* which takes place when a corpse has for some reason been lost. In such a case a megalith representing the man who has died is erected near the tomb and a very similar ceremony is performed.

is very clear to the observer but it is an aspect much less taken into account by the actors when they talk of the *famadihana*. This relationship has two aspects. First, there is affection and respect for the dead, marked by the giving of *lamba mena* and the spending of vast sums on them, and the obvious emotion of the participants. Second, there is the aspect of sacrilege. In one way the *famadihana* is a demonstration of the kinship links of the dead to the living. The giving of *lamba mena* and the assembly of the kinsmen of the dead marks off the dispersed family centred around the dead, a bilateral web. The group of the kinsmen of the dead are the *zana'drazana*. The genealogy in Fig. 9 shows how the dead are the links which hold this group together. This is an Ego-centred bilateral group and it should be noted that the people who will be buried in the tomb are not in any way the main actors.

It follows that, bearing in mind that the kinship system of the living is a bilateral web which does not divide society into exclusive groups, and that the idea of corporateness is a concept which can really exist only in relation to tombs, the shift of emphasis from the tomb to the individual dead is a shift of emphasis from groups to interpersonal relations. We are marking this change of emphasis when we pass from the return aspect, which is principally concerned with bringing the dead back to the tomb, to the emotional aspect, which is mainly concerned with activating the relationship between the living and the individual dead. The reaffirmation of the link of the living to certain individual dead at the same time stresses interpersonal relations between kinsmen. The *famadihana* is well suited to demonstrating such links because all direct kinship relations depend on links through the dead. This is because all kinship relations are ultimately based on having a common forebear in an ascending generation. If this forebear is dead the two relatives interact directly, but if this forebear is not dead the authority vested in the senior generations means that the two relatives must go through the intermediary of their senior kinsmen. By taking the simple example of two brothers we can see what this means. If two brothers whose parents are dead want to participate in an important action then they will combine together knowing that they are linked by the dead. If their parents are living any joint action has to be directed by their living parent and the relationship between them is of one brother to the parent of the other brother. In this way the fact that the links to the dead are demonstrated ceremonially under great emotional stress strengthens all kinship links between individuals. This strengthening of kinship is the

second aspect of the *famadihana*. In other words, while the return aspect of the *famadihana* is a ritual denial of the cross-cutting nature of kinship, since the grouping into tombs is a way of dividing society into non-overlapping groups by forgetting the kinship ties which do not fit into this pattern, the second aspect of the *famadihana* in contrast stresses the full spread of the individual's kinship relations. This is manifested by the fact that all relatives of the dead must participate irrespective of their tomb group and *tanindrazana* affiliations. It is, however, not simply a matter of maintaining individual ties; it is also a question of transforming them.

The aspect of the *famadihana* which seems at first most strange is the deliberate disrespect shown to the corpse. This seems to be a complete contradiction of the act of piety in giving *lamba mena* to the dead. The whole matter is obviously most complex. A similar topic has recently been discussed by Dr. J. Goody.<sup>1</sup> Two of his points are particularly relevant here. First, he states: "When the reversal concerns a strongly sanctioned prohibition, by the very act of breaking the social norm the initiate forges a bond with the other members of the group as against the rest of the world." In this case he is referring to associations, but a similar effect does seem to me to occur here, in the sense that in having committed a sacrilege together the bond between kinsmen is all the stronger. This is only one aspect. Dr. Goody also states for a ritual involving similar sacrilege towards the dead: "The fear of the corpse is purged by contact with the very object of disgust." This brings me to a completely new aspect.

The *famadihana* is for the actors a transformation of the living's idea about the dead. This applies for those dead for whom the *famadihana* is principally performed and who are being "touched" for the first time since their burial. During decomposition the body is terrifying because in some ways it breaks the division of those essential categories, life and death. Although it is dead it arouses in the living still the same picture and emotions as when alive. The rough treatment given to the corpse and its display as a skeleton is a clear demonstration of its complete death. It is interesting to note how, during the ceremony, the close relatives who have the most intimate memories of the dead person are forced to handle the skeleton so that the realization of death is fully accepted. They are made to come to terms with the fact that their

<sup>1</sup> J. Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, 1962, pp. 74-77.

brother, mother, etc, is nothing but a pile of dry bones, a point stressed by Hertz in a slightly different context:

Le fait brut de la mort physique ne suffit pas à consommer la mort dans les consciences: l'image de celui qui est mort récemment fait encore parti du système des choses de ce monde; elle ne s'en détache que peu à peu, par une série de déchirements intérieurs.

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Hertz's view of the secondary funeral as an act of separation is also relevant here. Hertz saw the ceremony as changing the nature of the dead so that they were more remote from the living. In other words finally liberating the soul of the corpse from its body. At a *famadihana*, however, no drastic change is thought to occur to the dead.<sup>1</sup> The change which occurs is in the attitude of the living to the dead. While in the ceremonies considered by Hertz the dead are separated by being removed away from the living, in the case of the *famadihana* the living are separated from the dead by being removed away from the dead. The ritually sacrilegious attitude which is forced on the living is one which makes them consider their relatives as irreversibly dead, and consequently separates the dead from them in a definitive manner.

There is one further aspect of this contrast between secondary funerals and the *famadihana*. The separation involved in a secondary funeral is an explicit belief: after the secondary funeral the soul is said to change its state. The separation involved in a *famadihana* is subjective and not explicit. The significance of this is that the separating effect of the ceremony varies with the individuals concerned and in some cases the final separation involves more than one *famadihana*. Even when bodies are being exhumed for a second or even a third time some aspects of the element of demonstrating and breaking kinship links remain, but in such cases the emotions are much weaker and the ceremony is much smaller and of only secondary importance.

An analysis of a *famadihana* must therefore take two aspects into account: firstly, the aspect of regrouping in the tomb, and secondly, the aspect of demonstrating relationship to the dead, and through the dead to other living people. This second aspect is ambiguous, since at the same time as the individual relationships are being demonstrated they are also being broken.

<sup>1</sup> Nor is the *famadihana* linked with the end of mourning.

The concept held by the Merina of their kinship system is one of segmentary, corporate groups. This illusion of corporateness and locality is maintained by its demonstrability for the society of the dead. The return *famadihana* plays a major part in this. In contrast, the *actual* structure of the kinship system is no longer one of localized corporate groups. As a result of the partial breakdown in the rule of endogamy and of territorial dispersion the actual structure of kinship has become very much what we would expect in a bilateral society; that is, a web of interpersonal relationships which, because of their overlapping, do not divide the society into groups. The second aspect of the *famadihana* serves the purposes of such a system by stressing interpersonal links between the living and the dead and, by extension, between different living people.

The *famadihana* therefore combines the picture of the exclusive ideal groups by stressing the unity of the dead within the tomb (this is clear in the return aspect) and, at the same time, the contradictory bilateral dispersed family of the dead. This is achieved by the giving of *lamba mena*, the gathering of all the relatives, and by sacrilege. What is most important is the combination of these two elements in one ceremony. This combination means that the *famadihana* becomes the articulation between the ideal kinship system and the actual system by being a significant part of the gradual process of depersonalization of the dead. Before the first *famadihana* those who have died are still often mentioned in conversation and clearly their personalities and their social ties are remembered with emotion in the same way as when they were alive. We saw how the first *famadihana*, and to a lesser extent the succeeding ones, involve the gathering of the dead's dispersed family which pinpoints his place in the kinship system. However, this is only one aspect for the ceremony also involves a separation from the dead. This separation takes the form of a brutal demonstration that the dead relative is really nothing more than a dry skeleton. After the *famadihana* the skeleton is always replaced in the tomb. This, as we saw, marks the dead man's place in the ideal society. Membership of the tomb by the dead and the placing of an individual finally in the society of the ancestors implies forgetting and ignoring many kinship relations of the dead which cut across the groupings of this society. The separation aspect of the ceremony does precisely this because it is no longer as relatives of the living that those who have died ultimately become part of the society of the ancestors but as a part of the tomb. After the first *famadihana* especially the names of the dead tend to

be forgotten and it is only as members of "our tomb" that they later have any significance. In this way the bilateral web of the living has been literally transformed by means of one or more *famadihana* into a system of discrete interlocking groups. This is the end of the process which began with the funeral in the village. The full funerary *rites de passage* therefore imply a ceremony involving the practical society, then a ceremony involving the moral kinship society, which ultimately means reducing the dead man to a part of the Merina model of an ideal society.