

Malagasy at the Mascarenes: Publishing in a Servile Vernacular before the French Revolution

PIER M. LARSON

History, The Johns Hopkins University

European expansion from the fifteenth century produced much writing on, and sometimes in, non-European languages that served a broad array of imperial interests. Most European ventures into what one scholar has termed “colonial linguistics” were based on investigations among speakers of native tongues in the regions in which those speakers normally resided, twining language studies with observed “native” cultural qualities and setting out territories of colonial interest defined by local language and culture.¹ Fewer colonial linguists ventured into plural societies to study the *linguae francae* of trade and labor that enabled communication across broad cultural and language differences, in part because such zones were considered dangerous and unstable, or lacking in mother tongues. Fewer still elected destinations of forced migration such as slave societies or freedmen’s towns and villages to examine the mother tongues of persons who had come coercively from afar, though many such settings in certain periods offered a rich menu of languages for study.² Those interested in the linguistic characteristics of slave societies tended to concern themselves more with the emerging European creoles, languages they could more easily understand than the native tongues of slaves or the contact languages of non-European provenance that sometimes coexisted with or preceded widespread use of European creole speeches in such

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¹ Joseph Errington, “Colonial Linguistics,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 19–39.

² Among the works of this nature are Alonso de Sandoval, *Naturaleza policia sagrada y profana, costumbres y ritos, disciplina i catechismo evangélico de todos Etiopes* (Sevilla, 1627); Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana: Or, a Comparative Vocabulary of Nearly Three Hundred Words and Phrases in More than One Hundred Distinct African Languages* (London, 1854).

locations.³ Today, most linguistic studies in the former slave colonies are focused exclusively on European creoles. Even recent monographs on African culture in the Americas only mention the speaking of African languages in passing, though language is a fundamental element of culture and linked in key ways to the continuity of ethnic ideas and practices.⁴ Together with the relative paucity of colonial documentation on slaves' lives and languages, the sited and topical hierarchy of colonial linguistics continues to powerfully structure historical studies of language in the former slave colonies.

Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than with respect to Malagasy and their tongue in the colonial Mascarene islands of the western Indian Ocean.⁵ The island colonies of Bourbon and Île de France were settled by the French East India Company in the 1660s and 1720s, respectively, and quickly became dependent on Madagascar for food and labor as well as for wives and consorts for many of their male colonists.⁶ Bourbon's first inhabitants were European men and Malagasy men, women, and children arriving from Fort-Dauphin, southeast Madagascar, the French East India Company's first colony in the Indian Ocean.⁷ Because we know that many of the European *habitants* (homesteaders) of southeast Madagascar cohabited with Malagasy women and learned to speak their language, there is no reason to assume that the first colonists in Bourbon spoke only French with each other, a key (and unsupported) assertion in most French creole studies of the region. Later arrivals at Bourbon and the first colonists at Île de France hailed from a dizzying number of origins in Europe, Africa, Madagascar, and Asia. But from the late 1720s to the last quarter of the eighteenth century, nearby Madagascar, only some two to three days' sail downwind in steady southeast trades, was the primary source of Mascarene slaves, supplying between 50 and 70 percent of new servile arrivals in the colonial islands to about 1775.⁸ Colonial censuses record Malagasy as forming majorities of about 60 percent and more in the

³ The often-cited linguistic work of C.G.A. Oldendorp in the Dutch West Indies, for example, was in the emerging island creoles, not native languages. Christian Georg Andreas Oldendorp, *C.G.A. Oldendorps Geschichte der Mission der Evangelischen Bruder auf den Caraibischen Inseln S. Thomas, S. Croix und S. Jan*, Johann Jakob Bossart, ed. 2 vols. (Barby and Leipzig, 1777); Soi-Daniel W. Brown, "From the Tongues of Africa: A Partial Translation of Oldendorp's Interviews," *Plantation Society in the Americas* 2, 1 (Apr. 1983): 37–61.

⁴ James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Douglas B. Chambers, *Murder at Montpellier: Ibo Africans in Virginia* (Jackson, Miss., 2005).

⁵ Malagasy is both an adjective and a noun describing the people and the language of Madagascar.

⁶ Île de France had previously been settled by Dutch colonists and their slaves. For an overview of Mascarene history, see Auguste Toussaint, *Histoire des îles Mascareignes* (Paris, 1972).

⁷ Jean Barassin, "L'esclavage à Bourbon avant l'application du Code Noir de 1723," *Recueil de documents et travaux inédits pour servir à l'histoire de La Réunion*, n.s. 2 (1957): 11–59.

⁸ Richard B. Allen, "The Mascarene Slave-Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Slavery and Abolition* 24, 2 (2003): 41.

two islands' slave populations during the 1720s and 1730s, a share that weakened slightly over the following decades.⁹ Meanwhile the number of enslaved persons on both islands surpassed that of the free during the 1720s and surged to between 80 and 90 percent of their respective populations by the 1770s.

Until the end of the slave trade into the islands in the early 1830s, some 135,000 of the 300,000 slaves disembarked at the French Mascarenes—or about 40 percent of the total—hailed from Madagascar.¹⁰ As a result of its preponderance within the eighteenth-century subaltern majority, Malagasy quickly became one of the most prevalent tongues spoken as a first language on the two islands. On Bourbon in 1765, for example, there were 9,300 Madagascar-born enslaved persons as against about half that many whites, a few hundred free persons of color, 3,300 East African slaves, and 8,420 creole slaves (i.e., born on the island). Censuses for the same period in Île de France are not available, but estimates from data in surrounding years suggest a roughly comparable population structure.¹¹ Although Malagasy arriving in the Mascarenes hailed from different parts of the Big Island (Madagascar), most came from the center and east of the island and their speech varieties were more or less mutually intelligible, as is testified in contemporary sources and suggested in most modern historical linguistic studies.¹² This ensemble of Big Island dialects in the colonies could not have formed a distinctly bounded speech community, but the speechways of Malagasy

⁹ Philip Baker and Chris Corne, *Isle de France Creole: Affinities and Origins* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1982), 147 (Île de France, 66 percent in 1725); J. V. Payet, *Histoire de l'esclavage à l'île Bourbon* (Paris, 1990), 17 (Bourbon, 59 percent in 1735). See also Jean Barassin, "Aperçu général sur l'évolution des groupes ethniques à l'île Bourbon depuis les origines jusqu'en 1848," in Catherine Méhaud, ed., *Mouvements de populations dans l'océan Indien: Actes du 4e Congrès de l'Association Historique Internationale de l'Océan Indien et du 14e Colloque de la Commission Internationale d'Histoire Maritime, tenu à Saint-Denis-de-la-Réunion du 4 au 9 septembre 1972* (Paris, 1980), 245–57.

¹⁰ Allen, "The Mascarene Slave-Trade," 41.

¹¹ Pier M. Larson, "La diaspora malgache aux Mascareignes (XVIIIe et XIXe siècles): Notes sur la démographie et la langue," *Revue Historique de l'Océan Indien* 1 (2005): 143–55.

¹² Linguists typically distinguish two large groups of speech variety communities (dialects) in Madagascar, divided roughly into the west-south and center-east portions of the island. Although today there are significant differences in speech varieties within each of these broad divisions, particularly in the south of the country (see especially Bouwer, below), this was likely less the case two centuries ago. Etienne de Flacourt, *Histoire de la grande île Madagascar, composée par le Sieur de Flacourt, Directeur general de la Compagnie Française de l'Orient, & Commandant pour sa Majesté dans ladite Isle, & Isles adjacentes* (A Paris, 1658), ii verso ("La langue est vniue & seule dans toute l'Isle"); Barthélemy Huet de Froberville, "Essai théorique sur la langue madécasse," Port-Louis, 28 octobre 1815, British Library, Manuscripts Division, Additional Manuscript 18131 (hereafter BL.MD.Add.Mss.), 5r–5v; Jacques Dez, "Aperçus pour une dialectologie de la langue malgache [I]," *Bulletin de Madagascar* 204 (May 1963): 441; Pierre Vérin, et al., "The Glottochronology of Malagasy Speech Communities," *Oceanic Linguistics* 8, 1 (1969): 26–83; Jacques Aly, "Étude ethno-linguistique de quelques dialectes malgaches" (Thèse de doctorat de 3e cycle en ethnologie, Université de Paris X, Nanterre, Paris, 1977), esp. 17–18; Leoni Bouwer, "The Viability of Official Malagasy in the Language Ecology of Southern Madagascar with Particular Reference to the Bara Speech Community" (Doctor Litterarum et Philosophiae, Department of Linguistics, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2003).

were nevertheless recognized as a rough unity by missionaries and others who worked among them. In colonies that classified everyone from the Big Island as *malgache*, persons from across Madagascar who spoke closely related varieties of the island's tongue began to identify with each other in ways they had not before. Malagasy identity was early forged in diaspora, as were many such ethnic and national identities in the Indian and Atlantic oceans. Things were rather different for continental Africans and for Asians arriving in the colonial islands, whose numbers in any case remained well below those of Malagasy until about the French Revolution. Most of the former were collectively known as *mozambiques* in Île de France (*caffres* in Bourbon) and spoke related Bantu languages, but few of these were mutually intelligible.¹³ No first language spoken by African and Asian slaves came close to Malagasy speech varieties in the number of persons able to speak or understand it. To converse with others who did not share their maternal languages, many in the Mascarenes adopted new speeches of interlingual communication.

The longstanding hypothesis among historians of language and literacy in the early colonial Mascarenes is that French and its creoles served this role exclusively, and that slaves' various native languages fell away quickly in a harsh colonial environment. It is a theory belied by the archive, at least in the case of Malagasy. Although Malagasy speakers constituted a majority of both islands' servile populations during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, their speech is seldom mentioned in modern linguistic studies except insofar as it *supplied words* to the French creole lexicon.¹⁴ French, of course, was the primary medium of communication within the European communities of the islands and among a growing number of slaves, especially in their dealings with masters or agents and institutions of the state. Let us turn to French and its creoles first, before coming back to Malagasy.

The French creole speeches of the islands emerged somewhat differently in Bourbon and in Île de France, and there has been much debate over their respective linguistic inputs, the timing of their emergence, and whether they owe most to the speech of masters or to that of (African, not Malagasy) slaves. Whatever the case, distinctive creole speeches were in use on both islands by at least 1750, and probably earlier at Bourbon than at Île de France.¹⁵ With few exceptions, the earliest examples of French creole speech

¹³ Edward A. Alpers, "Becoming 'Mozambique': Diaspora and Identity in Mauritius," in Vijayalakshmi Teelock and Edward A. Alpers, eds., *History, Memory and Identity* (Port Louis, 2001), 117–55.

¹⁴ See most notably Robert Chaudenson, *Le lexique du parler créole de la Réunion*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1974); Baker and Corne, *Isle de France Creole*; Annegret Bollée, *Dictionnaire étymologique des créoles français de l'Océan Indien: Deuxième partie, Mots d'origine non-française ou inconcue* (Hamburg, 1993).

¹⁵ Chaudenson, *Le lexique*; Baker and Corne, *Isle de France Creole*; Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham, N.C., 2005), 202–28.

in phrases and sentences can be found in late-eighteenth-century colonial archives and in French publications of the same era reporting local language usage.¹⁶ The earliest books *printed* in the French creole of the islands date only to the 1820s, however, a decade before creole slaves—those born on the colonial islands—became a majority in Mascarene slave populations. On Mauritius in 1822, Jean-François Chrestien published several poems composed in the French creole in a volume now very difficult to find. Six years later, creole language works appeared simultaneously on both Mauritius (ex-Île de France) and Bourbon, one a catechism composed by Protestant evangelists, the other a short compendium of five poems by L. Héry.¹⁷

Most printed materials available in the islands during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, were in varieties of metropolitan French. There was a hefty demand for books among whites in the colonial Mascarenes and an avid reading public. Well into the nineteenth century most colonial reading matter was imported from France privately or, after 1790, by established merchants in Port-Louis and Saint-Denis. Separate studies of estate inventories on the two islands reveal that nearly 35 percent of those who registered wills owned books when they died, a figure superior to that of many French cities of the time. These islanders, many of whom were slave owners and possessed of the means to acquire books in quantity, were keen to have ponderous volumes on their shelves even if they did not read them. The staple of private libraries in the colonial islands were the multi-volume encyclopedias and dictionaries then so popular in France, and the works of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, especially the *Oeuvres* of Voltaire and Montesquieu, and abbé Raynal's six-volume *Histoire philosophique*. Islanders frequently lent books to each other, a practice testified in the indignant newspaper advertisements demanding the return of delinquent volumes. While the private libraries of the Mascarenes' free, moneyed, and literate inhabitants were well stocked with the secular works then common in France, there were—by contrast to the metropole and in conformity with Catholic missionaries' repeated complaints about the religious laxity of Mascarene *habitants*—few volumes on religion in colonial collections and scarcely any bibles in particular.¹⁸

¹⁶ Robert Chaudenson, *Textes créoles anciens (La Réunion et Ile Maurice): Comparaison et essai d'analyse* (Hamburg, 1981), 3–7.

¹⁷ Jean-François Chrestien, *Les essais d'un bobre africain: petit recueil de poésies, composé de chansons choisies et corrigées, et de quelques fables traduites de Lafontaine, en créole; suivies de méditations mélancholiques, Par un Amateur* (Isle Maurice, 1822); *Catéchisme en créole* (Réduit, 1828); L. Héry, *Fables créoles dédiées aux Dames de l'Île Bourbon* (Saint-Denis, 1828). See also Chaudenson, *Textes créoles anciens*; Gillette Staudacher-Villiamée, *Catéchisme créole et Mission des Noirs à l'Île Bourbon* (Paris, 2000). Chaudenson misdates Chrestien's work to 1820. Île de France was taken by British forces during the Napoleonic Wars and renamed Mauritius.

¹⁸ Claude Wanquet, "Aspects culturels de la société réunionnaise au XVIII^e siècle," in *Le mouvement des idées dans l'océan Indien occidental: actes de la table ronde de Saint-Denis*,

Histories of language and literacy in the eighteenth-century Mascarenes have stressed these and similar developments in French and its creoles. But the preoccupation with the first language of most whites has eclipsed the significance and uses of other languages concurrently spoken on the islands through the first half of the nineteenth century. Between about 1720 and the French Revolution, for example, Malagasy dialects were not only spoken by those born on Madagascar; they served as a contact language among slaves of various geographical origins. But they were seldom spoken, understood, or possibly heard by most whites.

The complex linguistic mix of native and non-native speakers of Malagasy varieties during this period is difficult to characterize with precision. Malagasy certainly functioned as a broad lingua franca, probably in a dialectically creolized form not spoken anywhere on the Big Island. For instance, in 1764 missionary Philippe-Albert Caulier reported about his evangelistic work among slaves at Bourbon, "In this flock of black skin Malagasy is the dominant language, *which the other nations and especially the creoles*, more or less understand."¹⁹ Knowledge of Malagasy spread well beyond those born in Madagascar to creoles (some half or more of whom were, after all, the children of Malagasy-speaking parents) and "other nations," presumably Africans and Asians held in slavery. There is a lack of specific examples of reported Malagasy speech in the mid-eighteenth-century archive, and also of the French creole, and this makes understanding the Malagasy linguistic soup in the Mascarenes particularly complicated. It is clear that Malagasy *parlers* coexisted throughout the mid-eighteenth century with the French creole. Malagasy only decisively lost out to French as a contact language among slaves of differing maternal tongues after the French Revolution, as the share of Malagasy within the servile population sank well below 50 percent. Among those born on the Big Island and their children, however, Malagasy varieties were spoken on the islands to at least 1860.²⁰

25–28 juin 1982 (St. Denis de la Réunion, 1985); Claude Wanquet, "Jérusalem tropicale? Ou la Bible dans les îles du sud-ouest de l'océan Indien," in, Yvon Belaval and Dominique Bourel, eds., *Le siècle des Lumières et la Bible* (Paris, 1986), 233–36; Olivier Caudron, "Des institutions de lecture de l'île Bourbon sous la Monarchie de Juillet: Bibliothèque des Bons Livres et cabinets de lecture," *Association Historique Internationale de l'océan Indien, Bulletin de Liaison et d'Information*, nouv. série, No. 9 (May 1988): 11–63; Olivier Caudron, "Le livre dans la société de l'île de France du dernier quart du XVIIIe siècle," in, Uttama Bissoondoyal and Asha L. Sibartie, eds., *L'île Maurice et la Révolution française* (Moka, 1990), 175–90; Olivier Caudron, "Livre, lecture et révolution aux Mascareignes: quelques pistes de recherches," in, Claude Wanquet and Benoît Jullien, eds., *Révolution française et Océan Indien: Prémices, paroxysmes, héritages et déviations* (Saint-Denis et Paris, 1996), 149–54.

¹⁹ Philippe-Albert Caulier to M.T.H. Pave, St. Denis, île Bourbon, 25 février 1764, Archives de la Congrégation de la Mission, Paris (hereafter ACM), Recueil 1504, 182r. My emphasis.

²⁰ This is amply testified to in the Mauritius portion of the archives of the London Missionary Society, which focused its efforts in that island on Malagasy speakers. See also Larson, "La diaspora malgache," 143–55.

Because of the proximity of the Big Island to the Mascarenes, the economic dependence of the latter on it, the continual movement of people, goods, and information among the three islands, and the transit through Madagascar of many African slaves bound for the Mascarenes, Bourbon and Île de France enjoyed a close and ongoing relationship with a nearby and key supplier of bondmen—and with its language—possibly unique in the annals of colonial European slave systems. There are few places in the European colonial world where a native language of slaves is known to have lingered so long after emancipation and to have served as a contact language enabling interlingual communication.²¹

Among the first Europeans in the Mascarenes to take serious notice of the Big Island's vernacular were Lazarist missionaries from the Catholic order of the *Congrégation de la Mission*, headquartered in Paris, who first arrived at Bourbon in December 1714. Building on the order's experience with vernacular evangelization in the French colony of Fort-Dauphin in southeast Madagascar during the seventeenth century, at least some Lazarist personnel in the Mascarenes sought to evangelize Malagasy arriving at Bourbon and Île de France in their own language.²² Over time, other Europeans, too, took an interest in the Malagasy vernacular: French merchants plying their trade in the Big Island and supplying the Mascarenes, administrators concerned to insure a steady flow of food and labor to the islands, colonial governors who sought to extend European imperial influence to the Big Island, and Mascarene intellectuals interested in the technicalities of the Malagasy vernacular as a written language; all had a stake in promoting and supporting Malagasy language knowledge and literacy in the Mascarenes.²³ Written texts in the vernacular of Madagascar emerged as useful instruments for building French political and commercial influence in the nearby Big Island, and for evangelizing the first generations of

²¹ In Trinidad, Yoruba-speaking indentured laborers in the post-emancipation era employed their language, of which some adults in the mid-twentieth century retained a fragmentary knowledge. See Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1996).

²² For vernacular evangelization, which is the subject of forthcoming publication, see Philippe-Albert Caulier, "Directoire des paroisses de l'Isle de Bourbon pour l'Isle de France," 1 Oct. 1763, ACM, Recueil 1504. The seventeenth-century Lazarist mission to Fort-Dauphin in southeast Madagascar is discussed in Paul Durand, *Histoire de la Mission des Lazaristes à Madagascar*, vol. 9, *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris, 1866); Henri Froidevaux, *Les Lazaristes à Madagascar au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1902); Philippe Chan-Mouie, "La première évangélisation des Lazaristes, 1648–1674. Peut-on parler d'un échec?" in *Le Christianisme dans le sud de Madagascar* (Fianarantsoa, 1996), 11–21.

²³ Most prominent among these intellectuals was Barthélemy Huet de Froberville, whose lexical and editorial work on Malagasy and the Malagasy voyages of Mascarene merchants in the early decades of the nineteenth century is well known among scholars of Madagascar. See, for example, William Edward Cousins, "Among Old Malagasy Books in the British Museum: The 'Great Dictionary of Madagascar' by M. De Froberville," *Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine* (1889): 65–72; Flavien Ranaivo and Jean Valette, "Le Grand Dictionnaire de Madagascar: Préface," *Bulletin de Madagascar* 200 (Jan. 1963): 3–17.

captive migrants arriving at Bourbon and Île de France during the eighteenth century, as required by the Mascarene version of the *Code Noir*.

In this article I consider two publications in the Malagasy language that appeared before the French Revolution, works that illustrate the breadth and depth of interest in a language of slaves at the Mascarenes. One is a French-Malagasy and Malagasy-French vocabulary and the first book ever published in the islands. The other is a catechism published in Rome by Père Caulier, representing manuscripts he and clerical colleagues employed in vernacular evangelism at Bourbon during the mid-eighteenth century. Both of these works testify to the significance of Malagasy in Mascarene colonial language history but have been mostly ignored in linguistic histories of the islands in preference for a focus on works composed exclusively in French or the French creole. The production of vocabularies and catechisms in native languages, as I noted earlier, was a common European pursuit during the late eighteenth century. But those produced and utilized in slave societies and in the languages of slaves, as these works were, were rare, at least judging by the state of current research on this issue. It is in part the uniqueness of Malagasy letters in the slave societies of the Mascarenes that makes examination of Pères Challan and Caulier's works particularly revealing about the status of a servile language in colonial life. At the same time, historians of Madagascar typically assume that the language of the Big Island was first set to Roman character during the 1820s by Protestant missionaries in highland central Madagascar. This was not the case, clearly, and Catholic missionaries and their Malagasy speaking assistants in the eighteenth-century Mascarenes produced not only orthographies for Malagasy, but also assumptions about the fundamental unity of the Big Island's speech varieties, based on research with a different set of *parlers* than those explored by British Protestants in Imerina a century later.

The Malagasy Romanized vernacular literacy of Christian evangelists and other colonial elites at the Mascarenes was an esoteric and professionally oriented system of writing much like the Malagasy literacy in Arabic script employed by a handful of diviners and healers on Madagascar's east coast.²⁴ It scarcely filtered down among the Malagasy speakers who were ultimately its *raison d'être*. This curious form of vernacular literacy in, but less of, the Malagasy diaspora served largely as a clerical-mercantile *writing* technology of acutely restricted social scope. It originated in the seventeenth-century French colony at Fort-Dauphin and continued in the production of a wide variety of travel narratives and lexical works in the Mascarenes into the early

²⁴ Writing Malagasy in Arabic script dated to at least the sixteenth century and was very restricted in nature within the island. The best single overviews of this writing system, which is not my interest here, are Philippe Beaujard, "Les manuscrits arabico-malgaches (*sorabe*) du pays antemoro," *Omaly sy Anio* 28, 2 (1988): 123–49; Narivelo Rajaonarimanana, *Savoirs arabico-malgaches: La tradition manuscrite des devins Antemoro Anakara (Madagascar)* (Paris, 1990).

nineteenth century. Its purposes were broadly colonial: a means for Christian evangelization, the lubricant for commercial relations on Madagascar's east coast, and in some cases an aid to vernacular communication between masters and slaves at the Mascarenes. For those who employed it and commented about it, Malagasy literacy before the Revolution also served as a conduit for *knowing* Madagascar, for colonial thinking about Malagasy people in the slave societies of the western Indian Ocean. In that sense, vernacular—but not subaltern—letters in the language of slaves broke through the normally restricted bounds of colonial linguistics to serve as a medium through which whites imagined the origins and capacities of the unfree laborers in their midst. The colonial linguistic study of Malagasy vernacular literacy was but one strand in the unique twine of French racial ideologies developed at the Mascarenes, yet one that scholars have yet to explore in any detail.

Père Claude Bernard Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache*, a text of ninety-two pages, was published in Port-Louis, Île de France, in 1773, two years after Challan arrived there on ecclesiastical duties.²⁵ The first printing press set up in the Mascarenes was installed in Port-Louis in 1768 and soon set to government service. In the earliest years of its operation, it issued only edicts, proclamations, and other governmental and regulatory documents, all in French. A careful examination of the items appearing from the government publishing office confirms that Challan's work, the forty-sixth in August Toussaint's chronological bibliography of Mauritius, was the first monograph of any kind printed in the islands, preceding the next literary work published there, a novel in standard French, by a full thirty years.²⁶ This scarcely known Malagasy-French lexicon is the unacknowledged ancestor of Mascarene literature of domestic publication.²⁷ Mauritius national archivist and historian

²⁵ Claude Bernard Challan, *Vocabulaire malgache, distribué en deux parties, la première françois et malgache, la seconde malgache et françois, Par Mr. Challan, prêtre de la Mission & curé de la paroisse St. Louis, à l'Isle de France* (A l'Isle de France, 1773). Challan's year of arrival in Île de France, 1771, is found in a document entitled "Missionnaires de l'Isle de France," ACM, Recueil 1502, not foliated (this document is near the end of the volume).

²⁶ Auguste Toussaint and H. Adolphe, *Bibliography of Mauritius (1502–1954)* (Port Louis, 1956), 11, 45. The novel in question is Barthélemy Huet de Froberville, *Sidner ou les dangers de l'imagination* (A l'Isle de France, 1803).

²⁷ Vernaculars, including Malagasy, receive virtually no mention in Camille de Rauville, *Littératures francophones de l'Océan indien* (Saint-Denis, La Réunion, 1990); Jean-Georges Prosper, "L'influence de la Révolution Française sur la littérature mauricienne de l'époque," in Uttama Bissoondoyal and Asha L. Sibartie, eds., *L'île Maurice et la Révolution française* (Moka, 1990), 167–74; Jean-Georges Prosper, *Histoire de la littérature mauricienne de langue française*, nouv. éd. (Rose-Hill, 1994); Jean-Georges Prosper and Danielle Tranquille, eds., *Anthologie de la littérature mauricienne d'expression française, des origines à 1920* (Moka, 2000). In these titles, the understood non-francophone literature is that of Indian languages.

Auguste Toussaint is probably the only Mascarene scholar to recognize the significance and social provenance of Challan's work. In his study of early printing in the Indian Ocean, he observed that the *Vocabulaire malgache* was "the first book proper to be issued in this island" and "composed from information obtained from Malagasy slaves, then numerous in this French colony," an assessment echoed by French linguist and historian of Madagascar, Jacques Dez, in his unpublished and little-known technical study of the work.²⁸ It is possible that the Lazarists had intended Challan for a mission to Madagascar and set him to vernacular work upon his arrival in the Mascarenes, as they did with all such personnel they destined for missions on the Big Island.²⁹ The *Vocabulaire malgache* was the fruit of Challan's first years of study in Madagascar's vernacular at Île de France.

A more precise clue to the origins and purpose of Challan's work is to be found in the comments of colonial journalist, poet, novelist, and vernacular Malagasy specialist Barthélemy Huet de Froberville, the author of the novel *Sidner ou les dangers de l'imagination* (1803), "the very first literary work by a Mauritian author printed in Mauritius" and likely "the first novel of the southern hemisphere."³⁰ Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache*, wrote Froberville in 1815, emerged from the work of Lazarist missionaries in Île de France and represented the "northern idiom" of the Malagasy language from the region around Tamatave. This was in contrast to Étienne de Flacourt's *Dictionnaire de la langve de Madagascar*, published in Paris in 1658, which resulted from the Lazarists' prior vernacular evangelism in seventeenth-century Madagascar and represented the language of the south, around the erstwhile French colony of Fort-Dauphin.³¹ "This Vocabulary is exact but too succinct,"

²⁸ Auguste Toussaint, *Early Printing in Mauritius, Reunion, Madagascar and the Seychelles* (Amsterdam, 1969), 21; Auguste Toussaint, "La diffusion de l'imprimerie dans l'Océan Indien," in *Le mouvement des idées dans l'océan Indien occidental: Actes de la table ronde de Saint-Denis, 25–28 juin 1982* (St. Denis de la Réunion, 1985), 235; Jacques Dez, "Le vocabulaire malgache de l'Abbé Challan (1773)" (Typescript, D.R.L., Université de Paris VII, Paris, 1987), i: 3, 13.

²⁹ None of these missions actually materialized. Michel Mollat, "Les pays de l'Océan Indien dans les archives romaines de la Congrégation pour l'Évangélisation des Peuples," *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 44 (1974): 437–51; Jean-Louis Peter, "Pour un éventuel chapitre de l'histoire du Christianisme à Madagascar," *Omalv sy Anio* 8 (Jan.–June 1979): 167–73; Vincent Belrose-Huyghues, "Les Archives de la Propagande: Une source pour l'histoire de l'océan Indien Sud-Oriental (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)," *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome (Moyen Age—Temps Modernes)* 92 (1980–1981): 237–48.

³⁰ Jean-Georges Prosper, *Histoire de la littérature mauricienne de langue française* (Île Maurice, 1978), 38 (quote); Barthélemy Huet de Froberville, *Sidner, ou les dangers de l'imagination*, nouv. éd. avec préface de Mario Serviabile et avant-propos de Philippe Lenoir (Stanley, Maurice, et Sainte-Clotilde, La Réunion, 1993 [1803]), 15–16; Barthélemy Huet de Froberville, *Les orages de mars: Poésies et satires (1789–1832)*, Edition critique de Marc Serge Rivière et Gérard Fanchin (Port Louis, 2005), 62.

³¹ Etienne de Flacourt, *Dictionnaire de la langve de Madagascar, avec vn petit recueil des noms & dictions propres des choses qui sont d'vne mesme espece. Plus quelques mots du langage des sauvages de la Baye de Saldagne au Cap de bonne Esperance. Vn petit catechisme & les prieres du matin & du soir que les missionnaires font & enseignent aux neophites & catechumenes*

Froberville noted of Challan's work in the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, "Since it appeared his book has not stopped being the manual of the *habitants* of the islands and of all those engaged in the trade of Madagascar."³² In the decades after its publication the lexicon became a popular guide to necessary vernacular knowledge not only in the important commerce of the Mascarenes but also on the farms and plantations of the islands, where Malagasy-speaking slaves and European masters collided. One can imagine *habitants* employing the vocabulary and phrasebook to decipher the suspicious speech of slaves or to issue orders to newly arrived bondmen and women who could not yet muster the French creole. Whatever the case, Froberville confirmed several decades after the *Vocabulaire malgache's* publication that slave owners had become major consumers of the book.

The anticipated practical utility of the *Vocabulaire malgache* is confirmed by Challan in the front matter prefacing his work, but he does not specify a specific Mascarene target audience. "Only a desire for the public good compelled me to publish (*mettre au jour*) this little work, which although imperfect, will be useful," he notes in his dedication to the heads of the island's royal administration. An authorization for publication was offered jointly by the royal Governor and Intendant of Île de France, and follows the dedication. It states that Challan "presented the manuscript to us," leaving uncertain from whom the idea for publication first issued and for precisely what purpose. Whatever the case, in the short *Avertissement* (Cautionary note) that precedes the lexicon, Challan writes boldly, "The language of Madagascar, consists only in adverbs: having no genders, no numbers, no cases & hardly any conjugations. This poverty of expression makes it simple to learn, & he who makes a word makes it in all its senses; one does not have to remember conjunctions, prepositions, articles and that which serves in other languages to tie terms together to make sentences." Nothing could be easier to learn, it seems, than Malagasy!³³

The exuberant errors in Challan's statement that Malagasy was "poor in expression," easy for Europeans to learn, practically without conjunctions, prepositions or articles, and consisted largely in adverbs are only allayed by the aptness of his assertion that "he who makes a word makes it in all its senses," for, in the Big Island's language, many related words are formed from a single root or radical. The fantastical remainder of Challan's characterization of the Malagasy tongue went largely unchallenged, for virtually all who wrote or published on Malagasy in the colonial islands were whites in a slave

de cette Isle, le tout en François & en cette langue. Par le Sieur DE FLACOVRT Directeur General de la Compagnie Française de l'Orient & Commandant pour sa Maiesté en l'Isle Madagascar & Isles adjacentes (A Paris, 1658).

³² Froberville, "Essai théorique sur la langue madécasse," 8v, 38v–39r. My emphasis.

³³ All quotations in this paragraph are from Challan, *Vocabulaire malgache*, un-paginated front matter. All translations from French and Malagasy are mine.

society surrounded with servile vernacular speakers from the Big Island who did not enjoy the means of producing and circulating their own texts.³⁴ Malagasy assistants may have been key teachers and co-workers of the Lazarists in their intellectual and vernacular work, as I argue elsewhere, but in Mascarene slave society they could never be recognized as experts in the written versions of their own language or as having offered assistance in teaching colonials how to speak it or construct their vocabularies and grammars.³⁵ This perverse colonial logic—perverse because it obscures the roles Malagasy played in the clerical-mercantile literacy of their own diaspora—runs across most literary work in Malagasy at the Mascarenes.

Père Challan's opening claim that Malagasy was simple to acquire was probably a marketing ploy for his book, for a study of the *Vocabulaire malgache*'s content quickly reveals the correctness of Froberville's assessment of it as a manual of trade language and colonial conversation—and an unholy one at that, given its clerical author. Absent was most of the religious vocabulary the Lazarists employed in their evangelization of slaves, as testified in both Flacourt's catechism of 1657 (produced in conjunction with Lazarist missionaries working southeast Madagascar) and in later ecclesiastical manuscripts and publications fashioned at the Mascarenes. This suggests that the lexicon was never meant for the missionaries or their religious neophytes from Madagascar, but rather for the practical purpose of facilitating communication upon the *habitations* of the Mascarenes and assisting those involved in the Madagascar trade in their daily interactions with speakers of the other language.³⁶

One does not find vernacular glosses in Challan's work for the French equivalents of "commandment," for example, nor for "prophet," "redemption," "resurrection," "sacrament," "trinity," or a host of other key religious terms that were important to the evangelistic work of Lazarists in seventeenth-century southeast Madagascar and the eighteenth-century Mascarenes. *Zaanhar* at least figures for "Dieu" (God, 92), along with *Manoupou* for "prier" (to pray, 73), and *Manoupou zaanhar* for "prier Dieu" (to pray to God, 73).³⁷ And if one desired to take the Lord's name in vain, the French-Malagasy section offered up *Oh zanhhar* for "Ah mon Dieu!" (Oh my God!, 2). No wonder Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache* was published by the government press of Île de France

³⁴ The improbability of these remarks was recognized several decades later in Eugène de Froberville, "Aperçus sur la langue malgache," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 11 (Jan. 1839): 36–37.

³⁵ Pier M. Larson, "Enslaved Malagasy and *Le Travail de la Parole* at the Pre-Revolutionary Mascarenes," *Journal of African History*, 48 (2007), in press.

³⁶ Etienne de Flacourt, *Petit catéchisme avec les prières du matin et du soir, que les missionnaires font & enseignent aux néophytes & cathecumènes de l'isle de Madagascar, le tout en français & en cette langue, contenant treute instructions* (A Paris, 1657).

³⁷ To minimize linguistic confusion in the discussion that follows, Malagasy words in the lexicon will be given in italic, French in quotation marks, and my English translation in parentheses immediately followed by the relevant *Vocabulaire malgache* page number, where applicable.

rather than an ecclesiastical printer: it was issued by conscientious administrators to assist the merchants who supplied the islands with necessary food and slaves in their interlingual communications, and to give Mascarene *habitants* a means for deciphering the most widely spread mother tongue of Mascarene slaves. Island administrators relied upon a Lazarist to author the secular lexicon, for Catholics there were well known for their work in the Malagasy vernacular. The Malagasy language interests of church, state, commerce, and curious *habitants* in the Mascarenes are all intertwined in Challan's work.

The lexicon is not entirely devoid of religious vocabulary, however. That which is found frequently charts an independent course from the Arabic-script texts of coastal Madagascar, influenced by the language of Islam as employed in the Big Island and adopted by Lazarist missionaries in the Mascarenes and, earlier, around Fort-Dauphin, Madagascar.³⁸ "AnGES, bons anGES, mauvais anGES, genies supérieurs" (angels, good angels, bad angels, superior spirits, 3), for example, are not glossed as *malaingca* as they are in virtually all other vernacular religious publications of the time, but as *oulis*, *angatz*, and *oulio angatz*, an assortment of vernacular terms for charms and spirits of the dead. "Prêtre" (priest, 88) is not *ompisacabiri*, *ombiassa*, *faquihi* or *catibou* as in Flacourt's catechism of 1657, but *vazaa manounpou zaanhar* (European who serves God). "Baptême" (baptism, 6) is not *famouïsan* or *famouïzan*, but *manhacha*; "pécher" (to sin, 37) is not *manghota*, but *ampiazatou*; "croire" (to believe, 14) not *mancatauto* or *homeinou*, but *manguahé ahé*. "Diable, démon" (devil, demon, 15, 16, 59) is not only *bilise*, *rabilise*, and *bélich*, but also *angatz*. "Vierge" (virgin) revealingly enough, does not figure at all except perhaps as *siampissing*, defined as "fille sage, vertueuse," (wise girl, virtuous, 82) about which more below. The personalized orthographic system Challan employed differs from that of Flacourt in several respects.³⁹

In his *Vocabulaire malgache*, Père Challan offered up a glossary of colonial trade tailored to merchants, and a menu of vernacular conversation for the whites of the colonial islands who employed Malagasy slaves or kept Malagasy wives, concubines, and lovers and desired to communicate with them in their native tongue. The lexicon may even have been employed by certain literate Malagasy on the Big Island or in the Mascarenes in their relations with French-speaking associates, for it translates in both directions. The Malagasy-French (pp. 1–48) and French-Malagasy (pp. 55–92) portions of the vocabulary are not identical, but each contains over 2,000 entries, for a combined total of some 2,800 different glosses.⁴⁰ That the Mascarene administration would publish a

³⁸ See note 24.

³⁹ Noël J. Gueunier, "La langue du catéchisme malgache de 1657: Les premiers essais d'une formulation malgache de la doctrine chrétienne," in *Le Christianisme dans le sud de Madagascar* (Fianarantsoa, 1996), 23–48.

⁴⁰ Dez, "Le vocabulaire malgache," i, 2.

Malagasy vocabulary at all—and as its first book—is extraordinary testimony to the economic dependence of the colonial islands on nearby Madagascar and its unfree laborers (the Mascarenes shared a single governor at Île de France). That it was printed in 1773 rather than earlier was conditioned not only by Challan’s recent arrival at Île de France but by the political history of the Mascarenes, which passed from the French East India Company to the French crown in 1769 and whose trade was accordingly opened from the *exclusif* to freer modes of private enterprise. As a result of subsequent economic reforms, the volume of the trade flowing into the islands from Madagascar, as well as from other regions of the Indian Ocean and beyond, increased significantly from about 1770.⁴¹ Challan’s *Vocabulaire malgache* lubricated these intensifying circuits of regional commerce with the oil of vernacular translation.

Among the most important commercial expressions proposed by the colonial lexicon may have been “Combien avez vous acheté cela?” (How much did you purchase that for?, 2), *Phiri hano Mividi zané?*; “Vendez-moi cet esclave” (Sell me that slave, 46), *Ambidio anino ampouria*; and “Avez-vous des noirs à vendre?” (Do you have blacks to sell?, 46), *Ano manan ampouria ambidi?* Appropriate terms for colonial measures of length and volume for such items as textiles and rice are provided in their respective places: “brasse, mesure” (a span, 9), as *réfi*; “gamelle” (a bucket, 23), as *capil hazou, gamel*. “Flangourin,” the fermented sugar cane liquor commonly brewed up in the Mascarenes during the eighteenth century and at times employed in commerce between the colonial islands and Madagascar, is translated straightforwardly enough as *toctar* (cane liquor, 21). In fact, seven different kinds of *toc*, or “liqueur, spiritueuse” (liquor, spirit, 86), are listed under that entry in the Malagasy-French section.

Several evaluative phrases useful in assessing merchandise or information about it appear under the French entry “cela” (that, 11): “cela est très-bon” (that is very good), as *Tsaré toué*; “cela est mauvais” (that is bad), as *ratchi-toué*; “cela est sûr” (that is true, correct), as *toutou, toucoa*; and the necessary “cela est faux” (that is false), as *linga*. “Voler, voleur, vol” (to steal, thief, theft, 27), all appear together in a single entry and are glossed respectively as *mangalatz, mangaletz, and mangalaré*. Theft was a necessary companion to both European colonial trade and the eighteenth-century slave system of the Mascarenes that often half-starved its servile laborers. On the other hand, equally important for the merchant or planter were “honnête, bon, obligeant” (honest, good, obliging, 27), which are glossed true enough as *tsara fanahé*

⁴¹ Auguste Toussaint, “Le trafic commercial entre les Mascareignes et Madagascar, de 1773 à 1810,” *Annales de l’Université de Madagascar, Série Lettres* 5 (1966); Auguste Toussaint, *Le route des îles: Contribution à l’histoire maritime des Mascareignes* (Paris, 1967); Jean-Michel Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1974), 59–65; Pier M. Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770–1822* (Portsmouth, N.H., 2000), 60–65.

(good spirited). An intermediate section of the book, ensconced between the French-Malagasy and Malagasy-French sections of the glossary, contains a primer on counting in Malagasy. It is entitled “Numération usitée chez les Madagascarois” (Counting employed by the Malagasy, 49–53) and sets out numbers between one, *rec*, and ten thousand, *polou arrive*.

Many of Challan’s translations testify to the early interpenetration of Malagasy and European terms in the hybridized speech of Madagascar’s east coast and the Mascarenes. “Argent” (money, 5), for example, is given in Malagasy as *aréanne*, *prata vola*. The first of these glosses is likely a vernacularized form of the French “argent,” while *prata* is Portuguese. “Marché” (market, 30) is translated as *bazar*; “palanquin” (palanquin, 36) as *hamac*; and “barique” (cask, 61) as *barique*. But “culotte” (knee-breeches, 62), interestingly enough, is glossed as *bouritsetz*, almost certainly neither a French nor a Malagasy term in origin but a variation of the English “breeches.” This last gloss speaks to how some Malagasy took up the words, and perhaps also the clothing, of English-speaking buccaneers who frequented the Big Island’s coasts between about 1690 and 1725 as they were driven from the Caribbean to further-lying seas. The term must have persisted in local usage from that time until the late eighteenth century. Other terms of European origin appearing in the *Vocabulaire malgache* as Malagasy words include *glasse* (glass, 47), *guiche* (geese, 34), and *sitil* (steel, 2), all from English; *pingarath*, *pingard* (gun, 79) and *espada* (sword, 64), from Portuguese; and *plette* (pistol, 79), from Dutch.⁴²

Subtle translations of the sort considered above suggest an intimate knowledge of the vernacular usages of Madagascar’s northeast coast and lead one to wonder how Père Challan, who never seems to have traveled there, may have known of them. He might well have consulted with Mascarene merchants more or less fluent in the Malagasy language as colleagues did after him, but it is clear that Madagascar-born captives or temporarily visiting merchants or workers from the Big Island could have handily offered much of this information from their store of knowledge or after inquiring among their compatriots in the colonial islands. Both August Toussaint and Jacques Dez, as we have seen, have argued that Challan’s main informants were Malagasy slaves in the Mascarenes. Unfortunately, it is not possible to reconstitute Challan’s precise networks of consultation, but he likely employed multiple sources, including traders and slaves, to fashion his work.

Merchants who set up households in Madagascar and white *habitants* who took Malagasy lovers were provided functional glosses in the priest’s vocabulary for the necessary things of domestic life. Let me begin with the material. “Domestique, valet” (domestic, valet, 16) is translated as *marmit*, *caramo*. The former term was extensively employed in the eighteenth-century

⁴² For a fuller list see Dez, “Le vocabulaire malgache,” i, 23.

Mascarenes; the latter still designates pay received by an employee.⁴³ Commands for directing slaves and servants could be useful, so it is not surprising that the *Vocabulaire malgache* provides only imperative forms of some Malagasy verbs handy in managing the workers of colonial agriculture and commerce, even when the gloss is given as a French infinitive: *fafazou ranou* (water [imperative verb], 64) for “arroser”; *hadiou* (dig, 66) for “creuser”; *isao* (count, 68) for “compter, nombrer”; and *toumézanquéo* (stay there, 87) for “arrêtez-vous là.” One translation that is particularly revealing, for its relevance to the colonial vocabulary of population categories, is that for “créol” (creole, 14): *tercantoc* or, literally, “born in alcohol”! (Along the east coast of Madagascar the French term “créole” signified a person of mixed-race parentage, a meaning different from that assigned to the term at the Mascarenes, where in this period it tended to mean someone of any race born in the colony.)⁴⁴ There is no better linguistic testimony to the interwoven roles of alcohol and sex in the meeting of Malagasy, on the one hand, and Mascarene merchants and *habitants*, on the other.⁴⁵ Finally “chandelier” (candlestick, candelabra, 11) came out *fontérénassara*, and “moustiquaire” (mosquito net, 86) as *traonlai*. The second of these two glosses, which is still in use (the former is not), testifies to the use of mosquito nets in the French *ancien régime* empire well before knowledge of malaria’s pathology. Challan’s vocabulary is a rich testament to both linguistic and cultural *métissage* along Madagascar’s slaving coast and in the Mascarenes during the early modern era.

What might raise ecclesiastical eyebrows is Challan’s translation of words of the flesh, so useful and potentially alluring to French merchants and planters who set themselves up with Malagasy lovers, consorts, and wives on both the Big Island and in the Mascarenes. While “homme” (man, 27) is glossed *lalaet*, *oulou*, *lelahé*, the entry for “femme” (woman, 20) is considerably more developed.

Femme, en général. *Véavi. Vavi. Vave. Ampéla*, signifie une jeune femme. Femme épouse, *Vadin*. Le terme de *vadin*, signifie également une concubine: *badi*, signifie à peu près la même chose. (Woman, in general. *Véavi. Vavi. Vave. Ampéla*, signifie a young woman. Wife, *Vadin*. The term *vadin*, signifie also a concubine: *badi*, signifie about the same thing.)

Fishing through the word list one finds a multitude of Malagasy glosses for “amant,” “galant,” and “amante” (lovers, both male and female). One of the Malagasy equivalents proffered for the last of these terms is the French word “maîtresse” (mistress, 57), but also *saingni*, which in the Malagasy-French

⁴³ For Marmite see Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 111–12.

⁴⁴ See Manassé Esoavelomandroso, “The ‘Malagasy Creoles’ of Tamatave in the 19th Century,” *Diogenes* 111 (1980): 50–64. Although *tercantoc* lends itself to this etymology, it is possible the derivation is other than what I suggest here.

⁴⁵ See Dominique Bois, “Étrangers, esclaves et domestiques sur la côte est de Madagascar dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle: Perception et pratiques,” in Ignace Rakoto, ed., *La route des esclaves: Système servile et traite dans l’est malgache* (Paris, 2000), 205–21.

section is glossed as “maîtresse, amante” (mistress, lover, 82). If we look directly at the entry for “maîtresse,” on the other hand, we find the following Malagasy translation: *tope vave, tounpou vave* (polite title for a woman, 30). Following this line of inquiry, translations for a male lover in the French-Malagasy section include *fanguatéa* (64), *fannézot* (64), and *ranguit* (80). The first and last of the preceding terms are likely related to the modern words *mpifankatia* (lovers) and *ranitra/rangitra* (a kept man or woman); *fannézot* I do not recognize.

The lexicon also provides words for evaluating the moral quality of women. Thus *singue* and *saingni* are “libertine, fille débauchée” (libertine, debauched girl, 30, 83), and *pissing* is “putain, débauchée, coureuse, sans pudeur” (whore, debauched woman, runner, without shame, 79). It also provides its negation: *siampissing*, “fille sage, vertueuse” (wise girl, virtuous, 82). These terms all derive from the Malagasy radical/root *singa* (single, individual) and its related verb *maninga* (to go alone). In like vein, in the French-Malagasy section “putain” (whore, 40) is separately translated as *pissing, maroumasse*.⁴⁶ This last term is likely related to *maro masay*, many wives (*masay* properly designated middle wives in a polygamous marriage). But our Lazarist author also offers up sexual terms of a less theoretical nature, including “deshabiller” (to remove clothes, 15, 17) as *magnala cannézou, alini cannézou*, and *manhala simbou*; “se déshabiller” (to remove one’s own clothing, 73) as *manhalasimbou*; “s’habiller” (to clothe oneself, 70) as *magnatou cannezou*; “testicules” (testicles, 45) as *latac*; “tetton, mamelle” (teat, breast, 45) as *nounou, nounous*, and *soundraza*; and “bâtard” (bastard, 92) as *zaza fingue*.⁴⁷ If Challan’s lexicon was sometimes prurient for its age and author, it was nonetheless a useful practical guide to Mascarene merchants and slave owners. One wonders what its circulation may have been among Malagasy women along Madagascar’s east coast, who from the other side of the sea sought to form commercial and sexual associations with passing European men, or to insinuate themselves as free wives into the Mascarenes.⁴⁸ These diverse audiences may be among the reasons the dictionary provides several French and vernacular alternatives for “amants, galants” (male lovers) and translates words in both directions.

The technical qualities of the *Vocabulaire malgache* are not impressive by today’s standards but are quite in line with Francophone works in the vernacular of the Big Island at the time. Evaluating early modern lexicons of Malagasy is a hazardous business. Sound judgment is skewed by the standardization of

⁴⁶ The resemblance between *pissing* and the French *pisser*, pointed out by one reader, is only coincidental.

⁴⁷ Possibly due to a typesetting mistake, Challan probably intended this to be *Zaza singue* (single child).

⁴⁸ See Jean Valette, “Note sur une coutume betsimisaraka du XVIIIe siècle: Les vadinebazaha,” *Cahiers du Centre d’Etudes des Coutumes* 3 (1967): 49–55.

the Malagasy language in the nineteenth century with its adoption of highland Malagasy speech varieties as its norm, and today's different set of accepted equivalencies between French and Malagasy. (It should be remembered that Challan's lexicon is more than two-and-a-half-centuries old and may reflect a creolized form of Mascarene speech very different from that employed by any single set of Malagasy speakers at home.) Yet questionable glosses and outright mistakes in the work are manifold; those knowledgeable in Malagasy will already have identified many in the examples provided. Some problems include *azamietsic* (do not move, 61), which is given incorrectly in French as "remuer" (to move around); *mifahavalou* (to be enemies with each other, 75), as "ennemi" (enemy), a noun; and *tafic* (army, 83) also as "ennemi." Verbs are routinely glossed as nouns and the like, as in *mandrantou* (to travel for mercantile purposes, 72), translated as "voyage, voyageur" (journey, traveler). Even when leeway is given for the inevitable mistakes made by typesetters working from an entirely correct vernacular manuscript but unfamiliar with the Malagasy tongue—for example, easy mix-ups between f and s, n and u, or m and n—the work is littered with mistakes.⁴⁹ Yet as a glossary and phrase-book for its time, Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache* was useful in a practical sense and in many ways remarkable, both for its independence from the vernacular work of Governor Flacourt and his Lazarist compatriots in southeast Madagascar more than a century earlier, and as a testimony to the importance of the Malagasy vernacular in a literate form as a tool in the mercantile and slaving colonial society of the late-eighteenth-century Mascarenes. As we learned earlier, Challan's lexicon was still being employed as a guide to vernacular speech by French merchants operating in Madagascar and by slave owners at the Mascarenes during the early nineteenth century.⁵⁰ For a time, certain personnel of the colonial Mascarene state, church, and mercantile sector not only recognized the significance of the Malagasy tongue at the Mascarenes, but acted in pursuit of pragmatic interests and individual responsibilities to bestow that language with a Roman system of writing.

Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache* was followed eight years later by colleague missionary Philippe-Albert Caulier's *Catéchisme abrégé en la langue de Madagascar* (Short catechism in the language of Madagascar).⁵¹ Caulier's catechism

⁴⁹ For a list of such typographical mistakes in the work consult Dez, "Le vocabulaire malgache," i, 9–12.

⁵⁰ Froberville, "Essai théorique sur la langue madécasse," 38v–39r.

⁵¹ Philippe-Albert Caulier, *Catéchisme abrégé en la langue de Madagascar, pour instruire sommairement ces peuples, les inviter et les disposer au baptême* (Rome, 1785). Studies of the catechism include Modeste Rakotondrabe, *Les premiers catéchismes en langue malgache: 1657, 1785, et 1841, Recherches et Documents No 9* (Antsiranana, 1990); Clément Sambo,

was approved and published in Rome in 1785 by the Propaganda Fide, a body coordinating global missions in the Catholic Church. The catechism emerged from unpublished notebook *aide mémoires* that Caulier and his Malagasy slave assistants had employed for some decades in their vernacular *travail de la parole* (“work of the word,” or evangelism) among newly arriving slaves from the Big Island and adult Malagasy already living in the Mascarenes.⁵² The catechism originated, Caulier confessed in the book’s front matter, “from my practice of many years in teaching blacks recently disembarked, who (I am sure) have always heard & sufficiently understood me.” The vernacular lessons in the catechism, he claimed, were “given daily” during his time as a missionary at Bourbon. This confirms the importance of regular instruction in Malagasy *parlers* there during the mid-eighteenth century, at least in Caulier’s evangelistic repertoire if not also in that of his Lazarist brethren.⁵³ Yet Caulier never employed the final, published version of his catechism in the islands, for it appeared nearly a decade and a half after his retirement from the Mascarenes to the Lazarist headquarters in Paris, a post-facto affirmation within the European Church of his vernacular work and linguistic prowess. To what extent the catechism circulated in the Mascarenes after its publication is hard to tell.⁵⁴ It probably reflected the kinds of vernacular lessons missionaries on both islands employed in their evangelism among adult slaves between about 1720 and the political turmoil at the end of the century.

Published on the Mediterranean rim, at least an ocean away from its colonial nursery, Caulier’s *Catéchisme abrégé* is a sacred work altogether unlike Chalan’s *Vocabulaire malgache*. Yet it drew on similar networks of profane linguistic expertise, for Caulier submitted his vernacular teachings to the inspection of merchants in the Mascarene islands who knew at least some Malagasy speech varieties. In the “Avis au Lecteurs” (Notice to readers) prefacing the work, Caulier mentions in particular one Jean Marie, calling him “*un François*” (a Frenchman) and “the most celebrated Interpreter of the Trades of Madagascar for Île de France, to whom I sent my notebook of lessons & prayers

“Le catéchisme malgache de 1785,” in *Le Christianisme dans le sud de Madagascar* (Fianarantsoa, 1996), 106–21.

⁵² The second French expression in this sentence is from Philippe-Albert Caulier to Monseigneur L’archevêque de Paris, en la maison de St.-Lazare à Paris, 20 juillet 1773, ACM, Recueil 1504, 220r.

⁵³ Caulier, *Catéchisme abrégé*, 3.

⁵⁴ Manuscripts of a similar sort circulated in the islands, including “Catéchisme abrégé à l’usage des Insulaires de Madagascar, par M. l’Abbé Ante. Flageollet, prêtre de la mission de St. Lazare et Curé de la paroisse de Moka de l’isle Maurice, Revue, corrigé, et augmenté par Barthelemi huet Chev. de Froberville, Ancn. Cape. d’infanterie, membre de la société d’Emulation de l’isle de Maurice et de celle des sciences et arts de Batavia, Port Louis, Isle Maurice, le 5 Janvier 1816,” BL.MD.Add.Mss.18131.133r–158v. This manuscript is based on ones employed during the previous century. See Randriamboavonjy Razoharinoro, “Fikarohana momba ny teny malagasy tamin’ny taonjato faha-XVIII,” *Tantara* 9 (1980): 42–109.

(*Cahier d'Instructions*) in this language, with a French translation, which he followed word for word in the work he returned to me; a work that I received with as much satisfaction as his approbation of mine, although in a slightly different style.⁵⁵ For purposes of comparison and validation, in other words, Caulier had Jean Marie translate from French into Malagasy what he (Caulier) had previously translated. Caulier probably fashioned his earliest manuscripts by relying on his own knowledge of Malagasy, the assistance of ecclesiastical slaves, and the seventeenth-century works of Governor Flacourt. But to justify the correctness of the translation with Rome and his European audience, he claimed the parallel authority of a French merchant interpreter with long experience in Madagascar rather than that of any Malagasy collaborators and interlocutors, many of whom would have known how to speak at least some French and who worked extensively with Caulier.⁵⁶ The tangled web of connections between Mascarene commercial and ecclesiastical interests in the Big Island are evident in Caulier's catechism, as they are in Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache*.

The first thing to note about Caulier's *Catéchisme abrégé* is that, true to its title (Summary catechism), it is much shorter than Flacourt's vernacular catechism of 1657, on which it is nevertheless modeled (28 pages as compared to 112). Much of its sacred language is similar to Flacourt's and clearly derives from the earlier work. At the same time, the influence of Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache* appears minimal, suggesting the two contemporary works rely on different vernacular sources. Caulier may have examined Challan's lexicon in the final preparation of his catechism for press, but it is difficult to know.⁵⁷ The *Catéchisme abrégé* of 1785 comes in two parts. The first (pages 5–17) consists of Caulier's translations of a very abbreviated catechism and set of prayers; the second (17–27) offers Jean Marie's translations of the same texts. I read Jean Marie's vernacular rendition of the catechism with greater ease than Caulier's, which suggests the merchant may have translated closer than did the cleric to the Malagasy vernacular of the Big Island, or at least to the highland varieties that I know best. It is possible that Caulier's composition reflected more of a creolized Malagasy spoken in Bourbon by slaves of differing origins. In both parts of the work the vernacular texts are interlined with Latin, not French. However, Caulier writes in his notice to the reader that Jean Marie translated into Malagasy directly from a French text provided to him, not from the Latin that actually appears in the catechism. In his own vernacular translation of the Latin, Caulier notes that he sought faithfully to

⁵⁵ Caulier, *Catéchisme abrégé*, 3.

⁵⁶ For Lazarists' use of ecclesiastical slaves in vernacular evangelism see Larson, "Enslaved Malagasy and *Le Travail de la Parole*."

⁵⁷ Caulier departed the Mascarenes in 1771, the year of Challan's arrival. If he saw Challan's *Vocabulaire malgache*, he would have consulted it in Europe.

reproduce the sacred language in Malagasy, that he did not strive for “elegance,” as he put it, in the tongue of the Big Island. This admission reads as an apology of sorts for the awkwardness of many of his translations, especially in comparison to those of Jean Marie. It may also be, then, that Caulier’s Malagasy was stilted, rather than reflective of the common speech of the street.

Yet the admission is tempered by Caulier’s linguistic conceit, also developed in the front matter, claiming his published catechism as a manual of succinct and grammatically proper Malagasy (it seems not to this author). Commenting on Jean Marie’s translation, Caulier writes,

I find it more laconic than mine, but it is less so than the common style of the islanders (*le Style vulgaire des Insulaires* [meaning that of Malagasy]) who, not studying their own language, and especially about the sublime things of Religion, leave almost more to be guessed in their diction than understood, and suppress, as they do also with our French when speaking it, pronouns, articles, various tenses and modes &c. Not totally but rather like our peasants, who mispronounce (*écorchent*) French more than they speak it. . . . But just as it is true that our poor [French] speakers and speech givers can understand a correctly speaking author or orator, so it is also true that the islander [by which Caulier meant the Malagasy slave in the Mascarenes] can well hear, in the best diction (*à la belle prononciation près*), what a minister announces to him in the pure style of his language.⁵⁸

This text bears many messages. In his description of the “*style vulgaire des insulaires*,” Caulier may have meant the adumbrated grammatical features of the Malagasy contact tongue of Bourbon or simply the everyday language of native Malagasy speakers. Whatever the case, Caulier claimed to deliver instruction to servile Malagasy in the “pure style” of their language thanks to his ability to write Malagasy (he felt) in concise and correctly structured sentences and to his ability to read aloud from a prepared vernacular catechetical text that hewed so closely to its sacred Latin original. Caulier had discerned grammatical principles in the vernacular, he thought, and could diffuse them back among his catechumens through religious instruction in the Malagasy tongue. In this reasoning, Malagasy slaves were both Caulier’s religious neophytes and his *language students*, even when he refused to teach them how to read and write!

Caulier’s notion of the superiority of clerical vernacular literacy over “the common style of the islanders” was linked to his theory of the instructive power of religious truth as embedded in the sanctified language of catechisms in whatever tongue they were composed.⁵⁹ During verbal catechetical instruction in *French*, for example, we know that Caulier sometimes repeated answers to the questions he asked along with his slave-students to show them how to speak the colonial language correctly.⁶⁰ In a like manner, he probably viewed the catechism lessons he and his helpers offered slaves in Malagasy

⁵⁸ Caulier, *Catéchisme abrégé*, 4.

⁵⁹ See also Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 217–19.

⁶⁰ Caulier, “Directoire des paroisses,” MS not foliated.

as a model of proper vernacular speech. Trapped in their lexical and grammatical theories of vernacular literary superiority over the oracy of native or acquired servile Malagasy speakers, Lazarists depended on their Malagasy interpreters, collaborators, and catechumens to sustain their facility in the language but dared not—especially in the context of a colonial slave society—reveal them as useful or important sources of knowledge. *Malagasy* were the language students and *Lazarists* their instructors. But in matters of learning the vernacular, of course, the reality was fully the opposite.

In his premise that the *Catéchisme abrégé* and the manuscript predecessors of the publication he had actually worked from while in Bourbon were guides to proper style in the Big Island's vernacular, Caulier thought differently from Challan about the Malagasy and their language. Whereas in his *Vocabulaire malgache* Challan supposed Malagasy a simple tongue lacking much structure, easy to learn, and available to all who might dispose themselves to try it, Caulier felt the Malagasy language more complicated in its organization and capable of the ponderous task of rendering a correct translation of Latin, even if the Big Island's people did not fully evince that potential for precision in their ways of speaking. The fundamental difference in how Challan and Caulier understood Malagasy may well have stemmed from their relative experience with the tongue. Newly arrived in the islands when he published his vocabulary, Challan was untried in vernacular evangelism, and his comments exhibit a naïve, profane enthusiasm. Caulier, by contrast, published his work at the end of twenty-two years of evangelism among slaves at Bourbon (1749–1771), an undertaking that included much teaching and interaction with Malagasy speakers. The two authors were at opposite ends of ecclesiastical careers.

Despite reflecting the maturity of experience, Caulier's theory of the Malagasy language ran distinctly counter to the more secular and anarchic scheme of Challan. For the former, vernacular perfection was to be found in the faithfully translated teachings of the church; for the latter, no such perfection was ever to be had in a structurally deficient language. Anyone could speak the tongue of the Big Island. In their works Pères Challan and Caulier expressed two language-based theories of Malagasy inferiority revisited in subsequent vernacular work in the slave societies of the Mascarenes. For Caulier, the language of the Big Island was sophisticated, but its people were in dire need of ecclesiastical instruction to speak it correctly. For Challan, the language was simplistic and inadequate, and by extension, so were its people. Their capacities for self-expression curbed by an inadequate language, persons from the Big Island might never hope for perfection, at least in their own vernacular and its accompanying cultural appurtenances.

Linguistic theories about the mother tongue of Malagasy slaves spun in eighteenth-century vernacular ecclesiastical publications originating from the Mascarenes, fascinating and atypical as they were in the history of colonial

European slave societies, are one clue to Caulier's thinking about Malagasy and their language. The structure of his catechism is another. If it was a descendant of Flacourt's 1657 vernacular manual to the religion, the *Catéchisme abrégé* of 1785 nevertheless demonstrated its independence. Caulier brought new vernacular terms into Catholic religious vocabulary, including *hazon mitsivali* (forked tree) for "cross," rather than Flacourt's *crouce* (cross) or *hazon mitsampan* (branched tree). "Holy Spirit" he translated as *masintseriky* and *massin tsereq* rather than employing Flacourt's *masin pangahé* or *maßinpanghahe* (both from *masina*, holy, consecrated, and *tsereky* and *fanahy*, spirit, compartment—only the latter term, as *fanahy masina*, is still employed by Malagasy Christians). Caulier evinced a preference for a more European name for Jesus, employing *Raitssa Jesus*, *Jesus-Christ* and *Jesus Christi* when referring to Christ rather than Flacourt's *Rahissa* and *Rahissa chiristou*, which abandoned European cognates of the term "Jesus" in favor of the Koranic "*Raissa*."⁶¹ Caulier added *mitantambe* (whose modern meaning is to curry favor or ingratiate one's self) to the repertoire for "prayer," in addition to Flacourt's *voreche*, *miuoreche*, *missacabiri*, and *fuoreche*, terms with very different connotations.⁶² And, finally, Caulier glossed the trinity as *telouonne*, *telou oulou* (three persons) rather than Flacourt's *telou angharan* (three names).

In abbreviating the structure of his catechism, Caulier adapted it to his understanding of the circumstances of a mature slave colony and the requirements of parochial ministry within it. The catechism assumes—as did Caulier during his more than two decades of evangelistic work in and around Saint-Denis, at Bourbon—an audience of "poor sick or languishing islanders," by which he meant Malagasy arriving in the colonial islands as ailing captives fresh from the many trials of detention and oceanic middle passage. It therefore commences with instructions for evangelists to approach newly arrived slaves and to engage them in scripted vernacular conversation.⁶³ The encounter is choreographed to begin with an examination of a slave's body and an inquiry into his or her physical health.

⁶¹ *Rahissa* came into Flacourt's catechism by way of Malagasy language manuscripts written in Arabic script. These Islamic-inspired manuscripts were especially concentrated along the Big Island's southeastern coast. See Ludvig Munthe, et al., *Le catéchisme malgache de 1657: Essai de présentation du premier livre en langue malgache, approche théologique, historique, linguistique et conceptuelle* (Antananarivo, 1987); Noël J. Gueunier, "Le *Catéchisme* de Flacourt comme témoin des relations linguistiques dans le sud-est de Madagascar au milieu du XVIII^e siècle, suivi du lexique du *Catéchisme* de 1657," *Etudes Océan Indien* 23–24 (1997): 67–147.

⁶² Pier M. Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking': Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity," *American Historical Review* 102, 4 (1997): 979–80.

⁶³ Instructions to the evangelist appear in French, separate from the Latin and Malagasy script of the catechism's actual dialogues.

Evangelist: Hello. (*Salame anareo.*)

Slaves: Hello. (*Salame.*)

E: I am a priest of God. I have come here to teach you and to make you all love [him], do you serve me [*sic*] well? (*Zaho Ompisacabir gni Zanhar. Zaho ave itoui, naho mianatze-ri anareo, naho manahove i fitean-ri abi, manomp' anahé tsara-be, anareo?*)

S: Serving God, very good. (*Manompo Zanhar, tsara-be.*)

The *Catéchisme abrégé* then instructs the evangelist to choose one of the newly arrived slaves suffering from the effects of forced migration and to speak aloud with him or her in a manner that all present can hear. The illnesses and indignities of the slave trade manifested in the bodies of ailing captives were to serve as the entry point for exchanging meaningful words about the need for spiritual healing. The evangelist is instructed to take the elected slave by the hand and oblige him or her to stand:

E: Listen to the talk of God, our Lord, our Father, to instruct you man. Where are you sick? Where is your disease? (*Ringuc no ho, I fivoulang-to-be gni (ou) ni Zanhar, Tompo naïe, Rai naic; naho (ou) noho mianatzeri, ho-ano ho lahe! aiza marar? aiza arete-no?*)

S: In the chest (or) in the heart (or) in the stomach. (*An Tlatre (ou) An Po-co. (ou) An Troq.*)

E: Are you vomiting? (*Amandou-an-ho?*)

S: No vomiting. (*Tsisse amandouan.*)

E: A lot of shit? Shitting blood [i.e., are you suffering from diarrhea?]. (*Manghere maro? Manghere Rha.*)

S: Yes. No. (*He. Tsiar.*)

E: Come tongue [i.e., stick your tongue out]. (*Avia Lela.*)

“After having taken, or pretended to have taken the [slave’s] pulse,” the text drills the evangelist in parenthetical comments, “one continues in the same vein.”

E: Your body is sick, your spirit has enough sickness, there is sickness, because of the badness of our Father, our Mother before. They were not careful to observe the sacred commandments of their Lord God. Do you know that all those then [all people on the earth] are slaves of the Devil? (*I Vata-no marare-be; I amiroueno ampi marare, mis-marare, noho tsata-ratsi I Raitsiq, y Reine-naïe talo-a: Izereo tsi nazontou a gni adili-massin, Izi—Zanhar Tompon-reo. Fantr ano, zaie abiton-toulou, ave an Zanne, ondevo gni Bilitse (ou) Boulrtche?*)

S: I know. (*Fantr-co.*)

As succeeding lessons turn to Catholic doctrines of the “Creator God,” “Resurrection and Immortality,” and “Christ Incarnated and Redeemer,” followed by translated prayers, sickened slaves are repeatedly scripted to reply

“I know,” and sometimes to reiterate essential parts of the lesson in abbreviated form.

What Malagasy newly vomited upon the shores of Bourbon understood of these seemingly bizarre questions and pronouncements is difficult to know. The answers scripted into the catechism were unlikely forthcoming from the mouths of saltwater slaves. They read more as periodic self-validations (delusions?) by evangelists of the efficacy of the difficult vernacular language of the text. One Malagasy scholar has characterized Caulier’s language as “missionary Malagasy, almost incomprehensible and sometimes contradictory.”⁶⁴ This may well be the case, but the seemingly awkward language may also reflect common forms of eighteenth-century Malagasy speech in Bourbon, a creolized tongue of the past unknown today in Madagascar. Was Caulier successful in the minds of his hearers in his attempts to link bodies abused by the destructive forces of the slave trade with the need for internal spiritual healing? It is possible, yet improbable. What might saltwater captives fresh in their enslavement in the colonial islands have attributed to Caulier’s talk about “sinners” as “slaves of the devil,” for example? The early archival silence of slaves does not allow for precise answers to such fundamental questions. Judging by the sullen and angry reactions of many evangelized captives, as reported by Caulier himself, it is likely that the Lazarists’ carefully crafted evangelistic messages did not always fall on sympathetic or understanding ears.⁶⁵ It is clear from other evidence that enslaved persons passed more knowledge about Christianity among themselves than they acquired through direct encounters with clerics and their helpers.⁶⁶

Reception of Caulier’s vernacular utterances aside, the lessons and prayers in his Malagasy translation of the catechism amount in total to a mere twelve pages of text. The *Catéchisme abrégé*, a descendant of the lengthy treatise of Flacourt forged in the native societies of southeast Madagascar, was drastically abbreviated (from 112 pages to 12) to the requirements of a colonial society, where Malagasy were mostly slaves, and in conformity with Caulier’s sparing estimation of Mascarene bondmen and women’s mental capacities. At home as free persons in the seventeenth century, Malagasy were taught from Flacourt’s wordy catechism with its sometimes lengthy disquisitions and responses. But Malagasy slaves at Bourbon required no detailed knowledge of Catholic theology, the thinking went, for the Mascarene *Code Noir* urged far less religious instruction for slaves there than free residents in southeast Madagascar had received from Lazarist priests during the seventeenth century. Caulier’s *Catéchisme abrégé* of 1785 is a doctrinal skeleton. In

⁶⁴ Sambo, “Le catéchisme malgache de 1785,” 107.

⁶⁵ Philippe-Albert Caulier to Monseigneur L’archevêque de Paris, en la maison de St.-Lazare à Paris, 20 juillet 1773, ACM, Recueil 1504, 221v.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 220r, 222v.

proportion to their assessment of slaves' spiritual needs and mental capacities, which themselves sprang from written reflections on the Malagasy language, some Mascarene clerics of the eighteenth century condensed their religious teachings in the mother tongue of slaves.

The eighteenth-century works of Challan and Caulier prefigure the rich textual and lexical labor of Barthélemy Huet de Froberville in the Malagasy vernacular at Île de France/Mauritius during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. A major literary and public figure in the Mascarenes for his histories, journalism, novel, and poetry, all composed in French, Huet de Froberville's simultaneous manuscript production in Malagasy and about Madagascar (dictionaries, scriptural translations, grammatical essays, linguistic theories, and compilations of travel literature) testify to the rich intermingling of European and servile languages and literacies in Mascarene history, from the islands' streets and *habitations* to their literary debating halls.⁶⁷ All this Malagasy language work requires a rethinking of the linguistic, religious, and literary history of the Mascarenes with greater attention to a vernacular of slaves. The prejudices and constraints of a colonial slave society precluded the development of a reading public in the Malagasy vernacular or the emergence of a group of vernacular writers of Malagasy origin. The Malagasy language at the Mascarenes was, rather, a verbal form of communication principally among the lower classes, and its literacy was a practical tool and motivated interest of certain missionaries, merchants, planters, and literati of European origin. French literacy in the eighteenth century, by contrast, was confined primarily to the Mascarenes' free populations, though speech in the French creoles gained currency over time as a language of communication among slaves. The languages of Madagascar and France mingled most intensely in the speech of slaves and freedmen, many of whom were at least bilingual. And while French literacy migrated gradually from the free to the servile mainly in the nineteenth century, Malagasy literacy was taken up during the eighteenth century by certain of the free for their dependence on and religious responsibilities toward the islands' slaves, and because of the importance of Madagascar more broadly to the economies and societies of the colonial islands.

⁶⁷ Philippe de Froberville, "Barthélemy Huet de Froberville (1761–1835)," in *Hommes et destins (Dictionnaire biographique d'Outre-Mer): Madagascar, Tome III* (Paris, 1979), 244–46; Froberville, *Les orages de mars*, 3–53. For Malagasy *parlers* in the streets of nineteenth-century Mauritius, see Pier M. Larson, "The Vernacular Life of the Street: Ratsitanina and Mascarene Créolité," *Slavery & Abolition*, in press for 2008.

The two principal languages of the Mascarenes to emancipation were entangled in a complex set of social, religious, and mercantile as well as linguistic *interactions* suggested in the works of both Challan and Caulier. If we assess the influence of Malagasy *parlers* in the Mascarenes by their influences on the French creoles, as linguistic historians have done for both islands, we do not capture the numerous ways in which a major tongue of slaves in the eighteenth century helped to make the colonial islands what they were culturally, linguistically, and ideologically. Writing and publishing in Malagasy at the Mascarenes before the French Revolution contributed to racial thinking among whites there, and preceded by a half-century literary publication in the emerging French creoles. Publishing in the French patois of the islands took up the vernacular interest from Malagasy as if by neat transition in the 1820s. This conversion of vernacular interest and literary production at the Mascarenes from Malagasy to the French creoles mirrors demographic and linguistic transitions in their subaltern populations: the dominance of French over Malagasy in interlingual communication among slaves and ex-slaves by about 1800, and the rise of a Mascarene-born slave majority after 1830. Behind key literary developments in the Mascarenes lay transformations in the principal languages spoken by their slaves.

“The Indian Ocean is not the Atlantic,” historian Hubert Gerbeau recently reminded us with respect the history of slavery.⁶⁸ The unique mix of African, Malagasy, and Asian slaves at the Mascarenes and the constant come-and-go between the colonial islands and Madagascar, which shared an easy and continuing commerce in ideas and matrimony as well as food and labor, valorized the Malagasy vernacular in the slave islands in patterns apparently different from those common to the western Atlantic. Despite the recent efflorescence of work on African ethnicities in the Americas, there is little scholarly work on the vernaculars of slaves there from which to suggest an African language with equivalent status to Malagasy at the Mascarenes: both a contact language within a servile population of diverse origin and a literary language of evangelization, commerce, and even mastery among free Europeans and creoles. It is unlikely that any single African language in the Americas enjoyed the standing that Malagasy did in the Mascarenes. But there were some experiments in colonial linguistics among African language speakers in the slave societies of the western Atlantic, and knowledge about Malagasy at the Mascarenes may suggest avenues for further research into these.

Vernacular evangelism seems to have been of particular interest outside the British Empire and among Jesuits, who were enjoined by their founder to learn the languages of their evangelistic subjects. In her study of Catholic missions in

⁶⁸ Hubert Gerbeau, “L’Océan Indien n’est pas l’Atlantique: la traite illégale à Bourbon au XIXe siècle,” *Outre-Mers: Revue d’Histoire* 89, 336–37 (2002): 79–108.

the French Antilles, Sue Peabody writes that certain Jesuits employed “native” catechists to instruct new arrivals of their own ethnic affiliations and tongues. Some missionaries claimed even to have translated “the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Apostles Creed, the Ten Commandments, etc. into their languages,” but most catechetical instruction, she argues, took place in the French creole of the islands and under the direct supervision of French catechists. To my knowledge, researchers have not discussed any of the vernacular documents mentioned by Peabody.⁶⁹ In seventeenth-century colonial Cartagena de Indias (now Colombia), the major port of entry for slaves in Spanish America, some Jesuits sought to impart Catholic doctrines to newly arriving slaves directly in their vernaculars. Two of the foremost proponents of this method were Fathers Alonso de Sandoval and Pedro Claver, the former of whom published a poorly known treatise on the merits of vernacular instruction among slaves and the suitability of Jesuits to the task. Like some Jesuits in the French Antilles, Sandoval and Claver employed servile translators to evangelize among African captives in Cartagena, but little vernacular literacy work seems to have resulted from the mission, and they faced much opposition (the latter was true also at the Mascarenes). Nor do their methods appear to have been widely adopted by members of their order elsewhere in the Americas.⁷⁰

In the Danish West Indies, Moravian missionary C.G.A. Oldendorp interviewed slaves during the middle decades of the eighteenth century to produce an account of their African origins and to discuss elements of their culture and Danish creole speech. Oldendorp’s methods were innovative, but he did not stray from the new European language of slaves.⁷¹ Olabiyi Yai has conducted a unique study of two manuscripts produced in Brazil, one a Fon vocabulary and sentence book dating to 1741 and the other a Yoruba vocabulary composed in the early nineteenth century. He suggests that vernacular colonial linguistic works in that slave society were produced through an unacknowledged collaboration between Africans and Europeans and that the manuscripts reflected a creolization of multiple African dialects into two broad lingua francae.⁷² Scholars of Brazil are also beginning to see in the closely related Bantu languages of West Central Africa spoken by the enslaved among themselves an inchoate servile contact language, though they and Yai have done

⁶⁹ Sue Peabody, “‘A Dangerous Zeal’: Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635–1800,” *French Historical Studies* 25, 1 (Winter 2002): 60–61, 66–67.

⁷⁰ Sandoval, *Naturaleza policia*; Arnold Lunn, *A Saint in the Slave Trade, Peter Claver (1581–1654)* (New York, 1935); Alonso de Sandoval, *Un tratado sobre la esclavitud*, Enriqueta Vila Vilar, ed. (Madrid, 1987 [1627]); Margaret M. Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias* (Gainesville, Fla., 2004), esp. 68–69.

⁷¹ Oldendorp, *C.G.A. Oldendorps Geschichte der Mission*.

⁷² Olabiyi Yai, “Texts of Enslavement: Fon and Yoruba Vocabularies from Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Brazil,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London, 2000), 102–12.

little to explicate these claims in any detail.⁷³ As these studies suggest, vernaculars and vernacular literacies in the western Atlantic may have been more significant and lasting in certain places and times than they are currently thought to have been, and may have exerted heretofore unknown influences on colonial societies and cultures. As in the case of Malagasy at the Mascarenes, it is possible that the lack of interest and knowledge in servile mother tongues among researchers may play a significant role in the relative invisibility of eighteenth-century African language speakers and writers in the Americas. In future research scholars should seek to transcend the limitations of colonial linguistics, and to learn about the language varieties of African slaves in their places of bondage before those languages met their end, for African languages were certainly important elements of colonial life.

In the Mascarenes, Malagasy studies ultimately faded away, too, for one is hard pressed to find much evidence of the language there after 1860. But for a century and a half from about 1720 the dialects of the Big Island could easily be heard on the byways and farms of the islands. And for several decades spanning the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, writing and publishing in Malagasy was not only possible but officially encouraged in restricted contexts at the Mascarenes, taking its purpose and inspiration from the large diaspora of Malagasy speakers in the western Indian Ocean. In turn, that clerical-mercantile literacy of foreign elites in French slave colonies informed the work of Protestant missionaries who, along with many unnamed Malagasy colleagues, transformed vernacular literacy by bringing it to a mass of Malagasy speakers in Madagascar and the Mascarenes between 1820 and 1860.⁷⁴

⁷³ Robert W. Slenes, "The Great Porpoise-Skull Strike: Central African Water Spirits and Slave Identity in Early-Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro," in Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge, U.K., 2002), 183–208; Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 199. See also other essays in the compendium containing Slenes' essay, including the editor's introduction.

⁷⁴ Bonar Alexander Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant Impact: The Work of the British Missions, 1818–1895* (New York, 1979); Larson, "Capacities and Modes of Thinking"; Vincent Huyghues-Belrose, *Les premiers missionnaires protestants de Madagascar, 1795–1827* (Paris, 2001). The Malagasy vernacular work of Protestant missionaries in Mauritius between 1835 and 1860 is virtually unknown and is the subject of forthcoming publication.