

Romancing *Dahalo*:

The Social Environment of Cattle Theft in Ihorombe, Madagascar

John McNair

RABARIJAONA Bernadin, Project Advisor

Roland Pritchett, Academic Director, SIT Culture and Society

3 May 2008

For Amanda Burns

Acknowledgements

Before everything, I want to thank Frère Fazio, Père Emile, Frère Sedina; the Soeurs Trinitaires de Rome who shared their splendid cooking with me; Jimmy, Donatien, and all the guys who took me in as one of their own for as long as I wanted to stay. When I showed up unannounced, you fed and housed me and acted as if it was the simplest, most natural thing in the world, for which I am grateful. And thanks to all of my informants. If there are errors in this information, it is misinterpretation on my part. I hope the spirit comes across just the same. And thanks also to RABARIJAONA Bernadin, who encouraged me to go out there and dive in, because these *dahalo* are just young men, and will want to tell me their adventures.

“O had his powerful destiny ordained / Me some inferior angel, I had stood / Then happy; no unbounded hope had raised / Ambition.”

Part I: Ambitions

Beginnings

In 1990 a woman named Nancy, a Peace Corps worker in southern Madagascar, received a marriage proposal from a man she did not know. It was Easter Monday, a national holiday for the Malagasy, and the man had been drinking; his proposal included a dowry of a very substantial number of cattle, an animal of tremendous cultural and material wealth in this part of Madagascar. Nancy—not knowing the man—declined.

The man was what is known there as a *dahalo*, a cattle thief, and took this rejection as a serious blow, especially given the magnitude of his offer. It was known that she would be traveling by bicycle the next afternoon to a village some distance away. She had a meeting there. He gathered several fellow *dahalo* and, while she was en route to the village, they ambushed her. The men raped and then murdered her.

I heard the story of Nancy’s death some 15 years later. By that time this *dahalo* had been brought to trial and imprisoned; escaped, and been imprisoned once more. He died in jail of tuberculosis. His crime, like all such, seems startling, almost incomprehensible, the kind of thing no one should have foreseen. But there emerges in this story a connection between marriage, terrible violence—and *dahalo*. *Dahalo* are still a strong presence in cattle-raising

Comment [c1]: Big problem. I’m not humble enough, throughout this paper. I’m half-certain. It’s not aggressive, and it’s not aware that all we’re doing is just kind of stumbling along. There’s no good humor (bar). Let’s read some Paradise Lost, and try again.

Comment [c2]: Needs a title, huh. And in the end, here’s what matters: what is my argument; and how do I support it. If one believes in such things.

Comment [c3]: Blow to what ?

Comment [c4]: This story could use more detail, especially small details.

Comment [c5]: This is not the end of the story

Madagascar (and indeed throughout), and in this paper I will ask why people become *dahalo*, and hope to further explore and tease out this connection.

It seems vitally important not to lose sight of the fact that it is people who become *dahalo*; not characters, not actors, and not *a priori* or *de facto dahalo*. Nancy’s story—the story not of her life, but of her death—is only one such story. There are others.¹ During my fieldwork I met a religious man who had, in his youth, had a close friend who was a *dahalo*. They would sit around at night and swap stories: the *dahalo* would tell the religious man of his raids, and then my friend in his turn would tell his friend of the religious life. These are people, with agency, that bring this violence, and they could choose otherwise. I like to imagine that it is a choice they may not have made, given different circumstances. Perhaps by better understanding the choice and the circumstances, we can imagine a social environment in which becoming a cattle thief is no longer the best choice. That is the hope with which I began this research.

To trace out this phenomenon of *dahalo*—what I will turn soon to calling the phenomena of *dahalo*—I took as my starting point a hypothesis informed by the field of evolutionary psychology. I will turn first to exploring the theoretical underpinnings of this research, which draws primarily from evolutionary psychology. This informs the questions and methodology I followed. I will then sketch the context in which people become *dahalo*, and outline in broad form the many phenomena of *dahalo* and their interrelationships. Then we’ll dive into the explicit and implicit support for my hypothesis: that men become *dahalo* to increase their reproductive outlook, given an environment (in the broadest sense of the term) in which they have little chance otherwise to become reproductively competitive.

Comment [c6]: Do i ever do this ?

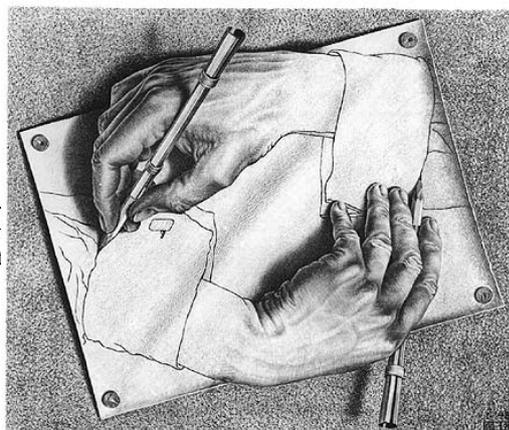
Comment [c7]: I can amend these now that I know what I actually do, and why.

Theoretical Background

Because my analysis will at times tend towards an apparent denial of human agency, an overemphasis on things irrevocably “biological,” I want to begin with a diagram.

Comment [c8]: I think it is never so terribly explicit.

¹ The difficulty will be to st time without cheapening eit



ask about both at the same

Drawing Hands, M.C. Escher – lithograph, 1947

This lithograph by M.C. Escher ripples into many levels of human activity, and informs, among other things, the pursuit of science. Science is a tool for action, for bringing change to the world. (The trick, as Richard Dawkins has said, is to want the right things.) Studies of human nature, especially when they announce hard conclusions, can appear to make human behavior inevitable. I hope to lean hard, throughout this paper, on the fact that it is the conditionality of human behavior that I discover here, the variety and sensitivity of available paths. We too are a part of our world, we too are natural. But we have this odd gift of changing our environment, and, too, of changing ourselves, of introspection and recursion. We are Escher's hand drawing the hand.

And I will steer hard away from classical sociological explanations: I do not want to explain social facts by social facts alone, as Emile Durkheim proposed. There is a problem with chalking human behavior up to culture. It builds a wall, an apparent inevitability; at best, such explanations offer no route around and away from their observations, they hit an unpassable wall, and at worst they become circular. Just as there is no such thing as a human being without culture, human beings are never not biological.

I advance these notions by way of making an argument for considering, in this paper, the biological foundations of culture. If we believe that evolution by natural selection produced organisms and all their traits, that theory does not describe a universe distinct from the one anthropologists attempt to explain. Specifically, I will argue that, in order to understand the phenomena of *dahalo* from a micro-social level, a perspective grounded in evolutionary psychology is singularly useful.

Evolutionary psychology considers human characteristics as evolutionary adaptations.² Traits present in modern humans can be assumed to be traits that were

Comment [c9]: And maybe this should be after I explain evolutionary psych.

² For readers unfamiliar with the field, note that “evolutionary psychology is not a specialized subfield of psychology, such as personality psychology or abnormal psychology. Instead, it is a different way of thinking

successful in past environments, and so were passed down to succeeding generations. Evolution by natural selection will tend to produce behaviors that conferred reproductive advantages on the ancestors of the current generation—behaviors that work against successful reproduction, or behaviors that are neutral, will not be selected for. Note that the success of a trait depends on the environment; the environment is the crucible that determines any given trait’s contribution to fitness. Specifically, evolutionary psychology argues that most modern human traits must have solved adaptive problems during a period in the recent evolutionary past called the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness (EEA), a period before the advent of agriculture when human societies were small, nomadic, and organized by kinship, and resources were obtained by hunting and gathering.

Many social psychologists have dismissed “biological” explanations on the grounds of observed cultural and individual variation: “According to this argument,” note Buss and Shackelford, “‘biological’ represents those things that are invariant, and so evidence of cultural or individual variability requires nonbiological explanations” (606). True: human behavior is not rigid. Yet to model humans as lumps of clay whose behavior is determined by things external to them is to miss the point entirely. Behavior is always a response to a stimulus, either from the external or internal environment, and without *some* (biological) mechanism dictating what responses follow which stimulus, no response is possible. Pure lumps of clay do not react to stimuli; do not, when stared at, shout or turn away or stare back. For these, a mechanism is needed. Biology, then, is highly relevant, even (and especially) to variously-cultured, context-sensitive animals such as ourselves.

Comment [c10]: Check out what that other paper, Conflict, had to say as introduction. (It’s good stuff, well worth paraphrasing, quoting as much as I can get away with.)

One of the key expansions evolutionary psychology offers to traditional psychology is a unifying foundation for empirical research: an understanding of evolution by natural selection, and of the EEA, allows the formation of testable hypotheses that address *what the mind is for*. An understanding of purpose offers a toehold into explaining the nature of human psychology and behavior. Humans offer an at first bewildering variety of behaviors, across cultures and across individuals and *within* individuals, that, if one follows traditional psychology, must be explored in more of a hit-or-miss fashion than a purposeful one.

Buss and Shackelford, informed by an evolutionary psychology perspective, ask what adaptive problems generally may be solved by the use of aggression. “What contexts trigger aggression, and can they be predicted and explained by specific hypotheses about the

about the entire field. Its insights and methods should be the groundwork for the study of psychology, not an afterthought” (Gaulin and McBurney).

adaptive functions of aggression?" This is a question I will follow. They ask also, "Can individual and cultural variation in aggression be explained by variations in the degree to which individuals and groups confront the classes of adaptive problems to which aggression is a functional solution?" (1997). And I will propose, in fact, that aggression can be explained this way, at least in part: that *dahalo* appear in contexts where violence would have increased reproductive chances more than it would have cost in increased risk.

A study based in evolutionary psychology by Daly and Wilson serves to illustrate, and informs at the same time my own study.³ Daly and Wilson, attempting to understand violence in urban neighborhoods, proposed that violence functioned, in the EEA, to secure the resources necessary to attract a mate. Violence as a strategy, as with all strategies, has costs and benefits; violence tends to invite retribution, but offers, potentially, a means of quickly increasing one's resources. Modern humans should possess mental mechanisms that advocate a turn to violence when the average benefits to fitness exceed the average costs to fitness, i.e., when the risk of having no opportunity to reproduce (measured always against one's competitors, who also contribute to the environment) is greater than the risks (perhaps of death) posed by following a violent strategy. In sum, they proposed a mental mechanism, designed by natural selection, that would guide action in the following way: if a nonviolent strategy means no opportunity to reproduce, and thus pass one's genes on to the next generation, then people should be willing to kill, and risk death themselves, if that gives them at least some chance securing the resources necessary to attract a mate. People in the past who did not have this mechanism would be less likely to become our descendants. Daly and Wilson, then, analyzed homicide rates and life expectancy in Chicago neighborhoods, taking life expectancy (controlled for the effects of homicide rates) as a measure of the opportunity to be reproductively successful, and homicide rates as a measure of the prevalence of violent strategies. Life expectancy varied between some neighborhoods by as much as 23 years—a significant loss, in terms of reproductive opportunities—and was found to predict very successfully the variation in homicide rates between neighborhoods (Daly and Wilson 1988). Over the long term, only people who switch to violence in these circumstances, and their descendants, are left. Behavior is condition-dependent, environmentally sensitive. We are.

Comment [c11]: What study is this ?
Do I even have something concrete ?

Comment [c12]: Feels mildly
redundant.

³ This happy unity is no coincidence. As author of this paper, I was able to make that intersection happen.

Methods and Questions

In order to examine these phenomena of *dahalo*, then, and understand how and why violence becomes the best strategy for these young men, a perspective of evolutionary psychology suggests an attention to the environment and to the mechanism. What is it in the environment that cues a recourse to violent strategies? How do these strategies promise to amend or ameliorate the situation, and result in an increase in reproductive fitness? With this perspective informing my research, I conducted a field study in the region of southern Madagascar between the towns of Ambalavao and Ihosy, a region historically populated by the Bara and Betsileo ethnic groups, and a region that is prime cattle country—Ambalavao is home to the second largest cattle market in the nation, and is a nexus for cattle merchants from across the south. There I followed these questions through interviews with experts on the subject: local informants. These included members of the gendarmerie, staff at a school that houses many children of *dahalo*, local officials, and residents of Ihosy and Ambalavao, as well as residents of the Fandana and Ambalamatsara villages. I visited too one “typical” village,⁴ Ambalamatsara, a village too small to show up on my map, roughly halfway between Ihosy and Ambalavao. My stay lasted a morning rather than the hoped week, but it was enough to offer at least some context for *dahalo*.

I may have spoken with practicing *dahalo*, or I may not have—especially given my identity as a foreigner, revealing the identities of *dahalo* was something most informants were quite wary of. They may be among us even here, they would say; anyone might be a *dahalo*. And everyone in a village knows who the *dahalo* are. But they would “never on their life” reveal this, as one gendarme put it, fairly typically (Commandant, Ambalavao). To illustrate the consequences of revealing the identity of a *dahalo*, Fanahy gave the example of a villager who snitched to the gendarmes. The revealed *dahalo* would stop the inquiry with bribes, and then give the gendarmes a little more money and ask who the snitch had been; the gendarmes will tell him, “It was M. Rakoto,” and, “that same day, Rakoto is finished.” This example is typical of my informants, who often suggested the same, perhaps with two fingers extended in the shape of a gun. Even openly asking questions about *dahalo* in *dahalo* territory was advised against; I risked my life, my informants told me, as well as the safety of the school that was, if unofficially, hosting me. One man suggested I use the code word “theft,” in

⁴ I hesitate to call anything typical, but can nonetheless be a useful adjective, if one that must be used and interpreted with caution.

English, instead of “*dahalo*”—*dahalo* being a word that any passersby might hear, and jump to too-hasty conclusions. “Theft” will be safer, he said.

Still, I would have liked to spend more time with people I could be sure were in very close contact with *dahalo*; this study would have benefited much from concrete, grounded examples, in tandem with the stories I was able to elicit. I nearly had the opportunity to spend a week in a village in “red zone” *dahalo* country, but was unable to secure a translator. During my three weeks, I did speak with one source who had at least one son who was a *dahalo*; similarly, I saw many children of *dahalo*. This one degree of separation was as close as I was (knowingly) able to approach *dahalo*. And this distance from the *dahalo*, slight though it is, forms a significant limitation to this study. It was not armchair research, but nor did I penetrate deep into the phenomenon. That I did not is a peculiar consequence of my power and visibility in such a setting, as a (white) foreign researcher, and the short amount of time I spent in the field. I feel that there is a strong possibility that I might have overcome any mistrust, given a translator to aid communication; alas, I lacked that, and such mundanities do impact research. An awareness of this distance from the phenomenon studied, however, has been valuable in its own way. Wilson has said that “there is no single, authentic, indigenous voice or reality that the researcher can discover and present to the world. Such things can be the stuff of romantic myths, at best useless, at worst dangerous...” And, again, “researchers should remind themselves of the limitations of their knowledge and judgment” (181, 183). I have been reminding myself, and this always apparent distance from the *dahalo* has been helping to prod my sometimes stubborn memory along.

Setting (Isolation)

To understand any human behavior, we must simultaneously attempt to understand the environment and context in which that behavior arises, or, to put a finer point on the matter, to which it responds. I take *dahalo*, the subject of this study, as one form of violence, but why does the violence take this form? Why steal cattle particularly, and why does the phenomenon take the shape it does?. The first step in answering these questions will be understanding the setting in which *dahalo* live.

My study centered on the region of south-central Madagascar inhabited by the Bara ethnic group. It is among the more sparsely populated regions of Madagascar, characterized by expansive hills and occasional rocky outcroppings. The primary vegetation cover is *dhangra* grass. The grass, well over a person’s height when mature, is controlled by frequent

brush fires, which bring new, tender shoots of grass to grow in for the cattle to graze. The primary economic activity is cattle raising, and herds of 20 and 50 and sometimes hundreds of cattle can be seen pasturing from the national highway, a two-lane strip of road; cattle dominate much of the cultural landscape as well. Agriculturally, rice farming dominates, supplemented by manioc, potatoes, and various vegetables, including carrots and cucumbers. Administratively the region extends through the Ihorombe and Ihosy regions of Madagascar; the two largest villages are Ihosy and Ambalavao, each about 15 000 in population. Most of the population, however, lives in small rural villages built mostly of mud brick. I will offer a description of one village by way of illustrating the tenor of these communities, if not quite supposing that it is a typical example. Ambalamatsara (which most locals know as “chez Tantara,” after the name of the man who founded the village a few years back, and serves as its chief family authority), only about 12 kilometers distant from the national highway, is a collection of about 15 or 20 mud-brick buildings. Seven families occupy these houses, and the heads of the households are, with one exception, all sons of the same father. The village is surrounded by rice paddies and plots of land for growing manioc, potatoes, and various vegetables, and is located near a small river perhaps 5 or 10 feet across on average. The rest of the surrounding countryside is populated by scattered small trees and *dhanga* grass in various stages of maturity. The nearest village is a few kilometers distant, perhaps a half-hour’s walk; until an immigrant community was built 7 kilometers away a few years back, the nearest villages in which one could buy sugar, salt, coffee, oil, soap, or other such goods were Andonaka or Zazafotsy, respectively 20 and 30 kilometers away. Dirt paths make Ambalamatsara accessible by car or light truck; ours was the only one in the village. If the isolation even in Ambalamatsara was palpable (I’ll attest to that), it is worth emphasizing the isolation of regions even farther from the national highway, and of spaces not occupied by villages. Uninhabited land far outweighs habitations in the Ihorombe region, and *dahalo*, when they steal cattle, naturally take to these spaces rather than the roads. The adjoint to the commandant of the Ambalavao gendarmerie noted the difficulty of pursuing *dahalo*: a gendarme is only “a man like any other,” he said. He can’t run after *dahalo* for miles with a heavy pack (in which to keep his supplies while out afield), only to find deserted land and more deserted land, and keep going like it’s no thing. So in regions far from police posts, he said, the risks of stealing cattle are not too great.

In this country, “Cattle are wealth,” my informants would tell me again and again in a powerful refrain. Some men own herds of a couple of thousand heads of cattle; these men are

Comment [c13]: I want to indicate here the isolation from the law and state control. Talk perhaps about arterial vs. Capillary.

the richest in the society. Those who own no cattle of their own are poor. As one of my informants put it, the richest men here are not like men in America, with credit cards and bank accounts; these men look out across their herds of cattle, and say to themselves, 'There, that is my treasure' (Fanahy).⁵ The cash economy is minimal, and land ownership is not too rigid—before 2000, when the state demanded that every inhabitant of the Ambalamatsara region delineate the land he used, land was not owned *per se*. A man would choose a spot in the area surrounding his house to cultivate, explained Tantara, and that would be the land he farmed; but land was not owned (or, therefore, inherited) and there were never conflicts over land. There were about 75 000 hectares of accessible land surrounding the village he was born in, more than enough for all of the families there (Tantara). Land was not a limited resource, and therefore not a valuable one.⁶ Tantara claimed ownership of 6 cattle, enough to work his fields and no more; before a state raid on the village he had lived in in 2000, one motivated by the suspected presence of *dahalo*, there were many, many cattle here, he told me⁷.

Comment [c14]: Near
Ambalamatsara

It is time now to better explain why I have been calling what I studied the phenomena of *dahalo*. It is a problem to think of *dahalo* as monolithic, as belonging to only one truth. From my interviews I elicited different, sometimes conflicting accounts of *dahalo*; there need not be only one final understanding. As I talked to more and more sources, it became apparent that their varied perspectives were not more-true or less-true glimpses of one phenomenon. There are many players, and many levels of involvement. Above all it is not an isolated phenomenon that exists only at the level of the village, or even the level of the region. The effects of *dahalo* reach throughout Madagascar and extend internationally. When my informants spoke of “*dahalo*,” each was speaking of different players and even different contexts; *dahalo* in the Bongolava are not the same as *dahalo* in the Bara region, and within the Bara region, too, *dahalo* can be involved for many different reasons. For these reasons, it is better to consider *dahalo* as a set of phenomena, rather than one phenomenon.

The current network that surrounds and articulates with the theft of cattle is often likened to the mafia. The analogy is a helpful one, and gives a fairly solid foundation for

⁵ « Il regarde ses zebus, et il dit, 'ça c'est mon trésor.' »

⁶ I did speak, however, with a prisoner who explained that he was arrested and convicted based on an accusation his neighbors made that he was a *dahalo*: their motivation, he said, was to get him out of the way so they could take over his deceased parents' land. Whether or not this story is factually correct, the apparent plausibility of the neighbors' motive makes it clear that land ownership is not a concept foreign to modern villages in this region. But given the population density, there is more than enough land to meet the demand.

⁷ Tantara and many others in Mahabodo knew about the prospective raid even before it happened, and dispersed out into the surrounding area just before. Some stayed. I wonder if the Mahabodo *dahalo* were tipped off about the upcoming raid by interested parties high up in the state. It seems likely.

interpreting observations. But stories can take on lives of their own, can run away from the truth they were, once, grounded in. At one point in my research, I realized that I had been imagining a celebration an informant had told me about as taking place in a red-painted banquet hall. The hall was warmly lit, with 500 villagers walking in from the night in their evening finery, arriving in twos and threes, checking coats. This is unlikely. But I persisted in imagining that, instead of Ambalamatsara, the small village that I had visited and the most likely place to turn for a real context. We dream what is familiar.

I offer this for several reasons. First, it becomes apparent that much of this paper, in fact, must exist in my imagination. Even with stories we know, we imagine them differently than we know—the rhetoric takes on a life of its own. You improvise. Jazz. You write a story, and the results surprise: you find you never knew the characters at all, you couldn't plan them. Even if you did create them, they get too much, they start “putting their lives together in ways I never dreamed of,” as Toni Morrison's narrator in *Jazz* says, almost from the sidelines. In my imagination, there are no mud huts.

This brings up a second problematic: I wonder how closely my informants' stories fit with their knowledge. I would hear stories, told with an authority and confidence of voice, in which higher-up *dahalo* interact with the president of the Republic of Madagascar to fulfill a deal he, Marc Ravalomanana, had made in person with George W. Bush, the President of the United States. The transaction involved 1000 of America's dairy cows, signed over by the president, in exchange for 5000 zebu cattle for slaughter. I had to assume that the story was intended more as an allegory to show the scale of international exchange, with figurehead presidents standing in symbolically for economic actors in their country, than as anything to be taken as indicative of a typical interaction. But with other informants too, I noticed how often my respondents pretended authority. When mere passersby were told the object of my study, they would have two reactions, the first being to marvel at what a strange creature is the *vazaha*, and the second being to tell me, quite simply, why *dahalo* are. They knew the answer to every question I asked. And it can be hard to guess who is answering with an authority of knowledge and experience, and who is inventing stories to satisfy me.

The third and final problematic suggested by this mafia analogy is that, even if the real world is more physically persistent than the imagined, imagining things is another kind of reality. Policy is made by mortals, who fill in imagined details when none present themselves. If we insist too much that *dahalo* is like the mafia, we risk imagining only the mafia (in its popular, silver-screen conception) in place of the phenomena we're interested in, and any

resulting policy may turn out to be better suited for a film than for real people. Editor Theresa Nielsen Hayden points out that would-be authors too often imagine (to take one of many possible examples) that “a person who flips open an ancient mystical tome and sounds out a bit of text in a language they don’t speak will invariably prove to be reading a dangerous and powerful magical invocation, rather than the copyright indicia or the author’s preface.” In a sense, what I am hoping to do are bring these small details to life. To tell this story with an eye for the finesses and subtleties of the actual people involved—for all that *dahalo* seem, from afar, to have made-for-film lives.

Dahalo, in its modern form, is organized crime, and stolen cattle may be bought and then sold at the international level. But the reasons for choosing the targets of theft, and for stealing cattle, are very local. One technique many of my informants used to illustrate *dahalo* to me (an outsider and a novice) was to act out, in a small way, the players and connections involved. My informant would become, perhaps, a jealous neighbor; I would become his victim. Rubber stamps and containers of white-out, when available, would be enlisted to play the part of *dahalo* or intermediaries. I will take a cue from them and offer now a story of an imagined *dahalo* raid, including what comes before and after the event of the theft, hoping thereby to present a backdrop against which the more in-depth discussion will look more comprehensible. The understanding I present emerged very gradually over the course of my fieldwork, informed by many different sources, each giving a window onto one aspect of the theft. Together, a coherent network of events emerges.⁸

Comment [C15]: I'll come back to this.

Interlude: Story

Jesse Thorn and Jordan Morris live in the same village, 40 kilometers outside of Ihosy, Madagascar, and they have a problem. Jordan and Jesse are both marriageable bachelors, aged 20 and 22, and, as fate would have it, they like the same girl. Coco is her name. Coco flirts with both of them, and shows no strong preference for either one. Jordan comes from a fairly wealthy family in the village; his dad has a herd of 1500 cattle. When Jordan moved out on his own away from his family, at age 16, he asked his father to deed him in advance his share of the cattle (there are four other boys in Jordan’s family, although some are by his father’s second wife). His father complied, and Jordan now has 200 cattle of his own, divided into 4 groups, each pastured in its own section of the land surrounding the village. Sometimes Jordan goes to visit his cattle (and sometimes he takes Coco with him), to check up on them

⁸ The broad form is not too mysterious. The devil, as always, is in the details.

and make sure he knows where they are, and of course it gives him pride. Look at those cattle, he thinks to himself—all mine. And it's true they look lovely, for this is the herd of the oldest cattle, the fattest, the most valuable. Their humps sway as they move, in what Jordan imagines is a stately fashion.

Jesse has no cattle of his own; his father died when he was young, in a *dahalo* attack on the village—he was in the pasture still when the thieves came, and when he shot at them, they saw the flame of his gun against the night—, and his mother cultivates but it has only been enough to keep afloat for these past few years. Jesse, nonetheless, is healthy. For a while tensions have been growing between the two, Jesse, Jordan; it started out with this girl Coco, but has since become a matter of much smaller things, of other friends, of imagined slights. One day Jesse does what has been growing in his mind all along—he goes into Ihosy on Sunday, on foot, with one of his friends in the village, Wofy. Wofy is a *dahalo*, as everyone in the village knows, but also a friend of Jesse's, and so this is not too remarkable, the two of them going off together. You can never be certain when Wofy is being a *dahalo*, and when he is just being Wofy. In Ihosy, Wofy takes Jesse to the house of an older man, two kilometers outside town. The older man is a *dahalo* too, but has been in the game for a while; he's risen to the status of organizer. His name is Harold. Harold hosts meetings every Sunday here in Ihosy, and *dahalo*, when they're looking for work (i.e., cattle to be stolen), come to his house to be divided up into gangs to go after targets. At around 1 the meeting comes to order. Wofy has already introduced Jesse to Harold, and told him Jesse's purpose. (If you haven't guessed by now, here it is: Jesse is going to have Jordan's cattle stolen.) 10 *dahalo* fill the room; these are senior lieutenants, each with several men of their own waiting farther outside the village. All told they represent 50 *dahalo* looking for work. Harold asks how many guys are willing to go on a raid to Jesse's village for a theft of 50 cattle; 4 of the lieutenants, all from the other side of Ihosy and well distant from the target village, raise their hands. They represent 30 men. It takes on average about 2 men per head of cattle stolen, so Jesse indicates that this will work if all 30 can do it, and says that there are 4 guns in his village; how many guns can they contribute? They have 5 hunting rifles between them. That's fine, Jesse says, for two of the guns are in the same house and can be held by one man. Harold says that his superior will pay 150 000 Malagasy FMG per head delivered, and the lieutenants talk between them for a minute. If they didn't take this price, someone else would elsewhere, so they look up and agree to do it. It is arranged that they will deliver the cattle to a point 6 kilometers outside Vohibe, a discreet location. And so Jesse leaves with the four lieutenants to go round up the

Comment [c16]: This story needs more pull, so people aren't just sitting there reading with their chins on their hands, absorbing dutifully this background, humming along to whatever's on the radio.

rest of the men. Wofy stays in the house; he is looking for work elsewhere, somewhere distant from his and Jesse's village. It would not do to steal in the same village.

When Jesse and his *dahalo* are all together, Jesse maps out the layout of the village, with squares to mark each house and x's to represent the guns, and tells the group how many cattle they will be stealing and where the pasture of the herd of the fattest zebus is located. It will be best to strike around midnight, he says; the cattle group together in the northeast corner around that time, and the village will be asleep. They arrange a date, two weeks later—a Tuesday—and the *dahalo* ask Jesse a few more questions, then all is settled and Jesse starts the walk back home.

After he leaves, the *dahalo* joke around some. Three of the lieutenants have worked together before, and have a fairly standard plan. Two wrestle briefly. They won't leave yet, not tonight; best to be safe. Most of the men are in their late teens or early twenties; the lieutenants are a little bit older, though still quite fit.

Comment [c17]: This is good. More of this.

A week and a half later, the *éclairneur* of the group, Peter, does his usual pre-theft routine—walks to the village and sets up camp a few kilometers outside, in the trees lining a small river. He checks on the cattle the night before the raid is scheduled to happen, to make sure that they are still pasturing in the same place and following the same routine. All is well. He settles down and waits.

The next evening the others arrive, on foot as always, with more bags of peanuts and manioc. They have been traveling for some days, staying at houses of *dahalo* they know along the route, or in safe spots the friends have arranged outside villages. They check in briefly and then divide themselves into three groups of ten. One group is made up of the thieves themselves, who will take the cattle from the pasture, round them up and run them out a kilometer away from the village. Another group will be waiting at this relay station, to take the cattle out the rest of the way. The first group will pass off the cattle and then go back to fortify the last group—which has been stationed in the village, with all but one of the guns, covering all the doors so that no villager can escape to follow the stolen cattle. They make sure especially to cover the doors of the houses with rifles.

The plan goes off without a hitch. Jesse has been pretending to be asleep in his bed, eyes half-open, waiting. Dogs bark to raise the alarm when the *dahalo* steal in to guard the doors, but by the time anyone has woken up, except for Jesse and Old Man Thurber (who sleeps poorly these days), they are all stationed. The villagers know that to try to leave the house now, even unarmed, even a child, is to be shot. They lay low in their houses. By the

Comment [c18]: There's no tension ! No tension at all.

time the *dahalo* back away from the village, the group with the stolen zebu is two hours ahead. The zebu dung is cold. 24 hours later, they are 200 kilometers to the northwest.

The villagers contact the *gendarmes* as soon as possible, but it is too late to catch the *dahalo*; they have gone through territory where there are no roads, and these are truly athletic men. Even the *gendarmes* who could possibly keep up are too late for it to be worth spending the money to go after these cattle. They take the information and the tag numbers of the stolen cattle, and say that they will keep an eye out for anyone trying to sell them.

The *dahalo* deliver the cattle to the appointed meeting spot, to another group of men, cattle herders for a significant cattle owner in the area. They receive their pay: 150 000 per head, just under 300 000 FMG each. It's enough to buy 10 beers each and a prostitute for a night, though not all will use it for just that; many will, but some will take the money to a party in their village, and spend extravagantly hoping to charm a particular girl; another will buy a nice shirt the next time he's in Ihosy, and a cell phone (he buys a Celtel SIM card, even though there is no phone service in his village); another will take that money home to build a house for his family, and maybe there will be enough left over to buy more candles and some sugar.

The cattle are now in the hands of this new group of men. They are delivered to their new owner, a man with business relations with a buyer in Antananarivo; he will add the cattle to his herd. He gets about 50 new cattle every few months. When the cattle come he has already prepared their papers (the numbers on the eartags of the cattle need to be filled in still, but it is signed and stamped with approval from the mayor's office; a small amount had to be paid for the favor. It is not too much, to this cattle owner, though it is a significant amount to that employee in the mayor's office, a welcome addition to his salary.). In a year's time the *gendarmes*, after news of a nearby *dahalo* raid, come around and ask to inspect his herd. He takes the captain of the *gendarmes* inside, to show him his book with all of his cattle registered. 1 000 000 FMG fall from the pages of the book into the hands of the captain. This is more than a month's salary for him, and as much as he would like to count through these cattle, it hasn't been easy to buy his kids notebooks and feed his family at the same time lately. He agrees that all is in order and heads back to his team. They will look elsewhere, says the captain.

In another two years, the cattle owner sells these 50 cattle, at 2 500 000 FMG each, to his buyer in Tana, a man with connections to senators, ministers. No one looks at the sale too closely, and everyone profits some. Even if the original owner had walked right next to the

cattle, he would not recognize them—they are bigger, fatter.⁹ They were stolen cattle once, but now they are well-documented, and the theft was long ago. It is not a theft for these players, but a trade; business, just business.

And Jordan? He got the girl after all. He lost 50 cattle, but still there were 150 left, and for Coco, who liked Jesse and Jordan about equally well, it was not a difficult choice.

(So These Are The Characters)

Move Along

This, as I have said, is one story. It is a story I have written more to illustrate the general scope of a “typical” theft than to give a qualitative, sensitive, detailed touch to the phenomenon. . But the longer I have waited to identify one gaping hole in this research, the more uncomfortable I have felt, so it will be best to admit, now, that my understanding of *dahalo* is riddled with partiality. I do not really know when *dahalo* marry, and who they marry when they do, and if they still go after girls after marriage, and anyway who become *dahalo* in any village, and for how long? It is a partial, sometimes confused picture that I have been able to glimpse, as looking at something for the first time but through a kaleidoscope, and not half so regular. I know types that circulate in the popular imagination (some of which join together in a coherent narrative; some of which do not), but I do not know what kind of basis in lived experience they have. This stems from the fact, as noted in my presentation of methodology, that I did not live among *dahalo*, did not see which imagined characters are shadows of which real people the storyteller has known; do not know how many times stories had been retold, transmitted, and lost some in translation. It is a problem stemming from the chaotic nature of my informants—*gendarmes* and Italian expatriate Jesuits and displaced immigrants and “true” locals—each drawing from vastly different worlds and experiences. To live in Southern Madagascar is not a homogenizing thing. And all of these are local, none more authentic than any other. What I do know: from amid the jumble, actors emerge who steal cattle because they need the money to win girls, or build their wealth. It is unclear precisely who these actors are, and how the adaptive problems they face differ from similar men who do not become *dahalo*. As a foreigner in southern Madagascar, I am very visible, reasonably powerful, and so I can’t slip below the radar too easily. I can’t learn things without

Comment [c19]: These haven’t yet emerged as questions. I need to move that part up.

⁹ One technique to disguise stolen cattle is to change the color of the coats by throwing hot sand on them, sand like in the Sahara (Fanahy).

people being very conscious that I'm learning them, which is a matter of my methodology and, too, its outcome: a paper to be, in some fashion at least, published. I'm in a position of power, but that power annuls my ability to gain and report information. This especially highlights that I am coming into a world with power relations already in place, and people will put me into a category even before they have seen me: a foreigner making investigations on the subject of *dahalo*. It is not a category *dahalo* will be expected to welcome.

Comment [c20]: Too much me.

Still, we make do, and make advances. It becomes apparent that the phenomenon of *dahalo* does not involve only the theft of cattle, or only thieves. It is spread wide, over much of Madagascar, in violence and corruption and business as usual, and, accordingly, there are many possible points to begin analysis. I will focus on only one of them: on the level at the root of this phenomenon, the basic unit, without which it might well roll to a halt—the young men who become cattle thieves, *dahalo*. It is not the only window into these activities. But it is one window. What motivates them to steal? What do they gain, and what options does this violence open up for them—and what risks, too? What is it about these circumstances, this environment, that speaks violence as the best option in the minds of these young men? Now that we have an idea of the general tenor of the activities, the players who might be involved, the interactions, the networks, we can proceed with a more detailed analysis.

Part II: Analysis

Running on Empty

Comment [c21]: This section is a little confused, haphazard.

Who are *dahalo*? One of the most obvious findings of my research was that there are many kinds; many levels of involvement, and involvement in different aspects of the phenomena. There are the bureaucratic *dahalo*, what one informant called the “*dahalo ambola ny tabatra*” (*dahalo* of the office), who falsify papers and accept bribes—the magistrates, the *gendarmes*, the judges (Fanahy).¹⁰ There are the *chefs de dahalo*, who organize raids and pay the muscle (minimally) for their services. There are the *dahalo* who buy stolen cattle. There are the *malaso*, who form the armed bands to steal cattle in the pay of the *chefs de dahalo*. There are the protectors, who ensure the security of an entire network of *dahalo*, to the point of arranging the deaths of any, *dahalo* or otherwise, who have leaked information about the

¹⁰ Much of the information that follows is a result of two extensive interviews with FANAHY Solo Pierre, a 60-year-old politician who lives just outside of Ihosy. Fanahy is from the Bara ethnic group, has spent much time in the bush, and has known *dahalo* over many years.

organization (anonymous source). There are the *mpanarivo*, the men to whom *malaso* deliver their stolen cattle and who hold them safe from the law between the theft and the sale. There are the *mavo*, what my religious source identified as the lowest level of cattle thief—young men 16 or 17 years old, poor, who take cattle from their corrals.¹¹

Each of these kinds, if we can presume to categorize, is made up of its own typical players. I will focus on only one category of *dahalo*, those who do the work of stealing the cattle—which is also the category most locals imagine when they hear the word, and the players they tend to be most familiar with. By my hypothesis, these men should be on the low end of a position of significant inequality in reproductive outlook, a low end that can best be left behind with a violent strategy. And my informants often identified poverty as a cause at the root of the production of *dahalo*.¹²

Some of my sources characterized *dahalo* as the lazy poor—they might well work, but choose to steal instead (Suzanne; Commandant, Ambalavao; Fanahy). These thefts, to them, are problems of character. Few people are willing to offer any other explanation, or even entertain one—it is only indirectly that other characteristics emerge, or after deeper conversation, as with Fanahy. Sources agreed that *dahalo* come from “the bush, not the city” (Fanahy). They’re aged between 12 and 40, said Fanahy; 12, notably, seemed to be the age at which he considered adolescence and manhood to begin (never 11, never 13). At age 12, he said, boys begin wanting to show that they’re independent, and so for their income start stealing cattle; their parents are farmers, and so they mooch off of their parents for the basic necessities of subsistence and shelter. His kids did exactly that: lazed around the house all day, and when they got up hung out with lots of other “bad faith” kids, and that is how they were pulled into the *dahalo* game. It is interesting to note that he identifies the parents of *dahalo* not as *dahalo* themselves (elsewhere, he had said that being a *dahalo* was “almost inherited”) but as farmers; I would suggest that this is not meant too literally but in the commonly accepted sense that everyone who lives in the country is a farmer. Given 80 boys

Comment [c22]: Show this

¹¹ *Mavo* is the Malagasy word for “yellow”—these thieves are so named because the soil of this region, a red, dense soil when it is on the ground, coats their clothing as they steal the cattle. As they are always on the run, with no time to wash their clothes, their shirts and pants and feet take on a yellow color, the color of the earth.

¹² On what appears at first a side note, they would also identify conflict (perhaps over girls, as with Jesse and Jordan) as the way the targets for thefts are chosen. Though such conflict involves different players than those that we are primarily concerned with—not *dahalo* themselves but rather those who direct them to a given victim—it is no less involved in the outcome. It is a sign of the importance of owning cattle, the wealth and value assigned to that, and also a measure of a definite inequality in cattle ownership. As we move through the words of my informants, inequality in cattle ownership will show itself more and more linked to inequality of reproductive access.

in a village, he continued, perhaps 10 will farm, and the other 70 will become *dahalo*. He explains that these 70 are simply boys of bad faith, who don't want to "take up the spade" and do the work of farming. The parents of all boys give them guiding morals around the hearth, telling them "you mustn't give up the spade;" the 10 who farm are the ones who listened to their parents.

Nearly everyone I talked to hastened to say that *dahalo* were "people like everyone else," who live in villages and, to an outsider, are no different from the others. "Like us," said Fanahy, "they have an identification card, a birth certificate." It's not stamped on their forehead, he said. The differences my informants note tend to be ones of character. Fanahy continued, "But the spirit..." He trailed off here, and then offered that *dahalo* were like bats: "It's during the night that they work. During the day, they sleep. That's how the *dahalo* are." They don't farm, he said, because they're tired from working all night; although if they're in town for a long time, they will work (presumably in the fields of their family). The commandant of the Ihosy *gendarmerie* (who is perhaps farther removed from actual *dahalo*) made similar comments. They were only poorly raised, he said—farmers who want "a little bit more" than what they will make by selling their produce. The Malagasy religious man with whom I spoke was more sympathetic. The *dahalo* friend he had had, he said, was among the poorest in his village.

It is worth noting at this point, briefly and inexhaustively, the form cattle theft has historically taken in Bara culture. Continuing at least into the 1940s, young men seeking to marry young women would steal the cattle of their father-in-law-to-be; one or two, never very many. If the man succeeded at stealing these cattle, it was apparent to everyone involved that he was strong enough to protect the daughter of the "victim." It is a custom which has been coopted and transformed into this modern variation. In towns and cities, it is more rarely practiced; there are undoubtedly some villages where such theft is to this day considered necessary, but levels of adherence vary, I am sure. Cattle theft as organized crime took off in the 1970s, with the regime of Didier Ratsiraka and the Second Republic (Fanahy). In this new situation and environment, which is quite different from the environment in Madagascar through the 1940s, the phenomenon can become what it is—organized crime. But that is not putting a fine enough point on the matter. I will trace how the phenomenon sustains on an individual level, while paying attention also to how the macroscopic social environment shapes and interacts with that, makes it possible and comprehensible, when viewed from an evolutionary light. To do this, I'll attend to three aspects of being a *dahalo*: strength shown in

stealing; the use of money gained; and the activities of *dahalo* of, shall we say, more mature years. The first will illustrate responses to *dahalo*; the second, some of the immediate actions *dahalo* take with their winnings; and the third, the hope behind it all, the hope of moving up.

Comment [c23]: Good, thanks.

Beating Plowshares into Swords

The theft of cattle is a highly demanding physical activity, more so than farming even, and as such can offer women very trustworthy insight into a man's fitness as a mate. Stealing shows strength. Young men become *dahalo*, the commandant of the Ambalavao *gendarmierie* told me, "to show that they are strong." He had explained to me that there were three prime factors behind *dahalo*: custom, poverty, and competition for marriage. Here he is speaking about what he called the custom side of *dahalo*. If you never steal any cattle, he said, historically and culturally, "everyone dominates you." On the other hand, everyone is afraid of a "king of cattle theft." This word king that he used is loaded with connotations of dominance, of wealth, of power. Everyone in a community knows who the *dahalo* are, he said: "it's an honor" to be a *dahalo*. When I asked asked if they were married, he looked at me in disbelief, as if to ask if I had even been listening to him: of course they are married, he said, this is "the strongest man in the village" we're talking about. This explanation is fairly typical of explanations of the "cultural" side of cattle theft; my sources differed, however, about how much that customary aspect was alive in practice today. Notably, "competition for marriage," *aside* from chalking it up to custom, was the third and last of the commandant's constellation of key factors that influence a young man to act as a *dahalo*. The commandant said that *dahalo* also steal in order to be competitive potential mates: if he and another guy were competing for a girl, he said, and the other guy was wealthier in cattle than he was, she will always choose the other guy. Suitability for marriage is directly related to how many cattle you own: he who owns more is the marrier.

Comment [c24]: This almost derails. If it could hide better, tuck itself in.

Prosper, an Ambalavao resident and *dahalo* expert, said that once, young girls were attracted to *dahalo*, and successful *dahalo* could have their pick of the women in the village to marry. No longer, he says. Girls recognize that *dahalo* are men "looking for problems in life;" on top of this, for each zebu stolen four must be paid in return, and those come from the family of the thief. This price is prohibitive (if a *dahalo* is caught). If what he says is true of the current situation, it could be that young men are only hoping to become *dahalo* to quickly make a windfall of money or cattle, and then get out of the game and look for a wife with whom to settle down.

Comment [c25]: It's just not pulling me in. I have to try really hard to care, concentrate to see where this is going. Offer a trail, at the least.

Jimmy and Donatien, two instructors at a school which houses many children of *dahalo*, told me that a villager is not considered a real man until he has been to prison. It is not enough to steal cattle. When you come back an ex-convict, they said, you get a hero's welcome in your village. Young girls and women jump at you. You are famous. They said that the custom of stealing cattle for marriage is alive and well in the countryside; if you are educated and want to marry a girl from one of the larger towns (like Ihosy), you might not do it, but if you wanted to return to your village and marry a girl from there, the father probably wouldn't grant permission until you had stolen zebu, to prove that you are strong enough to protect his daughter. Suzanne, the secretary of the urban commune of Ihosy, echoed what Jimmy and Donatien had said, but placed that custom 50 years prior: in the past, she said, women would ask a suitor if he had been to jail. If he had not, she would not accept him as a husband (it is interesting to note that most men, in contrast to Suzanne, put the approval or denial of a suitor, not on the shoulders of the bride-to-be, but on those of her family). Being to prison made him a man. Even if he was rich, even if he had stolen cattle aplenty—if he had not been to jail, she would not accept him. Fanahy (Suzanne's cousin, and likely the source of the information she told me) said that, historically (through 1940 or so), if a man had never stolen cattle and, especially, never been to prison, he was considered "a coward." Having been to prison showed that he was "a truly good guy;" he had done the act "before the people," brazenly—"he's a warrior, him, a fighter" the villagers would say among themselves.¹³ When he came out of jail, all the families would press their daughters toward him, saying, "this is a man." Now, though, "everyone distrusts an ex-convict." "Be careful," they tell each other, "he's a bad guy." These days, to be marriageable is to have worked honestly (Fanahy).

Comment [c26]: His voice vanishes behind this parenthesis, you don't realize he is talking.

I spoke also to a Malagasy religious man, who had grown up in the Bongolava region¹⁴ and had a close friend in his youth who was a *dahalo*. Before, he said, when it was cultural, there were rules. You would go into a neighboring village and steal the cattle there, and if you made it out past a certain limit, a halfway line, the people of that village would raise their hands in defeat and let their cattle go.¹⁵ They would acknowledge that you were the

¹³ While this is not a subject I will pursue in this paper, Fanahy's responses suggest that to be a *convicted dahalo* was considered a sort of rebellion against state power. It is notable that the Bara were among the least subjugated of any of Madagascar's ethnic groups, either under the French colonial regime or the Merina pre-colonial one. There is a story about the Fandana rock formation that exalts a similar fierce independence among the Bara.

¹⁴ The Bongolava region is historically home not to the Bara ethnic group but to the Sakalava, and more recently the Merina. Thus cattle theft there has a slightly different historical form; however, the points he makes serve equally well to illustrate Bara cattle theft.

¹⁵ Like in Capture the Flag.

stronger one, but will say, wait till next time—next week I could steal your cattle. And so it went, back and forth, with rules. Like in a sport, he offered, you could use certain weapons (not rifles), and there were boundaries. I find his comparison to sports a valuable one: rules, here as in sports, perhaps served to standardize what it meant to “win;” to know what winning indicates for the victor, i.e., that he is strongest. (There are no more rules, he seemed to lament.) Similarly (although this is not a custom of the Bara people, said Fanahy, himself Bara and “a native of this region [Ihosy]”), there are some southern Malagasy who do not allow cattle to be inherited; instead, a man’s cattle are all killed upon his death.¹⁶ This can yield conflict between a son and a father: the son wants to get rich, and his father has 5000 zebu that will, however, all be killed on his death. The son may contact someone outside, a *fatidra* (a term specific to *dahalo* meaning blood brotherhood) far away, and this *fatidra* will (with accomplices) steal the cattle and then hold on to them for 2, 3, 4 years; meanwhile he might give the son some of his, which have been replaced by this new influx of cattle. After enough time, the son will take the cattle stolen from his father and become rich. It is a waste, true, to kill all of these cattle on someone’s death, said my informant, but it is a matter of honor to have a funeral like that. And there is a moral behind it: in this way, the son must gain his wealth by his own strength, his own reason; the playing field is levelled with each generation (Malagasy religious man). And so once again, I argue, the rules give a standard for judging achievement in this work, so that achievement reflects ability as closely as possible. To give yet another example, said the religious man, the house of the father, in some societies, is burned when he dies. There is also the custom that young men leave the house of their fathers at 15 (or thereabouts), to go and seek their fortune. Then son goes far away, from his village and his family, and perhaps starts by working and then buying some chickens. He raises them, gets more chickens, his flock grows, until he has enough to buy some sheep, goats, and, in the end, cattle. In this way, little by little, he builds his fortune. At 25 or 30 he may have a sizeable herd of cattle, and then he marries.

Comment [c27]: Could go a little deeper, more explicit. Analyze! Don’t just present. Give people examples, ways to interpret.

Comment [c28]: Use this sentence structure better.

From 1970 onwards,¹⁷ Fanahy told me that the nature of cattle theft changed: it became like in Westerns, he said, although instead of on horseback these thieves do everything on foot, a sprint—they can cover 200 km in 24 hours “with their physical strength.” So today, despite a different character to the thefts, it is still something requiring a formidable physical fitness—women, men often told me when I asked, weren’t *dahalo*

¹⁶ A custom also mentioned by academic Rabarijaona Bernadin (personal communication).

¹⁷ This date, intriguingly, coincides with Madagascar’s Second Republic and Ratsiraka’s regime.

because they couldn't be, they are too weak physically; and *dahalo* are never older than 25, said the commandant of the Ihoso *gendarmes*' brigade, because 25 is "already old" for the demanding work they must do. After 25, they have to retire. I find it worthwhile to attend to this historical view of *dahalo*, because the sports interpretation seems significant: this is an activity that, beyond offering a chance to quickly signal fitness as a provider of resources (wealth), can also signal really significant physical fitness.

Comment [c29]: Yeah. Now build this up. Make it drive home.

(Every Girl's Crazy 'bout a) Sharp Dressed Man

What do *dahalo* do with the money they earn? This is another, and a very significant, aspect of the theft of cattle. To be a *dahalo* is an indicator of physical fitness, as explored above—a perennial contender for what women are most looking for in a mate. The other major contender is the ability to provide resources. Do young men become *dahalo* in order to quickly increase their wealth?

Comment [c30]: Jumpy, scattery. Haven't talked about this yet.

Every informant concurred on this matter: *dahalo*, at least the young ones who commit the actual thefts, do not make much money. For the best cattle, zebu weighing 400 kilos, a *dahalo* might be paid 150 000 FMG a head (Fanahy).¹⁸ These are cattle with a market value of 2 500 000 FMG, he said. If your share of the stolen herd is 2 cattle (a typical ratio of cattle per *dahalo*), you're making 300 000—best case. "10 beers and a woman" later, he said, and your money is finished. He suggests here what *dahalo* do with their earnings, from what he calls this "mauvais travail:" they buy time with prostitutes.¹⁹ It's not about love in these relationships, he would say. When I asked if *dahalo* were married, he said that yes, like everyone they are married, they have kids; the difference is that they raise their children with money they make from that work—stealing cattle—instead of another. He had broken *dahalo* into two broad categories—"adolescents,"²⁰ and "mature" men—and said that the adolescents steal cattle so that they can have money to buy such prostitutes (the mature men's reasons I will present in the following section). Prosper, too, said that having money to buy prostitutes was one reason *dahalo* stole; and Suzanne said that they steal for pleasure: being able to have

Comment [c31]: The truth is, you don't need this many examples. You can dispense with some of them, and devote more space to saying the things that are almost said, to making the complacency of this paper something spare and aggressive.

¹⁸ This price correlates closely with others I was given. None ranged beyond 100 000 and 200 000 Malagasy francs.

¹⁹ It is often unclear whether informants, who tend to speak in euphemisms like "pour faire plaisir avec une femme" or "pour se gaspiller avec les jeunes filles," are speaking of outright prostitution or, more generally, attracting ladies by spending money. One informant told me that, in the countryside, girls sometimes tend towards prostitution (he attributed this to a lack of education); it could be that this prostitution is not always formalized, and the activity occupies more of a middle ground.

²⁰ When I pressed him, he specified "adolescent" as meaning between the ages of 12 and 30.

money so that they can get girls, since their parents don't give them any.²¹ The *gendarmes'* commandant in Ihosy too said that *dahalo* don't get much money, and what they get they spend on "girls and consuming alcohol."

Closely linked to this usage of money for prostitution is attracting women with an eye towards the longer term. If you walk around at a party but have nothing in your pockets, said the adjoint to the commandant in Ambalavao, can't even buy a beer, can't treat girls, can't throw your money around in a pretense of richness with everyone watching—a guy would be ashamed of that, he said. Suzanne identified buying clothes as one activity *dahalo* with newly-filled pockets pursue. The Bara, she said, before, didn't hardly wear real clothing; now the boys all want to wear good clothes, nice T-shirts—they want to dress well. At one point I had asked two schoolteachers, Jimmy and Donatien, "What is wealth?" Jimmy had asked me, rhetorically, what context I was talking about. There are the towns and cities, he said, and there it's owning a car, a house. And then there's the country; and in the country, wealth is cattle.²² He noted that coming from Fianarantsoa to a village, however, every villager would consider them rich, purely from the fact that they live in the city. But they think of themselves as poor, and no one in the city has the kind of cattle people out in the country have. I asked Jimmy if he would call *dahalo* rich; "obviously," he said. They have a lot of cattle. So goods that aren't really very available to villagers (recall that in Analamatsara, a rather typical village in this respect, the closest town that sells even sugar and salt is 20 kilometers away) take on a valuation of wealth, and for a *dahalo*, I hypothesized, the more you can get goods that aren't too available to villagers, the richer you can appear.

This was born out in my research. I had asked Fanahy what had changed between 1940 and 1970; why did the *dahalo* phenomenon take this new turn? At first he would say only that the times had changed, but as I insisted, he offered that it was development, too. "*Chez les Bara, tout le monde ont des appareils*" now, he said. Around 1970, development had started to pick up. People would see things and say, "*j'ai tenté d'avoir cet appareil*." "Starting after the revolution," young *dahalo* would begin to say, "I need a cell phone, I need women; I need beer, rum." It's interesting that he links all of these together. Madagascar now, he says, is "nearly modern: *s'il y a des appareils chez vous* [in America], *ça arrive ici. Meme en brousse*." But to get these, people steal "the goods of others." They don't even know how to work the things they buy, he said: "a thing like that," he said, indicating my tape recorder,

²¹ (Money, not girls.) (Well also they don't give them girls. Hence the debacle.)

²² I asked my religious source the same question : what is wealth ? He responded almost as if he were quoting the school teachers: in the city, it's having a big house, big buildings, cars. In the country, it's cattle.

“they want that, but they don’t even know how to work it.” It’s just a gesture. Unless it’s a TV, something they truly enjoy, it’s just something “to show off.” He emphasized that it’s been since the revolution that this has changed: there’s less state control. He gives the example of all the approval needed to buy a gun, during colonialism, when you had to go through each level of government, from the neighborhood on up. Now it all happens outside the reach of the state. If you want a good thing, you have to buy it with bad money, money from the “*mauvais jeu*.” There’s not enough otherwise. Now, “if you have money, you can buy anything.” Money is easy to find here, but you never know where anyone’s money came from. “*Ici chez nous, il n’y a pas de controle entre le fanjakana et le peuple, quoi. Ca provoque de mauvaise foi pour les malfaiteurs.*” *Dahalo*, then, can win girls they wouldn’t have gotten otherwise—both prostitution and general sexual competition requires money that they wouldn’t have, if they didn’t steal it.

Comment [c32]: Now you need to analyze. Say why you told us all this. What does it show.

I Did It My Way

“Hope has two daughters, anger and courage. They are both lovely.”

(attributed to St. Augustine)

One of the foundations of my argument has been that violence, as an inherently risky strategy (it invites reciprocation in kind), should be tempting only when it seems to offer hope for advancement. Even when this hope is distant and slim, if the average benefits to fitness outweigh the average costs, it is hope enough. What are the possible futures once a man has chosen this path? Who is he looking to become?

I have asked this question to several sources: is there any hope for low-level *dahalo* to ascend through the ranks and become a higher-up *dahalo*, like the *chefs de dahalo*? Typically the answer has been no: there is no hope. The Malagasy religious man was one of these; they are paid too little, he said, to move up. I asked why *dahalo* didn’t ask for a higher price for the cattle they delivered; after all, the bosses couldn’t sell the cattle without someone to steal it. They are an integral piece. He said that yes, they *could* ask for higher prices; but the boss would simply take his work order elsewhere. There are plenty of *dahalo* who will be willing to do it for the going price, as low as it is. It’s a question of supply and demand, he said.²³ And this low pay makes sense: in any hierarchy, the person on top is always at a dangerous

²³ And sure there might be more *dahalo* than can be gainfully employed. It doesn’t need to be, guaranteed, the best option for all players. There only needs to be the hope that you’ll be among the few who stand out.

position. When UNC is number one in the nation in college basketball (as happens quite often)²⁴, every team the Tar Heels play gears up especially for that game. They are trying to knock down the number one seed, to take a victory over what is (no longer, they are hoping) the best team in the country. If you're on top, you're precariously so. And in organized crime, the bosses, knowing this fact, should take the lion's share of the money; the muscle, the lieutenants will get their cut, but never enough to approach what the bosses take. Because if it is all share and share alike, some uppity young *dahalo* can make enough to garner power and a faction of his own, and, just maybe, knock off the guy on top.

And again, as Fanahy was sketching me a fuller picture of the *chef de dahalo*, he told me that this was someone small-fry *dahalo* couldn't hope to become. And he is not easily attacked or knocked down, he said: he knows the *gendarmes*, the courts of justice, the procureur... and on top of all this (and perhaps because of it), he is very much feared among the *dahalo*. But the more Fanahy spoke, the more it seemed possible that some *dahalo*—if not the average *dahalo*, or even a moderately successful one—might hope for such prospects. “There are grades, like the military,” he said.²⁵ First you have the cadets, who know nothing at all and are new to the game. These start low and learn “little by little.” There is a progression, an advancement. “There are stages,” he said, “grades, steps.” There's the *chef* and he has his team; a vice-commander, who tells the men, that's your leader there, you need to listen to him (he's not “a leader by studies, but a leader by physical force,” Fanahy noted). And there is a specialization between the *dahalo*, he said. There's an “*opérateur... dispositions de combat... les tireurs d'élite*.” Every group has its sharpshooter, and every group its *éclairéur*. “*Il y a un sprint qui est dangereux a mille mètres ou bien à marathon*.” These last are the ones who can do 200 km in 24 hours, and it is they who make up the relay subgroup that take the stolen zebu far from the village. “*C'est un jeu!*” he said, “*un jeu, un sport. Mais un jeu...un mauvais jeu. Exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, ça. Il ne garde pas les mots de Dieu. Mais il a volé...*”

Then there are the experienced, older *dahalo*, and these are the leaders. *The chef de dahalo* is always “*un grand patron*,” he said—because conversely, if anyone has that many zebras, you can bet he did some bad things in the past. But now “he has left the *mauvais jeu*,”

²⁴ To the dismay of those hapless Duke fans...

²⁵ His original French was « échelons, » a word that has the connotation also of rungs on a ladder.

and raises cattle, calls the *dahalo* together and makes the orders.²⁶ These are “the foremost thieves,” he said: these higher-ups and the *fanjakana*, the people behind it all, the bureaucrats, the *gendarmes*, the magistrates, are the “*premiers responsables*” of the operation. They are the ones making real money off of stolen cattle. There’s a lot of money that disappears in between the 100 or 150 thousand per head the thieves bring back, and the 2.5 million the cattle are sold for: “*tu vois le décalage de bénéfice?*” said Fanahy. “*Il y a de bénéfice, ça.*” The *malaso* and *mavo*, I want to highlight, steal cattle because they are the most valuable commodity, but they do not get all this value: so also they may be stealing for the cachet it brings, the cultural value, in a sense, of cattle. (It’s like talking to the president: it doesn’t matter too much if you talk to him and he takes your advice on domestic policy, or if you talked about the weather or the best way to tie a pair of shoes. It’s that you can tell people that you talked to the president. Any material benefits are welcome but not a requirement.)

Describing the *patron*, the *chef de dahalo*,²⁷ Fanahy said that he is “*un type guerrier*” and always lives “*en brousse, au village.*” He has no bank account; “*il regarde ses zebus, et il dit, ‘ça c’est mon trésor.’*” He’ll have “*un homme de confiance,*” who knows where he stashes his money—maybe in a hole in the floor. If you look at his house, it’s not much: “*on regarde la cabane: c’est une mauvaise cabane.*” There is not even a bed to sleep on—he sleeps on mats on the floor. He buys nothing (“*c’est ça l’erreur,*” said Fanahy. “*C’est ça l’erreur.*”) He walks around with “*pas de sandales, de souliers. Au pieds nus.*” The barefoot millionaire. He doesn’t want to show everyone that he is a wealthy patron (although everyone does know, even the *fanjakana*), doesn’t want to be “*devant tout le monde.*” “*Il reste lugubre,*” he said, folding his arms and tucking his chin down. If one of his zebu dies, he cries. If one of his men, the *dahalo* he commissions, dies, never. There is one situation in which he shows his wealth: when a member of the family dies. “*Quand il y a de malheur chez la famille.*” For the celebration he buys wine, rum, 50 cases of beer, even, said Fanahy, even whiskey—Bretonne, or JB. Not something for “*les hautes personnalités,*” mind you, just simple old Bretonne, whiskey for the masses. He kills two of his zebu for the feast. On these

²⁶ So it seems that the “game” refers only to the *dahalo* actively involved in the theft. Which is very interesting, as that is exactly the level on which it most resembles, from a perspective of evolutionary psychology, a sports game.

²⁷ Who simultaneously, I gathered, was the guy who makes the plans for who and when to attack, and is a large cattle owner, and a warrior no less; the category seems to hold more roles than one man could possibly perform. He has subsumed them, acquired powers he surely delegates to people less visible to the popular imagination. As Theresa Nielsen Hayden notes, “It’s remarkable how many novels show us immensely powerful politicians, religious leaders, and corporate executives who have little or no staff, know everything that’s going on in their organization, and can completely reconfigure their schedules on one or two days’ notice.”

occasions, everyone in the village comes and sees the wealth of this man: beer, wine, rum, whiskey too! It's quite a celebration.

And if someone in the village dies, someone who is not a family member, he will give one zebu to the celebration. "*Il a honte s'il ne peut pas donner un zebu au sein de village.*" Because everyone knows he can well afford at least that much.

Do any ever pull out, I ask? Maybe a friend dies in combat. That happens, he says, "but it's more rare." More often a *dahalo* would see this death and say, "That's for him, God had that in mind for him."²⁸ Among the 70, maybe 5 say they'll stop this « *mauvais travail.* » He is not killed upon leaving, as Frere Fazio had suggested, but stays quiet like everyone else. And his chef de *dahalo* knows that that was one of his men, but thinks to himself, oh, he's left the game, "he won."²⁹ This suggests that *dahalo* might, sometimes, hope or imagine that they might "win" and then pull out with their winnings while they're ahead and still alive. Though in this case, in fact he hasn't won, said Fanahy, but has decided that this game leads to death, he's listened to his parents, who say, "you must stay at home. You must take up the spade."³⁰

Regarding the electronic gadgets that so attract the younger *dahalo*, he said: the patron looks at them and says, that's a waste, that. I'll keep my treasure for my kids. It's also that he has no education, and thinks that God gave him his treasure, that "it's not for everyone. I can't throw away my treasure."³¹ Fanahy put it this way: he doesn't want to make the exchange because, to him, money is just paper, and he has given away the thing of real value. He's not used to putting anything in the bank. He thinks the bank is the state, doesn't trust it; he wants to keep his money for himself, his family. So when money changes, he doesn't change with it. He keeps his outdated currency, not even knowing that it is no longer in circulation.

Fanahy had divided *dahalo* into two general categories: adolescents and mature men. These of the second, he said, steal cattle for a different reason than the first: rather than to throw get money only to throw it away, these steal in order to increase the size of their herd. He gave an example which illustrates one possible situation.

Some rich cattle owners, he said, sell their daughters off as spouses to *dahalo*, in exchange for protection for his herd of zebu (daughters are sometimes considered "as merchandise", he added. Their wishes don't figure much into it: "she has no choice but to

²⁸ « c'est pour lui, c'est Dieu qui a proposé ça pour lui »

²⁹ « il a gagné »

³⁰ « il faut rester, il faut prendre l'engade »

³¹ « c'est pas pour tout le monde. Je ne peut pas gaspiller mon trésor »

love”³²). The *dahalo* won’t attack another *dahalo*, or the father-in-law of one, so by marrying a *dahalo* into his family, he gains a kind of immunity. The daughters rarely marry otherwise, he said: sometimes they marry, yes, but only with “*gens bien renseignés*,” people high up in the government. These older *dahalo*, it seems, are competitive with (what I imagine would be) quite wealthy men; but it is a marriage of (financial) interest, he said, “not of love.” Which is interesting all in itself. These *dahalo* do not usually marry officially into the family; they are “types volants,” and so it is more of a concubinage than an actual marriage. He went into further detail: a *dahalo* might come to a village and say to the big *patron* there, hi, I’d like to work for you as a cattle herder. The *patron* says, OK, sure. So the *dahalo* stays a week, a month, and strikes up “relations” with one of the daughters of the *patron*. Everyone knows this guy is a *dahalo*, so the father allows the two to, in some unofficial sense, marry. The *dahalo* stays in the village for 2 or 3 years. At the end of this time he tells the father he is going to go steal some cattle, and he says, “Papa, can I take a gun of yours along?” The father grants this, and the *dahalo* goes out on this mission. He comes back later with 50 cattle, and says to the father, “I won, Papa!” Here’s 10 cattle for you, he says, because the father reminds him that it was his gun he used to steal the cattle; he gives 10 cattle to the daughter, and keeps the rest himself. And then, after five years, one day he’s gone forever. Maybe he’s dead somewhere. Maybe he left. That’s expected, that’s what it means to be a *type volant*, not a resident. As he told this story, acting out the part of the son, he sounded affectionate, subservient. On the part of the father, he sounded proud of the son: at one point the father-character said, “What a guy. He’s pretty strong, this guy.”³³ It is these older *dahalo*, he said, who bring cattle home and hold on to them, often keeping them semi-wild—visiting once or twice a week to check up on them, but otherwise letting them roam free.

This kind of behaviour for the older *dahalo* poses a problem, Fanahy noted. Despite networks of *fatidra* or *vakra*, blood brotherhood, there is conflict between *dahalo*. Another *dahalo* might see that this one has accumulated a sizeable herd, and say to himself, we worked together, he and I. We were the same generation. How did he come to have all this wealth, and me none? And, because he has accumulated wealth, this mature *dahalo* is no longer considered a *dahalo*, no longer bound by the ties of common purpose, and no longer immune from attack. The jealous *dahalo* steals his cattle. The old *dahalo*, who had

³² « c’est obligé de s’aimer »

³³ « c’est un type, c’est vraiment fort, lui. »

accumulated a wealth of cattle, becomes poor once more. “*Ça roule à machine,*” said Fanahy. And so it goes.

Part III: Beginnings (Again)

Drawing Hands

Through all of these observations, we see opportunity in violence, with risk minimized by the form this aggression takes. *Dahalo* steal cattle always at a distance from the people with whom they compete (and love and everything else), and minimal state control allows theft with relative impunity. *Dahalo* gain in reproductive fitness from these thefts. In the short term, the activity is one that, like sports, demonstrates considerable fitness, as evidenced by the popular perception of *dahalo*, historically and currently, as among the strongest men out there. On top of this, the money they earn is enough to be competitive as prospective mates—*dahalo* buy gadgets and shirts, and they treat girls, showing off their ability to provide. When *dahalo* are interested in only the very short term, they buy time with prostitutes. And in the long term, there is the prospect, though it is always slim, of accumulating a wealth of cattle—of climbing the workplace ladder, as it were, to become a *dahalo* at least somewhat higher in the ranks, a *chef de dahalo* or an organizer or, even, only a *dahalo* who keeps cattle of his own on the side. Once a man gains enough wealth in cattle, he has sufficient capital to set the ball rolling—to buy another 50 stolen cattle every month, to pay the necessary bribes. It is not easy when there’s little credit to be had—it is a possibility that, one source suggested, may *only* be available through violence. (Recall Fanahy’s observation that, if anyone has that many cattle (as a wealthy *patron*), you can bet he got there by doing some bad things.) “*Tu vois que tu as un pays sous-développé ?*” said Fanahy. “*Pour cela, ça c’est obligé, ça—obligé de faire un mauvais jeu comme ça.*” If you want a good thing, you have to buy it with bad money, he suggested. And because few people use banks, there is no paper trail—all money is more or less clean, and you never know where it came from.

And the system is set up to self-perpetuate. The positive feedback of violence on itself is something that has long been noted, but some explanations fall short of being able to inform workable strategies to break the cycle.³⁴ “A sensible man will be quicker on the trigger in what he perceives to be a relatively violent setting than in an apparently peaceful one, for

³⁴ And similarly, to any given gendarme, if everyone else is taking bribes, there’s little gained by him not taking one. Or, to a slaughterhouse owner, if other businessmen are getting their zebu for 150 000 FMG, plus bribes, they’re doing better business than I am, and will either run me out, or make me change to stay afloat.

example,” note Daly and Wilson, “not because he has become acculturated or has internalized local norms about the legitimacy of violence but because of a perceived shift in the risk of life-threatening action by antagonists.” The same is true for possession of cattle as for lives: both are valuable, and violence can be an effective strategy for retaining both. Such cycles of violence, I suggest (following Daly and Wilson) may be products of processes different than the ones we have attended to up to this point.

Which leaves us at a sort of prisoners’ dilemma, and the result a tragedy of the commons. The best strategy for each individual results in an outcome that no one wants, the worst for the collective whole, and not much good for anyone. This study suggests that any solutions should consider what choices there are to change the environment, the system, the game, and the resulting equilibrium.

Another reason, Fanahy proposed, that *dahalo* are “difficult to erase” is that there is a “commune” between them and the government. The heart of the government is not in it, on these individual levels—on the level of each gendarme or mayor who takes a bribe. But it is also a structural problem: they wouldn’t take the bribe if it weren’t so hard to turn down, given their salary. The phenomenon of cattle theft is not isolated, small, but connected to much larger environments, situations; *dahalo* play this “*mauvais jeu*” for a multitude of reasons. This is the sense I got also from the adjoint to the commandant of the gendarmes in Ambalavao: there are always multiple causes, he said. Among a group of *dahalo*, some will be doing it to treat girls; some for fun; some in order to survive, scrape out a living; some in order to build a house for their family. Always there are different reasons. I felt strongly that he understood what it was to be a *dahalo*—thought of it not as criminal but as, in some sense, the only option. If *dahalo* was something bad, it was bad on a structural level, not on an individual, criminal level. A level of economy, not morality. This kind of understanding, I think, combined with increased democracy so that power is taken by locals—the experts—is what will help most to bring about change for the better. We can draw our own hands, as it were, rather than take what is dealt to us.

Bibliography

- David M. Buss, Todd K. Shackelford. "Human aggression in evolutionary psychological perspective." *Clinical Psychology Review*. Volume 17, Issue 6, September 1997, pp. 605-619.
- Daly, Martin and Wilson, Margo. "Homicide (Foundations of Human Behavior)." Aldine Transaction, 1988.
- Daly, Martin and Wilson, Margo. "Crime and Conflict: Homicide in Evolutionary Psychological Perspective. *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 22, (1997), pp. 51-100"
- Gaulin, Steven J.C. and McBurney, Donald H. "Evolutionary Psychology." Prentice Hall, 2003.
- Nielsen Hayden, Teresa. "Remarks on some clichés I have (by definition) known too well." *Subterranean Press*, Issue 4, pp. 40-41.
- Nisbett, Richard E. and Cohen, Dov. *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996.
- Wilson, Ken. "Thinking about the ethics of fieldwork," in *Fieldwork in Developing Countries*. Devereux, Steven and Hoddinott, John, eds. Lynn Rienner Publishers, 1993.
- Commandant of Gendarmes, Ambalavao Brigade. Personal interview. April 8 and 11, 2008.
- Commandant of Gendarmes, Ihosy Brigade. Personal interview. April 22, 2008.
- FANAHY Solo Pierre. Personal interview. April 19 and 20, 2008.
- GPIC RAKOTOARISONA, Adjoint to the Commandant, Ambalavao Brigade. Personal interview. April 9, 2008.

Malagasy religious man. Personal interview. April 13 and 15, 2008.

Prisoner. Personal interview. April 14, 2008.

President of Fandana fokontany. Personal interview. April 16, 2008.

RAKOTO Jean Donatien. Personal interview. April 11, 12, and 13, 2008.

RAMAROLAHY Prosper. Personal interview. April 10, 2008.

RANDRIANASOLO Andrianiaina Jimmy. Personal interview. April 11, 12, and 13, 2008

RAZAFINDRAJAONA Suzanne, Secretary to the Urban Commune, Ihosy. Personal interview.
April 18, 2008.

Tantara. Personal interview. April 17, 2008.