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Sarah Fee

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- 1 My first meeting with Professeur Pierre Vérin, in Paris in 1987, was apparently typical of most first encounters with the man. And, in retrospect, revealed much about him. I arrived in Paris with nothing more than a bachelor's degree and a note from a distant American colleague of Pierre, but he instantly welcomed me to his newly created research center, CEROI, at 2, rue de Lille. In his opening salvo of a monologue, he proudly sketched the recent history of this center he had created from nothing: its new review (*Etudes Océan Indien*) and occasional publications, its new computers and its ability to host several Malagasy PhD students. He had increased class sizes from 2 or 3 retirees to over 30. Abruptly, he punctuated this avuncular introduction with a pop quiz: did I know this book, had I read so and so? It was only once I had been stumped, and a semblance of authority re-established, that he smiled again. He was a self-confessed fan of establishment. Although academic robes had been eschewed since 1968, for my dissertation viva in 2002 he had the jury dress in black woolen cloaks, which he personally supplied. Never mind the 30 degree temperature in the un-air conditioned salon of INALCO.
- 2 But back again to our first meeting. The formalities concluded, Pierre thereupon listened intently to my plans for research in Madagascar and plotted out all the necessities: the Malagasy colleagues I should contact, possible field sites, and the strategy for securing a research visa (not easy in 1987). With a photographic memory for bibliography and ethnographic facts, he also quickly mapped the terrain of my subject. Never once did he doubt that a 22 years old could venture off to rural Androy for a year. I had his complete confidence and support which never wavered over the years, and included his squeezing rocks for quasi-inexistent financial assistance to help me in the field.
- 3 At first, I had taken Pierre's macho façade to be a personal quirk. Over the years I learned the theatrical exterior to be typical of French intellectuals of his generation. When I later met Jean Malaurie and Jean Rouch, I sensed they were stamped from the

same mold. It was a mix of bravado, charm, charisma and obstinacy needed to gather funds and students in resource-scarce post World War II Paris. As well as to overcome the bureaucratic rules and naysayers that lurked at every corner. Yet, like a French house, Pierre's exterior hid a warm, almost whimsical courtyard, especially visible when he was relaxing with family and friends at his country home in Eclopgeñet. As one of Pierre's last PhD students, for over a decade I personally witnessed and was recipient of his deep generosity — unparalleled, I think, by other Malgachisant professors of the time — even as his health grew increasingly fragile. To cite but two of many hundred similar acts, on top of his many teaching, administrative and family duties, Pierre undertook paid lectures to sponsor the heart operation for the sister of one of his Malagasy PhD students. On another occasion he intervened when a colleague's son went AWOL on military duty. For weeks or months at a time, he housed and aided countless students at Eclopgeñet, to provide them the material and intellectual comforts necessary for finishing their dissertations. Many others were given generous access to his unparalleled private library, those glass cabinets in the dark paneled room filled to bursting with every kind of obscure printed treasure.

- 4 Pierre frequently spoke on the topic of Malagasy *fiavanana*, praising its positive aspects but always bemoaning too its darker side, its never-ending obligations and duties. And true to this concept, if he gave, he also expected much in return. Which could drive some of his students and colleagues to distraction. For Pierre, loyalty was the single most important quality in a person. And this strong, tall man was known to be reduced to tears more than once when, as was unfortunately the case, he felt his kindness betrayed. In many ways a complicated man, he was at heart also a very straightforward and simple one, a humanist for whom at the end of the day it was people that mattered. Knowing that in the final months of his illness he was surrounded by his children, grandchildren and stalwart wife Juliette — who aided and abetted in his extraordinary life's adventure — brings some comfort to those of his wider circle of *fiavanana* who will miss him deeply.