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Piracy in the Indian Ocean (ca. 1680–1750)

Piracy in the Indian Ocean (ca. 1680–1750)[1]

Burkhard Schnepel[2]

Abstract

This paper is about those manifestations of maritime violence that have been labelled piracy. Inevitably it is also about the power to define and judge some kinds of maritime violence as rightful and others as not. Finally and most importantly, I shall examine the nature of the delicate, but more often than not intimate, relationship and entanglement between pirates and piracy, on the one hand, and those agents and activities that were (considered) more legitimate, on the other. To look at piracy only in confrontational and oppositional terms would not only mean misunderstanding the nature of the colonising project and its moving forces, but also neglecting the vital and often integral role piracy played at certain times and places during this age of mercantilism and proto-globalisation in achieving 'connectivity in motion' across the Indian Ocean. The particular manifestation of the universal phenomenon of piracy that I wish to address here refers to the southwestern part of the Indian Ocean during the late seventeenth and early to mid-eighteenth century.

[2] Burkhard Schnepel is Max Planck Fellow and heads the Max Planck Fellow Group "Connectivity in Motion: Port Cities of the Indian Ocean" at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany (e-mail: bschnepel@eth.mpg.de). He is also professor at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg and Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Area Studies, Halle/Saale.

1. Introduction

This paper is about "maritime violence" (Risso 2001), to begin by using a neutral concept. More specifically, it is about those manifestations of maritime violence which have been labelled, less neutrally, 'piracy' – that is, piracy in the old-fashioned sense of the term, namely to enter another vessel against the will of its crew and to rob it of its cargo and/or hold it ransom.[3] But inevitably this paper also asks the question of who saw whom as a pirate, whereas other individuals resorting to a similar sort of maritime violence were not regarded as such. Hence, it is about the power to define and judge some forms of maritime violence as rightful and legitimate and others as not. Finally and most importantly, the present paper examines the nature of the delicate, but more often than not intimate, relationship and entanglement between pirates and piracy, on the one hand, and those agents and activities on the sea and the coasts that were (considered) more legitimate, on the other. I shall concentrate my investigation on European and American pirates operating in the southwestern Indian Ocean from around 1680 to 1750.

Piracy, both as a social practice and as an important trope in discourses of maritime power and marginality, is a global phenomenon that can be found on all oceans and seas during all historical periods. It existed (and exists) in all places and all times when maritime movements acquired a certain frequency and there was some value in the goods being transported.[4] Piracy as such is a multifaceted and dynamically shifting activity and phenomenon. It is not always nor even often possible to identify with ultimate clarity who is, was, and will be a pirate. Some individuals started their careers as ruthless and infamous pirates, only to find themselves, a little later, installed by King or Company as high-ranking captains or even governors tasked with fighting and stamping out piracy or attacking enemies. In numerous other cases, seamen were officially authorised and commissioned by their kings, governments, or trading companies to enter other ships forcibly and rob them, as long as these ships were of the right, that is, enemy nationality or company affiliation. These men and their crews – one could almost call them a special kind of 'trading company' – were then seen by those who commissioned them not as pirates but as privateers, corsairs, and even freedom fighters. However, the same persons who were considered legal and even glorified by one party were, from a different perspective or if they transgressed their erstwhile commission and attacked the wrong boats, despised as and declared to be pirates and sea bandits, not only by other parties but also by their erstwhile patrons.[5]

At times and in certain places – either when economic fortunes had changed or natural catastrophes had made life unbearable – the crews of whole ships and whole coastal or island communities

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[3] Risso defines maritime violence as "the *indiscriminate* seizure of seaborne or coastal property, under threat or use of force. It sometimes involves also the holding of passengers or crew for ransom" (2001: 293–294, her emphasis), a very acceptable definition, even though in the cases studied here we shall see that "coastal property" was a somewhat different matter. Note also that the stolen cargos were often labelled as 'prizes' (derived from the perfect form of the French verb *prendre*), and one can detect here a nice approach to the etymology of the modern word 'enterprise', which still connotes a commercial undertaking with some sort of risk (and force?) involved.

[4] See Alpers (2011: 19–21, 24–32) for a wide range of examples of maritime violence, including present-day Somali maritime violence. See also Davies (1997); Pennell (2001); Risso (2001: 302–316); and Rogozinski (1995). For a contemporary collection of the life histories of several pirates of the period under consideration, see Captain Johnson, alias Daniel Defoe (1972 [1724]), though this work extensively mixes *res factae* with *res fictae*.

[5] A first tentative 'absolutist' or essentialising definition of piracy might juxtapose this 'commission-criterion' to the criterion of "*indiscriminate* seizure" (Risso 2001: 293; cf. footnote 3 in this article) and thus argue for a basic distinction between 'privateers', i.e. those persons resorting to maritime violence who had some sort of authorising commission and some sort of connection to established land rulers and even a state, on the one hand, and 'pirates', i.e. those who acted autonomously and applied force indiscriminately, on the other. But then, we would face the difficulty of identifying, which commission was actually doing the authorising for whom and for how long, in connection with the fact that not even pirates used force indiscriminately but often spared other pirates.

could turn from being respected crews and fishing or merchant communities to pirates, while their merchant or fishing vessels were turned into pirate boats and their villages or coasts into 'nests of piracy'.[6] Even whole nations or their companies, for example, the Dutch and their Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) in the South China Sea in the seventeenth century, in a strange legal interpretation of what a *Mare Liberum* had to offer,[7] took to capturing and looting other vessels (in this instance, Spanish galleons or Chinese junks), killing or enslaving their passengers, and thus establishing, in their view, a legitimate side-line in trade and commercial ambitions.[8] "The perception of piracy", as Alpers (2011: 18) aptly puts it, "is essentially in the eye of the beholder". Consequently, declaring a given seaman a 'pirate' or a certain manifestation of maritime violence to be 'piracy' is contested. As such it is relative to the situation and perspective of the person who defines or, better, who has the power to define another person as a pirate.[9]

Alpers takes one step further in interpreting the matter, arguing that "what outside observers call 'piracy' is a consequence of exclusion from the international trade networks and access to the wealth produced by those who dominate them" (ibid.: 18). He also suggests that "piracy reflects the prevailing political economy and the relative placement of those who dominate any system and those who believe that they are either being marginalized by the existing relations of power or that they can break into it by force" (ibid.: 18). Alpers concludes that piracy is "an independent phenomenon that grows out of a process of exclusion from the dominant commercial exchange systems of the region" (ibid.: 33).

In this paper, by extending and further qualifying this view rather than simply contradicting it, I wish to demonstrate that, at least at certain times and places, piracy must be understood as more than just an expression and result of real and discursive exclusion. It is useful, I am convinced, to question the bipolarity inherent in such statements and I seek to relativise the implied dichotomy between those who have power and are considered legal, even when resorting to maritime violence, and those who lack power and are not recognised as legal. Rather, there were times and places in which the phenomenon of piracy was deeply integrated into established overseas systems of trade, credit, commerce, and rule. Piracy in these specific spatio-temporal figurations participated in and contributed to the emergence and stabilisation of the power of those who dominated maritime trade and its hubs. Piracy acted in support of those established networks across the sea, of those who built forts and factories and eventually established colonies. Piracy could be and often was

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[6] A contemporary case for this shift to piracy is the first phase of Somali piracy (before it was taken over by organised criminals), when fishermen of that 'failed state', which had no means of guarding its coasts, saw innumerable European and Asian boats, first, overfish their territorial waters and later illegally dump toxic wastes on the Somali coast. They then took matters into their own (illegal?) hands.

[7] See Grotius (1916 [1609]).

[8] In this respect, the Dutch East India Company was, of course, only following the example of the Portuguese, who introduced state-backed maritime violence into the Indian Ocean in their attempt to gain access to what had long been a rather peaceful free-trade zone. Prime targets for the Portuguese were Muslim ships of Arab, Persian, and Indian origin, which dominated the trade in the Indian Ocean at that time. Attacking vessels of these 'denominations' could also be justified as a valuable religious action and as a continuation of the crusade against Islam known in Europe and West Asia, albeit with other means and in a new, more global arena. There is no need to emphasise that it was not only the Portuguese in the sixteenth and the Dutch in the seventeenth centuries, but also, a little later, the French and the English who resorted to attacking boats of Indian, Arab, and East Asian origin. And these ships, which could thus turn, from one minute to another, from a merchant vessel into a warship or pirate vessel, also directed their weapons against the ships of their European rivals. These attacks against 'fellow Europeans' often reflected the existing state of peace or war between these nations back home in Europe. For examples of crown-, state-, and company-based piracy, see also Carter (2009: 48–49).

[9] The Ming Chinese, to give but one example, tended to label those merchant communities and ports in the Malayan maritime world who had *not* submitted to their authority 'evil pirates', while those who acknowledged Chinese supremacy were regarded as 'peaceful merchants' (see Alpers 2011: 19; Dreyer 2007: 55–56).

'translated' into an activity that became a useful aid in, and even an essential part of, the dominant maritime trade and the colonialising project to which this trade was geared.

In the last decade, historians and ethnohistorians have intensively searched colonial and national archives in London, Cape Town, Aix-en-Provence, Réunion, Mauritius, and elsewhere for more information on piracy in the southwestern Indian Ocean around 1700. It is mainly on these painstaking studies by Alpers (2011), Bialuschewski (2005), Carter (2009), Ellis (2007), Hooper (2011), and others (to be mentioned in the footnotes) that the present endeavour to assess the pirates' functional role in connectivity across the Indian Ocean is based, more so than on my own extensive archival research. My aim here is less to present a further contribution to this historiography than to use the available published data to discuss the theme of connectivity in motion, and to do so from the margins, so to say. The ethnohistorical data I present in Section 2 pertain to the exemplary life histories of some pirates in the period and macro-region under consideration. In Section 3, I shall look more closely at pirate connectivity in the Mascarenes, while in Sections 4 and 5, I discuss entanglements between pirates and indigenous groups on Madagascar. In Section 6, I shall finally argue and conclude that maritime violence, even of the piracy kind, could be and sometimes was not detrimental but rather vital to and instrumental in the achievement of 'connectivity in motion'.

2. Ex-Pirates of the Caribbean, New Pirates of the Indian Ocean

The particular manifestation of the universal phenomenon of piracy that I wish to address here refers to the southwestern part of the Indian Ocean during the late seventeenth and early to mid-eighteenth century. Piracy in this period and part of the Indian Ocean, quite astonishingly at first glance, had its roots in the Atlantic and Caribbean. In these latter regions, pirates like Henry Morgan, Monbars "the Exterminator", Edward Teach, also known as "Blackbeard", and other men (and sometimes women) of many different nationalities[10] found easy prey in the Spanish, French, and English galleons that were traversing the Atlantic Ocean to and from their South, Central, and North American colonies. While pirate ships also took part in and aided more 'regular' business ventures such as the slave trade from West Africa across the "Black Atlantic" (Gilroy 1993), by and large they increasingly came to be regarded as a serious menace to the established trade and to the companies or nations that were conducting it. Hence, by the middle to end of the seventeenth century, England, Spain, and France, as well as their Caribbean and North American dependencies, were making great efforts to stamp out piracy in the West Indies and the wider Atlantic. These efforts were enacted with such determination and led to so many losses on the pirates' side that, from the final decades of the seventeenth century onwards, they started to look for new 'pastures'. Many of these adventurers, such as the Anglo-American pirates Henry Bowen, Henry Avery, William Kidd, and Thomas Tew, or the French pirates Olivier Misson and Olivier le Vasseur, chose the northern bays of Madagascar, here especially the tiny island of Sainte Marie (Nosy Boraha), as well as the Mascarenes, the Comoros, and the Seychelles, as their main new bases. From there they started their raids on vessels of the Portuguese crown and of the Dutch, French, and English East India Companies. They also targeted ships of the Indian Moghuls with pilgrims and riches plying from Surat to Jeddah or back, of which there were around two dozen a year and which yielded valuable booty along the coast of western India and in the Arabian and Red Seas. All

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[10] However, the majority were of Anglo-American origin.

in all, the ex-pirates of the Caribbean and the new pirates of the western Indian Ocean found that the latter had enough to offer to compensate them for their losses on the Atlantic trade route. By the end of the seventeenth century, the shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean were so well frequented with ships carrying such valuable cargoes that what some interpreters have seen as the pirates' 'flight' from the Caribbean could also be viewed as a turn to richer pastures which held out the promise of great 'prizes'.[11]

But let us look at some life histories of pirates in greater detail.

William Kidd

William Kidd started his career in the 1680s as a merchant and maritime trader. During the Nine-Year War from 1688 to 1697, the English admiralty issued him with letters of marque as a privateer authorising him to prey on French ships. In 1696, he was commissioned by Lord Bellamont, the then English Governor of New York and Massachusetts, and supported financially by other high-ranking politicians and businessmen from the heart of the London establishment to become a privateer. This time, however, he was given the explicit commission to hunt down not French merchant and navy vessels, but Anglo-American pirates like Henry Avery, who, in 1696, had attacked two large and richly laden Moghul ships in the Arabian Sea and thus jeopardised the East India Company's more regular business ventures in India.[12] The detailed instructions Kidd received were, however, more dubious, to say the least, because it turned out that one principal desire of these people of standing was not to stamp out piracy so much as to get at the immense riches which the pirates of the Indian Ocean had acquired. Kidd, in the scheme of his bourgeois patrons, was to be a pirate against the pirates.

   On his way from New England into the Indian Ocean, however, Kidd did not only change the ocean of his activity, but also transgressed the line from privateer to pirate by attacking the Moghul pilgrim fleet himself as well as ships, which to his mind were French, but in fact were conducting Indian and English commerce. While roaming around the northwestern part of the Indian Ocean, at one point Kidd is reported to have stopped at the Laccadive Islands, where he and his men enslaved some male islanders to do menial and repair work on their ship, while torturing, raping, and killing other inhabitants of these islands. The Great Moghul, once again, not only complained bitterly to the English East India Company (EIC), but also had them compensate him for his losses. This, finally, stirred up the EIC and the politico-economic elite back in London, who saw their Indian assets dwindling, and they therefore decided to make a scapegoat of Kidd. When a general amnesty for pirates was issued in 1698, Kidd was omitted by name, and governors all over the incipient British Empire were ordered to capture him. On returning home to America, Kidd learnt of this decree, but apparently could not believe it, mistakenly trusting in his high-ranking, erstwhile

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[11] It was estimated by Dutch authorities at the Cape at this time that in 1705, i.e. at the heyday of pirate activities, there were more than 830 pirates on Madagascar. In offering their services to the King of Sweden in search of his royal protection, the pirates of that time and place themselves claimed to number 1,200 men (see Ellis 2007: 446; Hooper 2011: 226).

[12] On Avery, see Defoe (1972 [1724]: 49–62). The serious problems created by these and other pirate attacks on Moghul vessels are described by Risso as follows: "One of the ships belonged to Aurangzeb himself; it had been carrying Muslim pilgrims on their return from Mecca, as well as valuable cargo. Rumors spread that some pilgrims had been killed and some women violated. At the ship's home port, Surat, angry locals tried to lynch any available English merchants, on the assumption that Avery's attack was somehow sponsored, condoned, or facilitated by the East India Company. The Mughal governor of Surat intervened to prevent lynching, but he also ordered his troops to occupy the East India Company's establishments in Surat and nearby Suwali, to incarcerate their sixty-three employees, and to stop their trade" (Risso 2001: 307–308; cf. also 317).

supporters. He was duly arrested in Boston in July 1699 and hanged at Execution Dock, London, in May 1701.[13]

William Kidd is one eye-opening example of an individual who, like so many others, crossed the lines between trader, slave-trader (with and without concession), high-ranking officer on navy and merchant vessels, privateer with a license to attack enemy ships, and privateer to hunt down pirates and stamp out piracy, to become finally a pirate on the gallows himself. What is particularly remarkable in his case is how deeply entangled the activities of this merchant-turned-privateer-turned-pirate were with the activities of the political and economic elite in England and New England, without whose commissions and financial backing he could not have equipped and manned his ship. The fact that he did not manage to return to 'civilian' life was due less to what he actually did than to the fact that he attacked the wrong ships at the wrong time. When his erstwhile supporters from the centre of society and the politico-economic world themselves came under public attack back home because of the dubious commissions they had authorised, they found it wiser not to support Kidd during his almost two years of imprisonment and legal struggle, but to let him hang and thus be silenced.

John Bowen

One prime case illustrating the fact that even freebooters and anarchists of a special kind needed a hub, and that islands such as Mauritius were ready to provide this function, can be found in the person of the Anglo-American pirate John Bowen. Bowen was born in Bermuda in 1660 and subsequently started his 'career' as a pirate in the Caribbean. At the turn of the century, he and his companions transferred the major field of their activities to the Indian Ocean. Here Bowen, on board a vessel called *Speaker*, captured numerous English, French, Portuguese, and Arab vessels, especially along the west coast of India. That this coast of the Moghul empire was not only good for 'enter-prises', but also for selling one's booty to local Indian and Dutch merchants and for re-equipping oneself through them is captured in the following lines of Defoe:

> "The Pyrates here met with no Manner of Inconveniences in carrying on their Designs, for it was made so much a Trade, that the Merchants of one Town never scrupled the buying Commodities taken from another, tho' but ten miles distant, in a publick Sale, furnishing the Robbers at the time with all Necessaries, even of Vessels, when they had Occasion to go on any Expedition, which they themselves would often advise them of." (Defoe 1972 [1724]: 452)

At one point, however, Bowen decided to abandon this bountiful region and to steer for the safer havens of Madagascar, where the following events took place:

> "At the beginning of January 1702, the *Speaker* came up against a violent cyclone in the region of the Mascarene Islands and on 7 January captain BOWEN was in great difficulties off the south-east coast of Mauritius. Despite his efforts, he could not manage to save his ship from the raging seas and the *Speaker* was shipwrecked on the reef off the mouth of the Grand Rivière Sud Est, close to Roches islet. Aboard were 170 pirates and 30 Arab captives. They built rafts, and all made it to the shore in possession of their

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[13] Kidd's fate is described by Defoe (1972 [1724]: 440–451). See also Brown (2006: 67–68); Risso (2001: 308); Ritchie (1986); and Rogozinski (2002).

weapons. They set up camp a few kilometers from the lodge of the Dutch governor, Roelof Deodati and killed three oxen for dinner (…).
In the meantime, the governor who had been informed of the situation, had to accept the obvious, that, with the 52 men at his disposal, he had very little margin for negotiation. The governor therefore authorized the Dutch colonists to sell food to the pirates and to behave 'as friends' towards them, lest the worst should happen. Treatment was provided to the injured as part of an impromptu understanding." (Piat 2007: 21, his emphasis)

In the words of Defoe, the hospitality of the Dutch appears to have been even more pronounced:

"They met here with all the Civility and Good Treatment imaginable; *Bowen* was complimented in a particular Manner by the Governor, and splendidly entertained in his House; the sick Men were got, with great Care, into the Fort, and cured by their Doctor, and no Supplies of any sort wanting for the rest. They spent here three Months, but yet resolving to set down at *Madagascar.*" (Defoe 1972 [1724]: 452–453, his emphases)

For his further journey west, the Dutch governor of Mauritius sold Bowen and his companions a boat and "supply'd them with Necessaries for their Voyage (…) and gave them a kind Invitation to make that Island a Place of Refreshment in the Course of their future Adventures, promising that nothing should be wanting to them that his Government afforded" (ibid.: 453).

Some months later, after a brief stay on Madagascar, Bowen landed on Île Bourbon (today Réunion), "where on 19 August 1702, under pressure of numbers, the colonists supplied him with water and food for payment, in spite of Governor Villers' ban on trade with pirates" (Piat 2007: 23). In the early months of 1704, Bowen and his men once again chose to stay on Mauritius for several weeks. They did so close to the Dutch governor's fort, and, again, relations between the colonists and the pirates were peaceful, even amicable, during the pirates' two-month stay. "All transactions were duly paid for", as Piat (ibid.) emphasises.

One must ask why in this case the attitude of pirates towards the Dutch colonisers varied from that exhibited by Kidd and his men toward the inhabitants of the Laccadives. Was Kidd just more reckless and ruthless than, for example, Bowen and others? This must be doubted because in other instances Bowen and his fellow pirates did not hesitate to kill, torture, and rape as well. Were the Dutch colonialists and soldiers on Mauritius too powerful to be attacked and killed? This must also be doubted. Bowen and his men could easily have gained the upper hand had they wanted to. Was it less the force available locally which made the pirates hesitate to attack the Dutch settlers than the knowledge that all over the Indian Ocean the Dutch were represented by powerful ships and forts that could make pirate activity difficult and dangerous if Dutch citizens were harmed elsewhere, as on Mauritius? This is a possible explanation, especially given the occasional alliances negotiated between the Dutch and the English in the Indian Ocean. And the English, as also the French, would have taken the attack on Dutch settlers as a more general threat to their colonising ambitions in the macro-region as such. But one must also assume that both sides, not only the

pirates, had an interest in conducting and upholding the principle of proper and non-violent barter and trade, which was to their mutual benefit.[14]

In April 1704, Bowen and his men sailed from Mauritius to Île Bourbon, where he and several members of his crew laid down their arms and agreed to several other conditions demanded by Governor Villers with the intention of starting settled life there. One must assume that this move from Mauritius (abandoned by the Dutch in 1710 and taken over by the French in 1721 as "Île de France") to French Île Bourbon was not unprepared; maybe some communication about Bowen's plans had taken place beforehand. And the move was successful. Many of these former pirates settled down, married, and had children, their descendants being numerous and noticeable on Rèunion up to the present day. Bowen himself, however, died without issue soon after settling down.[15]

Christopher Condent

A further example of how porous the boundaries between pirate crews and settler communities could prove to be is provided by the life story of Christopher Condent, yet another pirate of English origin. He first roamed the Caribbean Sea before he and his men made their way to the Indian Ocean around 1719, where he captured a number of English, Dutch, Arab, and Moghul prizes, using the isle of Sainte Marie in northern Madagascar as his base. At one point in this burdensome life, namely in 1721, it seems that he grew tired of being a pirate, so he sent a message to the governor of Île Bourbon, requesting him to grant amnesty to himself and his 135 men (including their five dozen or so slaves). He stressed that they were willing to become good and loyal subjects of the King of France. The conditions upon which the governor and the council of Île Bourbon were willing to grant this amnesty were not acceptable to all the pirates. Apart from surrendering their weapons, they were asked to submit all slaves (except one per person) and to pay 20 piastres as a fine. In the end, apart from Condent, only 32 pirates accepted the offer.

It appears that in the following year, Condent functioned successfully as a mediator between the governor and various pirates when it became necessary to negotiate the payment of ransoms for prisoners in pirate hands. On the island, he had a liaison with the governor's sister-in-law and even had a child with her. But Condent eventually decided to go to France in 1722, where he married a woman from a respected merchant family of Lorient, henceforth leading a life as a wealthy *armateur* until his peaceful death in 1734.

What is striking in Condent's example is the fact that we find here a case of 'transnationalism': Condent, an English pirate, became a respectable French citizen. And this shift in national identity took place, not on the periphery of the kingdom, i.e. on Île Bourbon, but in one of its then colonial centres, namely in the major port city of Lorient in Brittany.[16]

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[14] Undoubtedly, a strong element of early racism must also be added to these considerations. The men and women whom Kidd enslaved, tortured, and abused were of Asian origin. This racism is also often reflected in the social compositions and hierarchies of the pirate crews and communities under consideration here. The higher layers were white, and only seldom does one find black, Asian, or Creole pirates of some standing; by contrast, many of the non-white pirates were abducted from the ships that had been captured and simply taken over as slaves, servants, sailors, and indentured labourers in pirate communities. These, then, should not be romanticised as being free and egalitarian, despite their sometimes anarchistic and anti-authoritarian appeal and self-identification. On this, see also Carter (2009: 51).

[15] On Bowen, see Piat (2007: 23); Brown (2006: 70–72); Defoe (1972 [1724]: 452–464).

[16] Some such changes in nationality may have been easier from English to French than vice versa, because the French government was reputed by pirates to be more trustworthy than the English when it came to adhering to promised pardons, as Rogozinski (2002: 159) points out. In this specific case, the French were the obvious choice not only because Île Bourbon was nearby, but also because Condent's attacks on Moghul ships were detrimental to English rather than French interests in the Indian Ocean. On Condent, see (Defoe 1972 [1724]: 581–584); Piat (2007: 26–27).

Oliver Le Vasseur

At around Condent's time, Madagascar and the Mascarenes also provided bases for the actions of one of the most myth-enshrouded of all pirates in the southwestern Indian Ocean during this period, the French pirate Oliver le Vasseur, also known as "La Buse". Like so many other pirates of his time, La Buse arrived in the Indian Ocean – in his case, in 1720 – from the Caribbean, with a short intermediate stay on the coasts of West Africa and Brazil. One of the most spectacular prizes he acquired was a magnificent vessel belonging to the Portuguese crown, namely the *Nostra Senhora de Cabo*. This ship, with immense riches on board, was lying in the harbour of Saint-Paul, Île Bourbon. While large numbers of the crew were on land, with the Portuguese captain and many other dignitaries of the vessel staying as guests with the island's French governor, Vasseur and another pirate captain named Taylor attacked the Portuguese vessel and made off with tremendous booty, worth several million Euros if translated into today's currency. The Portuguese Count of Ericiera, who was also the Viceroy of Portuguese India at that time, was among those who were captured, but later set free for a rather modest ransom (negotiated through Condent). La Buse and Taylor took the Portuguese vessel back to Madagascar, where they divided their spoils. They captured other vessels, including French ones, during the next couple of years, until the two men parted over a quarrel, with Taylor returning to the Caribbean, while La Buse stayed on in Madagascar and in the vicinity of Île Bourbon. When the then Île Bourbon governor Boucher-Desforges offered him an amnesty in 1724, La Buse rejected it, by contrast to other (in-)famous pirates of the time and region who accepted similar offers. In 1727, a new governor, Pierre Benoist, decided to put an end to piracy. He sent a well-armed vessel under the command of Captain L'Hermitte to Sainte Marie with an order to arrest La Buse. This having been accomplished, La Buse was taken to Réunion and there sentenced to death by hanging, carried out in July 1730 in the public square of Saint-Paul. Shortly before his death, La Buse made hints to the crowd concerning the place where he had hidden his immense treasure. But these hints were so vague that, despite the feverish efforts of innumerable treasure hunters all over the Mascarenes over many generations, this treasure has still not been found.[17]

3. Pirates on the Mascarenes

These glimpses of the life histories of a few pirates operating in the southwestern Indian Ocean (and beyond) in the decades before and after 1700 must suffice at this point to make some more general, yet preliminary observations, especially with regard to the entanglements of pirates with the early settler colonies of Île Bourbon (later Réunion) and Île de France (earlier and later Mauritius).

When on land, so it transpires from the preceding accounts, pirates preferred to stay in hidden and remote bays such as those provided by the Malagasy coasts or on small uninhabited or only sparsely inhabited islands like the Mascarenes.[18] In this southwestern part of the Indian Ocean there were as yet no strong states, native or foreign, which could endanger pirate activities too much, but quite frequently there were native communities or incipient settler colonies just around the corner.

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[17] See Piat (2007: 34–39).

[18] While Madagascar will be the focus of the next two sections, the Comoros cannot be dealt with here, though they certainly deserve attention. For this island group to the northwest of Madagascar, see Carter (2009: 57–58); Martin (1983).

More often than not, it was advantageous for both sides to trade with each other and to establish and maintain regular and 'friendly' forms of interaction. From the indigenous communities' and settlers' point of view, it was of course preferable to keep these heavily armed and militarily well-trained men at some distance (to keep them at bay, so to say). However, on land pirates had the same needs as other seafarers after a long and hazardous journey. Their crews had to recover from the often Spartan and brutal life at sea; some of them needed medical treatment for wounds or sickness; and they had to be housed and provided with food, water, alcohol, and other amenities. Taverns and brothels were needed to offer physical and mental relief; gambling provided a welcome opportunity to redouble one's booty or, more often than not, to lose it faster than it had been won; warehouses of a kind opened, and landed merchants offered enticements and opportunities to spend or sell one's loot. The boats had to be careened for cleaning, caulking, and repair, for the execution of which local carpenters and other handymen offered their services; and, of course, before departure these vessels had to be equipped anew, not only with all the available basic and possibly some luxury provisions such as wine, but also with gunpowder and with new, booty-thirsty crew members for the next expedition.

All these "necessaries" (as Defoe calls them) were usually regularly bought and duly paid for by the pirates, just as any other seafarers and merchants would have done. During their stays on land, then, these fierce individuals and communities, who did not hesitate to murder when on sea, were often remarkably observant of the rules that governed the more civil economic and social life at the fringes and in the interstices of the emerging colonial empires and the native Indian Ocean world. Trading and barter activities with pirates could give a considerable boost to the local economies, 'shadow' or otherwise, of the indigenous or settler communities involved. This economic impact attained greater dimensions if one considers the fact that pirates – by contrast to popular belief – were not really in the habit of burying their treasure in places where no one could later find it again. The greater part of the booty of pirate activity was sold, used in exchange for goods that were needed, or invested in some way or another. Through further transactions by visiting traders, this booty, especially that consisting of gold, silver, pearls, luxury commodities, money, or spices, entered and dynamically stimulated long-distance commercial networks and thus the wider world of the Indian Ocean in this age of global mercantilism and commerce.

For the pirates, settled life was not without its attractions, especially the older and weaker they became. There are stories of whole pirate communities who attempted to settle down and establish fortified villages or even to create their own utopian free republics.[19] Repeatedly, we hear of central European admiralties, local governors, or commanders-in-chief granting amnesty to whole groups of pirates who had laid down their arms, asked for pardon, and expressed their wish to return to respectable settled life. One must bear in mind that Île Bourbon, one of the incipient settler communities at that time and in this region offering such possibilities of retreat from a life of piracy, was only sparsely inhabited. The settler community consisted of some people coming directly from Brittany and other parts of France, while others were the remnants of French settlers who had had to flee from Madagascar in the 1670s after native onslaughts upon them. Occasionally, French settlers also returned from India to establish life on Île Bourbon. In this situation, governors, settlers, and the small slave population of that time were not in a very strong

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[19] In 1690, for example, an ex-Dominican priest and then pirate called Caraciolli and the Hugenot pirate Oliver Misson are rumoured to have attempted to create a pirate's republic called *Libertalia* in northern Madagascar near the Bay of Diego Suarez. See Brown (2006: 66); Defoe (1972 [1724]: 383–418); Piat (2007: 10); Schicho (2004: 230–231).

position and not always willing to offer any opposition to pirates appearing on their island. Some of these pirates just came to visit and replenish men and material for further raids at sea, while others came to stay, as happened in 1687, when Avery and his crew, laden with gold and other riches (including a Moghul princess), made a stop at Île Bourbon. A number of them settled on the island, while Avery went on with his trade.[20] In 1695 and 1704, when two large groups of pirates disembarked – the latter, as aforementioned, led by John Bowen – they were granted amnesty and became settlers.[21] These men not only provided sheer manpower to the island, namely their own labour and that of the slaves they brought with them and continued to bring in through their 'brethren' left behind on Madagascar, but they also possessed much needed crafts and skills (including military ones and as mediators between white settlers and other pirates as well as Malagasy natives). They also brought financial resources to Île Bourbon that could be invested in the infrastructure and, last but not least, they started families. All in all, the influx of 'pirate blood' into the embryonic colony of Île Bourbon was so substantial that it is estimated that "around three-quarters of the present-day 'white' population of Réunion have pirate forebears" (Carter 2009: 59). Establishing good relations with pirates, and even turning them into settlers, was thus a matter of killing two birds with one stone: to get rid of piracy, which was becoming increasingly detrimental to the colonialising project, and to find new settlers.

While the initial settlers of Île Bourbon were always eager not to fight the pirates arriving on their shores, but to conduct business with them and integrate them, the attitude of the island's governors was more ambivalent. Officially, they had to fight these men and forbid their settlers to deal with them, but practically they turned a blind eye to such interactions, tolerated them, and even tried themselves to come to terms with pirates and conduct business with them. This ambivalence was reduced when, in 1716, the Navy Council back home in France also came to realise that pirates had potential in terms of France's colonising ambitions and granted a general amnesty to those who were willing to lay down their arms.[22] It is remarkable that even Christian missionaries seem to have had a share in the shadow economy provided by pirates, not to mention the fact that ex-pirates often adopted the Christian faith and became respected members not only of settler communities, but also of the newly founded colonial parishes. When some of the Île Bourbon priests and missionaries objected to the general amnesty for pirates, they were reminded in no uncertain terms of these facts and thus made to look hypocritical.[23]

At around 1700, Dutch Mauritius was another, only sparsely populated island. There will, at any time, have been no more than two dozen company servants and an even smaller number of slaves, besides the settler population of a few dozen. As we have seen, this island was also visited by pirates, who outnumbered and out-gunned the embryonic Dutch community. However, as long as they were left unmolested by VOC officials and their soldiers, pirates had little interest in overrunning the Dutch community. As already noted, this may have been out of fear that the VOC, which was more aggressive elsewhere (especially at the Cape), might take revenge or even hunt them down. Furthermore, even from the most ruthless pirate's point of view it would have been disadvantageous to kill the colonists, who not only promised a temporary source of supplies then but also a constant supply in the future, and the colonists even welcomed the pirates to return. In

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[20] See Piat (2007: 14–17); Defoe (1972: 49–63).
[21] Moreover, in 1698, a royal decree of clemency by the British, with a general pardon and amnesty, was issued, and many pirates worldwide took advantage of the opportunity.
[22] See Carter (2009: 59–60).
[23] Here, one might add that the pirate Burgess, who remained for several years on nearby Madagascar, is reported to have had good relations with the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury (see Defoe 1972 [1724]: 506–510).

any case, there was not much to gain: the Dutch colony itself was struggling hard to survive in the face of rats, cyclones, and absconded slaves, which posed varied threats to its very existence. The VOC continued to keep the island for fear of others making use of its undoubted strategic potential. However, in 1708, the Company's board, the Heeren XVII in Amsterdam, decided to give up the colony, a decree which was put into effect in 1710. In 1721, after a period of desolation, the French took it over. In fact, the first colonisers on Île de France consisted of a small contingent of officials and settlers, including ex-pirates, from Île Bourbon.[24]

4. Pirates on Madagascar

The history of piracy in the southwestern Indian Ocean cannot be told without making Madagascar the focus of attention. During the sixteenth century, the indigenous Malagasy population had already established some sort of trading contacts with Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French traders and sailors, who started to introduce cloth, silver, muskets, copper wire, glass beads, and other items into the island's economy.[25] Madagascar had vital things to offer for the immediate needs of ships passing by: water, rice, beans, beef, yams, taro, poultry, lemons and oranges (soon found to be good remedies against scurvy), and many other much needed provisions, as well as wood and other material for repairing the boats. However, the first European sailors during the sixteenth century, who were heading for India and the Spice Islands further east in search of only the greatest promises of wealth, were soon convinced that the island's other attractions and riches were too small (or even non-existent, as in the case of precious metals or spices) to compensate for the heavy losses which they made when trying to establish more permanent trading posts on the island. So, by the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, the Portuguese and the Dutch, after some rather fitful attempts to establish forts and trading posts on the world's fourth largest island, had not managed to establish permanent trading posts or even forts and factories there.[26]

   The seventeenth century saw various more serious endeavours by France and England to establish not only short-lived trading posts but permanent settler colonies on the island. All these attempts eventually failed and even ended in disaster for the colonisers, leaving thousands of them dead.[27] Malaria, dysentery, fever, extreme tropical humidity, unbelievable incompetence and arrogance in the colonial administration, and – most of all – the failure to establish permanent good relations with the neighbouring Malagasy communities were the main factors in not being able to establish permanent European settlements on the island. In addition, Europeans also had to face the fact that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, powerful kingdoms developed in the island's south and west, most notably the Sakalava kingdom, which were well able to demand high

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[24] See Carter (2009: 60–64).

[25] While concentrating on the Mascarenes and Malagasy–European contacts, it should not be forgotten that from the late first millennium C.E. onwards, Madagascar, and especially its north-west coast, was home to several rather stable Swahili-Arab trading communities, known as "Sea People" or Antalaotra, who traded slaves and other commodities to the Swahili coast and southern Arabia (see Ellis 2007: 443–444; Hooper 2011: 220–221).

[26] On this period of Malagasy history, see especially Brown (2006: 30–37). Consequently, as already indicated, the Dutch chose to establish a colony on Mauritius (between 1638 and 1710) only to find that settling an uninhabited island was no less difficult than settling one with a hostile native population.

[27] As far as the English were concerned, these colonising efforts failed in the southwestern Bay of St. Augustine in 1646, after less than two years, and they also proved futile for the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales*, which abandoned its Malagasy colonising project at Fort Dauphin in 1674 after almost three decades of almost incessant hostility with the surrounding population and a final massacre during a mass marriage ceremony of French settlers to French orphans sent there by Louis XIV (see Ogot 1992: 885). As a consequence, the French started to turn Île Bourbon into a port of call and colony for their Indian Ocean ambitions.

prices and/or expel unwelcome visitors and settlers. Ironically enough, this emergence of powerful opponents to European colonisation was more or less the result of early contacts with the Arabian and European traders themselves. These contacts allowed some local rulers to achieve wealth and obtain firearms and thus to gain the upper hand against neighbouring chiefdoms and to unite the traditionally small and scattered local polities of Madagascar into larger politico-military units. Certainly trade with Arabs and Europeans did not initiate fighting and cattle raids among the Malagasies, which seems to have been endemic on the island already, but it intensified and drastically changed the character of these quarrels and fights. Small-scale and short feuds, enacted against the background of an approximate equilibrium of power between structurally opposed lineages, clans, and chiefdoms, changed into warfare in which one opponent tried to defeat the other in order to extend his rule and dominion at the latter's expense.[28]

Yet, despite all these failures to establish a firm and permanent foothold on Madagascar in the seventeenth century, ever-increasing European settler colonies at the Cape, on the Mozambique coast, and most of all on the nearby Mascarenes , as well as the mounting traffic around the Cape of Good Hope, passing Madagascar on their way to and from India and Indonesia, led to several bays and harbours on Madagascar gradually developing into quite stable ports of call for European ships going in either direction. Therefore, at the time of the arrival of Euro-American pirates in the second half of the seventeenth century, Madagascar had already become partially integrated into the Indian Ocean sphere of trade, commerce, credit, and socio-cultural exchange. This was even more the case because, apart from the basic provisions it had to offer to sailors and nearby colonies, Madagascar finally had a valuable commodity to offer in that it became an apparently unlimited reservoir for the Europeans' never-ending demand for slaves with whom to build up tropical colonies and plantation economies. In this trade with slaves, some Malagasy rulers functioned as significant slave-raiders in the island's interior and as traders at their ports, activities from which they profited.[29]

Euro-American pirates from the Atlantic and Caribbean, arriving in their new ocean of choice, more often than not chose the northeast coast of Madagascar, especially the Bay of Antongil and the islet of Sainte Marie, for their bases.[30] This was one part of Madagascar where natural conditions were relatively good, both for those staying on land, seeking concealment and retirement of some sort, and for those wishing to arrive and depart safely with their marauding ships. Furthermore, in this part of the island neither the Sakalava nor the colonial powers had made their presence felt to such a degree as to seriously impede pirate activity. Take the example of Commodore Thomas Mathews, who in 1722 was sent by the English East India Company to Madagascar with four warships specifically to hunt down pirates. However, he found that the pirates' defences and fire power were too strong for him to overcome. Furthermore, and maybe more importantly, pirates had something to offer in terms of profitable trade. So, in another fine example of the entanglement of pirates with apparently more legitimate, even anti-pirate

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[28] For an intimate description of these incessant fights among Malagasy chiefdoms, see the account by Robert Drury, who spent fifteen years as a shipwrecked sailor and then a slave and mercenary in the south and southwest of the island at the end of the seventeenth century (Drury 1890 [1729]). In this context, it is therefore more correct to say that the trade with Europeans was beneficial to some Malagasy groups only, and disastrous for others, as especially Bialuschewski (2005: 410–414) has argued with reference to the southern part of the island.

[29] On Malagasy history in the seventeenth century, see especially Brown (2006: 38–49) and Hooper (2011: 218–226); on the Malagasy slave trade the second half of the seventeenth century, see Bialuschewski (2005: 403–406; 414–418) and Campbell (2005).

[30] For an overview on pirates in Madagascar, see Deschamps (1972).

authorities, Mathews started trading rum and clothes for cattle and precious metals from the pirates and then returned to India, having become a richer man than before.[31]

One indicator of the fact that, in the decade before Mathew's bargains, the pirates of Île Sainte Marie had already begun to participate strongly in the long-distance, even global, commercial networks of that time are the reports we have of American merchants living there in order to conduct their trade at the source of the profits, so to speak, thus seeking to avoid the restrictive tolls and policies of their English masters. According to Ellis:

> "Some of the pirates who established themselves in Madagascar retained the links established during the heyday of Caribbean piracy with investors in New York, who had spotted in Madagascar's location a means of circumventing the monopoly on the supply of slaves to North America held until 1698 by England's Royal African Company. The leading financier of the Madagascar pirates was Frederick Philipse (1626–1702), a Dutchman who had settled in New York and had worked his way up to become one of its leading investors and entrepreneurs. In 1691, Philipse despatched an agent, Adam Baldridge, to set up a trading-station in Madagascar on the island of Sainte-Marie. Baldridge became a broker for many of the pirate networks." (Ellis 2007: 445–446)

Baldridge is known to have turned from trader to pirate and even to 'little king' himself. On top of these activities he married Malagasy women and left 'mulatto' offspring on the island before returning to America.[32] On account of these direct involvements between pirates and American merchants, it might even be argued that Euro-American piracy in the southwestern Indian Ocean was heavily sponsored by New England. In this sense, pirates and their trading contacts were spearheading processes of the proto-globalisation of that time.[33]

The indigenous political situation, which pirates confronted in the Bay of Antongil, as well as on the neighbouring littoral and island world, was characterised by the existence of segmentary lineage systems, similar to the 'model' so systematically described by Evans-Pritchard and others.[34] However, these Malagasy lineage systems were not acephalous. Rather, in the northeastern part of Madagascar, there had by now also developed a large number of local chiefdoms (emerging from and looming over the kinship-based clan-systems) headed by elders, local potentates, warlords, and even kings. In contrast to the Malagasy kingdoms of the south and the Sakalava kingdom of the west, however, these local Malagasy polities in the northeast tended to be small, often consisting of no more than a few villages, and the power of their chiefs was rather limited.

For the northeastern Malagasy rulers of various kinds, pirates must at first have been barely distinguishable from the other foreigners who had reached their coasts before. They had the same demands for necessities as any seafarer after a long journey around the Cape. But in their wilder appearance and less disciplined behaviour, pirates will also have been visibly different from the captains and crews of Company and royal ships. Also, their precarious legal situation vis-à-vis the Company and royal ships was quickly noticeable in their well-armed and fortified hide-outs, as well as in the sudden riches, which they continued to bring on to Malagasy shores. After some

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[31] See Brown (2006: 75–76); Carter (2009: 54–56).
[32] Forty to fifty years later, French traders and officers visiting the Bay of Antongil encountered 'mulattos', who presented themselves as belonging to the Baldridge clan. See Ellis 2007: 450.
[33] See also Bialuschewski (2005: 406–409); Brown (2006: 69–70); Carter (2009: 56–57, 65); Hooper (2011: 222–223, 227–228); Nutting (1978).
[34] See especially Evans-Pritchard (1940); Evans-Pritchard and Fortes (1940).

initial hesitation, barter and other more routine economic exchanges between pirates and the indigenous communities started to flourish, with advantages for both sides. Local rulers provided food and more and more often also slaves who could be sold on by the pirates. The latter, in return, had not only weapons to offer the local rulers, but their own fierceness and fighting power as well, which could make a decisive difference to local potentates in their internal power struggles.

Socially and culturally, the entanglement between pirates and Malagasy locals grew day by day. Some pirates decided to stay on land for longer times or even permanently. They learnt the local language and acquired other bits of local knowledge, which helped them and their *confrères* in their dealings with the natives and which, in external matters, turned them into well-versed mediators between European and Malagasy agents. More and more pirates also started amorous and even long-lasting marital relationships with Malagasy women, resulting in offspring and stable families of mixed pirate and Malagasy descent. The children of these unions became known as "Zana Malata" or "Mulatto Children".[35] As no few of the pirates' wives were the daughters of high-status local chiefs, Zana Malata came to acquire, in the indigenous kinship system, the status of daughters' sons or uterine nephews, while the ever growing community of Zana Malata local chiefs had the traditionally supportive role of direct or classificatory maternal uncles. While one could then well argue with Bialuschewski (2005: 419) that during the first decade of the eighteenth century we see 'the end of the pirate era' on Madagascar, their offspring with local women continued to wield considerable influence in internal and external affairs.

5. King Ratsimilahoe and Princess Beti

The maritime trade in cattle, rice, fruits, and slaves, as well as the growing stability of pirate and especially Zana Malata life on the island, finally led to gradual changes in the power equilibrium within the fragmented northeastern Malagasy political world. The weapons and gunpowder that were acquired by some local rulers, mostly by those who controlled regions with a port or at least a suitable place for anchorage, increased their military strength, which could be used against neighbouring contenders in their struggles for resources and power. So, internal Malagasy fights over access to ports and thus to these lucrative new trading opportunities increased, with the result that the internal balance of power turned out to be to the advantage of those who profited more from the trade and military alliances with the pirates and Zana Malata. Consequently, ever larger, more centralised and more powerful chiefdoms, which could be labelled 'early kingdoms' or 'segmentary states',[36] arose in this part of the island, some of which were headed by Zana Malata.

As is so often the case worldwide, slow and gradual processes of state formation experience a sudden boost when military events and conquering ambitions come to a peak. In the early eighteenth century, this is what happened on the eastern shores of Madagascar, where the more important ports like Tamatave, Foulpointe, and Fénérive just south of the Bay of Antongil came under attack and were forcefully captured by a confederation of chiefs of the southern-based Bentanimena ethnic group, initially also known as Tsikoa ("The Invincible"). The political and

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[35] On this, see Ogot (1992: 882); Piat (2007: 24).

[36] I use these terms in the senses proposed by Kulke (1993) and Stein (1980). Here, it might also be apt to apply the concept of 'little kingdom', as developed from within the anthropology and historiography of India. The situation in Madagascar is then to be understood less as a conglomeration of mono-archies struggling for predominance than as a poly-archical system of kingdoms, many little and a few great, standing in politically and ritually expressed hierarchical relationships to each other. On the theory of the 'little kingdom', see Schnepel (2002: chapter I). State formation in Madagascar is discussed by several authors, in the piracy context especially by Ellis (2007) and Hooper (2011).

military unification of the northern Antavaratra clans and chiefs, which became indispensable against these attacks from the south, was achieved by a young charismatic warrior named Ratsimilahoe, who, in 1712, inflicted a decisive victory on the (now no longer) Tsikoa, whose soldiers were killed or fled the area. But Ratsimilahoe was not only militarily successful. By a number of politically astute moves, he managed to incorporate allied chiefs, as well as formerly hostile chiefs of the Bentanimena, to found a new kingdom under his rule, which eventually occupied approximately six hundred kilometres of the east Malagasy coast. This socially, culturally and politically quite diverse and even heterogeneous kingdom was called "Betsimisaraka" or "The Indivisible-Many". However, while this confederation thrived with Ratsimilahoe on its throne in the capital of Foulpointe, after his death in 1750 the multi-centred kingdom soon disintegrated into its component parts under his successors.[37]

One of the major sources of wealth and power for the Betsimisaraka, who, despite the break-up of the kingdom, nevertheless continued to exist as an externally identifiable 'neo-ethnic' group (actually today the second largest on the island), was its involvement in the region's slave trade. In fact, throughout the eighteenth century and until the early nineteenth century, the Betsimisaraka became the chief suppliers of slaves traded from Madagascar to the French Indian Ocean possessions of Île Bourbon and Île de France. The raiding expeditions of these 'traders in humans' not only ventured into the interior of their native island, but also as far overseas as the Comoro Islands and the coasts of Mozambique. From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, when piracy of the Euro-American kind had already become a thing of the past, these maritime slave raids were conducted in the spirit of these erstwhile freebooters by their descendants; but they were conducted in vessels similar to those used by the forefathers of the indigenous Malagasy population, who had probably come to Madagascar from southeast Asia around AD 500 in outrigger canoes. According to Alpers:

> "Raiding parties gathered at the northeast of Madagascar before setting off as a fleet of larger outrigger canoes (*laka*) for the Comoros. The Betsimisaraka developed special large canoes measuring as much as 45 feet in length and 10–12 feet in width for these raids, which were intended to return with captives to be sold off to French traders for the Mascarenes. According to contemporary accounts, the largest fleets numbered up to 400-500 canoes with as many as 15,000 to 18,000 men. They utilized prevailing currents and winds, following typical Indian Ocean monsoonal patterns for the raids, which generally occurred on a five year scale." (Alpers 2011: 23–24)

Interestingly enough, these devastating slave raids were only put to an end in 1817, when the Betsimisaraka canoes ventured too far north, namely into the maritime dominion of the (Omani) Sultanate of Zanzibar. The ruler of this Arab stronghold on the East African coast sent his warships against the Betsimisaraka slavers not because he was against enslaving the local population in principle, but because he saw his own substantial stake in the business endangered.[38]

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[37] For more details on his rule, see Brown (2006: 78–82); Ogot (ed. 1992: 882–883).

[38] On Betsimisaraka slaving raids towards the Comoros and beyond, see Alpers (2009: 131–146); Brown (2006: 82–86); Hooper (2011: 236–239); and Martin (1983, vol. 1). It is an irony of history that the British fight against slavery, which in this part of the world started in earnest from about the second decade of the nineteenth century onwards, spared the Sultan of Oman/Zanzibar from British anti-slavery measures for a long time, indeed until the 1860s, because this ruler was much needed in the British struggle against the so-called 'pirates' of the Qasimi tribe, based on the coasts of today's United Arab Emirates, who were seriously interfering with British vessels heading into the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. See Bose (2006: 44–48); Davies (1997); Risso (2001: 309–316).

Let us now return once again to Madagascar at the time of the Betsimisaraka kingdom. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the founder and head of this kingdom, Ratsimilahoe, was a Zana Malata, the son of a local princess and an English pirate called Tom.[39] It seems that, in his youth, Ratsimilahoe not only learnt the ways of both the Malagasy and the pirates, it also seems that his father took him to England and India, where he received some kind of education. During the war against the southern invaders, as already noted, Ratsimilahoe proved himself most capable in fighting and in organising the northern confederation into a powerful, united force. Thereafter, he and his allies (and some of his former enemies) formed a powerful, though short-lived kingdom. In a clever move of internal diplomacy, Ratsimilahoe also married a daughter of the powerful Sakalava king Toakafo, with whom he had a son, named Zanahary. In 1735, he also had a daughter, called Beti, with another local Malagasy woman.[40] At Ratsimilahoe's death the kingdom seems to have been divided between his son Zanahary, based in Foulpointe, and his daughter Beti, who had her 'palace' on Ste. Marie Island. Both vied, separately and jointly, for a closer alliance with the French colony on Île de France, which in the meantime had been chosen by the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* as its *Chef-Lieu* in this part of the Indian Ocean. It was on account of this newly emerging and ever-growing French colony, lying about 850 kilometres east of northern Madagascar, and its ever-increasing demands for provisions that the centre of Malagasy trade in food and slaves had shifted during Ratsimilahoe's rule from Swahili and Sakalava hands on Madagascar's northwestern coast to its more convenient northeastern coast and thus into Betsimisaraka and Zana Malata hands.[41] Beti is reported to have offered her islet kingdom to the French as a new colony. Regardless of whether any of the sovereignty of Île Ste. Marie was actually ceded to France or not, it is reported that soon after some sort of agreement had been reached between Beti and twenty-nine Betsimisaraka chiefs, on the one hand, and a French deputation headed by the Company agent Guillaume Gosse, on the other, the leading French officer and fourteen of his companions were killed in a revolt by Betsimisaraka warriors against Beti's intentions.

After these events in September 1750, the further history of Princess Beti is shrouded in a degree of romantic mystery. It is reported that she started an affair with a French corporal called de Forval, who was sent from Île de France to northeastern Madagascar to take care of French interests there and re-establish peace. After an assault on his life by Betsimisaraka chiefs, who continued to oppose too direct an involvement of the French in their own political and economic affairs, Beti is even said to have saved the corporal's life, thereby putting her own life in danger and being forced to flee as de Forval's consort to the Île de France.[42] The colonial community of Port Louis, the island's capital, in the mid-eighteenth century had already experienced a degree of consolidation under the energetic colony-building efforts of Governor Mahé de Labourdonnais. He ruled the island from 1735 to 1740 and did much to improve its infrastructure and future prospects, also by

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[39] It is disputed, and cannot be verified, whether the surname of this Thomas was White or Tew.

[40] One important, though not undisputed source for the history of Ratsimilahoe is that of the Frenchman Nicolas Mayeur, whose *Histoire de Ratsimil-hoe* was written in the early nineteenth century. For the history of Ratsimilahoe, see also Ellis (2007: 447–451), Bialuschewski (2005: 422–423) and Hooper (2011: 233–234).

[41] Campbell (2005: 55–56) estimates that between 1767 and 1810 the Mascarenes imported approximately 110,000 slaves, 45 per cent of which came *from* Madagascar, while a considerable percentage of the remainder came at least *through* Madagascar. See also Ellis (2007: 441, 445). There remained a busy 'slave route' crossing the island's interior from the Sakalava kingdom to Betsimisaraka country supplying the island's eastern harbours with slaves captured by Sakalava in the interior or exported from Mozambique and the Comoros. The economic and political impact of this "Sakalava connection" is discussed by Ellis (2007: 451–453), who writes that "he [Ratsimilahoe, B.S.] and his Sakalava allies made such a systematic use of Europeans as advisors and auxiliaries, and were so closely integrated into overseas systems of credit and trade, that they foreshadowed some developments often regarded as innovations of a later period" (ibid.: 442).

[42] See Brown (2006: 83–84).

drastically increasing the importation of slaves. However, while some progress was made, the settlers still lived in a rather shabby and unhealthy town, more than half of its population being slaves. The colony could not yet be sure that it would survive. Life on Île de France was constantly threatened by cyclones, fires, epidemic diseases, rats, famines, company neglect, marooned slaves, and, last but not least, the on-going enmity with the English, whose warships more than once passed the island close by with the threat of invasion.[43]

Princess Beti's arrival and stay on the island from 1751 until her death in 1805[44] was quite remarkable and will have been a major topic of local gossip. Baron Grant, a French citizen of noble birth who was staying on Île de France in Beti's time, reports that "her colour was certainly displeasing to the white people and her education did not qualify her to be a companion to such a man as her husband" (Grant 1801: 220–221).[45] But, as Grant continues, "despite remonstrances of his friends, he lives happily with her" (ibid.), a blissful quasi-conjugal state which may also have been aided by the fact that Beti's "figure was fine, her air noble, and all her actions partook of the dignity of one who was born to command" (ibid.). As Vaughan (2006: 106) puts the matter aptly: "She was (…) of the right social class, even if she was of the wrong colour".

And, indeed, Beti fell in between or transgressed all the colonial racial categories that were apparently needed to build up and administer an incipient settler colony at a time and place which was far from our postmodern celebration of fluid identities, *créolité*, and cosmopolitanism. Beti was neither white nor black, but according to the categories in use on Mauritius at that time up until the final census in 1982, a member of the so-called '*gens de couleur*'. This group was small in size in Beti's time, but it was to grow ever larger the more frequent intimate relationships between white plantation owners and black slave women became. Furthermore, in a probably disturbing manner, the 'white' in Beti was, on closer inspection, not French but English in origin. In another ordering scheme, she was neither a slave nor a '*noire libre*' (i.e. there never was an act that 'emancipated' her from bondage), but born free and stayed so, just like the members of the white population of the island. In this respect, she belonged to the group of *civils blancs*. From the feudal perspective of the time, however, she was of a higher status than most of these free white citizens of Île de France, of whom most were *petits blancs*, while she was of noble blood and demeanour. For the slaves, freed slaves, and *gens de couleurs* on the island, Beti must have provoked ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, she was a black woman, free and full of dignity, and thus holding a status and exhibiting a habitus which many of the black inhabitants of the island longed for and aspired to, mostly in vain. On the other hand, she was a representative of that Malagasy community which was instrumental in capturing and sending more and more slaves to the island, only to lead a most miserable life there. For the French islanders (to continue our attempt to locate Beti in the social world of her time), she posed a serious gender problem. She lived openly with a quite respected member of the French community, not just as a tacitly tolerated mistress leading a shadowy life alongside a lawful wife, as was so often the case on these "fringes of empire" (Agha and Kolsky 2009). Instead, she was openly beautiful and self-confident, a childless woman of power and an "amazon" (as Grant called her) in a male-dominated settler society, in which the female ideal was to be submissive and gentle, and to bear a lot of children.[46] Furthermore, she was

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[43] See Toussaint (2013: 35–80). This British conquest was successfully conducted in 1810, when Île de France became a British colony and was re-christened Mauritius.
[44] A stay only interrupted by two returns to Madagascar in 1757 and 1762.
[45] De Forval actually seems to have been Grant's cousin.
[46] Up to half a dozen children and even more was not at all exceptional in these days and places.

a heathen within an insecure and unstable natural, social, economic, and political environment, in which Catholicism soon came to play a leading social and religious role. Last but not least, she was the granddaughter of a pirate.

These and other ambiguities in the life of "Princess Beti", as she is still remembered in Mauritius's contemporary historical imagination until today, were eventually smoothed over and even eliminated. By the time of her death, Beti had become a more suitable and more easily categorised member of Île de France colonial society: She seems to have married her French corporal, adopted the Christian faith, and regularly attended church, and she acquired a considerable estate outside Port Louis, thus entering the ranks of the landed aristocracy in this newly emerging plantation economy. Finally, this granddaughter of an English pirate and a Malagasy woman was 'naturalised', that is made a full French citizen, thus completing a three-generation translation from the existential mode of a pirate into that of a Franco-Mauritian noble in exemplary fashion.[47]

6. Piracy beyond Exclusion

By prominently using concepts like 'power', 'marginality', and 'exclusion' in the interpretation and analysis of piracy, as Alpers (2011) and others[48] have done, one may well be able to dispose of an essentialising view of piracy as an illegitimate activity per se. In its place, it might be possible to throw a new, more comparative and cross-cultural light on the causes of piracy and on piracy as a specific, dynamically changing figuration of maritime violence, in the production of which many diverse and even heterogeneous actors and factors are involved.

However, when piracy is seen chiefly and solely as representing the result of exclusion, one runs the opposite danger of romanticising pirates. Piracy is then interpreted in a Hobsbawm-like manner as an expression of social banditry and as being anti-imperialistic in nature, representing protest and resistance against oppressive states such as the Moghuls, or the all too dominant maritime powers, such as the Portuguese or the British.[49] However, this perspective and interpretational approach basically still retains the view of piracy as being outside and against the law and legitimate power. And this view obscures piracy's manifold, positive, and integral entanglements with those on the 'right' side of the law, and it was exactly these entanglements I sought to stress in this paper.

Against the background of the ethnohistorical data and discussion presented above, looking at piracy as a phenomenon that lies strictly outside, and even operates against, the existing structures of power and law not only fails to grasp the complexity and ambiguity of 'piracy' as such, it also implicitly tends to assume that the established structures of power are in themselves monolithic, homogeneous, and clearly identifiable. This, of course, is not the case. Take the state, an obvious candidate when it comes to identifying an actor that claims a monopoly of violence and thus perfectly plays what one might call for simplicity's sake (in such a dichotomous view) 'piracy's other'. It is common knowledge – and studies from history, social anthropology, political science,

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[47] On Beti, see Grant (1801); MacMillan (2000: 133–135); Vaughan (2006: 105–107); Piat (2007: 41–42); Brown (2006: 83–85).
[48] See Carter (2009); Starkey (2001); Rediker (1987); Risso (2001); and Subramaniam (2007).
[49] See, for example, Rediker (1987), the internet journal *Darkmatter: In the Ruins of Imperialist Culture*, 2009 issue; or Subramaniam (2007: 25) who argues: "The advent of the Portuguese and the enforcement of their *cartaz*-based politics altered the situation in so far as it displaced small time merchants and forced them to resort to desperate measures (…) traders became pirates quite inadvertently". Similarly, Pearson (2003: 126–127). See also Risso (2001: 316–319), who argues against such an interpretation.

and others have been at pains to show this in the minutest detail[50] – that what is regarded as *the* state is in fact a rather fragmented and multi-layered entity in which the different components more likely contest each other than work for the common good. The political situation in the macro-region of the Indian Ocean is even more complicated, not only on account of the fact that piracy typically operates on water and not on land, where the territorial integrity of one polity, and hence its traditional and legitimate realm of influence and power, is more easily defined. Rather, this ocean has connected a great number of polities, which are very different as far as their political, cultural, linguistic, economic, religious, and social constitutions are concerned.[51]

Compared to western models of mono-archy and the nation state, many of the Indian Ocean polities of the period in question are difficult to categorise when applying post-nineteenth-century western models and ideals. Even on the Indian subcontinent, where the Moghuls had established a hitherto unknown concentration and spread of power, the land was still divided into numerous little kingdoms, many of which were vying to become great themselves.[52] Little kingdoms like Cochin or Calicut on the west coast of India, for example, were constantly in conflict not only with each other, but also with their 'greater' neighbours further inland. And sooner or later they tried to influence these power struggles in their favour with the aid of Muslim traders, European powers and, last but not least, pirates. Similarly in Madagascar, we find a poly-archical system of tribes, chiefdoms, and mono-archies, in which some ethnic and neo-ethnic groups, like the Sakalava and Betsimisaraka, managed to greatly extend their dominions and spheres of influence due to contacts and trade with European powers, pirate or not. Others, most prominently the Merina in the island's interior from the late eighteenth century onwards, became 'great kings' ironically by countering slave raids and coastal predominance.[53]

On top of this multi-facetted overall picture of the Indian Ocean world, from the sixteenth century onwards various European powers entered the Indian Ocean. During the period under consideration here – that is, long before the Indian Ocean came to be called a "British Lake" in the nineteenth century – these various European powers, their East Indian Companies, and their settler colonies could not be at all sure that their endeavours to take part in or even monopolise parts of the Indian Ocean trade and finally to establish colonies there would be successful. Even 'back home', these European kingdoms were far from stable themselves, nor was the overall political situation in Europe peaceful and settled, but characterised by constant internecine dynastic wars. For a long time, the European powers and their agents in the Indian Ocean in no way represented a well-defined 'piracy's other' against the background of which piracy could unanimously be defined and dealt with.

Thus, the political arena as a whole, in which the European and American pirates of the southwestern Indian Ocean operated from around 1680 to 1750, was far from being unequivocal and stable. On the contrary, it was extraordinarily multi-layered, poly-centred, fragmented, competitive, and in great flux, both on land and at sea, and in the Indian Ocean world as well as beyond. Piracy, and (ironically, but not contradictorily) the struggle against it and over the *Deutungshoheit* of who was a pirate and who was not, was one important element *within* this manifold and contested politico-economic field, *not outside* it. And within this 'within', to identify

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[50] For a classic introduction to the problem, see Abrams (1988).
[51] This diversity still applies today, even after centuries of exchanges and globalisation (see Bouchard and Crumplin 2010).
[52] Estimates are up to 5,000. See Schnepel (2002: 1, and chapter I).
[53] See Brown (2006: 91–110).

some manifestations of maritime violence as piracy, as well as not being piracy, was as complex and variable as was the world of the 'piracy's other'. This is clearly seen by Carter (2009: 45) when she writes:

"Pirates are one group in a range of characters inhabiting the fringes of empire whose activities are generally seen as antithetical to and obstructive of colonial state development. In practice, the role of pirates was more complex than this stereotypical appraisal suggests. At a time when European powers were vying for control of key territories in India, and yet had to establish fortified colonies along the Indian Ocean trade routes, the activities of pirates, while initially a source of harassment and irritation to settler communities, were often also harnessed to further the development of embryonic states".[54]

In strange, sometimes direct, often indirect, but always dialectical ways, piracy therefore formed an integral part of the dynamically expanding early European colonisation of the Indian Ocean around 1700, reflecting, of course, all the internal cleavages between the various seafaring European nations. And at least in this specific spatial-temporal context, piracy was a vital and stimulating force of 'connectivity in motion' of the Indian Ocean World and the world beyond.

7. Summary and Conclusion

a) The life histories of pirates can only be grasped if 'the pirate' is not seen as an essentialised, outlawed manifestation of the person in the sense of the Maussian *personne morale* or of the 'social person' of orthodox British social anthropology.[55] Rather, to be a pirate or to be considered one was *only one* possible location in a conceptual space, with the statuses of pirate and governor representing the two extreme poles, while privateer, freedom fighter, slaver, trader, sailor, captain, settler, merchant, *armateur*, and officer are some of the other possible intermediate locations in this space. Changes within this space could, for any one person or group of persons, quickly change direction, and he, she, or they could end up anywhere between or at the poles. The question of the legitimacy or not of a given *personne piratal* and his actions cannot be totalized, but depends on the different, situationally relative, and dynamically shifting points of view of those who had to cope with these actions and assess them.

b) Some pirates were 'made' by the agents of colonial powers issuing *Kaperbriefe* or letters of marque authorising some sailors to attack enemy ships, often under the obligation to hand over a specified part of the loot to those who authorised the commissions and financed the trips. These 'privateers' or pirates-turned-privateers then certainly had what could be called 'state-building' functions. At one point, however, it occurred that some of these 'privateers' could not be controlled any longer and did not function in the way that had first been intended, though the authorising

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[54] For a similarly pronounced view of the integral role of pirates, see Starkey (2001).
[55] See Mauss (1938); Schnepel (1990).

powers always had opportunities to 'un-make'[56] these pirates and to turn them once again into privateers, legal sailors, or settlers, or else to hang them.[57]

c) Up until the first decades of the nineteenth century, European traders and colonial officers made extensive use of pirates, remnants of former pirate communities, or descendants of pirates as local middlemen in their insatiable desire for slaves. Piracy in the southwestern Indian Ocean (and elsewhere) was always linked with and ultimately turned into the slave trade, arguably the most essential trade for the early colonial project.

d) Euro-American pirates operating in the region and period in question had many skills which were needed not only for the slave trade, but also for other, more routine commercial interactions between local indigenous populations (as well as, of course, locally established traders of Indian, Arab, Persian, Armenian, Jewish, or other backgrounds), on the one hand, and Western traders, company officials, and representatives of settler communities, on the other. Pirates, at least some of them, and later especially their mixed offspring, possessed the linguistic abilities necessary for these roles, being also experienced in the often weary and lengthy local rituals of bargaining, and they had acquired some social and political standing in the places of trade. In a nutshell, they were masters in cross-cultural encounters, possessing both the local knowledge and status and the overseas knowledge and networks necessary to enable them to act as mediators in commercial and other affairs.[58]

e) The settled (ex-)pirates' knowledge of indigeneity, so well exemplified by the Zana Malata on the Malagasy shores, was not only used for slave and other trade, but also for the wider ambition to establish colonies in new, hitherto unexplored or unconquered places, as when Princess Beti and French officers from Île de France conspired to incorporate Île Sainte Marie into the French overseas dominions.

f) The borders (and transitions) between pirates and even pirate communities, on the one hand, and European and Eurasian settler communities, on the other, and thereby also the perceived borders between 'criminal' and 'legal' lives, were structurally blurred and offered many possibilities for economic and social 'transgressions' in both directions. Pirates could become respectable citizens in local indigenous or settler communities. Alternatively, ambitious young men in these communities, as well as disaffected or discharged sailors, ill-treated servants, and runaway apprentices and slaves – all in search of wealth and sometimes freedom – could join a pirate ship and become outlaws (for some).

g) The interaction between pirates (privateers, buccaneers, corsairs, freedom-fighters, etc.) and the representatives of the established colonial orders, both at home and in the colonies, was ambivalent, but in the end astonishingly often of mutual interest. Whole groups of pirates were granted royal pardons and thereby integrated (as individuals rather than as communities) into settler communities, where their descendants thereafter formed a substantial percentage of the population.

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[56] On the making and unmaking of identity, see Rottenburg, Schnepel and Shimada (2006).

[57] It is most probable that piracy managed to thrive, first in the Caribbean and then in the Indian Ocean, on account of the fact that, during the many intra-European wars and skirmishes, such as the War of the League of Augsburg between England and France (the "Nine Years' War", 1688–1697), so many 'letters of marque' were issued that the situation became close to anarchy and almost impossible to handle or judge, especially after these wars ended and peace treaties made these sailors jobless, as when, after the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, around 40,000 Royal Navy sailors were discharged. See Carter (2009: 46).

[58] In the words of Hooper, "The stability of trade on Madagascar, admired by European captains during the mid-eighteenth century, developed in part from contact with pirates in the previous decades" (2011: 230). The liminal or hybrid position of the pirate and Zana Malata mediators is also expressed by the fact that they often appeared in a mixture of French and local dress for the lengthy trade negotiations (see Hooper 2011: 234).

In some cases, they were thus enabled to return to the European or North American heartlands. Pirates had many skills and assets to offer which were much needed in building up settler communities: simple labour power, the more elaborate skills of soldiers, artisans, and planters, and last but not least, considerable wealth in some cases that could be 'pumped' into the colonies' commercial transactions or into their infrastructure.[59]

h) This usefulness of pirates in a world, which, from the European point of view, had yet to be explored more deeply and then conquered, also holds true for their nautical knowledge. Pirates are prime examples of trans-maritime motility, i.e. of the ability to move across the oceans and around the globe with an agility that could hardly be surpassed by any of their royal and company counterparts. They were able, sometimes very rapidly, to change their ocean of activity. In what became known as the 'pirate round', they also retained links with their erstwhile spheres of influence in the Caribbean and on the Atlantic coasts, thereby connecting the oceans through a sort of long-distance trade and socio-economic exchange: booty made in the Persian Gulf was brought to the shores and islets of Madagascar and from there sold to merchants from New England. The profits arising from these sales were exchanged against much wanted goods existing and produced in the New World, such as cloths, medical supplies, food, alcohol, gun-powder, guns, and even ships. Alternatively, it might be invested 'back home'. Pirates thus formed a significant part of the maritime vanguard of proto-globalisation.

To conclude, company and pirate ships alike – and the colonial officers, settlers, honest but ill-paid and badly-treated sailors, as well as despised pirates – made their way to the Indian Ocean containing and exhibiting various "existential modes" (Latour 2013). Occasionally, the modes of existence of pirate, trader, settler, or even indigenous littoral people existed side by side, so to speak; sometimes they swiftly changed their modalities in one direction or another, while at other times they were in contestation and even stark confrontation with each other. In the end, confrontations certainly dominated, especially after the conflicts with the Moghuls over hijacked pilgrim ships increased. But to look at the various modes only in confrontational and oppositional terms would not only mean misunderstanding the nature of the colonising project and its moving forces, but also neglecting the vital and often integral role piracy played in this age of mercantilism and proto-globalisation in achieving 'connectivity in motion'.

One might well end this story with a quotation from Daniel Defoe, who was well aware of the hypocrisy entailed by moral statements of his time on piracy. Asking himself whether pirates felt any remorse when dividing their spoils, Defoe held:

> "I can't say, but that if they had known what was doing in England, at the same Time, by the South-Sea Directors, and their Directors, they would certainly have had this Reflection for their Consolation; viz.: that whatever Robberies they had committed, they might be pretty sure they were not the greatest Villains then living in the World." (Defoe 1972 [1724]: 134)

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[59] See also Carter (2009: 62–63).

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