

# Fresh contact in Tamatave, Madagascar:

## Sex, money, and intergenerational transformation

### ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore practices of transactional sex among young women in contemporary Tamatave, Madagascar. As young men remain suspended in part-time jobs, young women have been able to embrace the possibilities offered by the informal sexual economy, which links Tamatave to France, Réunion Island, and beyond as well as creating complex redistributions of resources within Tamatave, shifting the balance of power in gendered and generational relations. Drawing on Karl Mannheim's concept of "fresh contact," I argue that a focus on the ways in which youthful practice refigures relations between generations works to complicate and nuance recent discussions of youth culture and youth agency. [*youth, transactional sex, generations, gender, agency, Madagascar*]

The role of youth in processes of social reproduction and transformation has become increasingly visible in recent years owing to a combination of the movement of international capital and neoliberal economic reforms. The cumulative impact of these developments has been to create contradictions for youth by simultaneously targeting them as consumers and making them particularly vulnerable to socioeconomic exclusion (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000; Ruddick 2003). In the city of Tamatave, a large, historic port town located on Madagascar's east coast, one way these contradictions manifest themselves is through young women's increasing attempts to use various kinds of sex-for-money exchange, which I refer to here as *transactional sex*, as a means not only to save themselves from grim economic circumstances but also to find new kinds of power and respected adulthood.

Youths' participation in the informal sexual economy in Madagascar has much to contribute to an emergent anthropology of youth (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Durham 2000; Leichty 2002; Sharp 2002; Stephens 1995; Weiss 2002). This recent writing about youth has moved away from assumptions guiding the older psychological anthropology of adolescence, the great strength of which was to demonstrate the cultural and historical variability in managing the transition to adulthood (Mead 1928; Whiting et al. 1986). What was problematic about this earlier approach was that it conceptualized youth as incomplete cultural actors and assumed that the transition to adulthood was profoundly shaped by specieswide biological factors.

In keeping with the current theoretical emphasis on relations of power and resistance, more contemporary studies of youth have recuperated an alternative sociological tradition that focuses on youth culture and the ways in which youth are social actors actively engaged in the construction and reconstruction of social and cultural forms (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995; Bucholtz 2002; Hall and Jefferson 1993; Sharp 2002). In emphasizing both the concept of "youth culture" and youth agency, however, this position runs the risk of fetishizing and reifying the category of youth,

separating youth off from the families and communities in which they live. It also risks fetishizing resistance and agency, a point that becomes acutely visible when one begins to explore the morally ambiguous contexts in which youth find themselves. In contrast to these views, I argue for a diachronic approach that places youth in changing historical, political, and economic circumstances by focusing on the role of transactional sex in creating new patterns of marriage, kinship, and intergenerational relations. Through an examination of young women's practices of transactional sex, I seek in this article to reorient the ways that youth have figured in contemporary anthropological analyses.

With respect to research on Madagascar, in particular, I argue that despite long-standing acceptance of youthful sexual experimentation among many groups (Astuti 1995; Bloch 1998; Feeley-Harnik 1991) the transactional sex that contemporary Tamatavian youth engage in is more than simply "youthful behavior," a transient phase that they will soon leave behind. Rather, because contemporary social and economic conditions have made normative paths to adulthood either irrelevant or impossible to traverse, transactional sex is intimately tied to processes of intergenerational transformation. Young women engaged in the sexual economy are contributing to a process of class formation that engenders new hierarchies associated with globalization and neoliberal economic reform.

My argument is based on fieldwork from 1999 through 2003. I conducted research with both youth and their families in Tamatave, spending time with youth in the narrow, twisting sand paths of residential neighborhoods, attending church and neighborhood activities, and talking to both youth and their parents about practices surrounding marriage and family formation, love and sex, and money, labor, and consumption.<sup>1</sup> To make my argument concrete, however, let me begin with the issue of transactional sex as I first encountered it, during a discussion I had one Sunday afternoon in September of 2000, on the beachfront in Tamatave.

### The rhythm of the times

Sunday afternoon is the maid's day off. At that time, the thousands of young women who have come from the countryside to work as servants in the homes of wealthier families are released from the oppressive conditions in which they labor the rest of the week. The normally quiet beachfront fills up with groups of young women cruising arm in arm. Young men tease them and follow at their heels. Vendors set up at the side of the road to sell peanuts, coconut candies, and shots of rum. The crush of bodies is so intense that people have to walk single file to force their way through the crowd. I am here to interview a group of high school youth, ages 15 to 18 years.

The young people that I am here to meet come from fairly modest backgrounds, their parents generally employed at the port or involved in small-scale trade. They are enrolled in the lyc ee, however, and feel themselves considerably more sophisticated and cosmopolitan than the young maids and rickshaw pullers who crowd the beach. They have chosen the location for our meeting to be well away from places frequented by their parents. Nevertheless, they distinguish themselves from their surroundings by lounging about with ostentatiously bored expressions, and they comment to each other that it has been "just eons" since they last came down *au bord* (as in *au bord de la mer*), as the popular beachfront locale is called in local parlance. Given their nonchalant demeanor and that they are faced with an oldster like myself, I fear this interview is going to be a disaster. Then Farida, a girl of 17 dressed in a body-hugging stretch knit dress and platform shoes, starts talking about her friend who earns money by having sex with *vazaha*, the Malagasy word for Europeans.

My friend, she works as a prostitute (*manao makorely*). She has a boyfriend who is still young. He is handsome and still in school. When she goes to the nightclub, the boy brings her there. She works [finding Europeans] and the boy, he just waits for her. And when she gets off work, they go home together and she keeps her money with that boy—so if there happens to be a *vazaha* who wants to sleep with her, then she says that that boy is her brother. And the *vazaha*, he thinks that he is his brother-in-law, but really it is his competition.

The group is instantly animated. Aurelie, dressed in a slinky, flowered dress, takes up the theme.

This couple I know, they were very poor. But the girl, she was very pretty! And she told her husband she wanted to work as a prostitute. She found a *vazaha*. She brought him home, and she said that her husband was really her brother! And the *vazaha*, he bought them many things. He gave them a boat (for fishing). And then one day the *vazaha* came unannounced and surprised the couple [together] and he realized that this man was definitely *not* her brother. And now he has had that boy put in jail.<sup>2</sup>

At this point the boys in the group are starting to squirm. I ask the group if it is wrong for women to choose the richer European man but secretly support a Malagasy lover. Farida answers first. "Well, if a *vazaha* who had a lot of money liked me, I'd go with him whether I liked him or not to get money, sure, and then I'd use that money to support my boyfriend."

The other girl nods assent, but Rodrigue, formerly lounging to the side with his baseball cap turned backward, suddenly loses his cool.

In terms of what makes me a Malagasy, I could not accept that, even if she were just my girlfriend, I would break up with her immediately. And I wouldn't agree to such an arrangement no matter how poor I was. What they did, it is because of poverty and it signals the destruction of Malagasy culture [*la culture Malgache*, said in French] and it will just make things worse if we do that. Even the girl who proposed that plan to her husband, you can see that she has lost what makes her Malagasy! [disgustedly] And the man, he accepted! That is what is ruining our ancestral land. We love money just too much now. Our social life is a mess. And we won't get rid of our poverty even if we do things to get money quickly. It ruins our culture. And, didn't you see, their wealth didn't last long, did it? It was like water from a sieve, it all fell through [their hands] again.

The girls, slightly chagrined, looked away, pretending to be absorbed in the flux of bodies around us.

These kinds of conversations about sex, money, gender, and morality were typical throughout the course of my recent research in Tamatave. The phenomenon these youth referred to was part of a generally perceived increase in girls' use of sex to earn money, a complex economy among young people in which sex, consumption, and social status are intimately intertwined. Despite a long history of different kinds of transactional sexual relationships in this region, both youth and adults I spoke with claimed that the current commodification of sexual relationships and the kinds of social arrangements that they entail are new phenomena. They date the change to the early 1990s, the postsocialist period associated with economic liberalization during which Madagascar experienced an influx of consumer goods as well as new forms of media and people began to carve out new domains of production and service. The rampant use of sex for money is part of the new Malagasy times, in which people do things however they can. As the popular singer Roissy put it in the song entitled "Bal Kabosy" (1994), "Everyone just does what they please, you go to the dance, and you follow the rhythm of the times" (*Bal Kabosy mandeha ho azy*).

### Analyzing youth and social change

In highlighting the active role of youth, most recent scholarship relies on the concept of "youth culture" (or subculture) and on youth agency as a way to validate the cultural production of youth (Friedman 1990; Hebdige 1979; Walsh 2003). This approach highlights the fact that people who are differently positioned with respect to both class and

the life cycle may participate in and value different social and cultural practices. This view is explicitly developed in the Birmingham school of cultural studies. Drawing on structuralist conceptions, which see culture as made of an ordered pattern of signs, scholars like Dick Hebdige (1979) argue that youth express their agency by creatively reordering the signs and symbols of the dominant culture through their use of particular commodities. In the context of scholarship on Africa, similar assumptions are implicit in Jonathan Friedman's (1990) study of *les sapeurs*, unemployed Congolese young men who engage in status competition around elegant, brand-name clothes. In so doing, they build up alternative forms of prestige and power that are viewed as a threat by state authorities. Walsh (2003) has examined how marginalized young men in Madagascar who seek their fortune in highly risky sapphire mining use forms of conspicuous consumption to assert their agency, rather than invest it in local networks in which they are almost certain to be subordinate. These studies provide important insights into the pragmatics of youthful consumption. In neither case are these groups and their consumption practices conceptualized relationally with respect to the larger intergenerational matrix of which they are a part. In Friedman's analysis, one learns nothing of the consequences of *les sapeurs'* actions for the families in which they are presumably embedded; in Walsh's analysis one gets little sense of more encompassing social and economic dynamics. In addition, their work downplays the powerful economic constraints that shape youthful practice. After all, if most of the girls I knew exercised considerable resourcefulness and skill in their pursuit of Europeans and older wealthy men, they were unanimous in agreeing that it was economic necessity that drove them into the sexual marketplace.

To extend prior analyses of youth by emphasizing the role of youth in processes of social reproduction and transformation, I draw on the work of the sociologist Karl Mannheim. In his classic essay "The Problem of Generations" (1972), Mannheim argues that because of the finite nature of the human lifespan, all societies are constantly faced with both the problems and the advantages of what he calls "fresh contact"—the fact that there is a certain distance in how each new generation approaches and assimilates shared cultural material. On the one hand, he acknowledges that the continuous emergence of new human beings means a loss of cultural material; on the other hand, he points out that "[generational change] alone makes a fresh selection possible when it becomes necessary: It facilitates re-evaluations of our inventory and teaches us both to forget that which is no longer useful and to covet that which has yet to be won" (Mannheim 1972:294). Such an approach highlights the ways in which youths' structural liminality—the fact that they are less embedded than adults in older networks of patronage and

exchange—makes them uniquely poised to take advantage of new social and economic conditions.

Consistent with Mannheim's insights, scholars of the lifespan have shown how the particular political-economic context in which youth enter a labor market and start to form families shapes the ways in which people reproduce and transform households and communities (Elder 1987, 1999; Newman 1996). Moreover, and in contrast to the view that the experiments of youth are soon incorporated into normative structures, this literature demonstrates that experiencing a particular set of events during youth can have lasting consequences in terms of a person's adult identifications and orientations to the world. For example, Thomas Weisner and Lucinda Bernheimer (1998) have shown that many people who joined the North American countercultural movement in the 1960s both continued to be influenced by the movement's values at midlife and drew on these values when they raised their children. The view of generational transformation to emerge from these studies is a dialectical one—age mediates the impact of particular historical and cultural events. At the same time, the manner in which a particular generation is changed by historical experience shapes the way in which social and cultural practices are subsequently transformed.

But generational change is not only about the loss of some practices and the adoption of others. Sometimes youth draw on old practices, but their enactment in new circumstances changes the effects of those practices, so that even the reproduction of practices with long histories in a region can entail change. In Tamatave, as I discuss below, young women's practices of transactional sex, and particularly transactional sexual relations with Europeans, have a long history reaching back to precolonial times. Nevertheless, the new context in which these practices are enacted reciprocally works to shape the extent, the content, and the effects of these practices in novel ways.

In the context of the postsocialist switch to neoliberal reform that characterized Tamatave in the late 1990s and 2000–03, processes of commodification and consumption were integral to how “coveting that which has not yet been won” was playing out among urbanites (Mannheim 1972:294). Youths' desire for novelty that Mannheim highlights took on a pervasively commodified form, and people came to believe that what one consumes defines one's identity and that the trappings of modernity not only represent but also are the essence of social power (Friedman 1990). Moreover, with the rise of consumerism, youth—particularly female youth—have become an increasingly visible category, everywhere used as part of the marked eroticizing of consumer goods. Youth and the qualities of sexuality associated with youthful bodies—particularly female youthful bodies—have been both discursively constructed and contested

by a variety of different interests, a phenomenon that restructures opportunities and shapes the ways in which youth think of themselves and their means of attaining adulthood. In youthful female sexuality, the individual body and the social body come together in a particularly potent way because it is through the individual bodies of young women and their changing practices that the social body may be reproduced and reconfigured. In Tamatave, the “fresh contact” that youth encounter not only forces them to rethink received ideas and practices of generational growth through kinship and marriage, but, accompanied by massive political inequalities on a global scale, it also contributes to a process of class formation. This process has the effect of encouraging the growth through kinship and marriage of certain sectors of the population in Tamatave while rendering others tantamount to prostitutes and bastards; some are even likened to slaves, an idiom of subordination that continues to structure how people imagine unequal social relations in Madagascar.<sup>3</sup>

The practices of transactional sex that I explore also put these young women at increasing risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. This is not part of the story I focus on here, however, simply because during the main years of my fieldwork, from 1999 to 2002, HIV had not yet become a major concern among youth. Rates of HIV remained comparatively low, although, not surprisingly, given the practices I describe, these statistics are changing.<sup>4</sup> The effects of neoliberal reform on middle-class young men are an important part of this story that I address elsewhere (Cole in press); owing to lack of space, I focus here primarily on the perspectives and experiences of young women.

### **Prolonging youth: Shifting economies in Tamatave**

Throughout the years of colonial rule (1895–1960) and the First Republic (1960–72), the path to economic success lay either through international trade or the government bureaucracy; often the two were tightly intertwined. Under these conditions, young Tamatavians sought success and upward mobility through schooling. Although access to schooling was a hotly contested political issue and outcomes were always uneven, most people nevertheless believed that access to schooling was synonymous with social ascent.<sup>5</sup> With the general impoverishment that Madagascar experienced throughout the 1980s, however, increasing numbers of urbanites found that this was no longer the case. As the Malagasy Franc (fmg) was repeatedly devalued, once prestigious jobs in the government administration, and even jobs working at the port, no longer provided enough income to support a family. The impoverishment of the country also meant that

schools were gradually emptied of books, supplies, and teachers; diplomas no longer guaranteed employment. These factors contributed to the prolongation of youth as an intermediate period between childhood and adulthood, as many youth were unable to find the employment that would enable them to form independent households and support dependents—the hallmark of adulthood in Tamatave.

In the early 1990s, these social and economic circumstances led to political unrest in many cities throughout Madagascar as protestors demanded that Didier Ratsiraka, the president who had instituted the state-socialist Second Republic in Madagascar, concede to new elections. In some cases, the demands were explicitly framed in terms of opportunities for youth. As one newspaper article, boldly entitled “Crisis,” read, “All the unhappiness of the world weighs on Malagasy youth and the situation is so bad that it needs to be dealt with before a catastrophe occurs. *Our youth want to become adult*” (*Tribune de Madagascar* 1991, emphasis added). Following these protests and nine months of generalized strike throughout 1991 and early 1992, new elections were held. Beginning in 1993, the new government abandoned the state-socialist ideology that had guided government policy from 1975 to 1991 and, in the context of negotiations with the World Bank and the IMF, adopted the language (if not always the practices) of democracy and neoliberal economics in its place. Whereas Madagascar was relatively closed to foreign influences throughout the socialist era of the late 1970s and 1980s, the economic and political changes that took place during the early 1990s created a wholesale “opening” of the country, with the creation of free-trade zones, a proliferation of foreigners who came for business or tourism, and the arrival of previously unavailable consumer goods. Whether people work as low-level government administrators, dockers at the port, or simply sell vegetables at the bazaar, they now tend to think about success in terms of access to ideas, practices, and commodities that come from beyond Madagascar.

Wealth in Tamatave starts at the port and moves out, first in comparatively large chunks controlled by Malagasy, European, Chinese, and Indian merchants who own many of the import–export businesses located in the area around the port and who live in the villas stretched out around the large bazaar and along the shore. It is then divided into somewhat smaller portions as it spreads among smaller-scale merchants who live on the larger streets, and then, finally, into the depths of the sand paths where, if one goes deep enough, one might believe oneself in the Malagasy countryside. Here, if they are employed at all, people work as maids, night watchmen, or very petty traders. The hierarchization of wealth created around the port is crosscut and intertwined in complex ways with the status and wealth that people receive from working

in the state bureaucracy, whether as doctors, midwives, teachers, or secretaries.

Although the spatial map I have provided is important for illuminating the historical bases of wealth and status in Tamatave, this structure is in a constant state of transformation. Viewed from a generational perspective, a recent study by the National Bureau of Statistics reports that whereas in the past one could easily classify a person as either a functionary, manager, or employee, today this is no longer the case because more than half of the population works in the unpredictable informal sector and more people are likely to end up in that sector than are able to replicate the status of their fathers (Projet Madio 2001:59). This trend is paired with a movement away from farming and commerce and toward industry and service; it is in the city of Tamatave that the highest proportion of youth have left the agricultural livelihood of their parents. Despite the difficulties in replicating one’s father’s class status, comparatively, Tamatave does offer some possible upward mobility, at least for those who already have some education: In Tamatave and Diego—notably, the two largest ports in Madagascar—the children of skilled workers are more likely to reach a managerial level of employment than people in a comparable position in other cities.

Yet these social and economic changes have not resulted in the shortening of youth that many people had hoped for. Rather, as in the latter part of the socialist period, youth continue to have difficulty finding jobs in the formal sector and school leads to employment only for the privileged few. This phenomenon is particularly visible in Tamatave, where people who have completed more years of schooling have more difficulty finding work than those with less schooling (Projet Madio 2001). At the same time, however, youth have been increasingly drawn into the consumer economy. The combination of low expectation that schooling will lead to a job with an increase in the importance of consumption practices means that youth have been particularly quick to seize on the newly emergent, fluid, and often ephemeral forms of production and service available.

Youth who were still in school, like those I met on the boardwalk, rely in part on their parents and wider network of kin for money. Farida, for example, lived with her grandmother but was sent money by her mother, who had married a Comorian sailor and lived in Réunion. Many young people I knew who had college degrees tried to find work with the NGOs that flocked to Madagascar throughout the 1990s largely as part of efforts to save the island’s biodiversity. Young men with less education tried to get low-level jobs at the port unloading ships or worked in manual day jobs as mechanics or handymen. Many young men claimed that the only way to get money is to do *biznesy*, which means any kind of illegal traffic one can get one’s hands on (breaking into the containers at the port,

stealing gas, or, even, some claimed, selling ancestral bones). Among young women, those who had more schooling sought jobs as cashiers or clerks in one of the several large supermarkets or import–export stores that had opened in the area. Poorer young women, particularly those who had just come from the countryside, inevitably worked as maids. Many young people also earned money during the lychee season, when they would work long night shifts packing lychees for export. During the period preceding the 2001 elections, another strategy that many young people used was to join political associations, usually funded by particular deputies who would then pay the youths to work as personal aides and to carry out small jobs. For young men, this often entailed becoming the deputy's right-hand man on the spot, involved in procuring services for and smoothing the way of the deputy. Young women also sometimes worked for powerful men by lending their beauty and sexual allure to particular campaign efforts.

Yet it remains the case that these sources of income are never enough: Parents can almost never give their children the money that youth think they need, and rarely do the jobs that young people obtain provide them with enough income to support their own households. This, broadly, is the background for the emergence of a new category of consumer youth called *jeunes*, many of whom are intimately involved in the sexual economy. Before I can consider this phenomenon, however, let me briefly give some background on local ideas of girls, sex, and marriage in Madagascar.

#### *Youth, marriage, and respectable sexuality in Madagascar*

In contemporary Tamatave, old and new understandings of youth coexist and intermingle in uneven and contested ways. The Malagasy word for *youth* most frequently used in Tamatave is *tanora*; alternatively, the Betsimisaraka words *gonalahy* or *gonavavy* are used to refer to males and females, respectively. All of these words have the connotation of growth; the word *tanora* is particularly closely associated with the growth of plants, so that one can also refer to rice that is *tanora*, in the sense of rice that is not yet ripe. In traditional terms, plant metaphors are regularly used to imagine human growth, so that a pubescent girl's breasts are described in the same words as a plant sending out new shoots.

The period of youth is widely seen as one of searching (*mitady*). Adults expect youth to search—whether for fortune, fame, a friend, or lover who can help them to unlock their *anjara*—a word that indicates one's personal lot or fate in life. Although the concept of “*anjara*” refers broadly to finding one's fate or fortune, it is also used more specifically with reference to marriage. Part of searching for one's destiny in marriage includes sexual experimentation among both men and women; people believe that a

successful marriage requires compatibility, which in turn means trying out many different paths—or people—before one settles down (see also Bloch 1998). In the Betsimisaraka village in which I worked previously, youth of the same sex would often sleep together in granaries or empty houses, slipping off for assignations. It is also normative for girls to receive gifts from their lovers (see also Bloch 1989a; Feeley-Harnik 1991). Ideally, this youthful period of searching ends and proper adulthood is achieved with marriage and the formation of a household, at which point women are supposed to be monogamous; men are not.<sup>6</sup>

These practices of searching, including trying out many lovers before formalizing a relationship, are widespread both in rural areas and among the lower classes in urban contexts. By contrast, middle-class urbanites are more concerned with controlling young women's sexuality, an attitude that reflects both the influence of missionary Christianity and a concern for consolidating or improving their class position. This concern does not translate into a strict effort to maintain virginity. Nevertheless, middle-class families do want to attain at least a veneer of bourgeois respectability.<sup>7</sup> Noelphine's mother, Claire, a 50-year-old Betsimisaraka woman married to a low-level functionary, described a middle-class version of how young girls got married in Tamatave in her youth, at the end of the First Republic (1960–72):

Young girls before, they didn't leave the house or dress up. They were well behaved and they could find a spouse. There would be someone who lived nearby who would say, “There's a young girl in that household”—even if that girl never left the house! If they talked to someone who needed a spouse they would say, “There is a really nice girl over there.” Like people doing business. They didn't need money, just talk. Often the parents would seek a wife for their son. And the parents would tell their son—go over to those people's house, for there is a really well-behaved girl there. If you like her, then we'll make her your wife. And the boy would go to look at the girl. If he liked her, then he'd have to watch her and see what her character was like, and then after that they would get married and they would be a household for all time. But these days, if you just sat at home all the time you'd never find a spouse. It is those girls who flirt a lot and dress up who find spouses. Things are opposite these days.

Although Claire framed her story as a transparent account of what things “used to be like,” the relationship of her narrative to past practice is complex—particularly her claim that parents used to control who married whom. According to more than 20 interviews I conducted with women and men in their late forties and early fifties—the parents of contemporary youth—the great majority of this

group had chosen their marriage partners; very few had had their spouses chosen for them. In fact, many people in their late forties and early fifties claimed that it was their parents (thus, contemporary youth's grandparents) who were more likely to have had arranged marriages.<sup>8</sup> When I later discussed how Claire had found her spouse, it was clear that hers, too, was a marriage of choice, despite her evocation of previous parental control. Her narrative is simultaneously a normative invocation borrowed from her parent's generation, an expression of anxiety over her own increasing lack of control over her children's sexual practices, and potentially an expression of fear as to what unconstrained sexual experimentation in the contemporary urban context might lead to.<sup>9</sup> Claire's observation, however, particularly her comment that nowadays girls need to "dress up and flirt a lot to find a spouse," also points to the emergence of the new youth category "jeunes," a group that has emerged in the contradictory space created by partial employment and consumer desire.

#### *Urban youth culture and the emergence of jeunes*

In contrast to "tanora," with its emphasis on productive labor and growth rooted in and, ultimately, contributing to the flourishing of families and ancestors, the concept of "jeunes" combines older rural ideas about the sexually playful nature of youth with a new emphasis on sophisticated individual consumption as a means to self-realization. "Tanora" emphasizes productive labor and the local construction of value; "jeunes" highlights the role of consumption of foreign goods and the localization of value perceived to come from outside. To be jeune is to be always up to date, to follow the fashions, and to know the latest "new things." It is to be sophisticated and worldly and to have watched the latest Britney Spears video or to know about the latest platform shoes. It is to have watched the latest porn videos and learned new—ancestrally tabooed—sexual techniques, so that you really know how to make your partner "dream" (*mirevy*, from the French *rever*).<sup>10</sup> To be jeune also means to know about how to obtain access to abortion and birth control so that one does not end up with an unwanted child. By contrast, young people in the country are tanora, bound to a miserable (in the eyes of my urban informants) life of planting rice, with nothing else to do and no knowledge of progress. Youth is soon over for country girls, my urban informants claimed, because they quickly find themselves pregnant. Nor are the young maids that crowd the waterfront on Sunday afternoon truly jeunes—although it is possible that with time and good luck they will become so. Rather, only young urbanites who see themselves as sophisticated consumers—whether of sex or fashion—are truly jeunes. Among jeunes, consumption of consumer goods marks status quite explicitly, so that the person who literally

"does not have" (*tsy manana*) is perceived to be of lesser social value, unworthy of his or her peers' respect.

Part of what it means to be jeune is to be a person who wants and knows how to use modern things and who is able to rely on his or her wits to get them. This is a view captured in Noelphine's mother's statement that, before, a girl could just sit home and get a spouse, whereas, today, a girl has to actively seek one out by "dressing well and flirting." The girl who does not go after what she wants is ridiculed. Her friends ask, "Aren't you young? Don't you want things? What are you doing? Do you want to be left behind?" At the heart of these questions is the assumption that desire for new, foreign things—styles, clothes, commodities—is both constitutive of what it means to be young and part of a new path to adulthood. Tamatavian youth I spoke with believe that adults are dissatisfied with their lot but less likely—because of their increased responsibilities—to be able to change it. Many urban women—even those who had recently come from the country—complain that rural people do not know enough to desire.<sup>11</sup> Urban youth, however, believe that they yearn in a special, urgent way to improve their conditions and that this ceaseless searching can lead to progress or change. Their desire to achieve these goals leads them into the sexual economy.

#### *Sex in the city: The search for money, love, and (maybe) marriage*

The practices of sex-for-money exchange that young women engage in are part of a complex sexual economy with many different ways of using sex to create relationships. In some cases this sexual and marriage economy has an institutionalized dimension. There is a large and thriving marriage market via the Internet and correspondence through which local women seek to meet foreign—often French and Réunionais—men. Usually, the woman pays a small fee and gives her photo to the people who run a marriage agency (*agence matrimoniale*), and they then place the photo on the Web; the woman waits for someone to contact her. Seeking a marriage partner through correspondence is accompanied by widespread participation in more informal practices of sex-for-money exchange.

Youth engage in transactional sex across a spectrum of possibilities, including short-term encounters with no long-term expectation of reciprocity—what most Malagasy I knew considered prostitution (*mivarotra tena*—lit., to sell oneself)—to more long-term liaisons characterized by the exchange of sex and caring services for material support, sometimes ending in formal marriage.<sup>12</sup> These different kinds of relationships are crosscut by different kinds of men with whom one forms relations. These men include the European or Réunionais (*vazaha*), who often comes either as a tourist or French cooperant, or who works in private businesses often associated with import-export;

the wealthy Malagasy, who was almost always described as the *directeur de l'entreprise*, or the executive who worked at the port; the wealthy Indian trader; and finally the "simple Malagasy" (*gasy tsotra*), with whom, as one young woman put it, "you would just never make it."

As I noted earlier, these different kinds of transactional sexual relationships have a long history in Tamatave, reaching back beyond the colonial period to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. By the second half of the 18th century, many of the lineage heads in the region around Tamatave and just to the north were already the offspring of European pirates and local women (Deschamps 1949). Throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries, enough local women lived with European men who had come from the plantation islands of Mauritius and Réunion that the term *vadimbazaha* or "spouses of Europeans" emerged in local parlance. In a dictionary from the late 18th century, the scholar-traveler Barthelemy Huet de Froberville defined the *vadimbazaha* thus:

Literally the wife of the whites, the foreigners. It is not a question of referring to European women or foreign women . . . rather the natives use the term *vadimbazaha* to refer to the Malagasy women that the foreigners take on their arrival to care for their homes; their [the *vadimbazaha*'s] prerogatives go as far as to include all the traditional conjugal rights. [Bois 1997:63]

Examples of practices more akin to Western notions of prostitution have long precedents, as well. Indeed, over the course of the 19th century, Tamatave earned the reputation for immorality and debauchery because of the large numbers of women who went out to spend the night on European ships anchored in the harbor. Guillaume Grandidier recorded that, at the time, women who engaged in sex-for-money exchanges were referred to as the *tsimihoririna*, or "those who do not sleep on their side" (Bois 1997:80). Today, this word has been replaced by the term *makorely*, possibly derived from *la maquerelle*, or madame, referring to a time when Réunionais women worked as madams (Solofo Randrianja, personal communication, February 7, 2002), although today women who engage in transactional sex keep the money primarily for themselves.<sup>13</sup> Early missionaries looked on both the *vadimbazaha* and the women who went out to the ships with horror, but European observers described the formation of liaisons with local women as essential if one wanted to settle in the area, and within Malagasy society both groups formed part of the local elite and even played a special role in local government ceremonies (Bois 1997).

Most contemporary young women first enter the sexual economy to gain the money that allows them to engage in the sophisticated consumption that is the hall-

mark of *jeunes*. Ultimately, they hope to use their beauty and sexy clothes to acquire a husband and, perhaps, if they are lucky, a ticket overseas. Young women's desire to improve their situation through finding men who could help them was particularly visible in the cultlike following of *Marimar*, a Brazilian soap opera that features a young girl who becomes rich through marriage but only after she has suffered cruelly at the hands of her elders. In the narrative, which unfolds over many episodes, the young, beautiful, and kind-hearted Marimar is the daughter of a wealthy man; however, her mother dies without revealing to Marimar her true origins. One day, Marimar steals a chicken from the wealthy Baniz family to feed her starving grandparents. The guardian catches her and is ready to turn her in, but her beauty and innocence capture the heart of Sergio, the son of the family. After a while, she and Sergio marry. The plot takes many twists and turns, but suffice it to say that Sergio's scheming stepmother hates Marimar because she is poor and accuses her of stealing a bracelet. Eventually, Marimar is released from prison and goes to Mexico to work. Marimar and Sergio are finally reunited and the evil stepmother dies. As young women interpreted it, the story contains a double critique of both adults and the ways in which they treat young people and the relationship between classes. It also powerfully confirmed their view that finding a rich man could be a poor girl's salvation. As one young woman emphasized, "The lesson you can take from the film is this: Poor people and rich people should love each other. And the lesson for parents is that they shouldn't hide things from their children. If Marimar had known who her father was, maybe she wouldn't have been poor. The things you see happen in *Marimar*, they are all things that happen in Madagascar!"

Most girls enter the sexual economy hoping to be like Marimar and find a rich man—preferably a *vazaha*. When they are unsuccessful or move too quickly from man to man, however, they move from the category of *jeune* to simple prostitute. People's views of those who slip into the category of prostitute are ambivalent, depending on how successful women are in converting short-term relationships of sex-for-money into longer-term relationships that lead to the creation of wider networks and the investment of wealth in social and economic reproduction. For example, several middle-aged women I knew had set themselves up in businesses, their money earned, so people claimed, from prostitution. Although they were mocked as young women just starting out, once they gained money they also gained status: Their neighbors knew where the money came from but did not dare comment on it, fearing that any critical comments made then might be turned against them in the future. But less successful women were heavily criticized; in one case I encountered, a young woman who worked as a prostitute complained that the boys in her

neighborhood mocked her and called her “the deformed Marimar.” As these distinctions suggest, all girls who engage in the game of sex for money are constantly involved in a politics of reputation. They balance precariously between a basic cultural acceptance of youthful sexuality and a strong sense that after a short period of searching, young women should be married off and in the home. Although the idea of women married and in the home has always been more relevant to middle-class than lower-class notions of adult femininity, it is an ideal that many urbanites seek to achieve, even if financial circumstances prevent most people from doing so. And if some women manage through their financial success to rewrite these norms, they are in the minority.

Two vignettes convey the kinds of relationships that young women form by entering the sexual economy as well as possible outcomes. I start with a story that Cathy, a 15-year-old girl who attended the local junior high school, told me about her older sister. Their parents came from southeastern Madagascar; the mother worked selling cooked food by the roadside, and the father worked as a docker. Cathy had not yet found a *vazaha* who might support her, but she exuberantly announced that she was sure she would love one if she found one because “they have a lot of money.” Her sister had found a *vazaha*, but things did not turn out as she had hoped.

My older sister already had a *vazaha* boyfriend. He had a motorcycle. But they have already broken up, and it was very sad the way he treated my older sibling. He was very mean. He liked to drink rum and go to nightclubs and when he was drunk he was cruel and liked to break glasses. They were together for a year, but during that time they often broke up because that *vazaha*, he liked too many women. They would break up because my older sister would get mad, but he’d come back to her and make up to her with gifts. My sister couldn’t stand to see him grovel and would go out with him again. But when he went home he sold everything that he had bought for her house. The only things she got was the clothes she stole and a small fan! But he lied to my sister! He told her, “We have to sell these things because we won’t live here anymore. I’ve found new work and I have to return to France. When I’ve settled down, after a month or two, I’ll send for you.” He gave my sister money to go do her passport and she was very happy. But when he got to France, he wrote only once to my sister. He asked her if her passport was ready, but then he never wrote again nor did he send her anything. My sister just cried and cried. His name was Franck—he was short and balding.

Although most girls did not recount stories of drunken French men who smashed glasses in fits of rage, many did experience disappointment with *vazaha* who made but did

not fulfill promises of marriage or of bringing a girl to Europe. Despite her older sister’s experience, Cathy remained optimistic about the possibilities of finding a man—a *vazaha* boyfriend or, perhaps, a husband—in the sexual marketplace. Her views seem to have been more influenced by accounts such as the one told to me by 14-year-old Flavienne, a girl who attended a private lycée and whose mother worked—sometimes—as a prostitute.

Flavienne’s mother came from a town to the north, where her Betsimisaraka mother and Chinese father owned a small shop. Her grandparents had cared for Flavienne when she was small, while her mother pursued *vazaha*; then Flavienne’s mother had come and claimed her. Flavienne recounted,

My mother doesn’t like to bring her boyfriends here, except for the *vazaha*. That *vazaha*, he is already married overseas. He has two children. But he and my mother, they have been together a very long time. He has supported my mother for years. When he comes to Madagascar, he always comes to our house but doesn’t go to the hotel. They are like a married couple. Some people think they are already married, but that Mama doesn’t want to live overseas. There was a time when he brought Mama to France, but he didn’t take Mama to the house where his wife lives. He brought her to another house. That *vazaha* really has a lot of money, and so he has a lot of houses. He really likes me. He treats me like his own child.

Each of these stories illustrates the ways in which young women use their sexuality to try to move from short-term transactional relationships in which they receive gifts and money in exchange for sex to more long-term bonds and social relationships that give them material support and enable them both to help their families of origin and to create new families of their own. Flavienne’s story about her mother suggests that in forming a stable relationship with a *vazaha*, and then by earning extra income through more casual prostitution when the *vazaha* was away, her mother was able to maintain a household and support her daughter, who attended a fee-paying school. Eventually, this *vazaha* took Flavienne and her mother back with him to France. But even in this success story, ambiguities as to the fate of Flavienne and her mother remain. The *vazaha* brought Flavienne and her mother to France but whether he divorced his wife to marry Flavienne’s mother is unknown. Whether Flavienne and her mother ended up abandoned and starving, as other women who had followed *vazaha* had reputedly done, also remains unknown. And although by going to France Flavienne’s mother rose up the social ladder, she did so by first risking her reputation to work as a prostitute. As I have noted, financial success, however, allowed her to rewrite the norms around what counted as respectable adulthood.

These same strategies, by contrast, subjected Cathy's older sister to the risk of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, the violence of Franck's hot temper, and, ultimately, disappointment when he left and took everything that he had given her with him. As Cathy's case suggests, for those who are less fortunate, participation in the sexual economy can lead toward downward mobility, as well. In talking about the possibilities for success in the sexual marketplace, many young people invoked the concept of "anjara," one's lot or fate, as determining whether they are successful or not. According to this view, it might be one's fate to marry a wealthy man but at a later age than is usually considered desirable. Viewed from the outside, however, there appears to be a window of opportunity—between about 18 and one's late twenties, perhaps early thirties—in which girls can succeed. After a certain point, if girls have little luck in the sexual economy, they can also get perpetually poorer and become firmly entrenched in the category of prostitute, making it less likely that any local man will want to marry them. If a girl is unlucky enough to fall pregnant and bear the baby, and if there are no grandparents who are willing to raise the child, this movement down the social ladder becomes all the more likely.

#### *Young women and shifting forms of social reproduction*

In their enthusiastic participation in the sexual economy of Tamatave, and particularly in their pursuit of vazaha, young women are clearly part of a long, historically constituted tradition in which women deploy their sexuality in the formation of relationships and obtain prestige through transnational relationships with vazaha men. Although these practices of transactional sex are old, however, the context in which they are taking place is doubly constituted as new, marked simultaneously by the changing social and economic circumstances brought about by neoliberal economic reform of the last ten years and by a particular generation coming into "fresh contact" with historically constituted practices. More specifically, the inability of many young men to get jobs that will enable them to sustain a family; the concentration of wealth into the hands of a few, primarily older, men; the influx of images of Western style and opulence that girls want to emulate; and finally the arrival of (comparatively) wealthy men from abroad all contribute to this new context. The result is that young girls can use their sexuality to link people in partially new ways, disrupting social hierarchies along the axes of generation and gender.

#### *Recrafting families*

Looking more closely at what young women do with the money they earn through sex gives some sense of the complex ways in which participation in the sexual economy disrupts and rearranges local family formations. It is diffi-

cult to generalize how much money young women receive from men, because it varies so widely from case to case. In some cases women could be paid as little as 5,000 fmg (less than \$1) for a quick encounter (*passee temps*); however, one woman who worked as a maid for a European, earning 50,000 fmg a month (about \$7), recounted how all the prostitutes in her neighborhood mocked her, claiming that they earned in one night what she earned in a month. Another young woman I knew who had created a stable relationship with a vazaha received between 1,500,00 fmg and 2,000,000 fmg (roughly between \$300 and \$400) a month to cover her expenses. As these examples suggest, many women who entered the sexual economy managed to just scrape by. For others, however, gifts and money from sex provided them with an important extra source of income, enabling them to purchase status-enhancing commodities, to invest in business, or to use their money to create new social relations on their own terms.

At least in the beginning of their entry into the sexual economy, many young women continue to live at home, using their money for clothes, cell phones, and other desired commodities. Owning fashionable clothes or cell phones is an important form of social capital, marking out a girl as modern and increasing the chances that she finds either one of the rare jobs available or a wealthier man, or both. If a girl is young—say, in her early teens and still in school—many parents object to the practice because it increases the likelihood that the girl will end up pregnant and will drop out of school. With slightly older girls, however, parents are often relieved to have the financial onus taken off them and shared because they expect that girls will be supported by their lovers; one way for a man to mark out a woman as a prospective wife is by giving her material support until a marriage can be arranged. Yet, in both cases, the girl's acquisition of status-producing commodities, which the parents often do not have access to, symbolically enacts a reversal of who holds power and authority within the household. The social status derived from control over commodities, however, competes against more normative modes of acquiring adult status through work and marriage, and young women are positioned uneasily between the two.

Girls unable to find a husband often set up houses of their own, either because their behavior makes them fight with their parents and they want the freedom to do as they please or because their parents do not have enough money to support them. Many of these young women have long-term ambitions and goals; however, the need to perpetually keep abreast of fashions and prestigious consumer items can make such goals hard to fulfill. When they do earn enough money, many women either redistribute it or use it to accumulate commodities, which they then give to whomever they please, creating networks of patronage of which they are the center. When

they are able to forge more long-term relationships of concubinage or marriage, young girls seek to use the money and connections they gain from their relationships with vazaha to help their families. Indeed, one young Malagasy man explicitly stated that women prefer vazaha because such men do not come with big, needy families, thereby allowing a woman to funnel resources to her own kin without dispute.

In seeking to use the money they gain through relationships with vazaha to help their parents, young girls, like young women in the 19th century, are motivated by more than a concern to increase their social status. Changes in the nature of the economy, however, mean that the effects of these relationships are potentially different, making this dream harder to realize. After all, in the 19th century, vazaha were often immigrants to Tamatave who sought to run plantations; they needed the vadimbazaha not only for sex or domestic services but also because the women provided access to productive resources—land and slaves—that were otherwise forbidden to them (Bois 1997).<sup>14</sup> By contrast, contemporary vazaha who come to Tamatave usually inhabit Tamatave temporarily, and they receive a salary. Although the woman might form a relationship with the intent of helping her kin, the desires and cultural expectations of the vazaha, less used to the idea of an extended family who could make demands, mitigate against these plans.<sup>15</sup> More generally, what Tamatavian girls have to offer now is different than their 19th-century counterparts. In the 19th century, the vadimbazaha could provide Europeans with access to land and labor in addition to the “comforts of home” (White 1990). Today, girls can only satisfy globally mediated fantasies about African sexuality and domesticity because, with the exception of a few tourist spots, the economy no longer relies on access to land. As a consequence, these girls are at a disadvantage when compared with their 19th-century predecessors.

Even when families are able to gain some access to the capital brought by daughters' liaisons with vazaha, the relationships that crystallize around the wealth still lead to the splintering of local families. A story told to me by Maman Pasy, a woman who owned a hairdressing salon and whose two younger sisters had fulfilled the dream and married Belgians, whom they had met via a marriage agency (*koresy*), gives some sense of this process. According to Maman Pasy, two of her young siblings had married vazaha, whereas a third sister was married to a local man. The Malagasy brother-in-law drove a truck, which was, in turn, owned by one of the Belgian brothers-in-law. Eventually, the Malagasy man lost a huge sum of money; the sisters married to the Belgians accused their Malagasy brother-in-law of theft and went so far as to bring him to court. When the case was tried, the Malagasy brother-in-law was eventually proved innocent, but in the mean-

time neighborly opinion sided with the sisters married to the Belgians and assumed the Malagasy brother-in-law's guilt. Remarking on the way in which popular opinion had sided with the vadimbazaha's position against the poorer Malagasy brother-in-law, Mama Pasy concluded, “People here, you know they like money, they like vazaha, so if the spouse of the vazaha does something wrong [like wrongly accusing her brother-in-law of theft], people protect her, because she has money. It makes me really sad to think that they no longer have what makes them kin because they are only thinking about money.”

In observing that, “they no longer have what makes them kin,” Maman Pasy provides a powerful commentary on how the economic transactions that accompany the coveted relationships with powerful vazaha also lead to the violation of expected kinship norms. The introduction of wealth into family relationships created problems among kin in earlier periods, as well; it was certainly something I had witnessed in the rural context in which I had worked previously. But in the rural context, invoking ancestral power to force people to remain together often mitigated, if never erased, wealth's disruptive effects. In the contemporary urban context, however, the threat of ancestral anger or of being cut off from kin did not carry as much moral weight, partly because once people managed to accumulate money, poor kin often ended up being more of a burden than a source of wealth.

People's perceptions of the ways in which participation in the sexual economy might transform kin relations was also embodied in another story that Rodrigue recounted that Sunday on the beach. According to the story, versions of which I heard in other contexts, as well, but that I was never able to verify as apocryphal or not, a couple had a pretty daughter who loved a Malagasy boy. The parents, however, wanted to capitalize on their daughter's beauty by forcing her to marry a vazaha against her will. In the event, the vazaha used the girl for his sexual pleasure and then discarded her—when Rodrigue told the story, he commented that it was the parents' fault that this girl had been “ruined.” Other versions of the story I heard—similarly recounted by young men—ended up with the use of love magic to bind the girl to the man and to keep the flow of money to her parents. Although most people expect daughters to contribute some material support to their natal households, as I have noted, they also believe that girls have a right to choose their lovers. The use of love magic to enslave one's own child against her will in a relationship that produced wealth for the parents cogently bespeaks young people's fears about how sex and marriage for money could undermine proper processes of social reproduction, nurture, and household-authority relations (see also Graeber 1996). That young men—precisely the kind of unemployed young Malagasy men that, in the story, the girl's parents did not want her to marry

and that many young girls I know also do not want to marry—should tell this story is worth emphasizing. As the next section makes clear, it makes sense that precisely those people most marginalized by changes in the economy and those who feel their own gendered positions to be threatened by women's relations with *vazaha* and other powerful men should make the most telling comments about the ways in which relationships pursued mainly for material reasons could pervert the normative behavior between parents and children.

### *Inversions: Women supporting men*

The same economic forces that push women increasingly into the sexual economy also work to marginalize young men, so that women's practices of transactional sex have become associated with the disruption of local notions of proper gendered relations. Nowhere is this phenomenon more visible than in the emergence of the *jaombilo*, the man supported by the money that a woman earns through her relationships with *vazaha* men or prostitution, more generally. As one young man explained, echoing the story with which I began, "The *vazaha* gives money to the Malagasy girl, and she gives it to her Malagasy boyfriend—it's a parallel finance system." Although no one I knew was able to identify the origins of the word *jaombilo*, the root *jao* means an uncastrated, powerful bull and is also by extension frequently used as a name for men (Gillian Feeley-Harnik, personal communication, March 19, 2002). The word had a previous analogue in *jaoloka*, a term used in western Madagascar to refer to a man who had the misfortune to live uxoriously, a phenomenon associated with changing patterns of social reproduction that intensified after migrants came to the area following the introduction of wage labor (Waast 1980).

Whereas people view women's practices of transactional sex ambivalently, depending, in large part, on how successful women are in forging long-term kinds of relations, views of *jaombilo* are entirely negative, a fact reflected in another word for the practice of women supporting men, *maladie legon*, which literally means "boys' illness." Girls like Farida bragged that they would certainly support a Malagasy lover if they received lots of money from a *vazaha*, but other girls I knew expressed distaste at the idea. Anita, the mistress of a rich political representative, who was quite frank about the fact that this was how she made her living, explained why she found the practice of *maladie legon* unthinkable: "It is very painful to see women supporting men! Prostitutes might part with money to support the man they love, but for me, it would be hard to support a man. People would make fun of me, and they would blame me." But one young woman who "went out at night" (*mivoaka alina*), an expression often used to refer to prostitution, expressed distaste at the notion, as well: "Who me," she said, "support a man?"

You've got to be joking." And for men, the practice was downright shaming, although many young men I spoke with admitted to having engaged in it for periods of time. As Beaumot, a man in his late twenties said, slapping his muscles, "You, a young man, not work with the force of your own body? That won't do!"

Part of the reason that people find the *jaombilo* so deeply disturbing is that it inverts what people perceive the proper relationship between men and women to be. In criticizing *jaombilo*, people are basing their arguments on the deeply held notion that men should support women, and not the reverse. In the urban context, men are ideally supposed to work and give their spouses salaries for household use, whereas women are supposed to perform domestic labor and use the money from their spouses to maintain the household. And, yet, in the case of the *jaombilo*, it is women who make a living for men by diverting the gifts or money they earn through sex with other men, a practice perceived as demeaning and emasculating for all of the men involved: the *vazaha* because he is cuckolded and used only for his money; the *jaombilo* because he is supported by a woman's willingness to divert her earnings from sex work for *vazaha* men. As one young man explained,

What makes it bad for a woman to support her man is that God said in the days of Adam and Eve that it was the man who supports and not the woman. It is like the man has no pride if a woman supports him—he who should make his spouse a living is making a living by her! If you took the woman from her parents, then you should be ready to care for her. It is like you are dishonored if you do not support the woman. If you do not get along at home, then the man is crushed but he won't dare to speak. Because there is someone who supports him.

Moreover, the gender reversal is further elaborated because in some cases women expect their *jaombilo* to perform household tasks, like washing clothes and dishes or cooking, that are explicitly marked as female tasks. The woman's control over money means she can shame the *jaombilo* at any time: In one fight I witnessed, a furious woman stood outside her house, holding up the man's clothes and enumerating how much each item had cost and just where she, not he, had earned the money to pay for it.

The gender inversion that *jaombilo* experience powerfully symbolizes the thwarted power of urban young men, who have historically been associated with the construction of Malagasy modernity (Ledoux 1951). In the past, at least some of these young men would have been able to find jobs in the government or even in business that would have enabled them to sustain the families and

productive enterprises that signal a fruitful—but also modern—ancestral land. Although in theory it is possible that jaombilo could use their earnings to invest or start businesses, thereby establishing the possibility of financial independence that is one aspect of legitimate entry into adulthood, they are instead notorious for sponsoring the short-term pleasures of others.<sup>16</sup> As Beaumont elaborated, “Jaombilo, they are people who girls support and they don’t work. They won’t take low wages. Whether they work or not they are full from their lover’s money. They are like the leaders of the gang in town, because they can finance many pleasures, like they can pay for their friends to go to discos, to drink, or watch concerts.” When these young men become “leaders of the gang,” they are also involved in forging new measures of status by positioning themselves as patrons controlling other young men’s access to pleasurable commodities like alcohol or activities like going to a concert. Like the women whose flaunting of status-producing commodities created a potentially new measure of adulthood, so, too, the jaombilo who distributed pleasures to his circle of friends marked a potentially new kind of adult man. But insofar as their activities did not lead toward the formation of households, which in turn might have enabled the buildup of capital among kin and more kin-based collective endeavors, they were less successful than young women at converting their positions into more respected visions of adulthood.

## Conclusion

So this is how “fresh contact” takes place in contemporary Tamatave, as youth’s participation in the sexual economy disrupts existing social hierarchies in important ways. Although young men remain suspended in part-time jobs or are driven to live from theft, young women embrace the possibilities offered by the informal sexual economy, which links Tamatave to France, Réunion Island, and beyond and creates complex redistributions of resources within Tamatave. As a result, young women have emerged at the forefront of a partially new body politics, by adopting a set of strategies that women in this region historically have used to advance their positions. These practices, however, have not been adopted wholesale but have become powerfully inflected with the consumerist values and practices that characterize contemporary Tamatave. Commodifying processes may be a means to other ends, as Andrea Cornwall (2002), writing about Nigerian practices around sex and money, has argued, but in Tamatave they have pushed themselves deeper into young women’s lives, becoming a primary way in which many young women think about and attempt to achieve status and value.

This analysis of youthful practice around sex for money as part of a process of fresh contact and intergenerational transformation helps to extend and nuance

recent anthropological discussions of youth culture by adding an important relational and temporal dimension to how analysts think about youthful practice. Not only do youth rework practices from the past but the way in which they deploy these practices also reshapes the ways in which families are currently being created and may be sustained in the future. Moreover, viewed through the lens of “fresh contact,” one can see that the practices through which young women attempt to gain adulthood and form families are not simply one factor to be added to discussions of globalization and youth. Rather, because the changing demands of culture and economy reshape the ways in which people forge relations, youthful practice works to form new social hierarchies that constitute globalization locally. Both of these points suggest that youth cannot be analytically separated from the network of social relations in which they are embedded. To argue this is not to say that youthful practice is devoid of any intrinsic meaning, a charge that has often been leveled at older anthropological and psychological studies of childhood and adolescence (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998). Rather, it is to suggest that youth are transformative of society because of the specific kind of agency bestowed on them by virtue of their position within a flow of generations.

But important questions follow. After all, the balance of generational and gendered power that I encountered may prove ephemeral. Some young girls might have gained a certain success for the moment, but it is difficult to tell how long this configuration will last. Not only would a sudden rise in HIV/AIDS make young women’s sex-for-money practices lethal, but on the basis of our knowledge of other parts of Africa, the kinds of socioeconomic landscape that I have described here also might well be accompanied by a combination of political instability and male violence. During the political crisis of 2002, the incumbent, Ratsiraka, created an economic barrier to choke off the capital city to try and defeat his rival, Marc Ravalomanana. The barriers also severely disrupted the sexual economy in Tamatave, as people found themselves with less money. Those who could fled the instability, and Europeans stopped traveling to the region. Such contingencies point to how fragile young women’s strategies are. Will these changes turn out to benefit a certain class of young women, whereas others find themselves trapped in an endless round of sex for money? Or will the new ways of attaining adulthood provide some more rurally based people who have come to the city with a means of social ascension, as several informants imply? In what ways might the shifts in women’s role and power affect the conditions in which future generations are raised? This is a story that will play out in subsequent generations and is for future ethnographers to document, but to do so will require that they continue to look beyond synchronic

notions of youth culture and youth agency to probe how the demands of economy shape the ways in which youth reshape how intimate bonds are forged.

## Notes

*Acknowledgments.* The research on which this article is based was funded by a U.S. Government Fulbright Grant, the American Philosophical Society, a Milton Grant from Harvard University, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. I am grateful to the Randrianja family for their hospitality during my various stays in Tamatave, and to Solofo Randrianja for arranging my affiliation with the University of Tamatave. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Workshop on African Studies at the University of Chicago, the anthropology departments at the London School of Economics and at McGill University, and the Medical Anthropology Seminar at Harvard University. I am grateful to the participants in all of these venues for their comments. I would particularly like to thank Jean and John Comaroff, Deborah Durham, Lynn Thomas, and the anonymous reviewers for the *American Ethnologist* for their constructive comments on earlier drafts.

1. Building on my fieldwork conducted in rural East Madagascar (1992–94, 1997), fieldwork in urban Tamatave (Toamasina) was carried out over a period of ten months from 1999 through 2003. The interview segments provided here are only a selected few out of over 100 interviews I have conducted.

2. Presumably the vazaha was able to put the Malagasy man in jail by accusing him of theft; the European man essentially used his economic power to impose his will on the situation and get rid of his rival. Aurelie later told me, however, that once the vazaha left, the police released the Malagasy man, which was how the wider community learned of the story.

3. I am grateful to one of my anonymous reviewers for this particular formulation.

4. According to UNAIDS (2002), in 2001 the rate of adults and children between 15–49 infected with AIDS in Madagascar was 0.3 percent; HIV prevalence among sex workers tested in the capital city increased from 0.0 percent during 1991–94 to 0.3 percent in 1995 to 1.3 percent in 1998. In Diego Suarez and Tamatave, HIV prevalence among sex workers in 1996 was 1–2 percent and less than 1 percent, respectively.

5. So contentious was the question of access to schooling that it was one of the key issues in the demise of Philibert Tsiranana's First Republic and the switch to the state-socialist Second Republic under Ratsiraka (see Covell 1989). For a contemporary discussion of the politics of schooling in Madagascar, see Sharp 2002.

6. The expression that most clearly expressed this idea was "men can't be adulterous, [even if they sleep around]" (*lehilahy tsy mba miseny*).

7. Families who have joined new evangelical churches represent an important exception to this rule. For this group, control over female virginity is extremely important, and people view girls who have lost their virginity as "spoiled" (*simba*).

8. In my discussions with people during my rural fieldwork, arranged marriages were described as *vady atolotra*, or "spouse presented [by the parents]." Even rural elders, however, insisted that spouses had a right to refuse one another and that you could not "force marriage" (*tsy azo atao forcé*), using the same word—*forcé*—they used to describe *corvée* labor during the French colonial regime.

9. Claire's reflections about the ideal type of courtship, in which parents at least partially shape their children's choice of spouse, is

part of a wider set of ideas concerning how families become materially linked to one another at marriage. Only a small fraction of people actually get married in a civil ceremony, although it is only a civil ceremony that is legally recognized by the state. What is socially recognized, however, and what most people do is perform a ceremony known as *vody ondry*, in which the groom gives a small sum of money to the woman's parents as a symbolic payment for their efforts in raising her (see also Bloch 1989b). It is only after a stable marriage forms, however, that a girl's natal family may benefit from the relations created by their daughter's marriage. In theory, at least, marriage means that a woman takes over the family finances, receiving her husband's pay and then using it to take care of household expenses. Because women control the purse strings, they are able surreptitiously to funnel money to their kin. Particularly in marriages of long duration and despite the fact that patrilineal links are ideologically prioritized, many married women hope and often succeed in favoring their kin at the expense of their husbands'.

10. Although I only explicitly discussed sexual practices with youth who actually considered themselves prostitutes (as opposed to *jeunes*) or with men, who were less reticent about sexual matters, several people mentioned that oral sex—which people see in European porn films—is ancestrally taboo. Their logic was that it involved mixing the head, which is considered clean, with the genitals, which are considered dirty.

11. In accusing rural people of not wanting enough, urban youth sound uncannily like French administrators in the colonial era (see Cole 2001).

12. There is a wide debate as to the appropriateness of the term *prostitute* in the African context; many scholars have pointed out the problems of categorizing sex-for-money exchanges according to particular Western formulations (Hunter 2002; Schoepf 1992, 1995; Wojcicki 2002; Zalduondo 1991). In this article, I have used the broader and more neutral term *transactional sex*; however, in some cases, I have retained the word *prostitute* because it denoted a very important category among my informants.

13. Although pimping is not formalized in Tamatave, occasionally people—for example, taxi drivers—do mediate between women and their clients and take some cut of the profits.

14. During the precolonial period, non-Malagasy were forbidden from owning land, so that marrying a woman was one of the only ways that early settlers obtained access to land.

15. Feeley-Harnik (1991:294) reports that women in Northwest Madagascar perceived *vazaha* as reluctant to establish kinship relations of the kind expected by local people.

16. In this respect, the practices of and attitudes toward the *jaombilo* are similar to those described by Walsh (2003) for sapphire miners and hot money (*vola mafana*) in northern Madagascar.

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*accepted May 21, 2004*

*final version submitted May 28, 2004*

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