

The Vernacular Life of the Street: Ratsitanina and Indian Ocean Créolité¹

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The record of an alleged conspiracy of Madagascar-born slaves and apprentices in Mauritius during 1822 offers a useful vantage onto the vernacular life of the street in the colonial Mascarene islands of the western Indian Ocean. This article examines details of the alleged conspiracy to propose that Ratsitanina, the accused ringleader, neither planned nor participated in a servile revolt. A close reading of the trial record, however, suggests that the Malagasy language was widely spoken in Mauritius in 1822 and that Malagasy speakers maintained communities in Mascarene diaspora through frequent encounters and vernacular exchanges along urban byways. Together with colonial censuses, these documents challenge scholars to rethink the timing and nature of creolisation in the French slave islands of the western Indian Ocean. Multilingualism and cultural heterogeneity were more salient features of colonial human landscapes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than commonly admitted in prevalent models of Indian Ocean créolité. This article proposes a dynamic model of creolisation for the Indian Ocean islands that emphasises the cultural and linguistic agility of subaltern colonial populations.

This story about créolité begins with political and human connections among islands of the western Indian Ocean and a dramatic colonial execution. Ratsitanina, a general of noble birth and son of a distinguished advisor at the court of King Radama in highland Madagascar, parted with his head on a platform erected on the Plaine Verte of Port Louis, Mauritius, at noon on 15 April 1822. Decapitated immediately before him were two other men born in Madagascar who had lived in Mauritius for a number of years, Cotte Voud, also known as Prospère, an apprentice (Prize Negro), and Latulipe, a slave. After the execution the three men's heads were posted

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atop pikes on a mountain behind the colonial port city. It was less the race or the legal status of the victims that explains their common fate—one a free man, one a slave, the last an apprentice—than their connections and actions based on the relevance of Malagasy identity and language in a colonial slave society of the western Indian Ocean. To start, let us focus on the free man. Two alleged crimes brought Ratsitanina before the executioner's block that day: one committed deep in Madagascar, the big island of the region still free of colonial rule; the other on the heights of Mauritius, its nearby colonial neighbour (see Figure 1).²

The free prisoner's misfortunes commenced six months earlier during a military expedition prosecuted by the ambitious King Radama of highland Madagascar and his British ambassador (then known as 'agent'), James Hastie, a Scotsman sent to the court at Antananarivo by Governor Farquhar of Mauritius. 'Fever, and the want of provisions,' wrote British missionaries later of the military action among the Sakalava Menabe far beyond the southwestern reaches of Radama's kingdom, 'proved dreadfully destructive to the troops in this expedition.' It seems Radama had travelled with too many soldiers and an insufficient supply of food. Hunger plagued the forces on their return to Antananarivo in October 1821, and malaria preyed on the weak. 'Even Radama himself, and the British agent, had a mere handful of rice, and a few birds which they shot, during the space of eight days.' Meanwhile the troops starved. Between 25 and 30,000 of Radama's soldiers expired, it was claimed, most from hunger, possibly some 30 to 40% of his army. The deaths seared themselves into both the collective memory and the historiography of highland Madagascar.³

According to Aristide Corroller, Ratsitanina presented himself at the door to Radama's tent one day on that mortiferous return to Antananarivo with a drawn sword. The 'athletic' Ratsitanina 'of swarthy complexion & high stature' threatened to kill the young and diminutive king, who in organising the expedition had followed the advice of his British agent and the governor of Mauritius. Radama was resting comfortably when Ratsitanina appeared before him, Corroller tells us, but through the fabric walls of his tent he alerted Raimaka, the head of his 'honourable' Tsimandoa body guards. No-one was hurt, and Ratsitanina was promptly arrested. 'See if this man is mad,' the king immediately commanded, 'and if not, hand him over to Brady to be tried by a court martial.' It appeared to those who inquired that day that Ratsitanina was quite sane. He was arraigned before the colonel-become-general James Brady, a Jamaican of mixed race on British payroll who commanded Radama's 'one-hundred-thousand-man army' of conquest, and found guilty of attempted regicide. He was sentenced to die.⁴

Normally, persons condemned to death by court martial were unceremoniously dragged off and extinguished by spear, musket, or fire. But Ratsitanina cheated death this time. His senior position in the army had gained him easy access to the king, yet the immediate reasons propelling him before Radama are not clear. As is typical of all such memorable events in Madagascar, accounts about precisely what Ratsitanina's offences were and where he had committed them differ significantly. Some renditions of Ratsitanina's motives insist that the target of his homicidal intentions was the British agent and not the king. Others have Ratsitanina concealing

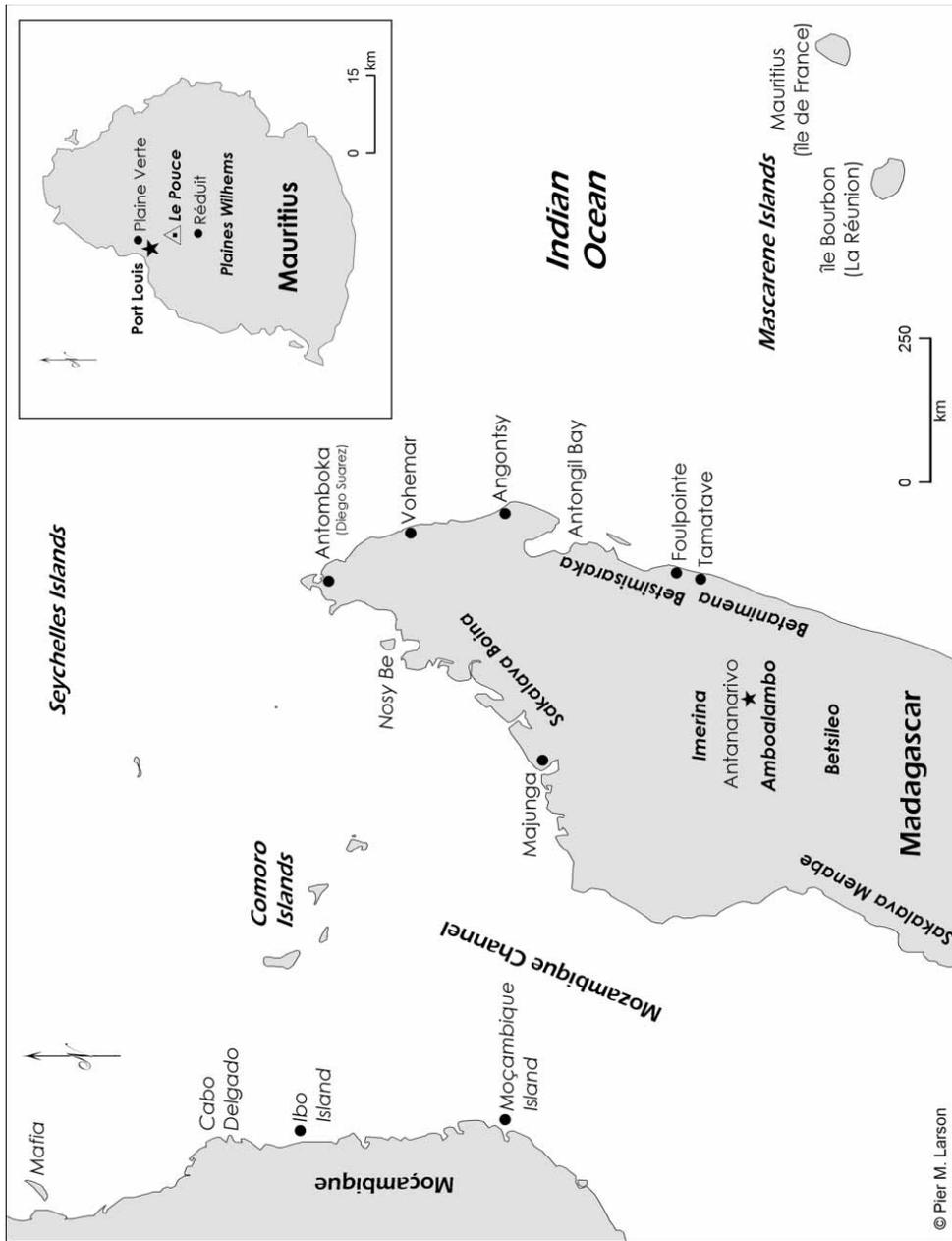


Figure 1. 'The Islands of the Western Indian Ocean, c. 1822.

a knife in his toga and being demasked by Hastie during a public speech delivered by Radama once the army had returned to its base at Antananarivo. French traveller Leguével de Lacombe who visited Madagascar after the execution of Ratsitatanina found rather improbably in him an advocate for French interests at Radama's court. Throughout the expedition, he wrote, Ratsitatanina sought an opportunity to remove the British agent from Radama's presence. When the occasion fortuitously presented itself, Ratsitatanina and his collaborating officers arrested Hastie and hauled him before the men in camp. The footsoldiers clamoured for Hastie's execution. His alleged offences were both his antislavery (convincing Radama to forbid soldiers from taking prisoners for the purpose of enslaving them) and the ill-informed logistical advice he offered the army. These 'crimes' against the wealth and wellbeing of the soldiers had deeply injured Ratsitatanina, a long-time slave trader—the career of most military officers in the king's army—and resentful of Radama's new ear for a Scotsman. British abolitionism in the Indian Ocean was costing Ratsitatanina and his family both wealth and political influence. Many believed the European participation in this expedition had translated into silent carnage and grinding hunger for a free army that had departed Antananarivo only some months earlier flush with expectation of victory and its booty to follow.⁵

Whether of attempting to murder king or British agent, the charges levelled against Ratsitatanina were likely fabricated. The most telling evidence of this was the continuing life of the prisoner. Court secretary Raombana reported in his rendition of the incident some decades later that 'from the mouths of those who seized him, I have been informed that no dagger were [*sic*] found about his person, and therefore the order of the King must have emanated from former malice against this illustrious person'. In fact, the youthful Radama perceived the seasoned Ratsitatanina and his brothers as serious threats, a stance testified by the decisions he took regarding them. Two of the brothers fell in Radama's armies. A third, the unwary Razakarivony, was murdered by one of Radama's generals, Rainitsiroba. The homicide, we are told, occurred by order of Radama in Razakarivony's house with a spear from his own collection of prized weapons. While one day feigning admiration of the arms arrayed on Razakarivony's walls, Rainitsiroba grasped hold of one of them and suddenly plunged it through the warrior's chest. The chronology of these fraternal deaths cannot be established, but they suggest that the charges against Ratsitatanina were designed to remove another member of an influential family from the insecure king's court at Antananarivo.⁶

The palace friends of one André Coppalle, a French academician sent from the Collège Royal of Mauritius in 1825 to paint Radama's portrait, assured him that the charges against Ratsitatanina had been made up and the conviction a sham. This in any case was the tenor of opinion at Radama's capital three years after Ratsitatanina's decapitation in Mauritius. And protesting intentions of regicide, Ratsitatanina demanded to drink *tangena*, a vegetal poison that positively determined guilt or innocence in matters difficult for human judges to discern, or when they had been corrupted. The *tangena* poison ordeal was renowned for its ability to detect the base and surreptitious intentions of witches and also to establish the speciousness of trumped-up charges. But trial by

tangena created an uncomfortable and delicate situation for both Radama and Hastie in late 1821. Ratsitanina's brother, Razakarivony, had been married to one of Radama's sisters, and Ratsitanina's father, Andriamambavola, was for decades a powerful presence at the royal court, faithfully serving Radama's legendary father Andrianampoinimerina. King and accused military commander were bound together in a dense mix of affinity, obligation, and enmity. And it seems Radama was 'secretly afraid' of Ratsitanina. If it followed on that of his brothers, Ratsitanina's death as an innocent man might have inflicted more political damage upon Radama than his fragile grip over power could bear, for his relationship with the influential military families of Ratsitanina's home district (Avaradrano, see map), on which his royal power rested, were sore and strained.⁷

For his part Hastie was also concerned with the stability of Radama's administration, to which British policy for the suppression of the slave trades of the western Indian Ocean had been linked since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. For the British agent, poison ordeals were 'absurd and cruel' proceedings unbecoming the justice of a king with whom a Protestant, abolitionist Britain had forged an alliance of friendship and legitimate trade, and whose government it sought to enlighten and civilise. More immediately, administration of the ordeal risked slipping the convict free of captivity or even from suspicion of attempted regicide in the eyes of highland Madagascar's people, casting doubt on their king's motives should it prove the prisoner innocent. Either way, a common trial by ordeal in this case could poison both Radama's power and Britain's abolitionist interests in the Indian Ocean.⁸

Prison and mountain

To sidestep the tangena ordeal and its potentially unsavoury international diplomatic outcomes, Radama and Hastie agreed to exile Ratsitanina to Mauritius, which had already begun to serve as a penal colony for British India. Agent and 'state prisoner' thus arrived in Mauritius on 3 January 1822 aboard the *HMS Menai* in company with a close political associate of Radama, an envoy named Rafaralahy Andriantiana, five Malagasy boys to learn military band in the colony, and a number of King Radama's soldiers. The role of Rafaralahy Andriantiana in conveying Ratsitanina to Mauritius is unclear, but the prisoner later accused the royal envoy of betraying him at some unspecified point into British custody. First passing into the colonial archive of Mauritius as simply *un noir malgache* the noble military commandant from nearby Madagascar was confined under the British agent's extralegal orders in the *bagne*, the prison workhouse at the port reserved primarily for government slaves and apprentices.⁹

For his part ambassador Rafaralahy Andriantiana proceeded to James Hastie's home, from where he sallied freely about colonial Mauritius with provisions, clothing, and a horse provided by Governor Farquhar to receive British gubernatorial 'consels', to sit for a portrait executed by one Monsieur Lemaire *fils*, and 'to gather information on the productions and economy for Radama'. The portrait painter was undoubtedly 25-year-old Auguste Hubert Lisis Le Maire, son of Jean Pierre Auguste Le Maire, the head of the marronage bureau at the time and responsible for rounding up runaway

slaves and prisoners. While son painted one Malagasy chief, father was about to hunt down the other. This Indian Ocean drama had all the makings of colonial circus. King Radama's free soldiers who had accompanied Rafaralahy Andriantiana, meanwhile, wandered about Port Louis at will, and no doubt unarmed. They chatted with Malagasy slaves and apprentices in the city marketplace and wandered the boutiques lining the town's commercial avenues seeking to purchase British military uniforms which they would sport to dramatic sartorial effect back home in Madagascar. The colonial city's byways as well as its prisons, it seems, were crowded with Malagasy.¹⁰

In the *bagne*, meanwhile, Ratsitanina remained under loose surveillance and in a private room on the second floor for some six weeks—until Sunday, 17 February. After sundown that evening, he slipped out the front door of his house of detention with the help of newly formed Malagasy acquaintances, wound his way through the dark streets of a colonial port town he had hardly seen, and up the mountains behind it. Over three days on the mountain known as 'the thumb' (*le Pouce*) the fugitive Ratsitanina was joined by a number of other men from the town, all of them born in Madagascar. In the days following his escape from the *bagne*, news of the presence on the mountain of a free Malagasy *général* spread like wildfire among Malagasy in the colonial port, attracting about a dozen slaves and apprentices to the heights and setting many more abuzz in town.¹¹

On Wednesday, 20 February, three days after Ratsitanina's escape from the *bagne*, the gathering of people on the mountain and a white flag they planted prominently there became plainly visible to those in the city. At 10 o'clock that morning a Malagasy apprentice named Jean Laizafy (usually Gallicised as Laizaf in the archive) serving Monsieur Orioux, commander of a maroon-hunting detachment, was marched by his master to the office of the colony's chief of police in Port Louis. In front of his master and the chief's assistant, Laizafy denounced the gathering of Malagasy on the mountain as a rebellion intent on 'setting fire to the four corners of the city' and 'profiting from the moment to massacre the Whites & and all those resembling them who would not join in'. Laizafy had himself participated in the gathering the previous night, an act for which he nearly paid with his head. In fact most of the accused later testified that Laizafy had coaxed them to climb the mountain and join Ratsitanina in the 'wicked conspiracy, against the lives and properties of the White Inhabitants of this colony'.¹²

Ratsitanina, Laizafy alleged, was ringleader of the Malagasy slaves and apprentices who had left their Port Louis masters without permission and would emerge as king-general of Mauritius from the flames. In this most improbable of tales Ratsitanina was to command a servile revolt of some 12 Malagasy on the hill ('a number certainly very inadequate to so great an enterprise') in the third-largest slaveholding colony of the British empire, though he himself was a slave trader and knew little of Mauritius, 'an island, wherein he was a stranger, had only been resident two months & possessed no sway whatever'. The fantasy of a military officer from the Big Island (Madagascar) come to free their slaves and apprentices from toil and to extinguish their lives of privilege was gobbled up by the colony's jittery holders of human property. Nearly all whites shared the sentiment later explicated during trial by the state prosecutor

that 'in a colony one is always on a volcano by the number of surrounding enemies'. Most consistently feared among those surrounding enemies were Malagasy speakers.¹³

Alerted to Laizafy's denunciation by his assistant, the chief of police rode into town from his suburban residence and requested General Darling to send British troops up the hill behind the city. Darling declined, citing a requirement for direct orders from the governor. From his country residence in Réduit that afternoon, Governor Farquhar sought to mobilise civilian militia forces under the *commissaires civils* of the districts surrounding the mountains and requested Darling only to post British forces at the primary mountain passes on the city side of the heights. Meanwhile, it appears that a militia from Port Louis, acting on the governor's orders, ascended the mountain to capture the Malagasy assembled there. It was only the next day, 21 February, that Governor Farquhar ordered Major General Darling to dispatch British troops to chase 'the Blacks assembled with hostile & rebellious intentions in the neighbouring mountains'. By that time Ratsitanina was already in custody.¹⁴

Pushed from 'the thumb' by the militia forces ascending the mountain from the town side, Ratsitanina fled southeastward down its slopes on the opposite face to Port Louis on the evening of 20 February, led, he testified later, through the cane fields of sugar estates on an island he did not know. He was captured along with acquaintances Narcisse, Léveillé, and Fanchin in the fields of Plaines Wilhems not long after daybreak the next morning (Thursday) by a vigilant planter, Leonidis Martin Moncamp *fils*, and his slaves. When encountered in the canes, Ratsitanina is reported to have 'insolently' inquired 'What do you want?' in his native tongue of the uncomprehending planter supervising the operation, words translated by one of Moncamp's Malagasy-speaking slaves named Mathurin. For this presumptuous question in his vernacular, Ratsitanina received a violent stroke on the head with the flat side of a machete. The blow portended sharper things to come. Hauled in to Port Louis over a series of days, Ratsitanina, the Malagasy slaves and apprentices who had so visibly assembled with him on the mountain behind Port Louis, and their supposed acquaintances and contacts in town numbering nearly 40 persons in all soon became the subject of a well-publicised legal proceeding stretching over nearly two months and generating a thick documentary record of some 2000 manuscript pages.¹⁵

Ratsitanina and a number of alleged accomplices were eventually condemned in the court of first instance for having planned a rebellion of Port Louis's Malagasy slaves and apprentices. The convictions were upheld with significant modifications by the appeals court and again with further modifications by Governor Farquhar. Three of the men were eventually sent for execution. 'Of those that suffered,' recounted (ex) Chief of Police Edward Byam of the occasion,

a Madagascar black, apprentice to government of the name of Prosper was first led to the block and suffered decapitation, which is here preferred for the blacks, as going to deprive them of the hope in their superstition fondly cherished, of after death, returning to their own country if the head be not severed from the body. During this execution . . . Rassitane (purposely reserved for the last) looked on with a firm & undaunted countenance. Next approached Latulippe but the executioner miserably mangling his head which made the unhappy object turn & give a scowl

after the first blow which rendered the executioner further tremulous in the performance of his duty which it required three or four blows to carry into complete effect. Rassitane's fortitude whilst viewing the mangled body of his countryman for a moment forsook him & his limbs shook under his robust & vigorous body and his teeth gnashed, but coming to his own turn, he recovered himself and advanced with a firm & unshaken step to the block on which with the greatest composure placing his head, he suffered the last ignominious act of his sentence, persisting in his not having committed the offence for which he suffered to the last. This melancholy event, announced by the discharge of a great gun & the hoisting of a red flag on the tower of Port Louis happened at noon on the 15th April 1822.¹⁶

Others of the condemned, including apparent ringleader Laizafy, were sentenced to witness the three decapitations at Plaine Verte and then marched off into lives of chained labour. They likely did not live long in this condition. Governor Farquhar had spared Laizafy the axe for having denounced the 'rebellion' of Malagasy, saving Port Louis's white inhabitants, the reasoning went, from the unthinkable conflagration that inevitably would have followed. Still others caught up in the meeting of Malagasy on the mountain were released to their grateful masters for the acute terrors of private punishment, having nearly caused them a significant financial loss and the stinging censure of the colony's whites for failing to control their servile dependents.¹⁷

The vernacular life of the street

The condemnation of Ratsitanina by a French colonial judicial system in a rising British sugar colony has ripened in the collective memory of modern Mauritius, which gained its political independence in 1968, as a romantic symbol of Creole resistance to a wealthy planter class of Franco-Mauritians. (In modern Mauritius 'Creoles' are the descendants of Afro-Malagasy slaves, to be distinguished from 'creoles' with a small 'c' which I employ to designate persons born on or particularly identifying with the islands, a meaning current in the Mascarenes to about 1830.) Walter Acton serialised a dreamy history of a creolised and culturally assimilated Ratsitanina in the *Port Louis Revue* in 1879; the same drama was reprinted a decade later in *Le Voleur Mauricien*. The state archivist of Mauritius entered the debate before the country's independence when he concluded, without citing specific evidence, that Ratsitanina, inspired by Laizafy, 'provoked an uprising of the many Malagasy slaves of the colony'. This line of mythmaking has flourished in independent Mauritius. In 1980 playwright and historian Azize Asgarally produced a new and sympathetic portrayal of Ratsitanina reminiscent of Acton's drama a century earlier. In successive academic publications, Issa Asgarally has interpreted the 'Ratsitanina affair' as a challenge to the colony's government and slaveholders. Gaëtan Benoît also writes in his essay on Afro-Mauritians published in 1985 that Laizafy 'inspired the prince to incite the large number of Madagascan slaves to revolt'. Using Benoît's essay as a point of departure, Sheila Ward featured an imaginary Ratsitanina bearing hardly the faintest resemblance to the man in her book *Prisoners in Paradise* (1986). Ratsitanina has today become a mythic figure in Mauritian Creole politics,

a key element of the push to exorcise what is popularly known on the island as *le malaise créole* (Creole discontent). Ratsitanina has also emerged as a heroic and resistant ancestor in popular Mauritian Creole music. The commandant and slave trader from Antananarivo is the curious and contradictory subject of a celebratory Creole imagination. In late 2004 historian and Creole activist Norbert Benoît alleged to great public fanfare that one of the mummified heads in the Mauritius Institute was *bel et bien* that of Ratsitanina. The head was later confirmed as a Maori *Toi Moko* from New Zealand and repatriated there. But no matter, Ratsitanina's well-worn tale of valour lived on in the spicy rumour.¹⁸

Modern Creole activists and the colonial justice system that in 1822 sent Ratsitanina to his death have much in common with respect to him, unfortunately. Both refuse to believe Ratsitanina's testimony before the court, silencing him to substitute their words and their understanding for his. Both view him through a long-standing mythical tradition in *île de France*/Mauritius explored recently by historian Megan Vaughan as a romantic and dangerous hypermasculine Malagasy leader of maroons, a colonial fear fantasy reaching back to the Dutch occupation of the island in the seventeenth century. In modern Mauritius Ratsitanina is 'read' again and again through a cultural stereotype of colonial roots from which his memory in the Mascarenes seems fated never to escape. Meanwhile the trial record and other historical evidence about the general and slave trader from highland Madagascar, though sitting in the nearby Mauritius National Archives, are largely ignored. Myth has its practical utilities, of course, yet in this case the political mileage wrung from telling stories of Ratsitanina-the-hero badly distorts Afro-Malagasy-Creole history in the islands. From the early nineteenth century down to the present, the popular imagination in the Mascarenes has thrown a shroud over the presence of Madagascar and Africa in the colonial islands, a shroud repeatedly symbolised by the insistence of both colonial court and modern scholar-activist to dance Ratsitanina to their own plotlines and to spell his name in misleading Gallicised variations of *Rassitatane*. What happens when we take the historical record and knowledge of Madagascar as our entry points into this colonial drama at the imagined cornerstone of modern Creole identity in an island of the western Indian Ocean?¹⁹

Ratsitanina's story is a matter of intrinsic interest and mystery, to be sure. He consistently and plausibly claimed in escaping the *bagne* he was seeking a boat promised by Jean Laizafy to ferry him back to Madagascar together with a crew of subordinate Malagasy slaves and apprentices from Mauritius willing to undertake the risky and exciting venture with him. At most times a sailing ship departing the Mascarenes would touch the east coast of Madagascar in only four or five days. Attempted flights to the Big Island by Malagasy who lifted fishing craft from the coastal estates and quiet shores of the colonial islands were frequent and sometimes successful. Some slaves entered merchant vessels while passing as free sailors for a quick return to their island home. Both law and practice kept Malagasy bondmen and women from practicing trades that provided them with access to small boats, which were to be placed under lock and careful watch to prevent unauthorised use. Ratsitanina

sought to escape his confinement in the *bagne* and rumoured pending transfer to the far outlying island of Rodrigues to return home, he emphasised more than once to the court, to see his mother and father. This was most likely an affected cover by the seasoned general for more political motives should he have been successful in reaching home. But Ratsitanina argued most convincingly that Laizafy betrayed him to curry the favour of his slave-catching master.²⁰

Laizafy may well have set Ratsitanina and the others up to advance his career as the lieutenant of a slave hunter or in doing the bidding of Radama's diplomatic envoy then in the colony, Rafaralahy Andriantiana, with whom he is said to have met several times. If so, the scheme backfired, for he was condemned to forced labour, escaping immediate death only by the governor's pardon. But it is also likely that Laizafy denounced the gathering of Malagasy he helped to assemble on the mountain for purposes of assisting Ratsitanina's watery escape when the enthusiastic group of young men became far too unwieldy for him to manage clandestinely. Whatever the case, by denouncing the gathering Laizafy saved his own neck. For some Malagasy slaves and apprentices at Mauritius, Ratsitanina-the-commander may well have represented a fleeting glimmer of hope for freedom in either revolt or escape—if these are what Laizafy actually sold to them when he sent them to visit the fugitive general on the heights. But it was a curious mixture of persons on the mountain behind Port Louis: a free slaving noble-general with designs on power at Antananarivo together with Mascarene slaves and apprentices, even if all Malagasy. From the peak, Ratsitanina must have looked out over a colonial port city he had helped to supply with unfree labour. According to Laizafy, Ratsitanina was now to unmake it with fire and sword.²¹

But the Malagasy on the mountain had only two machetes for cutting cane, a baton, and a pistol with several bullets, yet only powder enough for firing two of them tied in a filthy rag. Hardly an arsenal for war with the British troops whose line barracks Ratsitanina could observe in the town directly below, and whose power he knew by lengthy experience of war in Madagascar. But it was all damning evidence in an emotionally volatile slave colony of the supposed murderous intentions of Malagasy gathered on the hills overlooking Port Louis. The machetes were employed by the fugitives to fell a pilfered bull for meat. The pistol was fired twice in the air, probably by Laizafy seeking to alert the Port Louis militia to the men's mountain hideout. When Ratsitanina was captured in the cane fields of Plaines Wilhems not so far from where the University of Mauritius stands today, he threw his machete to the ground and gave himself up peacefully to the slaves of Leonidis Martin Moncamp *fi*ls, asking only in his mother tongue what they desired of him. He denied all knowledge of and participation in a rebellion. These actions were all of extraordinary cowardice for the 'heroic commander of a slave revolt'. And yet Ratsitanina paid for them with his head.

Leader of a slave revolt Ratsitanina most likely was not. The testimony of those dragged before the judges pointed squarely to Laizafy as the originator of the meeting on the mountain, and most slaves and apprentices in the colony probably knew all too well that partial confession to the charges brought against them—even if utterly false—was the most likely means for preserving their lives. A careful reading of Governor Farquhar's correspondence suggests he did not share the

French inhabitants' assessment of the gathering of Malagasy on the mountain behind Port Louis as a threat, even though he signed off on Ratsitanina's execution (he did so ostensibly to calm the public clamour over which he was responsible for establishing a *pax Britannica*). In a letter dated 28 February Farquhar assured London that only a 'handful of slaves' had been involved in the assembly. 'The colony,' he wrote, 'is perfectly tranquil, and more happy and contented than I think it ever was, as to its slave population.' Farquhar ended the letter with an apology. 'I trust you will excuse me,' he pleaded with the assistant to the principle secretary of state for the colonies, 'for intruding so long upon your time with details of such comparative insignificance.'²²

But most members of the courts of first instance and of appeal at Port Louis, along with its white residents, refused to see the meeting on the mountain as insignificant. They, as many Creole activists do today, found Ratsitanina guilty, the leader of maroon slaves who derived dangerous and mystical power from his connections with the Big Island of Madagascar and his manipulation of charms. It is more likely that Ratsitanina was a tragic figure, falling long and hard along his unforeseen itinerary of alleged crimes from his king's court into the dishonourable company (and the mercy, no less) of slaves in a colony he scarcely knew. Charms may have been his last line of protection, and these too failed him. That was the view across the water in Antananarivo in any case. As one courtier in Madagascar put it, 'His brave soul could not brook the idea of always remaining with slaves . . . This displeased Him very much, on account of his high rank; and certainly it was not proper to place him amongst slaves'. Not a single document testifies to Ratsitanina's anger or immoderation while in Mauritius. Rather, the archive tends to portray him, in custody, as confused and disheartened yet 'peaceable in the highest degree.'²³

Despite overwhelming material and circumstantial evidence running contrary to the popular myth of Ratsitanina as leader of a slave rebellion—the charge laid to him by the *state prosecutor* in a slave society it should be remembered—it is not re-determining the Malagasy fugitive's guilt or innocence that most interests me here. The record will never speak Ratsitanina's intentions to us. And for Afro-Malagasy-Creole history it does not matter. Nor should it. What is remarkable about the altogether prejudicial but tragically typical colonial incident is the ample court record of the proceedings against Ratsitanina and his associates, a record that when read for what it tells us about the lives of the city's subalterns, rather than the guilt or innocence of a single wayward slave trader from the neighbouring Big Island, testifies to an extraordinary presence of Madagascar in and around the urban locations of Port Louis during 1822.

When Ratsitanina went missing from the *bagne* in mid-February, James Hastie informed the public they were seeking a man 'acquainted with his native language only'. During his six weeks in confinement at the *bagne*, however, the monolingual Ratsitanina entered into dense networks of socialisation. The creole *grand commandeur* of the *bagne*, a Monsieur Gaiqui (sometimes also Gaigny in the documents), testified that Ratsitanina enjoyed the company of five *noirs* held in the same prison. Undoubtedly he spoke Malagasy with them. Gaiqui also testified he frequently observed Ratsitanina working the *sikidy*, or Malagasy divination with seeds, 'après la

manière de son peuple' for clients who arrived at the port prison. As news spread among Malagasy in the town that Ratsitanina was at the *bagne*, visitors began to gather at the loosely guarded centre of detention to greet him. 'Quelques noirs et négresses,' the court learned, 'who know him or knew him in his country visited him bearing mangos, bananas, and other similar things'. Sangane, for instance, testified that 'having heard it said that there was a Malagasy chief at the *Bagne*, I went to see him out of curiosity'. Brutus, Adonis, L'Espérance, Azor, Lubin, and Dick all socialised with Ratsitanina in the *bagne*. And there were others too.²⁴

One of Ratsitanina's co-accused, Jupiter (whose Malagasy name is also revealed as Mami, or Mamy), was even an acquaintance of the commandant's family from highland Madagascar who had suffered the misfortunes of capture and export enslavement. During these meetings, the judges learned, slaves and apprentices visiting the Malagasy *prince* enjoyed singing home tunes in their native tongue. The airs of Madagascar filled the *bagne*! Typically, however, the court record never explicitly testifies to the language spoken by the Malagasy assembled on the mountain behind Port Louis. But by all accounts Ratsitanina freely conversed with those who joined him there. This could only have been in Malagasy. Each time he was interrogated by the police or before the court Ratsitanina required an interpreter. There were several of these, including Ravode, described as a *natif de Madagascar libre* (either a Madagascar-born freedman, or a free person from Madagascar who had never been a slave in Mauritius), and one Jean Pierre Bombé, portrayed as a *créole libre* of the island, a Mauritius-born man one would assume, perhaps of Malagasy parentage. In any case, Bombé's linguistic competence extended far past the French creole to the native tongue of the Big Island, while Ravode's went well beyond his native Malagasy to the French patois.²⁵

Only days after Ratsitanina was captured in the cane fields of Plaines Wilhems, a professor at the Collège Royal of Port Louis by the name of Monsieur Boulanger was on business in the courtyard of the police station where the prisoner was being held. Boulanger was tarrying

close to the door of the cell where the Chief *Rassitanane* was temporarily confined. He [Ratsitanina] appeared at his small window where he uttered a sentence in Malagasy not understood by anyone present. Boulanger had a Malagasy fetched, who after having heard *Rassitanane* repeat what he had earlier said, the translation was, if his life be spared, he would reveal who had caused him to act on this occasion (*si l'on voulait lui accorder la vie, il ferait connaître celui qui l'avait fait agir en cette Circonstance*).

When Governor Farquhar learned of Ratsitanina's reported request for a plea bargain he rejected it outright. The event cannot be read as a confession of guilt to the state prosecutor's charges. What the prisoner's words at the window do reveal, though, is that Malagasy speakers were readily available on the streets of the colonial city to be fetched at a moment's notice for interpretive services between their mother tongue and French. 'The prisoner who wishes to confess should, constantly, be so confined as not to be able to *converse* with people in the street, or outside of the Prison,' Farquhar lectured the Procureur Général after learning of the incident. 'This is another

instance of the inefficiency of the [Police] Department,' he bemoaned. It is likely that Ratsitanina's successful attempt to communicate out of his window with those who gawked at him figured in Farquhar's firing of chief of police Byam only days later. The governor wanted the Malagasy prisoner held in isolation. Meanwhile, the gubernatorial rebuke was a rare admission from on high of the commonness of Malagasy speakers navigating the colony's streets, for Ratsitanina could only voice *Malagasy* words through his prison window.²⁶

This brings us to other discoveries in the court record. With the exception of Ratsitanina, virtually all the accused were younger men (and a few women) in their twenties and thirties. Most of them testified to the police and before the court in French creole, with snippets of that language reproduced in the record. La Paix, for example, testified that Laizafy had encountered him at *la Pompe* (a water source or a Port-Louis street, or both) and entreated him, 'Veni avec moi la haut montagne'. Yet born on the Big Island, most accused co-conspirators had spoken Malagasy with Ratsitanina. Taken together, these stories of linguistic versatility suggest that many Malagasy and their creole children in Port Louis were at least bilingual in 1822. Knowing the French creole of the island undoubtedly proved a necessity in certain circumstances and was useful also before the court, but when it came to socialisation with their own we cannot assume that Malagasy slaves and apprentices spoke the creole with any frequency. What is perhaps most striking from the record are the social and ethnic circuits of awareness that the alleged conspiracy laid bare. Whites in Port Louis seem to have been oblivious to the presence of Ratsitanina at the *bagne* or even on the mountain until he was publicly denounced by Laizafy as being at the core of a plot to burn the city and cut down its European residents. *Then* they took notice. Yet for weeks Malagasy had been chatting among themselves about the presence among them of a free Malagasy *chef, roi, or général*. 'Having heard that a Malagasy king or chief had arrived,' Brutus affirmed, 'he went to see him [at the *bagne*] out of curiosity'. Malagasy of various legal statuses in urban Port Louis seem to have constituted their community through a lively culture of the street.²⁷

When pressed for where he had first heard of Ratsitanina's presence on the mountain, Brutus, for example, 'responded having heard of it in the street (*dans la rue*) by several blacks and particularly from Adonis, a Malagasy belonging to Sieur Allaupe'. It was in part by the news of the street and the market (*le bazard*), words and ideas exchanged in passing, in the heat of everyday life, that Malagasy in Port Louis lived their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness and constituted their networks of ethnic socialisation I here characterise as a vernacular life of the street. Narcisse confirmed the identity of Ratsitanina while in the *bazard* in conversation with a free soldier of Madagascar in the service of Rafaralahy Andriantiana, who himself continued to explore Mauritius on horseback despite a clamour among the town's whites fearful about the potential dangers of allowing another Malagasy *prince* to roam the colony at will. Laizafy had done much recruiting for the mountain gathering among Malagasy frequenting the *bazard* and the *pompe*.²⁸

Young men without families and households of their own in a colonial island whose slave population was still mostly foreign-born and overwhelmingly male—especially

in Port Louis, where male slaves outnumbered female slaves by almost two to one in 1822—had formed a network of Malagasy friends ‘known in the street’ (*connait de rue*). This vernacular life of the street in which the conversations of slaves and apprentices were mingled with those of free Malagasy merchants, soldiers, and migrants travelling to and from Mauritius, characterised the public lanes of Port Louis. Often speaking their mother tongue, young Malagasy shared times of conversation in plain sight but beyond the knowledge, hearing, or concern of their masters and others. Openly ‘secret’ vernacular lives lived in the bustling byways, unremarkable to whites for their ubiquity and commonality, and lives exposed in the government archive only under extraordinary circumstances when slaves and apprentices faced the gravest of consequences if they refused to reveal their associates and associations. Only a looming emergency, it seems, could ferry the subaltern quotidian into colonial documentation.²⁹

Even as late as 1822 Port Louis’s circuits of urban friendship were being formed in large part, the trial record suggests, along old-country notions of ethnicity. As we have already learned, Ratsitanina was visited at the *bagne* by those ‘who know him or knew him in his country’. When Adonis was first questioned about why he visited Ratsitanina in the *bagne*, he replied that he had been sent there by Nelson and two other *noirs ambolambes* (Ambolambe blacks), Ambolambe/Amboalambo being an ethnic affiliation from highland Madagascar shared by Ratsitanina. It seems that Ratsitanina had energised the Amboalambo ethnic networks of Port Louis, networks that usually remain nearly hidden in the colonial record behind the deceptive (but perhaps only public) French names of most Malagasy slaves and apprentices, networks concealed, as Megan Vaughan has recently written, behind the more inclusive colonial category of *Malgache*.³⁰

This seems to be the only reference to Malagasy sub-ethnicities in the judicial record of 1822, but it was common knowledge in Antananarivo some decades later that Ratsitanina’s chief associates were *hova* (a term roughly synonymous with Amboalambo and designating people from highland Madagascar now usually known as Merina). ‘He was know[n] to most of the Hova slaves who were at Port Louis,’ wrote historian and courtier Raombana of Ratsitanina in the early 1850s, ‘and as they often come to visit Him on account of his high rank, He laid a plan with some of them for to seize one or two boats in the Harbour during a night time, steer westward, and try to gain the shore of Madagascar, whatever may be the consequence of it.’ It is most likely that the some four dozen Malagasy men and women brought in for questioning and prosecution represented a diverse group of persons originally hailing from across the Big Island who had formed acquaintances through their shared captivity and language at Mauritius, but Amboalambo from highland Madagascar may have formed the core of this group. What *is* apparent is that while Malagasy in Port Louis, most of them young men, appeared to communicate easily with one another in their various speech varieties, they did not automatically efface their specific ethnic identities to internalise only the colonially spun designation *Malgache*. Not only were Malagasy slaves, apprentices, and freedmen multilingual, they stepped in and out of Malagasy sub-ethnic identities as they found it useful and

desirable in colonial life. Nor did the gender imbalance of the enslaved population of the city compel young men to abandon their mother tongues or Big Island identities for creole ones, as is frequently suggested.³¹

There is so much more about Malagasy life in Port Louis in the judicial record of this event—about *gris gris* (charms) or *fanafody* as they were known in Malagasy and testified in the archive, about poisons and potions, about oaths, about glass beads, about marriages between Malagasy, about clothing of white *langoutis*, and about the meanings and uses of ginger among the Malagasy of the island. But one last detail is revealing about outsiders and historians *seeing* the vernacular life of the street. Before Ratsitanina slipped from the *bagne* on 17 February he was wearing a *lamba totorano*, the luxurious and stylish white silk toga with a blue border common to the high classes of Antananarivo and locally manufactured in the Big Island. This costume in which he had boarded the *HMS Menai* for his fateful crossing to Mauritius and in which he had wrapped himself to sing songs from home and to work divination in the *bagne*, he could not wear about the streets of Port Louis, even at night, lest he risk detection. He donned, rather, the nondescript trousers and shirt of a common black labourer of the island. In this colonial garb he disguised himself to townspeople as an unremarkable *noir* or *créole* navigating the streets on the business of his master, as a colonially domesticated and (to whites) unthreatening part of the urban background. Such clothing—like whites' fleeting glimpses of conversing slaves from afar—masked who he and his mostly male Malagasy friends actually were, what they did with their days, and how they behaved when among their own. We must peel away these superficial creole-colonial integuments to actually *see* the cultured persons behind them.

It is both in the more readily legible processes of creolisation represented by the trousers and the shirt, and in the foreign, the Malagasy vernacular, the many *lamba totorano* and colloquial conversations so to speak, daily donned and doffed as necessary by immigrants in lowly circumstances and making their way about the byways of Mauritius and île Bourbon that we must seek out the fibre and flavour of subalterns' everyday lives in Mascarene islands of the western Indian Ocean. We don't see these ethnically distinctive and culturally versatile lives often enough in the colonial archive because the monolingual producers of government documents in the two islands with roughly similar ethnic population structures could not or would not often recognise them, and they are largely foreign to most modern researchers who don't speak Malagasy or know the ways of the Big Island. In the archive, we tend by inclination and training to hear French and see trousers and shirt, not the Malagasy tongue or the *lamba totorano*.

Créolité as agility

The judicial record of Ratsitanina's condemnation and execution in 1822 helps us to think critically about language and creolisation in the Mascarenes. In her history of slavery in eighteenth-century île de France, Megan Vaughan writes that from its colonial origins the Indian Ocean island was a creole society in the making. 'By

creole,' she clarifies, 'I simply mean that the island, without natives, has always been the product of multiple influences, multiple sources, which to differing degrees merge, take root, and naturalize on this new soil.' Vaughan rightly points out that elements of île de France's culture of inter-ethnic and interlingual interaction, in which she is principally interested, derived from multiple external sources and became uniquely domesticated through various modes of human communication in the colony. She urges scholars of the islands to think 'in terms not of cultural survivals, but rather of the incorporation of African and Malagasy elements into the evolving new creolized culture, in which all groups participated to one degree or another'. Vaughan weaves a complex and convincing tale of cultural mixing in her study through histories of fertility, love, reputation, and language. Françoise Vergès adopts a similar stance in writing about neighbouring île Bourbon that 'It is not an African island, nor a French island, nor an Asian island; it is an island of creolization'. The island of creolisation that is now La Réunion developed out of the survival strategies of the enslaved in a foreign environment. 'Slaves learned to live and work side by side,' Vergès explains, 'to understand one another by creating and adopting the creole language, and by adopting and adapting one another's beliefs, rituals, and practices.' For Vaughan, Vergès, and other creolists such as Françoise Lionnet, Robert Chaudenson, Philip Baker, and Lee Haring, the shared language and civilisation that bound the people of the islands together were collective projects, the outcome of multiple sources and multiple sites of cultural fusion.³²

Scholars of Mascarene créolité have come far in explaining, to borrow Vaughan's words, 'the evolving new creolized culture, in which all groups participated to one degree or another'. Their work represents a variation of the creolisation process of 'blends and mixtures' first articulated in 1973 for the Caribbean and more broadly in later publication by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price. In their work, Mintz and Price argued that African immigrants did not arrive in the New World as coherent ethno-linguistic 'groups' but rather as 'crowds, and very heterogeneous crowds at that'. Because the ethnically randomised crowds of Africans arriving in the American colonies spoke so many different tongues, they write, they were obliged to adopt a European lingua franca for intercommunication and could not recreate in the new world ethnic lifeways as they had been in Africa. 'We can assume with confidence that the initial aggregates of slaves in particular New World enterprises usually did not constitute speech communities,' they conclude. Although it is flatly contradicted by evidence of the majority (and later plurality) of Malagasy speakers in Mascarene slave populations during the eighteenth century and the continuing presence of Malagasy speech communities in those islands well into the post-emancipation period, Mintz and Price's model has in large measure been adopted in most writing about créolité in the Mascarenes.³³

Reflecting the consensus of creole linguists such as Robert Chaudenson, Philip Baker, and Annegret Bollée (who differ on other issues), Megan Vaughan writes that 'Newly arrived slaves, in all their linguistic and cultural diversity, certainly would have had to learn fast the island's creole in order just to survive'. Malagasy and Bantu tongues were *langues de départ*, writes Vaughan, but creole languages were

inevitable *langues d'arrivées*. On this point Vaughan and her creolist colleagues are right in a very important respect. The evidence suggests that most—but by no means all—newly arriving Malagasy, Africans, and Asians expeditiously absorbed the French creole tongues of the islands and communicated with masters, and often with each other, in them. But this widely accepted model of unilinear linguistic change from native tongues on one end of a continuum to island creoles on the other is insufficient in two fundamental respects. It does not account for the simultaneous use of Malagasy as an interethnic *contact* language between about 1730 and the French Revolution (something I explore elsewhere). French creoles were not the only languages that united across ethnic lines. Second, the related assumption that native languages fell away quickly in a sort of zero-sum game with creoles, the former declining into very ‘limited currency’, existing only as ‘memories’, and never spoken by colony-born children, does not hold true for Malagasy (and probably also for speakers of East African languages like Emakua) at the Mascarenes. Once Malagasy had ceased to function as an inter-national contact language after the French Revolution, Big Islanders and their Mascarene-born children continued to speak their ancestral tongue among themselves beyond 1850.³⁴

In other words, while at the Mascarenes there was an ‘evolving new creolized culture, in which all groups participated to one degree or another’, not all participated in it to the same degree and many such participants also nourished old-country identities and spoke ancestral languages rather distinct from but nevertheless entangled with the ‘evolving new creolized culture’ and its francophone creole tongue. The colonial societies of the Indian Ocean were multilingual, multiethnic places where Malagasy was both a *langue de départ* and a *langue d'arrivée*. French and its creoles were one among the various means of interlingual communication within subaltern communities. This historically attested and socially patterned use of multiple languages in the colonies requires modification of the linguistic histories of the islands and the zero-sum conceptual apparatus through which language and culture are typically understood there. Instead of accounting only for an inevitable forward march of French and francophone *créolité*, scholars would best turn their attention to interactions among French and other tongues in the islands.

Repeated cautions by creolists against the synchronicity of still-prevalent cultural ‘survival’, ‘retention’, and ‘transplantation’ approaches to theorising immigrant African cultures in new worlds are well taken. Mintz and Price convincingly pointed out more than three decades ago that ‘No group, no matter how well-equipped or how free to choose, can transfer its way of life and the accompanying beliefs and values intact from one locale to another’. This was as true at the Mascarenes as it was in the Caribbean, and it is a proposition with which I fully agree. The problem with most writing on *créolité* is that it does not account for the coexistence and interaction of multiple colonial languages and lifeways, for the presence of Malagasy *parlers* and identities, or for those of African groups, together with creole ones. The analytical parameters of *créolité* typically allow only for cultural mixing, usually of European elements, on the one hand, with Afro-Malagasy ones, on the other, a process of movement along a single path toward *créolité* that nurtured ‘the evolving new

creolized culture, in which all groups participated to one degree or another'. And although conceptualised as the outcome of mixing, that 'new creolized culture' entailed the restructuring of French but the elimination of Malagasy, a highly asymmetrical theory of cultural-linguistic change that is not supported by the archive. Important developments in créolité are to be found also within Malagasy- and Bantu-speaking populations. The distinctiveness of these ethno-linguistic groups in Mascarene society was not a function primarily of survival or of transplantation, but of colonial demography and local promotion of the Malagasy tongue in French and British colonies of the western Indian Ocean. The racially asymmetrical character of island society did produce the francophone creole, then, but also colonial Afro-Malagasy vernaculars.³⁵

Another problem stems from a practical dilemma: studying culture and slavery is as much an evidentiary and linguistic challenge as it is a conceptual one. Virtually all work on creolisation in the western Indian Ocean is selectively premised on historical records of interactions in the French language and its creoles rather than on documents, whether in vernacular or in French, bearing witness to more culturally and linguistically particularistic lives. To put it bluntly, few creolists know African languages, or Malagasy, nor do they seriously consider documents that testify to the presence of these languages in colonial society (a notable exception being historian Megan Vaughan, discussed below). The francophone governmental archive is typically privileged over a more vernacular record such as the ecclesiastical archive. Through a narrowing of historical method and sources, the early hegemony of monolingual créolité in the islands can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The closely related assumptions of language loss and dissolution of connection to homeland, incorrect though they are for the Mascarenes, structures most cultural history in the colonial islands. 'The connection with their places of origin was severed on arrival in the colony,' writes anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen about slaves arriving in Mauritius, typifying the approach adopted by most creolists. Among creolists, Megan Vaughan paints the most complex and potentially open tableau of language on the islands. She acknowledges that there was 'constant traffic between Madagascar and Île de France', and that 'no sooner had one generation of slaves learned the new language [creole] than they were dead—ceding their place to a new boatload with their own langues de départ'. In an especially valuable article on the speech of African slaves in île de France contextualised by her extensive experience in East and Southern Africa, Vaughan points out that African identities underwent forms of creolisation soon upon arrival in the colonies and that 'The process of 'creolization' in eighteenth-century île de France involved cultural compromise, enrichment and loss, on the part of everyone, but some clearly lost more than others [by which she presumably means slaves]'. In the end, she concludes, 'we cannot really know to what extent "mother tongues" survived, if only for short periods, or to what extent bilingualism or multilingualism may have characterized the slave experience'.³⁶

Thanks in part to ecclesiastical archives and to Vaughan's relatively open conception of language in the islands, it is now possible to push our understanding of creolisation

even farther: creolisation in the Mascarenes was a process that drew from and interacted with but also re-produced rather than quickly erased its contributing elements, especially those from the Big Island. It is not possible to fully understand either creolisation or vernacularisation in the islands without reference to the other process. Linguistic loss in Malagasy did eventually occur, yet much later than normally assumed and through a rather different process than typically thought. The critical period for loss of Malagasy was not the early eighteenth century, but the late nineteenth.

With an eye for hybridity and a corresponding disinterest in colonial productions of ethno-linguistic particularity, *créolité*-as-mixing as expressed in most work on the islands is an inadequate model for explaining cultural and linguistic change. ‘Newcomers could not survive if they sought to protect the “authenticity” of their beliefs, rituals, and practices,’ writes Vergès with reason, for example. But she then continues more problematically: ‘The system of the plantation required slaves to forget the past, their roots, and their culture at the same time that it provided the grounds for preserving bits and pieces of their culture, which were then mixed with already creolized ones’. ‘The evolving new creolized culture, in which all groups participated to one degree or another’ was one facet of the racially and ethnically asymmetric societies of the islands, of course. Yet asymmetries of power can also reinforce cultural difference, a critical point that has received insufficient attention by scholars of the western Indian Ocean. Throughout the entire period of slavery, Malagasy bondmen and women were left with more than memories, traces, or bits of their home cultures. Immigrants practiced those cultures as they could, received information from home through new arrivals—both enslaved and free—and spoke home languages, only outside the hearing and seeing of most Europeans. Some fled westward across the water in boats attempting, mostly in vain, to escape enslavement and to find their way home. It is only today that traces and memories remain, but this was not the case across two centuries of slavery. The loss of Malagasy language in the Mascarenes is a colonial, but also a post-slavery, phenomenon, not an inevitable outcome of enslavement and creolisation. The mechanisms and timing of language loss must be rethought with attention to a changing colonialism and its shifting systems of unfree labour from the mid-nineteenth century.³⁷

In contradistinction to much recent thinking on *créolité* in the Mascarenes as a precocious mixing of peoples and cultural practices of varying origins in a francophone linguistic milieu, I want to suggest a more plural, less unilinear way of conceiving of culture and creolisation in the slave islands, one I believe more faithful to the historical evidence and with the capacity, in the words of Charles Stewart, to ‘move us beyond the current fixation on mixture as the prime characteristic of creolization’. Daily life in the Mascarenes was not merely the weaving of new island creole cultures and lifeways from diverse communal and linguistic sources or the mixture of European practices with Afro-Malagasy or Asian elements, the two dominant threads in classical approaches to *créolité*. Much daily living in both urban and rural locations, as Ratsitanina’s trial record confirms, took place within less Euro-creole milieus, contexts ill-represented in many European-language historical sources.

As a model for characterising cultural interaction in slave and post-slave societies, créolité is far more convincingly theorised as the learned capacity of persons to move in and out of the everyday challenges of cultural and linguistic *discontinuity* that characterised colonial landscapes for slaves and other low-status groups. Subalterns shifted between the Malagasy and Emakua and creole languages and emerging colonial lifeways, for example; they came to appreciate the varying habits of the *Malgache*, *Malbare*, *Mozambique*, and *Guinéen* (the terms would be meaningless in a precociously creolised society conceived in classical terms); and they functioned—often with cultural and linguistic ease, but certainly not always—among the fundamentally asymmetric contexts of family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, whites, and colonial court.³⁸

Let us return to Ratsitanina. Newly arrived at Mauritius, he was yet monolingual, unversed in the hazards of being Malagasy in a colonial society. Probably innocent of the main charges laid against him, he nevertheless lost his life. This was a classical sort of colonial fate for the uncreolised, for those who were not experienced at navigating the islands' different social milieus. Laizafy the ringleader, on the other hand, was a versatile, seasoned, and well-placed Mauritius 'creole', though born in Madagascar. His social agility and multilingualism got him into trouble to begin with, but also saved his head in the end. Like Ratsitanina, whites in general were not so culturally adaptable a group—racial privilege meant they did not need to be—though a few among them did test, traverse, and study ethno-linguistic boundaries. Créolité as a learned versatility in colonial society was mostly a function of cultural difference, then, not of an inevitable, precocious linguistic homogeneity. It was a skill of colonial life especially necessary and useful to those at the bottom of the social ladder.

The checkerboard manifestation of culture and language in the islands that I am advocating rings truer to the archive than do most classical studies of créolité, focused as they are exclusively on one cultural register among the many testified in the historical record. My approach is akin to the 'segmentary creolization' discussed more than three decades ago by sociologist Orlando Patterson with respect to Jamaica. It also bears some elements of the Euro-creole/Afro-creole continuum first suggested by certain linguists and later adopted by anthropologists such as Ulf Hannerz and Richard Burton. But rather than a linear continuum, I propose the rather more complex metaphor of a polygon, its sides representing different ethno-linguistic components of a heterogeneous society. The sides intersect at points to productively form angles of different acuteness representing the varying modes of conjunction among peoples and languages in the colonial islands, or multiple sites and styles of hybridity. The model of a polygon's sides, angles, and points captures the cultural lumpiness and plurality of Mascarene society better than does a continuum and can account for how vernacularisation and creolisation were mutually constituting, interacting in different ways. But like a continuum, the polygon is a heuristic device of imperfect utility. Thinking in terms of a creole continuum may be more helpful in describing linguistic and cultural shifts from a polyglot society toward a French creole monolingualism and more uniform culture over the *longue durée* of two to three centuries.³⁹

That lives of cultural discontinuity and multilingualism such as those of Ratsitatinina's Malagasy acquaintances in Port Louis during early 1822 and surrounding decades are not well reflected in the colonial government archive is in large part an artifact of that discontinuity, not evidence against it. To put it simply, while the speech of slaves before a court or in transactions with monolingual government officials and masters testifies to the spread of the French creole, it is no proof of subaltern monolingualism. The francophone government institutions that produced the records most scholars employ were but one of the many linguistic contexts through which slaves and apprentices passed. When they rubbed up against their masters, overseers, government institutions, and interacted with others who were not born on the Big Island, most Malagasy and Africans spoke the French *patois*, creating for the modern reader of documents generated through such interactions a misleading patina of francophone creolisation over a diverse subaltern population deeply differentiated by ethnicity and dialect, and adept in at least two languages.

Comparative examples from île Bourbon are instructive. The records of an alleged conspiracy of Malagasy slaves in 1799 in the Parish of Sainte-Rose testify to an uneven knowledge of French creole among the enslaved as well as to their Malagasy identity. Among the accused were those who could speak creole and those who could not. Presumably, the alleged co-conspirators all communicated in their ancestral tongue. The Malagasy language monolingual named Farlah (Rafaralahy) of this group who claimed he could easily bring down lightning on the *Comédie* (theatre) to kill or stun whites, seems to have conversed well with his alleged co-conspirators. And the scattered documentation available for the uprising of some 300 slaves, most of whom were Malagasy and creoles (one suspects the latter were *créoles malgaches*) in the Parish of Saint-Leu in late 1811 also suggests Malagasy, not French creole, as the primary language of intercommunication. Even when spoken openly in the streets and the markets, as we have seen, the Malagasy tongue was tuned out by those who did not know it. Only in moments of white panic such as those of 1799, 1811 and early 1822 did Europeans on the islands become interested in what slaves said to one another in their mother tongues. The vernacular life of the street helped to sustain a sense of Malagasy ethnic identity into the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰

Although I use both terms in this study, I prefer 'vernacular life of the street' to 'ethnicity', which is favoured by certain 'revisionist' scholars of Africans in the Americas. The former emphasises the key role of mother tongues in the maintenance of ethnic networks and opens scholarly investigation to subjects well beyond ethnic identity. More attention must be paid to the trajectory of slaves' ancestral tongues, a fundamental component of their culture and self-conception as well as an important feature of certain forms of western Indian Ocean imperialism. While the evidence for ancestral language use among slaves in the Indian Ocean appears stronger than that for the Atlantic, the vernacular history of the Mascarenes may be of utility in thinking through cognate issues of African ethnicity, native language use, and creolisation in the western Atlantic.

'One of the problems in writing about decolonization,' historian Frederick Cooper once noted, 'is that we know the end of the story'. In writing these words Cooper was

concerned with the way in which historians of modern Africa tended to interpret all African political activity in the twentieth century as leading inevitably toward a nationalist future. The same caution can be issued for the creole cultural history of the western Indian Ocean, where African and Malagasy speech varieties have now largely disappeared in favour of European creoles. To write the linguistic and cultural history of the slave colonies by seeking out only European languages and their creoles is to conceive of history backward, teleologically narrowing it to the production of the francophone modern, whether of creole languages or of twenty-first century creole identities. There was nothing inevitable about the fading away of African and Malagasy languages while substantial numbers of persons born in those countries still lived in the colonies. The long-term success of European creoles over Afro-Malagasy languages was the result of specific choices and circumstances that eroded vernacular use, the contours of which have yet to be properly demonstrated with appropriate evidence rather than assumed.⁴¹

Créolité and cultural *métissage*, then, were not the same thing. The creole languages and their corresponding emergent cultural forms were one type of *métissage*-mixing, but the broader colonial scene included nonwhite slaves, apprentices, merchants, free wives, and visitors from a wide variety of external origins who moved in and out of their native cultures as these came to be newly expressed in the islands. Such movement among multiple colonial registers was the essence of créolité. And native cultures and languages in the colonies were far from 'authentic' and 'pure', or 'transplants', 'retentions', and 'survivals' from the old country. They were each fascinating pools of hybridity in themselves in the new colonial environment. The Malagasy speech varieties of the Mascarenes, for example, were likely dialectally creolised variants of the Big Island's tongue not spoken anywhere in Madagascar but intelligible to most persons from there. They were indigenous creoles so to speak, analogous in constitution and function to the Bhojpuri language of South Asian Mauritians decades later, which differed significantly from homeland versions. But the vernacular life of the street, even if also restructured in a colonial environment, was something quite other than the language and culture of the francophone colonial court and the monolingual white household, just as Mauritius Bhojpuri is not a French creole. These disparate contexts of colonial society were not ends of a creole continuum. If both represented processes of colonial hybridity, they were nevertheless fundamentally dissimilar in substance.⁴²

Listening through the census

The scale of cultural discontinuity in the early nineteenth-century Mascarenes is best testified by the ethnic composition of the two islands' populations. As Megan Vaughan puts it gingerly in her work, 'Demographic creolization came late to île de France'. Neither the servile population of Mauritius nor of île Bourbon was characterised by a colonial-born majority before the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, a characteristic that sets them apart from most other European slave colonies of the time (save Cuba and parts of Brazil) and a fact that historians of the western Indian Ocean islands

have yet to come to terms with. Malagasy and Africans, with populations weighted toward boys and men, probably formed the majority of enslaved populations on both islands to at least 1830. The illegal slave trade into the two islands continued to at least 1825. The colony-born servile population of île Bourbon was only 29% in 1808 and 43% in 1826. On île de France, the population of creole slaves was enumerated at a mere 28% in 1806. These figures can be contrasted to those for Jamaica, where in 1835 some 65% of slaves were locally born.⁴³

Evidence about the precise ethnic makeup of Mauritius's servile population during the 1820s is contradictory. The archivist of the colony since 1815, among the best informed of the island's residents with respect to its demographic makeup, considered creole slaves as composing just 'more than a third' of the servile population in 1830, a meagre share resulting from massive imports between 1810 and 1825. A British-mandated registration of slaves in 1826–27, however, reported a bare creole majority of 50.2% in Mauritius. The discrepancy in ethnic shares among the slave population of Mauritius in these two counts likely stems in part from the fraudulent classification in the 1826–27 registration of newly arrived African and Malagasy captives as 'creoles' to hide illegal disembarkations from administrators and colonial police. This interpretation is supported by the 62% share of males among slaves reported in the same population. Falsified registers of 'creole' slaves submitted to government were one of the measures employed by the island's slaveowners to conceal the many saltwater slaves arriving on Mauritius and île Bourbon's shores after the British invasion of 1810 and the French slave-trade abolition of 1817, as is amply testified by contemporary observers and a number of recent studies of the illegal slave trade. Official estimates of the island-born portion of the slave population in the early decades of the nineteenth century are probably less accurate, then, than unofficial ones, and the share of Mauritius's creole slaves in 1830 probably lay somewhere between these two estimates and near to that of île Bourbon's (in the 45% range).⁴⁴

Whatever the case, the share of Malagasy-speaking persons within the servile populations of both Mauritius and île Bourbon declined significantly from its apogee of around 60% or more in about 1730 to between 15 and 20% a century later as the islands turned more to East Africa to supply their labour needs and as the proportion of colony-born bondmen and women inched upward. Due to a sharp increase in the slave population of the islands to the early nineteenth century, however, the number of Malagasy on Mauritius and île Bourbon mostly grew. By 1827 Malagasy had fallen to some 18% of Mauritius's slave population, according to the problematic slave registration mentioned above, but numbered 12,667 persons. The figures for île Bourbon in 1826 were some 24% and 14,371 persons. Corresponding numbers for Africans were 28% on Mauritius (19,157 persons) and 31% on île Bourbon (18,845 persons). And among creole slaves in the 1830s, many, if not a majority, enjoyed at least one Madagascar-born parent, knew and spoke Malagasy, and formed an integral part of the colonial island's Madagascar identifying communities. The many *créoles malgaches* of Mauritius threw their number in with the Madagascar-born population of the island, for although they became more accustomed to the French creole language and cultural métissage of the Mascarenes than their forebears, youthful,

second-generation immigrants were tied socially, culturally, and linguistically to the lifeways and households of their parents, a natural process testified also in the post-emancipation era. It would be surprising if the same pattern did not hold for île Bourbon.⁴⁵

Malagasy speakers were not only to be counted among the Madagascar-born slaves of the Mascarene islands and their children. A unique but well-known feature of the East African slave trade to the Mascarenes from about 1780 was the movement of many Africans to the colonial islands by way of Madagascar, either by marching across the Big Island on land, with sea voyages on either side, or by transiting through west coast ports such as Maintirano and Morondava, later re-embarking for the Mascarenes. There were various reasons for these seemingly cumbersome mercantile measures, including contrary winds and currents north of Madagascar opposing eastward-sailing vessels there, a greater probability of evading the British navy from the onset of the wars of the late eighteenth century, a large market in East African slaves within Madagascar itself that could supply îles de France and Bourbon, and the economic benefits of bulking. Some East Africans sojourned in the Big Island for a matter of weeks or months before re-embarking for the Mascarenes. But many others, especially children, lived for some years in Madagascar before being moved onward to the Mascarenes. In some years up to a third of the slaves departing Madagascar's east coast for the Indian Ocean's colonial islands had been born in East Africa.⁴⁶

Many of the 'Mozambiques' and 'Makoa' who transited through Madagascar learned to speak Malagasy dialects with varying degrees of competence, proficiency that enabled some of them to socialise in that language once they reached the Mascarenes. Like the French creole, Malagasy could assist East Africans speaking different languages to communicate with each other. Some of the servile interpreters (working between Malagasy, on the one hand, and English and French on the other) attached to British diplomatic and religious missions to Madagascar during the early nineteenth century were actually Mozambiques born in East Africa, not Malagasy. The colonial islands were a polyglot world, and creolisation occurred within subaltern populations as well as between slave and free. As late as 1853, many creole-speaking 'natives of Mauritius' were capable of communicating in 'a little English' together with 'a little Bengalee, and a little Malagasy'. One English-speaking traveller in that year also found 'a Malagasy from Mauritius' to serve as his Malagasy-English interpreter for travel about the Big Island. 'A negro who spoke English and Malagasy' accompanied a party of British adventurers along Madagascar's east coast during the middle months of 1864. That 'negro' was likely a resident of Mauritius who accompanied the party.⁴⁷

Some European men in the Mascarenes married free Malagasy wives from the nearby Big Island or found lovers from among the slaves and apprentices in the colonial islands. Many of the *libres* or *gens de couleur* on both islands (this population was much larger in Mauritius than on île Bourbon) were of Malagasy birth or parentage, and there was a continual movement of free Malagasy sailors, labourers, merchants, and even the occasional soldier between the Big Island and the Mascarenes, helping

to sustain the Malagasy language and Malagasy-speaking communities of heterogeneous origin there well into the nineteenth century. An unknown but not insignificant share of the apprentices (Liberated Africans) captured aboard illegal slavers after 1817 and condemned in the court of vice-admiralty at Port Louis were Malagasy. A number of such apprentices, as we have seen, were accused and condemned with Ratsitanina in 1822. Deriving from these diverse sources, Malagasy speakers continued to form the largest single linguistic community beyond French and its creole in the Mascarenes during the early nineteenth century, as they had done before the French Revolution. On each of the islands the Madagascar-born—slave, apprentice, and free—probably numbered about 15,000 in 1830, with an additional population of East African and colony-born Malagasy speakers augmenting this linguistic core.⁴⁸

In spite of population and linguistic evidence testifying to ethnic diversity in the colonial islands of the western Indian Ocean, subalterns typically appear to us in scholarship on slavery, emancipation, and language in the Mascarenes as French-speaking creoles or as francophone creoles-in-the-making with only a faint ‘memory’ of their erstwhile languages and lives. This deeply misleading image of linguistic and cultural homogeneity in the Mascarenes is now being addressed through new studies, especially in La Réunion where recent struggles over cultural pluralism have sparked fascinating inquiries into the religious and musical practices of Malagasy origin in the creole population. Histories of slaves’ lives in prior centuries will productively follow this lead and more accurately reflect the historical realities of multilingualism and cultural plurality in the two islands from at least the initiation of regular slave trading before 1730 to the decades after emancipation.⁴⁹

For modern scholars of Mauritius and La Réunion to ‘hear’ and to ‘see’ the native languages and practices of the large population of foreign-born slaves, ex-slaves, and their children in the archive can be a difficult task. In both islands today, the terms *Créole* and *Kaf* designating the ‘black’ descendants of Africans and Malagasy obscure the multiregional origins of this population, which in modern political struggles in the islands generally presents itself as a single block identifying primarily with African origin, not Malagasy. In a recent article on the politics of Creole identity in Mauritius, for example, one scholar states that ‘the slaves came from different parts of West and East Africa, and the groups were immediately mixed, no Creole is able to point out where his or her ancestors came from’, and ‘the people of African descent in Mauritius could not preserve any of their languages’. The pressure on scholars has been to think of *Créole-Kaf* populations only in vague and unified terms, ones in which the French creole language and shared history of African descent are defining features. There are political reasons not to emphasise Malagasy language and heritage in *Créole* and *Kaf* histories, though these were actually foundational to *Créole-Kaf* culture in the Mascarenes. To study multilingualism is seen to detract from a unifying political project and to weaken the political purchase of the modern creole languages as they confront metropolitan France and its tongue. Historians, however, must avoid working backward from today’s political preoccupations and Republican ideologies that de-emphasise cultural-linguistic plurality in France’s empire, while mythic heroes like Ratsitanina and monolingual models of *créolité* are best abandoned

for the prosaic and the mundane of the historical record and the colonial census, which testify to a rich multilingual Mascarene world of the past.⁵⁰

Notes

- [1] The following archive designations are employed in this article: ACCL SC SGGL, Auckland City Central Library (New Zealand) Special Collections, Sir George Grey Library; LMS ILMAU & AO, London Missionary Society archives (London), Incoming Letters Mauritius & Africa Odds; MNA, Mauritius National Archives (Coromandel); NAB CO, National Archives of Britain, Colonial Office (London, Kew).
- [2] 'Procès verbal d'exécution des nommés Rassitatane, Cotte-voud dit Prospère & Latulipe, requête de Mr. Barbès substitut du Procureur Général du roi', 15 avril 1822, MNA JB 140. Cotte Voud, like Ratsitanina, is a Malagasy name. Apprentices (*les apprentis*) were typically captives aboard vessels condemned in courts of Vice Admiralty for illegal slaving in the Indian Ocean and set out on medium-term labour contracts as legally free but nevertheless contractually bound persons. See Carter, Govinden, and Peerthum, *The Last Slaves*.
- [3] Ellis, *History of Madagascar*, I, 355 and II, 252–6 (quotations); Valette, *Études sur le règne de Radama I^{er}*, 19, 56–9; Callet, *Tantara ny Andriana*, II, 1068–70, 1083; Raombana, *Histoires* 2, 783–8; Larson, *History and Memory*, 220–1. Governor Farquhar's Madagascar policies are explicated in Ratsivalaka, *Les malgaches*.
- [4] Edward Byam, 'Three Years Administration of the Isle of France', 1822, NAB CO 172 38, 209 (swarthy complexion); Aristide Corroller, 'Relation intéressante de Madagascar depuis 1808 jusqu'à 1835', c. 1835, translated by H. Frederick Robe from French into English (in c. 1836), ACCL SC SGGL GMS 9, no pagination (see if this man is mad).
- [5] Leguével de Lacombe, *Voyage à Madagascar*, II, 14–16; Toussaint, 'Ratsitatane (? 1790-1822)' (concealed knife); Mantaux, 'Ratsitanina', esp. 115–17 (differing stories). A variant of the concealed knife story can be found in Raombana, *Histoires* 2, 817.
- [6] Coppalle, *Voyage à la capitale*, 59 (Rainitsiroba and Razakarivony); Raombana, *Histoires* 2, 817–18 (from the mouths).
- [7] 'Diary of James Hastie', NAB CO 167 66, entry for 6 March, 29–30 (tangena); Corroller, 'Relation intéressante', no pagination (tangena); Coppalle, *Voyage à la capitale*, 59 (opinion at Radama's court); Raombana, *Histoires* 2, 818 (secretly afraid), 1208–19. Ratsitanina was not Radama's nephew, as is commonly asserted. The claim first appears in a letter by Sylvain Roux and in Hilsenberg's journal, neither of which indicates which of Radama's sisters was Ratsitanina's mother. Ratsitanina's brother, Razakarivony, was married to one of Radama's sisters (i.e. they were brothers-in-law): Coppalle, *Voyage à la capitale*, 59 (Razakarivony); Mantaux, 'Ratsitanina', 117–18, text and n. 25.
- [8] Farquhar to Goulburn, Mauritius, 28 February 1822, NAB CO 167 62 11, 1.
- [9] Colonial judges affirmed the illegality of Ratsitanina's confinement: Byam, 'Three Years Administration', 214; Smith to Farquhar, Port Louis, 15 April 1822, NAB CO 167 62, 4. On Rafaralahy Andriantiana and his suite at Mauritius see Barry to Hastie, Port Louis, 28 January 1822, MNA HB 7 29, 1; Hastie to Barry, Port Louis, 19 January 1822, MNA HB 7 25, 1; 'Estimate of expense for Clothing for the Prince Farla and his suite', appended to Hastie to Barry, Port Louis, 17 January 1822, MNA RA 197, 99r; James Hastie to Colonel Barry, Port Louis, 8 January 1822, MNA RA 197, 27r; Valette, 'Le voyage'. Other sources for this paragraph: 'Confrontations des Témoins à Rassitatane', 5 mars 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 325r (betrayal); Hastie to Barry, Port Louis, 18 February 1822, MNA RA 198, 72r (state prisoner); Hastie to Barry, Port Louis, 8 January 1822, MNA RA 197, 31r (boys for the band). For Mauritius as a destination of South Asian convicts see Anderson, *Convicts*.
- [10] Barry to Hastie, Port Louis, 24 April 1822, MNA HB 7 56, 1–2 (portrait); Hastie to Barry, Port Louis, 19 April 1822, MNA RA 200, 113r and following documents (portrait); Hastie to Farquhar, Foulpoint, 14 November 1822, MNA HB 7 95, 1 (consuls); Virieux to Barry,

- Port Louis, 23 février 1822, MNA RA 174 (soldiers purchasing uniforms); d'Unienville, 'Le Maire'; Toussaint, 'Le Maire'.
- [11] We know Ratsitanina had been out of the bagné, accompanied and with permission, to a nearby house at the port to see Bibye Le Sage only once during his confinement: 'Déclaration de Jean Baptist Gaiqui', 21 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 40r-40v. The heights on which Ratsitanina and his associates gathered were also frequently characterised as 'la montagne du Champ de Lort', a designation consistent with le Pouce as well as other heights behind the city. Without adducing supporting documentation, Auguste Toussaint changed this to 'la Montagne des Signaux', the lowest of the heights and closest to the water: Toussaint, 'Ratsitanane', 154.
- [12] Déclaration de Jean Laizaf, 20 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 30v; Byam to Barry, Port Louis, 23 February 1822, MNA RA 198, 96r-96v (quotations).
- [13] 'Conclusions définitives du Ministère Public Plaignant', no date [March 1822], NAB CO 167 64, 461v; Byam, 'Three Years Administration', 215, 245.
- [14] For Farquhar's orders to the Port Louis militia see Byam, 'Three Years Administration', 214–17; Darling to Farquhar, Champ de Mars [Port Louis], 20 February 1822, NAB CO 167 62; Farquhar to Darling, Réduit, 20 February 1822, NAB CO 167 62 (two letters of this date and place). I have found no contemporary evidence to suggest that Adrien d'Epinaï formed and led this militia; the claim appears later in the work of Auguste Toussaint and without attribution. For Farquhar's orders to Darling see Farquhar to Darling, Port Louis, 21 February 1822, NAB CO 167 62, 1. See also Byam, 'Three Years Administration', 214–17.
- [15] Ratsitanina's reply and subsequent beating are reported by one of the arresting slaves: 'Interrogatoire de Dominique', 22 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 62v. Three of the some four dozen arrested in the dragnet were not Malagasy, and were described respectively as a 'créole malbare', a 'créole', and a 'moz' (Mozambique). We hear little of them in the judicial record and none of them were on the mountain: List of prisoners appended to Byam to Barry, Port Louis, 23 February 1822, MNA RA 198, 97r. The figure of some 40 persons arrested is mentioned in Byam, 'Three Years Administration', 213. The judicial record itself is found in two places: MNA JB 140 and NAB CO 167 64. The documents in London are copies of those in Mauritius despatched after the execution of 15 April. Some of the originals in Mauritius are literally falling apart.
- [16] Byam, 'Three Years Administration', 250–51. Governor Farquhar fired Byam on 28 February, allegedly because his residence was not within Port Louis city limits and because the chief had become the brunt of criticism by slaveowners in the city. Byam believed the firing to be motivated by personal enmity and he emerged one of the governor's foremost critics in this and other matters. See 'Minute by His Excellency the Governor', Réduit, 28 February 1822, MNA RA 216, document 36.
- [17] Pardoning Laizafy was passionately urged on Farquhar by his ex chief of police when the apprentice was first condemned to die by the court of first instance: Byam to Barry, Grand River of Port Louis, 16 March 1822, MNA RA 199, 99r-100r. The masters of some slaves condemned to die or to hard labour successfully sought compensation for their losses from government: Bruniquel to Rudelle, Port Louis, 23 May 1822, MNA RA 195, 10r-10v; Rudelle to Farquhar, Port Louis, 22 Avril 1822, MNA RA 195, 9r-9v; Rudelle to Barry, Port Louis 17 Mai 1822, MNA RA 195, 11r-11v.
- [18] Toussaint, 'La révolte'; Brey, 'Ratsitanane'; Toussaint, 'Ratsitanane', 153–4; Asgarally, *Ratsitanane*; Asgarally, 'Le dossier historique'; Benoît, *The Afro-Mauritians*, 60; Ward, *Prisoners in Paradise*, 18–24; Asgarally, 'Les révoltes'; Marimootoo, 'A l'intention'; Putschay, 'Entretien'; Putschay, 'Autour du crâne' (quotation). The rumour about Ratsitanina's mummified head in the collections of the Mauritius Institute originated in the mid-nineteenth century but was disproved as early as 1970: Mantaux, 'Ratsitanina', 151 and photograph on 149. For Toussaint's interpretation of Ratsitanina see Toussaint, 'Ratsitanane', 154.

- [19] Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 172–7. See also Gerbeau, ‘Histoire oubliée, histoire occultée?’; Nicaise, ‘L’irruption’.
- [20] Escapes and attempted escapes from the islands are discussed in Byam, ‘Three Years Administration’, 245–6; Gerbeau, ‘Histoire oubliée, histoire occultée’, 16–17; Eve, *Les esclaves de Bourbon*, 68–91. Escape efforts by Malagasy slaves were also made from the Seychelles: Luzor to Byam, Mahé, 15 Novembre 1821, MNA RA 185, 145r.
- [21] On the basis of documents in the Mauritius archives that seem now to have disappeared, Mantaux indicates that Laizafy had spoken more than once with Rafaralahy. The documents, once classified in HB 14 1, were in the personal possession of James Hastie at his death in Antananarivo (1826) and later entered the Mauritius archives through his successor, Dr Lyall. Rafaralahy—and through him possibly also Hastie, Farquhar, and perhaps even Radama—was involved in attempts to eliminate Ratsitanina: Mantaux, ‘Ratsitanina’, 119, including n. 45.
- [22] Farquhar to Goulburn, Mauritius, 28 February 1822, NAB CO 167 62 11, 3–4. Denmark Vesey and associates facing conspiracy to rebellion charges in Charleston, South Carolina, at nearly the same time adopted a strategy similar to that of the accused Malagasy of Mauritius (partially admitting to the charges laid against them to spare their lives): Johnson, ‘Denmark Vesey’.
- [23] Raombana, *Histoires* 2, 819–20 (brave soul). For Ratsitanina’s comportment see Byam, ‘Three Years Administration’, 213 (peaceable); ‘Déclaration de Jean Baptist Gaiqui’; ‘Information’, 25, 26 Fév., 1 & 4 Mars’, 26 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64. The accusation of magic levelled against Ratsitanina in this case was similar to that laid before a 23-year-old Malagasy slave named Jakoto (Rakoto?) and his (mostly Malagasy) accomplices in an alleged plot to kill whites in the parish of Sainte-Rose, île Bourbon, in late 1799: Wanquet, *Histoire d’une révolution*, III, 375–80.
- [24] ‘Cahier d’Affrontations de Rassitane’, 6, 7 Mars 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 416r (Sangane); ‘Interrogatoire de Rassitane’, 24 & 27 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 117r (visitors bearing fruit); ‘Déclaration de Jean Baptist Gaiqui’, 40r-41v (sikidy); ‘Information’, 25, 26 Fév., 1 & 4 Mars, 26 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 234r-236v (visitors); Hastie to Barry, Port Louis, 18 February 1822, MNA RA 198, 72v (native language only). Ratsitanina is also explicitly described in the judicial record as *ne parle que la langue malgache*: ‘Interrogatoire de Dominique’, 22 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 63v.
- [25] ‘Cahier d’Affrontations de Rassitane’, 6, 7 Mars 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 418r (Jupiter/Mamy); ‘Interrogatoire de Rassitane’, 110v (Ravode), 116r (Bombé); ‘Déclaration de Jean Baptist Gaiqui’, 40r-41v (song). For Malagasy-French court interpreters during the eighteenth century see also Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 93.
- [26] Farquhar, ‘Memorandum for the Procureur Général’, Réduit, 23 February 1822, MNA RA 216 33, verso; Virieux to Barry, Port Louis, 23 février 1822, enclosure to MNA RA 216 33, not foliated (block quotation, emphasis added).
- [27] Portalis, ‘Conclusions définitives du Ministère Public’, 442v (veni avec moi); ‘Cahier d’Affrontations de Brutus’, 7 Mars 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 422r. An alley named Pump Street is marked on British-era maps of Port Louis, perhaps referring to a water source somewhere along it.
- [28] Megan Vaughan’s work on eighteenth-century île de France similarly emphasises the importance of the street to slaves’ lives and interactions: Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, esp. chaps. 7 and 8.
- [29] ‘Interrogatoire de Brutus & Jupiter’, 20 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 33r (dans la rue); ‘Conclusions de Mr. Portalis’, no date [March 1822], NAB CO 167 64, 442r-v (Laizafy’s recruiting practices). The phrase *connait de rue* appears several times in the judicial record, including in ‘Déclaration de Jean Laizaf’, 20 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 31r; ‘Interrogatoires d’Arlequin, Lailave, Dick, Edouard, Nina, Nelson, Azor, S. Romme, Jean, César, Gregoire, Aly’, 21 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 47r (also, interrogation of Jean). For Rafaralahy Andriantiana during the trial see Virieux to Barry, Port Louis, 23 février 1822, MNA RA

- 174, 2; Toussaint, 'Rafarlah (c. 1763-1828)'. Toussaint suggests Rafaralahy Andriantiana went into hiding, but I have found no evidence for this. In the Sainte-Rose region of Réunion, water sources (*la pompe*) and locations for private drinking were places where in 1799 enslaved Malagasy socialised among themselves and also with some non-Malagasy to allegedly plot the death of whites: Wanquet, *Histoire d'une révolution*, III, 376 (*la pompe*), 377 (drinking). Port Louis's slave population figures are from Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey*, II, Table 11, 768.
- [30] 'Interrogatoire d'Adonis', 20 Février 1822, NAB CO 167 64, 36v; Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 104, 108. For the relationships among the ethnonyms Amboalambo, Hova and Merina see Larson, 'Desperately Seeking "the Merina"'.
 [31] Raombana, *Histoires* 2, 820 (he was known).
 [32] Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 2; Vergès, 'Indian-Oceanic Creolizations', 135, 141.
 [33] Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, x, 18, 19.
 [34] Chaudenson, *Le lexique*, I, 462 (second generation knows only creole); Baker and Corne, *Isle de France Creoles*, 107 (limited currency); Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 207 (quotation), 212 (largely lost their mother tongues), 100, 137, 226 (memory). For Malagasy as a contact language in the eighteenth century Mascarenes see Larson, 'Enslaved Malagasy'.
 [35] Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, 1.
 [36] Vaughan, 'Reported Speech', 69; Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 112, 207; Hylland Eriksen, 'Creolization', 157.
 [37] Vergès, 'Indian-Oceanic Creolizations', 141.
 [38] Bilingualism in 'Macquoa' and French creole is testified in Mauritius as late as 1861: Ryan, *Mauritius and Madagascar*, 164–5.
 [39] Patterson, 'Context and Choice', esp. 316–18; Burton, *Afro-Creole*; Stewart, *Creolization*, 18. Current approaches to créolité are set out in Vaughan's work and in comparative summaries of Mascarene créolité such as in Lionnet, 'Créolité in the Indian Ocean'; de Cauna, 'La fête Kaf'.
 [40] Wanquet, *Histoire d'une révolution*, III, 377; Gerbeau, 'Le complot de Saint-Leu', 333, 335.
 [41] Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 6.
 [42] Eisenlohr, *Little India*, 207 (Mauritian Bhojpuri).
 [43] Gerbeau, 'Quelques aspects'; Wanquet, 'La traite illégale à Maurice'; Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings'; Gerbeau, 'L'Océan Indien'; Allen, 'The Mascarene Slave-Trade', esp. 41; Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 102–3. Figures for the share of creoles in the slave population of île Bourbon are from Thomas, *Essai de statistique*, II, 322 (1826); Payet, *Histoire de l'esclavage*, 17 (1808). For the creole population of île de France see 'État Général des habitants de la colonie', in Milbert, *Voyage pittoresque*, II, 233 bis.
 [44] Rossi to Dunienville, Port Louis, 24 April 1815, MNA HA 5, document 58 (archivist's appointment); Unienville, *Statistique de l'île Maurice*, I, 276–8 (archivist's estimate); Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey*, II, 771 (British registration). For the falsification of slave registers mandated by British authorities see Caunter to Earl Bathurst, [London], 12 March 1821, NAB CO 167 60, 17–19; Barker, 'Distorting the Record'; Barker, *Slavery and Antislavery*, esp. 73–81; Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery*, esp. chaps. 3–5.
 [45] Thomas, *Essai de statistique*, II, 322 (île Bourbon figures); Unienville, *Statistique de l'île Maurice*, I, 278 (declining share of Malagasy); Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey*, II, 771 (Mauritius figures). See also Larson, 'La diaspora malgache aux Mascareignes'. On the existence of locally named *créoles malgaches* in both principle Mascarene islands into the twentieth century see Chaudenson, *Des îles, des hommes*, 10.
 [46] Ratsivalaka, *Malgaches et l'abolition*, 36; Larson, *History and Memory*, 53–4, 154; Campbell, *An Economic History*, 226, 229–32; Rantoandro, 'Makoa et Masombika à Madagascar'.
 [47] Ellis, *Three Visits to Madagascar*, 54–5, 150 (first two quotations); Rooke, 'A Boat-Voyage', 53 (negro). For 'Mozambique' translators between Malagasy and European languages see Hilsenberg and Bojer to Farquhar, Pamplemousses, 26 April 1822, MNA RA 200, 160r; Jeffreys, *The Widowed Missionary's Journal*, 68.

- [48] Ellis, *Three Visits*, 109; Carter, Govinden, and Peerthum, *Last Slaves*; Larson, 'Diaspora malgache'.
- [49] For recent studies of Malagasy heritage see Gerbeau, 'Histoire oubliée, histoire occultée'; Fuma, 'Aux origines'; Nicaise, 'L'irruption des aïeux malgaches'.
- [50] Bunwaree, 'Politics of Identity', 354, 355. The problematic assimilation of the slave past of the Mascarene islands to Africa, and créolité to Africanité, characterises this entire compendium. Nigel Worden has identified a similar dynamic of Malagasy histories in the Cape Colony being folded into an imagined continental African origin: Worden, 'Slavery and Memory'; Worden, 'Indian Ocean Slavery'.

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