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# Handicapped heroes, Sambilo the bull, and the treacherous terrain of polygynous relations in southern Madagascar

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## NOTE DE L'AUTEUR

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Noël Gueunier for his careful reading and comments on this text, and to Philippe Beaujard, Sambo Clement and Jean Bertin Irénée Ramamonjisoa for assistance with several terminological questions. I remain responsible for all the final interpretations as expressed here.

- 1 Twenty years ago in this same journal, folklorist Lee Haring (1987) expanded on his earlier lament (1982) that social scientists in their analyses of Malagasy tales tended to focus solely on the context (social and historic) to the exclusion of the text (internal narrative). He judiciously advised scholars that before they plumb a tale for empiric detail or symbolic meaning they need first consider its narrative qualities and whether a motif (such as the tree planted as a life token) is not in fact international in origin or stylistic in nature. Tales the world over combine and recombine elements of the fantastic, the historic, the foreign and the local, and their form and intent are, in part, aimed at “aesthetic satisfaction”. As a major contribution to this analytic and comparative end, Haring (1982) published the monumental *Malagasy Tale Index*, based on D. Paulme’s model, which assigns a narrative to one of seven categories based on its plot “structure”, rather than its surface “theme”, and identifies tale types and motifs with international equivalents.
- 2 While Haring suggested that anthropologists apply their trade only *after* such internal analysis is established, a number of these scholars (Beaujard, Gueunier, Fanony, etc.)

have since revealed that ethnographic knowledge is vital to that very process. Here, my modest aim is to directly demonstrate this through a reconsideration of three Bara and Sakalava narratives which the *Index* assigns to two separate types (1.7.27 and 4.08) and structures (ascending and spiral). It can be shown that they are in fact variations of a single tale type, which might be named *Handicapped hero victorious over treacherous brothers in forest quest*.

- 3 Its normalform runs thus: a boy with a handicap is spurned by his brothers. Upon the suggestion of the father (uncle, stepmother), the boys undertake a quest into the forest to procure (dangerous) animals. The cowardly brothers fail, while the resourceful, brave hero succeeds. Jealous, the brothers seize the prize and/or attempt to do away with him. Ultimately, the hero is triumphant and the brothers are punished.
- 4 The key to perceiving the similarities in motifs and plot resides in appreciating southern Malagasy institutions of polygyny and father respect, and their associated practices and concepts. The affinities between the three tales become even clearer when we take into account several Tandroy versions which postdate the *Index*, two of which are presented and translated at the end of this article.

## Sambilo the Bull and Treacherous Brothers

- 5 Most of tale versions examined here employ the motif of the pursuit of a wild, ferocious bull named “Furious”, Sambilo<sup>1</sup> (var. Lesambilo, Ilahisambilo, Resambilo). This mythical beast is especially popular in southwest Malagasy lore, notably tales and expressions used to frighten children and women fetching water<sup>2</sup>. By far the longest and most complex tale featuring this animal, entitled *Tsimamangafalahy* was collected by Cyprien Mandihitsy (Velonandro, Mandihitsy et coll. 1986) in the Masikoro village of Belavenoke.
- 6 The pregnant senior wife of a king craves the meat of dangerous wild animals. To satisfy her, the king and his people seek a series of beasts and eventually lose their lives to Lesambilo, a ferocious bull belonging to a rival king. When the woman’s son is born, he shows superhuman precociousness and strength but suffers from the stigma of being fatherless; when grown, he leaves to find and avenge his father, encountering many trials en route. He ultimately slays Sambilo and the rival king.
- 7 While containing many motifs of the other tales to be discussed here, its plot is substantially different and thus forms a separate type<sup>3</sup>. Our true point of departure is a different tale featuring Sambilo, recorded by Dahle in 1876 from a Merina narrator who attributed it a Sakalava origin<sup>4</sup>. In this instance, the rival is not the father’s slayer, but the protagonist’s brothers.
- 8 The hero “Split-Man” (Isilakolona) is half-flesh and half-wood. His three brothers have their father, the king, cast out and disinherit him. With his mother, the boy sets up a home in the forest and raises dogs. Restless, the three brothers decide to undertake a quest in search of “*things that are difficult to catch*”. The father suggests they fetch: 1- white guinea fowl, 2- vicious red bees, 3- the wild bull Ilahisambilo, 4- monsters with tails and women’s heads. For each pursuit, they pass through the forest and invite Split-Man to join them. He goes, having his mother plant a banana tree and listen for his dogs’ howling as life tokens. Each time, Split-Man successfully captures the prize (through virtues and/or magical formula) but the others outnumber him, seize the

item, and present it to the father as their own. On the third task, to catch the bull Ilahisambilo, treachery develops: the brothers leave the hero to confront the beast alone, but he successfully tames it by climbing a tree, jumping on its back and dabbing foam from its mouth on its head. The final, fourth, task ends in a transformation flight with the hero producing a series of magical obstacles to impede the pursuing monsters. Back in the village, Split-Man proves to his father it was he who accomplished all the tasks; the father turns his brothers into slaves and the hero becomes his only son.

- 9 Competing brothers appear frequently in tales around the world, Madagascar included<sup>5</sup>. Usually, the brothers set about the same tasks, with a single brother succeeding and all the others failing. In most instances, the boy, as with heroes more generally, begins the tale as an underdog who suffers from one or more types of the following disadvantages or handicaps:
- physical deformity. The hero brother may suffer a physical handicap (international motif “L112.3 Deformed child as hero”) which may take the form of an extreme deformity, e.g. the boy having only a head (cf. Haring 1.7.18 ) or a gourd for a body (cf. Haring 1.7.19), or the hero is half-flesh and half-wood (T551.4 Boy born with body half iron). It may take more benign forms, the hero being simply ugly or physically weak;
  - age. The hero is nearly always the youngest brother, a common international motif designated “H1242 Youngest brother alone succeeds”. In the many Malagasy tales where he appears, his position is spelled out in the initial situation and/or through his name Faralahy, “Last Son” or the like. As economic and political advantages lie generally with the firstborn, this filial position doubly confers an underdog status;
  - outnumbered. In rare instances, only two brothers are involved. In most tales, a single brother finds himself pitted against numerous brothers. Both internationally and in Madagascar, the rival brothers often number three or seven. In Tandroy tales, as we shall see, the hero tends to be pitted against eight half-brothers, a number which is not arbitrary;
  - disliked by family member(s). It is usually specified in the opening scene that the hero is disliked by his other brothers, his father and/or the entire family. This too may be indicated in his name, such as “detested by the father” Halandrae (Beaujard 1991). Occasionally, the mother remains loyal, following and aiding him when he is cast out.
- 10 All these initial disadvantages apply to the hero in the foregoing tale of “Split-Man”, which the *Index* classifies as the unique example of type “4.08 Deformed hero victorious”, thus a spiral structure. Meanwhile, it assigns two Bara tales, both collected by Faublée in the 1940s, to another structure (ascending) and type, “1.7.27 Exposed by treacherous brothers”. Let us consider these two more closely.
- 11 In the longer of the two versions (1.7.27 A), a man has one son, named Renaly, by one wife, and seven sons by another wife. The father falls ill and requests the boys go to the forest in search of wild guinea fowl. Taking his dogs, Renaly succeeds. The seven force the goods from him and present them as their own. The father suspects treachery, admonishes the seven and sends them to fetch wild tubers in the forest. While there, they play at carving logs into canoes. The treacherous brothers trap Renaly in one of the vessels which they cover, seal and throw in the ocean. The mother tries to call it to shore, but the father succeeds by sending men in canoes to fetch it. The father puts the seven to death.
- 12 Version B is very laconic and schematic, but the plot residue is nonetheless visible: after their mothers argue, seven brothers lure their halfbrother into the forest and try to stab him but are caught and admonished by the father; next, they lure him back into

the forest to view a coffin, in which they trap him, then throw in the ocean. When the hero emerges, his speech stresses that he was all alone but succeeded.

- 13 Table 1 breaks down the motifs and plot of these three tales and reveals their similarity. While much simplified, the Bara tales nonetheless contain the same core structure (plot) and motifs: quest in the forest for (dangerous) goods to please the father, initial success of the hero, subsequent treachery of his brothers, ultimate punishment of treacherous brothers and triumph of the lone hero. The expected variations are minor: the far shorter and less accomplished Bara versions contain fewer tasks and lack the motifs of the Life tokens (E761.7.5) and Transformation flight (D672), the latter being replaced by Victim tricked into box (K714.2) and Exposure in boat (S141). The only significant difference would appear to be the starting point or initial situation: the Sakalava hero alone suffers a lack in the form of a physical handicap. However, if we look more closely at the Bara tales, we see that, in fact, their heroes also suffer an initial lack. Rather than a fantastic physical deformity, however, it is social in nature, stemming from a disadvantageous position in a polygynous household: in both Bara versions, the narrator carefully establishes at the opening that the hero is the only son of a junior wife and, what's more, her co-wife has numerous sons. To appreciate how this poses a lack requires an understanding of the concepts and practices related to polygyny and father respect in southern Madagascar.
- 14 The account that follows is based on my research over several years in rural Androy.

## Polygyny and the creation of strong sons

- 15 Polygyny (*fampirafe*, *fampirafesañe*) is to this day frequently practiced in southern Madagascar. It is a deeply rooted custom that structures multiple aspects of thought, economic and social life. At any point in time, there may be few polygynous unions in a given village. However, as marriage is brittle and people may divorce and remarry six or more times in their lives, nearly all people — men and women — will, at some point, be partners in a polygynous union<sup>6</sup>.
- 16 Contrary to Western stereotypes, men do not seek additional wives for sexual gratification. “You don’t just take a woman because she has long [pretty] hair” or “just because you like her”, men stressed. Instead, discussants mention a range of practical, social and cultural considerations that would prompt a man to take a second (or third or fourth) wife.
- 17 First, polygyny allows a man to overcome the problem of barrenness. Rates of female sterility are quite high in rural Androy and adoption is not practiced, leaving a man with two choices. He can simply repudiate his barren spouse, a strategy adopted by some men. Or, if he still loves her (*mbe tea’e*) — often said to be the case —, he can take a second or third wife to give him children<sup>7</sup>. Surprisingly, few people located the motivation for polygyny in the prestige or “fame” it brings to a man: only a wealthy man can undertake the great cost of contracting a second marriage and then supporting plural wives and families. Third, having multiple wives ensures that there is always a woman to cook and care for the man when the wife, as is frequently the case, has to absent herself. In a related point, a few people held that polygyny can “break” a bad wife: with the competition of a cowife, a lazy or indifferent wife would be forced to compete for the husband’s affections. Finally, if the current wife has many children of a young age (*ampela savereñe*), she has little time or energy to devote to the care of her

husband. Often, her cooking and housework are indifferent. A man in this situation tends to seek out a barren or post-menarchal woman as a second wife to attend to his comfort.

- 18 However, the overarching ideological motivation for polygyny stressed by both men and women concerns not the man's fame, comfort or convenience, but its roles in producing "strong sons". For religious and practical reasons, it is not merely enough to have numerous male offspring. A man needs to have strong sons to serve as worthy substitutes for him (Middleton 1988:93, 97). And I learned it is in producing sons by "many mothers" (*maro rene*) – that is, by successive wives – that one is believed to have a better chance of achieving this. Two factors underpin this reasoning. First, even if a wife has numerous sons, there is still the chance that they will all be worthless (*votro*), that her people and the "land they come from" (*niboahañe*) are bad. The case that was often brought to my attention was that of a woman who had born five sons, each of whom was either mentally deficient, a thief or a general good-for-nothing. If a man has sons by several women, however, chances are that at least one set will be successful: "For even if the children of some of the wives are good-fornothings, those of one of the wives are sure to be wealthy"; "If you take a wife from the South, maybe they [the children] won't be successful but if you take from the West, too, maybe they will be" (*Fa lehe rarake ty ana ty ila'e, ho mpañarivo ty ana ty raïke*). But nature alone is not enough to ensure that one set will be strong; the competitiveness entailed in polygyny helps this along.
- 19 Like their mothers, sons by different wives are two different people, "two bodies or "divided into two stomachs. These matricentric units act as a single entity for inheritance and rituals (Ottino 1998, Fee 2000). The expectation is that half-brothers will compete with and rival one another, and thus attain greater personal fortitude and wealth than they might otherwise: "[The sons of co-wives] fight each other. They fight for their mothers. Each tries to "light the fire of the father", that's what makes having children by co-wives good. "Father resect, referred to as "lighting the fire", is a central tenet of Tandroy religious thought: a person's fortunes turn on receiving the blessing of his father which he accords in return for acts of fidelity and homage (Middleton1988). His curse, meanwhile, is believed to have the power to destroy a person and his descendants. Although less culturally elaborated, demonstrating respect to mothers is likewise practiced and glossed in terms of "lighting the fire"; should the father die, the brothers transfer many of their acts of homage to her. By having competing sets of sons, parents are more likely to receive care, acts of homage and a glorious burial: "The sons of the senior wife (*anam-baly bey*) and sons of the junior wife (*anam-baly masay*), each have their own corral. Each has livestock to sell when you are sick or old, and to offer you goods in homage (*mibanabana*)."
- 20 In the creation and competition of strong sons, mothers do not take passive roles. As elsewhere in Madagascar, the term for co-wife in Androy is "enemy" (*rafe*) and animosity is the expected behavior. As both a woman of different ancestry and a competitor for the husband's affections and resources, the co-wife is the quintessential, *de facto* rival (*rahambañe*). The rivalry is anticipated – even encouraged – in the polygynous marriage ceremony itself. In most areas, the elders of the village sacrifice a goat and have the new co-wives swear an oath (*titike*), known as *oselahimavo* ("yellow billy goat") not to practice witchcraft on each other or the husband<sup>8</sup>. Up until the 1950's, it was an institutionalized part of the polygynous marriage ceremony that as soon as the wife saw her husband's new bride, she would leap up and throw mats at the

newcomer, or whatever else came to hand, sometimes having hidden rocks nearby for that purpose. To this day, a woman must sit between the pair during the wedding ceremony to serve as a buffer. Following the ceremony, strict rules known as *alo* govern the husband's allocation of time and resources (Elli 1993, Fee forthcoming), dividing them generally in equal portions, although several economic advantages and honorific privileges belong to the senior wife. While helping to minimize conflict, the rites and rules do not stop it. Hostility, slander, gossip, and icy silence are not uncommon and physical fighting and accusations of witchcraft may occur as well. An oft-repeated saying runs: "*She laughs night and day, the woman whose co-wife has died.*"

- 21 Over time, the women's rivalry and fighting tend to become focused on their children. Co-wives work to ensure the success of their own sons. They jealously protect (*miambeñe*) their share of the inheritance in livestock, land, plows, carts, kettles, dishes, down to the last spoon. More nefariously, they try to cast aside children by other wives. Strictly speaking, it is not just children of contemporaneous co-wives who are in competition, but the children from all the husband's past marriages: in the event of divorce, the father has sole custody of children; if the ex-wife chooses to quit the village, her children become the charges of her husband's current wife, i.e. a stepmother. This stepmother also has a role to play in creating strong sons. It is openly recognized that stepmothers may abuse the children of other wives, working them like "little slaves" (*kondevondevo*), denying them food, and perhaps even beating them. Fittingly, stepmothers are known as "Lady Red" (*Ramena*): the color red is associated with intensity, heat, destructive forces (lightening, fire) and destructive emotions (envy, avarice). If privately criticized, the "Lady Red" is on another level valorized, for she, too, makes strong sons: when grown, the mistreated boys will strive to exact revenge through their success.
- 22 Although sons of all wives inherit cattle and land, the children of the senior wife (*anam-baly bey*) have several economic and political advantages. It is they who inherit the best fields, while the herd (or money for education) may be depleted by the time the sons of the youngest wives come of age. They inherit the authority of the father and will eventually rule the village. For these reasons, children of junior wives usually leave the father's village to establish new settlements. Should a co-wife bear only a single son, he tends to face additional challenges. Referred to as "only man" (*tokandahy*), he has no natural political or economic allies and consequently may be muscled out of property. However, again, these adverse conditions may in fact motivate him to strive harder than he might otherwise.

## Lack, Deterioration and New Improvement

- 23 Returning to the two Bara tales, we can now detect a spiral plot. In its synopsis of "Lone Man" A, the *Index* neglects to notice the all-important position of the hero as born to a junior wife. In "Lone Man" B, it recognizes this initial situation but incorrectly labels it as a motif of "unusual conception". However, the foregoing discussion has shown that being born into a polygynous household is commonplace, rather than unusual. Rather, in carefully specifying that the hero is the only son of the junior wife, and what's more, disliked by elders and his half-brothers, the narrator is establishing an initial situation of a lack or handicap. From this initial disadvantaged starting point, the Bara hero's situation improves when he succeeds at the tasks in the forest and/or earns his father's

protection; he suffers setbacks/deterioration at the hands of treacherous brothers (stepmother, uncle) before he is triumphant and they are punished.

- 24 In version B, the initial improvement, reward and punishment may not be obvious to the outsider, for they are telegraphic and implied: suspecting the treachery of the seven brothers, the father curses them by declaring: “You will not bury me”. This pronouncement forbids the sons from carrying out the greatest act of father respect: performing the animal sacrifices and rites necessary at the father’s death to ensure his passage to the afterlife and recreation as an ancestor. This curse effectively condemns the offending individual and all his descendants to eternal punishment. The hero’s reward is implicit but also understood: he alone will now perform these tasks and be the blessed, and only, heir.
- 25 Thus the Bara tales demonstrate the classic ingredients of a spiral plot as defined by Haring: lack, deterioration and new improvement.

### “The Lone Man”(Tokandahy)

- 26 The links between the Bara and Sakalava stories become even clearer when we examine three more recently recorded Tandroy tales which should also be considered versions of 4.08. One appears in Francois Benolo’s (1992)<sup>9</sup> collection of Tandroy tales and I have collected two, “Lone Man” A and B – recounted by two girls aged about 13 – which are presented below with an English translation. Longer than the Bara versions, they include many more of the same motifs and incidents as the Sakalava, notably the capture of Sambilo the bull. However, their tone and themes are ultimately closer to the Bara tales: the hero is likewise the only son of a cowife, and the narratives turn on the many and varied frictions of polygynous relationships.
- 27 In “Lone Man” A, the boy is the only son of a co-wife and disliked by his father “because he is only one”who meanwhile favors his eight sons born to another wife. In preparation for his *sandratse* healing ceremony, the father sends the eight alone to gather honey and then capture the wild bull Sambilo as sacrifice. Thus, he denies the hero the chance to participate in these tasks (and so receive his blessing). The hero goes anyway and, with practical advice from his mother, he succeeds while the others fail from stupidity or cowardice. The father then praises the hero. Jealous, the eight lure him into the forest under the pretext of making a coffin for the father. They trap him inside, seal it and throw it in a body of water. The mother rescues it and the eight are killed.
- 28 In “Lone Man” B, the adult adversary is not the father, but the stepmother. The hero is the son of a woman disliked by the village elders who is subsequently repudiated. His father then takes another wife who bears eight sons. Despising Lone Man, “she cooked up a plot to kill him” (*le namboare’e afera himateza’e*). She feigns pregnancy cravings and sends him in search of dangerous animals (pup of a ferocious dog, large snake, wild bull Sambilo). In the meantime, she sends her own eight sons on the safe task of fetching prickly pear. The hero’s grandmother gives him advice for catching the animals which includes climbing a tree and throwing vines to lure Sambilo, then jumping on his back. The hero then rides into the village on the bull, commanding it to eat everyone in sight, sparing only his grandmother.
- 29 The version recorded by Benolo (1992) from another area of Androy shows some minor variations on the central pattern. The hero is called “Doesn’t-leave-for-he’s-a-man”



(Tsimamangafalahy), and the boys are the sons of two brothers, patrilateral parallel cousins, rather than half-brothers; however, coming from different maternal lines and competitors for inheritance, this places them in the same structural position as sons of cowives. Identified as “rich and strong”, the hero is nonetheless disadvantaged in that his own father has died and his uncle is villainous: he advises his eight sons to do away with the hero so they may prosper (litt. “find a path”, *ahazoañe lalañe*). He feigns illness and has the boys hunt the wild bull Sambilo for him to eat as a cure. The eight hide while the hero climbs the tree and shoots the beast. The man next sends them to make a coffin. The eight trap the hero inside and cast it into the water. The mother and king’s wife bring it to shore. In the meantime, the eight have taken the hero’s property and wives, except one who refuses. The hero returns to the village and kills everyone, sparing the one loyal wife.

- 30 In these Tandroy versions, the hero’s marginal status is made manifest in several ways:
- through the characters’ names. The hero is either “Lone Man”(Tokandahy) (“one Man” A & B) or “Doesn’t-Leave-For-He’s-a-Man” (Tsimamangafalahy) (Benolo): he stays and fights rather than go elsewhere in search of fortune. Meanwhile, the favored eight half-brothers may be named “ords-the-Eight” (Ravalolahy);
  - the number of treacherous brothers: in Androy, the number eight is a symbol of wholeness, a full or discrete unit, as well as propitiousness; it is against this strong unit that the lone hero must do battle;
  - the hero is described as being disliked by the father or patrilineal elders (“one Man” A & B, Benolo), and/or lacking his father (Benolo) or mother (“one Man” B). The protagonist of the Benolo version (and Faublée A) may, at first sight, appear anomalous: he is identified in the initial situation as “rich and strong” However, given the dynamics of a polygynous family, this inversion does not lessen his lack or “handicap”: it incites the jealousy of others, in this case the treacherous uncle. Underscoring the disequilibrium, in this version, the eight are named “The-Eight-Worthless-Men” (Valolahitembo).
- 31 A table shows the similarity in motifs and structure of the Tandroy stories with the other versions discussed earlier (see below). They include some of the distinctive Sakalava incidents related to the forest quest absent from the Bara tales, notably the pursuit and dramatic capture of the wild bull Sambilo by climbing a tree. However, in theme and tone, the Tandroy tales have more affinity with the Bara versions: their plots turn on, and perhaps ultimately become a meditation on, the benefits and frictions of “having many mothers” and the creation of strong sons. If properly managed, producing heirs through several wives can benefit all concerned; but if not, if favoritism and rivalry is exaggerated or unchecked, it leads to the destruction of not only rivals, but also elders and the entire village. The motifs of the Sakalava tale are transformed accordingly. In the Bara and Tandroy versions, the quest in the forest and related tasks are modified from a search for the extraordinary to acts of father or mother respect: the fabulous white guinea fowl of the Sakalava tale becomes an ordinary guinea fowl which an ill father craves (Faublée A); instead of dangerous bees, it is their honey that is sought to present as homage to the father at his healing ceremony (“Lone Man” A). The wild bull Sambilo is hunted not merely because it is dangerous, but in order to serve as a sacrifice for the father’s ceremony (“Lone Man” A) or for an ill father or (step) mother to eat (Benolo, “Lone Man” B). Or, the animals sought (dog, snake) are not only dangerous, but also impure, unfit for human consumption, underscoring the a-social potential of the stepmother (“Lone Man” B). In

the Bara and Tandroy tales, the final venture into the forest does not involve monsters and magical escape, but the ultimate act of father respect: “burying” him by carving his coffin (Benolo, “Lone Man” A). One finds expressed, too, perhaps, the anxieties attached to the great burden of fulfilling father/mother respect and its apogee in the grandiose burial: the parent’s demands are insatiable and ever-increasing, the protagonist nearly perishing in his efforts to satisfy them, literally trapped in the father’s coffin and cast afloat. Such weighty topics are relieved in one instance by the use of an obscene motif: in “Lone Man” A, to reach the coffin floating on the pond, the owner of the water plugs his rectum and drinks it up, thus allowing the hero to come safely to dry land<sup>10</sup>.

- 32 While in the imaginary worlds of southern Madagascar, it is the “Lone Man” who triumphs, an adage from our own insists that “no man is an island”. Hopefully, before another twenty years lapses, anthropologists and students of oral literature will come together to update the *Malagasy Index Tale* and create as well a motif index.

#### Comparison of motifs and structure

	DAHLE (Isilakolona)	FAUBLÉE A	FAUBLÉE B	BENOLO	LONE MAN A	LONE MAN B
Initial situation and lack(s)	hero is half wood, half-flesh; his 3 brothers have their father, the king, cast out the hero	hero is only son of jr. wife; has 7 half-brothers	hero is only son of jr. wife; has 7 half-brothers	hero is only son of father who is deceased; disliked by uncle; has 8 cousins	hero is only son of a co-wife; disliked by father; has 8 half-brothers	hero is only son of woman disliked by elders; has 8 half-brothers and in care of step-mother
Departure, nature of quest	the 3 brothers desire a quest for the difficult; father suggests tasks	ill father requests goods	the 2 mothers of the brothers fight; 7 brothers decide to kill hero	quest planned to kill hero uncle feigns illness and requests goods	quest planned to kill hero father requests goods for <i>savaratse</i> ceremony	quest planned to kill hero stepmother feigns pregnancy cravings and requests goods
Tasks in forest	1. white guinea fowl 2. red bees 3. wild bull llahisambilo 4. female monsters	1. guinea fowl 2. dig sosa tubers, carve canoes	1. enter forest 2. make coffin	1. wild bull Sambilo 2. make coffin	1. honey 2. wild bull Sambilo 3. make coffin	1. pup of wild dog 2. snake 3. wild bull Sambilo
Helper	mother follows hero when cast out; tends life tokens	—	—	—	mother offers advice for capture of animals	father's mother offers advice for capture of animals

	DAHLE (Isilakolona)	FAUBLÉE A	FAUBLÉE B	BENOLO	LONE MAN A	LONE MAN B
Improvement	hero succeeds at tasks	hero succeeds at tasks, receives protection from father	hero receives protection from father	hero succeeds at tasks, receives blessing from father (implicit)	hero succeeds at tasks, receives praise from father	hero succeeds at tasks
Treachery, setback	brothers seize prize;  brothers have hero face dangerous animal alone	brothers seize prize;  brothers have hero face dangerous animal alone, lure hero into wooden vessel and cast in ocean	brothers try to spear hero;  lure hero into wooden vessel and cast in ocean	brothers lure hero into wooden vessel and cast in pond	brothers try to spear hero;  lure hero into wooden vessel and cast in pond	stepmother has hero face dangerous animals alone
Rescue, lack liquidated, fully satisfying ending	hero rescues self, father makes him only son and turns 3 brothers into slaves	father rescues hero, makes him only son, punishes the 7 brothers	villagers rescue hero; father curses 7 brothers (hero becomes only son)	mother & noble woman rescue hero; hero kills enemies, becomes sole heir	mother & pond owner rescue hero; hero kills brothers, becomes sole heir	hero rescues self with help of wild bull; hero kills enemies, becomes sole heir

### Tokandahy A<sup>11</sup>

#### Lone Man A

*Lehe teo ty ondaty. Raike niterake, nampirafe. Nampirafe amizay, le niterake ty valy raike toy, niterake Ravalolahy. Niterake ty raike, niterake Tokandahy. Heje amizay ty tokañe toy, fa tokañe. Fa tea i rae'e ey amizay ty Valolahy. Le hisandratse amizay i rae'e ey.*

*"Ie zao", sata an-dRavalolahy fa heje ty Tokandahy, "angalao tantele".*

*Ninday gorogoro naho sihoa hangalake tantele ty Ravalolahy. Ie re niavy ao nandeha avao tsy ninday afo. Ie re niavy ao amizay le hañohe tantele le nivoroavoroa tantele le nilay. Le tsy nahazo le nigoragora avao hirike ao. Ie re niavy ao ka amizay nandeha avao ka ty Tokandahy. Nandeha avao ty Tokandahy ndra te ie tsy irahañe.*

*"Atao akore ene ty alake i tantele ey?"*

*"Alao", hoe ty rene'e, "itondrao afo, atohofa amizay le tiofo."*

*Ninday finga bey naho sihoa amizay ty Tokandahy. Le nañohe le nahazo finga bey raike naho sihoa raika ty Tokandahy. Le nandese'e amizay re nandese'e. Ie re niavy ao amizay ty Tokandahy nifanariha'e an-dRavalolahy tomboke ho vonoe. Le narova ondaty maro oy amizay*

*Le nampagalaene an-dResambilo ty Ravalolahy hanandratañe an -drae'e ey. Nandeha amizay iareo nangalakean-dRasambilo. Nisenge hamaro amizay iareo le hitsepake an-dRasambilo le nikofiakofiahe'e, le nilay, le nihereñe avao lahatañe. Le nandeha ty Tokandahy le nañontane an-drene'e:*

*"Atao akore, ene, ty amitahañe an-dry Sambilo?"*

*"Manganiha rehe ambone hatae aña araradraràfo ty taho. Naho fa mihinane i tahoñe ey amizay re le ambotraho ami trafo'e ey."*

*Le niambotraha'e amizay re...*

*Le nandeha, nandeha, nandeha. Le nanganike ambone hatae bey amizay re le narara'e taho le narara'e taho. Le nihininañe amizay i raha ay le niambovoa'e amizay re le nitsepaha'e amy trafo'e ey amizay. Le nitongoa'e ambone amizay le nandese'e nandese'e.*

Mitreña mitreña rehe Sambilo

Mitreña mitreña rehe Sambilo

— Mmm. Mmm.

Nandeha, nandeha le...

Mitreña mitreña rehe Sambilo

Mitreña mitreña rehe Sambilo

Ho reim-bahoake

— Mmm. Mmm.

*“Intike Tokandahy nahazo andResambilo!”. Nivoalaboalatse iareo Valolahy hitomboke Tokandahy, fa nahazo Resambilo. Le nijebañe añivo iareo amizay ty rae’e tsy hahavaoñ tomboko Tokandahy. “Aleo izaho ho tomboheñe toe izay Tokandahy”, ty sata’e andRavalolahy tsy hitomboke Tokandahy. Le tsy tinombo’iareo. amizay. Le nanandratse iareo nasandratse ty rae’iareo.*

*Le finiran-dRavalolahy amizay hazo añ’ala añe. Finira’iareo, finira’iareo, finira’iareo. Ie re nivita fira’iareo amizay nandeha iareo noly an-tana añe. “Ndao Tokandahy”, hoe iareo amizay, “hamira hazo fa efa raty ty raentika, hamira hazo ho an-draentika.”*

*Le nandeha amizay iareo, lenandeha le nandeha. Le zoe’iareoamizay i hazo oy te fa intia. “Mmmnh, oharo amizay rikiahe tetandre an-draentika.” Le nañohatsealoha he ty raïke amy iareo. “He! Letsy tandre, he! le tsy tandre. Ehe,oharo ao Tokandahy te tandre.”Nañohatse amizay ty Tokandahy, lenagobo’iareo amizay ty Tokandahy.Finehe’iareo taly amizay, lenajo’iareo añate ty rano ey. Lenandeha amizay iareo noly.*

*Ie re niavy ao*

*“Aia”, hoa re, “ty Tokandahy?”*

*“Niengae’ay afara ao re,mamatsipatsike raha afara ao.”*

*Eo, eo, eo avao iareo. Le eo avao ty rene’e. Ie re an-kela añe amizay tsy avy ty Tokandahy nandeha ty rene’e nipay aze. Nandeha, nandeha. Ie reke niavy amy sihanke ey amizay le nibeko, nibeko ana’e ey añate rano ey. Le nibeko avao reke. Le nanoeñe amizay i ana’e ey. Le nandeha amizay re nangalake tompo rano. Le nanoeñe amizay re le linite lahivozake ty fori’e ey i tompo rano y. Le trinini’e amizay rano oy. Le nimaïke amizay. Le zoe’iareo amizay le nanoe’iareo amizay taly iy. Le nandese amizay i ana’e ey. Le nandese’a an-tanañe añe amizay. Ie re niavy an-tanañe ao tinombo’iareo amizay ka le tsy nitra’iareo.*

*Ie zay.*

*Tsy taliliko, fa talily taloha.*

*Ze tsy manoy ho zay, kovo-doha.*

And so there once were some people. One gave birth, and then [the husband] took a second wife. He took two wives and one of them gave birth to Lords-the-Eight-Men, and one gave birth to Lone-Man. Lone-Man was disliked because he was all alone. The father preferred the Eight-Men. And then the father decided to hold a healing ceremony.

“Listen”, he said addressing the Eight-Men and not Lone-Man, whom he didn’t like, “go and get some honey”.

So Lords-the-Eight-Men took a pail and a bucket to get some honey. And they left without taking a firebrand [to smoke the bees]. And when they got to the beehives, the bees swarmed at them and they ran off. And so they got nothing and had to return home empty handed. And then Lone-Man took off in his turn. Lone-Man just went on his own even if he hadn’t been sent on the errand.

“Mother, How does one fetch honey?”

“Take a firebrand with you”, said the mother, “advance it forward and blow on it.”

So Lone-Man set off with a big dish and a bucket. And he opened the hives and filled the big dish and the bucket with honey. And he carried and carried it back home. But when Lone-Man arrived, the Eight jumped on him to spear him but the gathered crowd protected him.

And then the Lords-the-Eight-Men were sent to fetch Sambilo [the ferocious bull] to serve as a sacrifice at their father’s healing ceremony. And they went off to get Sambilo, feeling proud and clever because they were many. But when they made to grab Sambilo, the beast demolished them and they ran off, they ran straight back home with nothing. And so Lone-Man went to ask his mother: “How can one trick Sambilo, Mother?”

“Climb on top of a tree and throw down some branches. And when he’s eating the branches, then jump and land on to his hump.”

And so he jumped on top of him<sup>12</sup>...

So he walked and walked and walked. And he climbed on top of a tall tree and he scattered branches all around. And so the creature began to eat and he seized his hump. Then he climbed on top and rode him forward and onward.

*Bellow, oh bellow, Sambilo*

*Bellow, oh bellow, Sambilo*

— *Mmm. Mmm* [narrator makes sound of bull bellow].

They rode on and on...

*Bellow, oh bellow, Sambilo*

*Bellow, oh bellow, Sambilo*

*So all the people will hear*

— *Mmm. Mmm* [narrator makes sound of bull bellow].

“Look, it’s Lone-Man, he got Resambilo!” And the Eight-Men leaped up in surprise and tried to spear Lone-Man because he got Resambilo. But the father put himself in the middle between them so Lone-Man would not be killed. “I would rather that you kill me than Lone-Man”, he said so they wouldn’t spear Lone-Man. So he wasn’t speared. And the healing ceremony took place, they held the ceremony for their father.

Then Lords-the-Eight-Men went to the forest to make a coffin [for their father]<sup>13</sup>. And they chopped and chopped the tree trunk to make the coffin. And when it was done they went back to the village. “Let’s go Lone-Man and make a coffin for our father because he’s sick and probably won’t make it. Let’s make a coffin for our father.”

So they all went off and walked and walked. And they came upon the coffin that they had already built. “Hmmm, let’s measure the coffin to see if it’s the right size for our father.” And one of the eight sons got in and tried it out. “Oh! He doesn’t fit! Oh! he doesn’t fit. Hey, Lone-Man, you try to see if it fits you.” So Lone-Man got in to try it out and they slammed on the lid with Lone-Man inside. They tied a rope all around it and then they plunged it into [a body of] water. And then they went home.

After some time had passed:

“Where is Lone-Man?”

“We left him behind, he stayed behind working on something with his ax.”

And the eight sons went about their business. And the mother went about hers. And when after a lot of time had passed and Lone-Man still had not returned, his mother went off to find him. She walked and walked. And when she got to the pond she sang out, she sang out to her child in the water. And she sung to her child. And then she went to get the owner of the pond. And he took action, the owner of the water plugged his anus with a sticky clump of vines plugged his anus with a sticky clump of vines<sup>14</sup>. And he slurped up all the water in the pond until it was dry. And they found the coffin and undid the ropes. And she took her child back home, she took him back to the village. And when they got there, they speared [the Eight-Men] until there was nothing left of them.

That’s so.

It’s not my tale, but a tale from the people of old.

Whoever cannot tell one in turn is an ugly bald head.

#### **Tokandahy B<sup>15</sup>**

##### **Lone Man B**

*Tonga teo amizay ty Zatovo le eo, eo... Nangala-baly amizay re. Ty valy halae’e toy hejehejen-droae’e. Nalae’e avao amizay. Eo, eo, eo. Sita niavy eo amizay i ampela ay, le niterake amizay, niterake lahy.*

*“Ie zao”, ho i rae’e ey, “Ie i Tokandahy ty añara o ana’o, korahē.”*

*“On”, hoe ty Zatovo.*

*Ie nibey amizay, naria’e amizay i rene i Tokandahy, le nangatake valy amizao re, ty tea i rae’e ey amizay. Le eo i ampela ay le niterake, niterake. Valo lahy amizao ty ana’e. Niheje’o ampela ao amizay arē ty Tokandahy, le namboarae’e afera amizao himateza’e.*

*“Milaolao amboasirasira raho”, hoe reke, “Akia areke.”*

Nandeha ty Ravalolahy hipay ty raketa ho hane'e.

"Akia rehe, Tokandahy.

"Le mandeha ka reke mañambara an-draza'e aña.

"Nao, ene", hoa re "ty raha añirahaña ahy."

"Ino?" hoe ty raza'e.

"Amboasirasira", hoa re.

"Andeso taolan-kena ao", hoe ty rene'e. "Atoraho amy o amboa ao eo i taolan-kena ay."

Nandeha amizay re, nandeha, nandeha. Nizoe'e amizay i rene'e ey te miroro. Nindese amizay i ana'e ey koainkoaña amizao i ana'e ey. Sita niangitrika'e amizay i ajaja ay natora'e mbeo amizay i taolan-kena ay. Nihane eo, le nandeha re.

"Intoaña ie", hoe re. Le naria'e ka tsy nihane'e. Sita niavy eo ka nandeha amizay amà... Mandeha ka reke naho niavy eo. "kia", hoe reke, "te-hihinaña, te hiteleña menaraña raho", hoe reke.

Le nandeha amizay le nirahe i ampela ay amizay re.

"Nay, ene", hoe re, "ty raha añirahaña ahy."

"Ino?" hoe ty raza'e.

"Menaraña", hoe re.

"Andeso taho", hoe ty raza'e

amizay.

Nindese'e amizay i taho oy boak'aña, le niavy eo. Sita niavy eo amizay amà, le natora'e ama eo amizay le nihane'e amizay. Le andeha ka reke le niavy eo amizay le...

"Intoy ie", hoe re. Le tsy nihinaña ka re.

"Nay", hoe re, "ty raha te ohane'e vata'e. Akia Ravalolahy", hoe re. Le nandeha ka ty Ravalolahy le nipay raketa ho hane'e.

"Akia rehe, Tokandahy angalao] i Sambilo", hoe re.

"Nay, ene", hoe re, "ty raha añirahaña ahy".

"Ino?" hoe ty raza'e.

"Sambilo", hoe re.

"Andeso taho", hoe re. "Ie taho naho avy aña rehe", hoe re, "manganiha ambone aña rehe", hoe re, "le toraho hatae", hoe re. "Hañientea'e aze heke fa naho mañente azo reke le atoraho omba eo i taho oy."

"En!" hoe re.

Le nandeha i ajaja ay. Ie niavy eo amizay i taho oy le natora'e aze amizay le mitongoa antrafo I añombe ey reke.

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Ampangalaeña ahy, zoke...

Noly amizay iereo.

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Ampangalaeña ahy, zoke, ty atoly menaraña le nalaeko, Ampangalaeña ahy ty amboasirasira le nalaeko.

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo.

"En, en! Nay i biby", hoe ty Ravalolahy.

"Biby vao iereo tsy liñisako eo ty hihavia iereo?"

Nandeha amizay iereo, nandeha.

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo ampangalaeña ahy, zoke, ty atoly menaraña le nalaeko, Ampangalaeña ahy ty amboa sirasira le nalaeko.

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo Mitreña, mitreña.

"Nay i biby, nene."

"Biby vao", hoe ty Tokandahy, "fa tsy raha mahazo anareo?"

Eo sita le niavy eo amizay le nandeha.

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo

Ampangalaeñe ahy, zoke, menarañe le nalaeko,  
 Ampangalaeñe ahy ty amboa sirasira le nalaeko.  
 Mitreña, mitreña rehe Sambilo  
 Mitreña, mitreña.

*Le niavy eo amizao, latsake añate traño ao amizay ty Zatovo, iareo foko'a'e. " e fara'e ty tsy haneñe", hoe reke, "i razako zay fa hamonoako añombe rehe." Le namonoa'e añombe amizay ty Sambilo solon-draza'e amizay le nihane'e. Le nandeha amizay re añ'ala añe.*

*Ie zay, Sarah.*

*Tsy taliliko fa talily ty taloha.*

Zatovo came along and time went by and by. Then he took a wife. The woman he wanted as a bride was disliked by his father's kin. But he took her anyway. Time went by. Barely had the new wife arrived then she gave birth, she gave birth to a boy.

"Listen", Zatovo's father told him, "Lone-Man will be the name of your child."

"OK", Zatovo answered.

When the child was bigger, Zatovo repudiated Lone-Man's mother and he took a new wife, this time a woman approved by his father's kin. And the woman lived there and gave birth repeatedly. She gave birth to the Eight-Men. She didn't like Lone-man and cooked up a plot to kill him.

"I have a [pregnancy] craving for the [ferocious] white dog<sup>16</sup>", said the woman. "Go and fetch one."

Meanwhile the Eight-Men set off to find prickly pear, food that she would really eat.

"Get going, Lone-Man."

So he went to tell his grandmother [father's mother].

"Oh, mother", he said, "there's something I need help with."

"What's that?" the grandmother asked.

"The [ferocious] White Dog."

"Take meat bones with you", said the [grand]mother. "Throw the bones to the dog", she said.

And so he went, he walked and he walked. He came upon the mother [dog] sleeping. He took the pup and it began to whine. Just at the moment when the mother dog was about to jump on the boy, he threw the meat bones. The dog ate them and he got away.

"Here it is", [he said to his stepmother]. But she threw it away and didn't eat it. And she quickly sent him on another errand. "Go", she said, "I want to eat, I want to swallow a menara snake", she said.

And he went then to do the errand the woman had given him.

"Oh, [grand]mother", he said.

"There's something I need help with."

"What's that?" the grandmother asked.

"A menara snake", he said.

"Take branches", she said<sup>17</sup>.

So he took branches with him from the village and he arrived there. And just as soon as he got there, well, he threw the branches and it ate them up. And so he went back and returned to the village and...

"Here it [the snake] is", he said. But she didn't eat it.

"Listen", she said. "Here is what I really, truly want to eat. Go Eight-Men".

And they went to look for prickly pear for her to eat.

"You, Lone-Man, go and get me Sambilo [the wild bull]", she said.

"Oh, mothe", he said [to his grandmother]. "There's something I need help with."

"What's that?" the grandmother asked.

"Sambilo", he said.

"Take branches", she said. "And when you get there, climb on top and throw a stick to get him to look at you for a minute and when he looks at you, throw the branches towards him."

“OK” he said.

And so the boy went. And when he got there he threw the branches and jumped on the hump of the bull and rode him.

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, brother, I was sent to fetch...*

And they went back to the village.

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, brother, I was sent to fetch the egg of the menara snake and I got it*

*Oh, brother, I was sent to fetch the White Dog and I got it*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

“Listen! There’s a monster coming!” said the Lords-the-Eight-Men.

“Is it a monster, or me who’s waiting there for you to arrive?”

And they walked on and on.

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, brother, I was sent to fetch the egg of the menara snake and I got it*

*Oh, brother, I was sent to fetch the White Dog and I got it*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

“Listen, there’s a monster out there, Mommy!”[said the Lords, the Eight Men].

“Is it a monster, or is it something coming to get you?” said Lone-Man.

And just as soon they continued on.

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, brother, I was sent to fetch the egg of the menara snake and I got it*

*Oh, brother, I was sent to fetch the White Dog and I got it*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

*Oh, bellow and bellow, Sambilo*

And as soon as they got there, he dropped into the middle of the house, into the middle of the family. “The only one you should spare”, he said, “is my grandmother and I will kill a cow [for you to eat in her stead].” And so a cow was to eat in her stead]. “And so a cow was slaughtered for Sambilo as a substitute for the grandmother and the beast ate it. Then he went back to the woods.”

That’s so, Sarah.

It’s not my tale, but a tale from the people of old.

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## NOTES

1. Noël Gueunier's forthcoming dictionary on the southwest dialects of Madagascar defines Lesambilo as "*Furious, the name of a ferocious bull in tales*" and indicates that the sense of the name Sambilo derives from the root term which has the meaning of "*being carried away, to make off with suddenly*".
2. In the North of the island, Lesambilo is the name of a one-horned bull (Gueunier forthcoming), while in the highlands, it is a horse-like creature named Songomby that is used to frighten children. Among the Tanala of the Southeast, meanwhile, as well as the Betsileo, *sambilo* is the term for a bamboo knife used for cutting the umbilical cord of boys (Dubois 1917 ; Gaudebout & Molet 1967).
3. Its multiple setbacks and triumphs would qualify it as a "Type 7, Complex plot", in Haring's classification. Another tale including Lahisambilo, *Le jeune homme qui tua le serpent à sept têtes*, recorded from the Sakalava by Birkeli (1922-23 :220-224), represents yet another type, similar in some respects to the foregoing Tsimamangafalahy. In the Birkeli version, it is a seven-headed serpent who has killed the hero's father before his birth and with whom he eventually does

battle; Lahisambilo makes only a cameo appearance, blamed for causing the old woman helper to break her water jar.

4. Jeanne de Longchamps also included a version of Isilakolona from northern Madagascar in her 1955 collection of folktales. I follow the *Index* in considering it to be a copy of the *Anganon'ny Ntaolo* version. Not a single motif or detail is altered in Longchamps' Antankarana version.

5. For a psychoanalytical analysis of competing brothers in Malagasy tales, see Beaujard 1991.

6. For example, during my fieldwork in a Tandroy village from 1992-1994, during conditions of famine, no man had more than one wife, yet 80% of all adults aged fifty or higher had, at some point in their past, been in such a union. In 1999, when economic conditions improved, three of the ten village men had two wives. Having more than two wives concurrently is extremely rare.

7. Often, it is the parents — either the father or mother — who bring pressure to bear on a son to give up a barren wife or to take a second wife.

8. A goat is speared and — with the senior wife holding the head and the junior wife touching the tail — the co-wives promise not to practice witchcraft on each other, or on the husband in the form of love charms. God is made witness to the act and invited to kill them if they do.

9. Another tale in Benolo's 1992 collection, *Soavita*, features the motif of seven sons pitted against a half-brother. However, the plot is substantially different, with the brothers wrestling a ghost (*lolo*). The seven exhibit only cowardice, not treachery.

10. See Gueunier (2001) on the use of obscene motifs in Malagasy tales.

11. Told by a girl aged about 13, village of Añalamahery, *commune* Andalatanosy.

12. The narrator makes a mistake here, getting ahead of herself in the telling.

13. The Tandroy often acquire coffins before death, especially if the person is very ill or old.

14. This same substance is used to plug holes in calabash water containers: the vine is beaten with a stick to produce a sticky mass which is pressed into the hole.

15. Told by a girl aged about 13, village of Befatike, *commune* Sihanamaro.

16. Benolo (1989: 90) defines the *amboantsirasira* as a “dog with white fur. Perhaps because its fur is thought to resemble salty land that it is called so.” Several areas in Androy have wide salt flats or lakes. Thus my translation as “White Dog.”

17. Here, the narrator, a young girl, seems to have botched the motif of the snake on two counts. First, she has Tokandahy feed tree branches to the snake, thus accidentally introducing too early this type of feed which belongs with the next incident, the capture of Sambilo: cattle in arid southern Madagascar are habitually given cut tree branches in order to consume the leaves. It is milk, rather than tree branches, that should be offered to snakes (Noël Gueunier, personal communication). Later, in the sung refrain, the narrator states that it was the egg of the snake that Tokandahy had been sent to fetch, not the snake itself. This seems to be the more likely target as it parallels stealing the young of the White Dog. I thank Noël Gueunier for pointing out these discrepancies.