

Transformations  
of African Marriage

editors

David Parkin, David Nyamwaya

Manchester University Press

for the

International African Institute 1987

6 Ivan Karp

## LAUGHTER AT MARRIAGE: SUBVERSION IN PERFORMANCE

All acts of the drama of world history were performed before a chorus of the laughing people. Without hearing the chorus we cannot understand the drama as a whole.

M. M. Bakhtin

Ritual processes are distinguished by an attitude of solemnity, or are they? At the very least we expect the emotional tone displayed within ritual and ceremonial to be consistent within each phase of the process. Among all the different complexes of custom in the societies of the West, marriage is a rite of passage which commands attention and respect. The social process of marriage rites has as its consequence transformations in status for the protagonists; it alters the relationships among the kin of each party, expresses a sense of commitment both to the relationship created in the rite and the other party to it. Finally, marriage acknowledges that the jural status of the protagonists has changed as a result of participation in the rite. It is little wonder that such a significant and encompassing change in the life of the persons involved should often be characterised by the sense of awe which Durkheim asserts is the emotional core of all religious rituals.

The difficulty with this characterisation of marriage rites and their consequences is that it could equally well be applied to marriage rituals among the Iteso of Kenya in all respects but one. The attitudes displayed at Iteso marriage ceremonies and no doubt by many other African peoples are not as consistent as we might expect to find associated with such significant social consequences. While an individual participant such as the bride can display anxiety and tension, which is normal for an event that has such important consequences for her, other participants, all women, treat this exclusively female rite as an occasion for laughter, joking and ribald commentary.

This chapter attempts to address the problem of contradictions between what Gregory Bateson called 'ethos', the emotional attitude or tone

displayed by participants to an event, and the meanings that can be extracted from an analysis of the complex of custom that composes the practices associated with the event.

My special concern will be with forms of communicative action which are not amenable to description in linear terms. These are aspects of discourse which as Anthony Giddens points out 'are often simply discounted' because they are 'refractory to being rendered as statements of propositional belief' or which, like humor or irony, derive their meaning not so much from the content of what is said as from the style; mode of expression or context of utterance' (1984: xxx). Giddens himself goes on to argue that even these are less important than the skills embedded in what he calls 'practical consciousness'. I think that Giddens underestimates the importance of performance-oriented forms as means of self-expression. That these are 'refractory to being rendered as statements of propositional belief' is a significant aspect of their meaning to the actors who perform them. Humour and irony are subtle and powerful means of expression available to people whose communicative options are otherwise constrained by the social conditions in which they act.

In any case it is certainly true that anthropologists have tended to ignore irony, satire and humour in social settings that are fundamentally serious. This failing may be the product of two related assumptions. First there is a tendency to attribute consistency to the actions and utterances of members of other cultures. Gellner refers to this tendency as the principle of 'contextual charity' (1970). It is likely that the types of experience that tend to be eliminated in order to create consistency will be the more ephemeral aspects of action.

The second reason for ignoring the performance of irony is that anthropological discourse has tended to exhibit a bias towards order. Those aspects of communicative action which tend to celebrate disorder and subversion are not only difficult to describe but often contradict the analyses that anthropologists make of ritual processes. The few instances of descriptions of laughter at marriage I have found in the ethnographic literature explain them as instances of tension release. What is needed in the analysis of ritual is a greater appreciation of contradictions internal to the process.

The general problem of how to understand contradictory definitions manifested in social behaviour has attracted considerable attention of late. One reason for this emphasis may be that as anthropologists have increasingly turned to more actor-oriented accounts of social life and forms, they have found, as did Bateson, that a significant aspect of variation across societies may reside not in custom but in performance. Indeed the different interpretations of what is customary facilitate this.

Some researchers now recognize more subtle shades of meaning in the anthropology of ritual form.

In *Naven*, for instance, I have shown how opposed meanings that are displayed. This single complex act is the rubbing of the mother's brother to his sister's face. In solemnity the act marked the acknowledgement and pride in the act as 'male mothers'. The act is in procreative activity. In pride in and association with the act.

There is a contrary frame of reference, however. Men dressed in children and perform the *Naven* act. It can be defined as a deliberate victim of the performance. (The act is an ironic commentary. In the act and his victim, it becomes a performance. Bateson develops precisely how Bateson develops 'metamessages' as he calls the performance, are interpreted to restore balance in a situation where one party is seeking to restore the community.

It is difficult from Bateson's work to distinguish between two aspects of the anthropology of ritual: the 'performance event', the situation, and the second is the elements of style, attitude, and audience that are expository and meaningful to them. Part of the expectations about how they participate in similar events in any meaningful sense, how the definition of the situation or the ways through which we make the ritual meaningful and relevant to the ethnography of New (political) life is often played

Some researchers now recognise that performance is capable of sustaining more subtle shades of meaning than are conventionally examined in the anthropology of ritual forms.

In *Naven*, for instance, Bateson found that the same ritual could have opposed meanings that depend on relationship of context to the ethos displayed. This single complex of custom is called the *Naven* ceremony, its central act is the rubbing of the buttocks on the shin, done by a mother's brother to his sister's son. Performed with a proper amount of solemnity the act marked the sister's son's achievements. It is an act of acknowledgement and pride. The Iatmul think of their mothers' brothers as 'male mothers'. The action is associated with aspects of sexuality found in procreative activity. In *Naven* mothers' brothers are asserting their pride in and association with descendants.

There is a contrary frame in which the *Naven* ritual can emerge, however. Men dressed in 'widow's weeds' can capture their sisters' children and perform the *Naven* with satirical intent. The same action can be defined as a deliberate denigration of the pretensions of the unhappy victim of the performance. Celebration in this case is turned into satire and ironic commentary. In the context of the relations between the performer and his victim, it becomes a potent instrument of social control. This is precisely how Bateson develops his analysis. The invocation of different 'metamessages' as he calls them, embodied in the more labile aspects of performance, are interpreted as acting as a control mechanism that can be used to restore balance in social relations which are undergoing change, where one party is seeking to redefine his relationship with other members of the community.

It is difficult from Bateson's account of the *Naven* complex to distinguish between two aspects of performance that are now important to anthropologists and folklorists concerned with such matters. The first is the 'performance event', the frame which is invoked to define the situation, and the second is the more ephemeral dimension of performance which Bauman refers to as the 'artistry'. (1977) This second can refer to elements of style, attitude and reaction on the part of performers and audience that are expository of how they experience and make the event meaningful to them. Participants undoubtedly bring to such events expectations about how they will experience them, expectations based on participation in similar events. These expectations are not institutionalised in any meaningful sense, however. They are not rules governing either the definition of the situation or the behaviour manifested in it. Instead they are ways through which we make the rules that define an event such as ritual meaningful and relevant to us. To the anthropologist familiar with the ethnography of New Guinea that has a familiar ring. Social and political life is often played out in public drama among the peoples of the

Sepik river, where the Iatmul live. Their political systems are oriented to what have been called 'big men', builders of highly unstable coalitions who are skilled in the political game of claim and counter-claim. In the political world satire and irony are valuable political tools.

The Africanist social anthropologist may find resonances as well. There is a sense in which Bateson's account bears considerable resemblance to Evans-Pritchard's account of the role of the leopard-skin chief in resolving conflict among the Nuer of the Southern Sudan (1940). At first sight this appears a curious assertion. The Nuer are not known for the dramatic and playful character of their political life. The tropes of irony and satire have not been described as mechanisms of political assertion and control. Yet the leopard-skin chief operates in much the same way as the *Naven* ritual among the Iatmul. Not an act, but a person, he provides the setting in which social relations can be redefined. Thus, the leopard-skin chief is equally a mechanism for the emergence of equilibrium. If the parties are of unequal power he may even be a means to assert control. Furthermore his actions provide a setting in which the authenticity of assertions about self, power and autonomy can be affirmed or denied — where the authenticity of claims about social reality is either validated or denied. Perhaps it is not surprising that two anthropologists of the same period should produce analyses so readily comparable in spite of the differences in the social formations they research.

We are no longer so interested as we once were in how social institutions restore equilibrium. Nor may we be so convinced that they achieve this so easily. The moment of reproduction is after all the moment of change. If a seeming contradiction can be used to restore social relations to an earlier state, then it is not so difficult to bring that contradiction to bear on change. In the marriage rites that I will describe for the Iteso the contradictions displayed in the rituals can easily be shown to have implications for social control. They are explicitly interpreted this way by the Iteso themselves. I am convinced, however, that a description that is content to interpret marriage rites as a mechanism for controlling others or establishing solidary social relationships and go no further trivialises the meanings with which the actors fill their performances.

This is in any case what I hope to show for the Iteso. For all its limitations, Bateson's work shows how subtle a vehicle for the creativity of message-making performance can be, in spite of the misleading cybernetic assumptions of his thinking. What is often missing in descriptions that are oriented to equilibrium or cyclical change are two related aspects of performance. First it must be remembered that both performer and audience bring prior expectations to the event, and second that the successful achievement of a performance which attempts to create a complex message such as irony is a difficult matter. It entails the creating

of implicit commentary to aspects of performance as between what Stephen Ty

Research in ritual and the mixing of tropes that a less complicated stratum framework for interpretation relatively uncontroversial *Naven* ritual, for example, participants must recognize asserts that *Naven* is a complex. The complex metamessage of a relatively simple one. This suggests to me meaning in performances. quality of the performance of something that is inherent people do and often in the enhance their actions. The however. They both assume between audience and performer they refer back to the context can be used to comment complex process may go on

For the purposes of this analyses are often judged on known into that which is pre-evaluated is not so much that which the performance is a transformed into something

I do not want to apply formalism or a socialist reading to show below with respect simply entail a change of focus against and serve as comment. It is related, as Handelman (1979). The relationship between performance and the ordinary and tension. It is precisely realise in his various attempts such as ritual and performance ordinary.<sup>3</sup> Bloch takes a kind that they are the very embodiment

of implicit commentary through the contradictory juxtaposition of such aspects of performance as custom and emphasis or utterance and action, between what Stephen Tyler aptly calls 'the said and the unsaid' (1978).<sup>1</sup>

Research in ritual and theatricality suggests that the complex messages and mixing of tropes that are characteristic of performance are parasitic on a less complicated stratum of meaning, that they refer to a different framework for interpretation, one associated with everyday life in which relatively uncontroversial meanings are attributed to events. Before a *Naven* ritual, for example, can be performed with ironic intent, the participants must recognise a pre-existing stratum of meaning which asserts that *Naven* is a ceremonial gesture that celebrates achievement. The complex metamessage is then achieved through the artful transformation of a relatively simple ritual gesture into a more complex theatrical one. This suggests to me a tentative hypothesis about the layering of meaning in performances. The power of the gesture often resides in the quality of the performance. The efficacy of symbols is not simply a matter of something that is inherent in custom. It is created and recreated in what people do and often in the ephemeral embellishments through which they enhance their actions. These embellishments are not referentially empty, however. They both assume and refer to what is known and shared between audience and performer. They do this in complex ways. As ritual they refer back to the contexts of everyday life and as performance they can be used to comment on the very process of referring itself. This complex process may go on simultaneously within a single event.<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter it is important to note that performances are often judged on the quality of transformation of that which is known into that which is performed. This judgement is aesthetic. What is evaluated is not so much the content of the performance as the skill with which the performance is achieved, how well the everyday is enhanced and transformed into something more than everyday.

I do not want to appear to be advocating either morally empty formalism or a socialist realist approach to ritual performances. As I hope to show below with respect to the Iteso data, a transformation need not simply entail a change of form or content. The transformation can act back against and serve as commentary upon that which has been transformed. It is related, as Handelman notes, to the formation of social identity (1979). The relationship between the extraordinary that is manifested in performance and the ordinary that is transformed may be one of conflict and tension. It is precisely this point that Maurice Bloch has failed to realise in his various attempts to assert that the extraordinary moments such as ritual and performance are less real, in some sense, than the ordinary.<sup>3</sup> Bloch takes a kind of Stalinist position to the ritual and the arts, that they are the very embodiment of false consciousness, that they impose

authority on the flux of what is universal and everyday. What he fails to recognise is that the everyday itself changes from social formation to social formation. He also denies the possibility that the creative elements in social life can be tied to cultural and social criticism. He has missed the entire development of recent Marxist thought from Gramsci to Raymond Williams. The alternative position has been explored by David Parkin, who has shown for a variety of settings that creativity is embodied in the transformations that agents work upon contexts (1980a, 1982).

The idea of transformation of the simple into the complex has its own implications. As I have argued, the notion of transformation assumes that the meanings that can be conveyed through performance are parasitic upon other meanings. I use the idea of a parasitic relationship here in a non-evaluative sense. What I am trying to convey is a relationship of non-reversible dependence in which an emotional inflection such as irony depends upon the acknowledgement of the possibility of a non-inflected performance. I want to state as firmly as I can, however, that to acknowledge does not mean either to accept or deny the claims entailed by performance.

In fact, as I will argue for Iteso women, the potential for complexity inherent in performance allows the performers and their audience to 'speak' with more than one voice at the same time. The different voices may contradict one another. If the result is confusion, such is the essence of social life.

My inspiration for this perspective is not so much Bateson but the Soviet literary theorist and philosopher M. M. Bakhtin. For a complicated set of reasons much of Bakhtin's work was published under other names. As Bakhtin he developed a theory of carnival in which he argued that the carnival frame, with its emphasis on bodily presentation, emphasised folk against official culture, bodily knowledge over rational processes, power against authority. In his brilliant book on Freud, written under the name of his friend Voloshinov, Bakhtin argues that utterances can simultaneously convey what he called 'official and unofficial' ideologies. Through the use of such mechanisms as intonation, complex and often conflicting messages manifest themselves. For Bakhtin a conflict of messages and interpretation is contained in one voice (Bakhtin 1965, 1981; Voloshinov 1973a, 1973b; Clark and Holquist 1984).

Bakhtin's writings suggest that accounts of ritual performances have been simplified. Performance can be used to assert differing messages of authenticity and inauthenticity either at different phases of the same performance, or even in performances that refer to one another. This much we know from the studies of Victor Turner and his students.<sup>4</sup> It is also possible, however, that the elaboration of unadorned meaning may assert contradictory messages simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> This effect can be

achieved through the differently performed of its performative nature of the social ritual performance can enhance itself.

If experience can be upon it in performance Bakhtin's writings. His calls 'unofficial ideological form as manifest performance, and then (Voloshinov 1973a; Clark and Bakhtin refers to the carnival formation. Hence Bakhtin carnival and privileged he argues that bodily process, living stuff, but (Bakhtin 1965; Clark argues that laughter at marriage comment on, the representation performed.

I turn, finally, to the first phase of the Iteso. For this analysis the process as it is punctuated expressed in symbol and first phase of the marriage women.

The Southern Iteso are the Kenya-Uganda border minority among the Barotsi substantial contact and in the Uganda side of the system has been characterised. It is a virtual historical reality. Many Iteso recognise the changes and are able to distinguish have had a longer-term changes in ritual custom indicates that throughout retained a core of custom their neighbours. While



everyday. What he fails to do is to relate the social formation to social criticism. He has missed the creative elements in the thought of Gramsci to Raymond Williams explored by David Parkin, and his activity is embodied in the work of (1980a, 1982).

The complex has its own logic. Transformation assumes that the performance are parasitic on the social relationship here in a way that is a relationship of inflection such as irony. The possibility of a non-inflected can, however, that to deny the claims entailed by

the potential for complexity and their audience to the. The different voices of the performance, such is the essence

much Bateson but the Bakhtin. For a complicated world lived under other names. Which he argued that the performance, emphasised folk ritual processes, power written under the name of the performance can simultaneous-deologies. Through the and often conflicting conflict of messages and (1965, 1981; Voloshinov

ual performances have at differing messages of of phases of the same to one another. This for and his students.<sup>4</sup> It of unadorned meaning v.<sup>5</sup> This effect can be

achieved through the manner and style of performance. Hence one action differently performed can transform content in a variety of ways. Because of its performative nature ritual can be used to indicate more than the nature of the social structure of which it is a part. The complexities of ritual performance can be made expository of the contrarities of experience itself.

If experience can be full of contradictions, so can the comments made upon it in performance. This perspective has been a central theme in Bakhtin's writings. His special concern has been to examine how what he calls 'unofficial ideology' has been expressed not so much through discursive form as manifested through the use of body and emotion in performance, and then to show its capacity to subvert 'official' ideology (Voloshinov 1973a; Clark and Holquist 1984: 171-86). By ideology Bakhtin refers to the definitions of self and person exhibited in a social formation. Hence Bakhtin has been drawn to such seeming ephemera as carnival and privileged obscenity. In his *Rabelais* book, for instance, he argues that bodily processes continually betray the existence of life process, living stuff, beneath the uniform imposed by official culture (Bakhtin 1965; Clark and Holquist 1984: 295-321). It may very well be that laughter at marriage among the Iteso tends to subvert, or at least to comment on, the reproductive purposes for which marriage rituals are performed.

I turn, finally, to the fieldwork portion of this chapter, marriage among the Iteso. For this analysis it will be necessary to describe the marriage process as it is punctuated by ritual over time, the predominant emphases expressed in symbol and rite in those rituals, and the performance of the first phase of the marriage, the one most distinguished by the laughter of women.

The Southern Iteso are a para-Nilotic speaking people who live across the Kenya-Uganda border. Within Kenya they comprise a linguistic minority among the Bantu-speaking Abaluyia with whom they have had substantial contact and intermarriage, as they have with the JoPaDhola in the Uganda side of the territory they occupy (Karp 1978). Their ritual system has been characterised by a high degree of flexibility and change. It is a virtual historical record of their experience of contact and change. Many Iteso recognise the dynamic quality of ritual processes among them and are able to distinguish between recent adoptions and elements that have had a longer-term residence among them. Despite the considerable changes in ritual custom that the Iteso have experienced, my fieldwork indicates that throughout the region they occupy marriage rituals have retained a core of customary practices that can distinguish the Iteso from their neighbours. While anthropologists have generally underestimated



the degree to which cultural borrowing and exchange occur throughout Africa, it is a good principle to assume that where an area of cultural conservatism does appear, the elements involved are essential for the preservation of some sense of identity or purpose.<sup>6</sup>

Marriage rites among the Iteso compose part of an essential cultural sphere dedicated to physical and social reproduction. The rituals are performed entirely by women. The men who do attend act entirely in the role of audience and interested spectator. They are entirely unessential for the ritual process and are often absent when they are performed. I am unaware of any other African society in which marriage rituals are so much the exclusive domain of women. This fact may seem even more puzzling when it is associated with the status of the Iteso, a patrilineal society whose enduring units are non-localised agnatic categories and groupings.<sup>7</sup> The women who perform the rituals on behalf of Iteso lineages and clans are the wives and mothers of the male members of agnatically constituted groups. Hence rituals of incorporation and procreation are performed by persons who are neither born into nor consanguineally related to the groups they perpetuate.

A great deal has been made in social anthropology of the 'matrilineal puzzle', that paradox that arises out of the contradictions between the matrilineal mode of descent and various residence patterns which separate heirs and their benefactors (Richards 1950). Lévi-Strauss, for example, refers to this type of social system as a 'dysharmonic regime', in contrast with patrilineal societies, which are supposed to be harmonic. In the harmonic regime of the patrilineal society no contradictions arise between residence and descent (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 197-221). This distinction ignores at least two critical points. First there is far more variation in residence in so-called patrilineal societies than Lévi-Strauss appears to note. The Iteso, for example, are almost entirely neo-local in residence and they have moved considerable distances from their natal homes in the recent past. Secondly, the harmonic-disharmonic distinction is articulated from the perspective of one sector of men's lives. Matrilineal societies probably do pose problems for men who have to choose between 'father love and mother right', as Malinowski described it, but women are often torn between conflicting interests and loyalties as well. Turner's studies of the social aspects of drums of affliction among the Ndembu show this very well (Turner 1969).

Hence the question of disharmony is more a question of perspective and social position than type of social system. My own view is that all social structures pose problems and difficulties for the agents who compose them. These difficulties differ with respect to such factors as position and history. Yet the idea that particular modes of affiliation pose seemingly irresolvable problems for the people who practice them has merit, if it is

not used in a simplistic way. The condition of the Iteso is a puzzle. Patrilineal societies are reproduced by a system of inheritance. Some of the literature on matrilineal societies shows that

Among the Iteso, inheritance is manifested through the house. It has been called 'the house of the living', whereby the children of a man and his wife. The Iteso have a substantial inheritance in the Amukura area full of land and more than one wife. Hence the women are living in a

Moveable property is inherited by the siblings. Cattle brought into the household can be used for the marriage of the household heads. This complex of inheritance has the consequence of making the siblings, each striving to

These social arrangements are a source of autonomy of adult women in societies with the household as the basic unit (1967; Mitchell 1967; Mitchell 1967). Inheritance practices is a source of autonomy for her children and to ensure the continuity of the household. The consequence of this is that a woman's children would be a source of continuity, and secondly, her children, her brother because he would have to marry and used to be a source of continuity in marriage relationships. The interests of their children are a source of continuity, severing the marriage

For an important period, her social life is a source of continuity. In another way we might say that the women are at their most extreme in justifying this situation. Matrilineal societies are women's productive areas. The women's productive area is her marital lineage. A

exchange occur throughout where an area of cultural lived are essential for the use.<sup>6</sup>

rt of an essential cultural duction. The rituals are to attend act entirely in the are entirely unessential for. hey are performed. I am arriage rituals are so much seem even more puzzling a patrilineal society whose ries and groupings.<sup>7</sup> The eso lineages and clans are of agnatically constituted reation are performed by guineally related to the

ology of the 'matrilineal contradictions between the e patterns which separate évi-Strauss, for example, onic regime', in contrast to be harmonic. In the contradictions arise between 7-221). This distinction is far more variation in Lévi-Strauss appears to neo-local in residence and their natal homes in the distinction is articulated es. Matrilineal societies o choose between 'father it, but women are often well. Turner's studies of Ndembu show this very

estion of perspective and en view is that all social e agents who compose n factors as position and nliation pose seemingly them has merit, if it is

not used in a simple-minded fashion. Iteso women experience contradictions in the conditions of their existence that could be termed a 'patrilineal puzzle'. Patrilineal societies are composed of groups and categories which are reproduced by aliens, non-members who have married into them. Some of the literature on witchcraft accusations in patrilineal African societies shows that the alien status of women is a vital concern.<sup>8</sup>

Among the Iteso the contradictions of the patrilineal puzzle are manifested through their patterns of inheritance. The Iteso have what has been called 'the house-property complex', a complex of inheritance rules whereby the children of one mother form a single inheritance unit. The Iteso have a substantial number of households with plural marriages. In the Amukura area fully thirty-three per cent of households contain more than one wife. Hence at one point in time more than half of the married women are living in a polygynous setting.

Moveable property, in the form of cattle, is inherited by sets of full siblings. Cattle brought in through the marriage of a full sister will ideally be used for the marriage of a male full sibling. On the other hand household heads control access to and distribution of the cattle. This complex of inheritance rules and the possibility of manipulating it often has the consequence of dividing households into competing groups of full siblings, each striving for a share of the family estate.

These social arrangements can have severe consequences for the autonomy of adult women. A striking feature of many patrilineal-based societies with the house-property complex is a low divorce rate (Barnes 1967; Mitchell 1967; Gluckman 1971). For the Iteso the result of their inheritance practices is to create an interest group centred on a woman and her children and to embed that group in a system of marriage exchanges. The consequence of divorce among the Iteso would be first, that a woman's children would be placed at a disadvantage in the inheritance process, and second that the marriage of the protector of the woman's children, her brother, their mother's brother, would be endangered because he would have to return the bridewealth he received at her marriage and used to marry himself. Thus, no matter what the quality of marriage relationships among the Iteso, women are constrained by the interests of their children and prevented by their natal families from severing the marriage tie.

For an important segment of a woman's adult life, her fertile married period, her social life is severely constrained and lacking in options. Put another way we might say that the controls that impinge upon her actions are at their most extreme during her fertile years. Iteso ritual and ideology justify this situation. Marriages are conceived of as entailing the transfer of women's productive and reproductive labour from her natal lineage into her marital lineage. A marriage is constituted through the exchange of one

element in production, cattle, for another, women. The women – cattle equation has been often enough remarked upon in the literature on Nilotic-type societies but there is not as yet any account of how systematically it pervades ritual processes (Kronenberg 1972).

For the Iteso this symbolic equation is marked at all important points in their marriage process. A marriage itself is only the beginning of the process of household formation and inseparable from that in Iteso thought and practice. Marriages are constituted over a considerable period of time and occur in a number of stages, many of which, incidentally, have been omitted recently in the increasing number of Christian families. The first ritual stage, called *akiguan*, the 'smearing', establishes the marital relationship. Many other life-cycle rituals mark the birth and growth of children until the final ritual of incorporation into the husband's clan, which can only be performed after children have grown and under conditions in which the health of the children and the viability of the household is seen as endangered. This ritual is called *egwasit*, the 'sprinkling', and involves an inversion of many of the relationships asserted at the smearing ritual.

In *akiguan* the bride is ritually associated with the cattle of bridewealth for which she has been exchanged. She is driven with the stick that is used to drive the bridewealth cattle to her natal home. This stick, called *aparas*, is itself a sign of fertility and women who have grown children and have performed the *egwasit* ceremony are entitled to carry it. The object that moves the cattle in one direction causes the woman to return in exchange. In the final ceremony, *egwasit*, the wife/mother assimilates herself to the category of cattle in ritual process through the act of covering herself with the hide of a freshly sacrificed cow and returning to her natal home, accompanied by her co-wives of the lineage. Cattle symbolism pervades marriage ceremonies and establishes the equivalence of these two elements of production, women and cattle. Married women practise a series of ritual prohibitions, called *italia*, from *akitale*, 'to be forbidden'. Many of these have direct associations with cattle or their habits. Thus, women may not step over the rope that tethers cattle to a peg in the household. Women may not eat the thigh bone of a cow. Neither women nor cattle are allowed to go out at temporal margins such as dawn or dusk. These prohibitions often have direct fertility associations. The prohibition against stepping over a cattle-tethering rope, for example, is also found in beer parties, where women may not step over a beer straw (Karp 1980). In both instances the prohibition is against a female reproductive organ, the vagina, occupying the same space as a connector which is similar to an umbilicus. The parallel was even suggested by some Iteso informants and is a familiar theme in Nilotic symbolism. The prohibition against eating the thigh bone of a cow is interesting because the hind leg is reserved for

either lineage or exogamy. The association with the reproductive powers is only forbidden to practice for several years. After *egwasit* the

In the initial ceremony symbolises the act of sex with the husband who are her 'co-wives' of her husband's lineage and go down to her waist. The bride is seated in a gourd with seeds. (various variations of this custom mark the regularisation of sex, that is, intercourse with women flanking the bride, women of the same generation as the bride, other 'co-wife'. The son of the future mother-in-law. The generation of sons to succeed them. A wife can be the mother-in-law refers to *Aterna*, 'to look after', another bovine equivalent to son's wives.

This second equivalent is sexual smearing. The clan for driving cattle and rebelling the bride rushes. There she finds her action with the wand. This is emanating from the household and the bride emerges and transformation. She performs the ceremony again. More particular ceremony, the anyone not in the relationship will be struck by illness.

This ritual sequence in which the bride fits, to her husband's lineage and as women for lineage and lineage of ritual custom on places the status of woman.

men. The women – cattle  
upon in the literature on  
account of how systemati-  
(1972).

at all important points in  
ly the beginning of the  
from that in Iteso thought  
nsiderable period of time  
, incidentally, have been  
ristian families. The first  
blishes the marital rela-  
e birth and growth of  
nto the husband's clan,  
have grown and under  
and the viability of the  
is called *egwasit*, the  
ny of the relationships

the cattle of bridewealth  
with the stick that is used  
This stick, called *aparas*,  
rown children and have  
arry it. The object that  
n to return in exchange.  
ssimilates herself to the  
of covering herself with  
ing to her natal home,  
tle symbolism pervades  
ce of these two elements  
practise a series of ritual  
bidden'. Many of these

Thus, women may not  
the household. Women  
en nor cattle are allowed  
ask. These prohibitions  
bition against stepping  
found in beer parties,  
(Karp 1980). In both  
productive organ, the  
which is similar to an  
e Iteso informants and  
hibition against eating  
mind leg is reserved for

either lineage or exogamous sub-clan at mortuary ceremonies. Once again the association with lineage identity and reproduction and women's reproductive powers is paramount. The connection here is that women are only forbidden to practise these prohibitions during their fertile married years. After *egwasit* the prohibitions are lifted.<sup>9</sup>

In the initial ceremony, *akiguan*, the bride sits on a cow's hide, which symbolises the act of sexual intercourse, flanked on both sides by women who are her 'co-wives', *akain*, women married to members of her husband's lineage and generation. These women are clothed only from the waist down. The bride's back is smeared with cream that has been mixed in a gourd with seeds. (This is a frequent practice. Some clans may have variations of this custom.) The symbolic action is intended to represent the regularisation of sexual intercourse within the confines of marriage, that is, intercourse whose purpose is procreation and reproduction. The women flanking the bride establish an equivalence among the married women of the same generation within a lineage; in fact, they call each other 'co-wife'. The smearing is performed by a co-wife of the bride's future mother-in-law. Thus two generations assert themselves at the ritual – the generation of established mothers and the generation that will succeed them. A wife calls her 'mother-in-law' *tata*, 'grandmother', while the mother-in-law refers to her son's wife as *ateran*, derived from the verb *Aterna*, 'to look after', sometimes 'to herd'. These usages establish yet another bovine equivalence – as men herd cattle, so women herd their son's wives.

This second equivalence is manifested immediately after the act of sexual smearing. The classificatory mother-in-law takes up the wand used for driving cattle and repeatedly strikes the bride. In order to escape her beating the bride rushes into the house in front of which she is sitting. There she finds her actual mother-in-law, who reputedly also beats her with the wand. This is certainly the impression conveyed by the shrieks emanating from the house. After a short but intense period the door opens and the bride emerges clothed in white, the colour of health, well-being and transformation. She may never wear the clothes with which she began the ceremony again. More rituals take place the next day, but after this particular ceremony, the bride sleeps with her husband. If she sleeps with anyone not in the relationship of classificatory younger brother to him, he will be struck by illness.

This ritual sequence establishes a hierarchy of reproductive status into which the bride fits, brings her sexuality under the control of her husband's lineage and asserts the responsibility of different categories of women for lineage and household reproduction. I will call the performance of ritual custom on this occasion the 'official' ideology of the Iteso. It places the status of women into what is an essentially reproductive world

view and strongly emphasises the importance of women as vectors of reproduction, just as it establishes the equivalence of women and cattle. Perhaps the most striking feature of the ritual is the absence of men as active participants. Domestic ritual is performed by women among the Iteso, on behalf of groups constituted through links among men who are conspicuous by their absence. This provides a dramatic portrayal of the patrilineal paradox.

My bare-bones description fails to convey the feel of the ritual performance, however. The actions are accompanied by much joking, fun, good-natured criticism and general commentary on the part of the women. The emotional high point of the ritual begins not when the bride is smeared with cream, symbolically a very significant act. Instead attention is focused on the act of beating the bride with the cattle-driving wand. If any men happen to be present, they show distinct signs of nervousness as the moment approaches. The old woman doing the beating is licensed to beat anyone she may choose and males are particularly good game. Even anthropologists are not immune! Other women who have a reputation for selfishness and lack of co-operation may be beaten as well. This is all experienced as great fun. The women dissolve with laughter as the old woman strikes out, and the shrieks from inside the hut are enormously amusing. Some of the sources of this amusement are easy to discern. Dignified men being chased by old women are certainly amusing to Western eyes. A joking punishment is a good agent of social control when applied to unco-operative co-wives. In any case we could easily argue that such rituals provide major contexts for the expression of female solidarity in Iteso society among women who occupy the same roles and co-operate in everyday life. Thus they serve to establish a sense of community, of a group of persons with the same interests and experience.

All this is true, but I think there is more as well. The pleasure derived from the ritual arises out of the tension between the official and unofficial perspectives involved. Women are agents of reproduction in Iteso society, and their role is utilised to justify their lack of autonomy, in their view as well. The Iteso perform their marriage rituals in order to establish a sense of bodily and behavioural discipline through which the significant units that compose their social order will be reproduced. This is particularly stressed in the 'beating' that provides the emotional high point of the ritual. This is the only point in any Iteso ritual where the whipping of another human occurs. I neither saw nor heard that it was so serious as to cause injury. The significance of the whipping is that it is performed at a ritualised moment of physical reproduction and in conjunction with a general equation made by the Iteso of women and cattle.

The women who do the beating have achieved successful reproductive status in the very lineages the brides are joining. Having performed the

'sprinkling' ceremony with the prohibitions that will. In some sense they are power, which is symbol.

Without the ritual act during intercourse will agency of women is made ritual practice is that women the terms. Through their physical reproduction. To achieve their effects, however the men of the lineage. Each party acts for another. paradoxical consequence power is specific; it is the superordinant becomes clear.

Thus Iteso ritual sets up women and the delegative paradox is dramatised. On the one hand women attributes of cattle. Both forms of self-control that need the external discipline (perhaps 'driving' is a better cattle to the natal home. The wand that drives the bride use for this wand is as a Thus the bodily discipline enforced.<sup>10</sup> Yet the very

Laughter at marriage does not lead to easy description for Iteso women. I could and would have felt foolish the sole point in Iteso ritual sole point where amusement what women do (they who laugh) begs an interpretation.

There is little more I episode in an elaborate ritual midst of the most serious society, a transformation

I think Durkheim would Iteso ritual. In Iteso society



'sprinkling' ceremony they are relieved of the responsibility of practising the prohibitions that will become the defining conditions of the new bride. In some sense they are effecting a transfer of fertility and procreative power, which is symbolised in the ritualisation of the act of intercourse.

Without the ritual actions of the women the physical actions of men during intercourse will have no effect. This is the moment when the agency of women is made apparent. What is of particular interest in Iteso ritual practice is that women are agents in two of the dictionary senses of the terms. Through their practice they bring about the effect of social and physical reproduction. This is the first and primary sense of agency. They achieve their effects, however, for another party which is absent, namely, the men of the lineage. This is the second sense of agency, in which one party acts for another. The limited autonomy of women has the paradoxical consequence of putting them in a situation of power. Their power is specific; it is the power of the subordinate agent upon whom the superordinant becomes dependent.

Thus Iteso ritual sets up a complex relationship between the control of women and the delegation to them of the right and ability to act. This paradox is dramatised most effectively in the act of whipping the bride. On the one hand women are ritually relegated and associated with the attributes of cattle. Both cattle and women are incapable of exercising the forms of self-control that enable independent goal-directed action. Both need the external discipline that is manifested in the act of whipping (perhaps 'driving' is a better word). The wand that drives the bridewealth cattle to the natal home of the bride is made of the same material as the wand that drives the bride into her mother-in-law's house. The only other use for this wand is as a display of status for post-menopausal women. Thus the bodily discipline that is enforced in the ritual is externally enforced.<sup>10</sup> Yet the very agents who enforce it are women themselves.

Laughter at marriage is one of those ephemeral phenomena that do not lead to easy description or explanation. Laughter is its own explanation for Iteso women. I did not ask women to explain why they laughed and would have felt foolish had I attempted to do so. Yet this is not only the sole point in Iteso ritual life where women are whipped. It is also the sole point where amusement is so strong. The particular conjunction of what women do (they whip each other) and how they experience it (they laugh) begs an interpretation.

There is little more I can say in describing the laughter. It is a brief episode in an elaborate ritual complex. Yet it happens, and happens in the midst of the most serious transformation of status women undergo in Iteso society, a transformation that is as abrupt as it is severe.<sup>11</sup>

I think Durkheim would have been pleased with the official ideology of Iteso ritual. In Iteso society men and women seek to control the bodies of

women for agnatic good. The paradox is that those bodies originate outside the lineages they reproduce and that men are excluded from the most fundamental contexts in which their lives are reproduced. The dependence of men is not that they do not control the lives of women but that they are forced to delegate their control to women themselves.

Thus men become dependent on women in a way they cannot escape. From one point of view, that of the women, this can be very funny, in an ironic way. They exclude the very men on whose behalf they act from supervising the rituals through which their lives are reproduced. I believe it is significant that the aspect of *akiguan* that is so amusing is the beating and driving associated with cattle-herding. The association of the control of women with the control of cattle is fairly patent in the ritual symbolism entailed here. Yet the paradox of the delegation to women of the control of women has its amusing aspects and consequences. Women are simultaneously controlled and controlling in this ritual. It is always difficult to interpret the inchoate aspects of experience but I suspect that they experience the power of procreativity in their rituals. After all, these inchoate aspects have the most serious consequences and often emerge out of serious situations such as severe illness. There is here a paradox of autonomy and control, of power (in the sense of capacity) and hegemony, that is manifested in women's experiences and rituals. The body is obviously a critical element in Iteso life. Women's bodies are significant vectors of social and physical reproduction. Yet Iteso capacity to control them is limited. The body is continually escaping from the constraints put upon it. A parallel can be drawn between the treatment and attitude to the body for women in ritual and Bakhtin's account of the body beneath the uniform in carnival. The body continually betrays attempts to hide or clothe it. Our hopes for the world are continually controverted by our attempts to control it. This then is the unofficial side of the external controls Iteso attempt to place on women's bodies. Their view of the consequences of their failures to control the body is tragic. Iteso domestic rituals are obsessively concerned about failures in fertility. Yet they may briefly escape the tragedy when they turn to a brief disorderly moment when women celebrate their resistance to control through laughter.

Women's roles among the Iteso can present real difficulties for themselves. It is just a little bit ironic that they can also present real difficulties for men. This is the unofficial side. If women are committed to the official ideology of Iteso society, this does not suggest that they cannot, on occasion, enjoy the problems they present both to men and even themselves. At some moments the unofficial gains a momentary triumph over the official. In this rupture of the official through performance emerges the laughter that constitutes the aesthetics of Iteso marriage rites.

## APPENDIX: NC

There is a considerable One distinguishing : to be defined in so r the same writers are example, define a se wife has separate de revision of his origin house-property com some patrilineal soci purposes of inheritin man 1971). In these and low divorce is woman marriage, sor to husband's lineage : add further that inh The only serious cri points out on the bas features Gluckman fo and that it was nec uxorial services and p guished.

This is an importar the system will be hypothesis that it wi wife vs. brother-siste childbirth distinction divorce only a small p has borne children. I incorporation into h turned. This ceremon status. Hence the Ites tion that the absence childbirth payments i producers of children supported by Iteso r reproductive status. I parallels with Iteso sy the house-property co property, marriage wi stock such as cattle



## APPENDIX: NOTE ON THE HOUSE-PROPERTY COMPLEX

There is a considerable body of literature on the house-property complex. One distinguishing feature of it is that the house-property complex tends to be defined in so many different ways that it is difficult to imagine that the same writers are discussing the same thing. Goody and Buckley, for example, define a society as having the house-property complex if each wife has separate domestic and living arrangements (1973). Gluckman's revision of his original argument very clearly points out that he meant the house-property complex to refer to a pattern of inheritance exhibited in some patrilineal societies whereby full siblings form an exclusive unit for purposes of inheriting the family estate *via-à-vis* other such units (Gluckman 1971). In these systems wives are the 'nucleus of patrimonial estates' and low divorce is found associated with the true levirate, woman to woman marriage, sororal polygyny, children born out of wedlock assigned to husband's lineage and high bridewealth (Gluckman 1971: 236). I would add further that inheritance should be restricted to moveable property. The only serious critique of Gluckman has been made by Parkin, who points out on the basis of a comparison of Luo and Giriama that all the features Gluckman found among the Zulu do not necessarily go together and that it was necessary to identify societies in which payments for uxorial services and payments for 'childbirth' are terminologically distinguished.

This is an important distinction. Where it is not made, Parkin suggests, the system will be resistant to change. Even more important is his hypothesis that it will be related to greater emphasis on the husband-wife vs. brother-sister relationships. The Iteso do not make the uxorial-childbirth distinction but clearly focus on childbirth in practice. At divorce only a small portion of the payments need be returned if the wife has borne children. If she has performed the *egwasit* ceremony of final incorporation into her husband's lineage, then no wealth need be returned. This ceremony acts as a certification of the woman's reproductive status. Hence the Iteso data tend to confirm Parkin's concluding suggestion that the absence of a terminological distinction between uxorial and childbirth payments is associated with a high value placed on women as producers of children and labour (1980b: 217). This interpretation is supported by Iteso ritual symbolism, which relates women's labour to reproductive status. Harriet Ngubane's study of the Zulu shows many parallels with Iteso symbolism. This suggests a further hypothesis. Where the house-property complex is associated with the inheritance of moveable property, marriage will be defined in terms of the exchange of women for stock such as cattle and this exchange will have social and physical

reproduction as its purpose and uxorial activities will be subordinated to reproduction.

### NOTES

1 This is actually a more complicated distinction than I indicate as it involves at least two sorts of 'unsaid' aspects of performance. The first are the implicit conventions that defy the frame of interaction and the second are the intentional creations of speaker and hearer (Tyler 1978: 459).

2 Don Handelman has explored the complexities of these issues with respect to Bateson's analysis of the *Naven* ceremony. His emphasis is on how performance can be used to redefine the definition of the situation from ritual to play.

3 See his 1974 article for the clearest statement of his position with respect to performance.

4 See especially Handelman 1979 and Kapferer 1983.

5 A major effort of Bakhtin was to assert that that a multiplicity of conflicting messages were invariably communicated simultaneously. (Clark and Holquist 1984: 68-70).

6 My fieldwork was primarily in the Amukura area and in the southern division of Busia District, Kenya. I have no evidence that those aspects of marriage rituals I will be discussing are different in locations with which I am unfamiliar.

7 Lineage-based forms of organisation among the Iteso are not property-holding corporations, and are corporate with respect only to ritual and marriage.

8 See especially Ngubane's account (1977) of how Zulu wives are accused of sorcery in terms of the logic of accusation and their stranger status.

9 Among the Ugandan Iteso the final ceremony in which the prohibitions are lifted is called *ekonyokoit* and is performed one year after the birth of the third child (Nagashima 1976). Among the Iteso of Kenya the timing is erratic and based on sustained illness. The emphasis is less on removal of prohibition than on the creation of a community of successful fertile women. Thus the *egwasit* leads to a second phase of the ritual, called *akinyam alitibor*, 'eating the vagina', in which the married women of a lineage return to the married home of the wife to share the roasted perineal flesh of the sacrificed cow.

10 A striking contrast can be found in Suzette Heald's account (1982) of how among the neighbouring Gisu male circumcision rituals require self conscious bodily control on the part of the initiate.

11 Two of the three instances I collected of attempted suicide among the Iteso were of young women about to be married.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bakhtin, M. M. 1965. *Rabelais and his World*. Tr. Helen Iswolski. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.  
 — 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. M. Holquist and tr. Caryl Emerson & M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.  
 Barnes, J. A. 1967. 'The frequency of divorce', in Epstein, A. L. (ed.), *The Craft of Social Anthropology*. London: Tavistock.

- Bateson, Gregory. 19  
 Bauman, Richard. 19  
 Press.  
 Bloch, Maurice. 197-  
*European Journal of*  
 Clark, Katerina and  
 Harvard University  
 Evans-Pritchard, E. E  
 Gellner, Ernest. 1970.  
 New York: Harper  
 Giddens, Anthony. 19  
 California Press.  
 Gluckman, Max. 1971  
 social structure amo.  
 London: Penguin Bo  
 Goody, J. R. and Buck  
*Africa* 43: 108-21.  
 Handelman, Don. 1979  
 identity', *Social Anal*  
 Heald, Suzette. 1982.  
 Héritier, Françoise. 198  
 Kapferer, Bruce. 1983. *A*  
 Press.  
 Karp, Ivan. 1978. *Fields*  
 Kegan Paul.  
 — 1980. 'Beer drinkin  
 & C. S. Bird (eds.), *E*  
 Indiana University Pre  
 Karp, Patricia P. 1979.  
 (eds.), *African Therape*  
 Kronenberg, A. & W.  
 Cunnison, (ed.), *Essay*  
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 196  
*et al.* London: Eyre &  
 Mitchell, J. C. 1967. 'On  
 (ed.), *The Craft of Soci*  
 Nagashima, N. 1976. 'Boi  
 8: 42-62.  
 Ngubane, Harriet. 1977.  
 Press.  
 Parkin, David. 1980a. 'Th  
 — 1980b. 'Kind bridewe  
*of Marriage Payments*. I  
 — 1982. 'Introduction'  
 Academic Press.  
 Richards, A. I. 1950. 'Somi  
 in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown  
*and Marriage*. London: I  
 Institute. (Reprinted 198  
 Turner, V. W. 1969. *The*  
 Institute.

- Bateson, Gregory. 1958. *Naven*. Stanford University Press, 2nd ed.
- Bauman, Richard. 1977. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.
- Bloch, Maurice. 1974. 'Symbols, song, dance, and features of articulation', *European Journal of Sociology* 15: 55-81.
- Clark, Katerina and Holquist, Michael. 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1940. *The Nuer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1970. 'Concepts and society', in Bryan Wilson (ed.), *Rationality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gluckman, Max. 1971. 'Postscript, January 1971' to 'Marriage payments and social structure among the Lozi and Zulu', in J. R. Goody (ed.), *Kinship*. London: Penguin Books.
- Goody, J. R. and Buckley, J. 1973. 'Inheritance and women's labour in Africa', *Africa* 43: 108-21.
- Handelman, Don. 1979. 'Is Naven Ludic? Paradox and the communication of identity', *Social Analysis* 1(1): 177-92.
- Heald, Suzette. 1982. 'The making of men', *Africa* 52(1): 15-36.
- Héritier, Françoise. 1981. *L'Exercice de la Parenté*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Kapferer, Bruce. 1983. *A Celebration of Demons*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Karp, Ivan. 1978. *Fields of Change among the Iteso of Kenya*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 1980. 'Beer drinking and social experience in an African society', in I. Karp & C. S. Bird (eds.), *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Karp, Patricia P. 1979. 'Living with the spirits of the dead' in C. Adede et al. (eds.), *African Therapeutic Systems*. Boston: Crossroads Press.
- Kronenberg, A. & W. 1972. 'The bovine idiom and formal logic', in Ian Cunison, (ed.), *Essays in Sudan Ethnography*. London: C. Hurst & Co.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969. *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*. Tr. R. Needham et al. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
- Mitchell, J. C. 1967. 'On quantification in social anthropology', in A. L. Epstein (ed.), *The Craft of Social Anthropology*. London: Tavistock.
- Nagashima, N. 1976. 'Boiling and roasting', *Hitiisubashi Journal of Social Studies* 8: 42-62.
- Ngubane, Harriet. 1977. *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine*. London: Academic Press.
- Parkin, David. 1980a. 'The creativity of abuse', *Man* 15: 45-64.
- 1980b. 'Kind bridewealth and hard cash', in J. Comaroff, (ed.), *The Meaning of Marriage Payments*. London: Academic Press.
- 1982. 'Introduction' to D. Parkin (ed.), *Semantic Anthropology*. London: Academic Press.
- Richards, A. I. 1950. 'Some types of family structure amongst the Central Bantu', in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde, (eds.), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute. (Reprinted 1987, KPI)
- Turner, V. W. 1969. *The Drums of Affliction*. London: International African Institute.

- Tyler, Stephen. 1978. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Academic Press.
- Voloshinov, V. N. 1973a. *Freudianism: a Marxist critique*. Tr. I. R. Titunik. New York: Academic Press.
- 1973b. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Tr. I. R. Titunik. New York: Seminar Press.

## RESUME

Les rituels de mariage des Iteso du Kenya ne sont accomplis que par des femmes au nom de groupes de parentés patrilinéaires. Les Iteso héritent des meubles au nom du droit sur 'la propriété de la maison'.

Donc les enfants d'une même mère forment un groupe d'intérêts se distinguant des autres groupes de réels germains. Le système de succession a pour conséquence de limiter l'autonomie des femmes après le mariage et avant la ménopause.

Le mariage en soi est représenté dans le symbolisme iteso, comme on peut s'y attendre un échange entre deux lignages, d'un côté une femme et de l'autre une bête à cornes. L'équivalence métaphorique de la femme et du bétail est manifestée au cours de nombreuses périodes de la vie et dans le rituel du mariage iteso.

Le but du mariage comme il est montré dans les rites et symboles est de régulariser les procédés physiques et sociaux de reproduction et de contrôler le corps des femmes qui reproduisent le lignage dans lequel elles se marient.

Cette intention est montrée par le premier mariage rituel appelé *akiguan*, 'l'embarbouillage', au cours duquel une belle-mère classifie son gendre rituellement le coit en barbouillant la mariée avec de la crème et en la fouettant avec un bâton utilisé pour mener les vaches. La scène du fouet déclenche l'hilarité des femmes iteso, en dépit de sa gravité en tant qu'expression rituelle de la reproduction.

Cette communication défend la thèse que le rire pendant un mariage exprime des attitudes complexes et contradictoires vis-à-vis le rôle de la femme dans la société iteso, comme il est défini par la procédure du mariage et vécu au sein de l'organisation sociale iteso. Le rire pendant le mariage est une 'idéologie informelle' qui va envers 'l'idéologie officielle', et se manifeste pendant les pratiques communément associés avec le mariage.

7. S. A. R.

SYMBOLIQUE  
FEMMES  
CULTES DE

De nombreuses formes  
*ambalavelona*, *ambalo*,  
*manga*, etc. Le type tra  
à la diffusion de trad  
ont élaboré des élém  
culturel malgache.

La symbolique des  
exprimée permet une  
statuts masculins aussi  
dans les organisations  
prendre comment les  
moniales et politiques  
essentiel des femmes  
compensation de leur  
voisinant avec des moc  
Nord-Ouest où la majo

Mais par ailleurs, les  
africaine - vagues succ  
tions déjà installées - se  
en terre malgache sembl  
femmes issues de Tomi

Le *tromba* permet un  
mort du souverain y est  
rêve transformé en drar  
aider les ancêtres royau  
jusqu'aux séances d'actu  
et donner leur opinion si  
passé sont remémorées  
privilegié de connaissanc