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"Nobody wants to kill":

Economies of affect and violence in Madagascar's vanilla boom

A B S T R A C T

Vanilla prices in Madagascar have reached historic highs. For the country's vanilla-producing smallholders, the influx of new wealth has resulted in profound affective changes—in large part owing to vanilla theft, which has become widespread. Anxiety and anger are rampant in vanilla-producing communities, and these feelings are increasingly channeled into deadly mob violence against accused thieves. Rather than random acts, these extrajudicial killings are structured by localized cultural, material, and affective forms, as people enact and embody commodity violence in intimate, often contradictory ways. Commodity violence emerges as an additional form of unwanted emotional and physical labor for smallholders. With the vanilla market, as with commodity markets more generally, it is those with the least to gain who are disproportionately exposed to violence and harm. [*commodity booms, affect, structure of feeling, vigilante violence, smallholders, vanilla, Madagascar*]

Niakatra be ny vidin'ny lavaný ao Madagasikara tato hoato. Nisy fiantraikany goavana amin'ireo mpamokatra lavaný madinika ao antoerana anefa izany fiakarana harena vaovao izany – indrindra nohon'ny halatra lavaný izay nirongatra be ihany tato hoato. Manjaka loatra ny tahotra sy ny hatezerana eny anivon'ny fiaraha-monin'ny mpamokatra lavaný, hany ka lasa mampihatra fitsaràm-bahoaka amin'ireo voapanga sy voatonontonona ho mpangalatra ny olona. Tsy tongatonga hoazy anefa izany fitsaràm-bahoaka izany, fa zavatra volavolain'ny olona avy amin'ny kolotsaina sy ny dinam-pokonolona eo antoerana, ampiharina amin'ireo manao herisetra aterakin'ny fiakaran'ny vidim-bokatra, izay matetika mifanohitra amin'ny fomba tokony ho izy ihany. Lasa manampy trotraka ny fahasahiranan'ny mpamokatra madinika ny fisian'ny herisetra aterakin'ny fiakaran'ny vidim-bokatra, na ara-pihetseham-pó izany, na ara-batana. Ireo mpamokatra madinika no tena iharan'ny voina sy fahavoazana, na eo amin'ny sehatry ny tsenan'ny lavaný izany, na eo amin'ny sehatry ny tsenam-bokatra ankapobeny. [*firoboroboam-bokatra, fiantraika, fifandroritan-kevitra, fitsaràm-bahoaka, mpamokatra madinika, lavaný, Madagasikara*]

Le cours de la vanille à Madagascar a atteint de nouveaux records. Pour les petits producteurs de vanille du pays, cette nouvelle richesse est venue avec de profonds changements affectifs en grande partie dus à l'explosion des vols de vanille. L'anxiété et la colère qui sévissent dans les communautés productrices de vanille se manifestent de plus en plus par le lynchage des individus mis en cause. Loin d'être aléatoires, ces exécutions extrajudiciaires sont l'expression de formes culturelles, matérielles et affectives localisées qui se manifestent par l'adoption et l'incarnation de la brutalité marchande de manières intimes et souvent contradictoires. Pour les petits producteurs, cette brutalité marchande apparaît comme une tâche émotionnelle et physique indésirable qui s'ajoute dans le cadre de leur travail. Sur le marché de la vanille, comme c'est le cas en général sur les marchés des produits de base, ce sont ceux qui ont le moins à gagner qui sont les plus exposés à la violence et aux préjudices. [*hausse des prix, affect, structure de l'émotion, violence des groupes d'autodéfense, petits producteurs, vanille, Madagascar*]

One night during the summer of 2017, cries of alarm were sounded in a small village in northeastern Madagascar.[1] Hearing the cries, residents left their homes and joined a group of people running down the main street. A young man in his early 20s had been caught stealing vanilla beans from one of the hillside fields lining the village. The group descended on the accused thief and attacked him, throwing stones and waving sticks and machetes. The young man was killed. His family lived in the village, and his mother came to collect his body. The regional police took no action except to publicly issue a stern reprimand.

Such forms of vigilante violence, termed *fitsaram-bahoaka* (people's justice) in Malagasy,[2] are increasingly common in Madagascar's vanilla-producing region of Mananara Nord, where smallholders are struggling to protect their crops amid today's dramatic vanilla boom.[3] After more than a decade, when the international market was depressed and vanilla bean prices dropped to US$20 a kilogram, export prices in 2017 spiked to a record US$600 a kilogram and to nearly this amount at the village level (Wexler 2017).[4] As a result, remarkable amounts of money are being brought to rural areas, where farmers prefer cash transactions to working through banks. Lacking reliable roads, traders are landing small private planes packed full of Malagasy currency on the small Mananara airstrip. Farmers return to their homes with suitcases full of cash. This is an incredible infusion of wealth for any rural community, and especially so in Madagascar, which consistently ranks as one of the world's poorest nations (Mattes, Dulani, and Gyimah-Boadi 2016).

Not surprisingly, farmers are pleased at the upturn in the vanilla market, since it has improved their standard of daily living while providing them with the capital to invest in agricultural land, home construction, private schools, and new vehicles (see Figure 1). Yet the price spike has also brought them new challenges and

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Figure 1. The vanilla boom has brought increased wealth to many rural vanilla-producing areas in Madagascar, as growers invest in construction materials, improved homes, and new trucks. Mananara Nord region, Madagascar, March 28, 2017. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

anxieties. Most notably, vanilla theft is increasing. While there were occasional incidents of theft during the "bust" vanilla market of the previous decade, more people are now taking the risk of stealing vanilla beans. They are also stealing at a much larger scale. About 40 percent of the 75 smallholders I surveyed said they lost vanilla to theft at some time in 2016–17, estimating their losses at 10 to 40 percent of their total crop.

As the threat of vanilla theft looms, currents of anxiety, suspicion, anger, and fear pervade village life, altering how people regard their fields, themselves, and each other. Fittingly, the Malagasy term for worry is *miasa loha*—"to work one's head," and farmers note the emotive labor associated with the price boom. They approach their fields each day wary that they may find some of their beans stolen during the night. People regard their neighbors with suspicion. As one vanilla farmer described to me, rapidly tapping the palm of his hand over his heart as he spoke, "This is how I wake up feeling now—this is how we feel now, always."

For rural communities, Madagascar's spectacular vanilla boom can be read not only as an economic event but also as an affective one. This time of accelerated market change is changing not just economic, social, and political structures but the very "structures of feeling" that shape "the undeniable experience of the present" (Williams 1977, 128). The concept of "structure of feeling" foregrounds how social relationships are brought to life through the personal, active, flexible, and subjective present, embracing the "tensions, shifts, and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion" of lived, not quite articulated experiences (Williams 1977, 129; see also Stewart 2017).

More than merely lending ambient background to market events, such underlying shifts do distinct forms of material and cultural work. In particular, there has been a sharp uptick in mob violence in the region, as local farmers search for a place to "carry their anger" (Rosaldo 1993, 1) against the vanilla thieves who threaten their livelihoods.

Acts of vigilante violence have long been a part of Malagasy culture—in the past, theft from tombs (Gardini 2019) and cattle banditry (Gumba and Randrianarisoa 2018) have motivated mob justice across the island. But with the vanilla boom these acts are occurring with alarming frequency. In a four-month period in 2017, an estimated 25 accused vanilla thieves died in mob attacks in the Mananara region, while the vanilla-producing regions north of Mananara saw more than 100 such killings (Neimark et al. 2019).[5]

The emotional and social landscapes in vanilla-producing regions of Madagascar are rapidly shifting as a result of the vanilla boom and the escalating wave of rural mob killings. My analysis of these shifts is based on long term ethnographic research with vanilla producers in Mananara Nord, where I have worked with smallholders for more than a decade.[6] My fieldwork spans the vanilla "bust" years of the previous decade as well as the more recent boom market. During this research, I spoke with people across rural communities, including those participating in and affected by mob violence, as well as with local political, community, and spiritual leaders. I also discussed the vanilla boom with others in the vanilla industry, including traders, bank directors, and government regulators.

Although mob killings may be thought of as highly unruly, chaotic events, the vigilante violence of Malagasy farmers generally displays an underlying structure and discipline that is deliberately channeled into familiar cultural and social forms. Mob killing events are often marked by speeches, ancestral associations, and guiding relationships of social hierarchy. These punctuated attacks are themselves embedded within prolonged collective and individual emotional cycles, including the escalating anger that precedes violent encounters and the lingering feelings of regret and shame that follow them. Mob violence is thus structured in the moment of the event as well as within broader affective currents of anger and regret, and this temporal "double structure" further shapes and is shaped by broader economic and material cycles. These include the boom-and-bust cycles of the international vanilla commodity market more generally, as well as the material characteristics of the vanilla orchid itself, whose annual rhythm of flowering, fruiting, and harvest marks different times of heightened affect—and vigilance—for smallholders.

Mob violence and its channeling into cultural forms represent one strategy that people turn to in order to reconcile the circulating tensions and shifting structures of feeling brought about by the vanilla boom. These tensions include those between individual gain and collective well-being (Bloch 1998; Lambek 1992; Sodikoff 2012); between the power and agency of state and nonstate actors (Goldstein 2003; Scott 1998, 2017; Weber 1946); and between differing moral codes of violence and retribution (Abrahams 1996; Rosaldo 1993; D. J. Smith 2004). Yet as mob violence increases across rural communities, it exacerbates the tensions it purports to resolve. It also reifies certain forms of power as violence is outsourced to marginalized members of the community while protecting wealthier vanilla farmers and, ultimately, the growth of global commodity enterprises more generally (Duffy 2007; Holmes 2013; Tsing 2005).

As international commodity markets solidify their reach across the globe, Madagascar's vanilla boom illustrates the complex, nuanced, and contradictory ways that violence percolates through commodity relationships. Commodity violence—the triggering of violence to further the production and trade of commodities—manifests in forms both spectacular and slow, visible and hidden. It includes not only physical harm but also emotional and ecological harm. Examining the multiplicity of forms within which commodity violence is articulated, enacted, and embodied situates this violence in a fine-grained cultural perspective, underscoring the considerable physical and emotional costs of the boom market for smallholders.

Indeed, Malagasy farmers describe mob violence, and the emotional weight of living within fraught and insecure markets, as yet another form of unwanted labor that they must endure. As one community leader told me after a vigilante mob in his village killed a young man, "Nobody living here likes these things—nobody wants them to happen. Nobody *wants* to kill."

Market affect and commodity booms

With their vanilla beans extremely valuable and increasingly vulnerable, farmers have more to gain through their agrarian work, but also more to lose. This tension leads to intensified feelings of desire, anxiety, resentment, fear, and anger. Such raw, intense emotions are common among people caught up in dramatic markets—for example, smallholders amid the rubber boom in Southeast Asia suffer anxiety dreams (Dove 2011); cacao farmers, hemmed in by market relations in Sulawesi, Indonesia, feel shame and embarrassment (Li 2014); the young men who test their luck in Indonesia's booming eaglewood market vacillate between "boundless joy" and stressful exhaustion (Groβmann 2017, 1283). In Madagascar, lavish displays of conspicuous consumption in boom markets are common. Such seemingly irrational behavior connects with the twin emotions of exuberance and apprehension that spectacular wealth may bring (Tilghman 2019; Walsh 2003; Zhu 2018).

Times of accelerated market changes can be examined as times of pronounced affective changes in a particular place and time, that is, as changes across its structures of feeling. In Madagascar the dramatic vanilla boom brings into sharp relief how these structures may shift. As new forms of wealth flood Malagasy villages, the vanilla boom is rapidly rearranging the textures and senses of everyday rural life—the quality of clothes people wear, the variety of food they consume, the increased din of motorcycles they hear, the waves of desire and fear they experience.

The affective dimensions of localized economic booms are seldom the focus of analytical attention, and are instead often regarded as reactive responses, not factors that shape larger patterns of commodity relationships. This may be for several reasons, including that notions of "affect" and "emotions" are themselves elusive and have multiple subjective meanings, especially when translating between

diverse cultural and linguistic contexts (Lambek and Solway 2001; Little 2014; Navaro 2017; White 2017).[7] Further, it is challenging to systematically study affect within complex systems and to "articulate in words and conceptualize theoretically what is only felt and sensed" (Skoggard and Waterston 2015, 109). This challenge particularly applies to economic analyses, which traditionally draw from more quantifiable and generalizable models (Tucker et al. 2015). Shifts in structures of feeling may, however, generate observable alterations in cultural formations. This is so because, "although [structures of feeling] are emergent or pre-emergent, they do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" (Williams 1977, 132).

The vanilla boom illustrates the rich potential of stepping *into* the messy spaces of affect in analyzing economic and commodity relationships. In particular, it illustrates the connections among affect, violence, and forms of labor in boom markets. As the threat of vanilla theft increases, people note their and others' frequent feelings of anger, anxiety, and fear. Wealthier households hire guards to watch their fields. Generally nonviolent people increasingly turn to violence to protect their harvests. Many farmers justify this violence by noting that law enforcement officials are indifferent to—or even complicit in—the theft of vanilla from fields. As one person summarized, "The police, the *gendarmes*—they are not doing anything to help us against bandits … we can't trust them." As a result, people feel they must take matters into their own hands and turn to vigilante justice—a contrast reflected by *fitsaram-bahoaka*, the Malagasy term for mobs as representing "people's justice" rather than "justice of the state."

Mananara Nord is far from the only place where relatively marginal people take up the violent work of the state, especially when populations face escalating security concerns (e.g., Abrahams 1996; Goldstein 2003; Krupa 2009; Metz, Mariano, and García 2010; D. J. Smith 2004). As with vanilla, violence is reported across a range of high-value commodity markets, including diamonds (Hoffman 2011; Katsaura 2010), gold and minerals (Idrobo, Mejia, and Tribin 2014; Kirsch 2010; Rustad, Østby, and Nordås 2016), and cacao (Dhariwal 2012). The case of the vanilla boom in Madagascar presents both similarities to and differences from other cases of commodity violence, illuminating the culturally distinct and socially nuanced ways that such violence is enacted, articulated, and embodied.

Vanilla production and trade

Acts of vigilante justice against vanilla thieves are situated within the historical complexities of vanilla production and trade in the Mananara region. This region includes the main town of Mananara Nord, as well as the surrounding rural villages and districts. The town of Mananara Nord has about 80,000 residents, transportation hubs, large shops, government offices, a bank, and many commodity operators. The predominant ethnic group in the region is the Northern Betsimisaraka. Although the farmers in this region vary in resources and landownership, the average rural household owns about a quarter hectare to one hectare of land, usually divided into several small parcels. Smallholders often cultivate both subsistence crops, including rice and tubers, and market crops, including coffee, cloves, and vanilla (Osterhoudt 2017).

Farmers in Mananara Nord have been cultivating vanilla for nearly 100 years. A species of orchid, vanilla is an extremely labor-intensive crop, requiring annual cycles of hand pollination, careful pruning, and continual environmental monitoring (Correll 1953; see Figure 2). Each successfully pollinated flower will produce one vanilla bean, which ripens on the vine from May to August. After harvest, farmers may sell their raw vanilla beans to collectors or continue sun-curing them for several additional months. Curing requires considerable time and skill, and finished vanilla beans are graded according to their length, color, smell, and moisture content. Generally, both men and women perform the agricultural work associated with vanilla, working together to weed, pollinate, and tend to vines.

Mananara's farmers cultivate most of their vanilla in hillside fields that include a diversity of native and nonnative species (Osterhoudt 2017). At first glance, these landscapes appear unruly. Unlike the vanilla plantations found to the north, where vanilla is largely cultivated in straight rows, most farmers in Mananara distribute their vines in more chaotic patterns within their managed forest systems (see Figure 3). The less legible nature of smallholders' vanilla fields connects to the region's historical relationship to the French colonial state, which ruled in Madagascar from 1896 to 1960. The French colonial administration attempted to control the valuable trade in vanilla beans by concentrating production in northeastern Madagascar, in a region today known as the Vanilla Triangle (Laney 2002, 705). Mananara Nord falls outside this region, and during certain periods of French rule the colonial government prohibited Mananara smallholders from growing vanilla beans. Many farmers did so anyway, learning cultivation techniques by working on vanilla plantations in the North and returning home with a few "borrowed" vines, which they integrated into their managed forests (Osterhoudt 2017). Hidden in hillside fields, the vines were difficult for colonial agricultural agents to spot when they periodically raided Mananara to confiscate illegally cultivated vanilla.

Currently, however, the deliberate illegibility and relative remoteness of smallholders' vanilla fields in this region make them especially good targets for thieves. Farmers often own several managed forest parcels, each in a different location surrounding the village. For any given field, vanilla

Figure 2. Freshly picked vanilla beans. During harvest season, which begins in June, farmers are especially worried about the theft of vanilla beans from their fields. Mananara Nord region, Madagascar, August 13, 2010. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

vines may be loosely dispersed across a relatively large area. This makes it difficult for vanilla farmers to guard all their fields at the same time. As vanilla prices reach record highs and vanilla vines remain unguarded, there is great temptation for people to steal. As a development worker in Madagascar said during the 2017 season, "It is as if the vines were waving hundred-dollar bills, just there for the taking."

Indeed, in 2016 and 2017 rural farmers saw a dramatic surge in nighttime vanilla thefts in the months leading up to the harvest season. According to local accounts, vanilla thieves are nearly always male and often younger than 30.[8] Who may be a vanilla thief is a topic of constant speculation in villages, as people whisper about who has been acting strangely or perhaps buying large amounts of cell phone credit from local stores (presumably to coordinate with buyers in town for stolen vanilla beans).

People often initially told me the thieves came from outside the village, or even from other regions of Madagascar. But when I spoke with them in more detail, it became apparent that many of the young vanilla bandits who were caught, and then killed, lived in or near the village where they were apprehended. People acknowledged that local thieves had certain advantages. Being local to an area, they would be more familiar with the surrounding terrain and might know which farmers were out of town on a given evening. Often, people said, these younger men were commissioned by more powerful people based in Mananara to steal vanilla, including members of the police. Some young people were caught stealing vanilla from elder members of their own families, which especially disturbed many people I spoke to, including one middle-aged farmer who described a recent theft in his village:

> The person was [prominent village resident]'s nephew—and there he was taking vanilla from his own family! That land would be his someday. I don't understand. He had no reason to steal. He could grow vanilla, but no—he steals it. I don't understand.

In this case, the thief was spotted but managed to escape. The farmer I spoke with said the boy would be unable to return to the village for at least five years or risk being killed.

The frustrations surrounding vanilla theft escalate when situated within the broader boom-and-bust dynamics of the vanilla market. The previous decade marked a

Figure 3. Growers cultivate vanilla vines in diversified agroforestry landscapes that include rice, cassava, mangoes, lychees, coconuts, and cloves. Tucked inside managed forests, vanilla vines are difficult to guard against theft. Mananara Nord region, Madagascar, November 1, 2010. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

prolonged vanilla bust, and during these years many Mananara households struggled to secure their basic needs. In tandem with the vanilla market depression, families also faced severe cyclones, political uncertainty, the rising cost of staple goods, and waves of illegal rosewood harvesting in nearby forests (Anonymous 2018; Schuurman and Lowry 2009; T. Smith 2009; Waeber and Wilmé 2013). During this time, many vanilla farmers in Madagascar and throughout the world stopped caring for their crops—simply put, it wasn't worth the effort (Brown 2009). In Mananara, however, smallholders largely maintained their vanilla crop in good working order (Osterhoudt 2017). When I spoke with them about this decision, they told me they remembered the previous vanilla price spike in the late 1990s and were betting that these prices would return in due time.

With vanilla prices now at record highs, it seems farmers' patience has been rewarded. They now, however, face a new challenge: protecting their vanilla beans from thieves. And as they struggle to protect their harvests, mob violence events are occurring with increasing frequency.

Structuring a mob

The image of a mob brings to mind unruly and irrational behavior. Yet such ideas of the "illogical masses" are problematic, in part because the underlying combination of social structures and state relationships makes violent resistance seem a logical choice for marginalized groups, particularly if they have few other options (Scott 1977; D. J. Smith 2004; Thompson 1971). Alongside the social and economic conditions that give rise to mob violence are the emotional and affective ones (Rosaldo 1993).

While the mob violence surrounding vanilla theft in the villages of Mananara Nord may at first appear chaotic, these events follow particular structures and forms. A mob incident typically occurs when a thief is caught stealing vanilla beans at night. The thief may be spotted in a variety of ways: by farmers sleeping in their fields, by private guards hired to protect the vanilla vines of wealthier families, or by members of the communal patrols organized by neighborhood councils, which circulate through the village streets and fields at night. If any of these groups spot a thief, they

alert the town by shouting. They will then attempt to apprehend the thief, restraining and bringing him to town.

Others in the village who hear the commotion will leave their homes and join the group. Usually, most people who join these mobs are younger male members of the community. Mob participants may or may not own their own vanilla, and the mob may include the landowner whom the thief stole from, but not always. Once the group is formed, they encircle the accused thief and wave sticks, stones, and machetes at him. The mob will beat and stone the suspect, usually until death.

As people confront the thief, according to a farmer who gave me a detailed account, they take turns shouting phrases at him. After each phrase, the person shouting strikes the thief with a rock, a stick, or a machete. As the farmer repeated some examples of the phrases to me, he punctuated each one by hitting his fist sharply on a wooden table to represent the blow:

> *Ianao foana no mahatonga izahay mijôño!* [*Bam!*]
>
> *Ianao foana no mahatonga izahay tsy matory amin'ny vadinay!* [*Bam!*]
>
> *Ianao foana no mahatonga izahay tsy mandry alina!* [*Bam!*]
>
> *Ianao foana no mahatonga izahay lany moka isan'andro!* [*Bam!*]
>
> *Ianao foana no mahatonga izahay sahirana!* [*Bam!*]
>
> Because you always come here, we remain alone, out in our fields! [*Bam!*]
>
> Because you always come here, we do not sleep with our spouses! [*Bam!*]
>
> Because you always come here, we never sleep at night! [*Bam!*]
>
> Because you always come here, we are covered with mosquitoes every day! [*Bam!*]
>
> Because you always come here, we suffer! [*Bam!*]

This verbal structuring of violence appears nearly ritualistic. The phrases follow Malagasy rhetorical traditions, including repeated phrasing, alternating speakers, and framing statements as the collective "we" to cultivate a sense of solidarity (Bloch 1998). These Malagasy linguistic and rhetorical traditions continue to structure much political speech and public life in Madagascar today (Jackson 2008; Wells 2018), including in Mananara Nord, where formalized speeches mark many culturally significant events, such as burials and ancestral ceremonies (Osterhoudt 2017).

The participants of any given mob are also not as random as they may appear. For instance, people living together in a household will often decide among themselves in advance who—if anyone—from the family will participate in mobs if a call is sent out through the village.[9] During this planning, female members of the household often use their influence to decide; this negotiation is an avenue for women to influence the structuring of vigilante justice events, even though they themselves seldom take part in mob violence.

There is thus an underlying structuring of how acts of vigilante justice unfold within the moment, as they are shaped along familiar cultural and rhetorical forms. Mob events are also situated within longer individual and collective emotional cycles, as people confront the vanilla boom's shifting structures of feeling and the tensions they bring. As elaborated below, these tensions include those between anger and harmony, guilt and repentance, and the individual and the collective. Enacting "people's justice" events may temporarily relieve the escalating tensions of everyday life in the vanilla boom, but they ultimately further complicate the tensions they purport to resolve, leaving behind lingering traces of violence, guilt, and remorse.

Harmony | anger

Structures of feeling are said to emerge as "pre-formations" that cumulatively shift the prevailing tenor and "style" of a time—of dress, of literature, of speech, or of art (Williams 1977, 131). During the vanilla boom, one such shift I observed was the growing expression of anger and resentment among people I spoke with. The underlying mood, compared with previous years of fieldwork in the region, was palpably tense. Many others I spoke with also noted the prevalence of anger in daily life. As explained by Justine, a village leader living in the Mananara region,

> People here are very angry [*vingitra*]—they are upset at thieves stealing vanilla. […] They feel like they are at war, in a battle. […] If a farmer goes to the fields and vanilla is lost [*very*], they are angry, very angry [*tezitra be*].[10]

While the vanilla boom brought to the forefront such fraught emotions, tensions had been accumulating in the region for some time. After 10 difficult years of market depression (Osterhoudt 2017), vanilla theft provokes not only anxiety over lost income but also waves of accumulated resentment and anger: against vanilla thieves, against the government officials who do not look after farmers' interests, and against the foreign traders who profited for so long from the low vanilla prices given to farmers.

A pastor of a local Catholic Church also noted that he was "seeing anger everywhere I look." Connecting this anger with promoting unhealthy emotional and physical states in villagers, he told his congregants one Sunday,

> Anger is bad for us—people are very angry [*tezitra*] now … they look at each other with hearts that are not

> clear [*fô tsy mazava*]. Even the doctors say to you, 'Your blood pressure is getting too high [*miakatra latension*]!' He tells you to eat less salt. But it is being angry that is doing this to you. […] This anger hurts your body [and] it hurts your soul [*fanahy*].

The pastor's remarks reflect the tensions between rising expressions of anger and the broader tenets of Malagasy community life, which in general discourage direct and public expression of strong emotions. People may instead express emotions through intermediaries, proverbs, and other indirect mechanisms. In part, the proclivity toward nonconfrontation is meant to avoid the attention and displeasure of the ancestors, who may be particularly drawn to instances of discord (Bloch 1985, 1998; Keller 2015). These orientations toward community and ancestral harmony continue to be enacted today by many in the Mananara region. In particular, the social ideal of collective harmony is connected to the Betsimisaraka concept of *fihavanaña*. Fihavanaña represents the "ideal of familial solidarity" as expressed through reciprocal kinship relationships that include both the living and deceased members of a family (Sodikoff 2004, 389; see also Sodikoff 2012). Although conflicts inevitably arise, people generally try to minimize outward expressions of anger.

Along with the increase in expressions of anger, another change in the region during the vanilla boom is the marked frequency of mob attacks. In speaking of this change, people primarily connect the rise in local violence with farmers' pragmatic concern for safeguarding their economic resources, especially since they do not trust the local police or courts to deter vanilla theft. Farmers explain that they must protect the value of their crop, and vigilante violence emerges as one strategy to combat theft. Yet, as Rosaldo (1993, 4) notes in his work on headhunting in the Philippines, mere reason alone will not cause one to kill, or "inspire any man to take another man's life." While participation in vigilante groups is motivated by economic and pragmatic concerns, there is an affective dynamic to the violence as well, as circulating anger turns to rage (Goldstein 2003).

Even as "people's justice" events draw from circulating emotions, they may potentially help manage such affect. Indeed, organized violence in other regions of Madagascar has been described as playing a "regulatory" role for channeling feelings of aggression experienced by young males (Bloch 1985). In the Mananara region, people recall past instances of vigilante justice against vanilla and clove thieves as a sign of solidarity against those who would harm their community. Similarly, in Nigeria, the urban vigilantes known as the Bakassi Boys were often regarded as local heroes who protected people where the state could not (D. J. Smith 2004). Mob violence in this context emerged as a form of pointed, almost celebratory resistance, allowing people to temporarily enjoy a feeling of power and solidarity.

Yet, while "people's justice" is not new to the Mananara region, the current pace and scale of mob events represents a significant shift in the area's relationship to violence. With the vanilla boom, mob killings are neither occasional nor potentially cathartic; rather they are relatively frequent and penetrate the everyday experiences and consciousness of smallholders. People go to sleep wondering if they will be called to confront a thief during the night; they wake up and immediately ask their neighbors if any bandits were killed in nearby villages the night before. Each day they must walk by the homes of people whose children or grandchildren were killed by local mobs. Before people can emotionally recover from one violent event, another one quickly follows.

The ubiquitous presence of violence does not ultimately manage or dampen local affective reactions, but it complicates and intensifies them. Such complications and contradictions were described to me by a farmer as I talked with him about the uptick in mob violence in his community. I asked him how he thought people participating in a mob felt afterward, once they had killed someone.

"Right after," he said, "people feel good. They feel calm. They feel clear."

It is afterward, he said, that the guilt comes.

Guilt | reconciliation

As mob killings channel collective anger, they leave unsettling feelings of guilt in their wake. In general, it is difficult for people to talk about the mob violence in their communities. Many are deeply conflicted over these killings, and express the difficulty in balancing the need to be vigilante with the desire to be moral. When people do talk to me about the string of violence in their rural communities, it is with hesitation.[11]

People have developed a variety of ways to navigate the guilt of participating in vigilante violence. From a legal point of view, mob violence diffuses blame across an essentially anonymous group. If a mob kills someone, it is difficult to know who struck the fatal blow and would thus be legally culpable for the murder. Without a single perpetrator, police are left with little room to act unless they take the extreme action of arresting everyone in the group (Goldstein 2003). When I spoke with people in villages where vigilante killings had occurred, they were careful to emphasize this point—that nobody knew, or cared to know, who had struck the fatal blow. Guilt is thus borne by the collective body.

Farmers also say vanilla bandits understand the possible repercussions of their actions but steal anyway, because they "are not afraid to die." Another person told me that "the vanilla thieves who get caught are the ones who don't know how to steal [*tsy mahay mangalatra*]." Ultimately, such framings place the burden of moral responsibility not

on the mobs but on the victims of violence, who knowingly set in motion a course of events that could end in their own murder.

To reconcile the moral conflict of vigilante violence, many people turn to Christian and ancestral frameworks. Most rural villages near Mananara have a Catholic church and an FJKM church (a Malagasy Protestant church loosely parallel to the Presbyterian Church), along with growing numbers of evangelical and Mormon congregations. While many practice Christianity within ancestral frameworks, others are adopting stricter Christian views and practices. Many members and leaders of Christian churches in vanilla-producing villages expressed concerns over the rise in mob killings. As one woman involved in the FJKM church explained,

> People who pray [*mivavaka*]—we know that the Bible says not to kill and that killing is wrong. But people are angry, and it is wrong to steal vanilla. […] Without vanilla, here, we can't give ourselves a good life.

During their services Catholic and Protestant churches often directly address the issue of vanilla theft and vigilante violence. At one Catholic service I attended, a person asked God to protect the community's vanilla beans from theft. At another service, the pastor led the congregation in a prayer directed at the vanilla bandits themselves, imploring them to choose a moral life over one of crime. He then extolled the congregation not to participate in mob violence but to bring suspected thieves to the authorities instead. The scripture is clear, he said: killing is wrong. Indeed, many Christian residents of villages told me they did not partake in the vigilante mobs; if they heard the nighttime alarm, they chose to stay in their homes.

Ultimately, it is the ancestral frameworks that most effectively help people navigate the affective politics of violence. Several people, both Christian and non-Christian, noted that vigilante mobs were better suited for those who adhered to more traditional Malagasy ancestral worldviews rather than those who attended Christian church services. This was so, they said, because the traditional Malagasy framework takes a more ambiguous view of life and death than Christianity does. As one person explained,

> For the [Christian] God, killing is always wrong … but for ancestor customs [*fomban-drazana*], the ancestors can understand that it may be OK—it depends. Or if people do something wrong [*tsy mety*], they can perform a rite [*tsaboraha*] and the ancestors will understand, they will probably forgive them.

Such comments reflect the defining characteristics of ancestors, who are known to feel both anger and compassion (Cole and Middleton 2001; Lambek 2003). Ancestors are especially likely to show understanding when they observe that living members of the community break cultural or moral norms to maintain a degree of community autonomy in the face of outside appropriation of land or resources (Gezon 1999; Keller 2015; Sodikoff 2012). Vigilante violence may be considered under this category of justifiable actions in the view of ancestors, as it aims to protect smallholders' resources—and their way of life.

The connections between mob violence and ancestral realms are also reflected by the structure of mob violence. As noted previously, the content and form of the phrases people yell during their attacks closely follow the rhetorical devices that mark arts of *kabary* speechmaking, which people employ on occasions when ancestors are likely to be present (Bloch 1998; Cole 2001; Osterhoudt 2018). Through such formulaic phrasing, acts of collective violence take on a ritualistic texture. This shift toward ritual, in turn, is a way to show respect to any potential ancestors who may be drawn to instances of discord, including acts of mob violence (Bloch 1998; Keller 2015).

Along with the capacity to forgive acts of mob violence, ancestral worldviews offer another important resource to Malagasy communities: a path toward reconciliation between the person caught stealing vanilla and their ancestral lineage, and between this lineage and the broader community. People killed as vanilla thieves are still given traditional burials by their families, although these ceremonies will often be sparsely attended. Through the ritual of burial, the accused thief can join the ancestral afterlife, thus restoring in death the "moral order" severed through mob violence (Lambek and Solway 2001, 65; see also Bloch 1998; Cole 2001; Regnier 2019). Indeed, when I told people in one village that I had heard a rumor that a thief killed in their town was left on the road for several days, preventing the family from recovering the body to perform a burial, they were visibly horrified. Such an action, they told me, would cross the line of morally accepted behavior.

In such ways, both the acts of mob violence and the forgiveness for them become situated within broader ancestral relationships. This positioning places the bulk of the emotional labor, and the physical risks, of vigilante mobs onto those members of the community who are most closely aligned with ancestral beliefs. Often, these people are more likely to be on the economic margins of rural communities, and they are less likely to have large vanilla holdings themselves (Osterhoudt 2018). Local forms of mob violence thus reflect Smith's (2004, 446) observation that, while "public support for vigilantism partly transcends social and cultural cleavages, it also builds upon them" (see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). This, in turn, echoes Williams's (1977, 134) assertion that there exists a "complex relation of differentiated structures of feeling to differentiated [economic] classes." With vanilla, as with market commodity relationships more generally, those with the least to gain are

disproportionately exposed to violence and harm (Calvão 2016; Holmes 2013).

Collective | individual

In addition to the escalating anxiety, anger, and guilt in response to the vanilla boom, tensions have also arisen regarding the "correct" way to balance collective well-being with individual gain. As described above, Northern Betsimisaraka communities generally support the idea of *fihavanaña*, which includes such a balancing. During the vanilla bust, *fihavanaña* was enacted in a variety of ways. For example, local farmers often organized into associations, or *fikambananas*, that exchanged information, shared materials, and maintained reciprocal labor arrangements.

At first, organizing violence into "people's justice" mobs appears consistent with the tenets of *fihavanaña*. Forming patrols, even those that transition into mobs, reinforces certain traditions of collective behavior, albeit toward violent ends. Indeed, farmers I had previously seen working together to weed fields or obtain organic certification were now joining forces to kill suspected vanilla thieves during the night.

Yet there are also contradictions and tensions in mobilizing collective mob violence against vanilla thieves. Generally, across Madagascar the offenses that justify mob violence are seen to fundamentally threaten the moral or social fabric of communities, or to target particularly vulnerable groups. These crimes may include stealing bones from ancestral tombs (Gardini 2019), sexually exploiting minors (Samuel 2013), or stealing cattle from pastoral communities (Gumba and Randrianarisoa 2018). Using violence in this way also makes it more likely that participants in the mob will gain ancestral forgiveness.

Killing people to protect vanilla, however, strains these core principles of "people's justice." Vanilla is a colonial export crop, cultivated for income, and farming vanilla is considered primarily an individualistic pursuit (Osterhoudt 2017). Further, those at greatest risk from vanilla bandits are not the more vulnerable members of the community but the wealthier ones who have greater vanilla holdings. Mobilizing violence to protect vanilla could therefore be interpreted as using force primarily to protect the wealth of the privileged. This framing, however, runs counter to the usual Malagasy narratives justifying mob violence as safeguarding the collective good.

In justifying mob violence against vanilla thieves, then, people take pains to articulate vanilla theft as representing a collective—not individual—offense. For example, vanilla thieves are described as antisocial individuals who partner with "outsiders" and disrupt collective well-being. Proverbs condemning those who profit dishonestly from the work of others punctuate everyday conversations, including "Whether they plant or steal, both become full" and "One works the rice, and another eats it." In structuring narratives this way, vanilla thieves are placed outside the protection of the collective, as the character of the "vanilla thief" becomes abstracted, dehumanized, and gradually framed as bodies able to be killed (Agamben 1998).

Local narratives of mob violence also emphasize how killing vanilla bandits safeguards the collective good. For example, farmers point out that if other villages became known for having vigilante groups, while their village does not, this could draw more thieves to their own community's vanilla fields. In expressing their anger over vanilla theft, people underscore the meaning of land to the Betsimisaraka, as well as the significant labor invested in vanilla cultivation. Connecting vanilla theft with broader relationships of land and agrarian labor foregrounds how vanilla cultivation connects to the overarching values, heritage, and identities embedded in landscapes (Besky 2017; Keller 2015; Osterhoudt 2017; Tsing 2015). In such ways, vigilante justice is described not as protecting income but as defending the collective, rural Malagasy way of life (Neimark et al. 2019).

Examining the phrases uttered by the members of the mob as they attack a suspect also illustrates the focus on collective well-being rather than individual economic gain. Notably, this litany of rage directed at the suspected thief does not explicitly include the loss of wealth or property that vanilla thefts cause. Instead, the enraged farmers point to how vanilla theft is changing their collective everyday life for the worse—in the fabric and texture of the community's structures of feeling. Sleeping in the forest, without their spouse, covered in bites, lonely and suffering—such shifts in experience erode the fundamental aspects of the "good life" that people cherish (see Figure 4). Indeed, people often refer to bandits stealing "our" vanilla, even if the person speaking does not, in fact, personally cultivate any vanilla.

This outward show of collective solidarity, however, does not always withstand the more affective responses that people experience in the aftermath of violence. Some express their doubts that vigilante justice ultimately safeguards the collective good. These doubts especially linger when the killed person is local to the community and thus more apt to regain the humanity temporarily erased through violence. For example, one afternoon I was walking with Tovo, a vanilla farmer, through his village, when he pointed out to me a small house along the side of the main road. He told me this house was where there used to live a young man killed by a local vigilante mob. This mob included members of Tovo's own extended family. The victim's mother still lives there, he said, and she is extremely upset that local authorities won't punish the people in the village who killed her son.

Figure 4. A young farmer on his way to sleep in his vanilla field. As vanilla theft increases, many people spend the night out in their fields to keep watch over their vines. Mananara Nord region, Madagascar, March 29, 2017. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

"What do you think?" I asked him.

He was quiet for a moment, and then answered, "I think she is right."

The tensions inherent in two oranges

> You can throw two oranges up into the air, but you can only catch one.
>
> Malagasy proverb

Smallholders in the Mananara region have been waiting for this vanilla boom for a long time. Indeed, it has noticeably improved the material lives of many households. It has also led to darker, pervasive affective states. I keep a Malagasy vocabulary notebook with me—one I've added to over the course of a decade of research in Madagascar—and these are the translations of some of the new words I wrote down during my most recent visits to vanilla-producing villages: "to have a pounding heart"; "to wake up in a sweat"; "to be jumpy"; "to be vigilant"; "to retaliate"; "to kill as a mob"; "to feel guilty"; "to feel alone"; "to repent."

Madagascar's vanilla boom illustrates how market events bring not only economic but also affective changes to communities. The changing affective landscape of the vanilla boom brings to the surface the "internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension" (Williams 1977, 132), that give rise to the structures of feelings across communities. Shifts in structures of feelings are often first observed across the particular cultural forms that more easily absorb affective impressions—such as art, literature, and language. In the Mananara region, agrarian landscapes also coalesce the affective shifts brought by the vanilla boom. Farmers look at ripening vanilla beans with anxiety rather than anticipation. They dread going to sleep out in their fields, plagued by mosquitoes and wary of thieves.

One person noted that the tensions intensified by the vanilla boom even changed people's bodily comportment as they moved through agrarian landscapes:

> Before, people walked around like this [head up, shoulders back, eyes forward]. Now they walk around like this [head down, shoulder hunched, eyes darting from side to side]. Farmers used to be happy going to their

fields, taking care of vanilla. Now, when they work in their fields, they are feeling scared.

Increasingly, people channel their anxiety and anger into "people's justice" events targeted at young men suspected of vanilla theft. Being implicated directly or indirectly in acts of mob violence emerges as a form of physical, economic, and emotional labor. To secure their livelihoods, already-overextended people must supplement the work of vanilla cultivation with additional forms of investment. They spend sleepless nights out in fields; they volunteer for community watch patrols; they purchase flashlights and blankets; they become enveloped in continuous emotive states of stress, anger, and fear.

The case of the vanilla boom illustrates the intersecting forms of commodity violence that permeate the production and trade of global resources. This widespread commodity violence includes, among other abuses, the violent excess of militias (Hoffman 2011; Le Billon 2008), the gendered harassment of workers (Barndt 2007; Estabrook 2011; Sciurba and Palumbo 2018), the detrimental health and environmental effects of toxic chemicals and pollution (Bertomeu-Sánchez 2019; Flachs 2019; Jacka 2018; Shattuck 2019), and the mobilization of forced child labor (Neumayer and de Soysa 2005; Ramos 2018). Such cases reflect the entrenched structural relationships of violence in global economic markets, as the bodies of laborers are exploited and dehumanized within systems that concentrate wealth and power in particular socioeconomic groups (Calvão 2016; Holmes 2013).

Commodity violence does not only act across macrolevels of economic and political structures, but reaches into the intimate realms of emotional states. Aspiration, anxiety, fear, exhaustion: these are not merely side effects of commodity markets but fundamental drivers of the continued circulation of commodities. These emotions generate particular forms of work and commodity value, as the allure of wealth entices people to enter into disruptive, and potentially violent, relationships of trade.

The risks and harm connected to commodity violence are not distributed equally across groups. In Madagascar, for example, the work of violence is disproportionately outsourced to certain demographics—often those groups already on the social and economic margins of the community (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; White 2017). Their emotive, physical, and violent work ultimately benefits wealthier actors within commodity industries, who profit as long as commodities are traded. In such ways, smallholder violence, and the youth who are killed, become absorbed into the global vanilla market, with an annual value of nearly $1 billion. Thus, commodity violence at the local level of production can partially be understood as farmers' seizing a degree of agency against an ineffective state (Weber 1946). But this agency is significantly constrained by the systemic relationships of power and violence that comprise the workings of international commodity enterprises (Duffy 2007; Tsing 2005; Zhu 2018).

While dramatic market events such as commodity booms may intensify emotions and increase incidences of violence, they do not create them. Rather, violence is present during "normal" markets as well, though in more subtle forms. While the vanilla bust market did not spark many mob violence events, it led to slower forms of violence: poor nutrition, clearing of forests, the inability to provide children with health care. Similarly, as the vanilla boom market fades, it leaves slower, lingering forms of violence in its wake. Facing the traces of violence in their communities, people must reconsider the intimate relationships they foster with their neighbors, with their faith, with their land, and with their own understandings of self. The material benefits of the boom market are great, but so are the costs.

These trade-offs are no secret to Malagasy farmers, who readily acknowledge that the two oranges of high vanilla prices and stark emotive reckonings are thrown into the air together. Yet racing hearts or no, guilty conscience or not, almost every farmer I spoke with agreed that higher vanilla prices are better. And, they told me, they hope that next year the prices go even higher.

Notes

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1. Throughout the discussion I have left identifying ethnographic details deliberately vague and have changed all names to protect the identities of participants.
2. Malagasy to English translations are made by the author.
3. Definitions of vigilantism are contested. I adopt the following broad definition: "the collective use or threat of extra-legal violence in response to an alleged criminal act" (Moncada 2017, 403).
4. There are various causes attributed to the boom, including growing demand, crop damage from cyclones, continued market deregulation, and money laundering connected to Madagascar's illegal rosewood trade (Brown 2009; Cadot, Dutoit, and de Melo 2006; Zhu 2018).
5. Most rural districts do not collect official statistics on the frequency of mob violence or the number of victims. I obtained estimates through speaking with government officials, residents, and members of law enforcement in the region.

6. These methods include participant observation, semi-structured interviews with people across the vanilla trade network, archival work in local, regional, and international archives, and oral history interviews. During fieldwork in 2017–18, I distributed brief surveys on vanilla production and theft ($N = 75$).

7. While recognizing the blurred boundaries between experiences of affect and emotion, in this account I generally consider emotion to be more discrete, individualized responses and affect to be an aggregation of such emotions considered over time.

8. I have heard of one instance in which a mob caught a vanilla thief who was a young woman. In this case, the mob did not kill her but brought her to authorities in Mananara.

9. I similarly thought about what I would do if a mob call occurred during my fieldwork, and decided I would not participate in mob events.

10. Stolen items are often referred to as "lost" (*very*).

11. Although I have worked in these regions for over a decade, some of this hesitation in talking to me about mob violence could result from my status as an outsider to the community.

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