

**‘A Man of Courage and Activity’: Thomas Tew and Pirate Settlements of the Indo-Atlantic Trade World, 1645-1730<sup>1</sup>**

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*“The sea is everything it is said to be: it provides unity, transport, the means of exchange and intercourse, if man is prepared to make an effort and pay a price.”*

– Fernand Braudel

In the summer of 1694, Thomas Tew, an infamous Anglo-American pirate, was observed riding comfortably in the open coach of New York’s only six-horse carriage with Benjamin Fletcher, the colonel-governor of the colony.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the far-flung English empire, especially during the seventeenth century, associations between colonial administrators and pirates were *de rigueur*, and in this regard, New York was similar to many of her sister colonies. In the developing Atlantic world, pirates were often commissioned as privateers and functioned both as a first line of defense against seaborne attack from imperial foes and as essential economic contributors in the oft-depressed colonies. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, moreover, colonial pirates and privateers became important transcultural brokers in the Indian Ocean region, spanning the globe to form an Indo-Atlantic trade network between North America and Madagascar. More than mere “pirates,” as they have traditionally been designated, these were early modern transcultural frontiersmen: in the process of shifting their theater of operations from the Caribbean to the rich trading grounds of the Indian Ocean world,

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the “Counter-Currents and Mainstreams in World History” conference at UCLA on December 6-7, 2003, organized by Richard von Glahn for the World History Workshop, a University of California Multi-Campus Research Unit. I am grateful to Kenneth Pomeranz of UC Irvine, the Director of the Workshop, for allowing me to present my work in progress; Randolph Head of UC Riverside, for his instructive comments as panel commentator and editor; Laura J. Mitchell of UC Irvine, for her generous assistance on an earlier draft; and to the many conference participants who offered insightful comments and suggestions. In addition to the central role played by Thomas Tew in opening up the Indo-Atlantic trade, the framing of this paper as a “social biography” was strongly influenced by Edmund Burke III of UC Santa Cruz. See Professor Burke’s edited collection, *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and a forthcoming edition on Middle Eastern biographies in the twentieth century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Many of the themes and much of the content of this paper will be further developed in my forthcoming dissertation, *Pirates Merchants, Settlers and Slaves: Making and Indo-Atlantic Trade World, 1645-1730*.

<sup>2</sup> See Letter from Peter de La Noy relative to Governor Fletcher’s Conduct, 13 June, 1695, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1853-1857), [hereafter cited as *NYCD* ], IV: 223. Epigraph from Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), I: 276.

they established settlements, married local Malagasy women, raised cattle as well as children, and traded and raided for slaves.

Through a social biographical approach of Thomas Tew, this paper attempts to situate pirates and piracy in their proper historical contexts, to demonstrate that the definition of “pirate” was an unstable and continually shifting category, and to establish that many pirates operated within cultural and societal norms.<sup>3</sup> Studying pirates and piracy has the potential to change the way we think about history, in part because it has to be done in a global framework. Such study reveals the ways in which the sinews of empire were constructed from above by ruling elites, from below by colonial merchants and seamen, and from beyond by entities outside the control of the metropole. Synthesized, studies of piracy can expose the general processes and contested means by which the economic, social, and cultural frameworks of empire were formulated.

Furthermore, juxtaposing North American colonies with settlements on Madagascar reveals the sundry workings in multiple directions of early modern colonizing projects, and provides a comparative trans-regional perspective on the traditional exceptionalist narrative of early America. In recent scholarship, historians such as R.J. Barendse have lamented the “traditional academic divisions” which have unnaturally hindered the study of connections between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds.<sup>4</sup> This paper attempts to remedy that gap in the scholarship, exposing early modern interactions between these two regions by tracking pirate settlements, their

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<sup>3</sup> For an overdrawn Marxist reading of early modern “proletarian” port culture, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). The authors make a broad claim for pirates as slave liberators, a claim that cannot be sustained from my own research. For more historically grounded works, see M. Rediker, “‘Under the Banner of King Death’: The Social World of Anglo-American Pirates, 1716 to 1726,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 38, 2 (1981), pp. 203-227; *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and his most recent, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004). Professor Rediker’s work pertains mainly to the period 1716-1726, when the cyclical post-war period of unemployed privateers caused the “golden age” of piracy—with its libertarian and anti-authoritarian bent—to take shape. My own project and claims of cultural and social normalcy among pirates expand the analysis to the seventeenth century.

<sup>4</sup> See René Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), p. 460. The historiography on the Atlantic World has grown exponentially in the past decade, but a classic starting point is Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973). For the most recent updates and reviews, see H-Atlantic discussion network, <http://www.h-net.org/~atlantic>. In addition to Barendse, a very good and explicitly Braudelian treatment of the Indian Ocean region is Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003); see also, K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

inhabitants and their sponsors over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

In many ways, the Madagascar pirate settlements very much belong to Philip Curtin's "broader pattern of culture change on and just beyond the frontiers of European expansion – a pattern that appeared in the seventeenth century in widely scattered parts of the world." The settlers mirror most especially "the transfrontier cow killers" of the 1660s Caribbean – the *boucaniers* of western Hispaniola, who lived on cattle hunting and trading between bouts of piracy, though there are some important differences. In Curtin's framework, the Caribbean buccaneers "flourished for a time...suppressed and dispossessed by the forward movement of European settlement colonies."<sup>5</sup> The pirate settlers of Madagascar also flourished for a time, but were suppressed and dispossessed by a different combination of factors. The "forward movement of European settlement colonies" took place not in Madagascar, but 8,000 nautical miles away in the Mid-Atlantic and New England colonies, which supplied most of the settler population in numbers well over a thousand.<sup>6</sup> More importantly, not merely local resistance but actual indigenous control of the region was the most determining factor in the demise of a number of the Madagascar settlements, while the political influence exerted by the Mughal emperors on the English Parliament, particularly regarding the East India Company, acted as an additional important suppressing factor.

### Pirates and the Imperial Atlantic

From the standpoint of Governor Fletcher, making use of veteran seamen like Tew was pragmatic, if not ideal policy during this time of unremitting imperial warfare in an undermanned colony short of skilled mariners to defend its coasts and central harbor. Throughout the seventeenth century, the legal distinction between pirates and officially sanctioned privateers was murky at best, with much crossover and blending between the two categories.<sup>7</sup> The European policy of "no peace beyond the line" had been the norm

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<sup>5</sup> See Philip Curtin *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 92. *Boucan* derived from a French word meaning to roast or dry meat over an open fire, which the *boucaniers* would do after hunting feral cattle. They then sold hides and dried meat to passing ships and also traded in the port towns. Curtin also discusses the *trekboere* of Cape Town and *coureurs de bois (mètis)* in the Saint Lawrence Valley. See also, Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> The Board of Trade, fearing the creation of a pirate state, reported 1,500 men, 40-50 guns, and 17 ships at the settlement on St. Mary's alone. See Representation of the Board of Trade, January 17, 1698, CO 324/6, fols. 222-225, Public Records Office, London.

<sup>7</sup> The most comprehensive book-length study of piracy law is Alfred P. Rubin, *The Law of Piracy*, U.S. Naval War College International Law Studies v. 63 (Newport,: Naval War College Press, 1988); see also, Lauren Benton, "Oceans of Law: Piracy and the Legal Geography of the Seventeenth Century Seas," presented at the American Bar

for well over a century, so that even in times of officially declared peace, hostilities in the Atlantic and the Caribbean were to be expected.<sup>8</sup> In the 1690s, when warfare between the French and English was constant, Fletcher's decision to commission pirates like Tew as legal privateers should be seen as a necessary measure to protect the beleaguered colony.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it came about that the pirate Tew found himself riding in a coach with the governor of New York, trading tales that can perhaps be reconstructed from fragments of the archival record. Slowly traveling through town, past the city's "auncient buildings," described by another contemporary observer as, "very meane...theyr streets Nasty & unregarded...Theyr shops very irregular, & few or none open,"<sup>10</sup> the governor and the pirate conceivably spoke of the depressed economy in the North American colonies. Perhaps Fletcher complained to Tew about the decline in trade with the Caribbean colonies brought on by King William's War (also known as The War of the League of Augsburg) and the generally heavy yoke of London's mercantile trading policies. Perchance their discussion involved the incessant rumors of a French invasion fleet, or the recent discovery of a French pirate hiding in Long Island Sound, who upon interrogation revealed that he was, "Well acquainted with this coast and...that 700 Recruits were sent to Canada this last Sumer, and that he was in Company of the Fleet."<sup>11</sup> Both Fletcher and Tew were certainly aware of the recent ransacking of nearby Block Island by the infamous French pirate, Montauban. Maybe Fletcher complained to Tew about the lack of imperial naval support for his colony, since only one patrol boat, the *Richmond* – grounded in ice from October through March – had been provided by the

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Foundation colloquium, Chicago, April 8, 2002; and N.A.M. Rodger, "The New Atlantic: Naval Warfare in the Sixteenth Century," in *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. John B. Hattendorf and Richard W. Unger (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> In practical terms, "the line" was an imaginary marker lying somewhere off the Atlantic coast of northwest Europe. French pirates had begun attacking Spanish galleons near the Iberian coast as early as 1523, and Elizabethan "Sea Dogs," soon joined by Dutch marauders, continued the assault into the seventeenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Governor Fletcher was eventually recalled from his post under allegations of corruption, and indeed, had commissioned a number of acknowledged pirates on privateering missions. As an indication of the fluidity between piracy and privateering in this time period, Fletcher's successor, the much-lauded Governor Bellomont, commissioned the most famous pirate of all, Captain William Kidd, on a privateering mission to capture pirates. Even avowed political adversaries of Fletcher's thought piracy to be "an honest occupation," see, for example, Staats to Johannes de Peyster, 10 July, 1699, de Peyster MSS, New York Historical Society. The best book-length study is Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Wayne Andrews (ed.), "A Glance at New York in 1697: The Travel Diary of Dr. Benjamin Bullivant," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 60 (1956), p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Gov. Fletcher to the Committee of Trade, 10 Oct., 1693, *NYCD* IV: 68.

Lords of Trade and Plantation who administered the colony of New York from their comfortable English estates, thousands of miles across the Atlantic.<sup>12</sup>

Given these difficult circumstances, Governor Fletcher courted Tew and treated him with the respect afforded to important guests of the colony.<sup>13</sup> Their conversation left such a strong impression on Fletcher that some years later the governor remarked that Tew was:

a man of courage and activity, but of the greatest sence and remembrance of what he had seen, of any seaman I had mett. He was also what they call a very pleasant man, soe that at some times when the labours of my day were over it was some divertisement as well as information to me, to heare him talke.<sup>14</sup>

If this information included Tew's early life and career, Fletcher would have learned it began in New England, sometime in the early 1660s, where Tew was apparently born to a Rhode Island seaman.<sup>15</sup> This was a common profession in the port towns of the North American colonies, whose central function, at least from London's perspective, was to serve as mercantile satellites of the metropole. In the eyes of the Lords of Plantation and Trade, the colonies existed solely for the economic profit of the mother country: in addition to offering personal aggrandizement to the Lords, the trade networks established early on also linked London with the North American and Caribbean colonies, and increasingly, with West Africa and the growing trade in African slave labor.<sup>16</sup> The trade was not yet strictly "triangular," since inter-colonial commerce between the North American mainland and the Caribbean flowed in both directions, as did trade – as we shall see – with colonial ports in Africa and eventually with the Indian Ocean. The colonial port towns of the Atlantic – New York, Boston, Newport, Charleston, Bridgetown, Philadelphia, Port Royal, etc. – were the nodes of this transatlantic web, and the sailors and seamen were the sinews that connected all the strands. The mobility of these seamen helps account for many socio-economic similarities and cultural

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<sup>12</sup> The log of the *HMS Richmond* can be found in the Admiralty Records, Public Records Office, London: 51/4310. The Little Ice Age of the 1690s kept New York Harbor frozen during the winter months.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Bullivant, a traveling physician from London, was treated by Fletcher to a similar coach ride in 1697. See Andrews, "A Glance," p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> *NYCD* IV: 447.

<sup>15</sup> For biographical background on Tew (and others), see David F. Marley, *Pirates and Privateers of the Americas* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1994). A "Richard Tew" appears as a petitioner on the original Rhode Island charter of 1663, but it is unclear what, if any, relationship existed between Richard Tew and Thomas Tew. See "Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations," July 8, 1663, Item 512, Vol. 5 (1661-1668), pp. 148-150. Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1574-1739, CD-ROM, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, John C. Appleby and Mandy Banton, (London: Routledge, with the Public Record Office, 2000), [hereafter cited as *CSP*].

<sup>16</sup> See I.K. Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy: The Board of Trade in Colonial Administration, 1696-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

continuities, including the utilization of pirates, in the port towns throughout the far-flung colonial Atlantic littoral. In many ways, New York City more closely resembled the Caribbean port of Port Royal than it did Albany, located upriver in its hinterland.

Tew, for example, had lived and worked as a privateer in Jamaica in the early to mid-1680s, where he would have been based in Port Royal, a well-established haven for Caribbean buccaneers. Although privateers are often associated with the sixteenth-century reign of Elizabeth, as N.A.M. Rodger explains, “there could be no privateering in the Elizabethan age or earlier, because there was no private exception; private, commercial warfare was the normal form of warfare in the open sea.”<sup>17</sup> Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, even as true European navies began to appear, royal leaders continued to rely upon privateers during wartime, issuing official commissions, or letters of marque, to individual mariners and ships in support of marauding missions. In times of peace, such commissions were called letters of reprisal, and as Robert C. Ritchie has explained, allowed an “aggrieved subject to steal from the subjects of the prince whose subjects stole his property in the first place.” Since there were not yet any formal methods of insurance in place, this was a “crude way of compensating for losses at sea, and illustrates the weak institutional structure of international relations at the time,” allowing many opportunities for abuse.<sup>18</sup>

The governors of Jamaica, in particular, actively encouraged buccaneers to utilize Port Royal as a base, and liberally commissioned them as privateers in the hope that the presence of the heavily armed pirate ships would discourage imperial enemies from invading the island. English crown finances could not yet fund such a fleet. In addition to protection, moreover, the citizens of Jamaica profited from supplies and services sold to the pirates, while Jamaican merchants acquired highly desirable cargoes at very little cost. This strategy proved remarkably successful, since no serious attempts to attack Jamaica occurred after the English seized it from Spain in 1655. As a bonus, the merchants of Port Royal grew rich on the plunder extracted through raids on Spanish towns and ships. Given its prior success in the war-torn Caribbean, the policy of utilizing pirates as privateers must have struck Fletcher, who was facing similar problems in his own colony in the midst of King William’s War, as an intriguing antidote to direct attacks.

By the end of the seventeenth century, meanwhile, the Caribbean was witnessing a transformation based upon a “rising number of naval ships...stiffening Spanish defenses...(and) growing trade with the Spanish colonies,” as Ritchie relates.<sup>19</sup> In addition, and perhaps more importantly in the global framework, the sugar plantation economies, built on the backs of African slave labor, began providing tremendous profits

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<sup>17</sup> Rodger continues, “unfortunately the English jurists who devised the concept of privateering used the old term to name their new licenses: they called them *letters of marque*...However often we may speak or write of ‘Elizabethan privateers’, the term is strictly anachronistic; there were no privateers in the sixteenth century.” “The New Atlantic,” p. 240.

<sup>18</sup> Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ritchie, “Samuel Burgess, Pirate,” in *Authority and Resistance in Early New York*, ed. William Pencak and Conrad E. Wright (New York: New York Historical Society, 1988), p. 116.

and a stable commodity for the Atlantic trade. As such, Caribbean administrators and merchants – as well as the metropolitan overseers in London – began to take a more active stance against piracy through the implementation of more stringent laws and the introduction of vice-admiralty courts throughout the colonies. Anglo-American privateers like Tew, finely attuned to these changing international dynamics, adjusted by altering their targets to French, and to a lesser extent, Dutch prizes, as dictated by shifting English imperial interests. Circum-Caribbean raiding campaigns began to extend northward along the North American seaboard and out into the open Atlantic, ranging as far east as the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands – important transnational maritime way stations controlled by the Iberians – and, as the slave trade increased with the rise of the sugar plantations, to the West African coast, where Europeans had established a number of fortified slaving factories.<sup>20</sup> It was during one such voyage, commissioned during King William’s War by the lieutenant governor of Bermuda in December 1692 to raid the French fort at Gorée in the Gambia River, that Tew bought a partial owner’s share, indicating his accumulation of some wealth before he turned pirate. Tew took command of the 70-ton sloop *Amity*, a rather small vessel for its intended voyage, and, accompanied by another ship, set off into the Atlantic with a crew of roughly sixty men. Whether or not Tew planned in advance to forgo his stated mission and “go on the account” will never be known, but the event occurred not long after departure. Separated from his consort in the midst of an Atlantic gale and suddenly alone with his crew on the open sea, Tew decided to double the Cape, a most difficult task which he had never before attempted, and try his luck in the rich trading grounds of the Indian Ocean seas. First, however, he had to convince his men.

Tew’s history, as written by Captain Charles Johnson in 1724, includes an incredible speech allegedly given by the Rhode Island captain at this critical juncture of the voyage. It revealed some very plausible motivations for Tew’s decision to turn pirate:

That they were not ignorant of the design with which the governor fitted them out; the taking and destroying of the French factory; that he, indeed, readily agreed to take a commission to this end, though contrary to his judgment, because it was being employed; but that he thought it a very injudicious expedition, which, did they succeed in, would be of no use to the public, and only advantage [a] private company of men, from whom they could expect no reward of their bravery; that he could see nothing but danger in the undertaking, without prospect of a booty; that he could not suppose any man fond of fighting for fighting’s sake; and few ventured their lives, but with some view either of particular interest or public good; but here was not the least appearance of either. Wherefore, he was of opinion, that they should turn their thoughts on what might

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<sup>20</sup> The Royal African Company’s factory was established at Bance Island in the mouth of the Sierra Leone River in the 1670s. A classic account is found in K.G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957). For a recent account of the lives of the London merchants involved in the trade, see David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). For a recent account of the French slave trade, see Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

better their circumstances; and if they were so inclined, he would undertake to shape a course which should lead them to ease and plenty, in which they might pass the rest of their days. That one bold push would do their business and they might return home, not only without danger, but even with reputation.

After the captain's speech, Tew's men are alleged to have cried out, "A gold chain, or a wooden leg, we'll stand by you!"<sup>21</sup> While the dramatic and literary attributes of such an exchange are unmistakable, the essence of it falls within the accepted knowledge of pirate society and culture.

While privateers and pirates plied the seas plundering other ships, they undoubtedly practiced a rough form of democracy aboard their own vessels, electing captains, distributing wealth equitably, and even establishing a form of insurance for any crew members who were injured or otherwise incapacitated during their excursions.<sup>22</sup> According to Johnson's account, the first thing the crew of the *Amity* did upon turning pirate was elect a quartermaster, basically a second-in-command, whose opinion, according to Johnson, was "like the Mufti's among the Turks; the Captain can undertake nothing which the Quarter-Master does not approve. We may say, the Quarter-Master is an humble Imitation of the Roman Tribune of the People; he speaks for, and looks after the Interest of the Crew."<sup>23</sup> The elective and honorary character of this position set it apart from the more humdrum role of quartermaster aboard merchantmen and in the royal navy, where the quartermaster would mostly oversee the daily tasks of the crew.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For a long time, the true identity of Captain Johnson was believed to have been Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Captain Singleton*, among many other related books. The *General History of the Pirates* is still indexed under "Defoe" by most libraries. Given the strong stylistic similarities and literary content, this is unsurprising, though inaccurate. In 1988, P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens, two scholars from New York University, challenged the Defoe theory in their book, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). Johnson's account is now generally accepted as historical, though there is no way of verifying the dialogue. See David Cordingly's introduction in *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates* (Guilford, CT: The Lyon Press, 1998), pp. xii-xiii. The quotation is found in: "Of Captain Tew," *A General History of the Pyrates*, ed. Manuel Schonhorn (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 422.

<sup>22</sup> In separate contemporary accounts, Woodes Rogers, Alexander Exquemelin and Captain Johnson have all described such democratic practices. Furthermore, the recent excavation of the *Whydah* wreck off the coast of New England has uncovered Spanish coins, or "pieces of eight," which bear the marks of being equally cut or divided by a sharp blade. See Barry Clifford, *Expedition Whydah: The Story of the World's First Excavation of a Pirate Treasure Ship and the Man Who Found Her* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999); the Whydah Museum is located in Provincetown, MA.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, "Of Captain Tew," *A General History* (1972), p. 423.

<sup>24</sup> See Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 113; and Rediker, *Villains*, pp. 66-68.



If, during their conversation, Tew had explained these rough forms of pirate democracy to the governor, Fletcher would likely have been struck by how much they contrasted with the land-based politics he had become accustomed to since his arrival in the turbulent colony. Sent from London to restore order after the recent upheaval of the Leisler Rebellion, which divided New Yorkers' loyalties for the next two decades, Fletcher deepened the rift by refusing to allow any Leislerians to sit in the provincial assembly until pardoned. When the pardons did finally arrive from London, he nonetheless dissolved the assembly, citing its inability to put the province in a proper state of defense. He then turned to significantly more thuggish methods, allegedly admitting that he had threatened, "to pistoll any man that should chuse Peter De la Noy [a prominent Leislerian] to serve for that place."<sup>25</sup> Testimony from another infamous privateer-turned-pirate, William Kidd, indicated that Fletcher, a royally appointed governor, had allied himself with a motley crew of soldiers and sailors, making them freemen of the city and thus enabling them to vote – a tantalizing glimpse into the social and cultural politics of New York at this colonial juncture. The fact that the governor also had them patrol the streets and threaten to impress anyone voting "incorrectly" suggests a methodology of political violence that runs counter to the alluring semblance of democracy found aboard the pirate ships.<sup>26</sup>

#### The Pirate Settlement of St. Mary's, Madagascar

It was not just aboard the ships, however, that pirates practiced their egalitarian ways. Their ways, indeed, were not always so universally egalitarian, either, as evidenced if we trace Tew and his men into the Indian Ocean world dominated by Mughal trade. After rounding the Cape, the pirates made a line for "the Babs" (the narrow choke point of the Red Sea), where they knew they would find richly laden Muslim vessels bound for trade, as well as pilgrimage, to the Red Sea ports of Jiddah and Mocha. It was not long before they scored, intercepting a vessel belonging to the Great Indian Mughal, Aurangzeb. After a one-sided fusillade, the men of the *Amity* boarded the Muslim vessel, despite the hundreds of Indian troops on board; the pirates allegedly took the vessel without suffering a single loss. Afterwards, Tew and his men sailed to the northeastern

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<sup>25</sup> Fletcher to the Lords of Trade, 19 Nov., 1694, *NYCD* IV: 113. There is little consensus among colonial Americanists regarding the origins and background of the Leisler Rebellion, which took place in the wake of William and Mary's accession to the throne. For a full-length study, see Jerome R. Reich, *Leisler's Rebellion: A Study in Democracy in New York, 1664-1720* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); for a more recent interpretation utilizing new archival sources, see David William Vorhees, "The 'fervent Zeale' of Jacob Leisler," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 51, 3, (1994).

<sup>26</sup> See Proceedings of the Lords of Trade, 28 Aug., 1695 (Whitehall), *NYCD* IV: 128. Regarding Fletcher's admission: "The Deponent (P. French) went to dine with Coll. Fletcher with the intent to know the truth of such Report and having spoke of it there in Coll. Fletcher's presence he the said Coll. Fletcher did not deny but rather owned that he had said so."

coast of Madagascar, where they encountered a thriving Euro-Malagasy trading post settlement whose roots extended back to colonial Manhattan.

On the approach by sea to the pirate settlement at St. Mary's, the island's skyline was dominated by waving palm fronds, out of which arose a substantial fort equipped with anywhere between five and fifty guns, depending on which reports are to be believed.<sup>27</sup> The excellent harbor toward the southern end of St. Mary's was one of few anchorages along the eastern side of Madagascar, and had the additional defensive advantage of a small island at its mouth that narrowed the approaches.

When Thomas Tew and *Amity* arrived in October 1693, they were heartily greeted by Adam Baldrige, an Anglo-American agent from New York who had arrived at Madagascar two and a half years earlier to establish a trading post. Baldrige's background, like most of these pirate-settlers, is somewhat shadowy, but he had allegedly killed a man in Jamaica in 1685 and thereupon turned pirate.<sup>28</sup> Given the relatively small fraternity of Anglo-American pirates and privateers, he would have certainly been familiar with many of the former Caribbean pirates now working the Indian Ocean region. By his own admission, Baldrige was most interested in trading and raiding for slaves, an assertion readily borne out by the belligerent actions he took upon his arrival. Immediately embroiling himself in an inter-clan war on the main island, Baldrige claimed he took seventy cattle and an unknown number of indigenous slaves. With this initial "working capital," he settled on what later became known as Pirate's Island in the lagoon at St. Mary's and began the construction of a wooden fort, which was eventually bolstered by numerous cannon obtained from passing ships.<sup>29</sup> Baldrige's trading post crudely resembled the slave factories and forts that had already been established on Africa's west coast. But instead of being financed and maintained "from above" by joint stock companies and their shareholders (or by the state, as in the case of the Portuguese Estado da India), the post at St. Mary's sprung up "from below" through the actions of pirates and ordinary seamen – albeit with the financial backing of some of New York's wealthiest merchants. The extensive involvement of many Dutch-born colonial merchants in this enterprise, most of whom were familiar with the workings of joint-stock companies from their own involvement in the Dutch East and West Indies Companies, might account for the similarities in the Indo-Atlantic entrepreneurial venture.

The principal colonial merchant involved was Frederick Philipse, who in large measure financed Baldrige's slaving and trading post on Madagascar. Philipse had emigrated to New Amsterdam in the 1650s as Frederick Flypsen, one of Peter Stuyvestant's carpenters. Under the generous surrender terms offered by the English, the Dutch-born Flypsen anglicized his name and swore a simple oath of allegiance to the crown, thereby qualifying as a loyal subject with all the rights and privileges of an English citizen. He married a wealthy widow who had been left a fortune in ships and building lots in Manhattan, and once the English annexation of New Netherland was

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<sup>27</sup> See *CSP*, Item 115 i, Vol. 16 (1697-1698), pp. 68-71, and the depositions of Adam Baldrige and Samuel Perkins in *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Documents*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970) [henceforth cited as *PP*]; also, Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*, p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Deposition of Samuel Perkins, *PP*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>29</sup> Reports ranged widely in their descriptions of the fortifications.

consummated, the entire English empire was open to him for trade.<sup>30</sup> Philipse may have become acquainted with pirates from his involvement in the shipping of Yucatan logwood during the 1680s, since many of the logwood cutters doubled as pirates and privateers during the off-season or after Spanish raids on their settlements near Trist.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, as early as 1682, Philipse had possibly made contacts with Caribbean freebooters during his unsuccessful salvaging operations for sunken Spanish treasure in the Bahamas. While speculative, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that Tew was a party to one or more of these enterprises.

Caribbean buccaneers first entered the Indian Ocean after pursuing the Manila galleons across the Pacific in the 1680s. It was not long before Madagascar developed into their favorite base, and a number of settlements grew on the island, even flourishing for a time. This occurred not because of any utopian desire to form separate communities, but because of Madagascar's geographically strategic location near lucrative Red Sea trade routes, because of the lack of any dominant naval or jurisdictional presence in the immediate region, and perhaps most significantly, because of the willingness of the locals to accommodate them. The island of St. Mary's became a particularly favored locale for the marauders. The natural abundance of the land included anti-scorbutic fruits (pineapples, oranges, lemons), bananas, coconuts, yams, rice – which was grown locally and was a common item of trade with the indigenous groups – taro, honey, chicken, turtle, fish and beef in the form of cattle, a pirate culinary contribution that can be traced to the Caribbean *boucaniers* of the early seventeenth century. The bays and inlets of St. Mary's were ideal for concealment from hostile shipping, and its long sloping beaches perfect for careening and cleaning their wooden ships of weeds and barnacles and for repairing leaks and timbers riddled by the tropical Toredoworm. The lack of any centralized political authority in the region was another important factor – nearly all European reports, beginning with the Portuguese around 1500, indicate that the island was fragmented into small, riverine sovereignties.<sup>32</sup> A broad and rich range of cultural, religious and ethnic ingredients made up the various island groups when Europeans

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<sup>30</sup> Philipse was also involved in the upriver Indian fur trade, as well as Virginia tobacco. See Jacob Judd, "Frederick Philipse and the Madagascar Trade," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 55, 4 (1971); and Patricia Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 60-62.

<sup>31</sup> On the logwood trade, see Arthur M. Wilson, "The Logwood Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Essays in the History of Modern Europe*, ed. Donald McKay (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1963). A detailed first-hand account of the logwood cutters and their settlements is found in *Dampier's Voyages*, 2 vols., ed. John Masfield (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1906). See also the author's forthcoming dissertation.

<sup>32</sup> For a comparative perspective, see Lauren Benton, "Lost in Atlantic Space: Colonizing and Intelligence in Riverine Regions, 1450-1650," presented at the Lost Colonies Conference, McNeil Center for Early American Studies, Philadelphia, PA, March 26-27, 2004.

arrived, though the predominant culture appeared to have been of Malay-Indonesian origin.<sup>33</sup>

Islamic slave traders had been involved in the northwestern part of the island for centuries. The Portuguese, who utilized the route along the Mozambique Channel, were also active mostly in the northwest coastal region of Madagascar where they attempted to settle, evangelize, and trade for slaves. An English settlement effort, financed in part by Prince Rupert in the midst of the civil war, languished after a year in 1646, while the French colony at Fort Dauphin on the southern tip of the island, founded in 1643, was eventually abandoned after three decades. The French would not return to colonize until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> When European plantations were established in the seas surrounding Madagascar in the second half of the seventeenth century, however, the demand for Malagasy slaves rapidly increased. The Cape Colony Dutch and the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (“VOC”) commenced buying slaves at Madagascar in the late 1650s, mostly for use on Mauritius, but also for Batavia and Cape Town. They were generally pleased with their efforts, calling the Malagasy “strong, robust and rudely built.” Meanwhile, the French sought Madagascar slaves for their new colony on Bourbon (Reunion Island) and the English for St. Helena and Sumatra. North American colonial interlopers, including pirates like Tew, were eager to become involved in this increasingly brisk trade.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The origin of the first Madagascar inhabitants remains the subject of some academic dispute, though it appears fairly certain that they were groups of Indonesian origin who had gradually migrated around the Indian Ocean rim, touching the East African coast before settling in Madagascar, a process which probably took place over a considerable period of time, beginning in the earliest centuries of the Common Era. A second wave of migration occurred during the second half of the first millennium when Arab expansion along the east coast of Africa pushed some East African coastal groups across the wide channel to Madagascar. Though continued Indonesian migration ended by the twelfth century, the language and culture remained predominantly Indo-Malay. Arab traders, known as Antalaotra, or “people from across the seas,” also arrived some time in the first millennium, further influencing the cultural mix. The most detailed general history on Madagascar is Grandidier’s *Collection des ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1903-7). For English language histories, see Mervyn Brown, *A History of Madagascar* (London: Damian Tunnacliffe, 1995); and Raymond Kent, *Early Kingdoms in Madagascar, 1500-1700* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). On slavery and identity in nineteenth century Madagascar, see Pier Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> See W. Foster, “An English Settlement in Madagascar in 1645-1646,” *English Historical Review* 27, Issue 106 (1912); and Glenn J. Ames, “Colbert’s Indian Ocean Strategy of 1664-1674: A Reappraisal,” *French Historical Studies* 16, 3 (1990).

<sup>35</sup> See Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, esp. chs. 6 and 10. The Dutch quote is found on p. 262; see also Frenise A. Logan, “The British East India Company and African Slavery in Benkulen, Sumatra, 1687-1792,” *The Journal of Negro History* 41, 4

English and colonial vessels began importing Malagasy slaves into the Atlantic world, including the West Indies, Massachusetts and New York as early as the 1670s, providing an alternative to the Royal Africa Company (“RAC”) monopoly on the West African coast.<sup>36</sup> There were a number of reasons for colonial interest in the East African trade, not least of which was neglect by the RAC in delivering slaves to the northern colonies. There was also profit to consider: whereas a sum of £3 to £4 was required on the west coast of Africa, where the RAC’s slave factories controlled the trade in human chattel, it cost only ten shillings in goods to purchase a Malagasy slave. In the late 1680s and 1690s, vessels from New York, controlled by prominent merchants like Philipse and Stephan Delancey, engaged heavily in this trade. In a remarkable display of entrepreneurship during the depressed 1690s, New York merchants became aware that pirates were utilizing Madagascar as a base and decided to supply them there, to provide regular ferry and mail service to and from New York, and to employ them as cultural brokers in the slave trade.<sup>37</sup>

More than mere “pirate haunts,” as they have traditionally been depicted, the settlements at Madagascar, especially St. Mary’s, developed from below into complex trans-cultural habitats.<sup>38</sup> In his contemporary account, Captain Charles Johnson explained how the Madagascar pirates, cognizant of native tribal enmities, overcame inferior numbers with superior firepower while forging alliances with certain local princes to obtain island fiefdoms for themselves. The pirates took natives as prisoners of war and forced them into slavery, either for themselves or by selling them to Baldrige, who eventually became known as the Pirate King. The trade with pirates garnered the most attention from contemporary imperial officials, as well as present-day historians, but slaving was the key factor in the formulation of these settlements, as well as their eventual demise. Philipse declared as much in his written instructions to Baldrige: “For negroes in these times will fetch thirty pounds and upwards in the head...It is by negroes

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(1956), pp. 339-348. Malagasy slaves were used to construct fortifications at the Fort Saint James pepper factory.

<sup>36</sup> See "An account of His Majesty's Island of Barbadoes and the Government thereof," Feb 3/13, 1676, CSP Item 812, Vol. 9 (1675-1676), pp. 348-349, CO 29/2, 1-14.

<sup>37</sup> See Judd, “Frederick Philipse”; Virginia Platt, “The East India Company and the Madagascar Slave Trade,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd series, 26, 4 (1969); James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), pp. 279-281, 386; and Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 38-40. In light of the recent scholarship, Philip Curtin’s argument that “the safest course is simply to disregard the slave imports of the northern colonies” is no longer tenable. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 143.

<sup>38</sup> Ritchie, for example, acknowledges that the pirates helped create a unique era in Madagascar history, but he elides the colonial complexity of these settlements – and the fundamental role of the Malagasy – in stating, “They were only an offshoot of the buccaneer raids in the Indian Ocean,” *Captain Kidd*, p. 85. Clearly, there was something more complicated taking place.

that I finde my cheivest Proffitt. All other trade I look upon as by the by.”<sup>39</sup> Though Baldrige did not provide any further information about his initial slave raid, Johnson detailed one absorbing account of how the slave trading operations worked in practice.

Spying a passing slave ship on one occasion, some Malagasy lit a fire on the beach to attract the vessel to shore, a technique widely practiced on all coasts of Africa at this time. The ship commander indicated his interest in slaves and was told there were few unless some of the crew would assist the natives in going to war against a neighboring tribe. The chief, Andian Chimenatto, offered to put his own wives and family aboard the slave ship to allay the slavers’ fears of a trap. Twenty slavers joined the Malagasy warriors and thus went off to war:

They took a Town and a great Number of Slaves, out of whom he (Chimenatto) ordered the Captain to pick and cull what they pleas’d; they asked the Price, he said, he required nothing, if they would let their Men go out once more. They went on a second Expedition, took several Towns, and brought down some thousand Slaves, beside great Droves of Cattle.

The two Ships took their Choice of about 6000 Slaves, which with fresh Provision, and Provision for their Voyage, cost them only 2 or 3 Barrels of Powder, and a few Arms.<sup>40</sup>

The passage leaves unclear how many of the “choice” slaves were chosen out of the many thousands, but it is evident that significant numbers were made available for the pirate-slavers. Some of the latter remained on the island when the ship sailed back to the Americas, and when the slaving ship returned the following year the same pattern was repeated.

Though slave raiding was a major preoccupation in the settlements, there is evidence of more balanced social interactions between the indigenous and European populations, as well as many examples of local dominance.<sup>41</sup> When Baldrige was later deposed by the English Admiralty Courts, he explained how indigenous rulers traded with pirates from their own supplies of rice and cattle, providing a glimpse of a transcultural society that was not controlled by Europeans. While some pirates may have had experience in proto-industrial agricultural labor, especially cutting logwood in the settlements near the Campeche Bay region of Honduras and the Yucatan, they could not have had any experience in the cultivation of rice. They therefore had to rely upon indigenous knowledge for cultivating their own fields, or otherwise traded with locals for this important dietary staple.<sup>42</sup> Cattle raising, on the other hand, had a long and colorful

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<sup>39</sup> Philipse to Baldrige, 25 February, 1695, cited in Judd, “Frederick Philipse,” p. 358.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, “Of Captain Cornelius,” *A General History*, p. 603.

<sup>41</sup> There are numerous examples of shipwrecked Euro-Americans who were either enslaved or otherwise barely survived the time with their “hosts.” Samuel Burgess, for example, stated that he was “glad to see a whigt faise having lived hard amongst ye Blackes, not having anything to Eat But what I was forst to Begg of them.” Cited in Ritchie, “Samuel Burgess, Pirate,” p. 134, n. 9 (High Court of Admiralty Records, I/98, fol. 44, Public Records Office, London).

<sup>42</sup> On Madagascar rice in the American colonies, see Duncan Heyward, *Seed from Madagscar* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937). For a persuasive

history in pirate culture, beginning with the Caribbean *boucaniers* of the sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup>

An examination of the initial cargo sent with Baldrige from New York indicates intentions to establish a long-term settlement. In addition to the expected manufactured goods, clothes, cases of rum, and barrels of gunpowder to be exchanged with the pirate-settlers for their plundered cargoes of textiles, silks, calicoes, drugs, spices, jewels, gold, and hard currency, the cargo included bibles and catechism books, as well as seeds and gardening tools.<sup>44</sup> These are items that indicate a much more complex colonial space than a mere “pirate haunt.” The presence of bibles and catechisms in the cargo lists raises significant questions regarding their anticipated use, whether for the maintenance of Christian beliefs among these pirate-settlers, or for attempts to convert the local Malagasy. There is anecdotal evidence in Captain Johnson's account, including a reference to “an Invitation from one Ort Van Tyle, who liv'd on the Main of Madagascar, to come to the Ceremony of christening two of his Children.”<sup>45</sup> (Interestingly, Governor Fletcher, who was instrumental in establishing the Anglican church in New York and providing it with public support, allegedly proselytized Thomas Tew during their carriage ride, admonishing him for “a vile habit of swearing” and presenting him with a bible or catechism book to help him mend his ways.<sup>46</sup>) Graham Russell Hodges has recently observed that Catholicized slaves from Madagascar arrived in New York in the 1680s, indicating successful proselytizing efforts by the Portuguese or French among a segment

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argument relating to the West African origins of rice cultivation in the Carolina Low Country, see Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Harvard University Press, 2001). Carney's book is a social scientific study that relies upon earlier work done by historians Peter Wood and Daniel Littlefield. See Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1975); and Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) My preliminary research indicates that Madagascar may instead be the source of the *sativa* strain, reaching the Americas through trade with pirates in the 1680s and 1690s.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed description of the process of “boucaning” pork, see Captain Johnson, *The History of the Lives and Actions of the Most Famous Highwaymen* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1814), p. 501.

<sup>44</sup> See Platt, “The East India Company,” pp. 550-551; Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*, pp. 37-38; *PP*, pp. 153-257; Judd, p. 363; and “Deposition of Adam Baldrige,” *PP*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>45</sup> Van Tyle had been a New York merchant of Dutch origins and sailed to Madagascar with Pirate Captain Hoar. See *CSP*, Item 740 xii, Vol. 17 (1699), p. 407; and Johnson, “Of Captain Howard,” *A General History* (1972), p. 492.

<sup>46</sup> *NYCD* IV: 447. Fletcher was so dedicated to the successful establishment of the Anglican Church in New York that he remitted the entire amount of the Church's wheat rents during his term, a feat that no other governor accomplished during this period. See “Extract of an Address from the Rector, Churchwarden and Vestrymen of Trinity Church in the City of New Yorke in America to the Queen,” *CSP*, Item 643 i, Vol. 27 (1712-1714), p. 331.

of the Malagasy population that was eventually transported to the Americas.<sup>47</sup> When Euro-American settlers died in Madagascar – a not uncommon occurrence given the prevalence of disease and warfare – Johnson often notes their burial in the “usual ceremony.”<sup>48</sup> A Christian culture thus appears to have played a prevalent role in the lives of many of the pirates – and perhaps some of the locals – of Madagascar.

The maintenance of Christian practices, however, was not necessarily the *modus vivendi* of all the settlers on Madagascar. There is evidence that some pirates converted to Islam, including former pirate captain James Kelly (also known as Gillam), who spent at least one and a half years at Madagascar,<sup>49</sup> and many colonial transplants developed far-reaching sexual relationships with Malagasy women. Johnson’s famous assertion that the pirates of Madagascar married “the most beautiful of the Negro women, not one or two, but as many as they liked, so that every one of them had as great a Seraglio as the Grand Seigneur at Constantinople,” might be an example of scintillating poetic license by the best-selling eighteenth-century author, but there is little doubt that sexual liaisons and marriages were common.<sup>50</sup> In one particularly insightful passage that elucidates the prominence of local women as well as the priority of slaving, an English deponent testified that both Baldrige and his assistant, Lawrence Johnston, were married to “country women,” adding that “many of the others are married at Madagascar... Their design in marrying the country women is to ingratiate themselves with the inhabitants, with whom they go into war against other petty kings. If one Englishman goes with the Prince with whom he lives to war, he has half the slaves that are taken for his pains.”<sup>51</sup>

Some of the marriages between Anglo-Europeans and the Malagasy women produced “pirate princes,” who became known locally as *zana-malata*. These men were to have considerable impact on local political organization. As anthropologists Jennifer Cole and Yvette Sylla have noted, because of the pirates’ access to firearms, they and their offspring began to act as mediators among the various Betsimisaraka clans, so that two privileged groups developed on the east coast of Madagascar in the early eighteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The first were local clan chiefs whose inherent supremacy was reinforced by their access to guns; the second group were Euro-American pirates who co-existed and intermarried with the Malagasy but were nonetheless seen as possessing an exterior, superior power. The slaving passage from Johnson cited earlier helps point to the importance of the introduction of European weapons to the locals, as well as to the

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<sup>47</sup> Hodges, *Root and Branch*, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. “Of Captain Cornelius,” *A General History* (1972), p. 605.

<sup>49</sup> Kelly was taken into custody by Governor Bellomont, who ordered multiple eyewitness affidavits to verify that Kelly had been circumcised “not after the manner of the Jews.” Kelly eventually escaped from prison in New York in 1699 with the help of local merchants. See Bellomont to Board of Trade, October 20, 1699, *NYCD* IV: 591-595; and Bellomont to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Nov 29, 1699, incl. affidavits, *CSP*, Item 1011, i-iii, Vol. 17 (1699), pp. 551-559.

<sup>50</sup> “Of Captain Avery,” *A General History* (1972), p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> *CSP*, “Narrative of Mr. Henry Watson, who was taken prisoner by the pirates, 15 August, 1696,” Feb 14, 1698, Item 224, Vol. 16 (1697-1698), pp. 106-108.

<sup>52</sup> See Cole, *Forget Colonialism: Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 37-38.



disruptive effects caused by Anglo-American intervention on the internal dynamics of the clans. Johnson further wrote, “The sight of a white Man against them (Malagasy) is such a Damp to their Spirits, that despairing of Success, they are preparing for Flight before they engage.”<sup>53</sup> Perhaps this was because the interloping Euro-American slavers began to ship Malagasy slaves away from their native land to offshore islands, like Reunion (Bourbon).<sup>54</sup> The lucrative trade opportunities brought on by contact with Europeans, particularly the introduction of firearms, further sparked an internal transformation and created the Betsimisaraka foundation, the genesis of which lay in internecine tensions among different ancestries on the east coast.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, the group of ancestries known as the Tsikoa (an alliance of multiple Antatsimo groups) grew jealous of the lucrative trade and control of ports enjoyed by clans further to the north, near St. Mary’s. Under the leadership of Ramanano, a warrior chief, the Tsikoa attacked the northern clans, looting and pillaging the area to the north of Tamatave, which included areas controlled by members of the Antavarata and *zana-malatta* groups. One member of the latter, Ratsimilaho, the son of an English pirate named “Tom” and Rahena, a princess from Fenerive, was in England at the time of the attack. When he returned, bearing gold and arms, he found his people enslaved by the southern clans. At the meeting of the local chiefs called to debate their next move, Ratsimilaho, deploring their submission to Tsikoa tyranny and calling for war, was named *filoha be*, or “big chief.” He launched a surprise dusk attack against the enemy, who were exhausted from a long day’s work ploughing the rice fields. Henceforth, the Tsikoa became known as the Betinimena, or “Covered with Red Mud,” from the rich red laterite soil that covered their bodies. Ramanano, however, counter-attacked and Ratsimilaho was forced to make an alliance with one of the other southern chiefs. At the ceremonial meeting, this alliance became known as the Betsimisaraka, “the many who will not be sundered,” and Ratsimilaho took the name, Ramaromanompo, or “he who is served by many.” The Betsimisaraka foundation, which originated from a creole population of Euro-Malagasy, lasted for two generations, its demise owing both to the death of Ramaromanompo in 1750, as well as the continuing internecine squabbles provoked by foreign traders.<sup>55</sup>

The ethnogenesis of the Betsimisaraka foundation unveils the complexity of the colonial experience at St. Mary’s and the impact of the pirates on the internal dynamics of Madagascar. Ramaromanompo, accompanying his father to England, hinted at an intimate relationship between an English pirate (known only as “Tom”) and his creole son, while the fact that Ramaromanompo returned to Madagascar indicates his continued ties to his kin relations. Furthermore, the significance of the Malagasy women is crucial,

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<sup>53</sup> Johnson, “Of Captain Cornelius,” *A General History* (1972), p. 603. Compare to Samuel Burgess’s quote in note #33.

<sup>54</sup> See Philipse’s orders to Burgess, June 9, 1698, Original Correspondence E/3/54, no. 6572, India Office, London (cited in Ritchie, “Samuel Burgess, Pirate,” p. 135, n. 25).

<sup>55</sup> See Brown, *A History of Madagascar*, pp. 75-83, Cole, pp. 37-38, and Berg, “The Sacred Musket: Tactics, Technology, and Power in Eighteenth Century Madagascar,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, 2 (1985), pp. 265-267. Though the foundation disintegrated, the second largest “ethnic” group in Madagascar today calls itself the Betsimisaraka.

since it was only through their recent unions with Euro-American pirates that the Betsimisaraka became real. As to the paternity of Ramaromanompo, for a long time his father was thought to have been Thomas Tew,<sup>56</sup> but this is an unlikely scenario since Tew spent only a short amount of time at Madagascar on his first voyage and then returned to the North American colonies, not England. Though Tew did eventually return to Madagascar on a second expedition in 1694, there is little chance that he fathered any heirs, since he was killed while attempting to take another prize.<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusion

Tew left St. Mary's upon completion of this first successful expedition to the region, though several dozen of his men made the decision to remain in the pirate colony, where the dynamics of survival competed with notions of democracy. Some of the settlers would die of tropical disease, while fourteen others, unhappy with their share of £1200 each, divided themselves into two groups of seven to fight to the death on the beach, winner take all. The two survivors of the death match split the booty, while the dark red blood of their felled colonial comrades soaked the white sands beneath them as it flowed into the tropical blue Indian Ocean.<sup>58</sup> Tew, however, would not have known their fate, for he had already sailed back to Rhode Island with his captain's share of the loot. He was greeted with great fanfare by the local residents. When the Rhode Island governor, "Honest" John Easton, failed to grant Tew a new privateering commission, Tew made the short journey down to New York, and found himself traveling its port city streets in a very private meeting with the governor. Undoubtedly, he must have told Fletcher that upon his return, he had reimbursed *Amity's* majority owners in Bermuda at fourteen times their original investment, a detail that surely would have interested the financially strapped governor.<sup>59</sup>

Though the exact conversations between Tew and Fletcher can never be known, the historical record does reveal that more than mere words were exchanged. Perhaps it was then, after Tew revealed these exotic tales, that Fletcher, as was later reported, gave

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<sup>56</sup> Brown, *A History of Madagascar*, p. 80.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson's chapters on Tew, and the fictional French pirate, Misson, include an elaborate telling of mixed-European pirate/Malagasy communities spread throughout Madagascar. Most scholars, including the author, agree that Johnson's depiction of Tew at Madagascar is fictional. Tew's death was corroborated by other accounts, including the depositions of Baldrige and Samuel Perkins, found in *PP*.

<sup>58</sup> For the death match, see "Deposition of Samuel Perkins," *PP*, p. 177, and *CSP*, Aug 25, 1698 [Item 771, Vol. 16 (1697-1698), pp. 403-404, CO 323/2, No. 131].

<sup>59</sup> See *CSP*, "Gilbert Nelson to the Council of Trade and Plantations," Nov 4, 1700, Item 903, Vol. 18 (1700), pp. 632 - 633, CO 37/3, No. 45 and CO 38/5, pp. 132-135; "Remonstrance of William Outerbridge and others to Lt. Gov. Bennett," Item 1014 xxxix, Vol. 21 (1702-1703), pp. 622-623, Item 1014 xl, Vol. 21 (1702-1703), p. 623; "Deposition of Gilbert Nelson," Item 1014 xlv, Vol. 21 (1702-1703), p. 624; "Deposition of Capt. Samuel Stone," Item 1014 xlviii, Vol. 21 (1702-1703), p. 624; and "Mr. Larkin to the Council of Trade and Plantations," Jan 26, 1703, Item 237, Vol. 21 (1702-1703), pp. 154-156.

Tew a gold watch “to engage him to make New York his port at his return.”<sup>60</sup> In exchange for the gold watch, Fletcher later admitted to the Plantation Lords, he received “a present which was a curiosity and in value not much.”<sup>61</sup> Given the intense political and economic problems that were wracking his colonial administration, the thought of fostering the pirate trade no doubt appealed greatly to Governor Fletcher.

When the six-horse carriage ride ended and the summer afternoon in New York slipped into evening, the sounds of music and mirth could be heard wafting from the windows of the governor’s hall at Fort James, where the wife of Thomas Tew, along with their two daughters, danced away the night dressed in rich Oriental silks and glittering diamonds. The gala function was, not incidentally, hosted by Governor and Mrs. Fletcher for the Tews and all of New York’s finest, probably including its wealthiest merchant, Frederick Philipse. As Tew watched his wife and daughters glide about the hall, splendidly dressed in their pilfered diamonds and silks, we might wonder if he pondered the possibility that he might never see them again, that the winds of imperial change were in the air and that soon after his departure for a second voyage to the Indian Ocean, an amazing privateering commission would be granted to William Kidd to hunt Tew down. This commission, however, would not be needed. After paying Fletcher the tidy sum of £300 for a new privateering commission, Tew easily rounded up another North American crew and sailed to the Red Sea, where he promptly suffered a death so horrible that his men, once so proud and brave, immediately surrendered to the Mughal ship they had been attempting to board. Their captain, once described as, “a man of courage and activity,” had dropped to the deck in agony and slowly died with his insides spilling out of him, his mid-section having been torn open by a well-placed Mughal shot.

This was neither the last nor most significant shot fired from the Mughals’ direction. Anglo-American pirates, including such nefarious examples as William Kidd and Henry Avery and often flying English colors, continued to harass Mughal trade in the hopes of imitating Thomas Tew’s now infamous first successful expedition.<sup>62</sup> Kidd’s letter of marque, which was commissioned in part to capture Tew, had originated in Parliament and included direct participation by King William III. It was pushed along by East India Company backers who had a major financial stake in the Indian Ocean trade. Kidd, however, turned pirate himself, thus providing an example of definitional fluidity in reverse: the privateer who became a pirate. Only a few years earlier, the surge in piracy had worked mostly in the opposite direction, from pirate to legalized privateer. As the Mughal rulers applied increasing pressure and threatened to dismiss the English from the lucrative East Indian trade, the English state, in turn, began a concerted campaign to eliminate the pirates by establishing admiralty courts in the colonies, unifying the disparate piracy laws, and generally monopolizing violence at sea through expanded naval expenditures. The pirate colonies at Madagascar, now threatened by more frequent

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from Peter de La Noy relative to Governor Fletcher’s Conduct, 13 June, 1695, *NYCD* IV: 223.

<sup>61</sup> *NYCD* IV: 447.

<sup>62</sup> The most infamous of the pirates to follow Tew into the region include Henry Every and William Kidd. Nearly all of the published editions of Johnson have chapters on these two men. For a fuller discussion of the political implications of Anglo-American piracy in the region, see Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*.

English naval excursions, also disintegrated on their own over brutal treatment of the natives, who eventually revolted and slaughtered many of the interloping colonials.

The settlement at St. Mary's received a devastating blow when some of the local Malagasy rose up against the pirate-settlers. Though Baldrige spun a tale of innocence, claiming that random roving pirates instigating the uprising by abusing the natives and stealing their cattle, there is contrary testimony from William Kidd, who arrived at St. Mary's in 1697. According to Kidd's version:

Baldrige was the occasion of that Insurrection of the Natives and the death of the pirates, for that having inveigled a great number of the natives of St. Maries, men, women, and children, on board a ship or ships he carried and sold them for slaves to a French Island called Mascarine or Mascaron, which treachery of Baldrige the Natives on the Island revenged on those pirates by cutting their throats.<sup>63</sup>

Baldrige's enslavement of the local Malagasy and transportation of them to "Mascarine," or Reunion Island (Bourbon), a distance of over one hundred nautical miles from St. Mary's, disrupted the critical Afro-Indonesian kinship ties of the Antavarata group and precipitated their violent reaction.

Baldrige somehow escaped the carnage, and returned to New York after spending eight years on St. Mary's as the Pirate King. He was, however, soon replaced there by Edward Welsh, who had arrived at Madagascar from New England as a boy. Colonial vessels also continued to arrive to trade, as affirmed in 1698 when a New Englander testified that while trading for supplies on the island, a brigantine from New York arrived, "which came to fetch Negroes."<sup>64</sup> Despite local insurrections, the pirate and slave trade continued apace on Madagascar as long as Philipse and the other colonial merchants continued to finance excursions. Internally in northeastern Madagascar, rising internecine tensions marked the beginning of the period that led to the formation of the Betsimisaraka foundation.

The preceding examination of the pirate settlements on Madagascar has hopefully demonstrated how strikingly similar they were in many respects to other early European settlement efforts – both official and *ad hoc* – in the Indo-Atlantic world. A significant difference, though one that probably meant very little to the local indigenous populations, was the relationship between these Euro-American settlers and their respective home governments. Although the exponential increase in the supply of slaves from West Africa would lighten the demand for Malagasy slaves across the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century, the growth of European coffee plantations in Bourbon and Mauritius ensured the continued circulation of Malagasy slaves throughout the western Indian Ocean.<sup>65</sup> That slave raiding and trading were at times brokered by fair-haired Betsimisaraka *zana-malats*, who carried out trans-oceanic raids against the East African coast and Comoros

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<sup>63</sup> Both the Kidd and Baldrige versions can be found in *PP*, p. 187.

<sup>64</sup> "Deposition of Samuel Perkins (of Ipswich, Mass.)," *PP*, p. 177.

<sup>65</sup> The Dutch abandoned Mauritius to concentrate on the Cape Colony in 1710, and the French took control five years later until 1814, when they ceded the island to Britain near the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Slaves from Madagascar, Senegal, and Mozambique continued to work the island until the British abolished slavery in 1835.

islands in twelve meter canoes carrying up to sixty warriors, alluringly suggests that they employed piratical techniques learned from their Anglo-American progenitors.<sup>66</sup>

Governor Fletcher, for his part, was eventually recalled from his own turbulent colony after his Leislerian political opponents used the piracy issue as leverage against him. The trade in Malagasy slaves was likewise suppressed by Parliament through a concerted effort by the RAC, though Philipse's son circumvented the monopoly again from 1716-1721, before the New York-to-Madagascar trade was permanently dismantled by stronger legislation and stricter enforcement from Parliament.<sup>67</sup> It would take five decades longer, and more revolutionary direct action by other North American men – and women – of courage and activity, before London's strangulating mercantilist policies were permanently ruptured. The seas connecting the Indo-Atlantic worlds – thanks to pioneering pirate-adventurers like Thomas Tew – would continue to provide unity, transport and the means of exchange and intercourse across the eighteenth century and beyond, though increasingly under the constricting gaze of the imperial British empire.

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<sup>66</sup> See Gwyn Campbell, "The Structure of Trade in Madagascar, 1750-1810,"

*International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26, 1 (1993), pp. 121, 123.

<sup>67</sup> The South Sea Company, infamous for its financial collapse in 1720, received a license from the EIC to carry Malagasy slaves to Buenos Aires. A more detailed description of Malagasy slaves in the Atlantic World can be found in the author's forthcoming dissertation.