
Gendering the Malagasy Diaspora: Comparative Perspectives

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Résumé

It is by now well established within studies of migration that transnational mobility and resettlement are profoundly shaped by dynamics of gender and race. With respect to gender, scholars have shown how gender norms shape the possibilities for mobility at the same time that migration and settlement in a new place sometimes allows for transformations in gender relations. While early studies hypothesized that independent female migration, entry into the job market and access to material resources empowered women, other studies have cast doubt on these arguments, pointing to a "gender stall" for migrant women (Choi et al, 2018). Race and the racial hierarchies inherited from the colonial encounter further complicate these dynamics.

How might these issues play out in the context of a relatively recent Malagasy diaspora? Historically, Madagascar was not a country of emigration, although internal migration was common (Fournet-Guérin 2010). Since the 1990s, however, the numbers of people migrating beyond the great island have increased significantly. The vast majority of these people migrate to greater France which as the former colonial power, continues to occupy a privileged position in the Malagasy political imaginary (see Cole & Somda 2025). Although statistics for the Malagasy diaspora in France are difficult to come by, information pertaining to France, in particular gives a sense of the growth of this group and its social contours. Crenn (2013) notes that in 1975 very few Malagasy had settled in France, especially compared to other groups from France's former colonies. Those who had were a highly elite group, who had largely come for education. By contrast, more recent studies estimate the numbers at somewhere around 150,000-200,000 (Razafindrakoto et al. 2018). The growth of the diaspora goes hand in hand with a diversification of points of origin on the island, with more people coming from coastal regions. Significantly, the population is overwhelmingly feminine: it is estimated that 2/3 of Malagasy living in France are women, a far greater proportion than other groups from the former colonies. In light of these observations, this panel invites papers that engage issues of gender and race and their intersection within the broader Malagasy diaspora.

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