

## Fragments of an Indian Ocean Life: Aristide Corroller Between Islands and Empires

On December 6, 1799, a boy named Aristide was born at Plaine Saint-Pierre, a coastal region of Île de France not far from its principal city of Port-Louis.<sup>1</sup> At the time Île de France was a small island colony of the southwest Indian Ocean, part of France's imperial portfolio since 1721. Aristide's birth and childhood were eventually framed in the French colonies by the Saint-Domingue slave rebellion and by the trying global wars that followed, quickly spilling over into the Indian Ocean. These conflicts disrupted metropolitan and colonial economies in the years surrounding Aristide's birth, but Île de France and neighboring Île Bourbon—which never freed their slaves as had been mandated by the French National Convention in February 1794—were minimally affected and poised for economic growth by the turn of the new century.<sup>2</sup>

During the French Wars, colonial economic life in the Indian Ocean was sustained by the commercial activities of neutral nations, that of U.S. merchants in particular.<sup>3</sup> The site of France's most important naval base in the Indian Ocean, Île de France and its economy relied especially on their orientation to the sea and on the servicing of passing ships. The island benefitted after the global conflicts by demand anew for colonial commodities in Europe, but its two ports and the skilled labor associated with them sustained a dual economy of urban maritime and rural plantation character. When in 1825 Britain offered Mauritius a preferential tariff on sugar, the plantation sector of the island skyrocketed, but just as the supply of slaves was drying up.<sup>4</sup> (Île de France became the British colony of Mauritius in 1810, a status confirmed by the Treaty of Paris four years later; nearby Île Bourbon remained in French hands.) Minimal disruption in the Mascarenes during the Wars, the islands' especially strong maritime orientation, and the nineteenth-century heyday of their economies differentiated the Indian Ocean islands from those of France's Caribbean possessions in a number of ways.<sup>5</sup>

There were other significant differences between France's Caribbean and Indian Ocean colonies. These divergences were reflected in the economies of

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the islands as well as in their social structures and oceanic connections. The newborn Aristide's story speaks to the uniqueness of the western Indian Ocean as well as to the ways in which it was similar to the Caribbean. In this chapter I survey Aristide's life for the insights it offers into the following deeply entangled themes of western Indian Ocean history: family strategies in a maritime world, the functions of genealogy, the aspirations of mixed-race peoples in colonial societies, the motivations and self-presentation of Franco-Malagasy men, the careers of multilingual middlemen straddling diverse polities, empire-building projects in the region, idiosyncratic circuits of colonial knowledge, and interconnections among administrators of Indian Ocean empire.

Aristide's family exemplified a distinctively southwest Indian Ocean pattern of settlement, one that entwined the free-settler, trade, and maritime diasporas of both France and Madagascar. Aristide's father, Pierre-Vincent Corroller, was an immigrant to Île de France from the port of Lorient, the French base of the *Compagnie des Indes orientales* (hereafter the *Compagnie*) in southern Brittany. Pierre-Vincent arrived in the Indian Ocean as a teenager in 1784 some fifteen years preceding Aristide's birth. Listed in the 1805 census of Île de France as an urban goldsmith, Pierre-Vincent owned six slaves. He was also engaged in the interisland trade of the southwest Indian Ocean, notably that to and from the "Big Island" of Madagascar. The Big Island was also the provenance of two of his household slaves—and of his wife. As a middling operator in that commerce Pierre-Vincent created a life for himself in the maritime and administrative city of Port-Louis.<sup>6</sup> His two professions, merchant and jeweler, both consumed and generated capital; they were thus probably dynamically related to each other. Jewelers and merchants are typically also moneylenders. Both professions lend themselves well to urban, seaport settings.

Pierre-Vincent Corroller encountered Aristide's mother in the modestly sized Franco-Malagasy community of Port-Louis city. Marie-Thérèse Catherine was a *citoyenne de couleur* (a mixed-race female citizen) in her early twenties when she gave birth to Aristide. She herself was born at Fort-Dauphin, in southeast Madagascar, in 1776, but had lived most of her life in Île de France. Fort-Dauphin and its surrounding region experienced a long, intimate, and sometimes violent relationship with the French empire. The *Compagnie* established its first Indian Ocean colony there in 1642. That experiment failed after the mass murder of European colonists more than thirty years later, in August 1674; in despair the *Compagnie* turned its sights elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> But merchants based both at the colonial islands and in Madagascar continued to connect Fort-Dauphin and other parts of the Big Island's heavily populated east coast with Île Bourbon and, after 1721, Île de France. Mercantile activities in the region facilitated the interisland flow of free Malagasy merchants and wives, food, and the enslaved labor that so animated colonial economies.

Marie-Thérèse Catherine immigrated to Île de France in 1778 from Fort-Dauphin as a two-year-old in the company of her Malagasy-born mother, Geneviève Hova, together with four of her brothers: Rasambe, Fisatra, Leroy, and Jean-René (see the family tree). Rasambe and Fisatra were Marie-Thérèse Catherine's half-brothers fathered by a Malagasy man named Rabefanaive from Fort-Dauphin. Rabefanaive sprang from one of the ruling families of the region surrounding Fort-Dauphin (or Anosy) known as the Raondriana. His ancestor

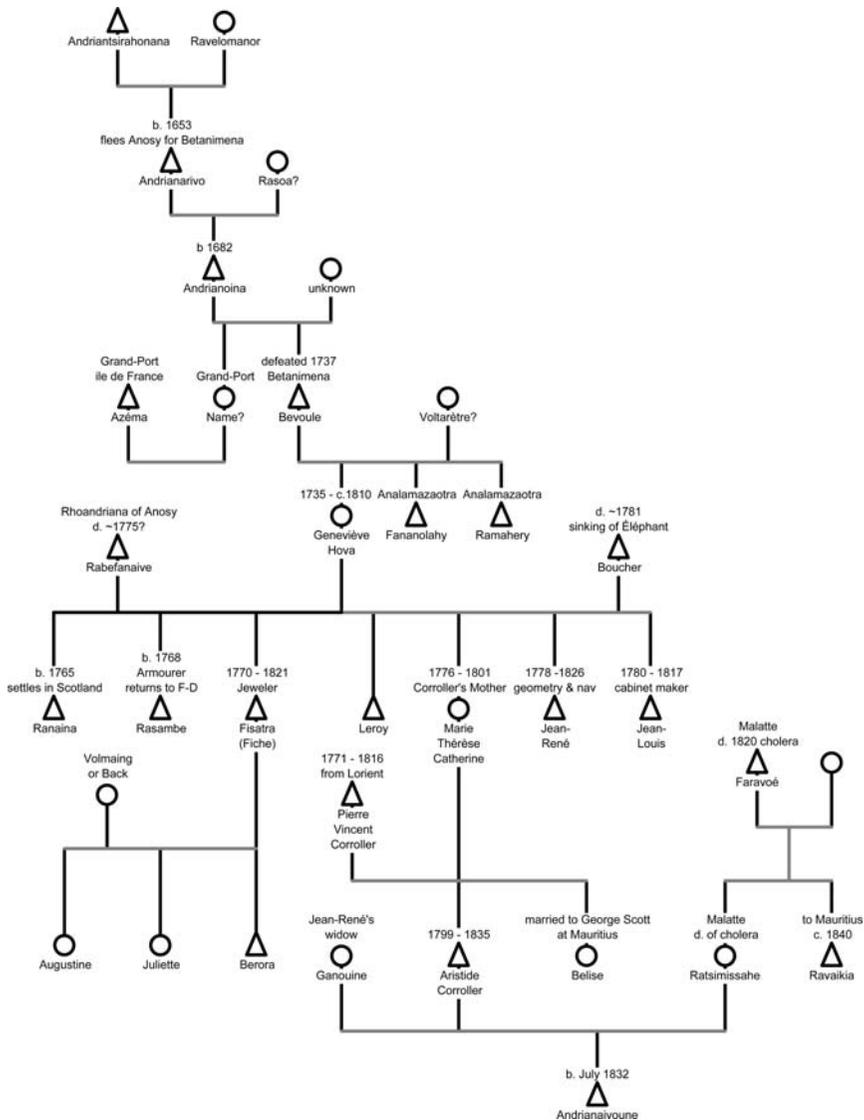
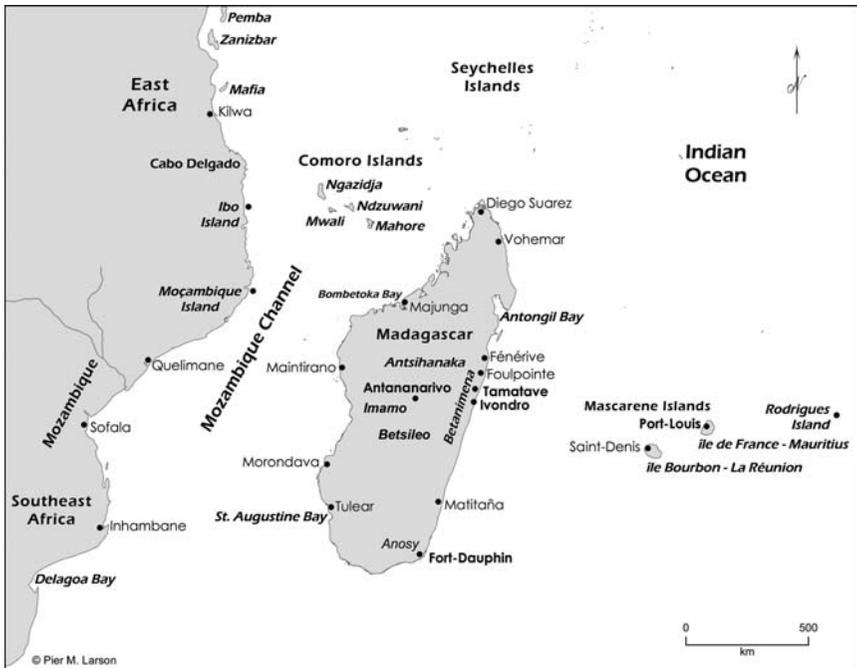


Figure 1. Aristide Corroller's Family Tree.

Andriandramose appears in French texts of the mid-seventeenth century as a sometime friend and sometime foe of the Compagnie's ill-fated colony.<sup>8</sup>

Marie-Thérèse Catherine's other brothers—Leroy, Jean-René, and Jean-Louis—on the other hand, were her full siblings. Their father was a Frenchman fittingly called “the butcher” (Boucher) given that he was a cattle merchant stationed at Fort-Dauphin and supplier of the Mascarenes with jerky and live kine. Boucher arrived at Fort-Dauphin in 1769, just before the



Map 1. The Southwest Indian Ocean, c. 1825.

abrogation of the Compagnie's trade monopoly. He served briefly as a different sort of butcher—as “Chirurgien major” (chief surgeon)—in the ranks of a second abortive French colonizing expedition to the Big Island by the Comte de Maudave (1768–1771).<sup>9</sup> After the prompt failure of that colony, Boucher remained at Madagascar for about another decade in the employ of the royal government at Île de France and as an “Entrepreneur des traites du Roi” (royal trade representative). Geneviève Hova became associated with Boucher in marriage when her Raondriana husband expired in southeast Madagascar. If their union had been recognized in Madagascar, it was not in Île de France. Colonial law proscribed the marriage of Europeans to persons of mixed race.

Despite this legal restriction, Aristide's grandmother, Geneviève Hova, had been advanced in pregnancy when she boarded the cattle-carrying ship the *Éléphant* in 1778 for Île de France with her children. During the crossing of some weeks together with about 300 restless oxen, she gave birth aboard ship to Aristide's uncle Jean-René.<sup>10</sup> Geneviève Hova boarded the *Éléphant* at Fort-Dauphin, we also learn, “with the intention of visiting her father's sister, who was the wife of Azéma, from whom descend the Provençals of Grand Port,” Île de France.<sup>11</sup> Both Aristide's mother and maternal grandmother, in other words, were associated with French merchants who zigzagged between Madagascar and Île de France. But even before her marriage to the king's cattle merchant, Aristide's grandmother already claimed paternal relatives living on the French colonial island. Aristide's family was marked by multiple connections

over several generations between the Big Island of Madagascar and the French colonies of the region.

Aristide's family story of affinal connections between free, well-placed Malagasy women and European merchants supplying the French colonies with slave labor and other commodities is improbable from a Caribbean—yea an American—perspective. Temporary and long-term unions between European merchants and African-descended women were common at Africa's coast, of course, and also in the Americas between European men and enslaved or freed African women. *Gens de couleur*, or free persons of color, in the Caribbean nearly all traced maternal kin back to the bonds of slavery.

Few free Africans immigrated to the Americas in the age of slavery, whether as settlers or as merchants. In part this was because of the exceptional distance separating the African continent and the Caribbean with attending high costs of sail transport. While Madagascar lies some 900 kilometers from Île de France, the distance between Gorée in Senegal and Martinique in the Caribbean is more than five times that. And in part few free Africans came to the Americas because there was little place in American social structures and imaginations for such immigrants, especially African businesswomen or wives. American colonial societies were typically more racially exclusive and possessed communities of *gens de couleur* bereft of ongoing ties to the continent and less conscious of their specific African origins. Like most American Creoles, *gens de couleur* in the Americas did not typically speak African tongues.

In the French islands of the southwest Indian Ocean, on the other hand, socially heterogeneous communities of enslaved, freed, and free Malagasy speakers were all classified among the *gens de couleur* and linked the Mascarenes with the Big Island both linguistically and economically.<sup>12</sup> (Madagascar is nearly 300 times the size of Île de France and in the early nineteenth century claimed a population at least thirty times as large.) The majority of these multilingual Malagasy in dispersion, like the *gens de couleur* as a whole, were women, and most of them, or their ancestors, had at one time been slaves. The bilingual women of Aristide's family, however, were of free origin.<sup>13</sup> This chapter takes the boy Aristide and his family as its subjects, all of them bilingual *gens de couleur* of free origin sometimes also known along Madagascar's east coast as *créoles malgaches*.<sup>14</sup> They formed a significant minority of both the *gens de couleur* of the colonial islands and of the broader Malagasy diaspora of the western Indian Ocean, a regional trade diaspora and emergent nation upon the western seas.<sup>15</sup> In this chapter I focus on the itinerant lives and strategies of that portion of the *gens de couleur* in the Mascarenes with meaningful ties to Madagascar.

In their condition as mixed-race people, Aristide's family actually belonged to *two* dispersions. Aristide's composite pedigree testifies to the interlinked lives of free French and Malagasy colonists that characterized the southwest Indian Ocean in the age of sail. Ranging from Fort-Dauphin in Madagascar to Plaine Saint-Pierre and Grand Port in Île de France, and by extension also to the ruling families of Anosy and the distant shores of Brittany, Aristide's birth story, as his life story more broadly, is characteristic of the oceanic corner of the world he inhabited. Through carefully planned alliances with European men, many women of free Malagasy origin forged family and business relationships spanning the Mascarenes and Madagascar. Some imbricated themselves into prominent

Euro-Mascarene families or turned the colonial islands into their homes and home bases.<sup>16</sup> Others viewed the Mascarenes as financing machines for political activity in Madagascar, some even employing their colonially generated capital to run arms to rebels there.<sup>17</sup>

If the basic parameters of Aristide's life were not atypical of the free Franco-Malagasy mercantile diasporas of the southwest Indian Ocean, our record of them is. Several years ago I uncovered a cache of manuscripts concerning Madagascar in the most unexpected of locations: the public library of Auckland, New Zealand. Among the documents were English translations of the memoirs and historical writings of one Aristide Corroller, the boy born at Plaine Saint-Pierre in late 1799. Following a career setback in Madagascar in mid-1828 Corroller scribbled out vignettes of his life, family history, accomplishments, notable events, and interesting people. These bits of personal experience and of Malagasy history shot through with the conflicted loyalties of a mixed-race man in the middle Corroller penned in French. The writings take the form of reflections on a colorful career Corroller interpreted as a success. In them the reader finds a curious mix of reflective self-fashioning and an inflation of accomplishment not uncharacteristic of a man fallen from power. Corroller titled the work a *Relation intéressante de Madagascar* (Interesting Account of Madagascar) but also called it more colloquially his *lambeaux de l'histoire de Malegache* (shreds—or fragments—of Malagasy history), a term that fittingly captures not only Corroller's bricolage of a “national” career but the disjointed nature of his writings.<sup>18</sup>

The texts are often awkward in composition and disorganized, a style also found in Corroller's “rather chaotic” letters.<sup>19</sup> The vignettes do not appear in chronological sequence. The *Fragments* seem more a stream of consciousness than a well-planned narrative. Herein lies their value. What is exceptional about Corroller's *Fragments* is not that like most autobiographies they are reflections upon and justifications of a multi-faceted career but that they are texts of his own composition, permitting the historian to explore the ocean-crossing lives of Corroller and his family as *he* interpreted them. Beyond their flattering exposition of a public self, Corroller's *Fragments* challenge us to rethink the fixity of certain boundaries in the western Indian Ocean. They document a life between islands and empires in a way that defies the more bounded and impervious representation of politics and biographies in this region that often emerges from research in government archives. It is Corroller's life at the margins and the ambiguities of his position that are of especial interest to the historian.

### Maternal Ancestors: Pedigree and Strategy

Members of Corroller's family were typically short lived. Corroller scarcely knew Marie-Thérèse Catherine, his mother. She breathed her last at Île de France on July 7, 1801, while Aristide was one and a half years old. Corroller's father, the Breton merchant-goldsmith named Pierre-Vincent, apparently lived to January 1816. Corroller would have been a teenager at the time. His father's death five years after Île de France fell into British hands may well have been the signal event that propelled Corroller to Madagascar. As for Corroller's maternal

grandmother, Geneviève Hova, she died of smallpox at Mauritius sometime after 1810 having witnessed the death of her daughter a decade earlier.

The sea midwived the careers of Corroller and his family. It also truncated them. Corroller's uncle Jean-René was born aboard the bullock-brimming *Éléphant* while crossing from Fort-Dauphin to Île de France with Corroller's grandmother and her siblings, a key transition for the entire family. Jean-René's maritime birth in 1778 was an apt symbol for the significance of oceanic travel to Corroller's kin. There was also a story afloat that Corroller, too, had been born on a ship owned by his father, when his mother boarded it to visit a sister near Tamatave.<sup>20</sup> Aristide's grandfather the "butcher," on the other hand, rode the *Éléphant* to the bottom of the sea in about 1781 when it sailed into a nasty hurricane while crossing between the islands. In early 1835, the year of Corroller's death at Tamatave, his cousin Sitouhaine (Jean-Louis's son) expired "on board the *Caledonia* Captain Laconfourgue, on his passage [from Madagascar] to Mauritius, where he was going for his education."<sup>21</sup>

*For his education.* The oceanic distribution of the family's births and deaths testifies to the relevance of strategy in its female members' peregrinations. Corroller's distant female ancestor, Ravelomanor, was a contemporary of French colonization at Fort-Dauphin (1642–74). Her son, Andrianarivo, was recalled by Corroller's family to have been implicated in the killing in late August 1674 of more than half of the French colonists at Fort-Dauphin. Andrianarivo fled north along Madagascar's east coast following the French abandonment of Fort-Dauphin, the story goes, fearing reprisal by the *Compagnie* and the French navy for his complicity in the mass murder that brought down the colony. Andrianarivo is reputed to have established himself as a ruler in the Betanimena region of Tamatave during the late seventeenth century, a time when European pirates also frequented the zone. The coasts of Madagascar had long been traveled and ruled by male parvenus, some of whom itinerated along that seaboard as it suited them to enhance their careers and most of whom married island women.<sup>22</sup> Geographically expansive political strategies and connections to French empire characterized Corroller's family in the early modern era.

Andrianarivo's grandson Bevoule was the crucial link between Corroller's pedigree and his later career in Madagascar. Springing from Anosy's Raondriana ancestry on the paternal side, Bevoule had risen to the *Ampanjakabe* (supreme kingship) of Tamatave-Betanimena by the time he was defeated near Foulpointe in battle in about 1737 by another recent arrival, Ratsimilaho. Son of the English pirate "Tom" and a Malagasy woman, Ratsimilaho created the Betsimisarakaka ("the many undivided") confederation of chiefdoms along Madagascar's east coast and died in about 1750.<sup>23</sup> Ratsimilaho's political allies and descendants were known as the *Zanamalata*, or "scions of the mulatto" and often just as *Malattes*. Corroller preferred this latter term, employing it—curiously for his own mixed-race status—with a good helping of derision. Bevoule's achievement in eastern Madagascar and his defeat in 1737 by Ratsimilaho set the scene for Corroller and his family's distaste for the *Malattes* of Madagascar and career choices eventually taking them to the Big Island from Île de France. Together with his uncles Fisatra and Jean-René, Corroller shared the dream of a renewed family sovereignty over the portion of Madagascar's east coast once possessed by Bevoule.

Corroller's genealogy bears important clues about the nature of his family's inter-island strategies. His family tree is populated by individuals who moved north and south along Madagascar's east coast (Andrianarivo fled north; Geneviève Hova returned south), and who crossed between Madagascar and Île de France. Although Corroller, his mother, and his maternal uncles were all of mixed race and came of age in Île de France, they reckoned themselves of Malagasy rather than European origin. Marriage of women to European men generated connections with colonial Île de France, but French lineage is largely ancillary to the family's memory of its origins. French husbands cap dead ends in Corroller's genealogy, and they receive little attention in his writings. Might this be because they evoked the limited social opportunities available to *gens de couleur* in the colonies? Corroller, after all, could not legally inherit property from his father in Île de France. His mother's and grandmother's marriages to European men were similarly unrecognized by the courts of the colony. Painful experiences associated with colonial forms of racial exclusion might be conveniently exorcised by genealogical adumbration.

There are, however, more convincing explanations for the structure of Corroller's family history. Many European migrants were loners coming out to the colonies as single men with shallow or broken kin relations. The absence of European lines of ascent in Corroller's pedigree also reflected his maternal family's orientation toward Madagascar and its status aspirations. After all, there was nothing royal about Monsieur Boucher the "butcher" or the middling goldsmith-merchant named Pierre-Vincent Corroller. The islands of the French empire did offer, however, suitable refuges from political struggles in Madagascar and excellent places to provide children with educations. And then there was love. Whatever the motivations for the connubial and lineal choices reflected in Corroller's pedigree, Île de France emerges in the family's history as a haven and a resource for women and their children. Corroller's genealogy is arranged to accentuate aristocratic ties to Anosy and Betanimena on the southern and central portions of Madagascar's east coast. Meanwhile Île de France offered Corroller's family the means to recuperate Bevoule's political achievements in Madagascar.

Corroller's pedigree emphasizes ascent on the paternal side from Bevoule up to Andriantsirahonana and Ravelomanor of Anosy. These patrilineal connections link Bevoule to royalty from southeast Madagascar. But from Bevoule to Corroller, it is matrilineal links that preserve the tie to Madagascar and an "inherited" right to rule along Madagascar's coast near Tamatave. Corroller capitalized on his matrilineal link to Bevoule by insisting that he (Corroller) was born in Île de France a "Prince" of Betanimena, the region of Madagascar his ancestor had once conquered. "I hold this title by hereditary right," Corroller remonstrated in a letter of 1829, at a time when "some weak person, by what I am told...doubted my title." He signed this document "A. Corroller, Legitimate and hereditary Prince of Bettanimena, &c."<sup>24</sup> The elected shift from maternal to paternal ancestry in Corroller's genealogy was key to the man's aspirations as a prince-to-become-king and was enabled by Madagascar's (as well as France's) flexible system of cognatic descent reckoning in which individuals chose with social legitimacy whether to emphasize maternal or paternal lines or to switch among them as desired. What appears existentially important to

Corroller's family were its distant links to royalty in Madagascar, not to France's colonies or French colonists.

But French empire had its place in their lives. At Île de France Corroller's uncles received educations unavailable in Madagascar, typically those with occupational emphases characteristic of skilled, urban *hommes de couleur* [men of color].<sup>25</sup> Only one of the uncles neither died nor was buried in Madagascar. For unexplained reasons the eldest of Geneviève Hova's children did not accompany her to Île de France in 1778. Perhaps he was deemed too old to do so, having been thirteen years of age at the time. Ranaina, Corroller tells us, "seeing no prospect of the return of his family [from Île de France] nor of the *Éléphant*, embarked as a novice or cabin boy on board of an English vessel which touched at Fort-Dauphin, and after many voyages to India and other parts of the world, having acquired a competence, he settled in Scotland, where he had posterity." We do not hear of him again. Of the brothers ferried over to Île de France, Rasambe "acquired a competence" in the production of artillery (the occupation of *armourer*); Fisatra, the trade of jeweler; Jean-Louis, cabinet making; and Jean-René, "geometry and navigation from the hydrographer Gauthier."<sup>26</sup>

Of Corroller's education we know more. Listed in colonial documents as a goldsmith, one of his father's two avocations, he was in aspiration if not training a man of letters.<sup>27</sup> One contemporary claimed that Corroller "was educated at the Royal College of Mauritius."<sup>28</sup> An editorial footnote added to Corroller's *Fragments* affirms this claim, observing that Corroller had "passed 10 years" at the Royal College.<sup>29</sup> Here we are presented with a dilemma. The editor in question was likely in a position to know about enrollments at the Royal College, but Corroller was an *homme de couleur*, a colonial racial category whose members were excluded from the College until 1829.<sup>30</sup>

Could Corroller have passed as white in Mauritius and enrolled in the Royal College, where "the sons of the principal French families have the means afforded them of classical and mathematical education"?<sup>31</sup> (Recall that both Corroller's father and maternal grandfather were French.) It seems unlikely, though money can sometimes cover over race. In the event, Corroller's education familiarized him with European history and the classics, which pepper his *Fragments* with illustrative spice. In Corroller's writings about Madagascar we learn, for example, that Chief Impady of the Alamazaotra hills was "the Agamemnon of the mountains," that General Rafezeheno of Antananarivo's army was "the Antipater of Madagascar," and that King Radama's foster brother, Lahifoutse (Lahifotsy), executed in early July 1828 for a range of indiscretions, was "the Alcibiades of the Hovas [a people of highland Madagascar]."<sup>32</sup>

British missionaries who knew Corroller in Madagascar claimed he had received "a French education" and that he "always speaks French," a suggestion that because of his childhood in the colonies Corroller was more competent in the colonial language than in the Malagasy spoken by his grandmother.<sup>33</sup> "We observe that He and his Nephew have no knowledge of the English," wrote missionaries of the uncle-nephew pair Jean-René and Corroller, "but they both understand and write French."<sup>34</sup> From the archival trail we may conclude that Corroller preferred to write in French rather than in Malagasy. The vast majority of his correspondence in the colonial archives is in standard French. When communicating with friends such as King Radama, he often scribbled marginal notes in the French Creole of the islands. His Malagasy language

letters in the administrative archive of the empire of Antananarivo, which he served as an adult, were most likely produced by a secretary. The Malagasy language letters are written in a style and employ a standard orthography of the sort taught in the royal/missionary schools of highland Madagascar, which Corroller never attended.<sup>35</sup>

Corroller's linguistic competence privileging French is evinced in a letter he dispatched to King Radama in 1828. The main text of the letter, which is not in Corroller's hand, is in standard administrative Malagasy. After his secretary closed the letter, Corroller jotted the following note in his own hand and in a Creole sprinkled with Malagasy words (italicized): "Pour tou vous *vahoaka* betanimena moi va mettre *tintely* dans zotre la bouche avec parole *volamena* dans zotre zoreille j'arrangerai *tsara dia tsara* betanimena" (I will put *honey* in the mouths and words of *gold* in the ears of all your Betanimena *subjects*; I will *really* fix up Betanimena [i.e. submit the province to Radama]).<sup>36</sup> The text suggests the way in which Corroller's native French Creole could be liberally salted with Malagasy words.

Corroller shared a stated proclivity for what we might call a French Indian Ocean Republic of Letters with his maternal uncle, Jean-René, whose library and literary practices he admired. "He would retire to his closet" after dinner, Corroller reminisced of Jean-René at his home on Madagascar's coast. There,

he had a library furnished with the works of Voltaire, Reynal, Helvetius &c. He would reply or dictate replies to letters he had received, for which he had an admirable facility, and devote himself to study till the hour of rest... [He was also] a great admirer of the antiquities and philosophy of the eighteenth century, and he contributed much to the abolition of the slave trade and to the annihilation of the foederal Malattes.<sup>37</sup>

Had Corroller actually *read* the enlightenment authors who graced his uncle's shelves with books? And to what extent might those writings have influenced his activities in Madagascar? There are few answers to these basic questions in Corroller's *Fragments*, leaving one to wonder about the precise nature and extent of Corroller's education in Île de France. But French fathers and literate competence are what separated Corroller and Jean-René from the latter's half-brothers Rasambe and Fisatra, both born at Fort-Dauphin of a Raondriana father. Fisatra was already eight years old when he arrived in Île de France; his brother Rasambe, ten. In genomes and in language, the older brothers were more Malagasy and less literate than Jean-René and his older sister, Marie-Thérèse Catherine, a newborn and a two-year-old, respectively, at their arrival in the colony. The oldest of the siblings, Ranaina, had been left in Fort-Dauphin but then made his way aboard a British ship and ended up in Scotland, as we have learned. The extended family, in other words, comprised individuals variously oriented toward Malagasy, French, and English. Corroller's description of family members' linguistic capacities suggests considered strategies aimed at mastering the cultural and verbal diversity of the islands, a sort of calculated familial cosmopolitanism.

But Madagascar was their center of gravity. Corroller's mother visited the Big Island at least once from Île de France, travelling "on board a ship belonging to his [Corroller's] father and commanded by a Captain Itasse"—a successor

vessel to the sunken *Éléphant*—to see a “sister” named “Ramire at Foule Pointe.”<sup>38</sup> Like Corroller, each of his uncles appears to have returned to Madagascar shortly after completing an education at Île de France. This gendered transoceanic movement may have issued in part from how race circumscribed advancement in the colonial islands. But the departure of an entire generation of male siblings from Île de France, including those with the highest educational achievements and proclivities for French literature and philosophy, suggests that their deepest aspirations lay in Madagascar, not the colonies.

### Big Island Careers: Corroller and His Uncles

If the women in Corroller's family tended to cross from Madagascar to the French islands, bringing their children with them, their male offspring pursued dreams and vocations in Madagascar. It was easier for mixed-race women to make a place for themselves in the French colonies through business and sexual connections with Europeans than for their male kin to adopt analogous strategies. Conversely, formal politics in Madagascar was largely a male preserve in the nineteenth century, even for those whose mothers provided the genealogical link to the Big Island.

Corroller's family tree balloons in the generation of his mother. Maternal uncles also feature prominently in Corroller's historical-biographical *Fragments*. Half-brothers Fisatra and Jean-René ventured to Madagascar with the aim of turning Bevoule's erstwhile leadership of Betanimena into their reality. To do so they had to evict the “feudal Malattes,” men floridly described by Corroller in Revolutionary rhetoric as “a brutal, unmannerly, and drunken set, with the habits and prejudices of their feudal ancestry.”<sup>39</sup> To effect this usurpation Fisatra and Jean-René would engage the services of their brothers and eventually also of their nephew. This was a family whose men relished the potential spoils of war in Madagascar over a more tranquil—and more subaltern, not to mention prosaic—life of skilled labor at Île de France.

The shift of Corroller's uncles from Île de France to Madagascar occurred at about the time Napoleon's governor, Charles Decaen, arrived at the Mascarenes (1803). This was a period of social and legal reverses for *gens de couleur* in the colonies as Napoleon repealed a range of revolutionary social measures.<sup>40</sup> Jean-René escaped Île de France by seeking employment as a Malagasy-French interpreter for the colonial government and worked closely with successive *agents de traite* (colonial trade representatives) at Tamatave. He took payment in silver as well as in armaments, launching his first conquests with French-supplied weapons.<sup>41</sup> If they started their careers in Madagascar humbly, then, Jean-René and his brothers set their goals far beyond employee status. With support from Decaen's government, the half-brothers plotted to supplant the *Malatte* rulers of Madagascar's east coast.

The plan cooked up by Marie-Thérèse Catherine's two sons and their French patrons was to replace a line of squabbling, largely monolingual *Malatte* rulers by bilingual *gens de couleur* from the colonies, French subjects claiming ancestral ties to ruling families in coastal Madagascar. Corroller reports in his *Fragments* that a French naval division under Commodore Jacques Félix Hamelin (ca. 1808–09) was dispatched to assist in the struggle to displace the *Malatte* chiefs Sasse and Lavalley—the two most powerful—by pounding their

respective bases at Foulpointe and Ivondro with artillery. The plot succeeded. The coups d'états transformed Fisatra and Jean-René from middling colonial artisans and interpreters into coastal strong men in Madagascar with fiscal bases, sovereignties, and armies of their own. Jean-René emerged the senior partner in this brotherly alliance; within his Betanimena kingdom he was popularly known as “the red king.” The half-brothers were in charge of Tamatave and Ivondro before the British conquest of Île de France in 1810.<sup>42</sup>

Gunboat victories can be difficult to sustain, especially when the cannon that purchase them sail away. And ruling requires human resources. At or about the age of twenty, Corroller, too, was called from Île de France to work for his maternal uncle-turned-king at Tamatave, Jean-René, who came under continual pressure from the displaced *Malattes* and occasionally also from his own brothers. This oceanic transition occurred sometime between 1817 and 1821, a period of tumult for Corroller's uncle-kings.<sup>43</sup> The youngest maternal uncle, Jean-Louis, “an excellent cabinet maker at Mauritius,” was the first to fall. Jean-Louis perished in 1817 at Ivondro from wounds received “at the battles of Isony and Mahéla” conducted against *Malatte* opponents.<sup>44</sup> Fisatra met his end in turn—also at Ivondro and in the course of 1820—“during the night in a revolutionary tumult by some wretched *Malattes*.” In response to these killings, the armies of Jean-René “from that moment proscribed the whole race of *Malattes* and made a war of extermination against them.”<sup>45</sup> The *Malatte* “racial” cleansing dragged on for years. It was not until 1825 that Jean-René and his allies crushed the remaining *Malattes*, sending many to their graves and dragging the remainder off to “prisons” far in the interior of Madagascar.<sup>46</sup>

Corroller's arrival at Tamatave to serve in the entourage of Jean-René occurred as his surviving uncle was also struggling to accommodate to a fast-rising monarch in the interior of Madagascar: Radama of Antananarivo.<sup>47</sup> King Radama's rapidly expanding land empire began to encroach on Jean-René's newfound coastal dominions as early as 1817.<sup>48</sup> Corroller portrays himself as peripheral to the principal events of armed conflict against the *Malattes*. He defines himself as “captain, & aide de camp to Jean René” in the early 1820s, a time when he also claims to have composed French language correspondence for King Radama and to have served that king and his rising Big Island empire in a variety of diplomatic negotiations with the colonial governments of Mauritius and Île Bourbon.<sup>49</sup> Corroller, in other words, bridged not only Madagascar and the colonial islands of France and Britain, he was a man treading in the borderlands of Madagascar's land-based polities as an intermediary between his uncle and King Radama.

If Corroller's situation as a man of mixed race impeded career ambitions in the French colonies, it proved an asset in Madagascar's borderlands. Corroller's claim to coastal Malagasy royalty at both Fort-Dauphin and Tamatave through his maternal line, together with his education, literacy, and oceanic connections, made him an ideal associate for empire builders in Madagascar be they his uncles or King Radama. These men sought intermediaries between the Big Island's coastal communities, Antananarivo's imperial center in the highlands, and the French and British empires of the southwest Indian Ocean. Corroller fitted the bill, and he seems to have relished dancing on the fence between his uncle, Jean-René, and King Radama of Antananarivo.

It is not until 1824 that Corroller describes having assumed military responsibilities. Several chiefs in the Ididy region of southern Antsihanaka (inland to the west of Tamatave), leading some 3,000 men, attacked and eliminated a garrison of King Radama's soldiers while the king was away in northwest Madagascar and Jean-René was temporarily absent from Tamatave. Corroller departed Tamatave with a mixed force of 600 *Simamaquivoules* ("those who do not cut their hair"), an irregular coastal militia, and 400 "military," presumably soldiers of the line from Radama's Antananarivo-based regiments.<sup>50</sup> Corroller later "returned to Tamatave with the residue of his fighting force, about half remaining alive." Having proved himself victorious—whatever the devastating carnage among his men outnumbered by the enemy three to one—Corroller reports he "received the brevet [certificate] of Colonel" and was subsequently dispatched on a secret mission as "Envoy Extraordinary" to French Governor de Freycinet at Île Bourbon.

The newly promoted colonel next traveled on to Mauritius, the island of his birth, on a diplomatic mission "about the beginning of 1825" before finally returning to Tamatave.<sup>51</sup> One can envision Colonel Corroller receiving the congratulations of friends and family at his residence on the rue de Paris in Port Louis before boarding a vessel back to Madagascar. "Since then," observes Corroller of himself in the third person, "he has not been out of Madagascar." Having received a military promotion probably unavailable to him as a mixed-race man in Mauritius, Corroller would never again see the colonial island of his birth.

Corroller's subsequent promotion to general was a bittersweet event that sealed the defeat of his uncles' political project. It occurred in March 1826 at the death of Jean-René "of liver complaint," a euphemism for sinking in rum. King Radama conferred the promotion, for over the last years of Jean-René's life he had accumulated an island-spanning empire that fundamentally undermined Jean-René's Betanimena kingdom. According to the British envoy at Radama's court, "agreeably to an arrangement that Radama some time past assented to," Corroller was to replace Jean-René at Tamatave upon the latter's death.<sup>52</sup> Jean-René had considered himself to be an independent King in voluntary *alliance* with Radama, but Radama, with his formidable armies of no match for the irregular, longhaired recruits of Tamatave, thought the relationship otherwise.<sup>53</sup>

In replacing Jean-René with Corroller, Radama transformed the king at Tamatave from an independent ruler into a subordinate governor of his empire and a senior officer of his army. Betanimena became an eastern province of Antananarivo:

Radama's dispatches were presented to him [Corroller], among which was his brevet of Major General and a commission appointing him Governor and Commandant [at Tamatave]... Corroller took the reins of government [writes the British envoy] under the title of Prince of the Betanimènes... Corroller lowered the flag of Jean René and hoisted that of Radama, saluting it at the time with twenty-one guns.<sup>54</sup>

As the flag of Jean-René's Betanimena came down, that of Antananarivo's empire went up. Corroller does not acknowledge this political humiliation in his *Fragments* (he was too proud, one surmises, to publicly acknowledge the family's setback), but his uncles' quest for political independence in eastern Madagascar

had come crashing down together with Jean-René's standard and the firing of Radama's guns. Corroller made the best of this situation by throwing himself into the expansion of Radama's empire. He also drew a yearly "stipend" of 1,200 silver Spanish dollars from the government of Mauritius for assisting in the continued suppression of the slave trade.<sup>55</sup>

Corroller's governorship of Tamatave province was an on-again off-again affair. Radama repeatedly called the young governor up to Antananarivo on a variety of errands, and General Corroller emerged between 1826 and early 1828 as one of Radama's closest advisors, replacing Adolphe Robin (a French soldier, theater actor, and fugitive from justice at Île Bourbon) as the king's "General Secretary and aide-de-camp."<sup>56</sup> Radama was careful to keep men with excellent knowledge of the Mascarenes and a mastery of European languages in his cabinet. His relationship with the king from Antananarivo, Corroller tells us, was to be sealed by his marriage to Radama's eldest daughter, a woman named "Ramace."<sup>57</sup> We do not hear of Ramace again in Corroller's writings (he was already married to a *Malatte* woman named Ratsimissahe—apparently the killing of *Malattes* did not extend to all of their women—and had taken one of Jean-René's junior wives, Ganouine, in levirate). But in planning to seal his alliance with Corroller through matrimony, King Radama was binding the man-in-the-middle to himself through ties of kinship, a tried technique in the repertoire of empire builders from Madrid to Paris to Antananarivo.<sup>58</sup> In the event, Adolphe Robin assumed Corroller's governorship at Tamatave, and Corroller accompanied Radama to Antananarivo in November 1827 following the latter's well-known visit to Madagascar's east coast.<sup>59</sup>

Operating from the urban capital of Radama's empire, General Aristide Corroller undertook a number of special missions for the court. These were of both a civilian and a military sort. Radama dispatched Corroller sometime in first half of 1828 with 1,800 soldiers to put down a rebellion in the southern Antsihanaka province northeast of Antananarivo.<sup>60</sup> The king also commissioned General Corroller to assemble a manuscript on "the Origin of the different tribes in Madagascar, the provinces, Chieftains, Customs &c. for the purpose of writing a history of Madagascar more perfect than any which has been published."<sup>61</sup> In pursuit of this scientific and humanistic goal, Radama dispatched Corroller on a voyage into the Betsileo interior of Madagascar south of Antananarivo and to Imamo, in the west, accompanied by another foreign ally and good friend to Corroller, Welsh missionary David Jones. The two men enjoyed:

a strong guard to visit all the interior Provinces for the purpose of collecting materials for the history of the country & of the aboriginal inhabitants, genealogies of the ancient kings, princes, and people, to organize a Nobility and form a General History of Madagascar, to examine well the natural productions & riches of the land, to make observations on the topography, manners & customs of each province &c &c.<sup>62</sup>

David Jones dates these enlightenment-style travels to January 1828.<sup>63</sup>

In organizing the Betsileo-Imamo expedition, Radama was pursuing another well-known technique of rulers such as Napoleon who both he and Corroller so

admired: the fact-gathering enterprise into new imperial possessions. The missionary on this expedition implanted schools on Betsileo territory while General Corroller set about amassing “scientific” specimens, notably fish species from lakes and rivers with which he planned to enter into business. Explorers are entitled to their perks: Radama granted Corroller a 15-year pisciculture monopoly to undertake this mission of discovery.<sup>64</sup>

The pastiche of an expedition was by all accounts successful. Yet Corroller's account begs the question of what and precisely who inspired it. Was it Corroller's education in Île de France, his reading of history and statecraft, counselors at Radama's court, longstanding practices of rule at Antananarivo, David Jones's religiously inflected sense of enlightenment, or some combination of the above? In the excursion's aftermath, Corroller and Radama began to contemplate their boldest, attention-getting mission yet: a sea invasion of central Mozambique with 12,000 soldiers in canoes led by General Corroller. Instead, unforeseen career downturns awaited both men. Returning to Antananarivo from his study mission to Betsileo-Imamo, Corroller brought:

a quantity of living fish, the specimens of his discoveries, and all the materials & journals of his voyage, which he laid before the king, having put them in as good order as possible during his sojourn at the lake [probably Mandrozeza east of Antananarivo, where Corroller was offered a country residence and where he composed much of his *Fragments*]. Radama wished to publish these for general information, but such parts as appeared precious and particularly interesting to natural history, philosophy, and the arts & sciences, remained obscured in the most profound silence and *at Radama's death* [in late July 1828] were burned together with the journals and reports of the generals on their return from their military expeditions.<sup>65</sup>

Corroller, his research, and his lofty aspirations of controlling a portion of Southeast Africa all went up in flames, so to speak, with the unexpected death of Radama. The king's successor, Queen Ranavalona, was concerned Corroller's writings might fall into the hands of her European enemies. One of her first orders on learning of Corroller's death in 1835 was to command military officers to seize all of his papers and books.<sup>66</sup> Ranavalona and her court were unconvinced by Radama's hybrid techniques of rule, his foreign allies, his scientific expeditions, and his overextending visions of oceanic empire. Having risen to the position of commander-in-chief of the empire's armed forces for a brief stint immediately before and following the king's death in July 1828, Corroller then fell sick and was relieved of command.<sup>67</sup>

Soldiers surrounded Corroller's lake residence of Ambohimandry in the early months of 1829.<sup>68</sup> The unlucky general worked assiduously on his manuscripts during this period of fall from grace. Was he attempting to rescue his reputation with words, or remind himself of notable achievements in the face of a present hardship? If mixed-race middlemen were perceived as assets by Radama, they were suspects under Ranavalona's regime, supported as it was by landed political clans north of Antananarivo that wanted to control the army and the government for themselves. In a seemingly nationalist strategy they deftly kept Corroller away from the reins of power in Antananarivo by first appointing him to Fort-Dauphin and then sending him off to Tamatave instead. Corroller had just resumed his duties as governor at Tamatave in late 1829 when it was

attacked by a French naval squadron. He served admirably, defeating a land invasion by the French navy and became involved in the negotiations with French envoys that followed.<sup>69</sup>

Corroller's career foundered after his return to Tamatave in part because of his European ancestry, in part because of his closeness to Radama and Île de France, and in part because of the potentially subversive nature of his probing oeuvres and militaristic dreams. "He continues his recherches," an acquaintance noted in 1831, "and told me that it was his intention to publish them."<sup>70</sup> In the end his only publications were short vignettes inserted into European monographs.<sup>71</sup> His lasting legacy is his manuscript autobiography, the *Fragments*, but these too remained in obscurity for nearly two centuries. I introduce them in this chapter, but a detailed study of Corroller's writing style, his consciousness as a man of many places, and his political imagination and choices of language awaits further publication.

Corroller remained mostly at Tamatave until his death in mid-November 1835.<sup>72</sup> He traveled from time to time on errands into the interior, including in about 1833 to receive an envoy from the Sultan of Zanzibar. But eventually he entered a decline brought on by depression about his diminished, liminal standing and exacerbated in the end by a refusal to take nourishment—"stung by the position of his affairs" as one knowing contemporary put it.<sup>73</sup> Consolidating polities after 1830 truncated Corroller's career as a man in the middle. Despair and tropical disease then took his life. Corroller rarely admitted these setbacks in his autobiography, reserving his feelings of defeat for conversation with his closest friends. This division of feeling complicates our attempt to understand how Corroller understood himself as a private person.

Corroller had made a career at the intersection of three empires—French, British, Malagasy—polities that variously enabled and constrained his ambitions. Those ambitions succeeded best where and when empires sought out intermediaries, in their early stages and at their borderlands. Corroller had been aware of the colonial constraints he faced in his mixed-race status. What he had not anticipated was that being a middleman, even one descended from coastal royalty, would eventually extinguish his aspirations in Madagascar too.

By 1835 all the principal men and women in Corroller's family narrative were dead. It was a record of mixed success. Corroller died a governor of Tamatave and an "hereditary prince of Betanimena" but also as a functionary of Antananarivo's empire. At one time, he had been second in power only to the king. Now the borderlands closed around him, and the rulers of Antananarivo exercised direct sovereignty over Madagascar's east coast. Queen Ranavalona appointed a governor from highland Madagascar in Corroller's stead; his remaining family had to make their peace with the loss of both sovereignty and political influence.<sup>74</sup>

### The Colonial Travels of Corroller's Fragments

Composed in French, Corroller's original manuscripts have not been found. They may have been held by his family or by the British colonial government of Mauritius after his death in late 1835 (born on Île de France, Corroller was theoretically a British subject from 1810). Or they may have found their way to Paris. In the event, the manuscripts eventually fell into the possession of

Frederick Holt Robe, the private secretary of British Governor Nicolay of Mauritius (1833–40). Born in 1801 or 1802 to a general in the British armed services, Frederick Holt Robe was Aristide Corroller's junior by three or four years. He was also Governor Nicolay's nephew.<sup>75</sup> The Indian Ocean careers of both Robe and Corroller were deeply influenced by their uncles. Corroller's uncle called him to Madagascar; Robe's to Mauritius. And Robe was briefly a contemporary of Corroller, for he arrived at Mauritius in late January 1833, just two years before Corroller's death in nearby Tamatave. We do not know if they met, but Robe managed Nicolay's correspondence with Corroller and the two men (Robe and Corroller) may have exchanged personal letters.<sup>76</sup>

As secretary to Governor Nicolay, Captain Robe was responsible for providing intelligence to his uncle on the government in Madagascar and prospects for British diplomacy and commerce there. To this end he entered frequent communication with British missionaries who worked extensively among the free and enslaved Malagasy speakers of Mauritius.<sup>77</sup> They and others with an interest in Madagascar schooled Robe in the ways and politics of the nearby Big Island so important to the economy of Mauritius. In September and October 1835 Robe ventured to the Comoro Islands and to Madagascar aboard the HMS *Andromache* on an intelligence-gathering mission and in the company of botanist Wenceslaus Bojer of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Pamplemousses (Mauritius). The ship upon which Robe sailed into the Mozambique Channel visited Fort-Dauphin, St. Augustine Bay, and Bombetoka Bay. The expedition dossier in the Colonial Office archives contains no suggestion that the *Andromache* put into Tamatave in the weeks before Corroller's death there in mid-November. Could LMS missionaries or Wenceslas Bojer, who had spent a year in Madagascar in about 1825, have played a role in procuring the manuscripts for Robe?<sup>78</sup>

The front matter to Corroller's *Fragments* bears the following notation:

Free Translation From a paper entitled "Relation [sic] intéressante de Madagascar Depuis 1808 jusqu'à 1835. Par un étranger, témoin oculaire qui ne peut se faire connaître à présent pour les raisons politiques & par rapport à ses confrères [An interesting account of Madagascar from 1808 to 1835, by a foreign observer who cannot divulge his name at present for political reasons and for the security of his colleagues]." Dated at Paris 1838. And said to have been found among the papers of the late prince Corroller at his death, and to have been written by his secretary at his dictation, and revised & interlined in his own hand writing.

This important notation, in the same handwriting as that of the translation (ostensibly that of Robe), raises several issues. The first is the attribution of authorship to Corroller. The content and organization of the *Relation intéressante de Madagascar* both point to Corroller, but the author of the *Fragments* always refers to himself in the third person throughout the text. In the preceding notation the translator confirmed Corroller's authorship, as he did also in the footnotes he added to the text. Second, the desire of Corroller—the "foreign observer" who composed the French-language originals—was to remain anonymous "for political reasons and for the security of his colleagues." These manuscript works of Corroller, who in the title conveniently identifies himself as a "foreigner" to Madagascar, were not meant to be made public while he was

alive. Many of the sentiments expressed in them would certainly have raised the ire of Ranavalona's court at Antananarivo and put the lives of the author and his family in jeopardy.

A third consideration stemming from the title notation is *Robe's* desire also to remain anonymous. Several portions of the English translation indicate that it was accomplished during the course of 1838, soon after Corroller's death.<sup>79</sup> Editorial notes affixed to the manuscripts refer to documents in the government archives of Mauritius, which would have been available to Robe as secretary to the governor. But it is notations in the hand of Sir George Grey, governor of Britain's Cape Colony and in whose library the manuscripts landed, that actually tie the translation to Robe. Each of the three volumes of the *Fragments* has a white card pasted to the front cover in Grey's hand identifying them as a "translation by F. H. Robe." The first inside page of Grey Manuscript 8 (GMS 8) has a further notation in pencil by Grey: "I do not know the date when this translation was made in Madagascar by Colonel Robe, but it must have been previous to 1857. GG."<sup>80</sup> The translations may or may not have been conducted in Madagascar, as Grey suggests, but it is clear that the third party who transformed them into English was Robe.

Finally, what are we to make of the Parisian provenance of the manuscripts as stated in the notation? Could Robe have acquired Corroller's original French-language manuscripts through a contact in Paris? Or was the claimed Parisian provenance of the original manuscripts simply another maneuver to obscure the origin of the works? There is another possible route of transmission too. Frederick Holt Robe was serving in Mauritius during the brief passage there in 1836 of an embassy from Queen Ranavalona's court at Antananarivo. Robe was responsible for escorting the party of six ambassadors about the colonial island.<sup>81</sup> Could one of the ambassadors have carried the manuscripts and allowed Robe to view them at Mauritius, or deposited them in Paris from whence Robe subsequently obtained them? All we know for sure is that in his duties as secretary to Governor Nicolay, Captain Robe was responsible for collecting intelligence about Madagascar. He was "very much interested in the affairs of Madagascar," confirmed one contemporary with experience in the Big Island, and "asked me a number of questions respecting the Malagasy Govt."<sup>82</sup> A British missionary knowledgeable about Madagascar had once "spent days with Mr. Robe & gave him every information asked for."<sup>83</sup> However he obtained access to Corroller's *Fragments* in the line of his duties, Robe viewed the work long enough to effect their English translation.

If a French-become-British colonial subject serving the Malagasy empire composed the *Fragments*, they passed out of Madagascar into British Mauritius and eventually made their way to Cape Town. Sir George Grey was a ruthless servant in pursuit of British hegemony in the Eastern Cape. He was also an avid collector of imperia, as were many colonials in Britain's eastern empire.<sup>84</sup> Grey's penchant for colonial collecting was letters, however, not curios. He amassed a voluminous library of manuscripts and publications in African languages, including Malagasy, through his many contacts with merchants, missionaries, and administrators in the southwest Indian Ocean.

Robe and Grey may first have crossed paths in mid-1838 well before Grey became governor of the Cape and about the time Robe was translating Corroller's work. Grey, who had been exploring Australia's south coast on his

first venture into the Indian Ocean, repaired to Mauritius to recuperate from a wound he had received during the expedition (reportedly he was speared by an Aborigine). It is likely that Robe, the Governor's secretary, would have had contact with a group of explorers on government payroll arriving in Mauritius. Grey may have first learned of Corroller's manuscripts from Robe in mid-1838. But it is unlikely he acquired Robe's translation during this brief visit to Mauritius. He had not yet embarked on an administrative career.

It was seven years later that the maturing imperial careers of Frederick Holt Robe and George Grey intersected in a more significant manner. When Robe departed Mauritius in 1840 he headed for the Mediterranean. He was an assistant military secretary at Gibraltar during 1845 when he was appointed to return to the Indian Ocean—this time as governor of South Australia and in succession to George Grey. Grey had become Governor of South Australia in 1841 at age 29, his first significant administrative post. Grey and Robe briefly crossed paths in Adelaide during the transfer of government in late 1845, for we know Grey departed on the same vessel that conveyed Robe to Adelaide. The succession of Grey and Robe to the governorship at Adelaide suggests that the two men became more than just acquainted with each other. Both forged careers in Britain's Indian Ocean empire.

Robe returned to Mauritius in 1848 at the end of a stormy governorship in Australia.<sup>85</sup> Robe and Grey probably maintained a gubernatorial correspondence during Robe's tenure in Adelaide and a gentlemanly one after his departure. Perhaps this is how Robe learned of Grey's growing library of Africana at Cape Town and decided to place a copy of Corroller's manuscripts there. Robe had been promoted to colonel by the time Grey acquired the translation of Corroller's *Fragments*; this promotion occurred in 1854. Grey noted of the *Fragments* in his own handwriting that "I do not know when this translation was made in Madagascar by Colonel Robe, but it must have been previous to 1857," suggesting this latter date as the approximate time Corroller's work entered Grey's Africana library, where it was catalogued in 1859.<sup>86</sup>

George Grey departed Cape Town in 1861 to become governor of New Zealand, leaving behind his library of Africana. But on the principle that Malagasy was an "Oceanic language" Grey requested in 1870 that the Malagasy materials he had left to the South African Library be transferred to New Zealand. When the Free Public Library of Auckland was formed in 1879, Grey donated his New Zealand library of some 8,000 volumes and pamphlets to that institution. Among these materials was Aristide Corroller's *Fragments*.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

It is to the circulation of administrators around Britain's Indian Ocean empire and to their collections of colonial literature, then, that we owe our inside knowledge of the strategies and ambitions of the island-hopping matriline of Corroller. Like the *va et vient* of Robe and Grey, Corroller's career was shaped by his peregrinations. Corroller's circuits of movement intersected with those of Robe and Grey—hence the transfer of the manuscripts—but they were predicated upon a different set of origins, connections, and aspirations, and took him to other places. Both race and location of birth were of significance in differentiating these circuits, as were family connections and social station.

The Englishmen were metropolitan whites in the service of the British empire; Corroller was a mixed-race colonial subject asserting a deep and distinguished Malagasy lineage on his mother's side and pursuing a career as a middleman in Malagasy empire. It is often the writings of European men like Robe and Grey upon which histories of empire are constructed. Corroller's *Fragments* reveal the circuits of men and women less readily visible to us than British governors, but no less important to Indian Ocean histories and to Mascarene social and economic life. Individuals like Corroller also shaped European colonial societies and made the extension of empires in Madagascar possible. The accomplishments and tragedies of these people in the middle, entangled as they were with those of Robe and Grey—intermediaries in their own right—have much to tell us about the diverse circuits of which empires were built and which made the Indian Ocean both the unique and the interconnected place it was.

## Endnotes

1. Aristide gives 1798 as the year of his birth; état civil documents suggest December 6, 1799: Aristide Corroller, "Relation Intéressante de Madagascar," Auckland City Central Library (New Zealand), Grey Manuscript 8, folio 32r (hereafter GMS 8, 32r); Georges Goyau, *Les grands desseins missionnaires d'Henri de Solages, 1786–1832* (Paris, 1933), 230.
2. Claude Wanquet, *La France et la première abolition de l'esclavage, 1794–1802* (Paris, 1998); Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham, N.C., 2005), chaps. 9 & 10; Stephen Taylor, *Storm and Conquest: The Clash of Empires in the Eastern Seas, 1809* (New York, 2008).
3. Auguste Toussaint, *Early American Trade with Mauritius* (Port Louis, 1954); James Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2010).
4. Richard Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999), 9–31; Richard Allen, "The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Slavery and Abolition* 24,2 (2003): 33–50.
5. Claude Wanquet, *Histoire d'une révolution: La Réunion 1789–1803*, 3 vols (Marseille, 1980–1981); Claude Wanquet and Benoît Jullien, eds., *Révolution française et Océan Indien* (Paris, 1996); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, 2004).
6. Goyau, *Grands desseins*, 229.
7. Pier Larson, "Colonies Lost: God, Hunger, and Conflict in Anosy (Madagascar) to 1674," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27,2 (July 2007): 345–366; Pier Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge, 2009), chap. 2.
8. François Caron, *Journal du voyage des grandes Indes*, 2 vols (Paris, 1698), i, 54–58, 78; Urbain Souchu de Rennefort, *Histoire des Indes orientales* (Sainte-Clotilde, 1988 [1688]), 96, 393.
9. H. Pouget de St. André, *La Colonisation de Madagascar sous Louis XV* (Paris, 1886); B. Foury, *Maudave et la colonisation de Madagascar* (Paris, 1956).

10. Archives nationales d'Outre-Mer (Aix-en-Provence, France), Fonds ministériels, Fonds anciens, Série C5A, Volume 9, Document 32bis, folio 5v (hereafter ANOM FM FA C5A 9 32bis, 5v).
11. GMS 9, nf (not foliated; Azema and Provençals); Bouchet, "Note Sur Le Fort D'Auphin dans L'Isle de Madagascar, A L'Isle de France le 17 Août 1776," ANOM FM FA C5A 5 19, 1r; "Extrait d'une lettre de Mr. Bouchet Entrepreneur des traites du Roi à Madagascar, a Mrs. Le Vte de Souillac et Chevreau, A fouldpointe le 12 8bre 1781," ANOM FM FA C5A 9, 19. See also Pierre Blancard, *Manuel du commerce des Indes* (Paris, 1806), 11–12.
12. Allen, *Slaves*, chap. 4.
13. Larson, *Ocean of Letters*, 196–292; Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 235–39.
14. Manassé Esoavelomandroso, "The 'Malagasy Creoles' of Tamatave in the 19th Century," *Diogenes* 111 (1980) 50–64.
15. Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640* (New York, 2007).
16. Clélie Gamaleya, *Filles d'Heva*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd. (Saint-André, 1991); Dominique Bois, "Tamatave: la cité des femmes," *CLIO* 6 (1997): 61–86; Sudel Fuma, "L'esclavage et le métissage: l'exemple d'une famille réunionnaise au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Île de la Réunion: regards croisés sur l'esclavage, 1794–1848*, ed. Benoît Jullien (Saint-Denis, 1998), 114–118; Robert Chaudenson, "Femmes et langues dans la société d'habitation bourbonnaise," in *La femme et les sociétés pluri-culturelles de l'océan Indien*, ed. Gillette Staudacher-Villiamée (Paris, 2002), 199–206.
17. The family of Chief Fohirandra of Ambodiharina (whose affine was Philibert, the "Grand Juge" of Tamatave) was married into the Luciany family of Mauritius: GMS 8, 2r & nf material for 1819. Female merchants and gunrunning (Volatsara): GMS 9, nf material dated 1825; Rafaralahy, Certificate/Passport for "Volatsara, femme," Fouldpointe, 10 octobre 1825, Mauritius National Archives (Coromandel), Series HB, Box 4, Document 64 (hereafter MNA HB 4 64); Rafaralahy to Général, Fouldpointe, 22 novembre 1825, MNA HB 4 75.
18. Corroller to Unknown, Tananarivou, 9 April 1829, in Désiré Gabriel Laverdant, *Colonisation de Madagascar* (Paris, 1844), 182–88.
19. Goyau, *Grands desseins*, 219 ("réflexions ... un peu chaotiques").
20. GMS 8, 32r.
21. GMS 10, nf material for 1817.
22. Paul Ottino, *L'étrangère intime*, 2 vols (Paris, 1986).
23. Nicolas Mayeur, "Histoire de Ratsimila-hoe, Roi de Fould-pointe et des Bé-tsi-miçaracs," c. 1806, British Library, Manuscripts Division, Additional Manuscript 18129 (hereafter BL MD Add Mss 18129); Guillaume Grandidier, "Histoire de la fondation du royaume betsimisaraka," *Bulletin du Comité de Madagascar* 4 (1898): 275–286; Stephen Ellis, "Tom and Toakafo: The Betsimisaraka Kingdom and State Formation in Madagascar, 1715–1750," *Journal of African History* 48,3 (2007): 439–55.
24. "A Letter from Prince Corroller, 18 Febr'y," Ambohimandry, 18 February 1829, London Missionary Society Archives, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, Incoming Letters Madagascar, Box 3, Folder 1, Jacket A, page 2 (hereafter LMS ILM 3 1 A, 2).
25. Allen, *Slaves*, 95.

26. GMS 9, nf material for 1826.
27. Armand Rakotovao, "Histoire de Aristide Corroller," *Bulletin de Madagascar* 326 (1974): 103.
28. GMS 8, nf material for 1821.
29. GMS 8, 32r.
30. Allen, *Slaves*, 79–80. "This rule," wrote a certain H. Black of the prohibition against admitting *gens de couleur* to the Royal College, "is never relaxed however respectable the person may be, whether the children are born in Wedlock by people of colour, or the offspring of a white person and one of colour *who are not permitted to contract marriage*" (emphasis in original): Black to Bathurst, Port Louis, Cornhill, 20 November 1826, National Archives of Britain, Colonial Office, Series 167 (Mauritius), Volume 90, page 2 (hereafter NAB CO 167 90, 2).
31. Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet, *Journal of Voyages and Travels*, 3 vols (Boston, 1832), iii, 236.
32. GMS 8, 19r (Alcibiades), 25r (Agamemnon), 48r (Antipater).
33. Freeman to Hankey, Antananarivo, 12 March 1829, LMS ILM 3 4 C.
34. Jones and Griffiths to Burder, Tananarivou, 19 December 1825, LMS ILM 2 2 C, 16.
35. Corroller to Radama, Vohibazaha, 2 Adaoro 1828, Archives of the Republic of Madagascar, Royal Archives, Series IIIICC, Box 322, Folder of 65 folios, page 1 (hereafter ARM AR IIIICC 322 65, 1).
36. Corroller to Radama, Vohiboahazo, 27 Adaoro 1828, ARM AR IIIICC 322 24, 1. See also Corroller to Radama, Vohijanahary, 29 juin 1828, in Rakotovao, "Histoire de Aristide Corroller," 109.
37. GMS 9, nf material for 1826.
38. GMS 8, 32r.
39. GMS 9, nf material marked 1826.
40. Henri Prentout, *L'Île de France sous Decaen, 1803-1810* (Paris, 1901); Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 258–59; Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, chaps. 12–16.
41. Jean-René is testified as interpreter for Mariette at his death in 1807 and then served Roux until about 1813: Chardenoux to Léger, Tamatave, 16 août 1807, BL MD Add. Mss. 18134, 128r (Mariette); Jean Valette, *Sainte-Marie et la côte est de Madagascar en 1818* (Tananarive, 1962), 23 (Roux).
42. Valette, *Sainte-Marie*, esp. 21–25.
43. Corroller first places himself in Madagascar in 1818: GMS 8, 69r. A notarial document from Mauritius in 1821 presents him as a 21-year old jeweler on the rue de Paris in Port Louis (Goyau, *Grands desseins*, 230.)
44. GMS 9, nf material marked 1826. See also GMS 10, nf material marked 1817.
45. GMS 10, nf material marked 1817.
46. GMS 9, nf material marked 1825 (*Malatte* revolt); GMS 10, nf material marked 1817 ("prisons" of Tsiroanomandidy).
47. Solofo Randrianja and Stephen Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History* (London, 2009), 123–38.

48. M. Colançon, *Histoire de Jean René, chef héréditaire de Tamatave* (Tamatave, 1937).
49. GMS 8, nf material marked 1821 (aide de camp); GMS 9, nf material marked 1816 (correspondence). See also "Additional Articles to the Treaty for Preventing Foreign Slave Trade at Madagascar," 31 May 1823, NAB CO 167 66; GMS 9, nf material for 1822 (quotation).
50. André Coppalle, *Voyage à la capitale du roi Radama, 1825–1826* (Tananarive, 1970), 21 (indisciplinés). GMS 9, nf material marked 1825 (armed inhabitants).
51. GMS 9, nf material under the date of 1824 (quotation). Corroller was likely traveling on a mission for Jean-René.
52. Hastie to Viret, Tamatave, 26 March 1826, MNA HB 4 89, 1 (quotation); Hastie to Viret, Tamatave, 7 April 1826, MNA HB 4 91.
53. Jean Valette, "Le traité passé entre Radama I<sup>er</sup> et Jean René, 9 juillet 1817," *Bulletin de Madagascar* 222 (1964): 957–59.
54. GMS 9, nf material marked 1826; emphasis added.
55. Hastie to Barry, Port Louis, 12 June 1826, MNA HB 4 117, 1.
56. "Journal of Mr. Lyall's Mission to Radama," 24 October - 28 November 1827, MNA HB 14 2, 16; Jean Valette, "Notes sur Robin," *Bulletin de Madagascar* 263 & 268 (1968): 345–361 & 772–784.
57. Ramasy (Ramace), Corroller writes, was Radama's daughter by the sister of Ramanetaka, then governor of Majunga. Ramanetaka was, in turn, married to Radama's sister.
58. I borrow the notion of repertoires of rule from Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010).
59. "Journal of Mr. Lyall's Mission," MNA HB 14 2, 93–97.
60. GMS 8, 21r–33r.
61. Jones to Unknown, London, 16 August 1831, LMS ILM 4 3 B.
62. GMS 8, 4r.
63. Jones to Unknown, Antananarivo, 29 July 1829, LMS ILM 3 2 A.
64. GMS 8, 7r.
65. GMS 8, 6r; emphasis added.
66. Ranavalomanjaka to Ramanasina, Tananarivo, 7 Alakaosy 1836, ARM AR BB 11, 3v.
67. GMS 8, 34r; Corroller to Lyall, Tananarivo, 27 juillet 1828, enclosure to MNA HB 10 2, 1; Lyall to Coleville, Tananarivo, 30 August 1828, MNA HB 19 3, 3. Corroller was replaced by Rainimahay.
68. GMS 8, 31r (residence); Lyall to Colville, Tananarivou, 1 March 1829, MNA HB 19 18, 49 (house arrest).
69. GMS 8, 44r–48r.
70. Jones to Unknown, London, 16 August 1831, LMS ILM 4 3 B.
71. Contributions can be found in William Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar*, i, 113 (census figures); i, 122 (origins of Malagasy); ii, 124–125 (Andrianampoinimerina); ii, 400–403 (Radama); J. P. Jourdain, "Ile de Madagascar: notice sur les Ovas," *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages* 4 (1839): 19–23 (death of Andrianampoinimerina).

72. There is some confusion about the precise date of Corroller's death. It is identified by most documents to have occurred between November 9 and 15.
73. Freeman to Dick, Port Louis, 24 November 1835, MNA HB 9 43, 1.
74. A. Siegrist, *Mademoiselle Juliette, Princesse Malgache* (Tananarive, 1937); Esoavelomandroso, "Malagasy Creoles."
75. See (Mary) Johns to Unknown, Abergaveny, 13 November 1844, LMS archives, Incoming Letters from Mauritius, Box 3, Folder 3, Jacket A, page 9 (hereafter LMS ILMAU 3 3 A, 9).
76. Corroller to Nicolay, Tamatave, 24 mars 1835, MNA HB 9 31.
77. Larson, *Ocean of Letters*, chap. 6.
78. For reports of this expedition see NAB CO 167 184. Admiralty records for the *Andromache* will need to be consulted to determine if it visited Tamatave on this voyage.
79. P. J. Barnwell, "Robe, Frederick Holt (1801–1871)," *Dictionnaire de biographie mauricienne* No. 17 (1941–1966): 528.
80. Identification of Grey's notations is confirmed by Auckland's Grey Library staff (email from Ian Sharp, 4 May 2009).
81. Ratsitohaina et al. to Ranavalomanjaka, Port Louis, 20 Alakaosy 1836, ARM AR DD 7, 83v–84r; Robe, "Memoranda, Of the Queen's Government," 27 September 1836, GMS 16; Gustave Mondain, *Documents historiques malgaches: des Malgaches chez Louis Philippe* (Tananarive, 1928), 13–18; Jean-Pierre Razafy-Andriamihaingo, *La geste éphémère de Ranavalona I<sup>re</sup>* (Paris, 1997), 52–76.
82. Johns to Ellis, Port Louis, 9 September 1836, LMS ILMAU 2 1 C, 3–4.
83. (Mary) Johns to Unknown, Abergaveny, 13 November 1844, LMS ILMAU 3 3 A, 9.
84. Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York, 2005).
85. Barnwell, "Robe," 528; E. J. R. Morgan, "Robe, Frederick Holt (1802–1871)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, ii (Melbourne, 1967), 383–84.
86. James Cameron and W. H. I. Bleek, *The Library of His Excellency Sir George Grey, K.C.B. Philology. Vol. I. Part III. Madagascar*. (London, 1859).
87. *General Catalogue of Grey Collection, Free Public Library* (Auckland, 1888), x, xii–xv, 291–92; Donald Kerr, *Books and Manuscripts Related to Madagascar in the George Grey Rare Books Room* (Auckland, 1996), unpaginated introduction ("Oceanic language").