

EMPIRE'S FOOTPRINT:  
EXPULSION AND THE U.S. MILITARY BASE ON DIEGO GARCIA

by

David Vine

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the  
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## Abstract

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David Vine

Adviser: Shirley Lindenbaum

Between 1956 and 1973, the U.S. Government orchestrated the forced removal of the people of the Indian Ocean's Chagos Archipelago to create a military base on the island Diego Garcia. This dissertation provides a historical ethnography of Diego Garcia detailing the creation of the base, the removal, and the effects of the removal on the people known as Chagossians to ask what Diego Garcia reveals about the United States as an empire and empire more broadly.

Contrary to arguments that the United States became an empire of economics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Diego Garcia represents a reactionary reliance on traditional imperial tools of overseas bases and military force to maintain global dominance in an era of decolonization and declining U.S. power. As a response to decolonization, Diego Garcia helped usher in an ongoing shift of bases from locations near population centers to locations isolated from potentially antagonistic locals. Although Diego Garcia was just one reaction among many to growing U.S. anxieties, Diego Garcia's significance increases as one of the first deployments of U.S. military power in the Middle East. Seeking to explain the expulsion further, the dissertation also shows how the officials responsible for the removal practiced policymaking in a way that generally ignored the human impacts of their actions.

Because understanding empire requires recognition of its costs, the dissertation demonstrates how the expulsion caused severe ongoing impoverishment for the Chagossians. Linked with at least 13 other cases of displacement around bases, the Chagossians' removal illuminates a pattern of the U.S. military displacing non-“white,” non-European peoples to build overseas military facilities, generally resulting in the impoverishment of the displaced. In sum, the dissertation suggests a more balanced perspective on American Empire, highlighting how overseas bases, along with other military and political tools, have worked in tandem with and undergirded economic forms of power, and how the national security that overseas bases supposedly offer has often been built on the insecurity of others. The dissertation concludes with the Chagossians' struggle to return to Chagos and win compensation, taking them to some of the highest courts in Britain and the United States.

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**CONTENTS**

Acknowledgments	iv
List of Tables	x
List of Images	xi
List of Abbreviations	xiii
Geographic Glossary	xiv
Introduction	1
1. Strategic Islands, Base Displacement, and American Empire	21
2. Anthropology and Imperialism: Building an “Ethnography of Empire”	39
3. Imperialism, Slavery, and the Plantation Complex: A History of the Chagossians	53
4. American Empire and the Bases of Expansion	94
5. Strategic Islands and “Exclusive Control”	133
6. “Absolutely Must Go”	170
7. “Chagossians in the Fire”	201
8. <i>Dérasiné</i> : The Impoverishment of Expulsion	212
9. Base Patterns: Displacement and the Military	257
10. Foreign Policy as Dehumanized Abstraction	278
11. <i>Lalit Chagossien</i> : The Chagossian Struggle	298
Conclusion: The Imperial Present and a Human-Centered Foreign Policy	312
Endnotes	321
Bibliography	334

**LIST OF TABLES**

1. Chagos population, by island group, 1826	61
2. Chagos population, by island group, 1880	75

## LIST OF IMAGES

1. Indian Ocean with Chagos Archipelago at center	3
2. Diego Garcia map with base	4
3. Satellite imagery of Diego Garcia	14
4. Satellite imagery of Diego Garcia, close-up on weapons storage areas	14
5. Diego Garcia air base	15
6. “Camp Justice”	15
7. “Prepositioned” naval vessels in the Diego Garcia lagoon	16
8. Close-up of prepositioned vessels	16
9. Box used by family to take personal belongings from Peros Banhos to Mauritius in 1972	19
10. Diego Garcia, with indications of former settlement locations	77
11. Map of East Point Plantation	91
12. The original 13 colonies in 1775	99
13. The United States in 1800	101
14. The United States in 1810	102
15. The United States in 1820	104
16. The United States in 1830	104
17. The United States Westward Expansion 1815-1845, with selected western bases and forts and facility creation dates	105
18. The United States in 1850	106
19. The United States in 1860	106

20. The United States in 1900	109
21. The United States, its colonies, and formerly claimed territories, 1970	128
22. Strategic Island Concept target sites	140
23. The official crest of the British Indian Ocean Territory	163
24. The official flag of the British Indian Ocean Territory	163
25. Map of Mauritius	219
26. Maps of Seychelles	220
27. Compensation house, Pointe aux Sables, Mauritius, 2002	240
28. Chagossian housing, interior, with damage from 2002 cyclone, 2002	241
29. Chagossian housing, interior, with plastic over beds, 2002	241
30. Chagossian housing, Mahé, Seychelles, 2002	242
31. Chagossian housing, Mahé, Seychelles, 2002	242
32. Chagossian housing, Cassis, Mauritius, 2002	244
33. Map of Port Louis, Mauritius	245
34. “Bathing Not Recommended” sign, on Indian Ocean beach, Cassis, Mauritius, 2002	246
35. Flowers on table with tablecloth, drawing, 2002	249
36. “Even when trying, you’re stuck,” (old Mauritian Kreol proverb), 2002	252

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CIA = Central Intelligence Agency

CNO = Chief of Naval Operations

DOD = Department of Defense

FRUS = Foreign Relations of the United States

GOM = Government of Mauritius

HMG = Her Majesty's Government [Government of the United Kingdom]

ISA = International Security Affairs [Department of Defense]

JCS = Joint Chiefs of Staff

MRs = Mauritius Rupees

NASA = National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NSA = National Security Agency

NSC = National Security Council

Pol-Mil = Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs [Department of State]

rpt = repeat

Rs = Rupees [used in pre-independence Mauritius and Seychelles]

SRs = Seychelles Rupees

UN = United Nations

USG = U.S. Government

## GEOGRAPHIC GLOSSARY

### **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT):**

From its creation in 1965, the islands of the Chagos Archipelago (Nelson Islands was accidentally omitted initially) and the Aldabra, Desroches, and Farquhar island groups formerly part of the colony of the Seychelles; after the independence of Seychelles in 1976, only the islands of the Chagos Archipelago.

### **Chagos Archipelago:**

About 64 Indian Ocean islands located around the Great Chagos Bank between approximately 4°5' and 7°5' latitude South and 70°5' and 72°5' longitude East in the following groups and individual islands (ancient names and spellings in parentheses; French and English names in continuing usage separated by forward slashes):

- Diego Garcia (Chagas/Chagos Island)—includes 3 islets at the top of its lagoon
- Peros Banhos—32 islands
- Salomon (Salamon) Islands—11 islands
- Île d'Aigle/Eagle Islands—2 islands
- Six Îles/Six Islands/Egmont Islands—7 islands
- Trois Frères/Three Brothers—3 islands
- Danger Island
- Nelson Island

The archipelago also includes the following banks and reefs in addition to the Great Chagos Bank: Blenheim Reef, Cauvin Bank, Ganges Bank, Pitt Bank, Speakers Bank, and Victory Bank.

### **Dependencies:**

Generally refers to the other islands that were part of colonial Mauritius prior to the establishment of Seychelles as an independent colony in 1903. They include:

- Seychelles Archipelago, including the Amirantes
- Rodrigues
- Lesser Dependencies of Mauritius (below).

### **Lesser Dependencies:**

Also known as the “Outer Islands” of Mauritius. Generally refers to:

- The Oil Islands (below)
- Islands of Cargados Carajos (St. Brandon)—16 islands

**Mascarenes:**

Generally refers to:

Mauritius (formerly Isle de France)  
Réunion (formerly Isle Bourbon)  
Rodrigues.

**Oil Islands:**

Generally refers to:

Chagos Archipelago  
Agalega Islands—2 islands

## INTRODUCTION

Among the most remote and secretive outposts in the Bush administration's "war on terror" is Diego Garcia, a tiny island at the center of the Indian Ocean, home to a major U.S. military base. Flying from a speck of a coral atoll southeast of the Persian Gulf and halfway between Africa and Indonesia, B-1, B-2, and B-52 bombers dropped more ordinance on Afghanistan than any others in the 2001 war (GlobalSecurity.org 2005). Leading up to the invasion of Iraq, weaponry and supplies stationed on Diego Garcia were among the first to arrive at staging areas near Iraq's borders, with bombers from the island again playing a key role in overthrowing the Hussein regime. Many believe the island is the site of a secret detention center for high-profile terrorist suspects, long off limits to the Red Cross, journalists, and other international observers (e.g., Human Rights First 2004:16; Mazzetti, et al. 2004; *Time* 2002).<sup>1</sup> While few know about Diego Garcia, far fewer know that to create the base the U.S. Government orchestrated the expulsion of the native people of the island and the surrounding Chagos Archipelago.

Between 1956 and 1973, with the help of the British Government, the United States planned, ordered, and financed the removal of around 2,000 people, known as Chagossians, to the western Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Seychelles, 1,300 miles away. The Chagossians effectively received no resettlement assistance and quickly became impoverished. Three decades later, most Chagossians, who now number more than 5,000, remain impoverished in exile.

Following the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, political scientists, historians, pundits, and others have widely acknowledged that the United States is an empire. With

few exceptions, anthropologists have been absent from the conversation. Amid earlier imperial debates in the 1960s, Kathleen Gough criticized anthropology, “the child of Western imperialism,” for having “virtually failed to study Western imperialism as a social system, or even adequately to explore the effects of imperialism on the societies we studied” (1968:403, 405). More than three decades later, Catherine Lutz found there was still almost no anthropological analysis of empire (2002:732).

This dissertation attempts to make an anthropological contribution to the study of imperialism through a historical ethnography of Diego Garcia. Detailing the history of how a base was created and how a people were displaced, the dissertation considers what Diego Garcia reveals about American Empire\* and empire more broadly.

\* \* \*

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\* The term *American Empire* is technically and geographically inaccurate as *America* and its adjective form refer to two continents and not solely to the United States of America. I use the term *American Empire*, however, because of the awkwardness of *U.S. Empire* and widespread recognition of the former. Elsewhere I refer to the *United States*, with *U.S.* as its adjective form (see also Smith 2003 465 n. 1).



Image 1: Indian Ocean with Chagos Archipelago at center (Saddul 2002:5).

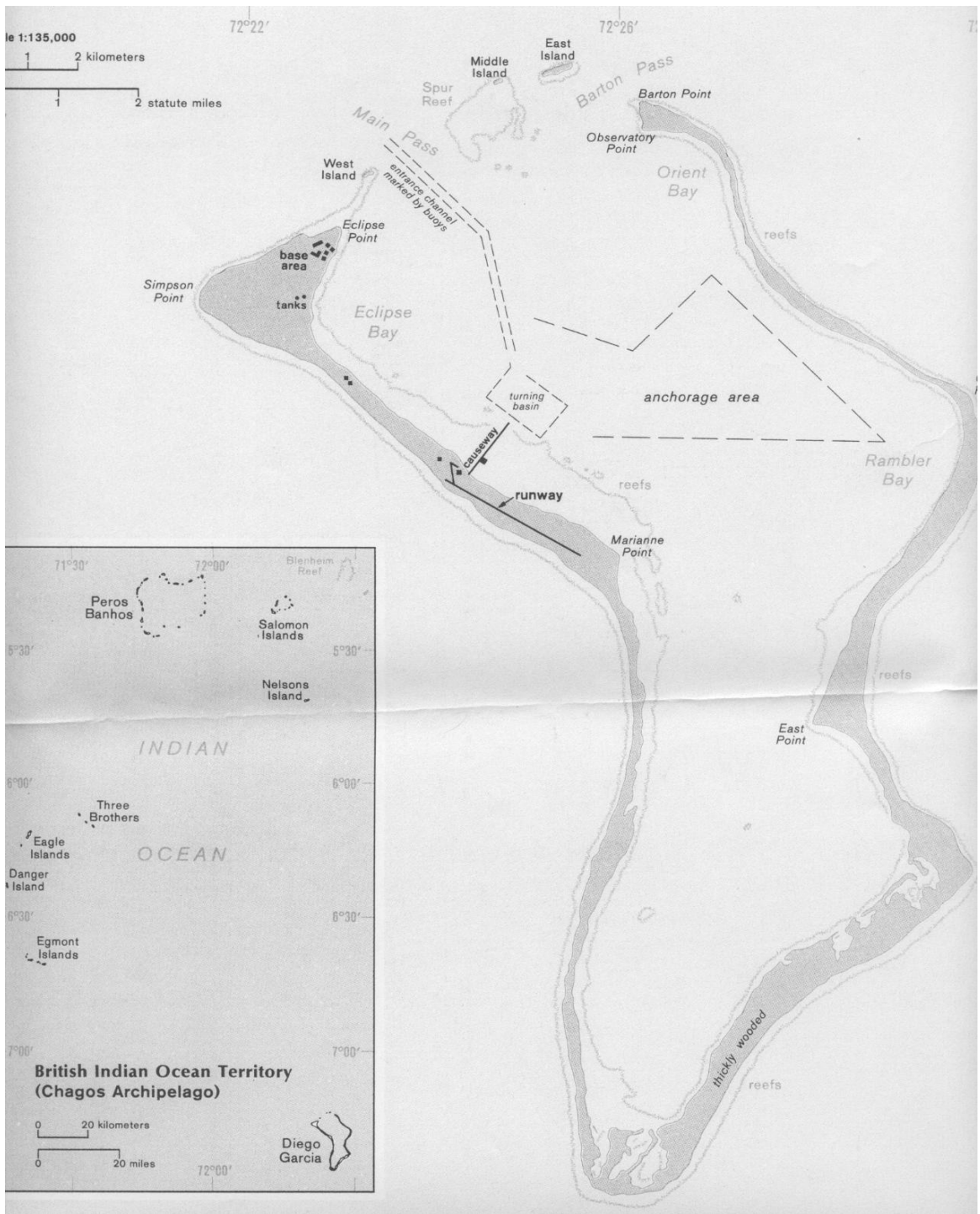


Image 2: Diego Garcia map with base; Chagos Archipelago and BIOT in inset (Library of Congress n.d.).

“You were born—”

“Peros Banhos,” said Marie Rita Bancoult,\* before I could finish my question.

“In what year?”

“1925.... The 30<sup>th</sup> of June.”

“And your parents? What island were your parents born on?”

“*Mo bann parens né laba mem,*” Madame Bancoult explained in her French Kreol<sup>2</sup>—“My parents were born there too.” She continued, “My grandmother—the mother of my father—was born in Six Islands—*Six Îles*. My father was also born in Six Islands. My grandfather was born there too. My grandmother on my mother’s side was born in Peros Banhos.”

Madame Bancoult does not know where her other ancestors were born, one of the small ongoing forms of suffering borne by people with enslaved forbearers. However she remembers her grandmother, Olivette Pauline, telling her that her own grandmother—Madame Bancoult’s great-great-grandmother—had the name “Masango” or “Mazango.” Madame Bancoult thinks she was a *Malgas*—a Malagasy from Madagascar.

Madame Bancoult’s birthplace, Peros Banhos, and the birthplace of some of her ancestors, Six Islands, form parts of the Chagos Archipelago, a collection of around 64 isolated coralline islands lying 1,000 miles from the nearest continental landmass, India.

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\* In line with agreements with research participants, all names from my ethnographic research are pseudonyms, except for those in the Bancoult family and U.S. Government officials who consented to the use of their names. Any utterances bounded in the text by double quotation marks are direct quotations that I recorded word for word during research. Utterances bounded by single quotation marks are approximate quotations where I was not entirely certain to have recorded every word as spoken. These approximate quotations are not reconstructions and instead indicate instances where I could not ensure that I had recorded a quotation word for word.

All quotations without citations are from my interviews and ethnographic research. I introduce these quotations and refer to them in the past tense. I generally introduce quotations from written works in the present tense. The primary exception to this rule is oral history interviews conducted by others, which, like my interviews, I introduce in the past tense.

The largest and best-known island in the archipelago rests about 150 miles south of Peros Banhos. Portuguese explorers named it Diego Garcia. The name for the archipelago seems to come from the Portuguese *chagas*—the wounds of Christ.

Madame Bancoult and the members of her family are some of the people of the Chagos Archipelago. The Chagossians, who are also known as *Ilois*\* [the islanders], are the indigenous people of the islands, with ancestry there dating to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Neither Madame Bancoult nor any of the more than 5,000 surviving Chagossians live in Chagos today. Like other Chagossians, Madame Bancoult lives 1,300 miles from her homeland, on the island of Mauritius, in a slum, in a small, aging turquoise-painted concrete-block house.

\* \* \*

Around 1956, a thin, middle-aged, spectacled civilian named Stuart B. Barber was working for the Navy and drawing up lists of islands, mostly in the southern hemisphere, from every map, atlas, and nautical chart he could find. Desroches, Farquhar, Aldabra, Cocos, Phuket, Masirah, Diego Garcia, Salomon, and Peros Banhos, were just a few.

What sent Barber searching through maps and atlases was the realization that islands make good naval bases to control the seas, but in the age of decolonization, islands controlled by friendly western powers were a disappearing commodity. The answer was to snap up as many strategic islands as possible before they were lost to the West. Former Navy officer Vytautas Bandjunis says that “Barber’s basic idea was that the United States, in anticipation of the independence of colonial territories, should acquire base rights in certain strategically located islands, mostly in the southern

---

\* The name has fallen out of favor as it has acquired pejorative connotations for many.

hemisphere, and stockpile them for future use as potential refueling stations, air patrol bases, and communication sites” (2001:2).

Barber quickly identified Diego Garcia as an important target for acquisition. Particularly attractive to Barber and other Navy planners were Diego’s central location in the Indian Ocean,<sup>3</sup> one of the world’s great natural harbors in its protected lagoon, and enough land to build a large airstrip (Bezboruah 1977:58; Bandjunis 2001:2). In the summer of 1957, the Navy sent Admiral Jerauld Wright, the Commander in Chief Atlantic, Commander in Chief U.S. Atlantic Fleet, Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, to survey the island (Bandjunis 2001:2).

By the following summer, the Navy had drawn up a proposal for a formal study of Barber’s idea and a base on Diego. One of the plan’s key features was that to ensure military “usage free of political complications,” the base should be “free of impingement on any significant indigenous population or economic interest.” The proposal noted that Diego Garcia’s population was “measured only in the hundreds” (R. L. Johnson 1958:2-3).

\* \* \*

Madame Bancoult’s story of exile begins in late 1967, on Peros Banhos, when a mule-drawn cart ran over the foot her youngest daughter, Noellie. After the accident, explained the short, stockily built woman with carefully braided white hair, she rushed Noellie to Peros Banhos’s infirmary. Like the other infirmaries in Chagos, in the neighboring Salomon islands and on Diego Garcia, this one lacked a doctor and was staffed only by a nurse and a midwife. After examining Noellie, the nurse told Madame

Bancoult that her foot needed an operation requiring transportation to the nearest full-service hospital, in Mauritius.

Going to Mauritius meant waiting for the next and only boat service—a four-times-a-year connection with the larger island. Which meant waiting two months. As they waited, gangrene set in on Noellie’s foot. When the boat finally arrived, Madame Bancoult packed a small box with some clothes and a rice cooker, locked up the family’s thatched-roof house, and left for Mauritius with Noellie, her husband, Julien Bancoult, and their five other children.

After four days on the open ocean, the family arrived in Mauritius’s capitol, Port Louis, and took Noellie to the island’s main hospital. A doctor operated on Noellie’s foot but, as Madame Bancoult said, he saw immediately that it had gone untreated for “much too long.” A month later, Noellie died.

Mourning Noellie’s death, the family had to wait two months until the departure of the next boat for Chagos. With the departure date approaching, Madame Bancoult walked to the office of the steamship company to arrange for the family’s return. When she came back to her family, she could not speak. Madame Bancoult said she felt like the “blood had been drained out of her.”

“What happened?” her husband asked. For an hour she said nothing, her heart “swollen” with emotion. “Did someone attack you?” her family asked. “I heard everything they said,” Madame Bancoult explained, “but my voice couldn’t open my mouth to say what had happened.” Finally she blurted out: “We will never again return to our home! Our home has been closed!” As she recounted for me almost 30 years

later, the monsieur at the steamship company told her, “Your island has been sold. You will never go there again.”

\* \* \*

Barber and the Navy formalized their plan in 1959, extending the rationale for building a base on Diego Garcia to lightly populated islands around the globe. They called the plan the “Strategic Island Concept.” The concept held that in the era of decolonization, the non-western “third world” was growing increasingly unstable and would likely become the site of future military action. “Within the next 5 to 10 years,” the study projected, “virtually all of Africa, and certain Middle Eastern and Far Eastern territories presently under Western control will gain either complete independence or a high degree of autonomy, often associated with an increased drift from Western influence.” With rising opposition to foreign military bases in the decolonizing world and increasing pressures from the Soviet Union and the UN, “a product of the foregoing trend will be the withdrawal of Western military and naval forces from, and the denial or restriction of Western military base facilities in, many of these areas” (Rivero 1960a:2).

The policy proposed avoiding mainland bases subject to such threats. “Only relatively small, lightly populated islands, separated from major population masses, could be safely held under full control of the West in the face of the currents of nationalism” for use as bases. To protect its “future freedom of military action,” the concept said, the United States would have to act quickly to “stockpile” rights to build island bases. Just as one would “stockpile any material commodity which foreseeably will become unavailable in the future,” the United States would have to purchase the islands or

otherwise ensure the maintenance of sovereignty by Western allies before they were lost to decolonization (Rivero 1960b; see also Bezboruah 1977:58).

The Navy identified Diego Garcia as its most important target for acquisition and in 1960, the Navy's highest-ranking officer, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Arleigh Burke, initiated secret conversations with the British Government about the island. Within two years, the idea to create a base had gained support among powerful officials in the Kennedy administration, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon of Robert McNamara and Paul Nitze, Dean Rusk's State Department, and the National Security Council of McGeorge Bundy. The administration initiated formal negotiations with the British and convinced the United Kingdom to detach the Chagos Archipelago from colonial Mauritius and other islands from colonial Seychelles to create a new colony solely for military use. They called it the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). During 1964 talks in London, State Department representatives insisted on an additional condition: That the United States would have "exclusive control" of the islands "without local inhabitants" (U.S. Embassy London 1964a:1-2).

In 1965, the British Government paid Mauritius £3 million to detach Chagos (a dependency of Mauritius since its settlement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), in contravention of international agreements forbidding the division of colonies during decolonization. A year later, the U.S. and British governments confirmed the arrangements with a little-noticed Exchange of Notes, requiring no Congressional or Parliamentary approval. According to the Notes, the United States would gain use of the new colony "without charge." In confidential agreements accompanying the Notes, the United States agreed to secretly pay the British \$14 million. The money was, as other secret documents show, to

be used to establish the territory, to pay off Mauritius and Seychelles “generously” to avoid “agitation in the colonies” (Peck 1965), and to take “those administrative measures” necessary to remove the islands’ inhabitants (Chalfont 1966).

\* \* \*

When Julien Bancoult heard his wife’s news he collapsed backwards, his arms splayed wide. He was speechless. Prevented from returning home, they were consigned to a foreign land and separated from their homes, their land, their animals, their jobs, their community, and most of their possessions. The Bancoults had been, as they say, *dérasiné*—deracinated, uprooted, torn from their natal lands. “His sickness started to take hold of him,” Madame Bancoult explained. “He didn’t understand” anything she said. Soon Monsieur Bancoult suffered a stroke, his body growing rigid and increasingly paralyzed. Before the year was out, Madame Bancoult would spend several weeks in a psychiatric hospital.

Beginning in 1967, any Chagossians like the Bancoults who left Chagos for medical treatment or for regular vacations in Mauritius were told that they could not return. Often they were marooned without family members and almost all their possessions.

The British soon began restricting supplies to Chagos, and by the turn of the decade more Chagossians were leaving as food and medicines dwindled. British authorities, who referred to the Chagossians as “Tarzans” and “men Fridays” (Greenhill 1966) designed a public relations plan aimed at, as one official put it, “maintaining the fiction” that the Chagossians were transient contract workers rather than people with roots in Chagos for more than five generations.

In 1971, U.S. officials began construction on Diego Garcia and ordered their British counterparts to complete the removals. First, British agents and U.S. soldiers on Diego Garcia herded up the Chagossians' pet dogs and exterminated them *en masse* in front of their traumatized owners. Then, between 1971 and 1973, British agents forced the remaining Chagossians to board overcrowded cargo ships and dumped them on the docks in Mauritius and Seychelles.

\* \* \*

Nicknamed the "Footprint of Freedom," the base on Diego Garcia has expanded dramatically since the final deportations. Most of the expansion occurred after the 1979 revolution in Iran, when Diego Garcia saw the "most dramatic build-up of any location since the Vietnam War," with more than \$500 million invested by 1986 (GlobalSecurity.org 2005). Diego Garcia's lagoon is home to an armada of "pre-positioned" ships lying in wait for wartime with enough tanks, weaponry, ammunition, and fuel to equip an expeditionary force of tens of thousands of U.S. troops for 30 days. The harbor has enough room to host an aircraft carrier taskforce, including tens of navy surface vessels and nuclear submarines. Two parallel runways over two miles long are home to billions of dollars worth of B-1, B-2, and B-52 bombers, reconnaissance, cargo, and in-air refueling planes. The island also hosts a range of high-technology intelligence and communications equipment including NASA facilities, an electro-optical deep space surveillance system, satellite navigation monitoring antenna, a HF-UHF-SHF satellite transmission ground station, and (probably) a sub-surface oceanic intelligence station (see Hayes, et al. 1986:439-446). Nuclear weapons are likely stored on the base (see e.g., maps below).

Diego Garcia saw its first major wartime use during the first Gulf War. Within eight days of the U.S. military issuing deployment orders in August 1990, 18 prepositioned ships from Diego Garcia's lagoon arrived by sea in Saudi Arabia. The ships immediately outfitted a 15,000-soldier marine brigade with 123 M-60 battle tanks, 425 heavy weapons, 124 fixed-wing and rotary aircraft, and 30-days worth of operational supplies. (Weaponry and supplies shipped from the United States took almost a month longer to arrive in Saudi Arabia, proving Diego Garcia's worth to many military leaders (Desch 1993:152-153).)

Since September 11, 2001, the base has assumed even more importance to the military. Within weeks of the attacks, the military had sent additional Air Force and other forces to the island, stationed on a new facility called "Camp Justice." In the two wars that followed, the base served as a key launch pad for U.S. bombers and prepositioned weaponry. The (once) secret 2002 "Downing Street" memorandum shows that U.S. warplanners considered basing access on Diego Garcia "critical" to the invasion of Iraq (Times Online 2005).

"It's the single most important military facility we've got," military expert John Pike told me in a telephone interview. Pike, who runs the military analysis website GlobalSecurity.org, explained, "It's the base from which we control half of Africa and the southern side of Asia, the southern side of Eurasia." Diego Garcia is "the facility that at the end of the day gives us some say-so in the Persian Gulf region. If it didn't exist, it would have to be invented." The military's goal, Pike said, is that "we'll be able to run the planet from Guam and Diego Garcia by 2015, even if the entire Eastern Hemisphere has dropped kicked us" from bases on their territory. Even prior to 2001, a State

Department representative described Diego Garcia as “an all but indispensable platform” (E. Newsom 2000:1).

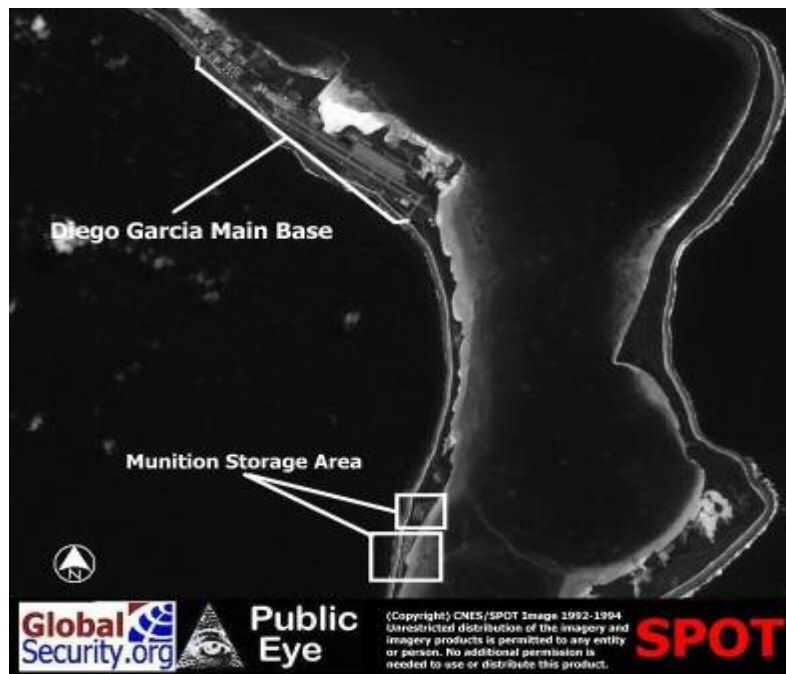


Image 3: Satellite imagery of Diego Garcia (used with permission: see copyright note on image).

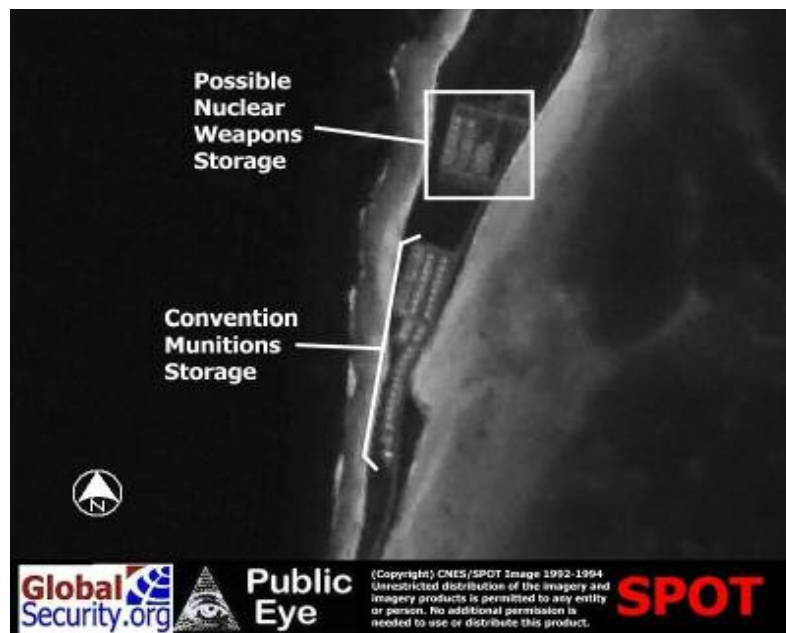


Image 4: Satellite Imagery of Diego Garcia, close-up on weapons storage areas (used with permission).



Image 5: Diego Garcia air base with bombers and specialized protective shelters for B-2 bombers (in white) (used with permission).



Image 6: “Camp Justice” (used with permission).

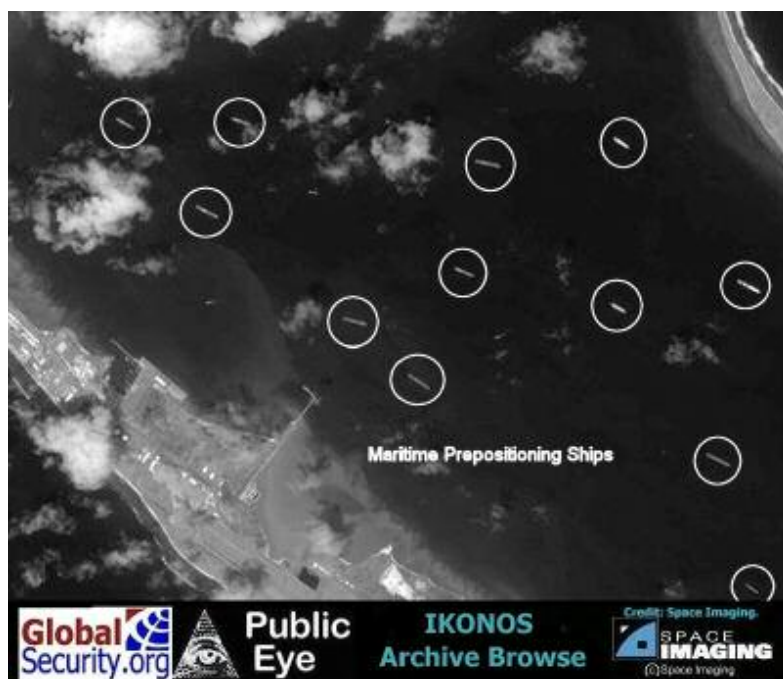


Image 7: "Prepositioned" naval vessels in the Diego Garcia lagoon (used with permission).



Image 8: Close-up of prepositioned vessel, approximately as long as a skyscraper is tall (used with permission).

\* \* \*

In Mauritius and Seychelles, only a handful of Chagossians received any resettlement assistance upon their arrival. Chagossians arrived unemployed, homeless, and with little money. Most had only a small box of belongings and a sleeping mat. They arrived in rapidly transforming societies with economic, political, social, and environmental contexts dramatically different than those in Chagos. They arrived in societies where their skills were ill suited to the local economy, and, in Mauritius, where they were members of a stigmatized Afro-Mauritian “Creole” minority. In 1975, a journalist from the *Washington Post* described Chagossians in Mauritius as living in “abject poverty” (Ottaway 1975). A year later, a British official said Chagossians were “living in deplorable conditions” (Prosser 1976:6).

In 1978 and between 1982 and 1985, some Chagossians in Mauritius received small amounts of compensation in land, housing, and cash from the British Government. (The smaller group of Chagossians in Seychelles, now numbering around 600, received none.) Despite the compensation, conditions appear to have improved only marginally for most Chagossians. Some sold their compensation land and houses for cash and used it and their compensation money to pay off large debts accrued since the expulsion. In 1997, a World Health Organization-funded report found that Chagossians were “still housed in tin shacks in the disadvantaged slums of Port Louis, without fixed incomes and without *de facto* access to education or health care” (Dræbel 1997:4). A 2001 fact-finding study described the existence of severe long-term damage to the population and “perpetual insecurity” resulting from the expulsion (Anyangwe 2001). The findings from a range of observers throughout Chagossians’ years in exile are clear: Chagossians have

been severely impoverished since the expulsion (e.g., Siophe 1975; Prosser 1976; Botte 1980; Sylva 1981, Madeley 1985; Dræbel 1997; Vine et al. 2005).

Five years after suffering a stroke Julien Bancoult died of what Rita Bancoult called *sagren*—profound sorrow. “There *wasn't* sickness” like strokes or *sagren* in Peros Banhos, Madame Bancoult explained. “There wasn't that sickness. Nor diabetes, nor any such illness. What drugs? [There weren't any.] If by chance you were drunk [and fell asleep] and you went to get your money, your cash, you would find it untouched when you awoke. No one would take it. No one would steal anything from a comrade. This is what my husband remembered and pictured in his mind. Me too, I remember these things that I've said about us, David. My heart grows heavy when I say these things, understand?”

Not long after Monsieur Bancoult's death, the Bancoult's son Alex lost his job as a dockworker and died at 38 addicted to drugs and alcohol. Another son Eddy died at 36 of a drug overdose. Another son Renault died suddenly at age ten, for reasons still mysterious to the family, after selling water and begging for money at a local cemetery near their home. Some fear he might have been poisoned.

“My life has been buried,” Madame Bancoult told me from a torn brown vinyl couch in her sitting room. “What do I think about it?” she continued. “It's as if I was pulled from my paradise to put me in hell. Everything here you need to buy. I don't have the means to buy them. My children go without eating. How am I supposed to bear this life?”



**Image 9: Box used by family to take personal belongings from Peros Banhos to Mauritius in 1972 (photo by author).**

### **Questions of Empire**

The creation of the base and the expulsion of the Chagossians raise questions about the U.S. Government, its officials, and the United States as an empire. Firstly, how and why did the U.S. Government create a military base on an isolated island in the Indian Ocean, 12,000 miles from the United States, and why did the Government displace an entire people in the process? Civilian populations live next to U.S. military facilities around the

world—even in Cuba—so why could the Chagossians not stay? Second what have the effects of the expulsion been on the Chagossians? That they were impoverished by their removal has been widely reported, but how did this happen and what is the relationship between the expulsion and Julien Bancoult’s sagren, his death, and the deaths of other islanders like the Bancoult’s children? And how have the Chagossians reacted to their expulsion? Third, and turning to broader implications for the United States, what do the base and the expulsion explain about a network of hundreds of overseas U.S. military bases developed since World War II? Is Diego Garcia an isolated and perhaps aberrant case or does it represent something broader? What does Diego Garcia say about the people working in the national security bureaucracy who orchestrated the creation of the base and the expulsion? And what does it say about the foreign policy-making process? In sum, the dissertation asks what the history of Diego Garcia contributes to understanding the United States as an empire and the evolution of empire more broadly.

## CHAPTER 1

### STRATEGIC ISLANDS, BASE DISPLACEMENT, AND AMERICAN EMPIRE

Revisionist historians and others (e.g., Williams 1962, Gardner et al. 1976a, 1976b) have long held that beginning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States has largely avoided the colonialism of the European powers based on territorial expansion and rule over subject peoples in favor of a more discreet, non-territorial kind of economic imperialism. The natural resources and labor of subordinate lands have no longer been exploited directly as under European colonialism. Economic control and exploitation, scholars say, have largely emanated from policies of the “Open Door,” the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank.

Echoing this tradition, Neil Smith (2003b; 2003a) argues that the American Empire has rejected European territorial colonialism in favor of a new model of global power based first around an architecture of global economic institutions enabling U.S. dominance and only secondarily around geopolitical tools. “The best-preferred strategy was to organize resource and commodity extraction through the market rather than through military or political occupation,” Smith says (2003b:360). The market became the basis for exploitation and the “camouflage of and mechanism for continued imperialism, albeit without colonization” (Smith 2003b:373).

David Harvey (2003) agrees with Smith that the American Empire has rejected the territorial aggrandizement of European empires, offering a similarly economic approach to U.S. imperialism. Drawing on Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, Harvey says that processes of “accumulation by dispossession” have come to characterize

contemporary imperialism since the 1970s as a solution to chronic capital overaccumulation problems. The primary tool of accumulation by dispossession has been the use of state power (led by the United States) to open new territories and markets to capitalist development through pressures exercised by multilateral economic institutions like the IMF and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The military intervention of the Bush administration in Afghanistan and Iraq—to secure control over the oil of the Middle East and central Asia—represents for Harvey just one form of accumulation by dispossession that more frequently takes a geoeconomic shape.

### **An Empire of Bases**

A smaller group of scholars emphasizes military not economic might as the defining element of American Empire (e.g., Lens 1987; Sherry 1995; *Monthly Review* 2002; C. Johnson 2004b). Several focus on the role of military bases, like Diego Garcia, arguing that the United States has created an “empire of bases,” deploying military facilities globally to exert imperial control and economic domination over weaker nations. Sydney Lens (1987) describes the maintenance of a network of overseas bases since World War II as an important element of a militarized, though mostly indirect and often surreptitious, form of global empire. Editors of the *Monthly Review* argue that bases are the primary means with which the United States keeps nations within an imperial system and maintains “its political and economic hegemony” (2002:1, 13-14). Like the others, Tom Engelhardt (2004) sees the U.S. “base empire” as one in which bases have become the primary mechanism of control in the way that gunboats were a tool of domination for Europe’s empires. Still Engelhardt, like Smith, describes the American Empire as

“perhaps unique” in being one of “all ‘gunboats’”—i.e., bases—and “no colonies” (2004:4; Smith 2003b:349).

Chalmers Johnson (2004b, 2004a) agrees, viewing bases as having replaced colonies in a new version of empire predicated on the United States using its global bases to dominate the world militarily. Yet Johnson sees bases as to some extent functioning differently than colonies and as driven by different forces. Key to Johnson’s position is the argument (shared by many in the basing literature<sup>4</sup>) that bases take on a life and power of their own. Once they are established, military and civilian leaders look for ways to use them and legitimate their existence. Often the acquisition of bases requires the acquisition of additional bases to protect the original ones. No legitimate military needs justify the bases. Instead, Johnson writes, bases fuel snowballing and “ever-tighter cycles of militarism, wars, arms sales, and base expansion” (2004b:214). Ultimately for Johnson, overseas bases can best be explained as pure expressions of militarism and imperialism, serving the military’s own interests and imperial ends like global policing, surveillance, the control of oil, and related U.S. corporate profits (2004b:152, 188, 214-215, 253).

C. T. Sandars offers a more balanced perspective in arguing that the United States is the first “leasehold empire” that “depend[s] not on the acquisition of territory by force, but on the negotiation of basing rights with independent sovereign nations.” Unlike traditional empires based on master-servant relationships, Sandars says, the U.S. leasehold empire is based on “agreement with her friends and allies” and leaves host nations with a degree of control little known under other imperial systems (Sandars 2000:319-320, 330). Sandars’s argument is an important refinement of Johnson and

others emphasizing the difference between the American Empire and previous empires. Still, Sandars goes too far to distinguish a relatively benevolent American Empire, failing to see ways in which host nations' sovereignty has been compromised by U.S. power, including by the presence of U.S. bases, and how the United States has actively supported systematic human rights abuses and repression in host nations (Sandars 2000:328-331). As I will discuss, Gerson (1991), Enloe (1989, 1990, 1993), and others are more accurate in describing damage to host communities and nations as fundamental, not incidental, features of the overseas basing system.

### **The Global Base Network**

60 years after the end of World War II and 50 years after the end of the Korean War, the United States controls 302 base sites in Germany, 111 base sites in Japan, and 106 base sites in South Korea (Department of Defense 2005a:2). Although the scope of the base network can be difficult to grasp, these numbers are indicative of its size. In total, according to the Department of Defense, the United States has 3,748 base sites worldwide (Department of Defense 2005a). There are likely well over 850 bases outside the 50 states, located in around 60 or more foreign nations, with 78 bases located in the far-flung U.S. territories alone, and U.S. military personnel stationed in some capacity in 155 nations and territories worldwide (Department of Defense 2005a; C. Johnson 2004b; Monthly Review 2002; Department of Defense 2005b). Globally, U.S. base sites include 571,965 distinct buildings, structures, and utilities—or nearly 20 times the total number of McDonald's restaurants worldwide (McDonald's Corporation 2006). The DOD

conservatively estimates the current value of its facilities at more than \$658 billion (Department of Defense 2005a; C. Johnson 2004b:154).<sup>5</sup>

Although I will show in chapter 4 how military bases have played an important role in the growth of the United States as an empire since independence, the birth of what became a global base network dates to World War II. Prior to the war, the United States possessed only a handful of bases outside the then 48 states. By the war's end, the United States had more than 30,000 installations at more than 2,000 base sites worldwide (Blaker 1990:9).

The nation acquired many of the bases in 1940 under the "lend-lease" or "destroyers-for-bases" program that sent 50 World War I-era naval destroyers to Great Britain in exchange for 99-year leases on a string of military facilities in the British colonies of Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Thomas, Antigua, Aruba-Curaçao, Trinidad, British Guiana, and the Bahamas, as well as temporary access to bases in Bermuda and Newfoundland. The Government followed lend-lease with deals to station U.S. forces in locations from Iceland and Greenland to the Portuguese Azores, Acapulco in Mexico, and Fortaleza, Brazil (Desch 1993:183 n.123; Lindsay-Poland 2003:45). By the end of the war, the U.S. military was building base sites at an average rate of 112 a month, many as part of the "island hopping" Pacific war with Japan (Blaker 1990:23). The global base network became the largest ever, some say, and it was built not over centuries but in five years (Blaker 1990:9).

Although the United States left the war as an empire without peer, the territorial aggrandizement and colonialism practiced by previous empires was not an option by the middle of the century. The European powers had long before divided the world among

themselves, and World War II introduced ideological changes that made large-scale, overt territorial acquisition politically impossible (Smith 2003b:2. 14-16, 21).

Shortly before the war's end in 1945, however, President Harry Truman declared at Potsdam, Germany, "Though the United States wants no profit or selfish advantage out of this war, we are going to maintain the military bases necessary for the complete protection of our interests and of world peace." Portentously, Truman added, "Bases which our military experts deem to be essential for our protection we will acquire" (Monthly Review 2002). Like previous empires the United States shared an inclination to acquire and possess as much territory as possible and an even stronger reluctance to give up the territories and bases it had acquired at war (Sandars 2000:16). While the United States eventually returned some territories and bases because of cost concerns and (partial) demilitarization, resulting in a reduction of about half its foreign bases (Blaker 1990:32), the nation maintained what became a "permanent institution" of bases representing an "unprecedented" staging of forces abroad in peacetime (Stambuk 1963:9).

After the war (and for the most part to this day), the base network included bases in Germany, Italy, Japan, and France occupied as a victor nation. It included bases in French Morocco and in most of the British territories occupied under lend-lease, and an extensive array of bases in Britain itself and in British-controlled Ascension, Bahrain, Guadalcanal, and Tarawa. Among its own colonial possessions, the United States retained bases in among others Guam, Puerto Rico, Wake Island, Cuba, and the Philippines (the last of which granted the United States a 99-year rent-free lease on 23 bases and military installations upon its independence in 1946 (Hayes et al. 1986:25)). In

the Pacific, U.S. leaders left the war against Japan determined to prevent another Pearl Harbor by making the ocean an “American lake” dominated by U.S. bases. The United States successfully retained control of captured islands and island bases throughout the Pacific, in Japan and its colony of Okinawa, and across most of Micronesia, which as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) became a colony in all but name that gave the United States the right under UN sanction to establish military facilities on its territory.

### **Imperial Anxieties: Losing Bases and the “Third World”**

Despite its unparalleled power at the end of the World War II, in the years that followed, the relative supremacy of the United States started to decline. The Soviet Union emerged as another empire able to challenge the United States, and China emerged as a regional competitor. As Britain, France, and other western European nations gave up their colonial possessions, their power and the power and influence of the United States and the West eroded. In the East-West confrontation of the Cold War, decolonization left the alignment of new nations up for grabs. With the United States allied with most of the former colonial rulers, a perception grew that many of the new nations and the world were tilting toward the East. By the 1960s, the power of the United States had noticeably diminished relative to that of the Soviet Union and China. Although the shift was probably less significant in real terms than it was in its perception, this made little difference at the time to U.S. officials and others in the world.

A significant source of many U.S. officials’ anxiety was their fear of losing overseas bases. Amid the post-war independence movements, opposition to foreign

military facilities was growing throughout the decolonizing world. As nations gained their independence, several evicted the United States from bases in their territories, and throughout the 1950s officials worried that the nation would be evicted from more. With the loss of bases, they grew concerned that U.S. influence over the future of the so-called Third World<sup>6</sup> would decline as well.

Fears about losing control were particularly acute in many officials' thinking about the regions bounding the Indian Ocean, from Southern Africa through the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Part of the concern stemmed from a growing interest in ensuring the flow of Persian Gulf oil to the U.S. economy. Officials in the State and Defense departments feared that U.S. military bases in these regions were inadequate to control events there. A 1960 joint State-Defense study of overseas bases found that, "The existing overseas military facilities system inadequately meets the requirements for support of U.S. military operations in the Middle East (except Turkey), Africa south of the Sahara, and South and Southeast Asia mainland in event of limited war or local aggression." The report pleaded for more bases and military capacity: "To enable the conduct of successful military operations in those areas, airfields, harbor facilities, channels of communication and transportation and other installations are needed" (Departments of State and Defense 1960:3).

At the same time, most U.S. officials understood that the United States remained the most powerful nation on Earth. By the time President Kennedy took office, both the President and Secretary of Defense McNamara knew that fears about a "missile gap" with the Soviet Union were unfounded, that the Soviet Union and China no longer represented a unified threat, and that the United States enjoyed "overwhelming strategic

dominance” (Porter 2005:14, 5-10).<sup>7</sup> In quantitative terms, Gareth Porter shows that although U.S. military strength narrowed from 40 times greater than the Soviet Union in 1954 to 9 times greater in 1965, that difference still represented the greatest disparity between a major power and its nearest rival since the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Porter 2005:4).

Aware of this power imbalance, that the United States possessed a dominance so great that in effect no other nation could constrain most of its contemplated activities, successive presidential administrations exploited a “new freedom of action” to pursue “more aggressive and interventionist policies” (Porter 2005:vii-1).<sup>8</sup> Thus there coexisted within members of the national security bureaucracy at the time a mixture of anxieties about declining U.S. power and the knowledge of profound military superiority (just as anxieties about terrorism and the knowledge of unparalleled military strength have coexisted among Government officials since September 11, 2001).

### **The Strategic Island Concept as a Solution**

With U.S. officials increasingly concerned about the uncertainties of decolonization, the loss of overseas bases, the decline of British power, and the lack of U.S. presence in and around the Indian Ocean, the Navy’s Strategic Island Concept offered a solution to their worries in the form of strategically located, isolated island bases. The main function of most overseas bases is to allow the rapid deployment of military power—land, sea, or air—in nations that would otherwise remain far from military forces stationed domestically. Strategists blandly call this “intervention.” Increasing the nation’s ability to intervene militarily around the globe became officials’ response to the dilemma posed by declining U.S. power and a desire to maintain U.S. global dominance. The Strategic

Island Concept in turn offered a way to allow such intervention in a large part of the world that until then had little U.S. military presence. As with the American lake strategy in the Pacific, the concept proposed the creation of new bases in a new ocean to ensure continued U.S. dominance by controlling every piece of available territory (or at least by denying the use of islands to the Soviet Union and China).

Stuart Barber's strategy acknowledged, however, the challenges of using bases to ensure dominance given the threat posed to overseas bases by the protest and agitation of non-Western peoples and governments. With bases likely to be lost to decolonization, the concept argued that the United States would have to find replacement sites. To avoid ongoing problems and conflicts with other non-Western populations and governments and to ensure the long-term survival of bases as part of an entrenched global network, the new sites would have to be insulated from such "decolonization pressures." The best way to do that, the strategy proposed, was to remove local peoples and governments as considerations in the base equation. This meant finding bases where locals could be removed and where the United States or its closest Western allies could retain territorial sovereignty in perpetuity, protecting the Government from ever facing eviction or having to consider the wishes of a newly independent non-Western government.

Such a plan called for a new geographical vision for the base network: The United States would avoid continental bases, closest to anticipated points of intervention, in favor of strategically located but remote island bases. Islands with small populations and little economic activity provided the most promising sites because of the ease of acquisition and removing populations. In sum, the plan proposed, if the United States was to retain its dominant position in the world, the nation would have to acquire

strategically located islands, either under its own sovereignty or held for the United States by its Western allies, cleanse the islands of their populations, and prepare them for base construction as future needs required.

The history of Diego Garcia shows that national security officials quickly adopted the Navy's concept as an important strategic framework. At the request of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Navy made plans for scores of strategic island bases around the globe. In the Indian Ocean, the idea was the basis for the creation of the BIOT and an initially planned "strategic triangle" of bases on Diego Garcia, the Seychelles' island Aldabra, and Australia's Cocos/Keeling islands. Although the costs of the Vietnam War reined in the most far-reaching plans and left Diego Garcia as the only major base created under the Strategic Island Concept, the strategy became an important argument for the retention and expansion of major preexisting island bases, including those in Guam, Micronesia, Ascension, the Azores, and Japan's Bonin-Volcano islands.

U.S. officials also coupled Diego Garcia with the first-ever build-up of U.S. naval forces in the Indian Ocean, beginning in 1964. Together the base and the naval deployment increasingly enabled the insertion of military power into a large and unstable portion of the world. Far from being a geopolitical strategy alone, however, the intent was always political, military, and economic: Diego Garcia allowed intervention and the threat of intervention in the affairs of other nations but also helped protect U.S. economic interests in the region, particularly U.S. access to Middle Eastern oil. In this, Diego Garcia is even more significant in representing one of the first steps by the United States to use its military power in the Middle East to defend U.S. oil supplies. Later, after the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the base was at the

center of the first large-scale thrust of U.S. military strength into the region. To respond to any future threats to the oil supply, Presidents Carter and Reagan developed a “Rapid Deployment Force” (now the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which led the wars in Iraq) at bases in the region, including a rapidly enlarging Diego Garcia (see Bandjunis 2001).

Fearing an unknowable and threatening future in the Third World and increasingly in the Persian Gulf, officials in the 1950s and 1960s crafted a plan for Diego Garcia to control the future through military force. Contrary to those who stress the American Empire’s reliance on economic tools, Diego Garcia and the Strategic Island Concept represent a reactionary reliance on the traditional imperial tools of overseas bases and military power to maintain U.S. dominance. Clearly Diego Garcia and the Strategic Island Concept were not the only reactions to declining U.S. power—there were economic, political, and other military reactions as well. But they provided part of a solution to perceived threats while simultaneously answering the challenges posed by decolonization to the exercise of power through overseas bases. In its reaction to these challenges, Diego Garcia and the Strategic Island Concept also represent a shift in the overseas base network and for the American Empire toward deploying military force in increasingly discreet ways. The new geographic model of moving bases from continental to island locations helped usher in an ongoing move from facilities near population centers to bases isolated—by geography, displacement, and other means—from the problems local people pose for military and civilian leaders.

## **Base Displacement**

That the United States resorted to a population removal to create a base isolated from local pressures becomes less surprising when one sees that Diego Garcia is one of at least 14 documented cases<sup>9</sup> in which the U.S. military (often the Navy) has displaced local peoples to build military facilities. Twelve took place after World War II. Two occurred around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 14 include displacements in Guam, Panama, Hawai'i, the Philippines, Vieques and Culebra (Puerto Rico), Greenland, Okinawa, and five sets of removals in the Marshall Islands on the Bikini Atoll, the Enewetok [Enewetak] Atoll, the Rongelap and Utirik [Utrik] Atolls, Lib Island, and the Kwajalein Atoll. In each of the cases, as for the Chagossians, one of the main consequences of displacement has generally been the impoverishment of the displaced. The 14 base displacements similarly follow the systematic removal of tens of thousands of indigenous Native Americans as part of the westward expansion of the United States, a process during which U.S. bases played a prominent role (discussed in chapter 4).

The full extent of the base displacement phenomenon is considerably broader. Because much of Diego Garcia's significance revolves around its being an island base, I have focused my attention on displacements occurring around other island bases (Panama is an exception). It is not my intention to create a distinction between island bases and continental bases. Focusing on islands was simply a way to examine a sample of U.S. overseas bases, some of which provide some of the best documented cases of base displacement. It is difficult to gauge the scope of base displacement without a systematic survey of U.S. overseas bases, or a representative portion thereof, and the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of base lands. While this is an important subject for future

research, the displacement of the Chagossians and the 13 other cases highlight a pattern of the U.S. military forcibly displacing groups of non-“white,” non-European colonized populations to build overseas military installations and generally resulting in the impoverishment of the displaced.

### **Imperial Shifts and Continuities**

The history of Diego Garcia viewed as part of the global base network points then to both shifts and continuities in the evolution of American Empire and empire more broadly. Instead of abandoning the model of European territorial colonial imperialism, the post-war American Empire has been characterized by the small-scale acquisition of overseas base territories, like Diego Garcia, allowing the nation to exert control over lands far larger than the territories acquired. Thus on the one hand, the extent to which imperial control has been exercised through the base network and not through colonies represents a break with previous empires. On the other hand, Diego Garcia and the base network represent several longstanding imperial trends including the persistence of traditional imperial tools of territorial acquisition and displacement, the development of modes of increasingly informal and indirect rule, and the continued use of those remaining colonies to exert dominance. This suggests that there is to some extent more continuity between the American Empire and previous versions than has been acknowledged.

To be clear, I agree with those who say that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American Empire has been characterized to a significant degree by economic forms of Open Door imperialism. Following the base network scholars and given my findings about Diego Garcia, however, I hold that the American Empire has relied in important ways on the

continued use of military force and on increasingly discreet overseas bases in particular to maintain its dominance. This is not to deny the significance of economics in the American Empire, only to shift the balance toward the relatively unexplored military dimensions. In sum, the dissertation suggests a more balanced perspective on American Empire, highlighting how overseas bases, in combination with political and other military tools, have worked in tandem with and undergirded economic forms of imperial power.

### **Diego Garcia and the Chagossians: Other Main Findings**

Before outlining the dissertation and moving into a chapter reviewing relevant literature and my methods, it is important to summarize some of the dissertation's other main findings. While the U.K. Government and its agents performed most of the work involved in displacing the Chagossians, the U.S. Government ordered, orchestrated, and financed the expulsion. First, the U.S. Government developed and advanced the original idea for a base on Diego Garcia as part of the Strategic Island Concept. Second, the U.S. Government solicited and eventually colluded with the British Government as its partner. Third, U.S. officials decided that the entire population of the archipelago was to be forcibly removed (a condition to which the British Government readily agreed). Fourth, the U.S. Government secretly paid the British for the expulsion, for the silence of Mauritius and Seychelles, and for other costs of establishing the BIOT as a military colony. Fifth, the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations circumvented Congressional oversight of military appropriations and base creation, censored media coverage of the base plans, and generally concealed the expulsion and the creation of the base from the U.S. public and the world. Sixth, after receiving a Congressional

appropriation for the base, the U.S. Government ordered the U.K. Government to complete the removal of the Chagossians from Diego Garcia and then from the entire archipelago, refusing requests from the U.S. Embassy in London and British officials to allow the islanders to remain on Diego Garcia as base employees. Seventh and finally, U.S. officials monitored the progress of the removals, ignoring warnings about the absence of a resettlement plan, with U.S. soldiers assisting in the extermination of Chagossians' pet dogs and the final deportations.

As literature on involuntary displacement predicts, absent a resettlement program most Chagossians quickly found themselves impoverished in Mauritius and Seychelles. Most have remained impoverished to this day, as marginal outsiders in exile, though there has been some improvement in their condition. Despite the Strategic Island Concept's plan to shield Diego Garcia from local opposition, Chagossians have challenged their expulsion since its earliest days, posing growing questions for the future of the BIOT and the base. Turning to the role that U.S. Government officials played in orchestrating the displacement, the dissertation identifies a dehumanized approach to foreign policymaking shared among members of the national security bureaucracy that enabled officials to displace the Chagossians with little thought whatsoever.

## **Overview**

Before entering into the body of the dissertation, it is important to define the concepts of "imperialism" and "empire" around which this work revolves. In short, I define imperialism as the creation and maintenance of hierarchical relationships of formal or informal rule, domination, or control by one people or sociopolitical entity over a

significant part of the life of multiple other peoples or sociopolitical entities such that the stronger shapes or has the ability to shape significant aspects of the ways of living (political, economic, social, or cultural) of the weaker. Empire is then the designation reserved for states and other entities practicing imperialism.

The dissertation uses these definitions to trace the history of the United States as an empire in chapter 4, providing a crucial framework for understanding Diego Garcia. Focusing on the extension of domination and control allows one to see how extraterritorial bases like Diego Garcia have become an important tool for the American Empire following more than a century of traditional imperial expansion.

Before approaching this history, Chapter 2 begins by discussing anthropological research on empire, and how I came to study Diego Garcia, before reviewing my research methods and the small body of literature on Diego Garcia and the Chagossians. The following two chapters explore the historical context behind the island. In both chapters, detailing the history of the Chagossians and the history of U.S. imperial expansion, imperialism appears as the dominant structuring phenomenon for both the creation of society in Chagos and its destruction. Chapter 3 demonstrates how a distinct people and society developed in Chagos amid late 18<sup>th</sup> century imperial competition in the Indian Ocean. Appreciating the evolution of Chagossian society is particularly important to understanding the nature of Chagossians' suffering in exile and thus the costs that the American Empire has imposed, further discussed in chapter 8. Chapter 4 offers a thematic history of the United States as an empire and the role that bases and population displacements have played in the expansion of the nation.

Chapters 5 through 7 then detail the history of the creation of the base, the expulsion, and its aftermath. Chapters 5 and 6 describe how U.S. Government officials created the base and orchestrated the expulsion. Chapter 7 details how the U.S. and U.K. governments removed the Chagossians. In chapter 8, the dissertation follows the islanders after the expulsion, documenting its effects and demonstrating the hidden costs of creating the base.

Expanding the dissertation's vision, chapter 9 details the 13 other identified cases of bases displacement, exploring racial and other contours to this pattern. In chapter 10, the dissertation returns to the officials who orchestrated the expulsion to identify a dehumanized approach to foreign policymaking that helped officials remove the Chagossians with little thought of the costs Chagossians would bear. Chapter 11 then comes back to the Chagossians to show how they have continually resisted their expulsion, conducting a decades long struggle to return to their homes and win compensation. In the Conclusion, the dissertation considers what Diego Garcia adds to understanding the evolution of imperialism more broadly, offering an anthropological contribution to the current debates on foreign policy.

## CHAPTER 2

### **ANTHROPOLOGY AND IMPERIALISM: BUILDING AN “ETHNOGRAPHY OF EMPIRE”**

It is not surprising that few anthropologists have made empire or imperialism their immediate subject of study. Anthropology as a discipline has its roots in the colonialism and imperialism of Europe and the United States and in the unequal power relations inherent in those forms of domination. Anthropology developed as the circumscribed study of non-western peoples as distinct cultural entities and until the 1960s largely ignored issues of power and domination. Anthropology is a colonial and imperial discipline in even deeper ways in that its primary research methodologies—ethnographic participant observation and colonial archival research—have depended on colonial rule and the power imbalance between colonizers and colonized. As Asad explains, “The colonial power structure made the object of anthropological study [non-Western peoples] accessible and safe.... It made possible the kind of human intimacy upon which anthropological fieldwork is based” (1973:17).

At the same time, colonial and imperial power structures never opened up their own leaders to investigation. This would have required anthropologists to move up rather than down power hierarchies and would have gone against the grain of a discipline founded on the “description and analysis—carried out by Europeans [and Americans], for a European [and U.S.] audience—of non-European societies dominated by European [and U.S.] rule” (Asad 1973:15). To have studied the imperial power structure and its actors would have been to consider, and perhaps to question, the disciplinary bases of anthropology itself.

Coming out of the upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s, a movement of disciplinary self-critique forced anthropologists to examine issues of power and imperialism. In 1969, Mina Davis Caulfield castigated anthropology for having accepted the existence of imperialism as a given and failing entirely to develop a theory of the phenomenon despite its being the most important force for cultural change in the history of humanity (Caulfield 1969). Despite these criticisms and exhortations to study the powerless (Nader 1969), most anthropologists have continued to study the lives of the powerless and those whose lives have suffered as a result of large-scale forces like imperialism. The study of violence and warfare provides a good example. With few exceptions, as one of its scholars (Sluka 2000) points out, researchers have focused on the experience of victims (e.g., Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Nordstrom 1997; Sluka 2000) rather than on the practices and practitioners of violence and warfare. Even those anthropologists who have recently turned to examine the colonizers' side of the imperial encounter (e.g., Comaroff 1989; Cooper and Stoler 1989) have typically been more concerned with demonstrating the internal complexities of colonialism and its own ideological conflicts than in understanding how imperial power operates at close individual or institutional levels of analysis.

### **“Ethnographies of Empire”**

In recent years, there has been some progress among anthropologists toward the investigation of empire. Catherine Lutz (2005, 2006) has called for the production of “ethnographies of empire” as a way to explore ethnographically the particularities, practices, shifts, and contradictions in empire, as well as its costs. In her ethnography of

Fayetteville, North Carolina, home to the Fort Bragg U.S. Army base, Lutz (2001) shows how U.S. foreign policy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has effectively become domestic policy, militarizing U.S. society and inflicting heavy costs on people at home. Lutz illustrates the costs of militarization on the people of Fayetteville and by extension throughout the United States, showing how Fayetteville and the United States have become societies shaped and “made” by the violence of war and preparations for war. In this Lutz provides an important model for investigating the connection between the militarization of Diego Garcia and its effects on the Chagossians.

Katherine McCaffrey’s (2002) examination of the military base in Vieques, Puerto Rico, to some extent takes a similar tack in tracing the interaction between the military and a local community. Beyond focusing on effects, she examines the development of an opposition movement against military occupation on Vieques, illustrating how a community has responded to a base, especially through various forms of “cultural resistance.”

Lesley Gill’s (2004) approach attempts to combine a study of the effects and dynamics of American Empire with McCaffrey’s emphasis on resistance. Her focus is threefold: on some of the actors involved in U.S. foreign policy (the students and teachers at the Army’s School of the Americas), on some of those affected by U.S. foreign policy (poor agricultural, coca-growing communities in Bolivia and Columbia), and on some of those resisting U.S. foreign policy (the anti-School of the Americas movement). Gill views the School of the Americas as a “window” on the imperial relationships that the United States has developed in the Americas and, as she argues, on how the United States has increasingly used collusion rather than outright domination to exercise control in the

hemisphere (2004:20, 59). Despite some shortcomings, perhaps related to the study's breadth, which tend to gloss important imperial relationships, Gill's work offers an important model for investigating empire, its actors, and those it has affected.

## **Background**

I began studying Diego Garcia after being invited to conduct research on the Chagossians by a lawyer representing the people in a lawsuit against the U.S. Government. Like most in the United States, I knew nothing about the Chagossians or their expulsion. I only vaguely knew that our government had a military base on an island called Diego Garcia, somewhere in the Indian Ocean.

I eventually produced two pieces of research for Michael Tigar, a lawyer and law professor at American University bringing the case: first, to analyze if, anthropologically speaking, the Chagossians should be considered an "indigenous people" (Vine 2003), and second, to identify and document the ways in which Chagossians' lives have been harmed as a result of their displacement (Vine, et al. 2005).<sup>10</sup> This dissertation builds on that earlier work.

Focused initially on the effects of the expulsion for my work for the lawsuits, I became increasingly interested in the forces and the individuals responsible for the expulsion. I became interested in questions including why was the U.S. Government involved in the exile of the Chagossians. Most attention by journalists and others focused on the role of the British Government, making me wonder which government ordered the expulsion and why? I knew the U.S. Government had displaced the people of the Bikini islands during atomic weapons tests, and that many were opposed to the Navy's use of

Vieques, so I started to wonder if Diego Garcia was an aberration or part of a pattern in U.S. foreign policy.

My interest in the foreign policy aspects of Diego Garcia grew as the base assumed increasing prominence during the war in Iraq. As I read about the history of the base, I saw how Diego Garcia was one of the first steps in an expanding U.S. involvement in the Middle East. Decades before the first Gulf War, government planners designed Diego as a base that would allow the rapid military intervention of U.S. forces in the Middle East to counter any perceived threat to U.S. interests. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq seemed the fulfillment of U.S. officials' visions for the base. More broadly, the wars illuminated the significance of military bases generally as the U.S. military moved to create new ones in nations around the Middle East and Central Asia and then, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, to solidify its hold on key bases in Iraq.

Diego Garcia seemed to provide an opportunity to build an anthropological contribution to the debates on U.S. foreign policy. Specifically, the dissertation would focus on the thousands of overseas U.S. military bases that, with little scholarly attention, have spread around the globe since World War II, on the role that these bases have played in U.S. foreign policy, and on the effects of bases on local populations.

Given my ethnographic research among the Chagossians, I thought it particularly important to devote the same anthropological attention to the U.S. Government officials involved in the expulsion and the development of the base. I began to see that a two-pronged, bifocal approach offering roughly equal study of the Chagossians and American Empire would offer the best way to understand Diego Garcia.<sup>11</sup> This dissertation thus tries to provide a robust anthropological contribution to the study of imperialism

combining structural analysis with ethnographic insight into the dynamics of American Empire, its actors, and some of those it has affected.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Effects of Expulsion**

‘Isms and ocracies. Give me facts.  
A rubber planter beats his labourer—all right, I’m against him.  
[Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* 1973[1955]:95.]

Half of my bifocal approach aims to systematically examine and document the effects of the expulsion through a historical ethnography of the Chagossians from the expulsion through the present, rooted in a historical understanding of the people and the removal process. The dissertation focuses on the effects of empire in an effort to consider the side of imperialism generally ignored or treated superficially by most non-anthropologist scholars. Here I hope to provide an international version of Lutz’s study (2001), examining and detailing the costs inflicted by a military base abroad.

Research among Chagossians, initially conducted at the request of one of their lawyers, involved more than seven months of work in Mauritius and Seychelles between 2001 and 2004. Of most significance here, I carried out ethnographic participant observation in Chagossian communities, living with a series of families and making numerous formal and informal visits to other homes. Among 20 Chagossians with whom I developed significant rapport, I conducted 33 semi-structured qualitative audio-recorded interviews in Mauritian Kreol, Seselwa, French, and English.\* I also conducted 14

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\* Chagossians born in Chagos spoke Chagos Kreol. While related to and mutually intelligible with other Indian Ocean French Kreols, Mauritian Kreol and Seselwa (Seychellois Kreol), Chagos Kreol is distinct from the others in some of its vocabulary and pronunciation of words. Most Chagossians have lost most of the distinctive features over four decades in exile. Much of the vocabulary in all the languages comes from French while also incorporating words from English and several African, Indian, and Chinese languages;

“loose” genealogical interviews<sup>13</sup> and scores of informal conversations and visits to Chagossian households.

To provide a broad overview of the population, I orchestrated a large-scale quantitative survey of Chagossians, referred to below as the “Chagossian Survey” (91 questions; n=321), conducted by paid, trained interviewers under my supervision. I established a Chagossian research advisory team to advise, oversee, and participate in the conduct of my research and held numerous research feedback meetings with Chagossians and others in Mauritius and Seychelles (see Mullings and Wali 2001). Finally, I conducted extensive archival and library research with thousands of documents in the Mauritius Archives, the Mauritius National Library, and the Musée et Archives de la Photographie; the Seychelles Archives, Seychelles National Library, and Seychelles National Heritage Museum; the British Public Records Office (National Archives) in Kew, England; and the U.S. Library of Congress.

### **American Empire and its Actors**

The second half of my bifocal research offers a historical ethnography of Diego Garcia as a base and the members of the national security bureaucracy involved in its creation. (By national security bureaucracy I mean primarily officials in the Departments of Defense and State, the National Security Council (NSC), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the military services, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) responsible for creating and carrying out major national military, defense, and foreign policy.) Between October

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the underlying grammar for the Kreols appears to come from Bantu languages (see Baker and Corne 1982; Papen 1978).

2004 and July 2005, I conducted more than seven months of concentrated research on the U.S. officials, building on several months of preliminary archival research. The new work focused on interviewing and additional archival study. During this period, I lived in Washington, D.C., home to many of the former officials and most of the archival sources. I requested permission to visit Diego Garcia and other islands in Chagos but was denied by U.K. and U.S. Navy representatives. Both have prevented the Red Cross and human rights groups from visiting, and it appears that no journalists have officially visited since the late 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Pike described the likelihood of a civilian visiting Diego Garcia as “about as likely as the sun coming up in the west.”

In total, I conducted in-depth semi-structured audio-recorded interviews with 12 former and 2 current U.S. Government officials. They included officials from the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Departments of Defense and State, and the U.S. Congress. Two interviews were conducted by email and two were conducted by telephone. The interview sessions sought to elicit detailed histories of the decision-making process leading to the development of the base and the expulsion. Throughout, I continually asked interviewees to describe their thinking at the time of the events under discussion to identify their contemporaneous interests, motivations, assumptions, and understandings. I conducted nine additional interviews of a similar nature with journalists, academics, military analysts, and a scientist who were involved in the history of Diego Garcia or who were otherwise knowledgeable about the base.

The most significant limitation of the interviews was my inability to speak with some of the highest-ranking officials involved in Diego Garcia. Many, including White House official Robert Komer and admirals Elmo Zumwalt and Arleigh Burke, were long

deceased. Some like Paul Nitze died early in my research before I could request an interview. Others including Robert McNamara, Henry Kissinger, and James Schlesinger did not respond to my interview requests. This pattern made my interviews skewed toward middle and low-ranking officials. Because of this shortcoming, in my history of the base and in my analysis I rely more heavily on government documents traded among the officials than on the interviews. I used the interviews mostly to provide insight into the attitudes, assumptions, and bureaucratic norms shared by officials at the time as well as to confirm details in the documentary and historical records.

I balance these retrospective accounts with an analysis of hundreds of pages of documentary evidence. These documents provided additional perspectives on officials' actions and thinking at the time. I located these documents in the U.S. National Archives, the Naval Historical Center, the Library of Congress, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, the State Department's *Foreign Records of the United States* publication series, the RAND Corporation, the British Public Records Office, and the files of the U.S. and British lawyers representing the Chagossians.

I have used these sources and interviews not just to understand the history of Diego Garcia and the dynamics of American Empire but also to understand more about the actors in the national security bureaucracy themselves. As Derek Gregory (2004) points out, the actions of states are not produced "through geopolitics and geoeconomics alone" (16). They are also produced by cultural, social, and psychological processes and practices, especially those that "mark other people as irredeemably 'Other'" and locate both the self and others spatially (Gregory 2004:16, 20). Thus the dissertation attempts to

use the history of U.S. officials' decisions and decision-making to uncover these processes and practices as well as the shared assumptions, logics, and mentalities of Government officials.

Guided by other ethnographies of empire, including Gusterson's (1996) emphasis on the power of institutions, Cohn's (1990) emphasis on discourse, and Schirmer's (1998) demand for an empathetic ethnography of the perpetrators of violence, I aim to explore U.S. officials as complex individuals, themselves shaped by complex forces.<sup>15</sup> Here too I follow the example of James Mann's (2004) psychosocial-political exploration of President George W. Bush's closest foreign policy advisors, known as the "Vulcans," as a generation of intertwined actors. Like Mann, I aim to illuminate the "beliefs and the worldview" (2004:xv) of the U.S. officials responsible for Diego Garcia by tracing the history of the base and the expulsion.

The dissertation thus aims to contribute to anthropological scholarship on empire, militarization, and other forms of domination, by subjecting American Empire and its actors to the same kind of ethnographic scrutiny most often reserved for imperialism's victims.

### **Diego Garcia and the Chagossians in Exile: Reviewing the Literature<sup>16</sup>**

The development of the base at Diego Garcia and the expulsion of the Chagossians has been the subject of a small body of literature since the 1970s. Analysts have typically focused on either the strategic military dimensions of the base or on Chagossians' experiences in exile. Prior to the expulsion, there was little literature available. The only major works were a survey of Chagos and the other small dependencies of Mauritius by

its former colonial governor Sir Robert Scott (1976[1961]) and the writings of missionary Catholic priest Roger Dussercle (e.g., 1934). In 2005, two academic theses (Jeffery 2005; Johannessen 2005) offered important contributions to understanding the construction of Chagossian identities in exile.

### *Strategic Analyses of Diego Garcia*

Strategic analyses have generally explained the development of the base as the centerpiece of an accelerating U.S. policy to control the Indian Ocean region and the flow of Persian Gulf oil through the deployment of military power (Bezboruah 1977; Larus 1982, 1985; Jawatkar 1983; Khan 1983; Sick 1983). Bezboruah (1977) and Jawatkar (1983) emphasize that Diego Garcia became especially important to this strategy because, after the expulsion, Diego Garcia was shielded from the political complications and opposition of a continental base encircled by growing, often anti-Western nationalism in Africa and Asia. Writing during the initial expansion of the base, Bezboruah accurately predicted that Diego Garcia would be “a decisive facility enabling the United States to ‘influence major shifts in the global balance of power’” (1977:84). Less than a decade later, Larus presciently found the base to have “become one of American’s essential military installations in the world, the hub for its strategic operational plans to deal with any future crisis in the Middle East/Persian Gulf area” (1985:435).

Some in the literature explain the development of the base as a product of Cold War competition with the Soviet Union (Sick 1983; Larus 1985). Others argue that rivalry with the Soviets was overblown at various points and exploited as a rationale to win Congressional appropriations for the base (Singh 1977; Jawatkar 1983; Sick 1983).

More than others, Singh sees the base as primarily motivated by a desire to increase the ability of the United States to intervene militarily with regional powers and to aid the deployment of submarine-based nuclear weapons in the Indian Ocean targeting the Soviet Union and China. The most recent analysis, by a retired naval officer (Bandjunis 1998) who participated in the development of the base, finds no single strategic motivation. In what is the best history of the base (even if the scholarship in this self-published book is flawed), Bandjunis (2001) argues that a series of regional events strengthened the perceived need for a base whose initial creation owes itself mostly to the initiative of the U.S. Navy.

### *The Chagossians in Exile*

Since the final deportations in 1973, a small body of journalistic accounts, professional reports, and academic theses has described the expulsion and its effects on the Chagossians. Journalistic works have been most frequent. Ottaway's 1975 *Washington Post* article—the first in the Western press to break the story—is representative in describing the “abject poverty” Chagossians faced in Mauritius after the removals. Almost thirty years later, Carlson Anyangwe's fact-finding report (2001) found severe immediate and long-term injuries resulting from the displacement. There has, however, been relatively little academic analysis systematically detailing the state of Chagossians' lives, with the exception of works focused primarily on identity formation and politics (Botte 1981; I. Walker 1986; Jeffery 2005; Johannessen 2005). There has been almost no work on Chagossians in Seychelles.

In the literature, there is widespread agreement that as a group the islanders have been deeply impoverished since their expulsion (Ottaway 1975; Siophe 1975; Prosser 1976; Botte 1980; Sylva 1981; Madeley 1985; I. Walker 1986; Dræbel 1997; Anyangwe 2001; Winchester 2001). Some have documented the high rates of unemployment and poverty among Chagossians (Siophe 1975; Sylva 1981; Dræbel 1997). Some have documented degraded housing conditions (Siophe 1975; Prosser 1976; Botte 1980; Sylva 1981; Dræbel 1997). Others have documented their many health problems and educational difficulties (Siophe 1975; Botte 1980; Dræbel 1997).

In documenting the history of the expulsion, most have focused on the actions of the British Government in removing the Chagossians. Madeley (1985) and Winchester (1985, 2001; see also Marimootoo 1997) explain that the U.S. Government required the removal as part of the BIOT agreement, but they focus little more on the U.S. role. Both emphasize the duplicity and (in a sarcastic understatement) “fibbing policy” (Winchester 2001:217) of the British Government in organizing the removals. Along with Anyangwe (2001), Madeley and Winchester stress the violation of the Chagossians’ basic human rights. Madeley is the most explicit in arguing that racism underlies the treatment of the Chagossians, as is clear from his title, “Diego Garcia: A Contrast to the Falklands” (1985).

Though he offers little new evidence to document Chagossians’ injuries, Anyangwe’s report concisely summarizes accumulated knowledge. Anyangwe concludes that, “The forcible eviction impacted negatively on the lives and livelihood of the evictees in other ways: individual and social impoverishment; physical, psychological and emotional trauma; insecurity for the future; loss of livelihood; loss of emotionally,

spiritually and culturally significant sights; loss of personal possessions they were forced to relinquish” (2001:43).

All of these analyses are important to understanding Diego Garcia. However, each generally sees either the base only within the context of Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf geopolitics or the expulsion of the Chagossians as a relatively isolated incident. The literature overlooks the ways in which Diego Garcia fits into wider patterns of U.S. foreign, and specifically military, policy. Jawatkar (1983) alone emphasizes how Diego Garcia is part of a global U.S. military strategy and the expansion of its global power. He argues that one must see Diego Garcia not as an isolated case but as part of U.S. “foreign policy objectives as a global power” and its chain of bases from the Pacific to South Africa (1983:279).

The dissertation now moves to consider the history behind the expulsion and creation of the base in two chapters, first on the development of Chagossian society and second on the imperial expansion of the United States.

## CHAPTER 3

### IMPERIALISM, SLAVERY, AND THE PLANTATION COMPLEX: A HISTORY OF THE CHAGOSSIANS

“A great number of vessels might anchor there in safety,” reported French Lieutenant La Fontaine from his 1769 naval survey of Diego Garcia’s lagoon (Scott 1976:68). For the first time, the imperial powers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century began to grasp the strategic significance of Diego Garcia as a naval base at the center of the Indian Ocean.

Within 15 years of La Fontaine’s survey a continuous settlement of diverse peoples from continental Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Europe, and later India established itself in Chagos. Over the course of nearly 200 hundred years, a distinct society and people developed in the archipelago.

Chagos was originally one of the dependencies of Mauritius, which also included the Seychelles archipelago (before it became a separate colony in 1903). Along with Mauritius’s other dependencies Agalega and Rodrigues, Chagos was known as one of the Oil Islands. They were so named for cultivating the dried flesh of the coconut, called copra, to make coconut oil. Until the U.S. and U.K. governments removed the Chagossians, the coconut along with the institutions of slavery and plantation agriculture would define life in the islands. In this chapter I present a history of Chagos and its people focusing on these defining features.<sup>17</sup>

### **Imperial Competition in the Indian Ocean**

Although before the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was no human habitation in Chagos, the islands were known by the seagoing people of several trading and imperial powers, including the Malays, Arabs, and likely the Indians and Chinese.<sup>18</sup>

Still there is no conclusive evidence to prove anyone visiting Chagos prior to the arrival of 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese visitors, who provided the name Chagos (originally, *Chagas* or “the wounds of Christ” (A. Toussaint 1966:110)). Scott says that most of the islands of Chagos were probably first sighted and recorded on maps in 1512 by Pedro Mascarenhas (for whom the Mascarenes were named) (1976:34). By the end of the century, the Portuguese had mapped all of the islands of the archipelago and the rest of what would become known as the Lesser Dependencies of Mauritius. On the whole, though, the Portuguese remained “indifferent” to the islands, according to Scott, using them only as markers on their trade routes to the Indies (1976:35), with the waters around Chagos developing a bad reputation among sailors (I. Walker 1993:562).

Imperial competition over the spice trade in the Indian Ocean led the Dutch to claim and settle Mauritius initially in 1598. After four failed settlement attempts, the Dutch abandoned the island in 1707. This left the Indian Ocean to France and England. The two competed for the islands in the western Indian Ocean throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century as strategic bases to control shipping routes to India (Scott 1976:42-3, 48-50; Teelock 2001:16-17). After occupying Réunion Island (originally Île Bourbon) in 1642, the French replaced the Dutch with a successful permanent settlement on Mauritius (renamed Île de France) beginning in 1721. The French later settled nearby Rodrigues and by 1742, Seychelles (Scarr 1999:5).

As in the Caribbean (see R. L. Stein 1979:9), France soon shifted its focus from military to commercial interests. French settlers built societies on the islands around enslaved labor and, particularly in Mauritius, the cultivation of sugar cane. At first, the French Company of the Indies tried to import enslaved people from the same West African sources supplying the Caribbean colonies. Soon though the Company developed a new slave trade to import enslaved laborers from Madagascar and the area of Africa known then as Mozambique (a larger stretch of the southeast African coast than the current nation) (Teelock 2001:104-105; R. L. Stein 1979:119). Indian Ocean historian Larry Bowman writes that French settlement in Mauritius produced “a sharply differentiated society with extremes of wealth and poverty and an elite deeply committed to and dependent upon slavery” (1991:13).

For most of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Chagos islands remained uninhabited, serving only as a safe haven and provisioning stop for ships gradually more familiar with its waters (Orlan 1958:129; Scott 1976:76). As the 18<sup>th</sup> century progressed, competition between the French and English increased in Europe, spilling over increasingly into a fight for naval and thus economic control of the Indian Ocean. Centrally located Chagos became an obvious military and economic target for the imperial powers.

English and French vessels started visiting and surveying Chagos with increasing frequency. France first claimed Chagos’s Peros Banhos island group in 1744 (I. Walker 1993:562). A year later, the English surveyed Diego Garcia. Numerous French and English voyages followed to inspect other island groups in the archipelago, including Trois Frères [Three Brothers], Egmont Atoll, and the Salomon Islands, before La Fontaine’s survey of Diego Garcia’s lagoon (Scott 1976:63, 69; Grant 1995:359).

### Settlement in Chagos

Permanent settlement in Chagos began around 1783, when an influential plantation owner from Mauritius, Pierre Marie Le Normand, petitioned for and was granted a concession to found a settlement on Diego Garcia. Documents in the Mauritian Archives reveal that the concession sheet from the French colonial government in Mauritius was signed February 17, 1783 (Couve 1783).<sup>19</sup> According to Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee, Le Normand received his “favourable reply in February 1783 and immediately prepared his voyage to Diego Garcia” (1986:92). Le Normand took with him twenty-two enslaved people, who became the islands first inhabitants (Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee 1986:91-92; I. Walker 1993:563; Scott 1976:20; d’Unienville n.d.).

Unaware of Le Normand’s arrival, the British East India Company launched a settlement party from Bombay to create a provisioning plantation on Diego Garcia in 1786. Surprised to find the French settlement, which they described as “a dozen huts of the meanest appearance,” on May 4, 1786, the British party did not flinch and “took formal possession of the island of Diego Garcia and all its Dependencies in the name of His Majesty King George the Third and in the name and for the use of the Honourable United Company” (Edis 2004:30-31).

Unable to resist the newcomers, Le Normand left for Mauritius to report the British arrival. When France’s Vicompte de Souillac learned of the British landing, he sent a letter of protest to Bombay and the frigate *Minerve* to reclaim the archipelago (Edis 2004:31; Scott 1976:75; I. Walker 1993:562). To prevent an international incident, the British Council in Bombay sent departure instructions to its landing party. The *Minerve* arrived in Diego and found the British settlement abandoned (less than six months after

its arrival), their grain and vegetable seeds washed into the sand despite having hauled six shiploads of soil from Bombay (“Diégo Garcia”; Scott 1976:20).

It is unclear if all the first settlers left with Le Normand and if he returned, but soon after a Monsieur Danquet<sup>20</sup> established a fishing settlement on Diego Garcia (“Diégo Garcia”; I. Walker 1993:563). Four more coconut plantations followed, established by Franco-Mauritian entrepreneurs Lapotaire, Didier, and the brothers Cayeux (Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee 1986:92; d’Unienville n.d.).

Like the societies in Mauritius and Seychelles, as well as in other island colonies, life in Chagos revolved around the use of enslaved people to exploit a natural resource—in this case, primarily coconuts. Iain Walker writes that by 1808 there were 100 enslaved people working under Lapotaire alone, who proved the most successful of the owners, building a copra processing plant for oil extraction in 1793 (1993:563). By 1813, there were a similar number of slaves in Peros Banhos, shortly after the Mauritian colonial government granted an 1813 *jouissance*, or concession, to create a plantation there (I. Walker 1993:563). Other coconut plantations were similarly established under other owners at Six Iles [Six Islands] in 1808 and at Trois Frères, Île d’Aigle [Eagle Islands], and Salomon Islands in 1813.

*A Climate for Coconuts and a Growing Society: Environmental Conditions in Chagos*

The islands in Chagos had, in the words of a 20<sup>th</sup> century agriculturalist, “a climate ideally suited to the cultivation of coconuts,” (Lucie-Smith 1959:6). Vegetation is particularly dense on Diego Garcia as a result of high rainfall and almost unvaryingly high temperatures, conditions also found in the other island groups. And unlike the

cyclones (hurricanes) that frequently tear across Mauritius and can damage so much of its sugar cane crop, Chagos is in the part of the Indian Ocean where cyclones form and is thus free from their dangers (only one cyclone is known to have hit Chagos, in 1891 (Ashe 1903:2)). Another agricultural observer Alfred J. E. Orian explains that, “These conditions are responsible for the absence of a distinct flowering season and the gigantic size of many native and cultivated trees” (1958:129). Meaning, most significantly, that coconut palms produce nuts year round for potential harvest.

All of Chagos’s islands are coral, rather than volcanic rock, atolls and are extremely low-lying: the highest elevation is 15 meters above sea level on Diego Garcia (I. Walker 1993:561; Scott 1976:16). Fishing opportunities are abundant, and the waters are still fished commercially under special agreements with the BIOT. Describing the conditions on Diego Garcia that many call idyllic, Orian writes, “The atoll is covered with luxuriant vegetation of bright green colour and is fringed by pure white sandy beaches. In places the tree-line is 125 feet high” (1958:129).

*Lepers at Diego Garcia: A Climate for Rest and Recovery*

Other than in the cultivation of coconuts, the natural environment played another important role in Chagos’s history. In establishing his plantation on Diego Garcia, Le Normand realized that the climate and the abundance of turtles on the island made Diego a suitable place for recovering lepers from Mauritius (Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee 1986:92). (In addition to the ability to quarantine people on Diego Garcia, turtle meat was thought to cure leprosy.) By 1792, the colonial government in Mauritius was sending lepers to the island, and in 1809 the French administration started requiring

plantation owners to accept and assume responsibility for lepers in exchange for each plantation's concession rights (Scott 1976:256, 99).

Mauritius Archives records from the period 1783-1828 list the names of three families of lepers, categorized as *blancs* [whites] or *mulâtres* [mulattos], living in Diego—Philippe, Isidor, Thomas. The records also report that most of the family members were accompanied by unnamed *noirs* [enslaved black men] and *negresses* [enslaved black women] making oil on the island (Etat des Lepreux n.d.). As late as 1827, other records record the transport of 13 enslaved lepers to Diego Garcia (Lecamus 1827). The transport of lepers to Diego seems to have stopped in the 1830s. Contrary to the predictions of some observers that this would produce a sickly population, Scott found “there has, however, been no such genetic quirk.... Physically, the people of Diego Garcia are not different from the inhabitants of the other Dependencies” (1976: 256-257).

### *The Transfer to British Rule*

French power in the Indian Ocean crumbled during the Napoleonic Wars at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British first seized control of Seychelles in 1794 and Mauritius in 1810. France formally ceded Mauritius, including Chagos and the other dependencies (as well as most of its other island possessions worldwide) to Great Britain in 1814 in the Treaty of Paris.

Unlike most instances of British colonial rule however, Mauritius under the British retained its French laws, language, religion, and customs (including enslaving Africans). “Mauritius became formally British but remained very French,” explains

Larry Bowman (1991:17-18). British oversight in Mauritius and even more so in the isolated Dependencies like Chagos was weak at best. The British sent the first government agent to investigate conditions in Chagos between 1824 and 1829 (Scott 1976:128) but otherwise simply encouraged the production of oil in Chagos to supply the Mauritian market (Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee 1986:92-93).

### **Life in Chagos from Slavery to Indenture**

Slavery thus remained the defining feature of life in Chagos from Le Normand's initial settlement to the abolition of slavery in Mauritius and its dependencies in 1835.

Enslaved labor built the archipelago's infrastructure, produced its wealth (mostly in coconut oil), and formed the overwhelming majority of inhabitants. After the concessionaires initially transported large numbers of slaves to Chagos to establish their plantations, transportation records indicate that slave owners made frequent voyages between Mauritius and the Chagos islands with relatively small numbers of slaves ("Return" 1821-1826).<sup>21</sup>

While most enslaved people in Chagos arrived from Mauritius, some may have arrived from Seychelles (Scott 1976:112, 119) and perhaps even on slaving ships direct from Madagascar and the Mozambique coast of Africa (Peerthum and Peerthum 2002). Some enslaved people would have been born in Mauritius and perhaps Seychelles, but most—like most of the enslaved people in Mauritius—were probably born in Madagascar, the Mozambique coast, and other parts of Africa (Scott 1976:2).

A letter from 1828 granting permission to transport enslaved people to, from, and within Chagos reveals the slave names<sup>22</sup> and origins of some of the early inhabitants of

Chagos. Some of the surnames are significant in that, while common, they are the same as those of families last born in Chagos (cf. Gutman 1976:185-201, on naming practices during slavery reflecting the maintenance of kinship ties among African Americans).

The letter lists: Pierre Louis, Creole of Mauritius; Prosper Jean, Malagasy; Marie Jeannie, Mozambican; Michel Levillain, Mozambican and his wife, Prudence Levillain, Malagasy; Theophile Le Leger, Creole of Mauritius (Permits 1828).

Colonial Parliamentary papers from 1826 (below) provide a picture of the population, including the nature of the islands as absolute slave plantation societies. It is important to note the significant gender imbalance in the islands, which continued through an 1832 census enumerating almost twice as many enslaved males as enslaved females (Commissioners of Compensation 1835). Some of the claims for compensation filed by owners of enslaved people at emancipation again reveal more of the names and origins of these early, enslaved inhabitants. They include Auguste Augustine, a 22 year old, and Marie Jeune, a 25 year old, both listed as from Mozambique (Claims n.d.).

**Table 1: Chagos population, by island group, 1826.**

**Diego Garcia, 1826**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Blancs*</b>	5	1	-	-
<b>Libres</b>	1	4	6	3
<b>Enslaved People</b>	168	37	3	10
<b>Lepers†</b>	30	5	-	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>

**Grand Total: 275**

\* *Blancs* = whites; *Libres* = free people of African descent and people of mixed descent.

† Most likely includes people of all of the other categorizations.

**Peros Banhos, 1826**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Blancs</b>	1	-	-	-
<b>Libres</b>	3	1	1	1
<b>Enslaved People</b>	58	33	12	10
<b>Lepers</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>

**Grand Total: 120****Trois Frères, 1826**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Blancs</b>	1	-	-	-
<b>Libres</b>	2	-	-	-
<b>Enslaved People</b>	19	12	3	1
<b>Lepers</b>	5	-	-	-
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>

**Grand Total: 43****Salomon Islands, 1826**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Blancs</b>	1	-	-	-
<b>Libres</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>Enslaved People</b>	4	5	-	-
<b>Lepers</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

**Grand Total: 10****CHAGOS TOTAL, 1826: 448<sup>23</sup>**

[Source: Parliament Papers of 1826 in Labouchere 1857b.]

In 1828 plantation owners in the Lesser Dependencies (who included concessionaires on Rodrigues, Agalega, and Coëtivy) petitioned the colonial government in Mauritius for an exemption from an order prohibiting the transfer of enslaved people from the Dependencies to Mauritius. The letter was most likely an attempt to cover up an

active illegal slave trade, which used the Dependencies to smuggle newly enslaved people into Mauritius for sale, disguised as enslaved people already working in the dependencies. Despite the self-interested nature of the letter and the owners' portrayal of the enslaved laborers as "happy and content" and their treatment as being of "the greatest gentleness," their petition reveals some important aspects of daily life for the enslaved people (Lapotaire, et al. 1828:13).

The enslaved labor worked "from sunrise to sunset for six days a week" under the supervision of overseers (see also Scott 1976:99, 104-105, 149). Outside their regular workdays, each enslaved person had the ability to make a small savings of money and to have a "*petite plantation*," a small garden, to raise animals and add to one's well being (Lapotaire et al. 1828:13). Scott confirms that by law, slave owners were required to provide basic food rations, clothing, housing, and medical care, and that "slaves were usually supplied with various vegetables...[and] encouraged to rear small livestock...either by way of incentives to good work or to place on the slaves themselves as much as possible of the onus of providing a balanced diet" (1976:105).

### **The Plantation Complex: From the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean**

A more accurate depiction of society in Chagos and daily life for its enslaved people comes from Sidney Mintz's observation that mere coincidence cannot account for the similarities exhibited by the societies of the Caribbean (1971:20). Despite thousands of miles separating them, the same can be said for the parallels found between the societies of the Caribbean and Chagos. Like the pan-Caribbean similarities, those between the Caribbean and Chagos (as well as other island societies in the Indian Ocean) are largely

the result of similar economic and social structures stemming from common histories of European colonization. Specifically, the introduction of the “plantation complex” (Curtin 1990) from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean is responsible for the parallels between the geographically dispersed islands. Because French colonialism was equally if not more influential in the development of Chagossian society than British colonial rule, I highlight the experiences of French Caribbean colonies in the following analysis. While the plantation complex provides a useful initial framework for understanding Chagos, the features of life particular to the archipelago are equally important and illuminating.

### *The Plantation Complex*

For historian Philip Curtin, the plantation complex (also known as the “plantation system” (Mintz 1974; Craton 1997)) centered in the Americas but stretched from Southern Brazil to the Mason-Dixon line in the United States, and included outliers in Natal and Zanzibar, Queensland and Fiji, Hawaii, and islands in the Indian Ocean (Curtin 1990:ix-x). Curtin says that these societies shared several important characteristics including, a mostly enslaved labor force, agriculture-based economies organized around “large-scale capitalist plantations” supplying specialized products to distant markets, political control emanating from distant European nations, a population that was generally not self-sustaining and required frequent replenishment (usually by enslaved peoples and later indentured laborers), and elements of feudal labor control (1990:11-13). Although scholars differ on some of the specifics of the plantation complex, Curtin, Mintz, and Michael Craton (1997) agree at base that, “the plantation system means a

rooted overseas capitalism based on conquest, slavery and coercion, and investment and entrepreneurship” (Mintz 1974:9-10).

The settlement and development of life in Chagos closely paralleled the development of plantation societies in the Caribbean and around the world. Curtin explains how the sugar masters of the Caribbean introduced the technology of the plantation complex to new colonies in Africa and Asia, including Mauritius (1990:179). With the plantation complex well established in Mauritian sugar plantations by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Franco-Mauritian entrepreneurs applied the same technology in Chagos, which came to exhibit most of the characteristics Curtin outlines. Chagos’s isolation, small size, and relatively late settlement account for some of its key particularities.

Most profoundly, slavery was the defining feature of life in Chagos until slavery’s abolition. Unlike most Caribbean societies, however, society in Chagos was based on slavery and slavery alone from its first days of settlement. Unlike in the Caribbean, there was no indigenous population in Chagos to force into labor and to replace when they were killed off. Likewise, perhaps because of its late settlement, the plantations in Chagos never employed European indentured laborers, or *engages*, to replace indigenous laborers (Mintz 1974:46).

As elsewhere in the plantation complex, Chagos had an agricultural economy based around large capitalist plantations supplying a specialized product—copra—to distant markets (in Mauritius, Europe, and elsewhere). Chagos was likewise subject to political control emanating from France and later England and exhibited elements of feudal labor control.

It is unclear how frequently the population in the archipelago required replenishment. There was certainly an ongoing flow of enslaved people to Chagos from 1783 until abolition in 1835. After emancipation, plantation owners continued to recruit and import indentured Indian laborers and formerly enslaved peoples from Mauritius to work in the islands.

Although Chagos was an agriculture-based economy organized around capitalist plantations supplying specialized products to distant markets, and as such was a “dependent part[] of European economies” (Mintz 1974:10), the majority of the copra harvest was not produced for European markets but was instead for the Mauritian market. As an incarnation of the plantation complex, Chagos is thus better understood not as a dependent part of European economies nor as primarily producing products for distant markets but as a dependent part of the Mauritian mono-crop sugar cane economy, which was itself a dependent part of the French and later British economies. Put another way, Chagos was a kind of colony of a colony or a dependent part of a dependent economy: Chagos fulfilled Mauritius’s oil needs to keep its sugar cane industry producing for distant European markets.

#### *Labor Organization and Daily Life in the Plantation Complex*

In the organization of labor and daily life, Chagos also exhibited similarities to the Caribbean plantation complex, as well as important differences. Architecturally, the plantations in Chagos were almost identical to the model sugar plantation of the French Caribbean. Robert L. Stein’s description of French Caribbean plantations (1979:8-9) could as well describe those in Chagos: Each was about 750 acres and near a river for

transportation (in Chagos the plantations were smaller and located on the ocean). Plantations were organized around a *maison principale* [master's house; lit. main house] near the front of each estate and surrounded by gardens, offices, and stores for the management. Nearby one found buildings for the processing of the raw materials (coconuts in Chagos; primarily sugar cane in the Caribbean). A few rows of small "almost makeshift" houses were nearby serving as accommodations for about 150 enslaved laborers. Surrounding the center of the plantation were animal enclosures, small kitchen gardens for the enslaved people, and the fields (coconut groves in Chagos) (R. L. Stein 1979:8-9).

Chagos's plantations were in some ways "as much a factory as a farm," employing the "factory-like organization of agricultural labor into large-scale, highly coordinated enterprises" (Mintz 1974:52, 54). While some of the work was agricultural in nature, much of it required the repetitive manual processing of hundreds of coconuts a day by women, men, and children in what was essentially an outdoor factory area at the center of each plantation. On the other hand, as in the Caribbean, most of the work was usually performed on a task basis, allowing laborers generally to control the pace and rhythm of their work. Given the isolation of Chagos, the limited work supervision available, and the tiny number of whites, owners probably viewed the relatively less onerous task system as the best way to maintain discipline and prevent slave revolts. (This was the case in the isolated Out Islands of the Bahamas where similar conditions prevailed (H. Johnson 1996:50).)

At the same time, authority over work regimens was carefully controlled as in factory labor, helping to shape a rigid color-based plantation hierarchy that mirrored the

one in the French Caribbean (see Eccles 1998:172-174; Miles 1986:32-34). This was also undoubtedly related to owners' fears of revolt, which in Mauritius and Seychelles made "domestic discipline," armed militias, and police the backbone of those related societies (Scarr 1998). Plantation owners came from the *grand blanc* [lit. big white] ruling class and ran the settlements essentially as patriarchal private estates. In exchange for their concession, owners accepted responsibility for the general welfare of their land and its inhabitants—*en bon père de famille*—much as a father was broadly expected to care for his family. "Responsibility for the administration of the settlements, before and after emancipation, was vested in the proprietors," explains former governor of Mauritius Scott. "For all practical purposes, however, it was normally delegated to the manager on the spot, the *administrateur* [administrator]" (Scott 1976:136). As in the French Caribbean, owners rarely lived on the plantations and instead exercised their authority through relatives and *petit blanc* [lit. little white] administrators who ran the islands from the *maison principale* or *grand case* [master's house] (Craton 1997:3; Eccles 1998:172).

The administrators controlled the islands with the assistance of *petit blanc* or "mulatto" sub-managers and other staff recruited to the islands and rewarded with better salaries, housing, and other privileges unknown to the laborers. The sub-managers in turn delivered daily work orders and controlled the laborers before and after work through a group of *commandeurs* [overseers], primarily of African descent who were given some privileges and after emancipation paid higher wages.

As in the French Caribbean, owners and their subordinates often ruled largely by fear (Eccles 1998:172). On an everyday basis, each administrator could shape not just work conditions but also much of daily life. With administrators changing about once

every five years on plantations before 1835, conditions under managers varied (Scott 1976:140). “As a result,” writes Scott, “the various settlements, while still broadly conforming to the same general pattern, had acquired by 1835 characters of their own” (1976:140).

Despite the constraints on their lives, some laborers could achieve a degree of upward mobility by becoming artisans and performing other specialized tasks. The vast majority of the population remained ordinary laborers of African and Indian descent at the bottom of the work and status hierarchy in a system that became engrained in the social order.

### **Emancipation and the Continuation of the Plantation Complex**

Slavery was abolished in Mauritius and its dependencies in 1835. After emancipation, a period of apprenticeship continued for about four years. As in the Caribbean (Craton 1997:380-381), the daily routine of plantation life during and after the apprenticeship period changed according to the dictates of each island’s administrator. On some islands, like Diego Garcia, life and the conditions from slavery changed little. On others, daily work tasks were reduced in accordance with the stipulations of the official “Assistant Protector of Slaves in Mauritius” (Scott 1976:140-141).

As in parts of the Caribbean, life in Chagos after emancipation was part of a continuum (Craton 1997:358) with the pre-emancipation era rather than a revolutionary departure. Curtin explains, “plantations often continued as the dominant economic unit—still managed by people of mainly European descent, still worked by people of mainly African descent. Even the old work organization of gang labor under intense

supervision continued on some Caribbean islands into the twentieth century” (Curtin 1990:173). Despite the end of slavery, the plantation complex lived on.

Overall, the basic structure of labor relations probably changed little in Chagos even if the quantity and demands of work lessened over time in favor of laborers. In 1949, a visiting representative of the Mauritian Labour Office commented on the generally “patriarchal” labor relations between management and labor in Chagos, “dating back to what I imagine would be the slave days, by this I do not imply any oppression but rather a system of benevolent rule with privileges and no rights” (Meyer 1949:1).

Until their closure in 1973, the plantations moved slowly toward more corporate ownership and management structures (Mintz 1974), with the gradual consolidation of plantation ownership beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The basic organization of the plantation complex however, remained largely unchanged into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, though the introduction of Catholicism, basic schooling, and other improved amenities changed some of the structure of life. In contrast to how Craton describes dramatic changes affecting post-emancipation Caribbean societies, Chagos was relatively unaffected (1997:436-437).

The most significant post-emancipation change likely came in the quality of labor relations. The years following emancipation in Mauritius were marked by the rapid departure of enslaved Africans from the Mauritian sugar plantations (e.g., Scarr 1998; Teelock 1998). Unlike in Mauritius, demographic data from Chagos suggests that there was no such migration—a phenomenon that demands explanation and that, I believe, suggests a significant change in the quality of labor relations and the development of a society deeply rooted in the islands.

To explain the lack of emigration from Chagos, one must again consider that the newly freed Africans and the Indian indentured laborers who joined them massively outnumbered the plantation management of mostly European descent in a setting of enormous isolation. For management, this demographic imbalance and the lack of a militia or police force as in Mauritius and Seychelles made the threat of an uncontrollable labor revolt real (as we shall see several examples exist, including the 1856 murder of an administrator by an Indian laborer). These facts combined with the relatively comfortable work benefits and relatively light workload increasingly enjoyed by Chagossians suggest that despite the continuation of the plantation complex after emancipation, the general nature of labor relations probably improved significantly in favor of laborers. Exceptions of brutality and harsh treatment remained through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but in general it appears that Chagossians gradually struck what for a plantation society was a relatively good work bargain, largely as a result of the demographic imbalance and isolation of the islands.

### **Indenture and the Introduction of Indian Labor**

While some of those previously enslaved on sugar plantations in Mauritius appear to have immigrated to work on Diego Garcia and other Mauritian dependencies (Carter and d'Unienville n.d.:57), the major population change in the post-emancipation period came when plantation owners began importing indentured laborers from India (while Indians were arriving on a much larger scale to work the Mauritian sugar cane fields). The extent and rate at which Indian labor was introduced in Chagos is unclear. A visiting magistrate's report from 1880 says that there were on the order of 10 Indians in all of

Chagos, a figure almost certainly too low (Ackroyd 1880:11). Some claim a figure of 40 percent Indian descent by the 1960s (Botte 1980; I. Walker 1986), which is almost certainly too high.

Regardless of the precise figures, which are likely somewhere in the middle, it is clear that Indians began living and working in Chagos on a permanent basis around the time of emancipation.<sup>24</sup> There is evidence that some, including Mauritian Governor Higginson, believed labor was being introduced illegally into Chagos and the other dependencies from India (Labouchere 1857a). The 1856 murder of an administrator in Six Iles, Mr. Hugon, supports the charge. Four Indians were eventually captured and tried for Hugon's murder. In their trial, the four claimed that they had been kidnapped from Cochin and made to work in Six Iles against their will. Though a Mauritian visiting police magistrate doubted the story in 1880 (Ackroyd 1880:8), historian Bulpin supports it, saying that labor was recruited to Six Iles by Captain Alexander Gerard and Captain Romain Rodriguez, "who kidnapped them by the simple means of employing casual labourers to load their ship in the East [Indies], and on the last day simply sailing away with these unfortunates still on board" (1958:314).

An 1859 commission investigating the archipelago after the murder found that "most of the island estates were well run according to the standards of the day" (Bulpin 1958:314). On Six Iles, however, "the labourers were set to drudgery with no reply to any complaints except the liberal use of the lash" (Bulpin 1958:314). Manager Hugon was "particularly hated" (Bulpin 1958:314). He was known to use what was reported as either his belt (Bulpin 1958:314) or a four-foot-long, one-and-a-half-inch-wide length of rope (Labouchere 1857b) to inflict "treatment" on his laborers (Bulpin 1958:314).

Apparently when Hugon went to inspect workers on Lubine Island in August 1856, he struck his “headsman...and was immediately attacked and killed by the labourers” (Labouchere 1857b). A knife-wielding man apparently cut Hugon’s throat with such force that he almost completely severed his own hand (Bulpin 1958:314). In the aftermath, the workers seized control of a ship, only to be captured and tried for the murder (Labouchere 1957b). Two were convicted but received only “eighteen months for manslaughter,” which was, given the racial attitudes at the time, “a caustic judgment on the management of the Atoll” (Scott 1976:263).

### **A Growing “Sense of Proprietorship”: Life in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The murder of Hugon and the working conditions leading to his death seem to have been an exception rather than the norm after emancipation. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bulpin says, Diego Garcia and Peros Banhos “were prosperous estates” (1958:28). In 1865, the colonial government in Mauritius ended the *jouissance* system and most plantation owners purchased their land outright from the government. Wages for laborers around 1860 were the equivalent of 10 shillings a month, a dollop of rum, and a “twist of tobacco if times were good.” Rations, which were treated as part of wages, totaled 11-14 pounds a week of what was usually rice (Bulpin 1958:314).

Laws issued for the Lesser Dependencies in 1877 established regulations for working conditions on the islands and the provision of basic services. To provide laborers with protection from any continuation of slavery-like conditions, the laws required laborers to work under three-year renewable contracts. Oral contracts seem to have always been more the norm, however, for people born on the islands. Scott says

that, “in the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of labourers in the islands under oral contracts (which were not applicable to imported labour) came to exceed the number under written contracts (which applied to resident as well as imported labour)” (1976:23-24).

Under the laws of 1877, work on Sundays “was strictly limited” and management was required to provide housing of minimum set dimensions, adequate provisions in a company store, a hospital infirmary, and a prison for short incarcerations (Scott 1976:160-161). Ordinance No. 4 of 1904 of the Government of Mauritius and its Dependencies strengthened these regulations.

In 1880, the visiting police magistrate reported that, “as a general rule the men enjoy good health, and seem contented and happy, and work cheerfully,” although one must be careful about drawing conclusions based on these uncorroborated official reports (Ackroyd 1880:11). The Magistrate found that people lived in “good huts” made of a wood frame and coconut palm leaves. Fish was “abundant on nearly all the Islands, and on most of them also pumpkins, bananas, and a fruit called the ‘papaye,’ grow pretty freely.” By 1880, the population of Chagos as a whole had risen to approximately 760. The Salomon group experienced the largest population increase, becoming one of the three primary settlements in Chagos. As during slavery, the disproportion of men to women was, for the time being, still significant (Ackroyd 1880:11).

Scott provides a detailed view of Diego Garcia in the 1880s that, he says, strongly mirrored life on the other islands in Chagos. After emancipation, activity in Diego Garcia revolved around three separately owned estates—Marianne Point, Mini-Mini, and

East Point. In 1883, the three estates were amalgamated into one entity by the *Société Huilière de Diégo et Péros* [Oil Company of Diego and Peros].

**Table 2: Chagos population, 1880.**

**Chagos Archipelago “Approximate Population,” 1880**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Diego Garcia</b>	227	86	87	400
<b>Peros Banhos</b>	80	25	45	150
<b>Salomon</b>	56	20	24	100
<b>Eagle Islands</b>	40	10	10	60
<b>Six Iles</b>	26	12	12	50

**CHAGOS TOTAL, 1880: 760**

[Source: Ackroyd 1880:12.]

The wage structure on Diego Garcia shows the increasingly detailed labor hierarchy in increasingly complicated island societies. Wages were 16 shillings a month for ordinary male coconut laborers and 12 a month for women. Some women working in domestic or supervisory jobs received more. “Millmen were paid eighteen and twenty shillings a month and were on a slightly higher level than rat-catchers, stablemen, gardeners, maize planters, toddy-makers and pig- and fowl-keepers,” explains Scott. “The next grade comprised the blacksmiths, carpenters and assistant carpenters, coopers, and junior overseers, who drew between twenty and thirty-two shillings monthly” (Scott 1976:162).

Management provided rations of between 10½ and 14 pounds of rice per week for adults and half that for children. Ripe coconuts were freely available upon request. Anyone could use boats and nets for fishing. Many laborers still kept gardens and generally management encouraged chicken and pig raising. Management often paid

bonuses in the form of tobacco, rum, toddy (fermented coconut milk), and, for some, coconut oil. Housing was free, and at East Point the manager “introduced the system of allowing labourers to build their own houses, if they so opted, the management providing all the materials.” The system proved a success, creating “‘quite superior dwellings’ and a sense of proprietorship” (Scott 1976:162-165). It continued as a work benefit, according to Chagossians and others, until the expulsion.

As during slavery, work was still conducted on a task basis. Work started early in the morning around sunrise and continued until a worker finished a task, generally until 2 p.m. or later, although sometimes as early as 11 a.m. if a laborer worked quickly. Men generally picked and husked 500-550 coconuts a day, leaving the small nut within the coconut. Women generally broke these nuts and removed the coconut flesh from 1,200-1,500 a day. Others worked cutting grass, collecting palm fronds, and running the oil mill, with similar daily tasks to meet (Scott 1976:163-164).

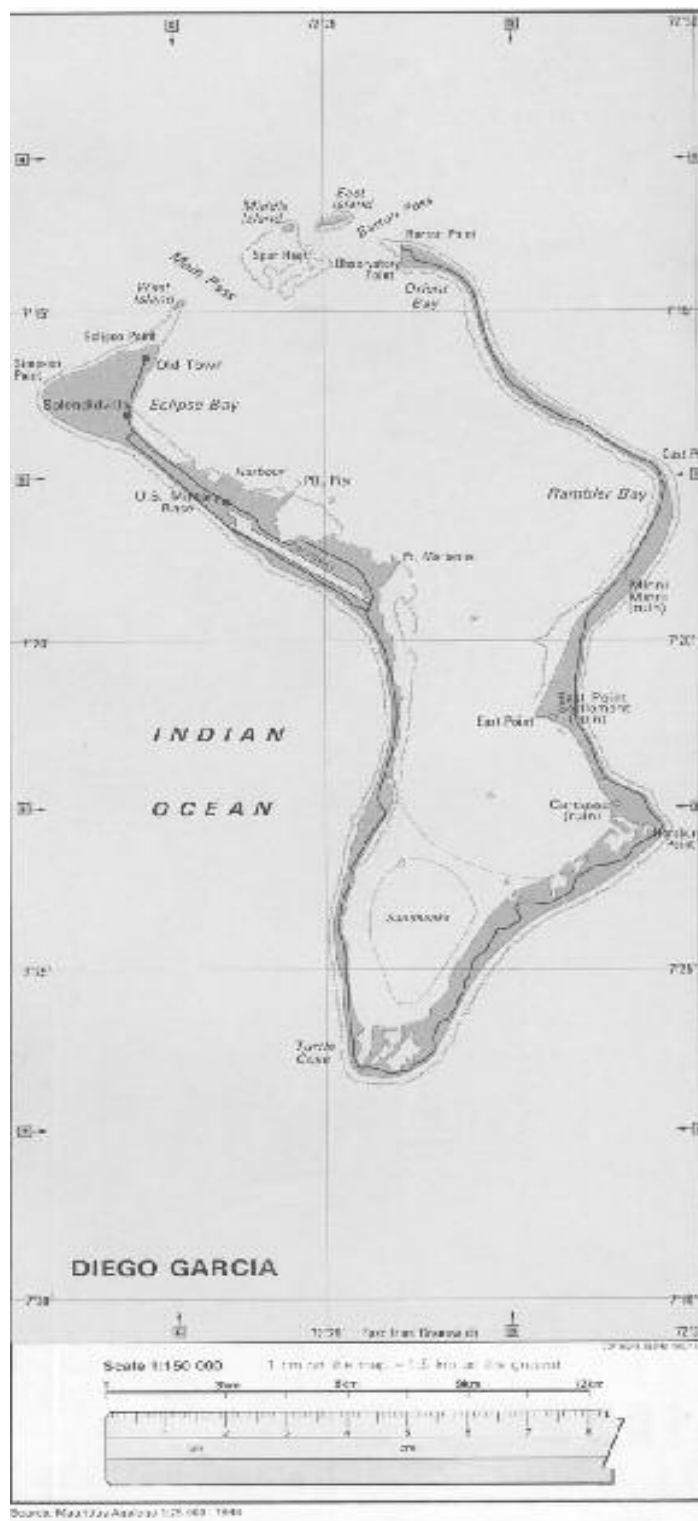


Image 10: Diego Garcia, with indications of former settlement locations (Saddul 2002:28).

Turning coconuts into oil began once the nuts had been collected, husked, and their flesh removed. The flesh of the coconut was dried in the sun, producing copra. Workers next crushed the copra in an oil mill, generally at the center of each plantation. Donkeys turned a large crank to crush the copra, yielding oil and leftover solids known as *poonac*, which became livestock feed for export and local use (Ackroyd 1880:11; Scott 1976:163-164). (This process remained largely unchanged until the closing of the plantations. Drying was later accomplished with oven-heated, enclosed drying sheds, while most of the copra was transported to modern factories in Mauritius for more efficient oil processing. The donkey-powered island mills remained to produce small quantities of oil for local use.)<sup>25</sup>

Although the exploitation and export of the coconut—in the form of copra, oil, poonac, whole coconuts, and even husks—dominated life in Chagos until the creation of the U.S. military base, several other economic activities were important to the islands. Honey, guano, timber, ship building, pigs, salt fish, maize and some vegetable crops, wooden toys, model boats, and brooms and brushes made from coconut palms were all products developed for export and local use. Guano in particular became an increasingly important export for the Mauritian sugar cane fields in the twentieth century, reaching one-third of Diego's exports by 1957 (Scott 1976:253; Warner n.d.).

The most significant departure from coconut exploitation came in 1882 when two companies established coaling stations on Diego Garcia hoping to create major refueling ports for steamer lines crossing the Indian Ocean. For an archipelago that was cut off from the rest of the world except for transport ships from Mauritius visiting two or three times per year, this was a potentially transformative change. The companies leased two

of the three islets at the entrance to Diego Garcia's lagoon for the stations. They imported forty Somali laborers on one-year contracts, although they soon returned them to Somalia when they "proved unreliable and troublesome." The companies recruited Mauritian laborers in their place, whom they also abortedly tried to replace with Chinese workers (Edis 2004:49). Eighteen English, Greek, and Italian skilled tradesworkers and artisans arrived to set up the operations.

The imported labor proved to be an ongoing problem for the peace of the islands, leading to a small revolt by the newcomers (put down when the manager at Pointe de l'Est brandished a revolver) and the creation of a government police post at Mini-Mini in 1885 (Edis 2004:49). Passengers on the steamships were also troublesome. Eventually, they were barred from disembarking while ships took on coal to prevent the introduction of disease and other troubles, including the "promiscuous plundering of coconuts" (Scott 1976:174).

In 1888, the coaling stations closed, as financial failures (see Scott 1976:169-178; Dupont 1883:2-5). And so, Diego Garcia "revert[ed] to its one stable industry, the production of coconut oil" (Scott 1976:178). (The police station closed too, though Mauritius's Lesser Dependencies Ordinance of 1904 sent investigating magistrates to the islands once every twelve months to monitor the islands (Government of Mauritius 1904:24).)

### **"French" Coastal Villages in the Indian Ocean: Chagos in the 20th Century**

By the turn of the 20th century, the societies in Chagos were well established. Again, conditions varied to some extent from island to island and from administrator to

administrator within each island group. At the same time, general similarities among the islands were the rule. Chagos Kreol, a Kreol French language related to varieties in Mauritius and Seychelles, emerged among the islanders (Papen 1978; Holm 1989:403-404). People born in Chagos became collectively known by the Creole name *Ilois* (or *Ilwa*).<sup>26</sup> From his visits in the 1920s and 1930s, Father Dussercle writes, “These ‘Ilois’ are in general good and great children, simple ordinarily, manageable, helpful, workers” (1934:9-10)<sup>27</sup>

Diego Garcia remained the largest settlement in the archipelago and the most significant of the Oil Islands along with Mauritius’s other dependency of Agalega. As in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pointe de l’Est [East Point] served as Diego’s capitol. By 1903, the administrator, Philippe de Caila, had served about 20 years. He was aided by 4 white assistants and had about 400 copra laborers under him (Ashe 1903:1).

The *Mauritius Almanac for 1915* describes Diego as the most important Oil Island, with 1913 coconut oil exports totaling 344,197 liters and 46,205 rupees. Total island exports reached Rs60,257. Diego’s population in 1911 was 517 (315 male, 202 female). There were six villages and several other isolated houses as well as two hospital infirmaries. Diego was also home to 81 asses, 3 horses, 3 bullocks, and 1 mule (Walter 1914: A52). Three decades later, conditions were roughly the same, with 6 main villages, 2 hospitals, and a population of 455 (Bax 1934:A7).

“From the seaward end of the pier,” Scott says of Diego Garcia from his time as Governor of Mauritius after World War II, “East Point has a closer look of a French coastal village miraculously transferred whole to this shore (and perhaps idealized in the process) than the headquarters of any of the other islands.” He explains,

The architecture, the touches of old-fashioned ostentation in the *château* and its relation to the church; the disposition of trees and flowering shrubs across the ample green; the neighbourly way in which white-washed stores, factories and workshops, shingled and thatched cottages, cluster round the green; the lamp standards along the roads and the parked motor-lorries: all contribute towards giving the village this quality.... The copra-processing facilities are unusually large—in a good year Diego Garcia exports as much copra as the rest of the Oil Islands together—but they strike no discordant note. Their severely utilitarian lines and lime-washed walls might belong to the appurtenances of an old farm. The association of East Point with a synthesis of small French villages, visited or seen on canvas, was strengthened by the warm welcome of the islanders, since their clothes and merry bearing, and particularly the small, fluttering flags of the school-children, were wholly appropriate to a *fête* [party] in a village so devised. [Scott 1976:242.]

Peros Banhos, with its 27 islands encircling a large lagoon, was home to Chagossians primarily born in Peros Banhos and “priding themselves on being natives of Peros Banhos” (Scott 1976:282; Russet 1939:13-14). Île Diamond [Diamond Island] and later Île du Coin [Corner Island] served as the capital of the group. Permanent habitation existed on 8 of the 27 islands, although most of the others had rudimentary lodging facilities for visiting work crews collecting coconuts. (At times, administrators apparently used these uninhabited islands as places to banish workers as a form of temporary punishment.) In 1913, Peros’s population was 300 (165 male, 135 female), and its exports, at Rs31,506, were about half Diego Garcia’s (Walter 1914:A52).

From his ethnographic work in the 1980s, anthropologist Iain Walker describes how in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Île du Coin developed into “a neat little village arranged around a semicircular village green, roads radiating outwards into the ‘suburbs’” (1993:571). Scott writes, “Most of the residents work on coconut extraction...and all may, if they please, go monthly to the Île du Coin for shopping and a dance. Transport between the

islands, within the bay, is by sailing ship—the management has a fleet of three—or by pirogues [small sailing vessels]” (1976:283).

Scott’s detailed description of Île du Coin is again helpful and evocative:

The residential quarter in the village consisted of reasonably large cottages of palm matting on timber frames, with thatched roofs supported on massive, white-painted palm trunks. There was one broad main road, pleasantly broken by large shady trees, with cottages on either side.... The people of Île du Coin were exceptionally proud of their homes. The gardens usually contained an arrangement of flower-beds and a vegetable patch, almost always planted with pumpkins and loofahs trained over rough trellis-work, with a few tomato plants and some greens. [1976:285]

As 19<sup>th</sup> century census records show, the expansion of settlement and economic exploitation of the Salomon (also “Salamon”) group developed relatively late compared with that of the other Chagos groups. Until ownership in Chagos was consolidated in 1934 under the Mauritian company Société Huilière de Diego et Peros, control over Salomon as well as Trois Frères, Eagle Islands, and Danger Island was leased by *Société Huilière de Salomon, Trois Frères et Six Iles* [Oil Company of Salomon, Three Brothers, and Six Islands]. This meant that prior to 1934 there was effectively no coordination between these three groups and the Diego and Peros groups, owned by the competing Société Huilière de Diego et Peros. Most significantly, transport sailing vessels from Mauritius made the long and costly voyages to the islands controlled by the Salomon company separate from ships visiting Diego and Peros (Ashe 1903:6-7).

Salomon’s population was relatively small, with only 160 people (90 male, 70 female) reported in the group’s 11 islands in 1913. Exports in the same year were valued at Rs22,405 (Walter 1914:A52). Unlike the other islands, Salomon had a large timber

industry for export and for Chagos's well-known boat building industry based in Salomon. As in Peros Banhos, five or six of the islands supported permanent villages, with people typically visiting the "model village" in the Boddam Island capital once a month for their pay, shopping, and relaxation (Scott 1976:271; I. Walker 1993:572). And as in Peros, most of the people in Salomon were locally born (Rousset 1939:13-14; Scott 1976:275).

Along the northwest side of the Great Chagos Bank, Trois Frères and Île d'Aigle were settled shortly after the granting of a concession for Trois Frères in 1813. The difficulty of navigating in the dangerous waters and winds of the area seems to have limited their settlement (Scott 1976:265). Trois Frères was permanently inhabited for a short period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then only until 1935.

The navigationally safest of the islands, Île d'Aigle, was, according to Walker, "a successful and well-managed estate" (1993:572). The population on what are actually two islands (Eagle Island and Sea Cow Island) increased from 38 in 1826 to about 75 by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and as many as 100 at times by the 1930s. "Eagle Island must have come to be regarded by its inhabitants," says Scott, "as a real home," with a "carefully tended" children's cemetery and evocatively named places like Love Apple Crossing, Ceylon Square, and Frigates' Pool (Scott 1976:266-67). In 1932, the successful island was inexplicably closed by its owners, only to be reopened unsuccessfully in each of the next two years. The owners of the islands transferred the inhabitants to Six Iles.

Six Iles (also known as Egmont Islands and which actually includes a seventh unnamed island) had a more troubled history than Eagle. After the awarding of a *jouissance* in 1808, Six Iles experienced periods of poor management, brief abandonment during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and the killing of the manager Hugon, described earlier. After 1861, Six Iles went from being “little more than a labor camp” to, within ten years, a home to “families occupying the six large islands” (Scott 1976:264). Temporary labor continued to arrive in the islands during times of prosperity and the islands seem to have been thriving by the 1930s.

A rapid and somewhat mysterious decline followed.<sup>28</sup> In 1935, the islands were closed and its inhabitants, along with those of Eagle Island and perhaps Trois Frères, were transferred to Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos, Salomon, and, in smaller numbers, to Mauritius (see Scott 1976:260-68; I. Walker 1993:572; Dalais 1935:1-2).

### *Island Migration Patterns*

The transfer and movement of inhabitants among and within the island groups was a common if not regular part of life. Because the islands were for most of their histories run as single-plantation estates, management had the power to shift labor as economic and other conditions dictated. Scott finds though that at least in the case of Salomon, however, such movement between island groups was probably more common in the earlier years of settlement than by the mid-twentieth century (1976:274).

For the most part, though, inter-island movement seems largely to have taken place within each island group and often for short stints during the course of a week. In other cases, families and individuals had the freedom (presumably only after the end of

slavery) to move among the islands as they wished. Movement within the Peros Banhos group is illustrative. Scott explains,

Originally, the labour force was concentrated in the Île du Coin, the outlying islands being worked by men who left their homes each Monday morning and did not return until Friday or Saturday. Some families choose the outlying islands because they find an unregimented life in the groves more congenial than the mild regulations and corporate disciplines of a village. Others find greater opportunity of providing for their families in individual islands. [1976:282.]

As an archipelago, the islands were connected to greater and lesser degrees by geography, prevailing nautical conditions, and the availability of transportation. The establishment in 1935 of the first regular steam ship connection between Mauritius and Chagos decreased travel times significantly. This four-times-a-year system provided a regular connection between Diego Garcia and the northern groups of Peros Banhos and Salomon, over 100 nautical miles away. Peros to Salomon transportation was by sailing ship and later motorboat. Transportation within groups and around Diego Garcia's lagoon was generally by small, locally based *pirogue* sailing ships, and later by motorboats. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the islands were also linked by wireless communications and received radio transmissions from Mauritius and elsewhere. Otherwise, news from the outside world came from illustrated magazines and other reading materials supplied by the transport vessels visiting Chagos.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chagos was so isolated that at the onset of World War I, people in Diego Garcia supplied the German battleship *Emden* with provisions before learning that Britain and its colonies were at war with Germany. By contrast, thirty years later during World War II, Diego Garcia became a small landing

strip for Royal Air Force reconnaissance aircraft and a base for a small contingent of Indian Army troops.

Movement between Chagos and Mauritius and Seychelles was also an increasingly common feature of life. The regular transport ships supplying Chagos from Mauritius generally carried an equal number of people to and from the islands. The Mauritian magistrates visited the islands as passengers on these ships and regularly reported traveling with between 5 and 20 laborers and staff going to or leaving the islands (see also Scott 1976:26). Father Dussercle, who visited the islands in a similar manner, remarks of his 1933-1934 voyage that, “in addition to the crew, we are about 15 passengers on board, almost all laborers, that we will disembark in the different islands of the Chagos Archipelago” (1934:12). This movement existed primarily for people to seek medical treatment unavailable in Chagos, for vacations in Mauritius to shop and see relatives, and as a result of the continued import of new workers, increasingly from Seychelles.<sup>29</sup>

The islands in Chagos and those of Mauritius and Seychelles, despite their distance from one another, are best understood as forming a broad *social field* (see e.g., Byron and Condon 1996:101) of intertwined social and economic relations. The concept describes well the situation of, for example, Caribbean migrants living in the United States or Europe and maintaining strong economic, social, and kinship ties to their home islands. Although long-term migration to Mauritius or Seychelles was relatively rare among Chagossians, seeing the islands as a *social field* is helpful in describing how the various islands formed a network of social and economic relations based in Chagos but extending to Mauritius, Seychelles, and other islands in the region.

Movement among the Chagos islands and between Chagos and Mauritius was thus an important feature of life in Chagos. Several of the family units explored in my genealogical interviews and ethnographic research were the result of unions between men and women who were born in different Chagos island groups but who came to work and live on the same island. At times, unions also matched a Chagos-born individual with a partner born in Mauritius, Seychelles, Agalega, or Rodrigues, who came to Chagos for work and subsequently settled there permanently. Frequently, children across generations of one family were born on several different islands. At times, women traveling to Mauritius for a vacation gave birth to a child there before returning home to Chagos. Just as in many island and continental societies, inter-generational migration became a common feature of life.

One family genealogy provides a good example: Alexina Cherry, a woman in her sixties now living in Seychelles, was born in Peros Banhos. Madame Cherry had seven siblings, five born in Peros Banhos and two born on Diego Garcia. Their father was born in Trois Frères and their mother in Salomon. Madame Cherry's paternal grandparents were born in Madagascar and the Comoro Islands and came to work in Chagos. Her maternal grandparents were born, like her mother, in Salomon. Her mother's maternal grandparents were born in Madagascar and worked and died in Salomon.

For her part, Madame Cherry met and married a Seychellois man in Peros Banhos, who worked for periods in Salomon, Peros Banhos, Diego Garcia, and Agalega. Madame Cherry had a total of 12 children (3 died as infants). Five were born in Salomon, four in Mauritius (during vacations and after leaving Chagos), two in Seychelles (one each before and after leaving Chagos), and two in Agalega (where the

family sought work after leaving Chagos). Dizzying perhaps but in this family one finds at least four consecutive generations born in Chagos and five consecutive generations living in the islands, as well as an example of the complex inter-island movement common among the archipelago's inhabitants (see also I. Walker 1986:9-10).

### **Growing Global Connections: Chagos before the Expulsion**

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Chagos had moved from relative isolation to increasing connections with Mauritius, other islands in the Indian Ocean, and the rest of the world. Steam ships from Mauritius and Seychelles were stopping in Chagos four or more times a year by the 1960s. Copra and coconut oil exports were sold in Mauritius and Seychelles and through them in Europe, South Africa, India, and Israel. Wireless communications at local meteorological stations connected the main islands with Mauritius and Seychelles. Short wave radios allowed reception of broadcasts from at least as far as Seychelles and Sri Lanka (Todd 1969; Dalais 1935:18).

The Mauritian colonial government began showing increasing interest in the welfare of Chagos's inhabitants and its economy. Specialists sent by the government investigated health and agricultural conditions in particular. With the help of their reports and suggestions, the government established crèches in each island group, schools, and a regular garbage and refuse removal system better than that in rural Mauritius (Lavoipierre 1953:5; Darlow 1953; Scott 1956:7).

The architecture of island life remained similar: Chagossians' houses were generally laid out in rows along roads leading to a village green and the administrative center of each plantation. Surrounding the green there were workshops, small oil mills,

drying sheds for the copra, artisan workshops, company offices, recreation grounds, a cemetery, and a church or chapel (in each of the three main settlements). Small dirt roads traversed the main islands and there were a handful of motorbikes, trucks, jeeps, and tractors. Water came from wells and from rain catchment tanks.

Everyone in Chagos was guaranteed work on the plantations and pensions upon retirement.<sup>30</sup> The vast majority of Chagossians still worked as laborers harvesting and processing coconuts into copra and coconut oil. A few male laborers rose to become foremen and commandeurs, organizing the laborers and delivering work instructions from the management (a few women were also commandeurs). Other men became artisans working as blacksmiths, bakers, carpenters, masons, mechanics, and in other specialized positions.

On each main island, a male administrator or manager seen as “white” or as a light-skinned Creole still represented the companies that owned the islands. The companies also employed several other people of European, Indian, Chinese, or some mixed descent who were considered “staff.” Like the administrator and unlike most laborers, staff members generally worked for a matter of years before returning to their permanent homes in Mauritius or Seychelles. Staff positions included accountants, assistant managers, clerks, engineers, nurses, midwives, and teachers. A few people from the laborer class worked privately as domestic and child care workers for members of the staff.

Wages for laborers remained small and were generally credited to a worker’s account on a monthly basis. Male laborers earned about 50 to more than 200 percent of female laborers. Artisans, foremen, and overseers earned as much as 600 percent of what

female laborers earned and those in staff positions earned considerably more. Workers received rations of food that included rice or flour, coconut oil, salt, lentils, fish, wine, and occasionally vegetables and pork. In addition to this base salary, laborers had opportunities to work overtime, paid in cash. Laborers received free housing or construction materials to build a house that became their property. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, most opted to build their own houses. Staff members, and some artisans, foremen, and commandeurs received additional benefits including larger houses and better housing materials.

Work benefits for laborers also included free firewood, free government crèches and schools for children, retirement pensions, regular vacations and free passage to Mauritius and Seychelles, burial services, and free health care and medicines. Workers were still given land near their homes, which many used for gardens, raising crops like tomatoes, squash, chili peppers, eggplant, citrus and other fruits, and for keeping farm animals including cows, pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, and ducks. Many workers also kept pet dogs and cats.

After the day's work task was completed, Chagossians could work overtime, tend their gardens and animals, fish, or hunt for other seafood, including red snapper, tuna, and other fish, crab, prawns, crayfish, lobster, octopus, sea cucumber, and turtles. Fish in particular was an important part of Chagossians' diets, as were coconuts. Workers often shared their catches with neighbors or could sell it, as well as surplus crops and animals, to the plantation company for cash. The plantations operated company stores where workers bought clothing, tools, and other household items.

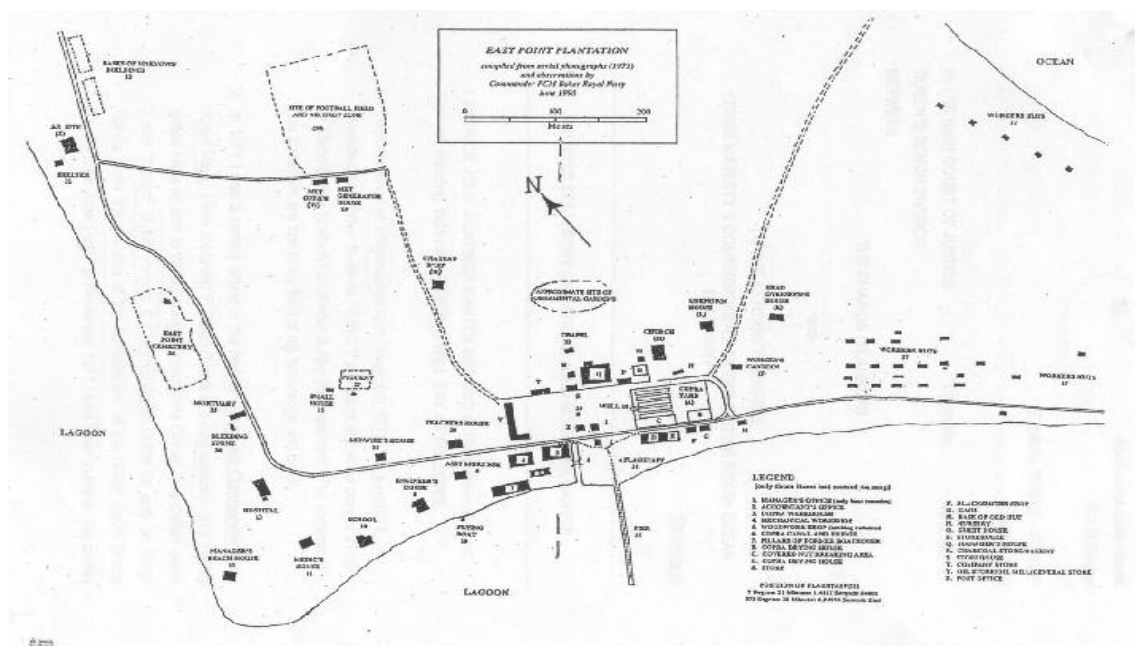


Image 11: Map of East Point Plantation (UKTB).

## A “Unique,” “Indigenous” Society

A variety of sources, including representatives of the U.K. and U.S. governments, agree that at the time of the expulsion, many of Chagos’s inhabitants could trace their ancestry across three to five or more generations born in the archipelago (Todd 1969:19; Ottaway 1975; *Sunday Times* 1975; U.S. Congress 1975:79-80; Scott 1976:23; I. Walker 1986:9; Powe 1996:640; Winchester 1985:39; Vine 2003).<sup>31</sup> By the early 1960s, the relative percentage of permanent inhabitants was decreasing as a result of what Scott says was “the importation of large numbers of temporary labourers, mostly single men from the Seychelles” (1976:181), and the “drift” of permanent inhabitants from Chagos to Mauritius, drawn by the allure of Mauritius’s “pavements and shop-windows, the cinemas and football matches, the diversity of food and occupation,” in much the way

that people in Great Britain left villages for cities after World War I. However, Scott adds, “I emphasize that it is still only a drift,” away from Chagos (1976:24).

Society in Chagos was changing in other ways around the time of World War II. In 1941, a single company, Diego Ltd., consolidated ownership of the islands. Along with two other companies interlinked by family and joint directorships, Diego Ltd. controlled Chagos and the Agalega Islands, as well as the transport line serving the islands and a coconut oil processing plant in Mauritius (Scott 1956:2; Lucie-Smith 1959:1-2). Two decades later in 1962, the islands again changed hands, purchased by a conglomerate, Chagos-Agalega Ltd., which included both Seychellois and Mauritian ownership, under the major Mauritian conglomerate, Rogers and Co., Ltd., and the Seychellois holding company Moulinie & Co., led by businessman Paul Moulinie. Despite the newcomers and the changes, he concludes “the island societies continue to hold together, happily without police forces and without any great or frequent recourse to coercive action” (1976:181).

On the eve of the creation of the BIOT in 1965 and the removals, a society and culture unique to Chagos was firmly in place. Mauritian historian Auguste Toussaint writes, “The insularity of this archipelago is total and, in this regard, Chagos differs from the Mascarenes and Seychelles, which are linked with the rest of the world. The conditions of life there are quite specialized and even, believe me, unique” (1972:18). Communities were tightly integrated and there was what many refer to as the “culture des îles” [culture of the islands] (Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee 1986:105). “It is a system peculiar to the Lesser Dependencies,” Scott wrote, “and it may be fairly described as

indigenous and spontaneous in its emergence, however shaky its early stages may have been” (1976:182).

Scott ends his 1961 book with a sympathetic if paternalistic description of the Chagossians (and the people of the other Lesser Dependencies). In it, one hears a foreboding warning from one who as Governor of Mauritius may well have known about developing plans aimed at realizing French Lieutenant La Fontaine’s original vision for Diego Garcia.

It must also be recognized, however, that ignorance of the way of life of the islanders might open the way to attempts to jerk them too rapidly into more highly organized forms of society, before they are ready. They have never been hurried. Their environment has probably inoculated them with an intolerance towards hurry.... This is far from being a plea to make the Lesser Dependencies a kind of nature reserve for the preservation of the anachronistic. It is, however, very definitely a plea for full understanding of the islanders’ unique condition, in order to ensure that all that is wholesome and expansive in the island societies is preserved. [Scott 1976:293.]

## CHAPTER 4

### AMERICAN EMPIRE AND THE BASES OF EXPANSION

As in the Indian Ocean, the story of the Americas since the arrival of Europeans has been shaped to a significant degree by imperial conquest and competition among a succession of European empires. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after Portugal, Spain, and Holland had achieved moments of preeminence, Britain and France were competing for imperial control in North America at the same time as they were fighting for islands 12,000 miles away.

Viewed in the light of this imperial succession and focusing on the conquest of territory by the United States, one can more easily see how there has been nothing natural or inevitable about the expansion of the United States (contrary to the arguments of many (e.g., Turner 1966[1894]; Adams 1902; Luce 1969)). Following revisionist historians and other scholars (e.g., Williams 1962; Van Alstyne 1960; Gardner et al. 1976a, 1976b; Harvey 2003; Smith 2003b; C. Johnson 2004a, 2004b), I argue that the United States has been an empire since its independence (and had imperial leanings prior to independence). I argue too that concepts of race and of the inherent racial superiority of socially defined “white” people of European descent have been crucial elements of the American Empire. That the conquest of territory by the United States has almost always been the territory of peoples defined as “not white” is neither coincidental nor secondary to the phenomenon of American Empire. Race and racism are two of the Empire’s defining features.

I divide the history of American Empire into three distinct periods (cf. Ho 2004). The first period began before independence and continued through the conquest of

territory across the North American continent and later, for the first time, outside the continent. This period culminated in the conquests of the 1898 Spanish-American War, in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Guam (the United States claimed American Samoa and Wake Island the following year).

The second period began after 1898 and featured a new, less territorially focused imperialism during which there was relatively little formal expansion of U.S. territory. This period is marked instead by both greater use of relatively subtle economic tools of control symbolized by “Open Door” trade policies initiated in China after the Boxer Rebellion, and frequent military intervention in and occupation of Latin American nations neighboring the United States.

The third and current period began with World War II and features three significant dimensions to a now fully global American Empire. The three dimensions are economic, political, and military (most others exclude the political: cf. Harvey 2003:184). As discussed previously, the economic dimensions of American Empire have centered on the creation and control of international economic institutions and agreements like the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. The political forms of imperialism (ignored by most) can be seen, for example, in the system of Cold War alliances and client regimes nurtured by the United States after World War II and in attempts to structure and manipulate the United Nations and other multilateral organizations for political ends. In addition to bases, the military dimension of the American Empire has been characterized by a greater reliance on the use of U.S. military force not just in the Western Hemisphere (as before World War II) but around the globe. This has included the maintenance of the world’s most lethal nuclear and non-nuclear military forces, the increased use of military

intervention around the globe, the related use of covert and paramilitary action to intervene in the domestic affairs of other nations (e.g., Blum 1995), the deployment of military advisors and arms transfers to other nations, displays of military power as threats and supportive gestures, and, ultimately, outright war (most prominently in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan).

As discussed in the introduction, the United States has followed in a line of empires that have relied on bases to conquer and control territories under their rule. I trace the history of the expansion of the United States across the three periods identified above and the role that bases have played in that expansion. The development of the overseas basing network during and after World War II is crucial to understanding the development of Diego Garcia and will be the focus of the latter part of this chapter. In particular I examine the creation of bases in the Pacific Ocean during the war with Japan as a precursor to the development of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. In the final sections of the chapter, I describe the wider context surrounding the creation of the overseas basing network. Here I focus on the militarization of the United States during and after World War II and detail the development of Cold War strategies for confronting the Soviet Union.

The history presented in this chapter focuses on the dynamics of territorial expansion, bases, and the military dimensions of American Empire. These elements are not the defining features of U.S. history or even of U.S. imperialism. The military dimensions of imperialism have always complemented economic and political dimensions. Here I focus on the military dimensions, and on territorial expansion and bases in particular, as providing what I believe to be the proper context for understanding

the history of Diego Garcia. The history constructed in this chapter is thus not a single history but one focused on a set of themes. Like all writing and especially in a cursory examination of more than 200 years, the presentation of these themes has involved choices and omissions. The themes are, however, those that I find most relevant to understanding Diego Garcia and what it illuminates about the United States as an empire.

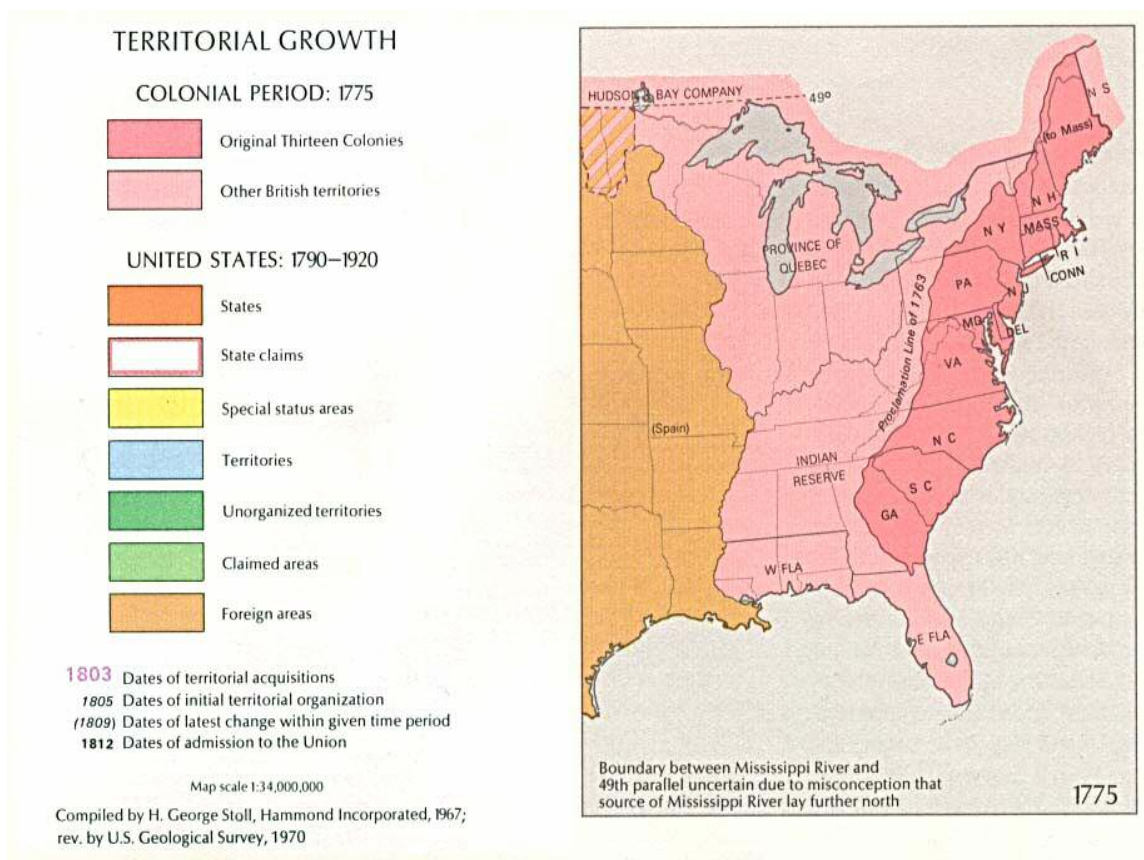
### **The First Period of American Empire: Settlement to 1898**

Drawing on the definition of imperialism I discussed in chapter 1, a focus on the extension of U.S. control over other territories and peoples illustrates how the United States has been an empire from its independence (and had imperialist aspirations since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century). When Britain's 13 North American colonies began moving toward independence in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the colonies' leaders looked to the European empires as models for what the colonies might become. At the time, the idea of a united continental empire stretching across North America was gaining currency in the colonies, built on an earlier "notion of preemptive right to the continent" included in the colonies' charters (Van Alstyne 1960:8). In the words of one historian, an "expansionist consensus unified the nation" (Weeks 1996:ix).

This vision grew in the years around the revolution. Elite revolutionaries were inspired to fight by the idea that North America belonged not to the King of England but to the colonists "as of right" (Van Alstyne 1960:vii, 78). (The idea that the land might rightfully belong to native groups was hardly considered.) Thus, from its earliest days, many conceived of the nation as an expanding imperial domain (or what George Washington called a "rising American Empire") of Americans of European descent whose

destiny was control over North America. (Significantly, the boundaries of this vision included an interest in laying claim to the Caribbean and to Cuba as an appendage of Florida (Van Alstyne 1960:1, 147-8; Williams 1962:19-21).)

By the end of the Revolutionary War, the new nation was in a desperate financial state as it struggled to pay its war debts. The nation found a solution in selling to speculators and settlers lands in the western reaches of the country claimed by the United States but occupied by native peoples. The policy was aided by strong expansionist desires in the new nation, fueled by surging feelings of nationalism and a growing population, interest in the fertile farming lands of the Mississippi Valley, and concerns about the nation's strategic defense against other imperial occupiers in North America (Horsman 1967:viii, 5-6).



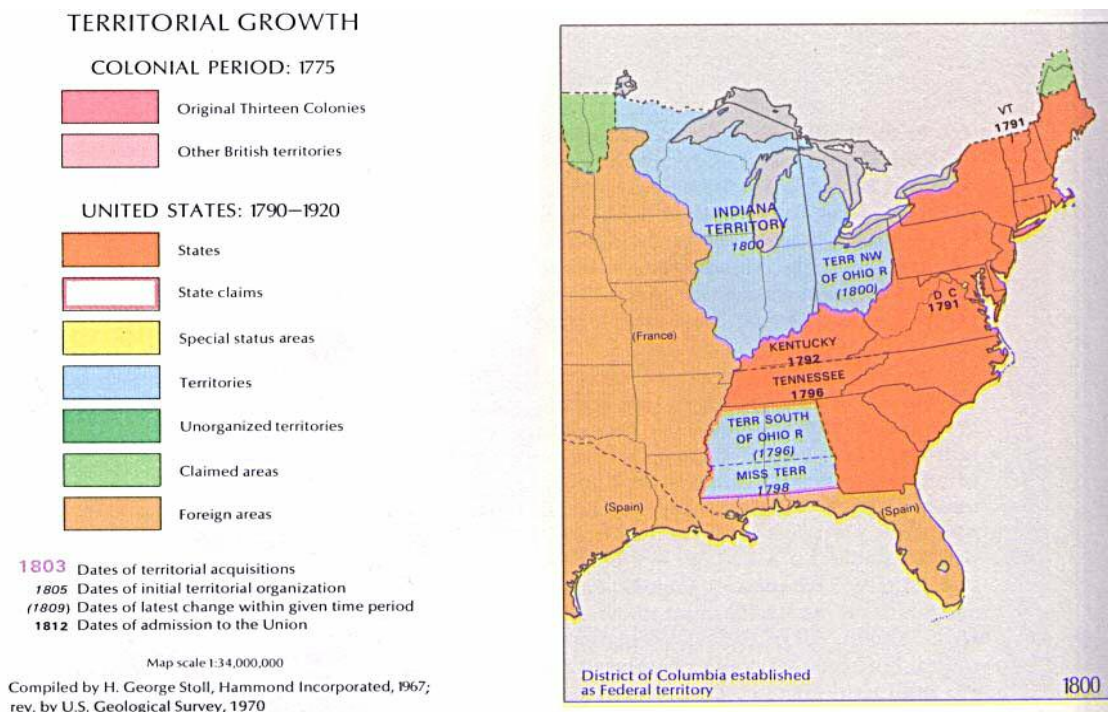
**Image 12: The original 13 colonies in 1775 (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**

Politicians miscalculated, however, when they believed they would easily seize and sell lands through treaties and negotiations with native groups. Incoming white settlers met with strong Native American resistance. Federal and state governments as well as armed settlers responded with military force. The result was widespread violence in the southeastern and the northwestern portions of the nation (Horsman 1967).

After the Constitution replaced the Articles of the Confederation in 1788, the new federal government formalized American Indian policy: Native Americans had right to the soil; the United States retained the right of conquest under any “just wars.” Not

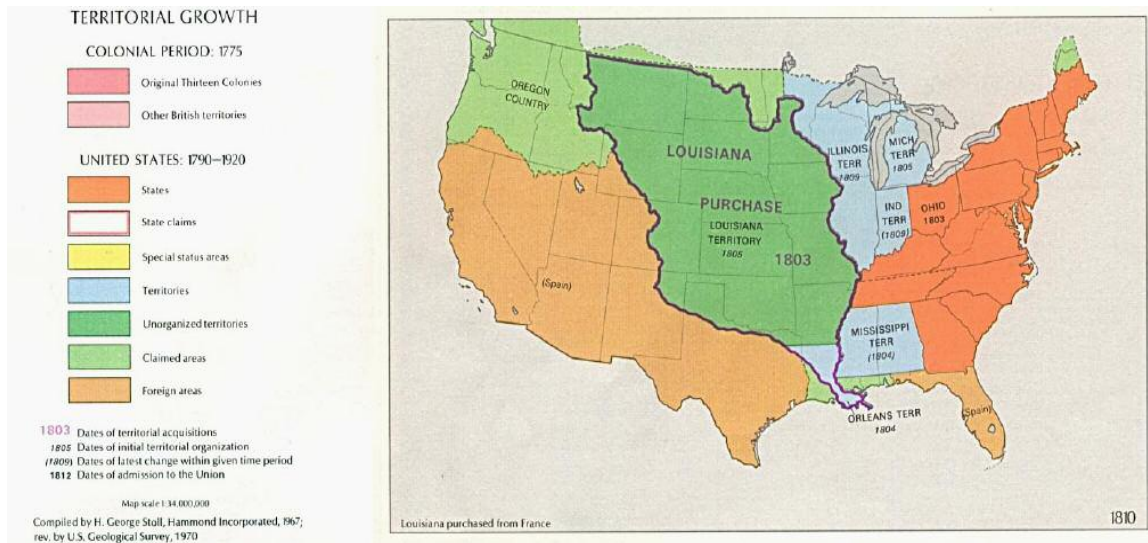
surprisingly, as historian Reginald Horsman points out, given that all governments think their wars are just, the government invoked this right frequently (1967:55).

Waves of U.S. settlers moved into Native Americans' lands as the century drew to a close, pushing Indians progressively westward. The advance quickened as Britain and Spain began pulling back from North America, withdrawing support they had offered native peoples for holding back U.S. expansion. In 1794, Britain and the United States signed Jay's Treaty, which gave the new nation undisputed sovereignty to the Northwest. Britain began abandoning its northern forts and its support for Native Americans, who in turn found it increasingly difficult to hold off U.S. settlers. Concerned that the treaty was a sign of a growing British-U.S. alliance, in 1795 Spain gave the United States use of the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans and withdrew its support for Indians in the southeast, clearing the way for further U.S. settlement.



**Image 13: The United States in 1800 (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**

In 1803, France sold the Louisiana territory to the United States for \$15 million, doubling the territory of the country and leaving only Native Americans in the way of U.S. settlement across most of the continent. When Native American groups sided with Britain in the War of 1812, their ability to resist U.S. expansion weakened further. The Government’s post-war “assimilation” policy gave way to new land expropriations and the enforced separation of Indians and whites. According to Horsman, “land and more land” is what settlers and many state governments wanted. To the settlers, the Indians were mere “obstacles” they wanted “to drive out or annihilate” (Horsman 1967:141,157). The federal government did little to stop them and much to assist the task.



**Image 14: The United States in 1810, after the Louisiana Purchase (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**

### *Militant Expansion*

Land is what successive governments of the young nation wanted as well. In 1818, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun charged Andrew Jackson, a national hero from the War of 1812, with ending Seminole raids from Spanish-controlled Florida into U.S.-controlled territory. Jackson invaded Florida and used the opportunity to seize Spanish forts at Pensacola and St. Marks. The following year, the United States and Spain concluded a treaty that gave Florida (and its numerous ports) and Spain's possessions in the Pacific Northwest to the United States. The Monroe administration declared the western boundary of Florida to be the Pacific Ocean (Weeks 1996:49-50).

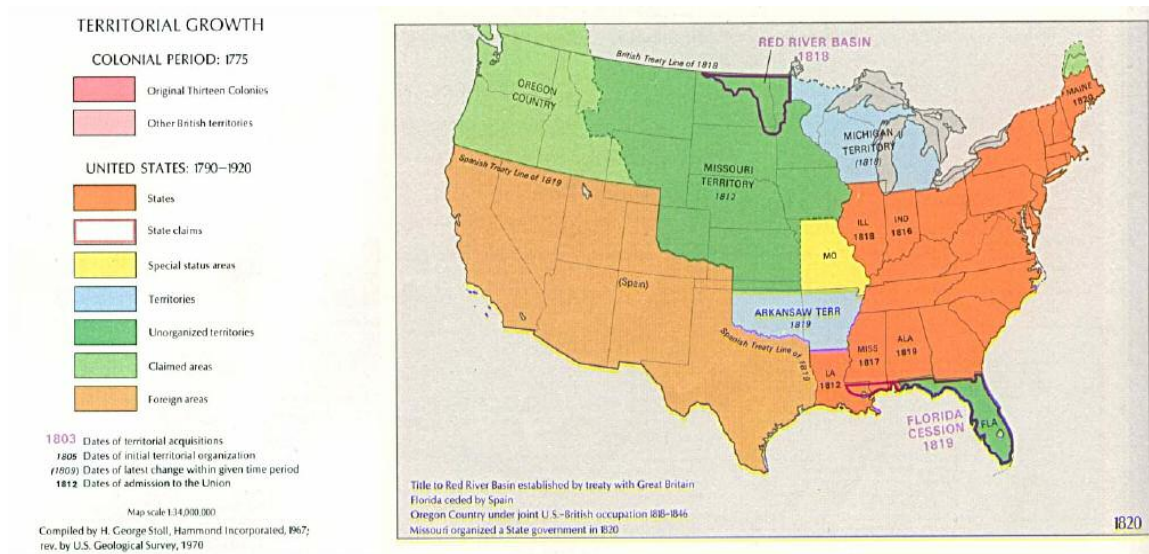
Monroe added an even broader claim in 1823. Under what became known as the Monroe Doctrine, the United States claimed exclusive right to colonize and dominate the affairs of the Western Hemisphere, informing the nations of Europe that the Americas “are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European

powers” (Brinkley 1999:282). Although the nation lacked the power to enforce the doctrine had it been challenged, the claim had rhetorical strength, setting a path for relationships in the Americas into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g., Gill 2004).

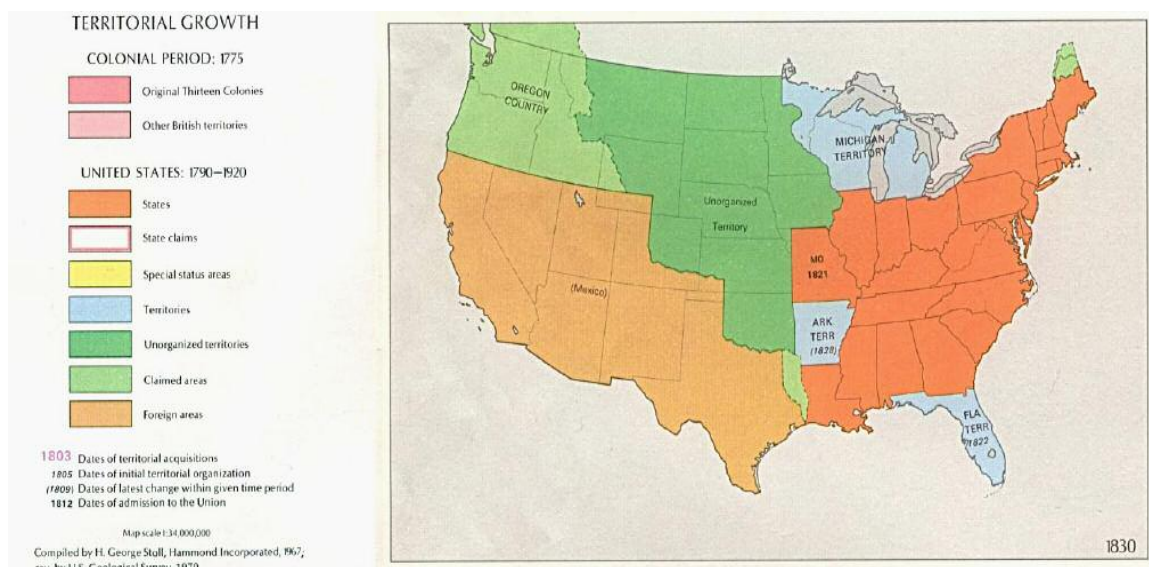
Through the rest of the 1820s, U.S. colonization in North America and warfare with Native American groups continued unabated. The Army rapidly became what one historian calls the “advance agent” of Euro-American westward expansion (Baker 2004:4), helping the federal government force Native groups into treaties and onto circumscribed “reservations” further west. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson formalized an “Indian Removal Policy” to move native peoples west of the Mississippi to open territory to white settlement. The Jackson administration pushed the Government’s previous “permanent Indian frontier” (dividing Indians and whites) past the Mississippi, forcing Native Americans to give up their lands east of the river for lands farther west. Over the next two decades the Government used Army troops and a chain of forts to enforce the removals and protect what became a mass migration of settlers and speculators (Prucha 1964:10-11).

The Cherokees and most of the major remaining Native American groups in the east were forced into camps and reserves in the new Indian Territory (later Oklahoma). Federal forts encircled the reserves to keep Native peoples in and whites out, though the new reserves would soon face white encroachment. The Cherokee’s 1832 “Trail of Tears” forced march westward, during which one in four people may have died, was just one example of the systematic population displacements (Brown 1970:7). It is estimated that the Government expropriated approximately 100 million acres of land from Native

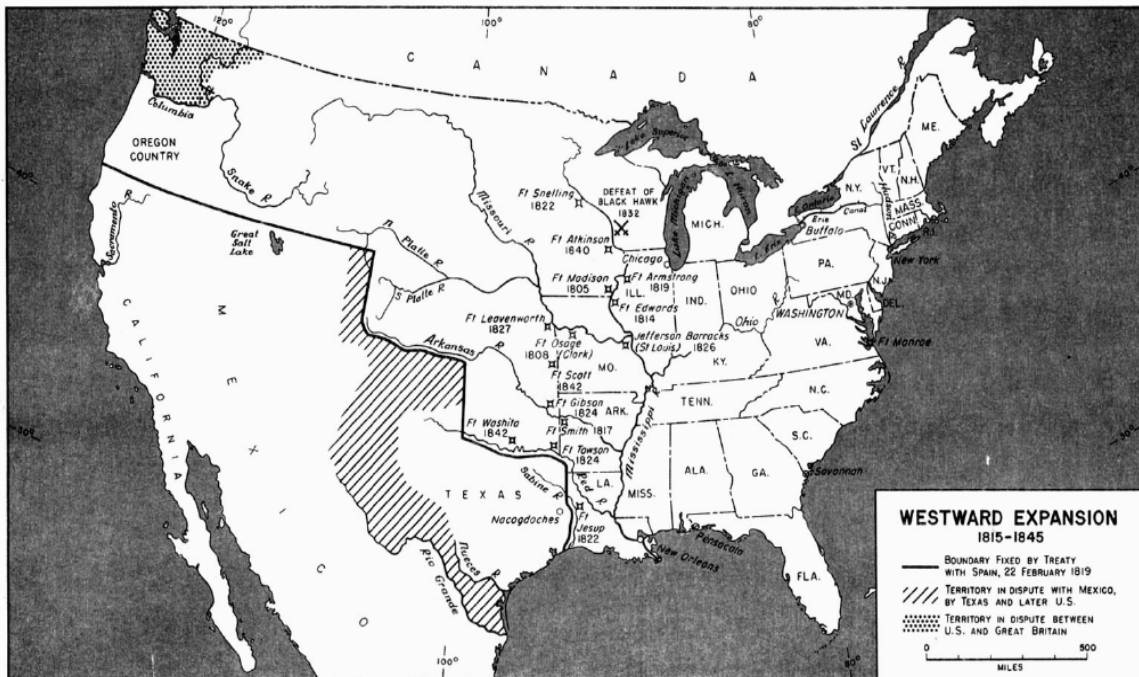
groups in the east alone (Brinkley 1999:306). Across the continent, Indians faced starvation and the growing dissolution of their societies (Brown 1970).



**Image 15: The United States in 1820 (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**



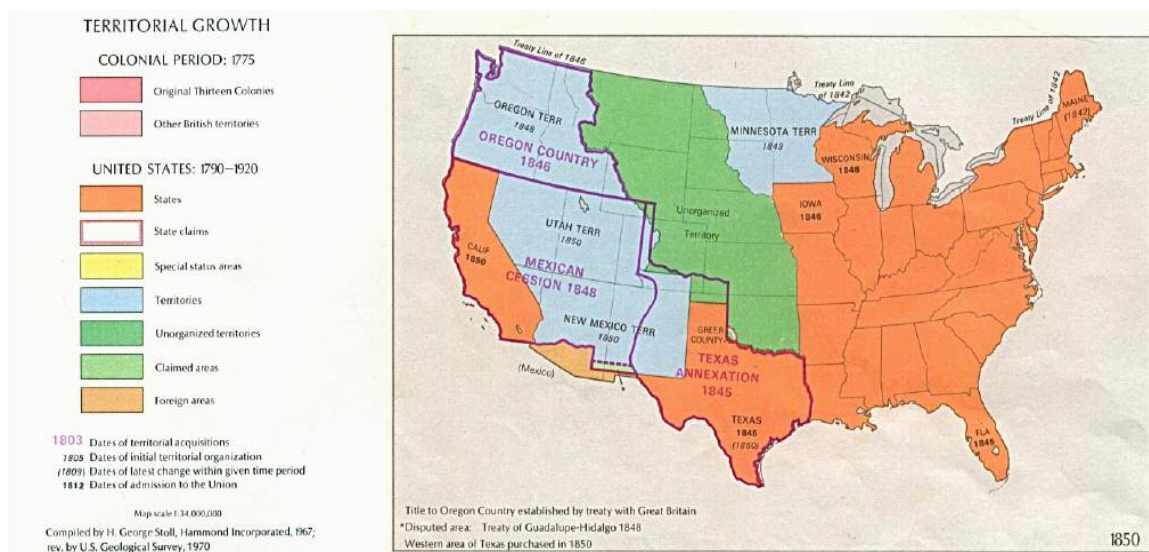
**Image 16: The United States in 1830 (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**



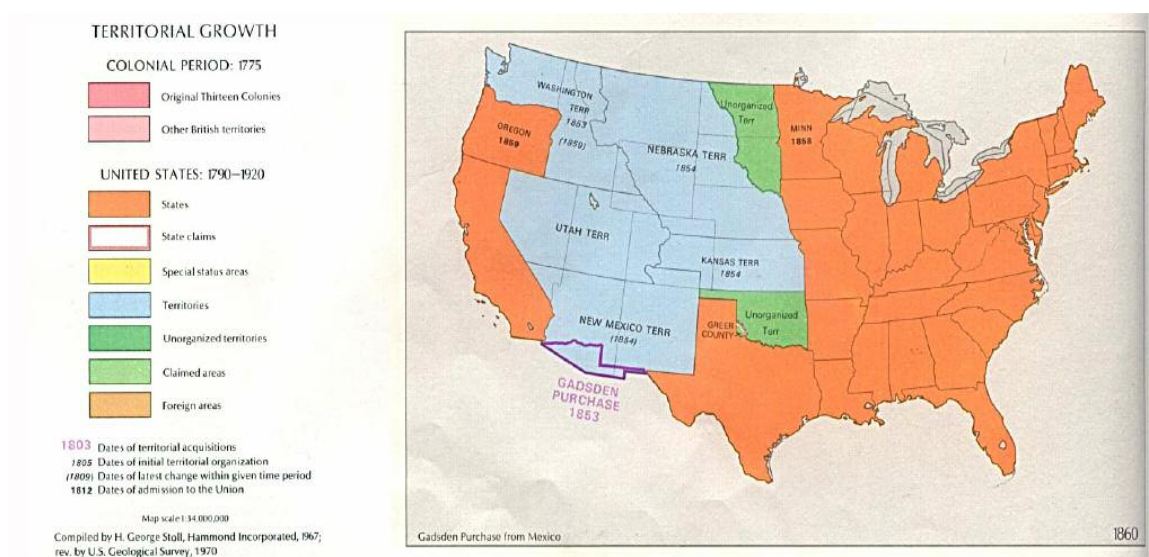
**Image 17: The United States Westward Expansion 1815-1845, with selected western bases and forts and facility creation dates (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**

### *Completing the Continental Empire*

Between 1845 and 1848, the United States annexed Texas and Oregon, and after a two-year war with Mexico, seized almost all of today's southwest and California. In 1853, the United States completed the Gadsden Purchase with Mexico for a parcel of land in Arizona. The acquisition completed the contemporary border with Mexico and the farthest extension of territory in what is now the contiguous United States. The migration of Euro-Americans westward followed the territorial expansion into Texas, California, Oregon, and the southwest.



**Image 18: The United States in 1850, following the war with Mexico (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**



**Image 19: The United States in 1860, marking the farthest extension of contiguous continental expansion (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**

As before, U.S. military forces provided protection for white settlers (including miners flooding into California as part of the Gold Rush). The Army established forts in California in response to alleged Indian “depredations” and attacks prior to the Civil War (Prucha 1964:23). By 1857, there were 138 army posts in the western territories (Baker

2004:5). Troops remained stationed near Indian reservations to maintain the order of the day and to stamp out resistance among “wild Indians” still outside the reserves (Prucha 1964:32-34). By the 1880s, major Native armed resistance had come to an end. The Government began consolidating its forts, although it established other bases to quell anti-Chinese riots along the construction route for the Union Pacific railroad and in Denver where locals thought army posts would help the city’s economy (Prucha 1964:34).

### *Beyond the Continent*

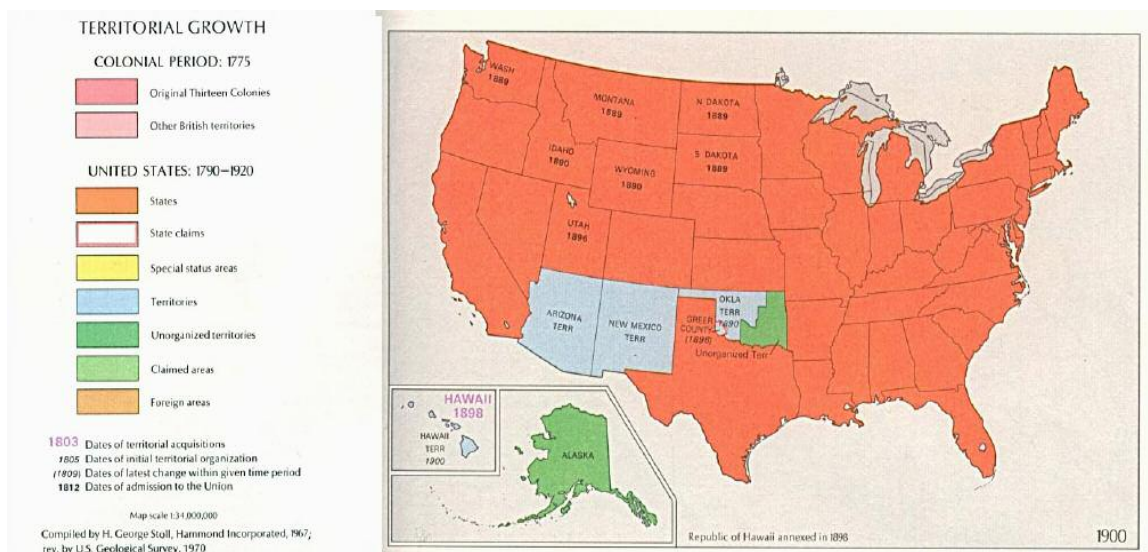
Although the period around the Civil War featured a lull in large-scale territorial growth, smaller-scale activity aimed at intervening in the affairs of other nations and extending the boundaries and power of the United States remained prevalent. On the eve of the Civil War, some southern proslavery advocates promoted the expansion of the United States into Latin America to create new slave-holding territories. Some led private “filibustering” invasion campaigns in the 1850s into Mexico and Central America, although all ultimately failed (Weeks 1996:140-143). After an 1853 campaign in Baja California, William Walker led at least six separate campaigns in Nicaragua between 1855 and 1860, before he was finally captured, tried, and executed in Honduras (Hall and Pérez Brignolli 2003:184-185). The U.S. military likewise conducted major interventions in Nicaragua in 1853, 1854, 1857, 1894, and 1896; in Panama in 1856, 1860, 1865, 1873, 1885, and 1895; and in Haiti in 1888 and 1891 (Hall and Pérez Brignolli 2003:209). To the north, plans for an invasion of Canada remained as late as

the 1930s, after U.S. troops crossed the border both during the Revolution and again during the War of 1812 (Carlson 2005).

After the Civil War, most expansion revolved around commercial and naval activity in the Pacific. U.S. trade with Asia had expanded significantly in the 1840s when the United States took over ports at San Diego, San Francisco, and Pudget Sound. The nation increased its Pacific Ocean commercial capabilities further with the establishment of coaling stations—necessary for new steamship travel—in 1857, on Jarvis Island, Baker Island, and Howland’s Island, of the Phoenix Islands, southwest of Hawai’i. In 1853, Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry purchased a \$50 plot of land on what is now called Chi Chi Jima, near Iwo Jima in the western Pacific, which he intended to become a U.S. coaling station (Jackson 1964:2). During and after the Civil War, the federal government explored possibilities for creating similar naval stations in the Caribbean (Challener 1973:5).

The most prominent acquisition after the Civil War was the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, bringing the nation to the northern edge of Asia. In the same year, the United States increased its possessions in the Pacific when it acquired Midway Island. Within a decade, the United States had signed an agreement to lease a naval station in Samoa (the Senate failed to ratify it and the United States only gained possession of what became American Samoa in 1899, the year in which it also acquired Wake Island).

In 1894, the United States gained access to a base in Hawai’i as part of a U.S.-supported overthrow of the local Hawai’ian monarchy by white sugar planters and settlers. The islands maintained limited sovereignty until the United States formally annexed Hawai’i in 1898.



**Image 20: The United States in 1900, missing the conquests of the 1898 Spanish-American War and other small island acquisitions (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**

The year of Hawai’ian annexation also saw the outbreak of the Spanish-American War and the largest seizure of territory by the United States since the completion of its continental expansion shortly after the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848. After the explosion of the *U.S.S. Maine* in Cuba in February 1898, under still mysterious circumstances, President William McKinley sent federal troops to invade the Spanish possessions of Cuba and Puerto Rico, and the Navy to take on the Spanish in the Philippines. In what was a rapid and ignominious defeat for a once mighty empire, the United States routed Spanish forces, claiming the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and (as a “protectorate”) Cuba. The Philippines alone included more than 7,000 islands and a population of 7 million (Kinzer 2006:48). Although scholars will continue to debate McKinley’s and the nation’s motivations for acquiring the distant Spanish possessions, the United States expanded its territory in dramatic fashion, bringing it fully into a group of aspiring imperial powers.

### **The Second Period of American Empire: Intervention and the Open Door**

The conquests of 1898 represented the culmination of the first century of American Empire with the extension of more than a century of colonization in North America outside the continent for the first time. Following 1898, the United States pursued a new kind of imperialism generally based on informal assertions of dominance. Rather than relying on the seizure of territory, it revolved increasingly around policies of the Open Door, using economic and political tools to exert influence over other nations (Williams 1962; Gardner et al. 1976a, 1976b; Smith 2003b), as well as frequent military intervention in and the occupation of neighboring Latin American countries.

Christina Duffy Burnett shows how the United States learned from the European powers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (and later, likely from its own difficult colonial experience in the Philippines) the value of a more discreet, indirect form of imperialism avoiding sovereignty over dependent lands. Burnett describes how by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sovereignty had come to imply a series of rights for colonized peoples. Aware of these rights, European leaders “adamantly resisted acknowledging sovereignty over their colonies...precisely to avoid sovereignty’s burdens.” The empires of the day turned to establishing “protectorates” in Africa and annexing territories like Cyprus (Britain) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Austro-Hungarian Empire) under cover of a lease. The colonial powers gained the “flexibility to settle their disputes in an *ad hoc* manner,” Burnett explains, “while depriving people of their land (and more) by all manner of deception and subterfuge. In short...‘greed and the wish for exploitation without administrative and policy costs had led European countries to employ hypocritical techniques of annexation without sovereignty’” (Burnett 2005).

Burnett (2005) shows how the United States similarly benefited from avoiding sovereignty over the “guano islands” of the Pacific and Caribbean and later 19<sup>th</sup> century conquests. After the nation got a taste of colonial conquest with its victories over Spain, in the Philippines, the United States found itself, after an initial lightning victory, fighting a deadly and costly insurgency to maintain control. In the wake of a lengthy, unpopular war, the McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt administrations developed alternatives to colonization as ways to exert U.S. influence (Dobson 1978:16). The strategies they developed in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based as they were on the evolution of European imperialism, became a template for the imperial strategies exercised by the nation into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When the Boxer Rebellion flared in China in 1900, the United States realized that facing competing interest from major European powers, the country lacked the military strength to control China unilaterally. The economic policy that became known as the Open Door was a solution to provide access to Chinese markets to U.S. businesses and prevent the Europeans from dividing China among themselves (Gardner et al. 1976b:266; Dobson 1978:16).

McKinley and Roosevelt showed similar military restraint in Panama, where there was long-standing interest in building a canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Instead of seizing the territory necessary to build a canal after Colombia rejected a proposed canal treaty, U.S. officials and U.S. Navy warships assisted secessionists in the province of Panama in declaring independence. The Government quickly signed a canal treaty with the new Panamanian state and threatened to withdraw Navy ships holding the Colombian navy at bay if the Panamanian legislature failed to ratify. The treaty gave the

United States control over the Canal Zone in perpetuity and authorized extensive powers including those of land expropriation outside the Canal Zone and authority to build military bases. Panama's constitution further allowed the United States to intervene militarily "in any part of the republic of Panama to reestablish public peace and constitutional order in the event of their being disturbed" (Lindsay-Poland 2003:27).

Like Cuba, Panama became an "American colony in all but name" (Sandars 2000:140). The country eventually hosted 14 bases and became the target of numerous military interventions by the United States. The bases also served as a launch pad for invasions elsewhere in Latin America.

In 1904, a year after signing the canal treaty, President Roosevelt announced his "corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine. The United States, he declared, had the right to intervene in any of the nations of Latin America if the poor state of their finances threatened European intervention. From 1898 through World War II, the United States intervened militarily in (and in some cases occupied) Mexico (1914, 1916-1919), Guatemala (1920), El Salvador (1932), Honduras (1903, 1907, 1911, 1912, 1919, 1920, 1924, 1925), Nicaragua (1898, 1899, 1909-1910, occupied 1912-1933), Costa Rica (naval presence 1921), the Dominican Republic (1903, 1904, 1914, occupied 1915-1924), Haiti (1914, occupied 1915-1934), Cuba (occupied 1898-1902, 1906-1909, 1912, 1917-1922), and 24 times in Panama between 1856 and 1990 (Brinkley 1999b:767; Lindsay-Poland 2003:16-17; Hall and Pérez Brignoli 2003:209). The military occupations in particular depended on the establishment of local military bases and garrisons to station U.S. troops. In Nicaragua alone between 1930 and 1932, there were at least eight U.S. garrisons (Hall and Pérez Brignoli 2003:228).

Concurrent with the shift to an imperialism of intervention and the Open Door was increasing interest in the build-up of a powerful navy and overseas naval bases to support the navy far from home. The greatest proponent of this “sea power” strategy was naval historian Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. Later called the “prophet” of the Navy by World War II Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, Mahan has proved the most influential U.S. naval thinker for over a century. Mahan’s books and articles in popular magazines were based largely on his analysis of the wars between Britain and France from 1660 to the fall of Napoleon in 1812, and argued that sea power or the lack of it determined the course of every major conflict in the period through the ability or inability to stop an enemy’s commerce. “If navies, as all agree, exist for the protection of commerce,” Mahan writes, “it inevitably follows that in war they must aim at depriving their enemy of that great resource, nor is it easy to conceive what broad military use they can subserve that at all compares with the protection and destruction of trade” (Crowl 1986:455). Applying these historical lessons to the United States, Mahan (and others) argued for the maintenance of a navy at least equal to Britain’s that was able to operate globally and supported by a system of new coaling stations and naval bases from China to the Caribbean (Crowl 1986:444-477; see also, Friedman 2001:2-3).

Spurred by Mahan, the Navy grew interested in creating bases in the Pacific to support U.S. commerce in Asia in the 1890s. The annexation of Hawai’i in 1898 was achieved in no small part because the growing empire needed a halfway base from which to control the Philippines and deploy its power into Asia (Kinzer 2006:86-87). Later, after warships again steamed eastward to stamp out the Boxer Rebellion, the Navy proposed to Congress the creation of additional bases in both the Far East and the

Caribbean. The Navy ultimately gained an indefinite lease for a base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (now the oldest U.S. base on foreign territory), control of a base in the Philippines' Subic Bay, and bases that came with Hawai'ian annexation. Apart from these acquisitions, Congress rejected most of the Navy's requests as too costly; the more expansive overseas base dreams of Mahan and the Navy were to be deferred (Friedman 2001:3).

Despite the Navy's disappointment, overseas bases continued to be an important element of imperial policy after 1898. During World War I, worried that Germany would overrun Denmark and create a base in the Danish Virgin Islands, the Wilson administration bought the soon renamed U.S. Virgin Islands for \$25 million. The war itself marked a milestone in U.S. intervention and willingness to use military force outside the continent. Before the next world war, however, there would be little more formal expansion. That is until just prior to the entrance of the United States in World War II, when the nation embarked on unprecedented growth in the territory under its control. The core of that expansion was the creation of a global network of military bases outside the United States.

### **The Third Period of American Empire: Development of a Global Basing Network**

Prior to World War II, the United States possessed only a handful of bases outside the then 48 states.<sup>32</sup> By the end of the war, the United States had more than 30,000 installations at more than 2,000 base sites globally (Blaker 1990:9). The development of the global basing network during and after World War II is one of the major elements of

the third period of American Empire and is thus essential context to understanding Diego Garcia.

At the core of my argument is the position that alongside its economic and political power, the American Empire has relied on its overseas base network to maintain and deploy U.S. military forces around the world as a mechanism of imperial control. From the Romans to the British to U.S. military facilities in Iraq, bases have been essential tools to securing empires and political, economic, and military control over vast lands. After World War II, the United States had what the *Monthly Review* calls, “the most extensive system of military bases that the world had ever seen” (2002). Although the total acreage of territory acquired has been relatively slight, in its impact the base network has represented a dramatic expansion of U.S. power and a significant way in which the United States has maintained dominance over other nations.

While the European powers tied their 19<sup>th</sup> century expansionist success to direct control over territories, World War II made this no longer an option. The European powers had long before divided most of the world among themselves, and the ideological mood of the time was clearly against colonialism and territorial expansion (Smith 2003b:2, 14-16, 21). The allied powers had made World War II a war against the expansionist desires of Germany, Japan, and Italy. The United States further framed the war as an anti-colonial struggle, criticized the colonial powers, and pledged to assist with the decolonization of colonial territories upon war’s end. After the war, the creation of the United Nations enshrined the decolonization process and the right of nations and peoples to self-determination and self-government. Seizing large territories for itself in

this context would have undermined the legitimacy of the United States and its position as a global superpower.

In an increasingly post-colonial world, the United States came to exert its power through more subtle and discreet means of economic markets, international political agreements, and foreign bases and their related military deployments. Smith acknowledges the role of bases in the post-war strategy, which he summarizes as “‘global economic access without colonies’ ...matched by a strategic vision of necessary military bases around the globe both to protect global economic interests and to restrain any future military belligerence” (Smith 2003b:349, 360).<sup>33</sup>

Without a collection of colonies like its imperial predecessors, the United States has used its overseas bases in many of the same ways. Without direct political control over most of the world, the United States uses bases and periodic displays of military might to keep wayward nations within the rules of economic and political systems favorable to the United States. The United States has “employed these bases to exert force against those nations that have sought to break out of the imperial system altogether, or that have attempted to chart an independent course that is perceived as threatening U.S. interests” (Monthly Review 2002). That is, as Gerson says, “U.S. forces abroad are used to influence and limit the political, diplomatic, and economic initiatives of host nations,” (1991:14). Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and Air Force Undersecretary James Blaker phrases it most bluntly when he says, bases have been used to “structure the character of other nations” and shape the future of the world (Blaker 1990:29).

The base network and broader military force more broadly, in combination with the nation's political power, are thus more accurately understood as integral rather than subsidiary components to the economic side of American Empire. Bases and the military undergird the economic imperialism Smith, Harvey, and others describe by keeping other nations in line with the rules of a global political and economic order orchestrated to a significant degree by the United States. In the Philippines, for example, the United States used military and economic aid and defense promises to extract not only decades worth of base access but favorable terms of trade and political influence as well (Lutz in press). At a broader level, it was the nation's unchallenged military superiority at the end of World War II that left it in a position to dictate much of the post-war international economic system upon which U.S. geoeconomic power is based. Put another way, the maintenance of global military power and a network of overseas bases by the nation with the dominant economy in the world is an integral part of its geoeconomic dominance (Monthly Review 2002). (The mechanisms of this dominance are discussed in more detail below.)

### *Destroyers for Bases*

On September 3, 1940, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt informed Congress that as commander in chief, he was authorizing an agreement with the United Kingdom to provide nearly bankrupt wartime Britain with 50 World War I-era destroyers in exchange for U.S. control over a string of air and naval bases in Britain's colonies. The United States acquired 99-year leases and near-sovereign powers on bases in the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Thomas, Antigua, Aruba-Curaçao, Trinidad, British Guiana, and

temporary access to bases in Bermuda and Newfoundland (see Desch 1993; Blaker 1990; Sandars 2000). The program became known as “lend-lease” or “destroyers-for-bases.”

Ostensibly the bases were for the defense of the western hemisphere against the Axis powers. Importantly, they were also used to preempt Germany or Italy from establishing bases in Latin America. Functionally, the military came to use the bases primarily to shuttle arms and aircraft to the battlefields of Europe and Africa, as well as for intelligence gathering, naval convoys, and anti-submarine warfare in the Atlantic. The bases created the foundation for a network of U.S. bases that would come to span the globe.

With the entrance of the United States into World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the emphasis for the U.S. military was not if it should expand its collection of bases but how to expand the number as quickly as possible (Blaker 1990:29). By the end of the war, the U.S. military was building base sites at an average rate of 112 a month (Blaker 1990:23). The Government followed lend-lease with deals to station U.S. forces in Iceland, Greenland (Denmark), Ascension (UK), Haiti, Cuba, Suriname (the Netherlands), the Azores (Portugal), Acapulco (Mexico), the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), Palmyria (south of Hawai’i), and Recife and Fortaleza (Brazil) (Desch 1993:183 n.123; Lindsay-Poland 2003:45). Major regional base networks emerged in the southwest Pacific, the central Pacific, North Africa, and from India through Burma and into China. The global base network was according to some, the world’s largest collection of military bases held by a single power, and it was built not over centuries but in five years (Blaker 1990:9).

In addition to their defense purposes, the multiplication of bases likely had a “strong element of imperial rivalry” (Sandars 2000:4-5). Roosevelt first became interested in obtaining island bases in the Caribbean in 1939. Within a year of entering the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were already making plans for a network of post-war bases around the globe. By 1943, a paper for the Joint Chiefs declared that “adequate bases, owned or controlled by the United States are essential and their acquisition and development must be considered among our primary war aims” (Sandars 2000:6). Domestic planners likewise saw the advantage of maintaining the base structure after the war for the nation’s burgeoning airline industry, which needed access to airfields as intercontinental air travel increased (Sandars 2000:4-5).

*Island Hopping: The War in the Pacific*

Of the Navy’s wartime base construction spending, ninety percent went to the Pacific, mostly on strings of small islands during the war with Japan. After the shock of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent loss of bases in the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island, the U.S. military remembered the strategic doctrine of Mahan: Island bases were a way to win the war and ultimately to control the peace—to ensure that there would never again be a Pearl Harbor (part of the Japanese attack came from a base on tiny Kwajalein in Micronesia’s Marshall Islands).

U.S. strategy in the Pacific soon centered on the control of island military bases. The military fought its way slowly through the ocean in a series of deadly and costly battles, retaking its lost islands and fighting from island chain to island chain toward mainland Japan. Following battles for each island group, a construction “frenzy” built

bases to launch assaults on other islands and at Japan itself (Hayes et al. 1986:18-19). Many of the affected islands and the local peoples living on them faced “devastation” from the brutal battles (Hanlon 1998:24-26).

The battle for the Marshall Islands, one of Japan’s “mandates” (i.e., internationally legitimated colonies) from World War I, illustrates the deadly fighting that went on in the Pacific and the nature of the basing complexes that followed. In a span of eight days in 1944, the United States assaulted and captured all six square-miles of Kwajalein Island with a force of 40,000 troops. The United States suffered 372 dead and 2,000 wounded in the fighting. Japan suffered 8,000 dead. (Although histories of this and other battles in the Pacific always note the “bloody” nature of the fighting, the attention is almost always on the (relatively few) U.S. soldiers who died, not on the Japanese and certainly not on the Marshallese, whose dead no one seems to have bothered to no count.) Within two months, the U.S. Army had turned Kwajalein into its main base in Micronesia, hosting 22,000 troops. (Later the island would become a major missile-testing base.) Within three months of taking what is now the Marshallese capitol, Majuro island, the Army and Navy had built a 5,800-foot airstrip and a naval anchorage. On Enewetok Atoll, another base hosted more than 11,000 troops (Weisgall 1994:43).

By the end of the war, the United States had built or occupied thousands of bases in the Pacific alone. Before discussing what happened to U.S. bases in the Pacific and around the globe after the war, it is important to discuss the context in which these post-war developments occurred. For it is in this context that the idea of building a base on Diego Garcia first developed. Although many trends—political, economic, cultural, social, and military—evolved out of World War II, the two most important for

understanding Diego Garcia and the base network are patterns of militarization and Cold War strategy.

### *Militarization and the Cold War*

In many ways, post-war policy was, as Smith (2003b), Harvey (2003), and others point out, dominated by geoeconomic manipulation. The massive growth of the U.S. military during World War II was not to disappear, however. During the war, President Roosevelt and other leaders and intellectuals changed how the nation viewed the world, war, and threats to the nation's security. The new vision was one of an "intrinsically threatening world," Lutz explains, where instability no matter how far removed from the United States was seen as a threat to the nation. And in this world, the role of the military was transformed into a "permanently mobilized force" ready to confront threats wherever they might appear (Lutz 2001:47-8).

Such was the creation of the national security state, which meant the military interventions of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were increasingly matched by the use of covert activities designed to shape the destinies of other nations. Centered around the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), National Security Agency (NSA), National Security Council (NSC), and an increasingly powerful presidency, the national security state introduced a new level of secret government operating with limited forms of democratic oversight (Lutz 2001:84-86; Sherry 1995; Lens 1997).

In a process that started before the war, military interests began overwhelming civilian control and entering into most realms of civilian life (Sherry 1995; Lens 1987). "The pernicious feature" of this creeping militarization, Sydney Lens explains, "was not

only the expansion of military influence into civilian areas from which it should have been excluded, but the injection of the military élan throughout our society—a constant pressure driving American life toward the reactionary” (1987:22). And so President Eisenhower warned the nation as he left office that the growing influence of the military was not just a problem of politics and public policy, but one of “an insidious penetration of our own minds” (Sherry 1995:235). The United States, says Lutz, had become a “society made by war and preparations for war” (2001:9).

### *Cold War Military Strategy*

Two of the most prominent architects of early Cold War national security strategy were State Department diplomat George Kennan, author of the policy that became known as “containment,” and Kennan’s successor, Paul H. Nitze, author of the similarly influential planning document NSC-68. Kennan is identified with introducing a “realist” approach to the practice and study of foreign policy. Arguing that previous foreign policy had been based too much on emotions and subjectivity and on a “legalistic-moralistic approach,” Kennan advocated a doctrine focused on what he and his followers saw as the “realities of the world.” Specifically, this meant pursuing realistic analysis of the “national interest” and global “power realities” in a world in which force was a destructive but necessary method of foreign policy.<sup>34</sup>

Kennan is similarly credited with authoring the containment strategy that guided U.S. foreign policy during the early Cold War. Although a full discussion of containment is not possible, its fundamental aim was to establish a worldwide balance of power favorable, in the eyes of Kennan and other Government official, to the United States. For

Kennan, establishing this balance of power required political, economic, psychological, and military tools. Economic aid came to be a primary tool of Truman administration foreign policy in an attempt to rebuild Japan and the nations of Western Europe as strong allies opposed to the Soviet Union. NATO and other treaty organizations played an equally important political-military role as part of Kennan's argument for a selective approach of defending key strategic strongpoints with military force (see Gaddis 1982).

With the drafting of NSC-68 in 1951 under Nitze's leadership, U.S. policy increasingly emphasized the military aspects of containment. Instead of defending key strategic strongpoints, NSC-68 saw danger everywhere and emphasized defending the United States and the West at every point on its "perimeter" (Gaddis 1982:90-91).

The main product of NSC-68-driven policy was the "forward strategy." The strategy held that the United States should maintain its military forces as close to the Soviet Union (and later China) as possible. The forces would create a line of defense against Soviet and Chinese expansion and allow rapid military deployment (nuclear and non-nuclear) to meet any perceived threat to the nation. A 1963 paper outlined how the base network was "essential" to the forward strategy: The base network

provides a basis of support and dispersal necessary for the retaliatory forces of the Air Force and the Navy and for other forces in forward areas. It permits the forward deployment of ground, sea and air forces in or close to potential spots in areas throughout the world where the security interests of the United States require military strength to deter or deal swiftly with any military action against areas of the Free World. [Ricketts 1963:Tab B.]

Three main components to the forward strategy emerged, each revolving around naval, ground, and air power respectively. First was the deployment of naval forces in the Pacific, as an outgrowth of the strategic lessons learned in the Pacific war (discussed

above). For the Navy, this meant employing an “offensive defense”: That is, in the military’s language, and in the tradition of Mahan, “projecting” U.S. forces as close to the shores of the Soviet Union, keeping it hemmed in and unable to project its own power outside Soviet territory. Second was the ground force corollary of the naval strategy: the deployment of large numbers of ground forces in Europe to prevent any thought of a Soviet invasion. By 1950, NATO embraced the “forward strategy” of deploying forces as far east as possible against the Eastern Bloc. Third was the creation of a ring of air bases encircling the Soviet Union with nuclear-armed long-range bombers (Baker 2004:49).

NSC-68 and Kennan’s containment strategy share a newly global vision of U.S. foreign policy and an aim of encircling the Soviet Union, and increasingly China, with offensive nuclear and non-nuclear military power as close to enemy borders as possible. Although there are precedents for such a policy dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century acquisition of naval and coaling stations in the Pacific, the post-war military policies of Kennan and Nitze represented a shift in U.S. foreign policy. “The security of the United States, in the minds of policymakers,” one scholar explains, “lost much of its former inseparability from the concept of the territory of the United States” (Stambuk 1963:13). Even further, this “dominant mode of thought” crowded out all alternative visions and, as Lutz says, still “necessitates an exhaustive sorting of the world into friendly and unfriendly nations and the globe to be sliced comprehensively into military zones patrolled twenty-four hours of each day by American troops” (2001:86).

### **The Post-War Basing Network**

It is within this context of militarization and aggressive Cold War policy that the global basing network, and eventually Diego Garcia, developed. With the end of the World War II, the United States, like previous empires, was averse to giving up territories and bases gained in wartime. Even if the military had little interest in using a base or a territory, principles of “redundancy”—the more bases the safer the nation—and “strategic denial”—preventing enemies from using a territory by denying them access—held that the United States should almost never give up its acquisitions.

Although many in the military in particular were disappointed when the country returned about half its foreign bases with the close of the war (Blaker 1990:32), the United States maintained a “permanent institution” of bases in peacetime (Stambuk 1963:9). In Germany, Italy, Japan, and France, U.S. forces retained rights of occupation as a victor nation. The United States signed deals to maintain three of its most important bases in Greenland, Iceland, and the Azores. The nation retained facilities in most of the British territories occupied under lend-lease, continued occupying French bases in Morocco, and gained further access to British facilities in Ascension, Bahrain, Guadalcanal, and Tarawa. While Britain wanted to give complete independence to India and Burma, the State Department asked its ally to maintain control of three airfields in the former and one in the latter (Sandars 2000:21). U.S. bases in Great Britain turned the British Isles into what one journalist called an “emergency parking lot for the Strategic Air Command” (Sandars 2000:101). And the U.S. military had access to an even wider array of British and French bases still held in their remaining colonies. Among its own colonial possessions, the United States retained important bases in Guam, Puerto Rico,

Wake Island, and Cuba. When the Philippines gained its independence in 1946, the United States pressured its former colonial possession to grant it a 99-year rent-free lease on 23 bases and military installations (Hayes et al. 1986:25).

With the Pacific at the heart of the post-war national security strategy, the military was particularly committed to keeping what it felt were *its* bases in the ocean. Because of the high human and financial costs of acquiring these bases and leaving the war with a renewed belief in the Mahanian basing doctrine, the military felt justified in retaining control of its captured islands as “spoils of war” (Sandars 2000:59). “Having defeated or subordinated its former imperial rivals in the Pacific,” Hayes and colleagues explain, “the United States military was in no mood to hand back occupied real estate” (Hayes et al. 1986:23-4). Congress agreed. It “shared the feeling,” McHenry explains, “that no one had the right to give away land which had been bought and paid for with American lives” (McHenry 1975:67). Louisiana Representative F. Edward Hébert explained the logic prevalent among members of the military and Congress after the war: “We fought for them, we’ve got them, we should keep them. They are necessary to our safety. I see no other course” (McHenry 1975:66).

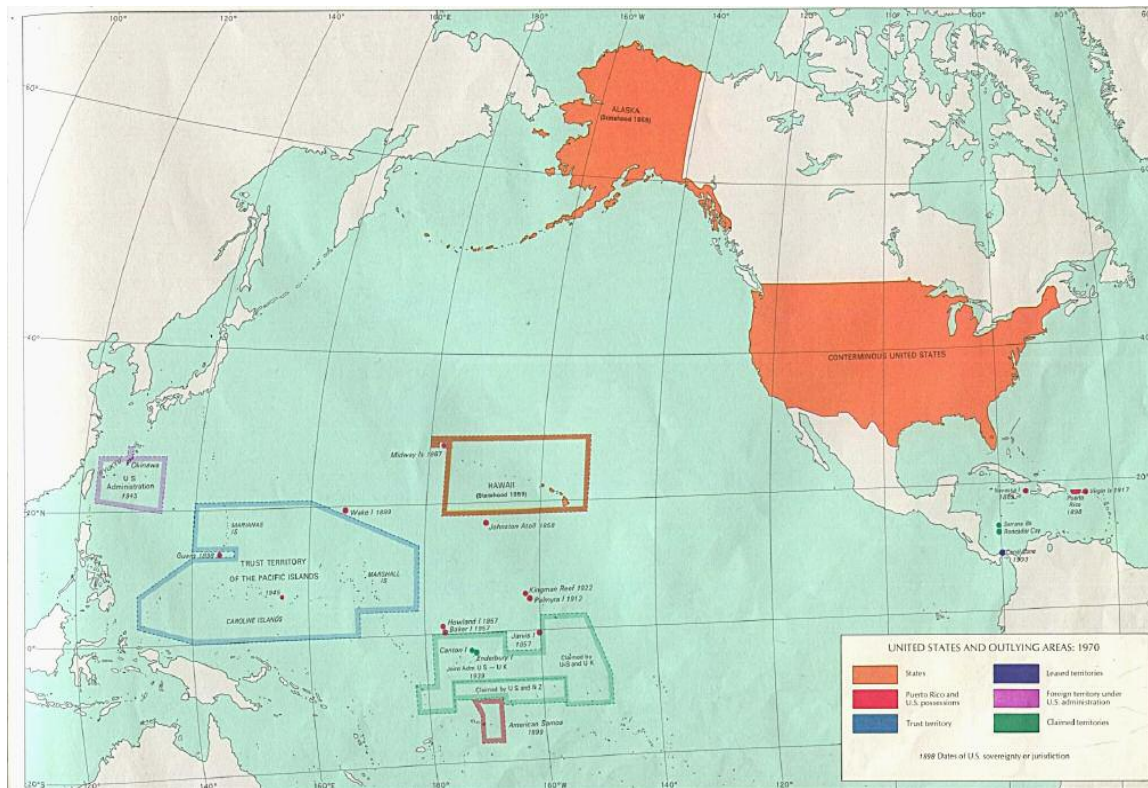
The maintenance of such an extensive collection of military bases was driven by a widely held strategic belief that the security of the nation and the prevention of future wars depended on dominating the Pacific (and to a lesser extent the Atlantic) through a Mahanian combination of unparalleled naval forces and island bases. “Most importantly,” Hal Friedman writes, “this imperial solution to American anxieties about strategic security in the postwar Pacific exhibited itself in a bureaucratic consensus about turning the Pacific Basin into an ‘American lake’” (2001:1-2).

For General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Japan, and other Navy leaders, this meant creating what they called an “offshore island perimeter.” The perimeter was to be a line of island bases stretching vertically across the western Pacific like a giant wall protecting the United States, yet with thousands of miles of moat before reaching U.S. shores. “Our line of defense,” MacArthur explained, “runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia. It starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu Archipelago, which includes its main bastion, Okinawa. Then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain, to Alaska” (Hayes et al. 1986:28).

The island base plan found support from Kennan, who saw the strategy as equally beneficial for hosting air power to control East Asia without large ground forces. To carry it out, military leaders demanded complete sovereignty over Guam, the other islands in the Marianas and Micronesia, and the retention of other Japanese-controlled islands. Some suggested full incorporation of Guam and other Pacific islands into the country as states or as part of a new Hawai’ian state. In the process of breaking up the British and French empires and sensitive to being attacked as colonialists, State Department and other Truman administration officials opposed outright sovereignty.

Eventually the administration struck a compromise to turn most of Micronesia and some of the other Pacific islands into a “strategic trust territory.” Under the auspices of the UN, this Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) would be administered by the United States until the islands could assume self-government. Although the military initially opposed anything short of full sovereignty because of the international oversight requirements involved, the United States was able to govern the islands effectively as part

of the nation. Among other UN-granted powers, the United States had the right to establish military facilities in the TTPI. The Navy



**Image 21: The United States, its colonies, and formally claimed territories, 1970 (courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin).**

maintained direct administrative control of the islands until 1951. In the words of Stanley de Smith, the trusteeship was “de facto annexation, papered over with the thinnest of disguises” (McHenry 1975).

### *The Functions Bases Play*

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense James Blaker’s study of the U.S. overseas basing network explains how the wartime basing experience “inculcated a peculiarly American set of assumptions about overseas basing. These assumptions held that

overseas base sites are an inherent part of superpower status; that more base sites were better than fewer; that necessary basing could be created from scratch and did not depend on an existing infrastructure” (1990:29). More broadly, the creation of the base network in World War II was part of a shift in the U.S. psyche from isolationism to an internationalism bent on shaping other nations and determining the course of world events (Blaker 1990:29). “The United States left World War II,” Blaker writes, “with the notion that its extensive overseas basing system was a legitimate and necessary instrument of U.S. power, morally justified and a rightful symbol of the U.S. role in the world” (1990:28).

Once established, the United States used the base network as a straightforward military tool. Initially, the military used bases to encircle and contain its major imperial rival, the Soviet Union. Equally, the United States used its bases to launch more than 200 Cold War military interventions in weak industrially underdeveloped nations (i.e., the so-called Third World) (Gerson 1991:12-15).

The base network and the deployment of military power it enables should not however “be seen simply in terms of direct military ends” (Monthly Review 2002). The United States has used the base network equally to exert dominance over weaker countries and to advance the perceived economic and political interests of U.S. corporations and the U.S. Government.

Base expert Robert Harkavy (1982, 1989) shows how during the Cold War, bases and negotiations around base access became a major part of modern diplomacy and nations’ economic relations (primarily between the superpowers and subordinate countries but to a lesser extent between former colonial powers and their client regimes).

In the immediate post-war period, spending on overseas bases, especially in Europe, was a deliberate U.S. strategy for aiding its Western allies. Although this eventually led to balance of payments problems (Harkavy 1982:301-302), foreign bases increasingly assumed wider significance in most host nations. The United States (and the Soviet Union) increasingly traded access to bases in other countries for arms supplies and other forms of rent including military and economic aid, diplomatic support, and military protection.

Although Harkavy shows how host nations exerted progressively greater demands on their “tenants” for higher “rents,” he illustrates how bases became an entry point for the United States and the Soviet Union to apply pressure on other nations and maintain them as subordinate client states. The exchange of basing access for arms extended into other kinds of linked economic relations in what Harkavy calls an “arms-transfer-basing nexus”: One agreement spiraled into another as trading base access for arms was tied to oil sales, which was tied to sharing weapons technology, which was tied to the development of a national television network, which was tied to a whole range of other access to raw materials, labor, intellectual and investment opportunities (Harkavy 1982:337).

Others agree about the role U.S. bases have played economically, following in a long-established imperial pattern. From the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, naval strategist Admiral Mahan “was clear that if the United States were to dominate trade with China, it required foreign military bases to support an interventionist Navy,” Gerson writes. “Since that time, U.S. bases in the Asia/Pacific region, Central America, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the Third World have ensured that U.S. economic interests have privileged

access to the resources, labor, and markets of these regions” (Gerson 1991:14). Some of this access has been the result of direct negotiations related to base occupancy; other access is the result of more indirect negotiations and the broader spreading influence of bases.<sup>35</sup>

While Harkavy (1982, 1989) previously stressed the *quid pro quo* nature of basing relationships and the containment and deterrence functions of primary importance during the Cold War, he now argues (2005) that the U.S. basing network has become more focused on the unilateral control of oil resources, economic interests, and outright intervention. The *Monthly Review* (2002) cites the role that newly established Central Asian bases have played since the war in Afghanistan, in helping to fulfill plans among corporations and the U.S. Government for U.S.-controlled oil and natural gas pipelines out of the Caspian Sea: “Without a strong U.S. military presence in the region, through the establishment of bases as a result of the war, the construction of such a pipeline [by the Unocal Corporation] would almost certainly have proven impracticable” (Monthly Review 2002).

In their economic role, bases provide another example of Harvey’s *accumulation by dispossession* (2003), although they operate on a different scale and in a different way than he generally describes: In the establishment of foreign bases, the small-scale dispossession of another country from some of its national territory has become a tool, like those of the international financial institutions Harvey focuses on, for opening up a country’s markets to capital accumulation by U.S. corporations.

*The Base System Evolves*

The grandest plans for post-war bases were initially trumped by concerns about costs and (partial) demilitarization after the war. In the Pacific, the military abandoned its plans for such an extensive offshore island perimeter (which would have resembled something like an offensive, oceanic Maginot Line), instead relying on key bases in Japan, Guam, and Hawai'i, and continued control over the TTPI. The Korean War reversed this trend with a 40 percent increase in the number of overseas bases (Blaker 1990:32). For military and civilian leaders, the war cemented the importance of maintaining large bases in the eastern Pacific, on Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan, on Guam, and in South Korea (Hayes et al. 1986:29-30, 45).

By the end of the 1950s, around one million U.S. troops and their families lived on or near bases abroad. By 1960, the United States had entered into 8 mutual defense pacts with 42 nations and executive security agreements with more than 30 others, most of which provided various kinds of basing access. After some post-Korea reductions, there would be another 20 percent increase in base sites during the war in Vietnam (Blaker 1990:32), one of which was Diego Garcia.

## CHAPTER 5

### STRATEGIC ISLANDS AND “EXCLUSIVE CONTROL”

In March 1942, a luxury PanAm “Capetown Clipper” seaplane skidded to a halt across the water of Diego Garcia’s lagoon. Out from the plane stepped two officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The two met Diego’s administrator and signed his autograph book. They proceeded to survey the northwest tip of the island for construction of a 4,000-foot runway for U.S. and allied planes (Edis 2004:63, 109n.1; Bandjunis 2001:13). Although the United States never built the runway, the survey marked the first visit by U.S. military planners to Diego Garcia and the archipelago.

The history of the Indian Ocean shows how previous imperial powers dominated the seas long before oil, the Cold War, and the decline of the British Empire brought the United States to its waters. Once Great Britain seized power from France with the fall of Napoleon, the British dominated the ocean through the end of World War II.

During World War II, the Indian Ocean was a relatively minor theatre. Still Germany periodically attacked allied shipping in the ocean,<sup>36</sup> and Japan seized the Andaman Islands, threatened India, and, using the same fleet that attacked Pearl Harbor, launched a surprise attack on Ceylon (Sri Lanka) (Edis 2004:62-63, 68). Fearing the fall of Ceylon and its naval base, the British established an alternate base in the Addu Atoll, at the southern tip of the Maldives, 400 miles from Diego Garcia. “As a precaution” against having to move further south in the ocean, Edis explains, the British gradually developed Diego Garcia into a small base for ships and reconnaissance seaplanes and a communications center (Edis 2004:62-64, 68; Jackson 2001:42, 44-47).

A detachment of British Royal Marines arrived in 1942, before the Americans, and outfitted the entrance to Diego Garcia's lagoon with two six-inch navy guns at what became known as Cannon Point. Mauritian, Indian, and other British soldiers remained on the island through the end of the war, though the island saw no military action (one Catalina seaplane wrecked on the beach by a storm became a favorite playground for young Chagossians).<sup>37</sup>

After the war, aware of Britain's declining global and regional power and of the increasing importance of petroleum reserves in the Middle East, the United States established a small Middle East naval force, MIDEASTFOR, in 1949, in the Persian Gulf state of Bahrain. With only a handful of aging vessels, the force was mostly a symbolic one meant for political as much as military purposes. Around the same time, the Department of Defense started showing interest in securing a logistics base facility in the Indian Ocean (Bezboruah 1977:76).

After the 1956 Suez war, the ability of the British Government to assert long-term control over the ocean looked uncertain at best to U.S. officials and the world. U.S. military strategists foresaw the development of a "power vacuum" in the region as British power receded. They began to look more seriously at establishing a larger presence in the ocean (Bezboruah 1977:59, 83, 227). This and the following chapter detail the expansion of the U.S. presence through its creation of the base on Diego Garcia.<sup>38</sup>

### **Barber's Concept: Combating the Dangers of Bases**

In February 1955, the Chief of Naval Operations created a new office, the Long-Range Objectives Group, to plan the Navy's long-term technological, weapons, and strategic

needs. Known as Op-93, the Group's first annual report said it was "mandatory" to have a "courageous approach" to its planning mission (Director, Long-Range Objectives Group 1956:1).

"The brains of the outfit," according to Op-93's highest-ranking staff members, belonged to the group's lone civilian, Stuart Barber (U.S. Naval Institute 1978:300-301). Others in the Navy also knew Barber as "exceptionally far-sighted," according to Navy historian Dr. Jeffery Barlow (one archived document suggests that he may have proposed an extension of the Monroe Doctrine into the Indian Ocean region 20 years before President Carter applied this principle in the Persian Gulf).<sup>39</sup>

Barber began work on his Strategic Island Concept idea around 1956. The genesis for the plan was the recognition that local peoples and the governments of newly independent nations were increasingly endangering the viability of many of the Navy's overseas bases. Barber understood that despite the advantages of overseas bases for controlling territories, peoples, and commerce, they also carry with them significant risks. The most serious is the possibility that a host nation will evict its guest. There is also the danger that for political or other reasons a host would make a base temporarily unavailable during a crisis (during the recent war in Iraq, for example, Turkey's Islamist ruling party refused to allow the United States use of its territory for a large troop deployment, though it permitted the basing of warplanes and use of its airspace). Thus a 1958 memorandum likely drafted by Barber warned that in the event of hostilities in the Indian Ocean region, "access via Suez, and undisputed access via Singapore or through the Indies may be denied, as may air communications other than via Australia or Central Africa. Access to anchorages and airfields may be denied or limited north of the equator,

as the product of anti-colonialist feelings or Soviet pressures” (R. Johnson 1958:2). In most cases, guest nations are at very least forced to negotiate periodically with their hosts for a variety of base rights.

The other main risk for bases on foreign soil is that posed by the people outside a base’s gates. As recent U.S. experience in Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Okinawa has shown, foreign bases can become targets of attacks and lightning rods for local protest and criticism about foreign intrusion and imperialism (*Monthly Review* 2002; McCaffrey 2002). Worst of all, the military fears outright revolt against a base. This was of special concern for U.S. officials during an era of rising nationalism and anti-imperialism in Africa and Asia. So too U.S. military officials also worry about espionage, security, and social problems posed by local populations. Clark G. Reynolds writes in a study of maritime empires that, “navies, like their governments, regard any political upheaval as dangerous to imperial stability. Rebels cannot be tolerated if order (or ‘peace’) is to prevail” (1983:7).

In short, soldiers and diplomats view local peoples as the source of troubles, headaches, and work distracting the military from its primary missions. In their minds, a base free of any non-military population is the best kind of base because it lacks such problems. If civilian workers are needed to work on a base, importing outsiders without local ties or rights, who can be controlled and sent home at will, is typically preferred.

For these reasons, after World War II the U.S. Government increasingly looked for bases in relatively unpopulated areas (Bezboruah 1977:52-60). With anti-Western sentiment and opposition to its bases growing in the 1950s, Barber realized that finding base locations without “local problems” was the best long-term solution to maintaining

the Navy's overseas bases. Which led him to the nautical charts with the idea of putting bases on strategically located, isolated islands with small populations. In the words of Navy insider Bandjunis, Barber and soon others in the Navy realized that, "remote colonial islands with small [colonial] populations would be the easiest to acquire, and would entail the least political headaches" (2001:2).

### **Selecting Diego Garcia**

As Barber and others in Op-93 looked for islands, they considered not just an island's strategic location but political, economic, cultural, and social factors. As Admiral Thomas Moorer later explained, island selection was based on a weighing of "military and political factors." "Our military criteria were location, airfield potential, anchorage potential," he wrote. "Our political criteria were minimal population, isolation, present [administrative] status, historical and ethnic factors" (Moorer 1962:2). The Navy, and soon others in the Government, wanted to ensure (1) that selected islands would be relatively easy to separate from the territories to which they were attached, (2) that military occupation of the islands would not arouse opposition once they were detached, (3) that a population would be easy to remove, and (4) that islands would be relatively easy to retain control of in the long-term.

After researching scores of islands (see list below) and sending Admiral Wright to Diego Garcia in 1957, Op-93 determined that Diego Garcia was ideal. On "military" grounds, Diego Garcia was close to perfect, as Barber had recognized early on. Among the "political" criteria, the Navy found that Chagos had a small population and that it was isolated politically, socially, and culturally from the main island of Mauritius.

Most importantly, Navy officials understood the ethnic dynamics of Mauritius: While people primarily of African descent formed the majority in Chagos, people of Indian descent dominated Mauritius. Officials understood that the Indo-Mauritian leadership would care little about uprooting an isolated African population whose ties to Mauritius were historically tenuous. Given the limited economic output Chagos delivered to Mauritius, moreover, Navy officials realized that Britain would have an easy time convincing Indo-Mauritians leaders to give up the islands. Given the general isolation and obscurity of Chagos and its people (Op-93 called the archipelago “among the most neglected minor backwaters of the world” (Rivero 1960b:5)), the Navy realized that few elsewhere would notice, let alone object.

Diego Garcia was especially attractive to many in the Navy because of a growing interest in increasing the U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean (Bandjunis 2001:1; Bezboruah 1977:76, 227). Since World War II, the Navy held a strategic doctrine that the United States should dominate all the world’s oceans. With the Pacific, Atlantic, and Mediterranean secured by the 1950s, the Indian Ocean was largely unknown to the Navy, far from the United States, and rarely visited by Navy vessels. Arleigh Burke, who would soon play a key role in promoting the idea of a base on Diego Garcia, claimed to have “foreseen” soon after the war the weakness and eventual withdrawal of the British from the Indian Ocean and “advocated a U.S. Indian Ocean presence as early as 1949” (Bezboruah 1977:58-59; see also Ryan 1984:133).

For naval vessels to operate in an ocean, however, navies need to be able to supply and repair their ships. In the Atlantic and Pacific, the United States had coastal ports and island bases like those at Pearl Harbor, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Other than a

small outpost at Bahrain, the Navy had little capacity to operate in the ocean. The Strategic Island Concept showed the service a way to operate in the ocean, and the Navy was “buoyed by the fact that there were so many such islands in the Indian Ocean,” and particularly by Diego Garcia. Most of the islands were controlled by the British, Bezboruah says, and the Navy “did not see any real difficulty in persuading Great Britain to enter into [ ] an agreement” to create island bases (Bezboruah 1977:58). As with the Pacific Lake strategy after World War II, Government officials ultimately hoped to ensure U.S. dominance in another ocean by controlling every available piece of territory or at least by denying their use to the Soviet Union and China.

### **The Wave of the Future**

Although Stuart Barber is widely credited with developing the Strategic Island Concept and first identifying Diego Garcia, the name on many of the most important documents proposing the plan and the man with the power to generate most of the initial interest was Rear Admiral Horacio Rivero, the third Director of Op-93. Appropriately sharing a first name with both the figure from bootstraps mythology (Alger) and the naval hero from the Battle of Trafalgar (Nelson), Rivero was born in 1910, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, and became the first Latino to serve as an admiral in the U.S. Navy. (The coincidence seems beyond irony when one considers that Rivero married Hazel Hooper, of Horatio, Kansas.)

After graduating third in his class at the Naval Academy in 1931, Rivero studied at the Naval Postgraduate School and M.I.T., where he received a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering. During World War II, Rivero was assigned (appropriately

SECRET

TAB-A

INFORMATION ON SELECTED POTENTIAL SITES

<u>ISLAND AND CONTROL</u>	<u>LAND AREA SQ MI</u>	<u>APPROX. POPU-LATION</u>	<u>NEAREST ISLAND</u>	<u>AIRSTRIP POTENTIAL</u>	<u>ANCHORAGE POTENTIAL</u>
<u>INDIAN OCEAN</u>					
Cocos Is. (Aust.)	9	650	550	E	4
Diego Garcia (UK)	11	500	60	P#	1
Aldabra Is. (UK)	40	50	15	P#	4
Ile Desroches (UK)	2	75	20	P	5
<u>SOUTH ATLANTIC</u>					
Sal, C.V.I. (Port.)	87	2000	20	E-7	5
Ascension (UK)	34	400	700	E	-
Principe (Port.)	54	5000	80	?	5
Annohon (Sp.)	6	1700	100	?	-
<u>CARIBBEAN</u>					
Little Cayman (UK)	9	60	4	P#	4?
Barbuda (UK)	62	1000	30	P#	5
Grenadines* (UK)	1-13	100-700	Var.	-	4-6
Virgin Is. (UK)	67	7300	NA	P#	4-5
<u>PACIFIC</u>					
Saipan (TTPI)	47	7000	3	E	2
Tinian (TTPI)	39	500	3	E	5
Ulithi (TTPI)	2	500	3	E	1
Kwajalein (TTPI)	6	1300	30	E-7	1
Eniwetok (TTPI)	2	0	170	E-7.5	1
Bikini (TTPI)	2	0	50	E-4.5	1
Tarama Jima (Ryu.)	10	4500	20	P#	-
Kerama Retto (Ryu.)	18	4500	12	-	5
Iwo Jima (US Occ.)	8	0	35	E-10	-
Chichi Jima (US Occ.)	15	200	20	-	5
Marcus Is. (US Occ.)	2	0	550	E-5	-
Ninigo Is. (TTNG)	8	300	50	P-10	3
Hermit Is. (TTNG)	3	50	50	-	2
NuKumanu (TTNG)	3	100	30	P-12	1-2?
Christmas Is. (UK)	223	300	160	E-10	6
Canton Is. (US-UK)	4	300	40	E-9	3
Oneata, Fiji (UK)	2	300	10	P-9	2
Ontong Java (UK)	4	800	30	P-11	1-2?

TAB-A

DECLASSIFIED SECRET

Image 22: Strategic Island Concept target sites (Rivero 1960b). (All marks by author.)

enough, given the times) to the *U.S.S. San Juan* as an assistant gunnery officer. He participated in battles for islands across the Pacific, including those at Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Guadalcanal, the Gilbert Islands, the Santa Cruz Islands, the Solomon Islands, and Rabaul. After the war, Commander Rivero served as assistant to the ordinance division leader at the Los Alamos weapons lab, William S. “Deak” Parsons, who had been the weaponeer on the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima (Naval Historical Center 1972).

In a 1978 oral history after his retirement from the Navy, Rivero recalled his work with Barber on Diego Garcia. “One of the important things that was done,” Rivero explained, was that “Stu, with help from some of us, got involved in looking at all the little islands around the world that might have some potential value. This was Stu’s idea, that we should stockpile base rights...before a lot of these countries became independent.”

“Because this was the wave of the future,” interjected his interviewer.

“That was the wave of the future, and Stu saw it very clearly. So, looking around, we picked a number of islands, and one of them was Diego Garcia” (U.S. Naval Institute 1978:301).

Rivero worked to win supporters for the “brilliant idea” within the Office of the CNO and then from the powerful CNO himself, Admiral Arleigh A. Burke (U.S. Naval Institute 1978:302-303). In June 1960, Rivero suggested to Burke approaching the British Navy about Diego. Burke thought it a “good idea” (attachment to Rivero 1960b) and broached the subject at an October meeting with his British counterpart, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Caspar John (Ricketts 1960). Working from Op-93’s plan, Burke

proposed that the British Government detach Diego and the rest of the Chagos Archipelago from colonial Mauritius as well as several other island groups from colonial Seychelles to create a new territory that would ensure basing rights for future U.S. and U.K. military use.<sup>40</sup> Burke piqued the interest of the British Navy and returned from the meeting to submit a proposal on the Strategic Island Concept and Diego Garcia to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

Despite some initial Air Force opposition to a plan coming from the Navy, the JCS took the Navy's proposal under consideration and expanded its scope to a worldwide search for bases (Blouin 1960). The Navy started base development studies for some 50-60 strategic islands, including ones in the Pacific and Atlantic, and worked to build support for the proposal in the Department of Defense (Bandjunis 2001:3). (The Navy maintained its focus on Diego as "Burke's firm advocacy made the acquisition of the atoll an article of Navy faith" (Ryan 1984:133).)

"This is long overdue," replied one Deputy Secretary of Defense (Black 1961). In a memorandum delivering an Op-93 document to high-ranking Kennedy Administration officials McGeorge Bundy, Walter Rostow, and Paul Nitze, another Pentagon official wrote, "the study has considerable appeal as a possible solution to the dilemma posed by our continuing problem of maintaining an overseas base structure" (Rowen 1961).

The Navy, under the guidance of Op-93's new director, Rear Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, formally briefed Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Nitze in April 1961. Nitze soon raised the topic with his counterpart in the State Department, Jeffery C. Kitchen, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs (Moorer 1962:1). Although Kitchen warned against the "outright

purchase” of islands proposed by DOD (only with sovereignty did military officials feel assured that they would have unrestrained base access and freedom of military action), he reported that, “The Department of State would have no objection to initiating confidential talks with the United Kingdom regarding the detachment of Diego Garcia from the Mauritius group before the granting of self-government.” Kitchen predicted “no major difficulties” in such discussions (Bundy 1962:1-2).

The British, for their part, were “trying desperately to figure ways to hang on in the Indian Ocean,” as Kennedy and Johnson administration national security official Robert W. Komer said in a 1970 oral history interview. From his RAND Corporation office in Santa Monica, Komer explained, “Seeing Malaya going independent; having lost their position in India, Pakistan, and Burma and Ceylon.... The British, sensing that it would be desirable from the standpoint of their strategic interests to get the Americans involved in yet another area where they could no longer carry the can...the British were, I would say, quite interested in having us come in” (Komer 1970a:28).

U.S. officials knew that the British were considering the withdrawal of some of its military forces in East Asia and the Middle East. They saw the Strategic Island Concept as a good opportunity to encourage the British to maintain this “commitment” through collaborating on island base rights. (Providing basing rights was and is widely considered to be both a sign and a reality of a military commitment, as well as an affirmation of a *de facto* alliance or, in this case, “special relationship” between nations.)

When U.K. Minister of Defence Peter Thorneycroft informally notified Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in July 1961 that because of financial difficulties, Great Britain might withdraw all its forces east of Aden (in what is now Yemen), the Navy

narrowed the focus of the Strategic Island Concept to efforts to secure base rights in the Indian Ocean alone (CINCPACFLT 1964:Tab-B).

Early in 1962, the Joint Chiefs signed on to the Navy's plan, recommending to McNamara that "steps be taken to assure long-term access rights for the US for use of strategically located islands in the Indian Ocean" (CINCPACFLT 1964:Tab-B). Over three days of major U.S./U.K. talks in Washington, in September 1962, Secretary McNamara and Minister Thorneycroft began formal diplomatic negotiations on a "possible joint Indian Ocean base" (Nitze 1962).

A "Top Secret" JCS discussion of the application of the Strategic Island Concept in the Indian Ocean shows how the Joint Chiefs and eventually the Pentagon accepted Barber and Op-93's plan in its entirety. The sparse language of the JCS illustrates step by step their acceptance of the concept:

- With the withdrawal of British forces from the area east of Aden, a military power vacuum will exist in the Indian Ocean area....
- The United States requires bases to provide for the projection of its military strength around the world. There are important gaps developing in the Free World base structure which are opening up as the Western powers withdraw.... This need is most acute at present in the Indian Ocean area....
- Encroachment of the Sino-Soviet Bloc into the areas which are loosely termed colonial could be made vastly more difficult by conclusion of treaties and agreements now for permanent union with the United States....
- US bases on foreign continents are inherently under pressure from a wide variety of sources [including]....nationalism [and].... Communist influences....
- Acquisition of suitable islands by the United States would appear to be the most advantageous procedure [to counteract these forces]....

- Islands having a limited population which are removed from continental mainlands and do not appear economically attractive seem to offer the most feasible avenues for United States development. [Joint Chiefs of Staff 1962:3930-3933.]

As studies and planning continued in the Navy and Defense and State, the State Department sent the following note to the British embassy:

Washington, April 25, 1963. The Government of the United States proposes to the British Government the initiation of discussions by appropriate military and civil representatives of the two Governments looking toward the possible strategic use of certain small islands in the Indian Ocean area. The two Governments share a common concern for an adequate long-term allied presence in the area, and it is thus considered important that there be effective coordination of strategic planning on the matter. [FRUS 1996:565.]

The British embassy responded by presenting “its compliments” to the State Department and its “honour” of offering the following reply:

Washington, July 29, 1963. Her Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom agree that the two Governments share a common concern for the effective defence of the whole area against Communist encroachment. In principal, therefore, they welcome the American initiative for exploratory discussions. [FRUS 1996:623-624.]

### **The “White House African”**

Alongside the State Department of Dean Rusk, there was a second, unofficial State Department in the Kennedy administration. This was the elite group of White House staffers working for Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy. The “Bundy State Department” they called it. The size and cautiousness of Rusk’s State Department left Kennedy dissatisfied, and Bundy’s group filled the void, eventually surpassing the Rusk State Department in influence (Halberstam 2001:48, 69-70).

Halberstam describes how the Bundy team was a group of “bright young men summoned from all areas of government and academe” (2001:70). That they were considered and thought of themselves as “the best and the brightest” testified equally to their elite, and often elitist, upper-class backgrounds. “Every encounter,” with Bundy, recounted staff member Jim Thompson, “was like a mini Ph.D. exam” (Halberstam 2001:70).

One of the brightest of the bunch was Robert W. Komer, graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Business School. During his first wartime service two decades prior, Komer served as an intelligence officer and a historian. After getting his Harvard business degree at 25, friends from the war convinced him to join a new government branch called the Central Intelligence Group. “[I] went to the CIA before it was CIA and found that it was a perfectly fascinating career,” Komer explained. “These fellows said to me,” he continued, “You know the war with the Germans and the Japs may be over, but the war with the Communists seems to be beginning and public service is just critically important. So with your wartime background....” (Komer 1970b:1-2).

Komer served in the CIA for almost a decade, helping to create the first National Intelligence Estimates and focusing on Middle East policy. After a year at the National War College and working as a liaison with the National Security Council in the Eisenhower Administration, Komer was asked by Bundy and Walt Rostow to join the national security team in the Kennedy White House (Komer 1970b:2-3). Before long, Komer became the White House expert on India and Pakistan, the Middle East, and Africa, earning him the title of “White House African” (Komer 1970c:71).

(Years later, after Komer had moved from the Bundy State Department to serve as President Johnson's personal representative in Vietnam, Halberstam had this to say on Komer: "Robert Komer, the chief of pacification, bumptious, audacious, anxious to show everyone in town how close he was to the President (six photographs of Lyndon Johnson on his office wall, a Saigon record) had gone around to dinner parties telling reporters that he had assured the President that the war would not be an election issue in 1968. It was not one of his better predictions" (2001:738).)

Around 1963, Komer seized on two intertwined ideas gaining momentum in the national security bureaucracy: One, to increase the U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and two, to create a chain of Indian Ocean bases with the British with Diego Garcia as the centerpiece. In a 1970 oral history, Komer recalled his thinking:

Look, this whole area from Suez to Singapore is heating up. We've had the Chinese making trouble in '62. We have the Paks [Pakistanis] starting to play footsie with the Chicoms [Chinese Communists] and then with the Russians. We have Bandaranaike in Ceylon. We have Sukarno over on the eastern end. We have (Julius K.) Nyerere in Tanzania sort of playing games with our friends the Chinese as well as the Russians. We have the Zanzibar business. I was saying, "Look this is an area of the world that is becoming more volatile at the very time when the former strategic balance-holders, the British essentially, are pulling back and that projecting the trend, it's a more important area." [1970a:29.]

With the approval of his boss Bundy, Komer sent a memo to the President in June proposing the deployment of an aircraft carrier task force in the Indian Ocean supported by island bases (Komer 1970a:28-34).

"Despite my parochial viewpoint," Komer started the memorandum, "I see an increasingly strong case for maintaining a small task force in the Indian Ocean." He continued, "It is a simple fact that our greatest lack of conventional deterrent power lies

along the broad arc from Suez to Singapore.... We have traditionally left the defense of this region to the British, yet their strength is waning at a time when we face a potential show of force or actual combat needs ranging from Saudi Arabia to the Persian Gulf and Iran through India and Burma to Malaysia” (Komer 1963a). The answer for Komer to increased anti-Western sentiment and perceived chaos in the region was the deployment of increased U.S. military force.

Although he did not mention Diego Garcia\* or the Strategic Island Concept by name, Komer clearly envisioned island bases supporting the task force: “Mobile, sea-based, air power could be a real asset to us here.... It would also minimize the need for expensive on-shore base rights, which would be politically difficult to obtain,” and “especially if the Navy could settle for a protected anchorage or use of UK bases” (Komer 1963a).

Kennedy “jumped on it with enthusiasm” (Komer 1964), and said, “Let’s try it out for size. Take it up with McNamara” (Komer 1970a:32).

Komer quickly wrote a memorandum in Kennedy’s name asking McNamara to investigate the task force idea. The Indian Ocean area, he stressed, is one where “our military presence...is exceedingly light, and yet the pot is always boiling.” Komer closed with an allusion to island bases by emphasizing that such a step should only be taken, “in a manner which would not require expensive base arrangements or involve significant flow of gold” (Kennedy 1963).

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\* In a handwritten note on the same memorandum, Komer in fact seems to confuse Diego Garcia with Diego Suarez, the French port in Madagascar.

McNamara was initially resistant to the task force, or as Komer put it, “very lukewarm” (Komer 1970a:29). But Komer persisted, keeping it on the agenda of the Departments of Defense and State. McNamara asked for the view of the JCS, which readily approved the plan. Secretary of State Rusk wrote to McNamara supporting the idea of a task force as “a significant stabilizing influence throughout th[e] area,” and adding that “we would view the establishment of the Indian Ocean base facilities at Diego Garcia which we are planning to negotiate with the British as an ideal protected anchorage to support an Indian Ocean Task Force. Indeed, it is our view that this negotiation should be pursued as a matter of some urgency” (Rusk 1963:2-3).

At the same time, McNamara had just approved a separate JCS recommendation to create a communications station in the Indian Ocean. The station, codenamed Project KATHY, was designed to fill a communications gap in the area south and east of the Suez Canal and allow increased naval operations in the area, in part to “contain” any Chinese movements southward. In 1963, Kennedy approved the proposal for a communications base and ordered McNamara to carry out the plan (Bandjunis 2001:3-5; Bezboruah 1977:58-59). The State Department concluded that on political grounds Diego Garcia was the best site available. On August 23, State instructed its embassy in London to approach the British about conducting an urgent survey of the island (FRUS 1996:653-654).

The response from the British Foreign Office was positive but included an ominous exchange. As the embassy reported in a telegram to Rusk, the Foreign Office “expressed the view that in formulating reply HMG might feel it necessary to consider

impact of large military installation on few inhabitants of this small island” (U.S. Embassy London 1963).

An embassy official “responded that perhaps this aspect might better be considered during broader discussions and asked that consideration now rpt [repeat] now be limited to survey question” (U.S. Embassy London 1963). The Foreign Office official agreed, saying the “request would be given urgent attention” (U.S. Embassy London 1963).

Komer meanwhile continued to push McNamara on what became known as the “Indian Ocean Task Force.” When Komer went to see Navy officials to generate more interest in his projects, he reported back to Bundy that the “Navy of course is strong for it.” Admiral Claude Ricketts, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, told Komer that for a base, the “Navy could make do with no more than a communications facility (\$15 million) which is needed anyway, plus an airstrip (\$5 million). Of course,” he added, “Navy would like more” (Komer 1963b).

By November, McNamara finally relented under Komer’s pressure and directed the JCS to begin planning for a deployment of an Indian Ocean Task Force. The flotilla sailed into the ocean, four months after Kennedy’s assassination, in April 1964. The Government renamed it the “Concord Squadron” to arouse fewer suspicions (among the Soviets, Chinese, and Indians especially) that the deployment signaled the major shift in U.S. policy that it in fact represented.

**“Exclusive Control (without Local Inhabitants)”**

Shortly after Jeffrey Coleman Kitchen started work for the State Department in 1944, at the age of 23, he worked on closing overseas military facilities acquired through Lend-Lease in the Office of Foreign Liquidation. Kitchen was later promoted to be Special Assistant to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and later a Deputy Director in the State Department’s Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs. After five years at the RAND Corporation at the end of the Eisenhower Administration, Kitchen returned to the State Department as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs (known as “Pol-Mil”).

For three days beginning February 25, 1964, Kitchen and Frank Sloan of the DOD’s International Security Affairs division (known as “ISA”) led a U.S. delegation to London for secret talks on Indian Ocean bases. Two members of Kitchen’s staff sketched out the joint State/Defense delegation’s intentions entering the talks: “On the one hand,” State and Defense were concerned about “threats to the stability and security of the area” from “massive communist military power” to the north and local disturbances that might offer the Soviets and Chinese opportunities to intervene in the region. “This, coupled with the fact that the Persian Gulf area is the largest source of petroleum available to the West on financially acceptable terms,” they wrote, “makes the [Arabian] Peninsula a key area” (FRUS 2000:83-86).

“On the other hand,” State and Defense were concerned about the “serious potential difficulties” preventing U.S. military intervention in the region and were studying ways to overcome these difficulties. Amidst rising costs in the war in Vietnam, they rejected continuous troop deployments or the construction of extensive military

facilities. “We are, therefore, focusing on less conspicuous ways of supplementing and facilitating the employment of highly mobile air, land, and naval forces on which we would expect to rely.” Merging Op-93’s original proposal and JCS thought into developing State/Defense policy, the authors eschewed the use of mainland facilities whose access might be denied in emergency situations by regimes unsympathetic to Western military presence in favor of strategically located islands under British control (FRUS 2000:85).

Essential to the usefulness of such islands, State and Defense asserted, is that they would be available to the West “without delay, negotiation, or political restraint.” The authors identified Diego Garcia and other islands in the Chagos Archipelago and some of the outlying islands of the Seychelles archipelago as prime possibilities. “They do not appear to us,” they wrote, “to be capable of supporting serious independence movements and are probably too remote and culturally isolated to figure plausibly in the plans of any mainland government” (FRUS 2000:85).

In London, Navy, Air Force, and Army officials joined Kitchen, Sloan, and their staffs to meet with counterparts from the Foreign and Colonial Offices and the Ministry of Defence. On the first day of talks there was quick consensus on the basic plan to augment the U.S./U.K. military presence in the region and to gain permanent control over strategic islands to support new military activity. In the case of Diego Garcia, the Navy’s representative reported back to the JCS that the Colonial Office felt it would be possible to separate the island from Mauritius to retain control after anticipated Mauritian independence.

“May be possible to transfer Diego Garcia from Mauritius to Seychelles which will be easier to deal with [as it was not expected to gain independence soon],” a telegram explained of an initial idea for retaining western control over Diego. “Only 200 people involved” (ADMINO CINCUSNAVEUR 1964a).

U.S. officials and their British counterparts agreed on ensuring total control over Diego Garcia and Chagos without the possibility of outside interference. “It would be unacceptable to both the British and the American defence authorities,” a UK Colonial Office document explained, “if facilities of the kind proposed were in any way to be subject to the political control of Ministers of a newly emergent independent state [i.e., soon-to-be independent Mauritius or Seychelles]” (UK Colonial Office 1964). Diego Garcia was attractive if it were to become British sovereign territory precisely because it was not subject to “political restrictions of the type that had shackled or even terminated flexibility at foreign bases elsewhere” (Ryan 1984:133).

On the last day of the talks, Kitchen returned to the U.S. Embassy to report back to the State Department on the progress of the discussions. Kitchen telegraphed, “Re Diego Garcia—UK willing to move rapidly as possible to separate Diego Garcia from Mauritius. Thereafter, joint US/UK survey will be conducted under UK auspices. If survey satisfactory, UK will move to acquire entire island for US communications site and later development other austere facilities” (Bruce 1964).

The U.K. representatives were surprised however when Kitchen and Sloan broached the issue of the local populations on the islands. Some archived versions of the agreement that came out of the talks remain censored on this point. Elsewhere documents show that the British were “clearly disappointed” to hear that the United

States was not interested in offering aid or employment opportunities that might benefit the economies of Mauritius and Seychelles in connection with development of the bases. Instead, Kitchen and Sloan explained the U.S. Government had something entirely different in mind. They wanted “exclusive control” of the islands “without local inhabitants” (U.S. Embassy London 1964a:1-2).

The U.S. representatives wanted control of the islands without interference from any local populations, just as they wanted no interference from an independent Mauritian government. Despite their surprise, British representatives quickly agreed to the expulsion. “H.M.G. should be responsible for acquiring land, resettlement of population and compensation at H.M.G.’s expense,” the representatives agreed. The U.S. would assume responsibility for all construction and maintenance costs (U.S. Embassy London 1964b:2-3).

For U.S. officials, as Barber had recognized, just as frightening as having to answer to an outside political force like Mauritius or Seychelles (other than consultation with the United States’ closest ally) was the prospect of having to confront a potentially angry local population. Worst of all was the possibility that the population could press claims for the right to self-determination before the United Nations and thus threaten the life of the base. “The Americans made it clear during the initial [BIOT] talks,” detailed another formerly secret U.K. document, “that they regarded freedom from local pressures as essential” (“Defence Interests in the Indian Ocean” 1965). Another Foreign Office brief, marked “secret and guard” was even more explicit:

The primary objective in acquiring these islands from Mauritius and the Seychelles...was to ensure that Her Majesty’s Government had full title to, and control over, these islands so that they could be used for the

construction of defence facilities without hindrance or political agitation and so that when a particular island would be needed for the construction of British or United States defence facilities Britain or the United States should be able to clear it of its current population. The Americans in particular attached great importance to this freedom of manoeuvre, *divorced from the normal considerations applying to a populated dependent territory....* It was implied in this objective, and recognized at the time, that we could not accept the principles governing our otherwise universal behaviour in our dependent territories, e.g. *we could not accept that the interests of the inhabitants were paramount and that we should develop self-government there.* [UK Foreign Office 1966:para. 10-11, emphasis added.]

The brief goes on to explain that the Americans would be unlikely to participate if the needs of a local population had to be treated as “paramount” (UK Foreign Office 1966:para. 12). The U.S. Government wanted total freedom to do what it wished with a group of what it considered “sparsely populated” islands irrespective of the treatment owed to the people of dependent territories. With the indigenous population to be removed from Diego Garcia, military planners were thrilled at the idea of a base with no civilian population within almost 500 miles. In simplest terms, the U.S. Government wanted the Chagossians removed because government officials wanted Chagos uninhabited to ensure complete political and military control over Diego Garcia and the entire archipelago.

The plan for Diego Garcia had all the advantages and almost none of the disadvantages of an overseas military base in the eyes of military and diplomatic officials. It had all the advantages as a relatively surreptitious way to exercise U.S. power and was controlled by “a longstanding ally (the United Kingdom) unlikely to toss [the United States] out for governmental changes or U.S. foreign policy initiatives” (Dunn 1984:131).

With the population scheduled for removal, the U.S. Government would have almost the perfect base: strategically located, free of any potentially troublesome population, under *de facto* U.S. control yet with its closest ally as sovereign to take any political heat, and almost no restrictions on use of the island, save periodically consulting with the British.

Before leaving London, the two sides agreed to a series of secret recommendations and future steps involving the development of what officials now termed a “strategic triangle” of islands including Diego Garcia, Aldabra in Seychelles on the western edge of the Indian Ocean, and Australia’s Cocos/Keeling Islands to the east. Unlike with Mauritius and Seychelles, U.S. officials were willing to have a white, Western Australian Government retain sovereignty over a planned base.<sup>41</sup>

The British Cabinet approved the recommendations in principle on the day the talks concluded. Six days later, Secretary Rusk approved the agreements; DOD and the JCS approved them the following month (Kitchen 1964:3).

When both the U.S. and U.K. delegations to the United Nations heard news of the plans, they expressed concern. Officials jointly suggested a slow implementation of the strategy “to minimize adverse reaction at the UN and throughout the world.” Each step should have “some logical cover,” they recommended (USUN 1964:1). “Discreet timing and spacing” of the steps should be employed. “Any step which clearly reveals the true intentions should be taken after other preliminary steps” so as to reduce the amount of time opposition would have to build against the base (USUN 1964:4, 2). In particular the delegation warned, “The transfer of population no matter how few...is a very sensitive

issue at the UN. It should be undertaken on the basis that the populations must be induced to leave voluntarily rather than forcibly transferred” (USUN 1964:3).

### **Surveys, Secrecy, and a “Considerable Service to the U.S. Government”**

Despite attempts to maintain the total secrecy of the discussions and planning, the *Washington Post* was ready to run a story about the London agreements by June 15, 1964. Fearing that the story might derail their plans, Kitchen and Assistant Secretary of State Jeff Greenfield left the State Department’s Foggy Bottom headquarters to meet with the managing editor of the *Post*, Alfred Friendly, and ask him to hold the story.

Off the record Kitchen explained to Friendly the background of U.S. involvement in the Indian Ocean and the plans for island bases. Kitchen stressed how publication of the story would endanger British negotiations to remove the islands from Mauritius and Seychelles and a secret U.S./U.K. survey of the islands. Friendly promised not to publish the story until after a U.S. or U.K. announcement. Rusk called it “a considerable service to the USG” (Department of State 1964; FRUS 2000:91-93; see also Bandjunis 2001:10-11).

A month later, White House and State officials feared that the *Post* and the *Economist* might break the story within a matter of days. In a heavily underlined memorandum hurriedly delivered by Komer, Rusk wrote to alert President Johnson and to provide him with background on the development of the bases. Rusk described the islands as “*virtually uninhabited*” (emphasis in original). A more detailed supporting document added, “We have carefully chosen areas where there is a limited number of transients or inhabitants (e.g. 100-200 people)” (FRUS 2000:91, 93).

Under continued pressure from the State Department, the *Post* did not publish the story and the secret island survey went off without interruption. A team of Navy and Air Force engineers and construction experts left for the Indian Ocean at the end of July and completed its work within a month.

Upon the survey team's return, the Air Force for the first time grew interested in Diego Garcia as a base for B-52 bomber operations (Bandjunis 2001:14). The Navy's evaluation was even more enthusiastic: "Anchorage excellent with minimum blasting coral heads.... Logistic airstrip feasible [at two sites].... Island excellent for COMMSTA [communications station] regards interference and ground conductivity.... Sufficient land available other support as required," reported a telegram back to Navy headquarters (CINCUSNAVEUR 1964).

Briefed by the survey team in Washington, Admiral Horacio Rivero, now Vice Chief of Naval Operations, exclaimed, "I want this island!" According to Bandjunis, Rivero "turned to one of his staff and told them to write a letter to the British using whatever words or justification that were necessary" to get it (Bandjunis 2001:14). There is no record of any discussions that may have taken place about another of the survey team's findings: That a distinct native population was living on Diego. The team's report admitted, "the problem of the Ileois [sic] and the extent to which they form a distinct community is one of some subtlety and is not within the grasp of the present manager of Diego Garcia" (Newton 1964:para. 25).

The *Washington Post* finally ran its story on August 29<sup>th</sup>, more than two months after it had been written, buried in the media void of end-of-August vacations. The last column of the article erroneously described the population of Diego Garcia as consisting

“largely of transient laborers” most of whom were “understood to have left” (Estabrook 1964:A1, A6).

A day prior to publication, the article’s author, Robert Estabrook, met with U.S. Embassy officials in London. They convinced him to remove references to the detachment of islands from Mauritius and Seychelles and to make the story less definitive about which islands were the focus of attention. An embassy cable reported that Estabrook initially refused to delete a paragraph explaining that the *Post* had held the story at the request of the State Department; the published article included no such reference (U.S. Embassy London 1964c). The story gained little attention and was soon forgotten.

### **Platinum Handshakes**

Within the Defense Department, Diego Garcia faced more resistance. For financial reasons Secretary McNamara deleted the Navy’s fiscal year 1965 proposal for an initial communications station on Diego Garcia. Congress denied a similar funding request the previous year because the Navy and DOD had not yet settled on an island site (Bandjunis 2001:9, 14).

Reshaping their proposal based on the survey results, in March 1965 the Navy came up with a plan for fiscal year 1967 for a \$17.8 million air, sea, and communications facility. Facing continued cost pressures, the Navy reduced the request to a \$5 million communications site. McNamara decided to defer funding until the following fiscal year, citing the still unfinalized diplomatic negotiations (Bandjunis 2001:16-17). With the Navy temporarily stymied, the Air Force and JCS meanwhile proposed funding a joint

U.S./U.K. air base on Aldabra, one of the Seychelles island groups scheduled for detachment. At the suggestion of Paul Nitze's replacement as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, John T. McNaughton, McNamara denied that request as well (FRUS 2000:94-96).

On the British side, the U.K. Government began pressuring Mauritian representatives during independence negotiations in 1965 to give up Chagos in exchange for Mauritian independence. During meetings with Secretary Rusk in Washington in April, new Labour Party Prime Minister Harold Wilson brought up the detachment and said that Britain would "pay a price" at the UN for its actions (U.S. Department of State 1965). In 1960, the UN General Assembly had passed Declaration 1514 (XV) "on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples." The declaration called for the complete independence of non-self governing territories like Mauritius and Seychelles without alteration of their borders, thrice demanding that states respect their "territorial integrity" during decolonization, and condemning "any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country" (United Nations 1960:sec. 6).

The British understood that they would have to pay Mauritius and Seychelles to silence any protests over the detachment and trump any Soviet voices encouraging protest: "If we do not settle quickly (which must mean generously) agitation in the colonies against 'dismemberment' and 'foreign bases' (fomented from outside) would have time to build up to serious proportions, particularly in Mauritius" (Peck 1965). A British official was more blunt during face-to-face meetings, telling U.S. representatives that British officials could not proceed with detachment of the islands (by this point

agreed to be Chagos from Mauritius and the Aldabra, Desroches, and Farquhar groups from Seychelles) until they knew what “bribe” they could offer the Mauritian and Seychellois governments (U.S. Embassy London 1965a).

A few days later, Peck told Kitchen he was “red-faced” over the matter but stressed the need to give Mauritius a “platinum handshake” (U.S. Embassy London 1965b). British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart officially inquired in an aide memoire if the United States was willing to make a financial contribution. Stewart estimated the total cost at £10 million, or \$28 million, and explained that the money would “include compensation for the inhabitants and commercial interests displaced” (Thompson 1965).

The Joint Chiefs took the matter under consideration and decided “perpetual access” to the islands was worth \$15 million. Although McNamara initially disagreed (he believed payment would be a signal to the British that the United States was ready to assume Britain’s position in the Indian Ocean), the Secretary of Defense changed his mind and on June 14, 1965, authorized a contribution of up to half—or \$14 million—of Britain’s BIOT expenses (FRUS 2000: 97; Kitchen 1965:1-3).

With the financial arrangement secured, Kitchen led another State/Defense team to London to finalize the foundations of the deal. The meetings were held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September, at the same time as British ministers were concluding independence negotiations with Mauritian representatives. The leading Mauritian official Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, who would become the first prime minister of Mauritius, was given little choice: Accept the detachment of Chagos from Mauritius and £3 million or no independence. Ramgoolam chose independence and the money (see Marimootoo 1997). (Seychelles, which was further from independence, had even less choice in the matter but

won construction of an international airport, now essential to its tourism-based economy. Seychelles eventually negotiated the return of its three groups when it gained independence in 1976.)

As the Mauritian independence negotiations concluded, the British Cabinet informed the visiting U.S. delegation that it would detach the Mauritian islands and the three Seychellois groups and maintain them under British sovereignty. “After two years of, at times, intensive negotiation,” reported a memorandum for now Secretary of the Navy Nitze, “the use of the islands on acceptable terms for US defense requirements has been secured. The principal task remaining is to work out the details on making the islands available, particularly the status of the local population” (Calvert 1965).

The decision to retain the islands was not announced publicly. On November 8, 1965, the British Government invoked an archaic royal prerogative of the Queen to pass laws without Parliamentary approval. The Government, in the name of the Queen, quietly established the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) with what is called an Order in Council (not the last time this tool would be employed).

More than a month later, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 2066 noting its “deep concern” over actions taken by Great Britain “to detach certain islands from the Territory of Mauritius for the purpose of establishing a military base.” Citing the UN prohibition on disturbing the territorial integrity of non-self governing territories, the General Assembly asked Britain “to take no action which would dismember the Territory of Mauritius and violate its territorial integrity” and instead to implement Declaration 1514 of 1960 fully (United Nations 1965).

Robert Komer moved more quickly than the UN. Two days after the BIOT was created, Komer sent the following nine-word memo to “Jeff” Kitchen: “Congratulations on the islands. Now how about some forces.”



**Image 23: The official crest of the British Indian Ocean Territory, Britain’s last colony.**



**Image 24: The official flag of the British Indian Ocean Territory.**

### “OBE”

In Washington bureaucratic language, “OBE” stands for “overtaken by events,” meaning that an issue or an action is no longer relevant because of changed circumstances. Not long after the creation of the BIOT, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the communications station proposal for Diego Garcia and found that it had been “overtaken by events” and “that the high cost of construction did not warrant” the project (Calvert 1966). The “events” were the development of satellite technology that made the need for a communications station on Diego largely obsolete. The U.S. Embassy in London

informed the Foreign Office of the change. The embassy said that no population removal would be necessary in 1966.

Undeterred, Navy planners returned to draft a new base proposal. One rear admiral suggested to Nitze that creating a fuel station for ships transiting the Indian Ocean might offer a “suitable justification” for a facility (Davies 1966). Rivero, now as Vice CNO, drafted a four-page proposal for a \$45 million “fleet support activity,” comprising an anchorage, runway, austere communications equipment, berthing and recreation facilities for 250 men, and 655,000 barrels of petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) storage. Nitze took the Rivero proposal and rewrote it personally (Nitze 1966) before sending it on to Secretary McNamara.

One of Nitze’s staff members Robert Murray explained that Nitze’s office considered the base a “contingency facility.” From his office as President and CEO of the consulting firm the Center for Naval Analyses, Murray recalled that he and his colleagues said at the time, “None of this makes a lot of sense in today’s world. It’s only if you believe that you don’t know what the world’s going to look like, or what our interests are going to be in it, that you would want to do this. And if the cost is low...then, why not?” Murray clarified, “I mean, it was speculation against the future. Or a hedge against the future.”<sup>42</sup>

Because hedges and speculations do not frequently earn funding from Congress and thus priority within DOD, Nitze offered McNamara three justifications for the base: Diego Garcia was necessary because of the loss of naval ports in littoral nations as a result of anti-Western sentiment, “tenuous” naval communications capacity in the Indian

Ocean, and the need for the United States to augment its military presence in the ocean as Britain appeared on the verge of reducing its forces “East of Suez.”

Nitze closed his memo to McNamara by saying the facility was the “minimum” necessary to meet the Navy’s existing requirements but could serve as a “nucleus around which to build an altogether adequate defense base.” Known for his persuasive writing style, Nitze argued, “We should plan now for the orderly development of a fleet support facility before the need for it reaches emergency proportions with attendant higher costs” (Nitze 1966).

The reply from the Pentagon came from Nitze’s former deputy at ISA, John McNaughton. McNaughton politely informed Nitze it was “prudent and necessary” for the Navy to continue in-house studies of the project (McNaughton 1966).

The Navy complied and later the same year offered a little-changed but repackaged facility at the same cost as Nitze’s proposal. Just before the end of 1966, the Pentagon rejected a proposed Congressional notification package, concerned about expected opposition on Capitol Hill, a pending military budget review in the midst of the Vietnam buildup, and the lack of British financial commitment to the project (Bandjunis 2001:20). The project and the Chagossians’ fate were again deferred.

On the other side of the Atlantic, British officials announced their decision to build a joint U.K./U.S. air base on Aldabra. In July, McNamara discussed the issue in a mid-morning telephone call with President Johnson, who was preparing for a visit by Prime Minister Wilson later that day.

“What about this—his wanting to help you, uh, uh,” Johnson began hesitatingly. “Wanting you, to build, uh, uh—wanting us to participate in building an airport, when he moves out of Aden?”

“Uh—that, that. Alebra, in the Indian Ocean,” McNamara replied, misremembering the island’s name. “We can go in on a 50/50 basis, and I think it will cost us on the order of, of, uh, uh [pause] 10 million, I think.\* The island’s name is A – L – D – A – B – R – A. Aldabra.”

“Alright. And have you agreed to that?” Johnson queried.

“Uh, not in detail. No. And if you want to, it’s, it’s fine with us. [Pause] 50/50.”

“Alright. Anything else?” Johnson asked, moving the conversation to other issues (L. B. Johnson 1966).

Six days later McNamara approved a proposal to accept cost sharing for the Aldabra base and to alert the British to the new planning for Diego Garcia (Bandjunis 2001:20).

### **“Under Cover of Darkness”**

While the Navy continued its studies and planning to win funding for Diego Garcia, Jeffrey Kitchen continued hammering out an official government-to-government agreement on use of the BIOT islands.<sup>43</sup> In mid-November, Kitchen returned to London for more secret talks, accompanied by a team of six, including officials from the Pentagon, the Navy, and the Air Force. Over two days, Kitchen initialed the agreements with his counterparts in the Foreign Office. Kitchen noted that although financing was

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\* The actual estimated cost for half of the project was \$25 million.

not yet secured for Diego Garcia, the Secretary of Defense had approved the Navy's plan for a facility that could be expanded quickly in the future (U.S. Embassy London 1966).

The agreement was to be completed by an "exchange of notes" innocuously titled, "Availability of Certain Indian Ocean Islands for Defense Purposes." Unlike treaties, which must survive time-consuming legislative approval before Congress and Parliament, an exchange of notes accomplishes the same thing without the legislative approval and public notification.

The agreement, published discretely months later in the United States by the Government Printer's Office, made all the islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory "available to meet the needs of both Governments for defense." As agreed, the United Kingdom would remain sovereign in the territory. The United States would have access to the islands for 50 years with an option to extend the agreement for an additional 20 years. Each government would pay for constructing its own facilities, though in general access would be shared. According to the published notes, the islands would be available to the United States "without charge" (United Kingdom 1966:1-2)

In a set of confidential accords accompanying the notes, the U.S. Government agreed to make the secret payments to the British of up to \$14 million, or half the costs of creating the BIOT, as McNamara had agreed months earlier. These payments helped pay the British for "all costs pertaining to the administrative detachment of the Indian Ocean islands in question and to the acquisition of the lands thereon"—diplomatic legalese for the costs of deporting the Chagossians, buying out the plantation owners, and bribing Mauritius and Seychelles.

A secret British document explained the arrangement:

Besides the published Agreement there is also a secret agreement under which...the US effectively, but indirectly, contributed half the estimated cost of establishing the territory (£10m). This was done by means of a reduction of £5m in the research and development surcharge due from Britain for the Polaris missile. Special measures were taken by both the US and UK Governments to maintain the secrecy of this arrangement. [Brack 1971, emphasis in original.]

Seeking to avoid Congressional oversight and the need to win Congressional approval for a budget appropriation, the DOD credited the British for payments owed on research and development costs on the purchase of Polaris missiles. Another British document described the evasion of Congress:

The second point, and of even more importance to us, is the American insistence that the Financial Arrangements must remain secret.... The Americans attach great importance to secrecy because the United States Government has, for cogent political reasons of its own, chosen to conceal from Congress the substantial financial assistance which we are to get in the form of a remission of Polaris Research and Development dues. [“British Indian Ocean Territory” 1966:2, emphasis in original.]

No money was exchanged directly, but in effect, a \$14 million debt was wiped off the books for Great Britain.

Yet this was not the only secret agreement. Another confidential “agreed minute” referred to a paragraph in the public notes where the United States agreed to notify the United Kingdom in advance of using any island so that it might take any “administrative measures” necessary to make the islands available for use. Those administrative measures, the secret notes show, were any actions taken for closing down the plantations and “resettling the inhabitants” (Chalfont 1966).

The agreement was signed by the U.S. Ambassador, Honorable David K. E. Bruce and a representative for the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, George Brown, M.P. Jock Stoddart helped negotiate the agreement for Kitchen and observed the

signing. Stoddart explained to me that to avoid publicity, the public notes and the secret attachments were signed “under cover of darkness,” the day before New Year’s Eve, December 30, 1966.

## CHAPTER 6

### “ABSOLUTELY MUST GO”

With the initial hurdle of setting up the territory completed, the task of building the base became significantly easier. The territory was Britain’s (the questionable legality of the detachment aside). An agreement had been signed. The British Government was offering land for a base in a region seen as increasingly important strategically. The question was no longer *if* the U.S. Government would build, but *what, how much, and how soon* it would build—and correspondingly, how soon the Chagossians would be removed.

Paul Nitze’s staff member Robert Murray recalled that the British, “relieved us of a lot of problems. I mean, we didn’t have to think through [the question of the removals] anymore. We didn’t have to decide how we were going to manage our force relative to the local population because there wasn’t a local population.” In the minds of officials, logistics aside, the Chagossians were already gone. The expulsion was by this time a given.

At first, the Pentagon simultaneously pursued the Air Force’s interest in Aldabra and the Navy’s proposal for Diego Garcia. The Air Force budgeted \$25 million in fiscal year 1968 for the 50/50 base on Aldabra. For Diego Garcia, Secretary of the Navy Nitze asked McNamara to “reconsider” his 1966 decision to withhold the Navy’s request from Congress. This time Nitze had a new spin on the base, proposing Diego as an “austere” refueling port for ships traveling to and from Vietnam. The plan had a revised \$26 million budget divided into two funding increments beginning in fiscal year 1969. But,

he noted, the austere facility would still offer a “nucleus” for expansion into a larger base, “if need arose” (FRUS 2000:103-105).

British ministers, who had appointed themselves the legislature for the new British colony of the BIOT, moved ahead with their work by passing BIOT Ordinance No. 1 of 1967, allowing for the compulsory acquisition of land within the territory. After negotiations with the landowners, the United Kingdom bought Chagos from Chagos-Agalega Ltd. for £660,000.<sup>44</sup>

Such sums were significant for the British Government, in the midst of a severe financial crisis and a review of its global military commitments. In April and May, British officials informed their U.S. counterparts that they remained interested in a Diego facility but that their financial participation would be no more than a nominal one (O’Grady 1967). By July, a U.K. White Paper announced the withdrawal of all British troops from Singapore and Malaysia by mid-1970.

As the British planned for construction on Aldabra, U.K. and U.S. scientists who had been sent by the governments to survey the BIOT rallied public opposition against the base. In what soon became known as “the Aldabra affair,” scientists from the Royal Geographic Society and the Smithsonian argued that the military would endanger local populations of giant tortoises and rare birds, like the red-footed booby, which made Aldabra the “Galapagos of the Indian Ocean” (Pearce 2004). According to one of the scientists who surveyed the islands, David Stoddart, Diego Garcia “was simply a coconut plantation. The plants were common and the birds and land animals few” (Pearce 2004).<sup>45</sup>

An article in the *Times* of London entitled, “Scientists fight defence plans for island of Aldabra,” incorrectly described each island of the BIOT as having “few more than 100 people...mainly migrants.” In the article’s second column, headed, “Removing the People,” the defence correspondent for the *Times*, Charles Douglas-Home, somewhat sarcastically explained the logic behind the removals:

In spite of B.I.O.T.’s colonial status, the Government hope to evacuate all local population as soon as construction of the bases is complete. In that way, no doubt, they can adhere to the Prime Minister’s often repeated statement that Britain will no longer build or occupy defence bases against the wishes of the local population. In contrast to most other defence policy decisions, the bases will remain and the locals themselves will be removed. [Home 1967.]

### **The Whiz Kids Take a Chop**

While the British were facing international scientific opposition over the turtles, the Diego project was still facing resistance within the Pentagon. Nitze and the Navy however had an ally at DOD in Nitze’s former office and McNaughton. Together they pushed McNamara to approve the new Diego-as-fueling-depot plan.

McNamara, however, referred the proposal to the office in the Pentagon that bureaucratically speaking defined his tenure as Secretary of Defense: Systems Analysis. When McNamara became Secretary of Defense, he ushered into government a mode of rational economic analysis growing in popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, which he saw as a way to seize control of the Pentagon from the military services by imposing rationality on Defense decision-making. McNamara brought with him a group that would become known as the “Whiz Kids” to implement the changes. “Young, book-smart, Ivy League,” these “think-tank civilian assistants,” many coming from the RAND

Corporation, championed rational calculation and statistical analysis as the basis for all policy decisions. “Everything was scrutinized with the cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis” of RAND, Fred Kaplan says in his canonical *Wizards of Armageddon* (1991[1983]), asking questions like, “‘What weapon system will destroy the most targets for a given cost?’ or ‘What weapon system will destroy a given set of targets for the lowest cost?’” (1991:254-255).

McNamara’s office of Systems Analysis, with its head Alain Enthoven, was the office in the Pentagon primarily charged with providing this analysis. “McNamara would not act on a proposal without letting Alain’s department have a chop at it,” explained Earl Ravenal, a Systems Analysis staffer who worked on the Diego Garcia proposal, in a 2004 interview. In Systems Analysis, statistically based cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit calculations helped shape, justify, and evaluate military policymaking. Nearly every weapons purchase, every troop deployment, and every base decision had to pass through Systems Analysis for approval. “Systems analysis became accepted as the buzz word, the way that decisions were rationalized, the currency of overt transactions, the *lingua franca* inside the Pentagon,” Kaplan writes (1991:257). Often, this language and the use of statistical data alone were enough to create the veneer of rationality and justify policy decisions.

Ravenal’s team in Systems Analysis received the proposal for Diego Garcia with instructions to “look into the quantitative rationale” for the base and “see if it makes sense.” They took the Navy at its word and evaluated its most recent justification for the project—to create a new fueling depot for ships traveling to and from Vietnam.

Ravenal's team found the base was not cost effective: Given the distances involved and the costs of transporting fuel, it was cheaper to refuel ships at existing ports.

McNamara wrote to new Secretary of the Navy Paul R. Ignatius to inform him that he would again defer "investment" on Diego Garcia. He explained that cost tabulations had shown "that using Diego Garcia for carrier refueling is more expensive than current arrangements" (FRUS 2000:108). Ravenal explained that the Navy and ISA were "extremely annoyed." They were "hopping up and down" mad. Even people within Systems Analysis were concerned that Ravenal's team had defied the Navy over such a (relatively) small project. According to Ravenal, Nitze's Senior Aide, Rear Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, who had worked with him on Diego Garcia since Nitze's days at ISA, immediately knew that the Navy had picked the wrong rationale to get the base.

"We knew it would be a billion [dollars] before [long]," Ravenal recounted. "They said, 'Why are you opposing an austere communications facility?' I said, 'That's not what's going on here. You're going to have a tremendous base here. It's gonna be a billion'—of course it's over that now."

### **"The Master of the Game"**\*

"When it came to writing official, top-secret reports that combined sophisticated analysis with a flair for scaring the daylights out of anyone reading them," writes Kaplan, "Paul H. Nitze had no match" (1991:138). For five decades Nitze was at the center of U.S. national security policy, although never more centrally than in his authorship of the 1950 NSC-68 memo, which quickly became one of the guiding forces in U.S. Cold War policy.

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\* Burr and Wampler 2004.

In NSC-68, and throughout his career, Nitze became an ardent proponent of building up “conventional, non-nuclear forces to meet Soviet aggression on the peripheries” (i.e., in the so-called third world) (Kaplan 1991:137). NSC-68’s language was “deliberately hyped” and a “bludgeon,” admitted another of its authors, Nitze’s boss, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, that was used “for pushing their own, more militaristic views into official parlance” (Kaplan 1991:140, 139). In NSC-68 and his later work, Nitze, a Democrat and former Wall Street financier, offered a view of the world that offered a “highly pessimistic vision of Soviet military might, and the idea that the only real answer to the Soviet challenge lay in the construction of a gigantic, world-wide U.S. military machine” (Kaplan 1991:141).

In June 1967, Nitze left his job as Secretary of the Navy to become Deputy Secretary of Defense, the second highest-ranking official in the Defense Department. Half a year later, Britain devalued the pound and faced with deep military spending cuts and scientific opposition, Prime Minister Wilson announced the cancellation of the U.K. base on Aldabra. McNamara, Nitze, and other U.S. officials were little interested in building the base alone (which they had always viewed primarily as another way to keep a British presence “east of Suez”). They returned their focus to Diego Garcia (FRUS 2000:92-93, 109-117; Bandjunis 2001:30).

Before long, however, changes came closer to home. McNamara had left the Pentagon, and Clark Clifford became Johnson’s new Secretary of Defense. With Clifford focused almost entirely on Vietnam, Nitze was left to run most of the rest of the Pentagon. Having worked on Diego Garcia since 1961 during his tenure at ISA, Nitze began meeting with Navy officials to discuss plans for Diego.

In April 1968, the JCS offered a “reappraisal” of the Diego Garcia proposal in light of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the January 1968 British decision to withdraw their forces east of Suez by the end of 1971. Foreseeing a “power vacuum” and predicting Soviet and Chinese “domination” in the region, the JCS recommended “the immediate establishment” of a base on Diego. They proposed a \$46 million joint service facility capable of supporting limited forces in “contingency [i.e., combat] situations,” as well as Army and Air Force infrastructure, including a 12,000-foot runway capable of landing B-52 nuclear bombers and C-5A transport aircraft (FRUS 2000:109-112; O’Grady 1968).

Internally the JCS crafted a strategy to dissuade the Secretary of Defense from being “unduly influenced” by Systems Analysis: “The project is analogous to an insurance policy,” their rationale explained (in the revealing language of the business world, discussed in chapter 10). “Low premiums now could lead to large returns later if military requirement does develop.... We are trying to buy preparedness which is never cost-effective” (O’Grady 1968:3). Systems Analysis was not convinced and again urged the Secretary to “reject the JCS proposal” on the grounds of its cost effectiveness and its risk of starting an arms race in the Indian Ocean (Enthoven 1968).

For once, Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze agreed. He found that “no justification” existed for a major base. He found, however, that “adequate justification exists” for what he called a “modest facility” on Diego Garcia, at a cost of \$26 million (the price he previously suggested as Secretary of the Navy) (FRUS 2000:113-114). In this case, Nitze let the JCS provide the bludgeon with its hyped-up warnings of Soviet “domination” and Chinese “expansion.” In the face of these articulated threats and with

the major JCS proposal on the table, Nitze's plan looked like a cheap, rational option, challenging the heart of the Systems Analysis opposition.

The Navy submitted a plan for the base along Nitze's suggested lines. It sent Elmo Zumwalt back to Ravenal to make the case. "They knew they were going to win this time," Ravenal recalled of the visit. "They were going to do it right this time.... They weren't going to make some sort of a [weak] case." Still Systems Analysis continued its opposition, now questioning the urgency of the Diego project and asking for it to be deferred until fiscal year 1971. But this time, Ravenal explained, "We lost that round."

Indeed, ISA approved the plan as expected and in November 1968, Nitze signed off on the Navy's request to include \$9,556,000 in the fiscal year 1970 military construction budget (Bandjunis 2001:35-36). Within days, the Navy had notified the armed services committees of both houses of Congress. Under Nitze's leadership, an interdepartmental group of top officials from the Pentagon, State Department, CIA, and Treasury Department began arguing for the base (U.S. Department of State 1968:7).

In January 1969, a classified line item for Diego Garcia appeared in the fiscal year 1970 Military Construction budget. The funding process for the base was finally underway. "You have to see," Ravenal said of Nitze, "He threw the football as Secretary of the Navy, and he caught it as Deputy Secretary of Defense."

### **"Maintaining the Fiction"**

Planning for the removals began among British officials and their U.S. counterparts as early as 1964. By 1966, in a memorandum entitled, "Status of Inhabitants and

Immigration Legislation, British Indian Ocean Territory,” the Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote, “We can hardly accept the basic principle set out in Article 73 [of the UN Charter], i.e. that the interests of the inhabitants of the territory are paramount, we should not accept the responsibilities laid on the Administering Government under this Article of the Charter.” To avoid the UN obligations due permanent inhabitants, the Secretary proposed “to avoid any reference to ‘permanent inhabitants,’ instead, to refer to the people in the islands as Mauritians and Seychellois” (Secretary of State for the Colonies 1966).

British official Alan Brooke-Turner further spelled out the dilemma facing his government. The Colonial Office “wish to avoid using the phrase ‘permanent inhabitants’ in relation to any of the islands in the [BIOT] because to recognise that there are permanent inhabitants will imply that there is a population whose democratic rights will have to be safeguarded and which will therefore be deemed by the U.N. Committee of Twentyfour [on decolonization] to come within its purview.” Brooke-Turner feared that the attention of the Committee of Twenty-Four would put political pressure on Britain at the UN and force it to report on the inhabitants. Members of the Committee might press to visit the BIOT jeopardizing the “whole aim of the BIOT to provide islands for the defence needs of the United Kingdom and the United States in the Indian Ocean.” Brooke-Turner seconded the Colonial Office’s recommendation to insist that there were no permanent inhabitants and suggested issuing documents showing that the Chagossians and other workers were “‘belongers’ of Mauritius or Seychelles and only temporary residents in the BIOT. “This device, though rather transparent,” he wrote, “ would at

least give us a defensible position to take up in the Committee of Twentyfour” (Brooke-Turner 1966).

“This is all fairly unsatisfactory,” a colleague responded in a handwritten note a few days later. “We detach these islands—in itself a matter which is criticised. We then find, apart from the transients, up to 240 ‘ilois’ whom we propose either to resettle (with how much vigour of persuasion?) or to certify, more or less fraudulently, as belonging somewhere else. This all seems difficult to reconcile with the ‘sacred trust’ of Art. 73, however convenient we or the US might find it from the viewpoint of defence. It is one thing to use ‘empty real estate’; another to find squatters in it and to make it empty” (Brooke-Turner 1966).

“We must surely be very tough about this,” a Permanent Under-Secretary (most likely in the Colonial Office) replied later in 1966. “The object of the exercise was to get some rocks which will remain ours; there will be no indigenous population except seagulls who have not yet got a Committee (the Status of Women Committee does not cover the rights of Birds)” (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2006*:para. 27, emphasis in original).

A colleague, D. A. Greenhill, wrote back, “Unfortunately along with the Birds go some few Tarzans or Men Fridays whose origins are obscure, and who are being hopefully wished on to Mauritius etc.” (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2006*:para. 27).

British officials eventually settled on a policy of “maintaining the fiction” to the international community that the Chagossians were transient contract workers with no connection to the islands (Aust 1970).

### **Planning the “Evacuation”**

While DOD quarreled over funding, the State Department’s Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs and the embassy in London coordinated the removals with the British. “U.S. would desire removal of migrant laborers from Diego Garcia after due notice in accord with Minutes to BIOT Agreement,” read an August 1968 telegram to the embassy in the name of Secretary of State Rusk. The message, which had been approved by DOD, instructed the embassy to inform British officials of the State and Defense departments’ concerns that the removals might arouse the attention of the United Nations’ Committee of Twenty-Four. He asked that the removals be carried out in a way so as to minimize such negative publicity, preferably with resettlement taking place outside the BIOT (Rusk 1968).

The joint State/Defense message noted that the British had been using the term “inhabitants” to describe the people of Diego Garcia in inter-governmental discussions. The message claimed instead that the people were “migrant laborers.” “We suggest, therefore, that the term ‘migrant laborers’ be used in any conversations with HMG as withdrawal of ‘inhabitants’ obviously would be more difficult to justify to littoral countries and Committee of Twenty-four” (Rusk 1968).<sup>46</sup>

The embassy spoke with the Foreign Office the next day. Ambassador David Bruce telegraphed back to the State Department that the Foreign Office’s representative, “took the point on ‘migrant laborers’” but noted that although “it was a good term for cosmetic purposes...it might be difficult to make completely credible as some of the ‘migrants’ are second generation Diego residents” (U.S. Embassy London 1968:1).

State, Defense, and British officials continued their close collaboration in planning the removals. In January 1969, another State/Defense message indicated the U.S. Government's displeasure with a request by the BIOT administrator to re-hire 50 "Chagos-born laborers" in Mauritius for work on Diego Garcia (Rogers 1969:4). After some indecision, the embassy in London informed the British that they would not oppose resettlement of the Chagossians from Diego in Peros Banhos and Salomon. They refused however to provide a guarantee that the United States would not develop facilities on the islands for 20 years. U.K. officials had asked for the guarantee to encourage Moulinie & Co. to expand production on Peros and Salomon so as to resettle all the displaced labor from Diego Garcia. Without the guarantee, the Company rejected making the investment necessary to absorb all those displaced. The British Government rejected making the investment on its own, and with it, the idea to resettle Chagossians from Diego in Peros and Salomon on the grounds that it was an "unsound investment" and risking the possibility of a second deportation (Annenberg 1969).

As much, the Foreign Office feared an ever-growing population of people born in the BIOT with parents who were also born in the BIOT. With Mauritius having won its independence in March 1968, such people would have "exclusive attachment" to Chagos and the BIOT and "could not be disguised as Mauritians." As it stood, there was already a sizable population with both Mauritian and U.K. citizenship. The Foreign Office was unsure if the Mauritian Government was aware that many of the Chagossians were also British citizens (if this fact had been known, the British would have had more difficulty arguing that the Mauritian Government should take responsibility for their resettlement). "It is therefore most important" for British officials, the embassy explained, that "no

reference be made to distinction between Ilois and Mauritians—for any discussions with outsiders, they are all Mauritians” (Annenberg 1969).

The Foreign Office delivered a document discussing the deportation options to Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart around the 1969 Easter holiday. On June 10, the embassy in London met with the Foreign Office for an “extended session” on the “Chagos evacuation.” The Foreign Office foresaw a staggered deportation over several years, with Diego to be “cleared” first.

### **Convincing Congress**

“Negligible.... For all practical purposes...uninhabited.” This is how the Navy characterized the Chagos population in briefing papers delivered to members of Congress as officials finally began lobbying for Diego funding. When pushed by Senate Appropriations Committee member Senator Henry Jackson about the local population, one Navy official “told him that it consisted entirely of rotating contract copra workers, and that the British intended to relocate them as soon as possible after Congressional action was complete.” Recounting Jackson’s reaction, the official explained, “He came back to this question twice more. He was obviously concerned about local political problems. I assured him that there should be none” (Leddick 1969a).

On Capitol Hill however, the political problems mounted for the Navy. First the Senate Armed Services Committee rejected the project, only to have it restored in a House/Senate conference. Then, after the House Appropriations Committee authorized funding, Jackson’s Senate Committee disapproved it, despite the Navy’s lobbying campaign, including visits to the Hill by new CNO Admiral Thomas Moorer. In

appropriations committee conference, Senators led by Democrat Mike Mansfield refused to yield through four meetings on the military construction appropriations. Democrats saw the project as a new military commitment overseas at a time when the Nixon Administration had already indicated its desire to withdraw from Vietnam. Others wanted to “hold the Brits feet to the fire,” and keep the U.S. from assuming their role in the Indian Ocean (as the base seemed to suggest) (Leddick 1969b). The conferees left the project unfunded but gave the Navy an oral agreement that it should return in the following year’s budget cycle with a paired-down request for a communications station alone (Bandjunis 2001:37).

Following the Congressional defeat, Nixon’s new Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird gave the Navy simple instructions: “Make it a communications facility” (Shepard 1970). Within two weeks, new Secretary of the Navy John H. Chafee submitted to Laird a proposal for a \$17.78 million “communications facility,” with an initial increment of \$5.4 million for fiscal year 1971.

This of course was the same justification that in 1965 had been overtaken by events. Navy documents show that the only part of the Indian Ocean in which it lacked communications capabilities was in the ocean’s southernmost waters, closest to Antarctica and far from any potential conflict zones (Frosch 1970). A closer examination of the Navy’s budget shows too that half the cost of the revised “communications station” project was for dredging Diego Garcia’s lagoon and building an 8,000-foot airstrip. Both were said to allow the resupply of a facility that featured little more than \$800,000 worth of communications equipment. The project featured the construction of a 17-mile road network, a small nightclub, a movie theater, and a gym (Chafee 1970). Under the guise

of a communications station, the Navy was asking for the nucleus of a base whose design allowed for ready expansion and the restoration of deleted elements of the base.<sup>47</sup> As the CNO's Office of Communications and Cryptology put it, "The communications requirements cited as justification are fiction" (see attachment, Op-605E4 1970).

By the spring of 1970, with Congressional funding likely for the following year, British officials wanted to begin making arrangements for the deportations. Most importantly, the British were eager to begin negotiations to convince the Mauritian Government to receive the Chagossians and arrange for their resettlement. State and Defense officials on the other hand were concerned that Mauritian officials would leak news of the negotiations and endanger Congressional funding by arousing international attention to the removals. Accordingly, they blocked the British from beginning negotiations until funding had been secured (Annenberg 1970; Greene 1970). Presentations to Congress continued to maintain that there would "be no indigenous population and no native labor utilized in the construction" (Blouin 1970). (Members of Congress were concerned at the time about increasing problems between overseas bases and local populations making these assurances useful for securing funding.)

At the same time, Defense and State wanted "to retain enough distance" from the details of the deportations to ensure British officials would not look to the United States for assistance and to avoid anyone making the connection between the impending base construction and the removals. The departments, for example, denied a suggestion from the embassy in London to send an engineer to assist simultaneously with the base planning and the resettlement program (Rogers 1970b).

As expected under the previous year's oral agreement, Congress appropriated funds for the "austere communications facility" in November 1971. The funds were again listed as a classified item in the military construction budget. In a closed-to-the-public "executive" session of the House Appropriations Committee, Navy representatives told members of Congress for the first time that the BIOT agreement included the "resettlement of local inhabitants" and the \$14 million Polaris missile payments to the British (Rogers 1970b). House members never publicly raised the issues outside the executive session.

By December 1970, Navy officials were working "to pursue the early removal" of those they were still, at times, calling "copra workers" (Small 1970). On December 7, 1970, a joint State/Defense message, telegraphed in the name of Secretary of State William P. Rogers, delivered instructions to the U.S. Embassy in London. Rogers asked the embassy to inform British officials that it was time "for the UK to accomplish relocation of the present residents of Diego Garcia to some other location." The instructions were clear: "All local personnel should be moved from the western half of the island before the arrival of the construction force in March 1971. We hope that complete relocation can be accomplished by the end of July 1971 when aircraft begin using the air strip and the tempo of construction activities reaches its full scale" (Rogers 1970c).

The Embassy reported that the British were facing serious difficulties in arranging the deportations as a result of the restriction imposed by the U.S. Government against speaking with the Mauritians until after base funding was guaranteed (Greene 1970). State and Defense sent an immediate reply: No matter the difficulties, deporting the

population is the obligation of the United Kingdom and one for which the United States had paid through the Polaris money transfer (Bandjunis 2001:46).

At 10:00 a.m. Washington time, on Tuesday, December 15, the Nixon Administration publicly announced its intention to build a joint U.S./U.K. military facility on Diego Garcia. The State and Defense departments provided embassies with a list of anticipated questions and suggested answers to handle press inquiries, including the following:

Q. What is the purpose of the facility?

A. To close a gap in our worldwide communications system and to provide communications support to U.S. and U.K. ships and aircraft in the Indian Ocean.

Q. Is this part of a U.S. build-up in the Indian Ocean?

A. No.

Q. Will other facilities be built in this area?

A. No others are contemplated.

Q. What will happen to the population of Diego Garcia?

A. The population consists of a small number of contract laborers from the Seychelles and Mauritius engaged to work on the copra plantations. Arrangements will be made for the contracts to be terminated at the appropriate time and for their return to Mauritius and Seychelles. [Rogers 1970d.]

### **“Let the British Do It”**

If as Earl Ravenal put it metaphorically, Paul Nitze threw the football that was Diego Garcia as Secretary of the Navy and caught it as Deputy Secretary of Defense, the man who caught a lateral from Nitze and ran the ball into the end zone was Admiral Elmo Zumwalt.

Elmo Russell Zumwalt, Jr., was born in San Francisco in 1920, the son of two doctors. He was a high school class valedictorian and attended prep school before entering the Naval Academy and starting an unprecedented rise to the top of the Navy hierarchy. At 44, Zumwalt was the youngest naval officer to be promoted to Rear Admiral. At 49, Zumwalt became the Navy's youngest-ever four-star Admiral and the youngest-ever CNO. His record of medals, decorations, and honorary degrees runs a single-spaced page, including medals from France, West Germany, Holland, Argentina, Brazil, Greece, Italy, Japan, Venezuela, Bolivia, Indonesia, Sweden, Colombia, Chile, South Korea, and South Vietnam. Matching this aristocratic glint, Zumwalt married Mouza Coutelais-du-Roche, a woman of French and Russian parentage, whom he met at the end of World War II among the White Russian community-in-exile in Harbin, Manchuria (Zumwalt 1976:17-19).

As CNO from 1970 to 1974, Zumwalt gained attention for integrating the Navy, for upgrading women's roles, and for relaxing naval standards of dress and service in keeping with the times. In an order to the Navy entitled, "Equal Opportunity in the Navy," Zumwalt acknowledged the service's discriminatory practices against African-Americans and ordered corrective actions. "Ours must be a Navy family that recognizes no artificial barriers of race, color or religion," Zumwalt wrote in what was then a bold statement, especially in the U.S. armed forces. "There is no black Navy, no white Navy—just one Navy—the United State Navy" (Zumwalt 1976:203-204).

Nitze recruited Zumwalt in 1962 to work under him when Nitze was Assistant Secretary of Defense in ISA. In his memoirs, Zumwalt describes working intimately with Nitze, eventually following him to his position as Secretary of the Navy as Nitze's

Executive Assistant and Senior Aide. Zumwalt was “at Paul’s side” during the Cuban Missile Crisis and during negotiations leading to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Under Nitze’s “tutelage,” he earned a “Ph.D. in political-military affairs.” Zumwalt writes, “When I left him I had firsthand experience of how political-military affairs were managed, conceptually and tactically, at the top level of government” (Zumwalt 1976:27-29).

Nitze, for his part, rewarded Zumwalt by recommending him to receive the rear admiral’s second star two years before others in his Naval Academy class were eligible and without having commanded a destroyer squadron or cruiser, as was the Navy’s tradition (Zumwalt 1976:34). Upon becoming the Navy’s youngest-ever rear admiral, Zumwalt left the Secretary of the Navy’s office to command a cruiser-destroyer flotilla. Later he became Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Vietnam before his promotion by President Nixon to CNO.

Zumwalt worked on Diego Garcia from his time with Nitze at ISA and maintained the same interest in the base of his “mentor and close friend” once he left Nitze’s staff (Zumwalt 1976:28). One of the officers on Zumwalt’s staff, Admiral Worth H. Bagley, remembered in a 1989 oral history interview how Zumwalt had wanted to boost the U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean, in part out of concern for the “growing reliance on high oil imports at a time when things were looking unstable.” Helped by the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, Zumwalt increased the pace of deployments in the ocean. “He went out himself and visited the...African countries,” Bagley explained. “Just looking into the question of bases and things of that sort.... To see if he could find

some economical way to increase base and crisis support possibilities there” (U.S. Naval Institute 1989:311-312).

“In dealing with Diego Garcia also?” Bagley’s interviewer suggested.

“Moorer did that. Zumwalt finished it up for him,” Bagley replied (U.S. Naval Institute 1989:313).

And so Zumwalt did. Once Nitze and Admiral Moorer had secured funding from Congress, Zumwalt focused on removing Diego Garcia’s population as quickly as possible. At a December 10, 1970, meeting, CNO Zumwalt told his deputies that he wanted to “push the British to get the copra workers off Diego Garcia prior to the commencement of construction,” scheduled to begin in three months (Dick 1970).

A secret letter confirmed British receipt of the order to remove the Chagossians: “The United States Government have recently confirmed that their security arrangements at Diego Garcia will require the removal of the entire population of the atoll by July if possible. This is no surprise. We have known since 1965 that if a defence facility were established we should have to resettle elsewhere the contract copra workers who live there” (Watt 1971:1-2).

As both governments prepared for the deportations and the start of construction, the U.S. embassies in London and Port Louis began recommending that the Navy use some Chagossians as manual laborers for the construction. Zumwalt refused. Two days after his December 17 order redressing racial discrimination in the Navy, Zumwalt stressed that by the end of construction all inhabitants should be moved to their “permanent other home.” In a small note handwritten on the face of Zumwalt’s memo, a deputy commented, “Probably have no permanent other home” (Blouin 1970).

In line with Zumwalt's orders, two Navy officials flew to Seychelles to meet with the commissioner and administrator of the BIOT, Sir Bruce Greatbatch and John Todd. On January 8, they made plans for evacuation of the western half of Diego Garcia before the arrival of Navy "Seabee" construction teams, the "segregation" of Chagossians and Seabees, and the "complete evacuation" of Diego Garcia by July (Small 1971a:1). Greatbatch and Todd explained that this was the fastest they could get rid of the population other than to "drop Ilois on pier at Mauritius and sail away quickly" (attachment to Small 1971a).

A day before the January 8 meeting, Zumwalt received a memorandum from the State Department's Legal Adviser bearing on the deportations and the speed at which they would be accomplished. In the memo, the Legal Adviser discussed "several legal considerations affecting US-UK responsibilities toward the 400 inhabitants of Diego Garcia." In particular, the Adviser pointed out that the 1966 U.S./U.K. agreement "provides certain safeguards for the inhabitants," and that the United States is responsible not just for facilitating U.K. steps to ensure the inhabitants' welfare but would be seen to "share the responsibility" if they were not resettled properly. The Adviser also noted the commitment made by both nations under the UN Charter to make the interests of inhabitants living in non-self-governing territories "paramount."

Although the responsibility for carrying out measures to ensure the welfare of the inhabitants lies with the UK, the US is charged under the Agreement with facilitating these arrangements. London 10391 [embassy memo] states that the US constrained the UK from discussing the matter with the GOM pending the outcome of our Congressional appropriations legislation. In light of this, we are under a particular responsibility not to pressure the UK into meeting a time schedule which may not provide sufficient time in which to satisfactorily arrange for the welfare of the inhabitants. Beyond this, their removal is to accommodate US needs, and

the USG will, of course, be considered to share the responsibility with the UK by the inhabitants and other nations if satisfactory arrangements are not made. [Attachment to Small 1971.]

Despite the warning, the Navy's pace and planning for the deportations continued unabated. Two weeks later a nine-member Navy reconnaissance party arrived on Diego Garcia with Todd and Paul Moulinie. On January 26, Todd and Moulinie gathered the Chagossians to the manager's office at East Point and told them their fate. On January 28, a Navy status report detailed the progress of the deportations:

Relocation of the copra workers is proceeding in a satisfactory manner. The Administrator of the BIOT has given his assurance that the three small settlements on the western half of the atoll will be moved immediately to the eastern half. All copra producing activities on the western half will also cease immediately. The BIOT ship NORDVAER is relocating people from Diego Garcia to Peros Banhos, Salomon Islands, and the Seychelles on a regular basis. [Small 1971b:1.]

On February 4, a State/Defense message directed all government personnel to, "Avoid all direct participation in resettlement of Ilois on Mauritius." The cable explained that "basic responsibility clearly British," and that the United States was under "no obligation assist with" the resettlement. On the other hand, the departments conceded that the Government had some obligation to give the British "sufficient time" to adequately ensure the welfare of the Ilois. Even further, the telegram stated, "USG also realizes it will share in any criticism levied at the British for failing to meet their responsibilities re inhabitants' welfare" (U.S. Department of State 1971). Despite the instructions, State and Defense took no steps to fulfill their admitted obligation and offered no relaxed timeline for the relocations

On March 9, a Seabee landing party arrived on Diego to prepare for the arrival of a Seabee construction battalion later that month. Within days, unexpected reports came

back to Navy headquarters from the advance team. Rear Admiral Dick Pratt, who was commanding the team, went to the office of one of his superiors, the Deputy CNO for Plans and Policy, to voice his concerns. “He warns of possible bad publicity re the so-called ‘copra workers,’” the Deputy CNO wrote after speaking with Pratt. “He cites...fine old man who’s been there 50 years. There’s a feeling the UK haven’t been completely above board on this. We don’t want another Culebra,” he said, referring to the negative publicity and opposition faced by the Navy during major protests in Puerto Rico against 1970 plans to deport Culebra’s people and use their island as a bombing range (attachment to Cochrane 1971).

Of course by now most in the Navy were well aware that generations of Chagossians had lived on Diego and in the rest of Chagos. “It is thus true that criticism could be made of the relocation of these persons to another island,” Captain E. L. Cochrane, Jr. admitted to the Deputy CNO four days after the Seabees began construction. “A newsman so disposed,” he continued, “could pose questions that would result in a very damaging report that long time inhabitants of Diego Garcia are being torn away from their family homes because of the construction of a sinister U.S. ‘base’” (Cochrane 1971:1).

Cochrane explained that the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Navy have all recognized the issue and that the “relocation of persons...is indeed a potential trouble area and could be exploited by opponents to our activities in the Indian Ocean.” The three agencies concluded however, “that the advantages of having a station on an island which has no other inhabitants makes it worth the risk to ask the British to carry out the relocation.” In fact, Cochrane concluded, the advantages of having the British relocate

the inhabitants were” so great that the United States should adopt a strict ‘let the British do it’ policy while at the same time keeping as well informed as possible on the actual relocation activities” (Cochrane 1971:2).

Weighing the concerns of the advance party and Cochrane’s policy recommendation, Zumwalt had the final say. On a comment sheet with the subject line, “Copra workers on Diego Garcia,” Zumwalt offered three words:

“Absolutely must go” (attachment to Cochrane 1971).<sup>48</sup>

### **U.S. Responsibility?**

The deportations continued over most of 1971. Despite the warning of the State Department Legal Adviser and the concern of the State and Defense departments, Navy officials continued to pressure their British counterparts to complete the deportations as quickly as possible. A State Department official in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Africa later acknowledged, “In order to meet our self-imposed timetable, their evacuation was undertaken with a haste which the British could claim has prevented careful examination of resettlement needs” (D. D. Newsom 1972b:1; 1972a).

Over the same period U.K. representatives attempted to negotiate an agreement with the Mauritian Government to resettle the Chagossians in Mauritius. Despite delays during the final deportations, by the end of October, the final inhabitants had been removed either to Mauritius, Seychelles, Peros Banhos, or Salomon. Construction continued unabated, with the runway already operational by July 1971.

With the arrival of the last Chagossians in Mauritius, the U.S. ambassador in Port Louis, William D. Brewer, grew increasingly alarmed at the condition of a group he

described as “1300 miserable and uneducated refugees” (1971:4). Ambassador Brewer wrote in December that although he believed “primary responsibility” lay with the British Government, he worried that the United States was also vulnerable to public and UN criticism. “The USG has a moral responsibility for the well-being of these people who were involuntarily moved at our request,” he argued. And the United States’ moral responsibility was especially heavy given that the Government had “resisted GOM and HMG efforts to permit Ilois to remain as employees of the facility” (Brewer 1971:1, 4). Even if legally speaking significant responsibility lay with the British, Brewer felt, the U.S. Government was responsible for ordering the removal.

By the same token, Brewer was outraged about the lack of resettlement planning. “To our knowledge,” Brewer wrote, “there exists no operative plan and no firm allocation of funds to compensate them for the hardship of the transfer from their former home and their loss of livelihood” (1971:1). While the British were attempting to convince the Mauritian Government to create a resettlement plan, Brewer pointed out that such a scheme was “foredoomed” on two counts: First, because of the “political impossibility” of giving special resources to the Chagossians while unemployed Hindus, Muslims, and Afro-Mauritians received nothing, and second, because of the Mauritian Government’s own inability to make use of current British aid money, let alone new funds for a special Chagossian project (Brewer 1971:3).

“The plight of the Ilois,” Brewer wrote, “is a classic example of perpetuation of hardship through bureaucratic neglect” (1971:5). In short, he said, “The Embassy believes we have regrettably neglected our obligation toward them. We recommend that early and specific exchanges with HMG be undertaken in order to assure the welfare of

the Ilois and that authority for this essentially political matter be appropriately centralized within the Department” (Brewer 1971:1).

For the next three months, Brewer continued to cable passionate reports about the Ilois, for whom he believed “justice should be done,” trading charged letters with an undersecretary of the Air Force and others in the bureaucracy over the U.S. Government’s responsibility (1971:5). Brewer lambasted the “inadequate and cavalier treatment so far accorded the Ilois” (1972a:2). It was “absurd,” to say, as some in the bureaucracy continued to maintain, that Diego Garcia had “no fixed population,” given its history of habitation dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, “DOD acknowledged its responsibility for the removal of the Ilois by payment of \$14 million to HMG.” Brewer wrote that the Government did not fulfill its obligation to the Chagossians by its \$14 million payment, pointing out correctly that most of the money seemed to have gone toward building an international airport in Seychelles. “The point of our exercise,” Brewer said, is that “the USG should make sure that the British do an adequate job of compensation” (1972b). (Around the same time Brewer also helped “burnish the Diego public relations image” in Mauritius by delivering 3,000 bags of Christmas candy prepared by Diego personnel to underprivileged and children’s groups (Brewer 1972a:1).)

The response to Brewer from higher-ups in the bureaucracy was a February cable from the State Department. The telegram underlined again that “basic responsibility” lay with the British but for again conceded that, “USG also realizes it may well share in any criticism levied at British for failing [to] meet their responsibilities re inhabitants’ welfare.” State directed the London embassy to inform the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office of the U.S. Government's "concern" over the treatment and condition of the Chagossians and to ask the British for more information about resettlement plans. State added that "continued failure resolve these issues exposes both HMG and USG to local criticism which could be picked up and amplified elsewhere"—in other words, by the Soviets, the Chinese, or at the UN (U.S. Department of State 1972). In July 1972, the State Department reassigned Brewer to an ambassadorship in Sudan.

Later that same spring, the Mauritian Government proposed and the British Government accepted a plan to resettle the Chagossians. Despite the majority of Chagossians reporting that they wished to receive compensation in cash, the rehabilitation scheme called for the provision of housing, pig breeding jobs (never a significant economic activity in Chagos), and some cash payments. On September 4, 1972, Mauritian Prime Minister Ramgoolam accepted £650,000 to resettle the Chagossians, including the remaining few hundreds who were still to be removed from Peros Banhos and Salomon in 1972 and 1973. Answering the question of if the resettlement plan would work, the U.S. Embassy in Port Louis replied, "We doubt it" (Precht 1972:2). British officials likewise realized that the sum was too little for an adequate resettlement, but were happy to have struck such a cheap deal. The plan was never implemented and few Chagossians saw any money until 1978.

### **Expansion**

By Christmas Day 1972 on Diego Garcia, Bob Hope and Red Foxx were cracking jokes for the troops (Bandjunis 2001:49, 58). Shortly before the final deportations from Peros Banhos in 1973, the Seabees completed the 8,000-foot runway and made the

communications station operational. By October—in what was quite a feat for a mere communications station—the Navy was using the base to fly P-3 surveillance planes to support Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war (Bandjunis 2001:62).

As Nitze and others in the U.S. Government had hoped, the original “austere communications facility” on Diego Garcia served as a nucleus for what became a rapidly expanding base. Before the base was operational, Zumwalt was already asking others in the Navy in 1972, “What do we do in 74, 75, and 76 for Diego Garcia?” referring to expansion ideas for fiscal years 1974-1976 (Minter 1972).

Restricted to the use of the Azores as its only base from which to resupply Israel during the October war, the Navy submitted an “emergency” request for \$4.6 million in additional construction funds. The Pentagon turned them down. Within weeks, the Navy submitted a request to the Pentagon for an almost \$32 million expansion of the base over three years, to include ship support facilities and a regular air surveillance capacity. Days later chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Moorer sent a recommendation to Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger to expand the base beyond the new request, including a runway extension to accommodate B-52 bombers. In the first month of 1974, the Air Force asked for a \$4.5 million construction budget of its own (Bandjunis 2001:64-71).

After an initial fiscal year 1974 supplemental appropriation was deferred to the fiscal year 1975 budget, additional appropriations for Diego Garcia soon became a minor political battle between the Ford Administration and Democratic Senators concerned about U.S. military expansion and a growing arms race with the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean. Hearings were held in both houses of Congress. Amendments to defeat

the expansion and force arms negotiations in the Indian Ocean were introduced but defeated. After President Ford affirmed that expansion of the base was “essential to the national interest of the United States” (which Congress had made a condition of new funding), the Pentagon won appropriations for fiscal years 1975 and 1976 totaling more than \$30 million (see Bandjunis 2001:309).

### **Congressional Hearings**

On September 11, 1975, after *Washington Post* reporter David Ottaway (1975) broke the story of the Chagossians’ expulsion, Democratic Senators Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and John Culver of Iowa proposed a Senate amendment demanding that the Ford Administration explain the circumstances surrounding the expulsion and the role of the U.S. Government in the removals. The amendment passed. A month later the Administration submitted to Congress a nine-page response drafted by State and Defense.

The “Report on the Resettlement of Inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago” said that Chagos had been inhabited since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that “despite the basically transitory nature of the population of these islands, there were some often referred to as ‘Ilois’ .... In the absence of more complete data,” the report added, “it is impossible to establish the status of these persons and to what extent, if any, they formed a distinct community” (House 1975:41).

Addressing the removals, the report explained that the 1966 U.S-U.K. agreement envisioned the total evacuation of the islands to make them available for military purposes. The report cited three reasons for wanting the islands uninhabited: security concerns, British concerns about the costs of maintaining civil administration, and

concerns about “social problems... expected when placing a military detachment on an isolated tropical island alongside a population with an informal social structure and a prevalent cash wage of less than \$4.00 per month” (House 1975:42). (This of course was a polite way of referring to concerns about prostitution and other unwanted sexual and romantic relations between military personnel and locals.)

As to the deportations, the report said, “All went willingly.” It continued, “No coercion was used and no British or U.S. servicemen were involved” (House 1975:42). Although acknowledging that the “resettlement doubtless entailed discomfort and economic dislocation,” the report concluded that, “United States and United Kingdom officials acted in good faith on the basis of the information available to them” (House 1975:44). The last sentence of the report offered the Ford Administration’s final position on the Chagossians: “There is no outstanding US obligation to underwrite the cost of additional assistance for the persons affected by the resettlement from the Chagos Islands” (House 1975:45).

On November 4, 1975, during a hearing held by the House Special Subcommittee on Investigations, Government officials held firm. The Democrat subcommittee chair Representative Lee H. Hamilton asked the State Department’s representative George T. Churchill, “Is it the position of our Government now, that we have no responsibility toward these islanders? Is that our position?”

“We have no legal responsibility,” Churchill replied. “We are concerned. We recently discussed the matter with the British. The British have discussed it with the Mauritian Government. We have expressed our concern.”

“It is our basic position that it is up to the British. Is that it?” Hamilton pressed.

“It is our basic position that these people originally were a British responsibility and are now a Mauritian responsibility,” Churchill explained.

“We have no responsibility, legal or moral?”

“We have no legal responsibility. Moral responsibility is a term, sir, that I find difficult to assess” (House 1975:66).

Churchill added that it was the position of the Government not to allow the Chagossians to return to their homelands. Congress has never again taken up the issue.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **“CHAGOSSIANS IN THE FIRE”**

Four days after the Government of the United Kingdom created the British Indian Ocean Territory in November 1965, the British Colonial Office sent the following instructions to the newly established BIOT administration, headquartered in Seychelles: “Essential that contingency planning for evacuation of existing population from Diego Garcia...should begin at once” (UKTB 4-132). These instructions mark the beginning the expulsion process, which is the subject of this chapter.<sup>49</sup>

#### **Gradual Depopulation**

The British coordinated the removals through the three companies running the islands: Chagos-Agalega, Ltd. and its two corporate owners, Moulinie & Co. and Rogers and Co. Following the signing of the 1966 agreement with the United States, British officials began negotiating to purchase the islands in the territory that were privately owned. In March 1967, the United Kingdom bought Chagos from Chagos-Agalega for £660,000. The next month the British Government leased the islands back to Chagos-Agalega to continue running the islands on its behalf. At the end of 1967, Chagos-Agalega terminated its lease, with Moulinie & Co. agreeing to manage the islands for 8 percent of the gross value of the archipelago’s produce. Moulinie & Co. further agreed to act as agents of the British Government.

Until early May 1967, just after the British Government’s purchase of the islands, Chagossians could, as they had been accustomed since emancipation, leave Chagos for

regular vacations or medical treatment in Mauritius and return to Chagos as they wished. After May 1967 (and perhaps earlier for some), the BIOT administration ordered Moulinie & Co. to prevent Chagossians, like Rita Bancoult's family, traveling to Mauritius from returning to Chagos. The management contract Moulinie & Co. signed in January 1968 to manage the islands for the BIOT specifically prevented labor importation without BIOT consent while also establishing the number of workers allowed on the islands, working hours, and wages (United Kingdom 1968).

When stranded Chagossians protested to the Mauritian Government in February 1968, Government officials asked Moulinie & Co. to allow their return on the next ship to the islands. Moulinie & Co.'s director Paul Moulinie cabled his old partner Rogers and Co., which operated the main steamship traveling from Mauritius to Chagos with a reply: "Regret BIOT not in favour of further labour intakes for the time being until negotiations with the Ministry of Defence" (Lanstates 1968). When Chagossians like Rita Bancoult arrived at the Rogers and Co. offices, they were told that they could not return to Chagos (Mauritius Ministry of Social Security 1968). The company's steamer, the *M.V. Mauritius*, left for Chagos shortly thereafter with no Chagossians aboard.

This scene was repeated over the next three years as more Chagossians arrived in Mauritius and were denied return passage. Some Chagossians report being tricked or coerced into leaving Chagos for vacations in Mauritius (see Madeley 1985:4). Because there was no telephone service in Chagos and because mail service between Mauritius and Chagos had been suspended, news of Chagossians being stranded in Mauritius did not reach those in the archipelago. A growing number of Chagossians thus found themselves stranded in Mauritius. They had lost their jobs, they were separated from

their homes and their land, with almost all of their possessions and property still in Chagos, and often separated from many of their family members. Most were confused about their future, about whether they would be allowed to return to their homes, and about their status in Mauritius.

Chagossians found themselves in a country that was highly unstable after gaining its independence in March 1968. Unemployment was over 20 percent (Greenaway and Gooroochurn 2001:67; Durbarry 2001:109). British experts warned that the island would soon lack the resources to feed and support its rapidly growing population. A secret British telegram discussing the situation acknowledged “the near impossibility of [Chagossians] finding suitable employment. There is no Copra industry into which they could be absorbed” (Woller 1969). The result, according to another British official, was that most were languishing “on the beach” (Counsell 1969).

Just after independence, riots between Afro-Mauritians and Indo-Mauritian Muslims broke out in Port Louis and continued through most of 1968. As Chagossians explained in a 2004 research feedback meeting, they had never seen anything like this “bagar rasial” [racial riot] in Chagos. Life had been turned upside down. Suddenly, as one put it, “Chagossien dan difé, nu dé lipié briyé”—Chagossians were in the fire, both our feet burning.

With labor running low on the plantations, Moulinie & Co. requested permission from BIOT authorities to bring Chagossians back from Mauritius. BIOT authorities denied the request (Lambert 1968). British officials understood that “if we accept any returning Ilois, we must also accept responsibility for their ultimate resettlement” (UKTB 5-578). The British realized that the more Chagossians they evicted by denying their

return passage, the fewer Chagossians they would have to forcibly remove and resettle when so ordered by the United States. To keep the plantations running at a basic maintenance level, the BIOT administration allowed Moulinie & Co. to replace the stranded Chagossians (who numbered at least 259 adults plus their children in Mauritius by 1970) with imported Seychellois workers (Woller 1969).

The future of the islands remained uncertain as the U.S. military sought funding for construction on Diego Garcia. The BIOT and Moulinie & Co. gradually reduced services on the islands and made only basic maintenance repairs to keep the plantations running. At first Moulinie & Co. neglected the islands out of concern for making capital investments on plantations it knew the BIOT might soon shut down. After the company sold the islands and gave up its lease, the BIOT institutionalized this neglect in the contract Moulinie & Co. signed to manage the islands: No improvements of more than MRs2,000 (around £150 at the time) could be made without BIOT permission (United Kingdom 1968).

Reports from BIOT administrator John Todd document the neglect and deterioration of the islands. In May 1967, Todd found, "The islands have been neglected for the past eighteen months, due to uncertainty as to their future" (Todd 1967:5). Beginning in 1965 with the creation of the BIOT, Moulinie & Co. began importing three-month stocks of food rather than the six-month stocks ordered previously. This left food supplies lower than normal, as on Diego Garcia as early as 1968, and at times made the islands and the Chagossians increasingly reliant on fish and their own produce to meet food needs (Todd 1968:4).

According to Chagossians, and confirmed by British Government documents, medical and school staff left the islands after 1967 (and perhaps as early as late 1965). At the infirmary in Peros Banhos, the midwife left Chagos between May 1967 and August 1968. She was not replaced, leaving only a single nurse at the infirmary (Todd 1967:3; Todd 1968). Around the same time in 1967, the school in Peros Banhos closed due to the lack of a teacher (it seems later to have briefly reopened before closing permanently). In the Salomon Islands, the midwife departed during the first half of 1969, leaving a single nurse employed there as well. The teacher left between July 1969 and July 1970, and the school there closed (Todd 1967:3; Todd 1969a:33; Todd 1969b: 3; Todd 1970:2).

### **Forced Removals**

After the U.S. military secured funding from Congress to begin construction, a nine-member U.S. reconnaissance team arrived in Diego Garcia on the January 23, 1971, with BIOT administrator Todd and Moulinie & Co. director general Paul Moulinie. The next day, Todd gathered the island's inhabitants for a meeting. He informed them that the BIOT would close Diego Garcia and the plantations, but that the BIOT would move as many people as possible to Peros Banhos and Salomon. As Todd recounts, "This drew no comment from the Seychellois but a few of the Ilois asked whether they could return to Mauritius instead and receive some compensation for leaving their 'own country'" (Todd 1971). According to Madeley, "One Ilois woman, Marie Louina, died on Diego when she learned she would have to leave her homeland" (1985:5). Most Chagossians remained in Chagos by accepting deportation to Peros Banhos and Salomon, about 150

miles away. Many Seychellois workers and their Chagos-born children were deported to Seychelles. Some Chagossians “chose” deportation directly to Mauritius.

Many Chagossians explained to me that they were promised land, housing, and money upon reaching Mauritius (see also Sunday Times 1975). Moulinie’s nephew and Moulinie & Co. employee Marcel Moulinie made a sworn statement in 1977 that he “told the labourers that it was quite probable that they would be compensated.” He continued, “I do not recall saying anything more than that. I was instructed to tell them that they had to leave and that is what I did” (Moulinie 1977).

Within a few months, Marcel Moulinie and other company agents forced all Chagossians on the western side of Diego Garcia, including the villages of Norwa and Pointe Marianne, to leave their homes and their land to resettle on the eastern side of Diego so construction could begin (Greatbatch 1971). “Resembling an amphibious landing during World War II,” describes former Navy officer Bandjunis, Navy “Seabees landed on Diego Garcia in March 1971 to begin construction” (Bandjunis 1997:47). A tank landing ship, an attack cargo ship, two military sealift command charter ships, and two dock landing ships descended on Diego with at least 820 soldiers and equipment to construct a communications station and an 8,000-foot airstrip. The Seabees brought in heavy equipment and set up a rock crusher and a concrete block factory. They blasted Diego’s reef with explosives to provide coral rock for the runway (Bandjunis 2001:47-49).

According to many Chagossians, there were threats during this period that they would be bombed or shot if they did not leave the island. Children hid in fear as military aircraft flew overhead (see also Marimootoo 1997:46, 48; Mein 2002; Alexis 2002).

Ottaway reports that “one old man...recalled being told by an unidentified American official: ‘If you don’t leave you won’t be fed any longer’” (1976).

The BIOT administration and its Moulinie & Co. agents soon began removing families from Diego to Peros Banhos and Salomon. Some Chagossians refused and were told they had no choice but to leave (see e.g., Mein 2002). In August 1971, the BIOT dispatched its 500-ton cargo ship, the *M.V. Nordvær*, to Diego to remove the last families from the island. When the *Nordvær* experienced engine troubles before reaching Diego, the BIOT administration sent another ship, the *Isle of Farquhar*, to continue the removals (Greatbatch 1971). By then food stores in Diego were running low and BIOT officials began contemplating emergency assistance. The Navy’s Seabee contingent eventually provided food and later medical supplies (United States, House 1975:61).

In the days before the last inhabitants of Diego Garcia were removed, BIOT commissioner Sir Bruce Greatbatch ordered Moulinie & Co. to kill all the dogs on the island, including those belonging to the Chagossians as pets. Marcel Moulinie, who had been left to manage Diego Garcia, was responsible for carrying out the extermination. According to Moulinie, he first tried to shoot the dogs with the help of U.S. soldiers armed with M16 rifles. When this failed as an expeditious extermination method, he attempted to poison the dogs with strychnine. This too failed. Moulinie explained in an interview at his home in Seychelles how he finally lured the dogs into a sealed copra-drying shed where he then gassed the dogs *en masse* with exhaust piped in from U.S. military vehicles. Setting coconut husks ablaze, he burnt the carcasses in the shed (see also Moulinie 1977:para. 14).

After the *Isle of Farquhar* took a load of Chagossians and Seychellois from Diego, a repaired *Nordvær* returned to remove the final inhabitants. The passengers were generally allowed to take a small box of their belongings and a bed mat. Most of their possessions and all their animals were left behind.

No physical force seems to have been used to load people onto the boats. However, the BIOT's Moulinie & Co. agents told everyone in Diego Garcia that the island was closing and that they should board the boats. There would be no more work, Marcel Moulinie and the other agents said. There would be no more transportation to and from the island, the food stores had run out, the pet dogs had been exterminated, and the boats were taking away most of the salvageable plantation infrastructure. U.S. military personnel were present at least to observe the last boatload leaving Diego Garcia. By the end of October 31, 1971, all the inhabitants had been removed and, except for military purposes, Diego Garcia was closed (see also Moulinie 1977; Madeley 1985:4-5).

Marcel Moulinie describes the departure in testimony given in 1977 (re-sworn in 1999):

There was a crowd of people there and a lot of them were crying.... A few days before, all the family dogs had been exterminated and the donkeys killed. People were upset about this as well as being upset about having to leave the islands. I persuaded Marcel [Ono, a Diego Garcia overseer] that he had to go as there were no more rations on the island and the boat had not brought in any food. The stores had been removed and there was no way of feeding anyone. Again nearly all of the Chagossian adults and their families went to Peros Banhos and Salomon. I last saw him as he walked on to the boat. [Moulinie 1977:para. 14.]

Chagossians and other observers report that conditions on the boats were overcrowded and that the open seas were often rough. The *Nordvær* had cabin passenger space for 12 and deck space for 60, for a total of 72 passengers. More than twice this number traveled

on the boat during the last voyage of the *Nordvæ*r, which brought 146 passengers to Seychelles (The People 1971). Almost all of the laborers made the 1,300-mile, four-to-six-day journey on deck exposed to the elements or in the cargo hold sitting and sleeping on top of or next to copra, guano, horses, equipment, and other cargo taken from Diego Garcia. Many Chagossians describe becoming ill during the passage. Again Marcel Moulinie discusses the conditions on the last boat to leave:

The boat was very overcrowded. The boat deck was covered with stores, the belongings of the labourers and a lot of labourers were traveling on deck. [BIOT Commissioner] Greatbatch had insisted that the horses be carried back to Mahé and these were on deck with the labourers. The labourers also traveled in the holds. This was not unusual but there were more people than usual in them. The holds also held a lot of copra being taken out of Diego. When the boat finally arrived the conditions were filthy. They had taken four days to travel and many of the women and children were sick. The boat deck was covered in manure, urine and vomit and so was the hold. [Moulinie 1977:para. 16.]

When passengers from the *Nordvæ*r arrived in Seychelles, laborers were housed in a newly constructed prison block before most traveled onward nearly 1,300 miles to Mauritius (Dale 1971). Moulinie & Co. managers were housed in hotels (Greatbatch 1971).

After the emptying of Diego Garcia, around 370 Chagossians remained in Peros Banhos and Salomon. Like those who went to Mauritius and Seychelles, those who went from Diego Garcia to Peros and Salomon had been required to leave most of their possessions, their furniture, their gardens, and their animals in Diego. This meant that they needed to replant their gardens and buy animals and furniture for their new homes in Peros Banhos and Salomon. They received MRs500 (at the time about £38) as a

“disturbance allowance” to compensate them for these costs (those going to Mauritius and Seychelles received nothing).

The neglect of Peros Banhos and Salomon by the BIOT and Moulinie & Co. continued and conditions worsened in 1972 and 1973. Food supplies declined and Chagossians recount how their diet became increasingly dependent on fish and coconuts. Before the last removals in 1973, Chagossians say that there was no milk to drink. Women fed their babies a mixture of coconut milk and sugar in its place. Medicines and medical supplies ran out. People ate the spongy, overripe flesh of germinated coconuts. The remaining staff in each islands’ infirmary left and the last school, in Peros Banhos, closed.

In June 1972, the *Nordvær* continued emptying Peros and Salomon. At least 53 Chagossians left on this voyage with the clearly expressed desire “to go on leave to Mauritius and return later to the islands,” hopeful that conditions would improve (Todd 1972). Again Chagossians say conditions on the ship were terrible. Marie Therese Mein, a Chagossian woman married to the departing manager of Peros Banhos, describes the voyage:

Our conditions were somewhat better than the other suffering passengers since we were given a small cabin, but we had to share this between my husband, myself and our 8 children. We could not open the portholes since the ship was heavily laden, and the sea would splash in if we did. It was therefore extremely hot and uncomfortable. Many people were in much worse conditions than us, having to share a cargo compartment with a cargo of coconuts, horses and tortoises. Some had to sleep on top of the deck of the ship. No meals were provided, and the captain, a Mr. Tregarden, told the families to prepare their own meals. By contrast the horses were fed grass. The passage was rough and many of the passengers were seasick. There was urine and manure from the horses on the lower deck. The captain decided to jettison a large part of the cargo of coconuts in order to lessen the risk of being sunk. The whole complement of

passengers suffered both from an extremely rough passage and from bad smells of animals and were sick and weary after the 6 day crossing. [Mein 2002:para. 14.]

Mein was three months pregnant at the time. She miscarried a day after arriving in Seychelles.

A subsequent voyage of the *Nordvær* had 120 Chagossians on board, nearly twice its maximum capacity (Seller 1967). By December 1972, BIOT administrator Todd reported that Salomon was closed and all its inhabitants moved to Peros Banhos or deported to Mauritius or Seychelles. A small number of Chagossians remained in Peros with enough rations to last until late March or April.

Early in 1973, Moulinie & Co. agents informed the remaining Chagossians that they would have to leave. At the end of April, with food supplies dwindling, the *Nordvær* left Peros Banhos with 133 Chagossians aboard (Nordvær 1973). The *Nordvær* arrived in Mauritius on April 29. The British High Commissioner in Port Louis explained the predicament of the Chagossians as, “nowhere to go, no money, no employment” (Giddens 1973a).

By this time however, the Chagossians on the *Nordvær* had heard about the fate of other Chagossians arriving in Mauritius. The new arrivees refused to disembark. They demanded that they be returned to Chagos or receive houses in Mauritius. Eventually 30 families received a small amount of money and dilapidated houses, amidst pigs, cows, and other farm animals, in two of the slums of Port Louis.

A month later, on May 26, 1973, the *Nordvær* made its final voyage, removing 8 men, 9 women, and 29 children from Peros Banhos (Nordvær 1973b). The expulsion from Chagos was complete.

## CHAPTER 8

### *DÉRASINÉ: THE IMPOVERISHMENT OF EXPULSION*

For more than 30 years since the last deportations, Chagossians have lived in what many call *lamizer*—miserable abject poverty. Chagossians' poverty has not been accidental. It is the unsurprising result of the Chagossians' expulsion from their homelands. It is the result of the Chagossians having been, as they say, *dérasiné*—forcibly uprooted and torn from their native lands.

The involuntary displacement of populations is a widespread global phenomenon resulting from events as disparate as large-scale infrastructure projects, warfare, environmental disasters, and the seizure of land for military bases. Approximately 30 million of the world's people are currently refugees. Recently, as many as 10 million a year have been involuntarily displaced by large-scale infrastructure projects alone. Research aggregating findings from hundreds of involuntarily displaced groups worldwide has shown that absent preventative measures, the most common result of displacing populations against their will is “the impoverishment of considerable numbers of people” (Cernea 2000:12).

Research in India, for example, has shown that the country's “development” programs have displaced more than 20 million over four decades but that 75 percent have ended up worse off than before their displacement. “Their livelihoods have not been restored; in fact, the vast majority...have become impoverished” (Cernea 2000:12).

The work of anthropologist Michael Cernea (e.g., 1993a, 1993b, 1997, 2000, 2005) has systematically demonstrated the link between involuntary displacement and

impoverishment. “Such impoverishment,” he writes, “is manifest in numerous [] countries throughout the developing world when involuntary resettlement occurs” (Cernea 2000:12). Drawing on findings from hundreds of cases of displacement, Cernea shows how displacement results in “massive loss and destruction of assets, including loss of life; unemployment, sudden drop in welfare and standards of living; prolonged uprooting, alienation and social disarticulation; cultural and identity loss; severe long-term stress and psychological effects; political disempowerment,” and other damage (Cernea 2004:13). “Everywhere,” he writes, “the core content of unmitigated forced displacement is economic and social uprooting” (Cernea 1997:1572).

Cernea has been influential in international development policy and social science by developing a model (considered by many the dominant model in the field (Cernea 2005:196)) that explains the processes through which involuntary displacement puts people at risk of and, without preventative measures, generally causes impoverishment.<sup>50</sup> This Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model identifies eight specific phenomena that are the most common features, or subprocesses, of displacement-caused impoverishment. They are landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, lost access to common property resources, and social disarticulation.<sup>51</sup>

Taking advantage of one of the IRR’s primary functions—diagnosing and documenting the harms of displacement—over four years of research shows that as a result of their expulsion, Chagossians have as a group experienced severe chronic impoverishment (Vine et al. 2005). As Cernea’s work predicts, this impoverishment has extended beyond economic poverty to include material, physical, psychological, social,

and cultural forms of impoverishment. Guided by the IRR model, ten major subprocesses appear as part of Chagossians' impoverishment. They are: traumatic expulsion, joblessness, ethnic discrimination, educational deprivation, economic and social-psychological marginalization, homelessness, landlessness and lost common property, food insecurity and malnutrition, increased morbidity and mortality, and sociocultural fragmentation (Vine et al. 2005).

As Cernea's work shows, given the absence of preventative measures and a functioning resettlement program during the removals, Chagossians' impoverishment and its constituent subprocesses should not be surprising. As we will see in the next chapter, similar negative effects have occurred in comparable cases of displacement around U.S. military bases. This chapter describes the aftermath of the expulsion and the onset and evolution of Chagossians' impoverishment.

### **Arrival**

When Chagossians like Rita Bancoult's family were first prevented from returning to Chagos in 1968, they found themselves separated from their homes, their jobs, their communities, and the graves of their ancestors. Like others, Madame Bancoult was forced to find new permanent housing, and, not insignificantly, to pay for housing for the first time. Her family's experience was typical when they rented a small single-room corrugated metal shack near a cemetery in Cassis, one of the slums of Port Louis.

After the forced removals began in 1971, Chagossians were left on the docks of Port Louis. "The Ilois walked bewildered off their ships and tramped through the slums of the capitol," Madeley writes, "to try to find a relative or friend who would offer

accommodation” (1985:5). The *Sunday Times* of London reported in 1975, “The islanders have to go begging to survive, and live in shacks which are little more than chicken coops” (1975). More than half lived in one-room houses with as many as 9 people in a single room. In Cassis, Siophe found a single courtyard where 7 Chagossian families were living with 10 other families and sharing one water tap, one toilet, and one shower among them (Siophe 1975:114-121).<sup>52</sup>

Already scattered over 1,300 miles between Mauritius and Seychelles and with their society destroyed, Chagossian communities dispersed further around Port Louis and the main island in Seychelles, Mahé. Although many in Mauritius settled around other Chagossians, most of the social networks and village ties that previously connected people were severely ruptured. Chagossians deported to Seychelles found themselves even more isolated, crowding into the homes of relatives or squatting on the land of others. Some families lived “anba lakaz,” or underneath another family’s house on stilts. One family lived in a vacant cowshed, slowly transforming it into a formal house over many years.

In Mauritius, Chagossians found themselves on an overcrowded island that population experts were warning might become a “catastrophe” given one of the fastest growing populations in the world (Titmuss and Abel-Smith 1968). Conditions in Port Louis were particularly bad. British experts described them this way:

The housing conditions in parts of Port Louis are worse than anything we saw in the villages [in rural Mauritius]. Hundreds of people are crowded into tin shacks hardly fit for animals. Not surprisingly, Tuberculosis and other diseases are very common in these slums, and a large proportion of the families depend on the help, regular and irregular, of the Public Assistance Department. Urban rents are relatively high and there is a

serious shortage of housing in the towns; a situation made worse by the cyclone damage in 1960. [Titmuss and Abel-Smith 1968:7.]

Although by most accounts health in Chagos was “if anything somewhat better than in Mauritius” (African Research Group 2000:3, 5), soon after their arrivals, many began to fall ill and die. A 1975 Chagossian petition protesting their treatment to the British Government lists 40 people who died since arriving in Mauritius (Saminaden, et al. 1975). Madeley cites a survey by an Ilois support group documenting, by 1975, 9 cases of suicide and 26 families that “had died together in poverty” (1985:6). Among these deaths, Madeley offers the following examples:

*Elaine and Michele Mouza*: mother and child committed suicide.  
*Leone Rangasamy*: born in Peros, drowned herself because she was prevented from going back.  
*Tarenne Chiatoux*: committed suicide, no job, no roof.  
*Daisy Volfrin*: no food for three days, obtained Rs3 (about 20p) and no more as Public Assistance. Died through poverty.  
*Josue and Maude Baptiste*: poverty—no roof, no food, committed suicide.  
 [Madeley 1985:6.]

Another report by a Chagossian support group details 15 individuals who received psychiatric treatment, 11 suicides, and at least 44 other deaths “because of unhappiness, [] poverty and lack of medical care” (Comité Ilois Organisation Fraternelle n.d.:2-5). The report says,

I have come across an impressive number of cases where Ilois have found death after having landed in Mauritius, i.e. from one to 12 months’ stay in Mauritius. The causes mostly are: unhappiness, non-adaptation of Ilois within the social framework of Mauritius, extreme poverty particularly lack of food, house, job. Another cause of this mortality was family dispersion. The main cause of the sufferings of the Ilois was the lack of proper plan to welcome them in Mauritius. There was also no rehabilitation programme for them. [Comité Ilois Organisation Fraternelle n.d.:3.]

According to Madeley, by mid-1975, “at least 1 in 40 had died of starvation and disease” (1985:5).

Some of the deaths seem to have been the result of Chagossians’ vulnerability to illnesses that were rare or unknown in Chagos. An article in the *Manchester Guardian* cites 28 children as having died of influenza by 1975: “Diego Garcia was remote and disease free [sic], scoured of germs by wind and distance. Of a total of more than 900 who came to Mauritius, 28 of the children died from influenza. Adults and children died of the diphtheria against which Mauritians are automatically vaccinated. And the cultural shock of arriving in the teeming, humid, poorer quarters of Port Louis still takes its toll” (M. Walker 1975). Anthropologist Iain Walker notes, “A number of the deaths were attributable, no doubt, to the susceptibility of the Ilois to diseases common in Mauritius, but rare in the islands, which, in conjunction with conditions of extreme poverty, proved fatal” (I. Walker 1986:14).<sup>53</sup>

Amid their other problems, Chagossians faced a society beset by systemic unemployment and communal tensions following gang violence and riots between Muslims and Creoles (e.g., Selvon 2001:394). Officials acknowledged, “There is no Copra industry into which they could be absorbed” (Wooler 1968). By 1971, the outlook was worse as British officials predicted unemployment might lead to “outbreaks of disorder, perhaps comparable to those which in September 1970 led to appeals for British military assistance” (Watt 1971:3). Unemployment in Seychelles was according to British officials, “even worse than that in Mauritius,” reaching as high as 27.5 percent (Pacific & Indian Ocean Department 1969:paras. 6, 8).

It should not be surprising then that Chagossians had significant difficulties finding employment. In the aftermath of their arrivals, almost half depended in whole or in part on non-work income, including public welfare, the help of family and friends, charity, loans from moneylenders, and other sources (Vine et al. 2005:114). By 1975, unemployment for Chagossians in Mauritius affected about one-third of the working-age population with only around one-quarter of family heads working in full-time jobs. Most of those employed were working in low-paid jobs as dockers, maids, fisherfolk, and truck loaders (Ottaway 1975; Siophe 1975).

#### **From Universal Employment to Structural Disadvantage**

Chagossians moved from lives of virtually guaranteed universal employment complete with an array of employment benefits to lives in increasingly competitive economies, where the skills they possessed were generally not in demand, where the formal education, which most did not have, was increasingly important to securing employment, and where most found themselves lumped socially into dark-skinned “Creole” groups facing employment discrimination in stratified societies allowing little socioeconomic mobility.

The Mauritian economy that Chagossians encountered during the late 1960s and 1970s was undergoing massive transformation. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the economy and life of Mauritius had been dominated by sugar cane production. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mauritius was the epitome of a mono-crop economy, dependent on the fluctuations of the sugar market and the colonial rulers in England. At the time of Chagossians’ arrival, one of the highest population growth rates in the world meant that increasing numbers of



Image 25: Map of Mauritius (Saddul 2002:17).



Image 26: Maps of Mahé, Seychelles (with the capital, Victoria, in pink) and other Seychelles islands (Saddul 2002:29).

working-age Mauritians were entering a labor market dominated by a sugar cane sector that could not absorb additional workers (Titmuss and Abel-Smith 1968).

In 1970, following examples in Hong Kong, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, and Jamaica, the Mauritian Government began attempts to diversify its economy with the establishment of an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) to lure foreign investment and create jobs in the production of cheap exports. EPZ factories and employment boomed over the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s (one of the few successful examples in the world according to many (e.g., Dabee and Greenaway 2001)). During the same period, Mauritius further diversified its economy with a major expansion of its tourist industry. While sugar cane remained a dominant part of the economy, the two new sectors grew, largely on the basis of Mauritius's supply of cheap, relatively well-educated female labor. In recent years, the government has attempted to diversify the economy further, encouraging "offshore" foreign financial investment, higher-end export development, and information-based technology industries, following the Indian model (see e.g., Durbarry 2001; Bowman 1991; Ramkalaon 1998; Woldekidan 1994).

The economy of Seychelles underwent a similar transformation. Prior to the 1970s, Seychelles had a stagnant colonial economy dependent on a handful of globally insignificant agricultural exports. In 1971, Seychelles opened its first international airport (built by the United Kingdom as compensation to Seychelles for taking its three island groups for the BIOT). This began the explosion of a previously tiny tourism industry that continues to drive much of the Seychelles economy to this day. More recently, Seychelles has tried to develop its substantial fishing resources and to become, like Mauritius, a center for offshore finance and high-tech services, while continuing to

expand its tourism industry (see e.g., Benedict and Benedict 1982; Kaplinsky 1983; Economist Intelligence Unit 2001; Gabbay and Ghosh 2003).

Although the economic booms in Mauritius and Seychelles have made both nations more economically prosperous on a per capita basis than almost any other nation in sub-Saharan Africa, Chagossians have for the most part not shared in this prosperity. The expulsion left most Chagossians structurally disadvantaged in Mauritius and Seychelles in ways that largely prevented their benefiting from wider economic prosperity.

Importantly, Chagossians arrived in Mauritius and Seychelles before the major economic changes were underway or before they had taken hold. They arrived in one country, Mauritius, that had a sugar cane mono-crop economy unable to absorb additional workers and in another, Seychelles, described by the Benedicts as a “rundown plantation” (Benedict and Benedict 1982:161) with even higher unemployment than Mauritius. And they arrived, for the most part, with few employable skills. Mauritius had no copra industry (except for a small one in its dependency of Agalega, where a few Chagossians relocated). Though copra has been the main export in Seychelles since the 1840s, the industry was diminishing rapidly in the period when Chagossians arrived (overall agricultural employment declined 10 percent from 1971 to 1977, by which point just 2.8 percent of households were earning their primary income from farming) (Franda 1982:16, 81, 84-85).

Some of the other skills Chagossians brought with them were also rendered economically useless or bore significant costs in their use. The talents of Chagossian marine carpenters and boat builders were of little commercial use in countries where

wood-based boat construction had grown largely obsolete. Chagossians' fishing skills were relatively more useful after the expulsion, and fishing has remained a source of employment for Chagossians to this day. A 1975 article however illustrates some of the difficulty facing Chagossians trying to make a living from fishing in Mauritius: "Michel tried to become a fisherman when exiled, but the local [small-scale] fishermen, themselves unable to compete with the new fishing fleets with refrigerated holds, do not welcome further competition" (M. Walker 1975:122).

With such competition, earning a profitable living in the fishing industry in Mauritius (and to a lesser extent in Seychelles) has increasingly meant working for the long-distance fleets that cruise away from Mauritius for several months at a time. Employment on these ships has thus resulted in additional (temporary) displacement and the separation of families for significant parts of each year. One Chagossian man, for example, leaves his family for six months at a time to work on a fishing boat and then works in informal jobs for the rest of the year, mostly as a mason. Two of the most economically successful Chagossians gained their starts at relative prosperity by finding jobs in the merchant marine. This came at the cost of separation from their families for far longer periods, over more than a decade. One explained that he "sacrificed" 11 or 12 years of his life away from his parents, sending a portion of every paycheck back to them in Mauritius. As Ranjit Nayak explains of many displaced peoples, "Certain occupations taken up by the resettlers...may involve further expulsion. These occupations are taken...not by choice, but because of compulsion to earn their livelihood" (2000:103).

The conventional, and idealized, view of the economic boom in Mauritius is that the nation achieved full employment by the late 1980s. Though unemployment

decreased significantly as a result of the growth in EPZ and tourist industry employment, unemployment and underemployment have remained problems. For many poor Mauritians, and especially for Chagossians, moving from unstable, insecure jobs to stable employment has proved difficult (Lau Thi Keng 1997). Even near the height of Mauritian employment growth, in 1986, more than 30 percent of the labor force was working in the informal sector (Lamusse 2001:41).

In this light, Chagossians economic difficulties are even less surprising. By the 1980s, one survey found 85.8 percent of male Chagossians underemployed and 46.3 percent of women unemployed. “The economic situation of the Ilois community,” Botte writes, is characterized “by low wages, unemployment, [and] underemployment” for people with skills still ill suited for the Mauritian labor market (Botte 1980:27). Another 1981 survey indicates a male unemployment rate of 41 percent and female unemployment at 58 percent. Of the few Chagossian families who had “satisfactorily remunerated jobs,” Sylva says, most were Chagossians who arrived in Mauritius prior to 1960 and married Mauritians (Sylva 1981:2-3, 11-13).

Not surprisingly, some members of the community have also been engaged in illegal activities to earn income, including prostitution, theft, and trafficking in illegal drugs. When the Chagos Refugees Group surveyed almost the entire population in Mauritius in 2001, 38 Chagossians were in prison, yielding a significant incarceration rate of approximately 809 per 100,000.

Prostitution appears as an ongoing employment opportunity of last resort for Chagossians with relatively few other opportunities. Botte’s 1980 study of Chagossian women found at least 23 engaged in prostitution (“prostitution as a trade did not exist” in

Chagos, she says (Botte 1980:41-42; see also Madeley 1985:6)). Although prostitution is not a subject that most Chagossians were eager to discuss, my research (in Mauritius) suggested that prostitution remains a source of employment.

Given their employment difficulties and little to no savings from Chagos, from the earliest days in Mauritius, many fell into debt to pay rent and other basic living expenses, often to the owners of small neighborhood grocery stores (Botte 1980:30-31). Since the economic boom of the 1980s, buying furniture, electronics, and other household items from department stores with high-interest credit has become a widespread phenomenon among the poor of Mauritius (Boswell 2002:19-21). Many are active participants in this kind of indebtedness, which reflects a multiplication of Chagossians' generally unfulfilled materialistic desires in nations enjoying economic growth (see e.g., Botte 1980:47).<sup>54</sup>

As the IRR model predicts, downward mobility was stark: Chagossians found themselves displaced from a society where they enjoyed lives of structural security and where they and their ancestors had worked and lived for generations with guaranteed employment, food, income, housing, health care, and education. Subsequently they found themselves in positions of structural insecurity and marginalization in societies where they were outcast foreigners at the bottom of social hierarchies and where they generally qualified only for the most marginal of jobs.

### **Overlapping Forms of Discrimination**

Arriving in Mauritius, and to a lesser extent in Seychelles, Chagossians entered a new social environment of longstanding racism and discrimination against people of mostly or

entirely African descent, known locally as Creoles. In Mauritius, bigotry and prejudice against Afro-Mauritians dates from the introduction of enslaved African peoples on the island. Bigotry against people of African ancestry increased with the introduction of indentured laborers from India, soon to make up the majority of Mauritius's population and against whom Afro-Mauritians were pitted by a "white" ruling class of French and British ancestry. Since this time, those of European descent have remained at the top of the social hierarchy; people of some European descent and people of Indian ancestry have occupied a middle strata; Afro-Mauritian Creoles have remained primarily working class, at the bottom of the hierarchy.

In Seychelles, where the population is a more homogeneous collection of people of mostly mixed African and European descent, there is relatively less discrimination against people of recognizable African ancestry (in part because almost all Seychellois have at least some (recent) African ancestry). Still, high social and economic status in Seychelles remains closely linked to lightly pigmented skin and European ancestry. Discrimination remains prevalent against those with the darkest skin.

Being primarily of African or mixed African and Indian descent, Chagossians in Mauritius are viewed as part of the Afro-Mauritian Creole community. This is the community that has benefited least from Mauritian economic success. Anthropologist Rosabelle Boswell (2002) explains, "While Mauritius made remarkable economic progress in the 1980s and a majority of Mauritians benefited from the island's development, a significant heterogeneous minority of Mauritians, known locally as Creoles, have not profited from Mauritius[']s economic success." Increasingly in Mauritius there is recognition that Afro-Mauritians, marked as they are by their ethnicity,

class, and residential geography, have been excluded from the economic prosperity of the nation as a whole (Asgarally 1997). Arriving in a setting where they were lumped into this discriminated against minority group, Chagossians have faced additional barriers to economic success.

Some of Chagossians' inability to benefit from national macroeconomic growth can be attributed to structural and individual discrimination faced by Chagossians, both as Afro-Mauritians and specifically as Chagossians. Because they belong to two stigmatized groups, the discrimination they have faced often involves a complex array of overlapping prejudice and bigotry. The expulsion put Chagossians in a position of structural disadvantage by making them vulnerable to a double discrimination in ethnically hierarchical societies.

Chagossians are generally thought to occupy a subset of Afro-Mauritian Creoles, known as *ti-kreol* (literally, "little Creole"), who by definition are found in the most marginal and lowest-paying occupations. Eriksen describes in stark and commonly held racist terms the place in the national hierarchy of the *ti-kreol*: They are, "perhaps [the] most stigmatized category of people in Mauritius; that is, the segments of Creoles ...comprising fishermen, dockers, unskilled workers and artisans.... As an ethnic category, the 'ti-kreol' are known by outsiders as lazy, backward and stupid people, as being too close to nature and resembling Africans in a not particularly flattering fashion" (Eriksen 1986:59). With the *ti-kreol* at the bottom of Mauritian society, Chagossians are widely considered to be, along with people from the Mauritian dependency of Rodrigues, among the bottom of the *ti-kreol*—the bottom of the bottom. Similarly in Seychelles,

most Chagossians are recognized as belonging to a stigmatized darker-complexioned minority.

These hierarchies are not just a matter of perception. They reproduce themselves in ways that have maintained Mauritius and Seychelles as relatively rigid hierarchical societies organized around class and ethnic stratification. As indicated above, Boswell, Eriksen, and Asgarally point to the ways in which Afro-Mauritians have remained at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy in Mauritius. Similarly in Seychelles, wealth and high status have generally remained closely related to the lightness of one's skin (Franda 1982:36-37).

Arriving in Mauritius and Seychelles, Chagossians then found themselves in positions vulnerable to ethnic and racial discrimination, both as Chagossians and as Afro-Mauritians, and as a result detrimental to their economic success. Their arrival at times of heightened social tensions was also noted with considerable anxiety by many of their hosts sensitive to new competition, leading to yet more discrimination and ill treatment. During these early years in Mauritius, the word "Ilois" shifted from a term of identification to a term of insult, pronounced derisively *Zzzeel-wah*. In 1975, Ottaway noted employment discrimination by Mauritian "employers who favor local Mauritians" (1975). In Seychelles, discriminatory treatment began when about 30 were housed in a local prison with the assistance of local authorities, while higher-level Moulinie & Co. staff stayed in hotels. At its most benign (not very), Chagossians experienced a passive form of discrimination because they had few of the social connections important to finding jobs in these small island societies.

Botte documents how Chagossians were an “unskilled and illiterate community... vulnerable to exploitation,” who suffered discrimination from their Mauritian neighbors, particularly in their search for employment and in the low salaries they received (Botte 1980:43, 27, 31). Desperate to find work and earn money after their arrival, many Chagossians used “intermediates” to connect them with employers and jobs. When they were to be paid, the intermediates took most of their salaries. Many intermediates and employers appear to have exploited Chagossians’ innumeracy and relative inexperience with cash. Botte explains how the exploitation worked, particularly against women: “These ‘intermediates’ explained to the employers that these Ilois women are not used to money and [that] some money could be given to the intermediates from the salary of that poor maid-servant or washerwoman. These Mauritian employers preferred to engage the Ilois women because [they] did not know about labour law and the employers had only to exchange a [M]Rs10 note into many coins to make the employees believe[] that it was much money” (Botte 1980; see also I. Walker 1986:16). (Over time, Botte says, Chagossian women realized that they were being cheated and became more assertive with Mauritian employers (1980:39, 25).)

Given their inexperience, Botte says, “even the shopkeeper cheated them” (1980:38). As Chagossians widely attest, many became vulnerable to the exploitation of local moneylenders and pawnbrokers charging high rates of interest and keeping newcomers in debt (Botte 1980:30-31; I. I. Walker 1986:17).

Recently, half of the first generation surveyed and one-third of the second reported suffering job or other discrimination as a Chagossian (Vine et al. 2005:125; see also, Botte 1980:38-39; I. Walker 1986:21-22; Dræbel 1997:36). Nearly two-thirds (65.5

percent) of the first generation and almost half of second-generation respondents (44.7 percent) said they had been a victim of verbal abuse.

For many, one of the most painful forms of discrimination has been Chagossians' exclusion from jobs on the Diego Garcia base. Since the 1980s, the base has employed non-military service workers who are neither U.S. nor U.K. citizens. Most of these workers have come from Mauritius and the Philippines. When Chagossians have attempted to apply for and obtain these jobs at recruitment offices in Mauritius, they have been rejected repeatedly. It appears that no one who was born in Chagos or who is the child of parents born in Chagos has worked on Diego Garcia since the expulsion. Two Indian Ocean scholars confirm that, "One of the ironies of this construction upsurge [at the base in the 1980s] is that laborers are being recruited in Mauritius; however it has been stipulated that no Ilois...are to be allowed to go" (Bowman and Lefebvre, 1985:n. 28; see also Gupte 1982:A5).<sup>55</sup>

Jacques Victor, who was born in Diego Garcia, said that he went three times to apply for jobs and was rejected each time. As soon as they saw that he was born in Diego, he said, they turned him away. Mr. Victor used these rejections as an opportunity to talk about his entire experience in Mauritius. "They judge us," before even knowing us, he said in broken English. 'It's as if life is a prison for us here in Mauritius—there is a lot of discrimination.' "Beaucoup, beaucoup discrimination. Beaucoup," he said, switching into French. Lots, lots of discrimination. Lots.

### **Educational Disadvantage**

Chagossians' structural disadvantage has been compounded by their low levels of education brought from Chagos and systematic educational disadvantage in exile (particularly in Mauritius). In Chagos, low levels of formal education and illiteracy were insignificant to performing the vast majority of jobs. In Mauritius and Seychelles, having little formal education and being illiterate or nearly so were significant impediments to securing an increasingly large number of jobs and to achieving upward job mobility. Most of the new employment created in Mauritius and Seychelles (i.e., in the EPZ and tourist sectors) demanded at least some educational background. At the height of the EPZ boom in Mauritius, "the availability of cheap, *literate and skilled* labour," in addition to financial incentives and infrastructure encouraged "a massive flow of foreign direct investment" (Durberry 2001, emphasis added). By contrast to the relatively high levels of education in Mauritius, almost all Chagossians who were adults at the time of the expulsion left Chagos illiterate: In 1975, just 2 percent of Chagossian adults could read a little (Siophe 1975:115-116). Most of those who left Chagos as children arrived having received a low-quality formal education that worsened in the last years in Chagos and that was interrupted, at best briefly, by the expulsion. In some cases, children were barred access to schools or had significant difficulty enrolling. Many school-age adolescents often had to curtail schooling to find jobs and help their families financially. By 1975, 27 percent of school-age children were out of school (Siophe 1975:118-119). As a result, even in jobs outside the EPZ and tourist sectors, Chagossians competed against Mauritians and Seychellois who in most cases would have received more formal education than what Chagossians received.

Among those who entered school, many experienced discrimination and verbal abuse from teachers and classmates. If children managed to finish primary school without having dropped out for work, family, or academic reasons, most could not afford secondary school, which only became free in Mauritius in 1976. Universal free secondary school in Seychelles only became fully available in 1981.

Those Chagossian children who have attended school in Mauritius have found themselves structurally disadvantaged in additional ways: Living for the most part in the poorest areas of Mauritius, they have attended the worst schools with the worst teachers in a school system that systematically discriminates against poor students (Dræbel 1997; Bunwaree 1998). For the most part growing up with illiterate parents meant they had little help with their studies.

### **Exclusion and Isolation**

As a widely stigmatized minority, many Chagossians describe feeling excluded from mainstream life in Mauritius and Seychelles. As several in Mauritius put it, Chagossians are “eksklu de lavi Moris.” They are excluded from Mauritian life.

Much of this sense of exclusion seems to stem from feelings among Chagossians that they are not part of Mauritius as a nation. These feelings are rooted for many Chagossians in the history surrounding the founding of the nation and the bargain by which the “father of the nation,” Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, is understood to have “sold” Chagos (and the Chagossians) to the British Government in exchange for Mauritian independence. Given this history, many Chagossians feel that Mauritius is, as they say, not a nation for them. Like many other Afro-Mauritians, many Chagossians

feel that Mauritius is “for the Indians” or “for the Hindus” (the majority ethnic and religious groups in Mauritius). Mauritius is not, they believe, “for the Creoles,” and it is especially not “for Chagossians.” In this way, many Chagossians in Mauritius feel a double exclusion: first, as Chagossians who gave up their homeland so the rest of Mauritius could have its independence, and second, as members of the minority Afro-Mauritian Creole population.

In Seychelles, similar feelings of exclusion are widespread. Unlike in Mauritius where Chagossians gained Mauritian citizenship upon its independence, those in Seychelles were not granted automatic citizenship. Many lived in the country for decades and eventually had to buy citizenship. These feelings combine with a widespread sense of being discriminated against by the Seychellois and their government in access to jobs, housing, schooling, and other opportunities.

Marie Ange Pauline described having a photograph of the Queen of England on the wall of her family’s home in Diego Garcia and being confused about their nationality once in Seychelles. ‘Were we British? Were we Mauritian?’ she wondered at the time. She and others were left asking, “What are we?” In both Mauritius and Seychelles they became a people without a country, without a homeland, without their “ter natal” [natal land]. Many Chagossians speak of never feeling “at home” in Mauritius and Seychelles. And many non-Chagossians have treated them this way, as a people apart.

Elizabeth Colson describes how home and a familiar environment provide a refuge that is crucial to people’s sense of self and identity. Destroy people’s home, take away their familiar environment, and people are likely to suffer, both materially and psychologically, becoming disoriented and insecure (Colson 1989).

While there is no automatic connection between home and psychological disorder among displaced peoples (Malkki 1995b), most Chagossians suffer painful feelings of homelessness and alienation. Madame Pauline said she sometimes thinks about what life would be like if they had not been removed. ‘Maybe Diego would be like Seychelles is now,’ she said, referring to the ways in which Seychelles has developed economically since she arrived in 1972. ‘I would be more at ease there,’ Madame Pauline continued. ‘I’ve never felt comfortable here in Seychelles. We are treated as foreigners in Seychelles,’ she explained, ‘and in Seychelles they don’t like foreigners. We have always been treated as foreigners here.’

### **Feelings Powerlessness, Shame, and the Loss of Identity**

As predicted by the involuntary displacement literature, many Chagossians have experienced feelings of powerlessness since the expulsion. Many (both first and second generation) have been left asking why the expulsion happened, why they were victimized, and why Chagossians cannot live in their natal land. Others have internalized blame for the expulsion, questioning how they could have allowed themselves to be exiled. They ask why did they not resist and protest their expulsion more vigorously. Why did they not stop it from happening?

Thayer Scudder explains that being moved against one’s will is to have suffered a “terrible defeat.” He writes that it is “hard to imagine a more dramatic way to illustrate impotence than to forcibly eject people from a preferred habitat against their will” (Scudder 1973:51). Elizabeth Colson likewise holds that expulsion causes increased dependence and, just as importantly, an awareness among displacees of this increased

dependence. Involuntary displacement, she says, is a clear demonstration to a group and its members that they have lost control over their own destiny, that they are powerless (Colson 1971, 1989).

Chagossian women have been particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and abuse. Josiane Selmour's Mauritian husband beat her until she finally went to the police and took him to court (which eventually fined him). For Madame Selmour, abuse stems from the fact that 'Mauritians don't like Chagossians.... Mauritians call Chagossians 'sovaz' [savages] and say, 'Alle Zilwa!' [Go away Ilois!]. Husbands too.... They take advantage of Chagossian women. They abuse them, they call them names, because Chagossian women are powerless.' Other women echoed these feelings, although it is important to note that Madame Selmour was able to go to the police, and that women's power can be seen in the dominant role they have played in political organizing (discussed in chapter 11). Many women reported experiencing abuse from their husbands or domestic partners (especially from non-Chagossian men), as well as physical and sexual abuse at work. Some described verbally or physically abusive relationships between Chagossian spouses as a result of stress and pressures in the home. When Chagossians were newly arrived, some Mauritian public assistance officers appear to have taken sexual advantage of Chagossian women and even suggested to friends that they do the same. "Some Mauritian men who pretended to help," Botte writes, "were looking for other benefits" (1980:38).

Many similarly described feelings of shame about being Chagossian since the expulsion. These feelings of shame have many sources. Some derives from their material poverty and the discrimination they have faced in Mauritius and Seychelles.

Many tell of feeling shame as children at having had to attend school barefoot when their classmates wore shoes or in wearing second-hand and tattered clothing.

Lisette Volfrin, who was removed from Diego Garcia and then Peros Banhos as a teenager in the 1970s, described feeling “ashamed” and embarrassed that her family could not afford nice clothing to wear to church like other children. She remembered walking to school from their home, a shack on a relative’s land, with neighbors throwing apricots, fallen from the trees, at her and her siblings. She remembered neighbors spitting on them. All their neighbors were very mean and cruel, she said. People would say they had not been vaccinated and would make them sick. (This was a common insult aimed at Chagossians. If they had not previously been vaccinated, they were vaccinated upon arrival in Seychelles. Evidence seems to point to the opposite of the insult’s implication: Living in Mauritius and Seychelles has made many Chagossians sick.) Madame Volfrin explained that she has never felt at home in Seychelles. ‘Why can’t we have our homes?’ she wondered aloud.

Chagossians’ community life and some forms of cultural expression have suffered as a result of these feelings of shame and social stigma, compounded by their geographic dispersal. As Cernea emphasizes, “The deterioration of community life is apt to generate a typical state of anomie, crisis-laden insecurity, and loss of sense of cultural identity” (1997:1575). Since the expulsion, many Chagossians have experienced such a loss of cultural identity. Others, many of whom have been heavily involved in political organizing, have maintained a strong sense of Chagossian identity. Still others grew up with little sense of Chagossian identity or have felt the need to conceal their identity because of abuse, discrimination, and negative stereotyping.

Some Chagossians similarly express feelings that they have been prevented from full cultural expression, and thus self-identification, as they have felt forced to adapt to the cultures of Mauritius or Seychelles, especially in their styles of dance, music, and cuisine. Many Chagossians have also hidden their identity by concealing their accents and changing their linguistic practices. While their Chagos Kreol is related to and mutually intelligible with Mauritian Kreol and Seselwa (Seychellois Kreol), Chagos Kreol is distinguishable from the others in some of its vocabulary, in its pronunciation of words, and in the accent of its speakers. Chagossians described to me trying to change their accent soon after arriving in Mauritius or Seychelles. One man explained that people cannot express themselves as they would like. ‘Chagossians have to change their language and their accent,’ he said. ‘Chagossians have to think twice every time they start to speak.’

For years after arriving in Seychelles, Madame Volfrin’s sister Marie Ange Pauline hid her identity for fear of being deported by the government in a one-party state where she held no citizenship. For years she felt ashamed to identify herself as a Chagossian in school when teachers asked where she was born. For years, while an active protest movement was growing in Mauritius, she and others in Seychelles felt powerless to argue for their rights in the one-party state. Finally in the late 1990s (after the start of a multi-party democracy), Madame Pauline decided that she was no longer going to hide her identity. She described this as her “coming out.” Although by using this phrase, Madame Pauline did not intend to compare her experience to that of homosexuals in heterosexist societies, the parallels are strong. Like many homosexuals,

Madame Pauline felt stigma, discrimination, and fear because of her identity as a Chagossian, motivating her to keep her identity secret.

Despite this assertion of pride and growing political involvement, Madame Pauline described asking herself still, ‘Why didn’t we resist?’ Even though she remembers that people in Diego Garcia were scared of the U.S. military forces arriving on the island and the possibility that they might bomb if they resisted, even though she remembers her father protesting the removals, she often asks herself, ‘Why did we let it happen to us?’

### **Land and Financial Compensation**

In 1978 and again between 1982 and 1985, many but not all Chagossians in Mauritius received financial and (in the 1980s) land compensation as a result of their expulsion. No Chagossians in Seychelles received compensation. 1978’s compensation was payment from the £650,000 transferred by the British Government in 1972 to the Mauritian Government to resettle the Chagossians. Although a majority of Chagossians requested that this compensation come in the form of housing, eligible Chagossians instead received cash payments of around €2,826 (in 2004 euros) and between €372 and €558 for children 18 and under (Mauritius Legislative Assembly 1983:3-5).

Between 1982 and 1985, many but not all Chagossians in Mauritius received land on one of two plots around Port Louis and cash payments totaling around €7,050 (in 2004 euros) for adults. In part these payments were to pay for government construction of a home or to build one’s own home. Since the expulsion, housing remained one of the islanders’ most pressing problems (Silva 1981:3; Botte 1980:29-30).<sup>56</sup> Many

Chagossians received land and two-room concrete-block houses built by the Mauritian Government (see photograph below) in what became known as a *Cité Ilois* in either the slum Baie du Tombeau or in Port Louis's brothel district, Pointe aux Sables.

Other Chagossians who did not opt to receive these houses used their compensation money to purchase new housing or to improve preexisting homes. Many report using both compensation payments to pay off substantial debts. Others told of people selling their new land and houses to settle debts. Unscrupulous brokers (including Chagossians, some said) enabled many of these sales, which according to many in Mauritius undervalued the land and houses significantly.

On the whole, housing conditions appear to have improved as a result of the second compensation in particular. As a 1997 WHO-funded report explains, they now “vary between the decent”—i.e., housing from the compensation—“and the flimsy”—i.e., homes usually built with a corrugated metal roof, with walls of some combination of concrete, sheet metal, and wood, with kitchen and sanitary facilities located outside the house, and generally lacking running water and electricity (Dræbel 1997; see also Madeley 1985:10-11).

Even with the improvements some enjoyed from a concrete-block house, most still live in the lowest tier of housing quality in Mauritius and Seychelles, and some live in conditions that are among the worst in both nations. Chagossians' housing conditions are generally comparable to those found in the townships of South Africa.

Most live in overcrowded conditions, still concentrated in the poorest, least desirable, most disadvantaged, and most unhealthy neighborhoods in Mauritius. Significant percentages live under even more dilapidated housing conditions with

dangerous structural deficiencies and limited access to basic services including electricity, running water, and sanitary facilities: 40 percent of households lack indoor plumbing and 26 percent are without any running water in the house (Vine et al. 2005:174-187). Generally housing problems are more critical for Chagossians in Mauritius than in Seychelles, in line with wider national differences.



**Image 27: Compensation house, Pointe aux Sables, Mauritius, 2002 (photo by author).**



**Image 28: Chagossian housing, interior, with damage from 2002 cyclone and plastic sheets covering gaps in wall and roof, Roche Bois, Mauritius, 2002 (photo by author).**



**Image 29: Chagossian housing, interior, with plastic over beds to catch rain falling from roof, 2002 (photo by author).**



**Image 30: Chagossian housing, Mahé, Seychelles, 2002 (photo by author).**



**Image 31: Chagossian housing, Mahé, Seychelles, 2002 (photo by author).**

**Chagossians Today: “Maybe My Children Will Get Jobs”**

After Rita Bancoult discovered that she and her family had been barred from returning to their homes, she and her husband rented a one-room shack in Cassis, a neighborhood where many Chagossians have lived since the earliest days of the expulsion. Today, Madame Bancoult’s oldest living son, Louis Olivier Bancoult, still lives in Cassis, 100 feet down a narrow path from the family’s first home in Mauritius.

Most of Cassis, the closest of Port Louis’s slum neighborhoods to the city center, is a maze of rusting, corrugated metal fences lining small passageways, dirt paths, and roads, with surrounding houses and shacks usually cobbled together from mixtures of concrete block, metal, and wood. Four major cemeteries dominate the landscape. Trash is often smoldering in empty garbage-strewn lots. Piles of metal sheets lie waiting to be used for home repairs. From above, one sees a tightly packed clutter of corrugated metal roofs, often weighed down against Indian Ocean winds with bed springs, broken-down bicycle parts, wood scraps, odd pieces of metal, and bricks, with an occasional palm tree or two-story concrete-block house jutting up from below. An open drainage sewer runs through the middle of Cassis, past one of the cemeteries and toward the ocean.

Cassis (see map below) is encircled by two major highways, several large industrial facilities, and a diesel-burning power plant. On Cassis’s south, the two highways bring congested and exhaust-filled lanes of traffic to and from the capitol. Cars and trucks find a shortcut between the two highways by using the streets of Cassis, adding additional exhaust and noise pollution and the danger of large vehicles to the neighborhood. A large industrial dry cleaning plant, a major bus depot, and a local bus

station stand nearby. On the west of Cassis lies the Fort Victoria power station. Another diesel station lies a little more than one kilometer to

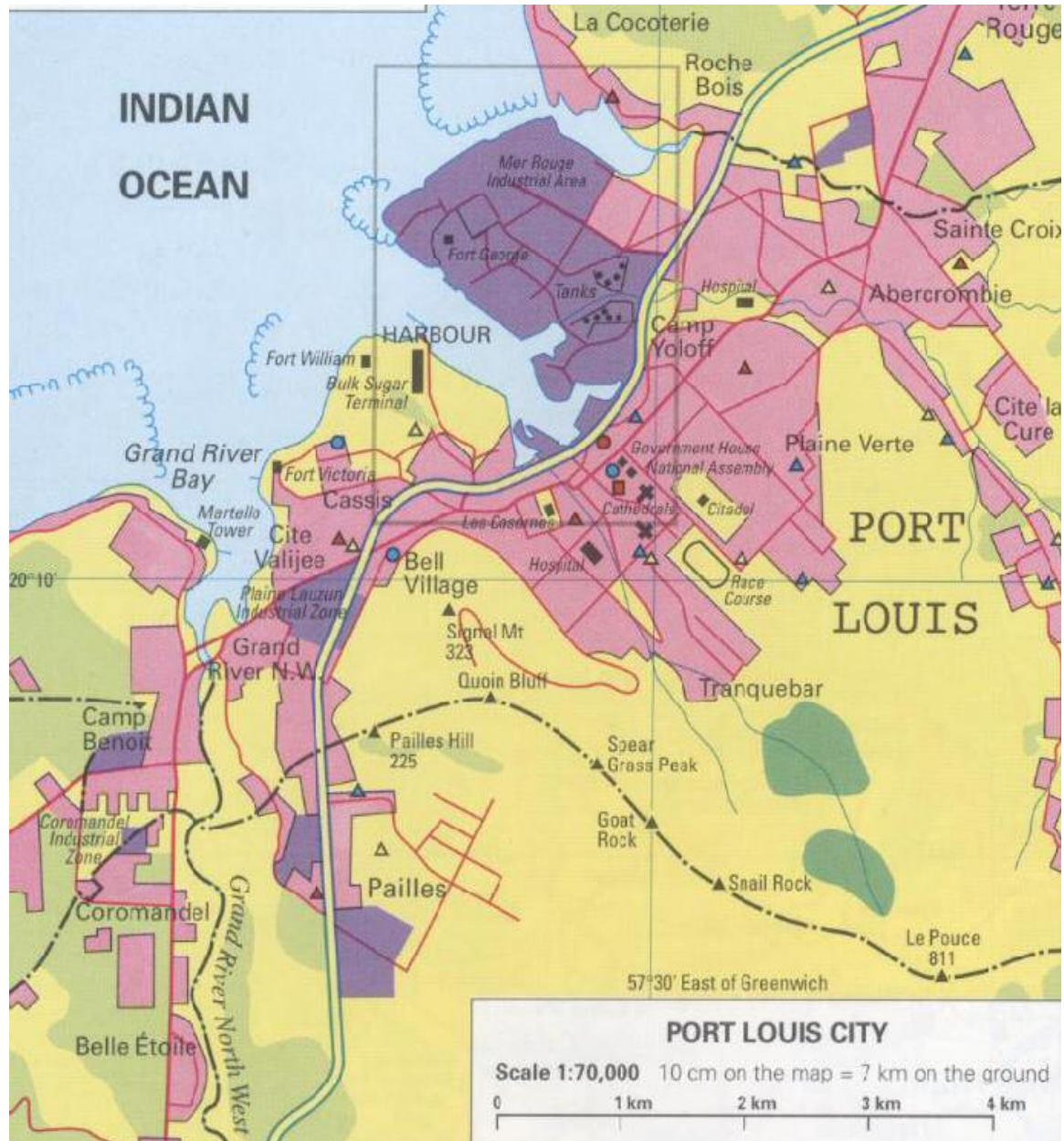


**Image 32: Chagossian housing, Cassis, Mauritius, 2002 (photo by author).**

the south. On the east, closest to Port Louis, Cassis is bounded by the Bulk Sugar Terminal, a sand processing plant, large petroleum tanks at the Fort William Storage Facility, and other industrial buildings (which, with a cemetery, surround one of the only green areas in Cassis, a park known as Les Salines).

Although Mauritius is known internationally for its beautiful beaches, and although most of Cassis is surrounded by the Indian Ocean, there is very little water and beach access in the neighborhood: Between the Fort Victoria power station and the sand plant, a small stretch of beach remains. A large government sign strongly recommends

against swimming. A landing area for fisherfolk lies nearby, small wooden boats dotting the water at anchor just off the shore. Up from the water there are about ten yards of beach, across which are scattered pieces of coral, broken shells, and decaying fly-ridden seaweed, along with a collection of broken bottles, rusted cans, abandoned tires, lost



**Image 33: Map of Port Louis, Mauritius, with Cassis at center-left, west of city center (Saddul 2002:18).**



**Image 34: "Bathing Not Recommended" sign, on Indian Ocean beach, Cassis, Mauritius, 2002 (photo by author).**

lonely shoes, shards of wood, plastic bags, rusting car parts, and broken clumps of white styrofoam. At the end of the beach there is a mountain of sand out of which emanate a sulfurous stench and nine pipes stretching into the ocean (and perhaps explaining why bathing is not recommended).

In slums like Cassis, most Chagossians still struggle to find work. The WHO-funded survey found that those who were working were doing so in jobs at the bottom of the Mauritian pay scale, with considerable job insecurity and highly vulnerable to the instabilities of the labor market. In many households, researchers found, only a single adult was working. Often, however, a single job was insufficient to support a family and the report found Chagossians having to supplement their income with a second job (Dræbel 1997:15-16).

My research findings were consistent with the previous decades of research and show little improvement in Chagossians' overall employment and economic situation. As of 2002/2003, just over a third (38.8 percent) of the first generation and less than two-thirds (60.6 percent) of the second generation were working at the time of the survey, with the majority of those employed in manual labor jobs (Vine et al. 2005:116-119). The median monthly income among Chagossians was €87.<sup>57</sup>

Of those Chagossians who are employed, many have jobs that are characterized by high job insecurity, temporary duration, and informal employment commitments. Chagossians are still primarily employed in manual labor, including as dockers and stevedores in the shipping industry; as janitorial, domestic, and child care workers; as informal construction workers and masons; and as factory workers. Others find piecework jobs, often to supplement other employment, such as making decorative furnishings, stitching shoes, or weaving brooms from coconut palms.

Among many Chagossians there appears to be a deep pessimism about their economic and employment prospects. The French aphorism, "Ceux qui sont riches seront toujours riches, ceux qui sont pauvres restent toujours pauvres" [The rich will always be rich; the poor will always be poor] is a kind of chorus among some young adult Chagossians (and other working-class Afro-Mauritians). I asked Jacques Victor, an out-of-work 40-year-old mason from Diego Garcia who was working weekends as an informal clothing vendor, if he thought it would be possible to find a better paying job. "In Mauritius, no. In Mauritius, no," Mr. Victor responded in English. "Ilois have the qualifications. But they [Mauritian employers] say, 'How can they have this kind of qualification?' They much prefer [to keep us] lower than low. It's like that." I asked

Mr. Victor at the end of our interview if there was anything else he wanted to tell me. “I want to return to our land. Be there now—get our lives that we were living, yesterday,” he said. “Maybe my children will get jobs.”

One of Rita Bancoult’s grandsons, Jean-Roy, is a 24-year-old born in Mauritius who was orphaned by the deaths of his parents to drugs and suicide. Working in temporary off-the-books construction jobs in 2002, Jean-Roy described no longer hoping for a better life. “Asterla mo aksept lamizer,” he said. Now, I accept a life of miserable poverty.

In general, Chagossians born in Mauritius and Seychelles or leaving Chagos at a young age seem to have been more successful in securing employment and better remunerated jobs than their elders. Others from this younger generation are still mired in insecure, low-paying irregular jobs. A few women have followed Mauritian or Seychellois husbands to Europe or Australia in search of work in the years following the expulsion. Although wealthier than their counterparts in Mauritius and Seychelles, most are living relatively precarious lives among the working poor in these new countries.

In recent years, about 300 Chagossians have left Mauritius and Seychelles in search of work and better lives in England. In May 2002, Chagossians became eligible for full U.K. citizenship and passports as former BIOT residents. They have met mixed success. In July 2003, around 30 Chagossians arrived with little or no money and what they believed were promises of work. The group soon found themselves stranded and homeless, sleeping for more than a week on the floors of London’s Gatwick airport. With time, most have found housing and low-wage service sector jobs (many at Gatwick), in the vicinity of London.



**Image 35: Flowers on table with tablecloth, drawing by young second-generation Chagossian, Roche Bois, Mauritius, 2002 (photo by author).**

### **Dying of Sagren: Illness as Synecdoche**

When Rita Bancoult described her husband Julien’s death, she said that he died of *sagren*. “There *wasn’t* sickness” like strokes or *sagren* in Chagos, she explained to me.

“There wasn’t that kind of sickness. Nor diabetes, nor any such illness.”

Indeed, while Chagossian health was once better than that in Mauritius, it is now comparable to low levels of health characterizing the poorest sectors of Mauritian society, a nation with one of the highest incidences of chronic disease in the world. The WHO-funded study found that Chagossians suffer from elevated levels of chronic colds, fevers, respiratory diseases, anemia, and transmissible diseases like tuberculosis, as well

as problems with cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension, work accidents, and youth alcohol and tobacco abuse (Dræbel 1997:18-25, 34). The report found children and the elderly particularly vulnerable to disease, including water-borne diseases tied to poor hygiene and contaminated water supplies like infant diarrhea, Hepatitis A, and intestinal parasites. A large number of work accidents also characterized the population, likely related to the physical labor and few work protections many Chagossians face (Dræbel 1997:34, 21).

At the same time, the WHO-funded report found that Chagossians do not enjoy the same access to health care services as others in Mauritius because of their poverty, their limited knowledge of the health care system, and their limited confidence in health care providers and in the efficacy and quality of treatment (Dræbel 1997:26-35). Around 85 percent of Chagossians surveyed reported needing more health care—more than any other social service need (Vine et al. 2005:213).

Sandra Cheri is a Chagossian nurse and one of few people qualified to comment professionally on the state of Chagossian health. (She is also one of the few Chagossians in Mauritius with a government or semi-professional job; in Seychelles, by contrast, Chagossians with government and professional employment are relatively common). I asked Madame Cheri about common health problems experienced by Chagossians. She listed diarrhea and vomiting, gastroenteritis, fevers, and influenza—illnesses they share with people throughout Mauritius. But Madame Cheri said Chagossians also suffer from a high incidence of diabetes and hypertension because of dietary changes experienced since arriving in Mauritius. In Chagos, she said, there was no stress and the food was different (fish even tasted better). There was no hard alcohol in Chagos, only wine and

homemade brews like *calou* and *baka*. In Mauritius there is rum and whiskey and, “many, many Chagossians are alcoholics.” She sees many Chagossian alcoholics at her hospital and in Cassis, where they are stumbling and drunk, shoeless and dirty along the road. Mauritians exploit many of these alcoholics, Madame Cheri added, knowing that they will work for a few rupees just to buy a MRs60 (around €2) bottle of rum.

Visibly intoxicated men are a common sight in Mauritius and Seychelles and most Chagossians attest to substance abuse as a problem in the community. My 2002/2003 survey provided evidence to support these assertions. Although survey questions asking about illegal substance use are renowned for underreporting actual use, one in five second-generation respondents and just under one in five from the first generation said they needed help or treatment for an alcohol or drug problem. A mere one and two percent of second and first generation respondents respectively said they were receiving such treatment (Vine et al. 2005:229).

When, like Madame Bancoult, Chagossians contrast suffering from illnesses with descriptions of a nearly disease-free life in Chagos, the contrast represents both a commentary on the expulsion and a sign of the emotional and psychological damage the expulsion has caused. For many, the illnesses that they and their relatives and friends have experienced have come to represent all of the difficulties of life in exile and the pain of being separated from their homeland. Illness and disease have become a synecdoche for the suffering of the expulsion.

When Chagossians like Madame Bancoult talk of people dying of *sagren*, however, they are not speaking metaphorically. The Chagos Refugees Group has an



**Image 36: "Even when trying, you're stuck," (old Mauritian Kreol proverb), Roche Bois, Mauritius, 2002 (photo by author).<sup>58</sup>**

"Index of Deceased Chagossians" listing the names of Chagossians who have died in exile. For 396 of the deceased individuals, a cause of death is indicated. In 60 of these cases, the cause of death is listed as wholly or in part due to "sadness" or "homesickness" (Chagos Refugees Group n.d.).

The WHO-funded report documents the phenomenon whereby *sagren* (French: *le chagrin*) "explains illness and even the deaths of members of the community":

The notion of *le chagrin* has an important place in the explanative system for illness. *Le chagrin* is in fact nostalgia for the Chagos islands. It is the profound sadness of facing the impossibility of being able to return to one's home in the archipelago. For many people we met, this *chagrin* explains illness and even the deaths of members of the community. During one of our first visits in the community, we met an old man suffering from diabetes and hypertension. Paralyzed for many years, this man only left his home every three months when an ambulance came to

take him for treatment at the hospital... Some weeks after having met him, we learned of his death. In the street with others who came to express their condolences to his widow, we tried to learn more about the deceased, including the precise cause of his death. It was then that one of his friends responded that he had died of *Chagrin des îles* [loosely: sorrow for the loss of the islands]. Knowing that he would never again return to the island of his birth, he had preferred to let himself die. [Dræbel 1997:25.]

Chagossians are not alone in the belief that grief and sadness can be a cause of death. “There is little doubt,” Scudder and Colson explain, “that relocatees often believe that the elderly in particular are apt to die ‘of a broken heart’ following removal.” Importantly this belief appears to have medical support: “The evidence is highly suggestive” that sadness can cause death “for Egyptian and Sudanese Nubians...and the Yavapai.... Elderly persons forced into nursing homes or forcibly removed from one nursing home to another are reported to have high mortality rates in the period immediately succeeding the move” (Scudder and Colson 1982:269). Other research has shown that acute stress can bring on fatal heart spasms in people with otherwise healthy cardiac systems (R. Stein 2005).

Nayak provides more evidence of the connections between the grief of exile and health outcomes and between mental and physical health. From his work with the Kisan of eastern India, Nayak writes, “The severance of the Kisan bonds from their traditional lands and environment is a fundamental factor in their acute depression and possibly in increased mortality rates, including infant mortality.” Like Chagossians grieving for their lost origins in Chagos, “a continuous pining for lost land characterizes the elderly [Kisan]. Anxiety, grieving, various neuropsychiatric illness and post-traumatic stress disorders feature among the Kisan. In essence, they suffer from profound cultural and

landscape bereavement for their lost origins” (Nayak 2000:95-96). This is what Scudder refers to as the “grieving for a lost home” syndrome among displacees (Scudder 1973).

Sandrine Alexis, now in her early 30s, came to Mauritius as a young child with her parents and six siblings on one of the last voyages of the *M.V. Nordvær*. Madame Alexis explained that her family had to leave everything in Chagos. When they first arrived, the family lived on the streets of Port Louis’s largest slum, Roche Bois. Often they had no food or water. When they came to Mauritius, her parents were healthy, she said. But once in Mauritius, her parents “tombe malad”—they fell ill—with sagren and *latristes*—sadness. They “tombe dan lamizer,” she continued. They fell into miserable abject poverty. Over time, three of her siblings died in Mauritius.

When an older man told how his father died of sagren in 1970 after he was prevented from returning to Diego Garcia, I asked him to define sagren. The man replied, sagren is “not having work...lacking” food, drink, education for yourself and your children, and not becoming “abitye”—being unable to adjust—to life in Mauritius.

For this man and others, the sorrow of sagren is so obvious it does not need to be spoken. When Chagossians talk about sagren, they are talking about more than their deep sorrow. They are also talking about their experiences with lamizer. Likewise, when people talk about lamizer, they are referring to more than their experiences of deep impoverishment in exile. They are also talking about their feelings of sagren and *latristes*.

Sagren, *latristes*, and lamizer have become three intertwined ways for Chagossians to talk about their suffering. In using any one of these words, people immediately refer to their common experience of having been dérasiné—forcibly

uprooted and torn from their birthplace—and the myriad ways—physical, economic, social, cultural, psychological—that they have suffered as individuals and as a community as a result of their *dérasinman*—their forced uprooting. Sagren, latristes, and lamizer come to represent the inseparable combination of Chagossians’ profound sorrow over their expulsion and the profound material suffering the expulsion has caused.

This kind of suffering is an example of what medical anthropologists call “social suffering” (Kleinman, et al. 1997). The concept is useful for the way in which the word *social* helps identify a distinct kind of suffering. Social suffering is social in that causation resides in the social world as opposed to within individuals. “Social suffering,” three prominent medical anthropologists explain, “results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people” (Kleinman et al. 1997:ix). The phenomenon is also social because it affects specific populations as a result of their (vulnerable) positioning in the world—for example, Jews and other minorities in the Holocaust, economically impoverished African-American and Latino urbanites in the United States, and refugees. Further, the phenomenon is social because it refers to suffering that is fundamentally experienced as a social phenomenon, among a community of sufferers, and not just as an individual. This kind of suffering is so “profoundly social...that it helps constitute the social world” (Kleinman et al. 1997:xxiv).

So it is for the Chagossians: Their suffering was and is caused by the force and power of the U.S. and U.K. governments and individuals within those governments, targeting the Chagossians, as the next chapter discusses, as a vulnerable group. Likewise, as indicated by their common use of the words sagren, latristes, and lamizer, Chagossians’ suffering has been experienced socially. With their lives utterly

transformed by the expulsion, they have become a community of sufferers sharing common experiences that have shaped their social world (see Jeffery 2005). The words *sagren*, *latristes*, and *lamizer* reflect this shared social reality and have come to serve as a kind of shorthand, among themselves and with outsiders, for the totality of their suffering and the shared experience of having been *dérasiné*.<sup>59</sup>

## CHAPTER 9

### BASE PATTERNS: DISPLACEMENT AND THE MILITARY

After the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the U.S. Navy was given responsibility for orchestrating large-scale post-war nuclear weapons tests, named Operation Crossroads. To begin, the Navy needed an isolated island test site. “We just took out dozens of maps and started looking for remote sites,” explained one of the two officers responsible for finding a location. “After checking the Atlantic, we moved to the West Coast and just kept looking” (Weisgall 1994:32).

The Navy considered more than a dozen sites in the Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Most officials ruled out because the waters surrounding the islands were too shallow, the populations were too large, or because the weather was undependable. They considered the Caroline Islands in Micronesia, Bikar and Taongi in the Marshall Islands, and even the Galapagos (the Interior Department struck it from the list because of its rare species) (Weisgall 1994:32, 328 n. 41). Initially the Navy was most interested in one of the Carolines, as one memorandum explained, “partly because evacuation of natives would not be a major problem” (Weisgall 1994:32).

Eventually the Navy picked the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. Or as the official U.S. history of the atomic tests says, “Bikini won out” (Weisgall 1994:33). “Bikini just popped up as the one atoll that made all sorts of sense,” explained Frederick L. Ashworth, who co-directed the search. “It had a good-sized lagoon, a few large islands for observing stations, good access through wide channels and a reasonably

shallow area a few miles off the main island to anchor the target ships [for the test].” The Navy was also pleased that Bikini had an indigenous population of about 170 (Weisgall 1994:33).

On February 6, 1946, the *U.S.S. Sumner* arrived at Bikini. Its crew blasted three channels in the reef off Bikini island so a Navy transport ship would be able to reach the beach and remove the islanders. In Congressional testimony five days after Operation Crossroads was announced, there was only a single reference to the Bikinians. Jonathan Weisgall, an authority on the removals, describes how Admiral William H. P. “Spike” Blandy said the islanders would be “removed to another atoll in accordance with proper procedure and their interests safeguarded.” When asked if they would be compensated, Blandy replied, “Yes.... Their interests will be safeguarded in that respect” (Weisgall 1994:106).

Navy Commodore Ben H. Wyatt—“Battling Ben” from his Naval Academy football days—was given the job of telling the Bikinians that they would be moved. “The ostensible purpose of Wyatt’s visit was to ask the Bikinians if the United States could use their atoll as an atomic test site,” Weisgall writes, “but he knew the islanders had no choice in the matter.” President Truman had approved the removal a month earlier, and the reef blasting had already begun (Weisgall 1994:106-107).

Wyatt met the islanders after the end of their church services. People sat cross-legged on the ground, under the shade of coconut palms, to listen to their visitor. Wyatt delivered a homily and drew heavily on the bible, “compar[ing] the Bikinians to the children of Israel whom the Lord saved from their enemy and led into the Promised Land.” Wyatt described the power of the atomic bomb, and how Americans were “trying

to learn how to use it for the good of mankind and to end all world wars.” He said the Navy had searched the whole world for the best place to test the bomb, and Bikini was it. “Would you,” Wyatt asked the Bikinian’s leader, “and his people be willing to sacrifice their island for the welfare of all men?” (Weisgall 1994:107).

Within a few hours the islanders agreed to Wyatt’s proposal, though they had not been told where they would go. Weisgall explains that the people were “awed” by the U.S. defeat of Japan and grateful for the help Americans had provided since the war with food, doctors, and building construction. The timing of the Wyatt’s arrival after church and his invocation of God and of the power of the bomb made the people “believe that they were powerless to resist the wishes of the United States” (Weisgall 1994:107-108).

One Bikinian, Lore Kessibuki, explained, “This was a very difficult question...but we didn’t feel we had any other choice but to obey the Americans.” Some did not want to leave but “that group didn’t win because we were quite afraid,” he continued. “We just wanted to follow the words of the American man.... It had just been the end of the war. We were still afraid and we wanted to heed his words” (Weisgall 1994:108).

“Fortunately, the Commodore had the ability to translate the stark language of a Navy message into gentle words,” the Navy later reported. “It was an historic occasion, this impact of the accumulated scientific knowledge of centuries upon a primitive people, and it was staged with sincerity and poise.” Another military official described it in more straightforward terms as “one hell of a good sales job” (Weisgall 1994:107, 114).

The record is unclear if Wyatt said the islanders would only be removed for a short period. “The evidence, though, strongly suggests that he only asked the Bikinians

to leave temporarily,” Weisgall says. “The Navy would take care of us, we were told, until we went back to Bikini,” some later told a Navy anthropologist. When a reporter asked Admiral Blandy at press conference if the people had been informed that the Navy would drop the bomb on their atoll, Blandy just laughed and said he didn’t know (Weisgall 1994:108-109).

Eventually the Rongerik Atoll was selected as the relocation site, and the Navy “mounted a campaign to assure the public that the Bikinians were actually going to be much better off by leaving Bikini” (Weisgall 1994:110). When the removal day came, the Navy had the islanders repeat their meeting with Wyatt for movie and press cameras gathered for what became a “major media event.” When Wyatt again asked Juda for his people’s reply, Juda said, “We are willing to go.... Everything is in God’s hands.” Wyatt told the translator, “You tell them and King Juda that everything being in God’s hands, it cannot be other than good.” For the benefit of the cameras, Wyatt and the islanders performed at least seven more takes of the reenactment (Weisgall 1994:112-113).

On March 7, 1946, the Navy completed the removal, less than one month after Wyatt’s arrival. Within months of relocating, people were homesick and concerned that Rongerik’s coconuts, an important part of their diet, were smaller than on Bikini (Weisgall 1994:206). Soon it became clear, says Weisgall, that the move had been “ill-conceived and poorly planned.” The *New York Times* wrote that the Bikinians “will probably be repatriated if they insist on it, though the United States military authorities say they can’t see why they should want to: Bikini and Rongerik look as alike as two Idaho potatoes” (Weisgall 1994:308-309).

The Bikinians were soon running out of food and suffering from malnutrition. By 1948, planning was underway to move the people to Ujelang. Instead they were sent to a temporary camp on Kwajalein Island, near a major U.S. base. Later that year, the Navy moved the islanders to a new permanent home on Kili Island. By 1952, the Government was forced to make an emergency food drop on Kili as conditions again deteriorated for the people. With public outrage growing since the days on Rongerik, in 1956, the United States gave the Bikinians \$25,000 (in \$1 bills) and a \$3 million trust fund making annual payments of about \$15 per person (Weisgall 1994:309-313). Weisgall says, “the Bikinians were completely self-sufficient before 1946 but after years of exile they virtually lost the will to provide for themselves” (1994:313-314).

While the islanders moved from island to island, between 1946 and 1958 the Navy conducted 68 atomic and hydrogen bomb tests in Bikini (Hanlon 1998:186). In 1947, an additional 147 people were removed from Enewetok Atoll for similar testing. The March 1, 1954 “Bravo shot”—the first U.S. hydrogen bomb test—vaporized Bikini’s Nam Island and parts of two others. When winds shifted after the test, a cloud of radiation spread over 7,500 square miles of ocean. Fallout left Bikini Island “hopelessly contaminated” and covered the inhabitants of the Rongelap and Utirik atolls, other Marshallese camping on the Ailinginae Atoll, 28 U.S. military personnel on Rongerik, and 23 people on a Japanese fishing vessel, the *Lucky Dragon*. The Government evacuated its troops the day after the test. It evacuated the people on Rongelap and Utirik two and three days after (Weisgall 1994:302-305).

Across the Marshall Islands, nuclear testing also displaced the people of Lib Island. Radiation from some of the nuclear tests caused scores of deaths and widespread

disease. The removals and the overall disruption to Marshallese societies have led to declining social, cultural, physical, and economic health, high rates of suicide, infant health deficits, and slum housing conditions, to name just a few effects (e.g., Kiste 1974; Lutz 1984).

In 1968, President Johnson allowed the Bikinians to return to their islands after a clean-up. They did the following year, although they were shocked to find the islands decimated and that many parts had disappeared altogether. In 1978, medical tests revealed that the clean-up had been inadequate and that “the people may have ingested the largest amounts of radioactive material of any known population.” They were again moved. After 15 years of lawsuits and negotiations, the Bikinians received a \$75 million settlement for the taking and use of their islands. \$110 million was put into a trust for the decontamination and resettlement of the islands. After an extensive clean up some have now returned (Weisgall 1994:314-415).

One of the two officers responsible for selecting Bikini as the nuclear test site was rewarded for his work by being made an admiral. His name was Horacio Rivero, the future director of Op-93.

### **Base Displacement**

Across the world, often in isolated locations, often on islands, and often affecting indigenous populations, the U.S. military has displaced local peoples as part of the creation of military facilities, almost always leading to the impoverishment of those affected. As chapter 4 showed, 20<sup>th</sup> century removals like those in Chagos and Bikini followed more than a century during which the United States engaged in the systematic

displacement of native peoples in North America. Although the connections between the removals have rarely been as obvious as the two cases involving Rivero, displacement has been a marked feature of the development of the post-World War II overseas base network. At times, displacement began in the midst of World War II combat with the pretext of wartime necessity. Most removed during wartime, however, were not allowed to return at war's end, and these early displacements only paved the way for the military to displace greater numbers in peacetime. The following sections describe other examples of base displacement and some of their effects on displaced populations.

#### *Thule, Greenland*

In the isolated reaches of Greenland (colonized by Denmark in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), the U.S. Government ordered the expulsion of another indigenous people to expand its air base in Thule. The U.S. and Danish governments maintained a joint “weather station” there during World War II, and in 1951, as part of a defense agreement, the United States established the Thule Air Base, aimed at the Soviet Union. Two years later, when the United States wanted to expand the base, it made a secret agreement with the Danish Government to displace around 150 Inughuit people from their homes. Families were reportedly given four days to move or face U.S. bulldozers. The Inughuits were given blankets and tents and left in exile in Qaanaaq, a forbidding village 125 miles from their native lands (Lyng 2002; Brown 2002; Olsen 2002).

One of the few studies of the Inughuits' experience says that the removal severed the people's connection with lands to which they were “intimately linked” (Lyng 2002:27), caused them physical and psychological harm and the loss of ancient hunting,

fishing, and gathering skills, and endangered their existence as a people. In recent years, Danish courts have ruled on the “illegality” of the Danish Government’s actions, constituting a violation of the people’s human rights, but said they have no right to return (Lynge 2002:10, 32-36).

*Vieques, Puerto Rico*

In the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, the Navy carried out repeated removals on the small island of Vieques. Between 1941 and 1943, and again in 1947, the U.S. Navy displaced thousands of people from their lands, seizing three-quarters of Vieques for military use. Few benefits followed military occupation. Instead, stagnation, poverty, unemployment, prostitution, violence, and the disruption of subsistence and other productive activities became the rule (McCaffrey 2002).

In 1961, the Navy developed plans to seize the entire island and evict all 8,000 inhabitants of the island. Secretary of Defense McNamara offered in exchange to return to the Puerto Rican Government land taken from Puerto Rico during World War II and an opportunity to buy land the military acquired from private owners (McCaffrey 2002). Only when Governor Luis Muñoz Martin alerted President Kennedy to the political implications of a military expropriation amid Cold War scrutiny of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States did Kennedy stop the further land seizures and removals. Bombing continued on the island until 2003 (McCaffrey 2002:38-39).

*Culebra, Puerto Rico*

On neighboring Culebra island, military occupation dated to at least 1941 when President Roosevelt claimed for the military the airspace over Culebra and a three-mile radius of surrounding ocean. In 1948, the Navy seized 1,700 acres of the island for a bombing range. By 1950, the population had shrunk to 580, from 4,000 at the turn of the century, and the Navy controlled one-third of the island and its entire coastline, encircling civilians with the bombing range and a mined harbor. Beginning in the 1950s, the Navy started drafting plans to remove the rest of Culebra's inhabitants. The Navy's 1961 plan for total eviction on Vieques also called for the removal of all Culebra's residents. In 1970, the Navy attempted to remove the islanders again. When the issue became a "*cause célèbre* of the Puerto Rican independence movement," political pressure forced the Navy to look for another island and cease use of the bombing range. Ultimately this came at the expense of those in Vieques, where bombing increased (McCaffrey 2002:70-72).

*Okinawa, Japan*

In Okinawa, which was itself a colony of Japan before coming under direct U.S. military rule from the end of World War II until 1972, the military seized large tracks of land and bulldozed houses for its bases, during the 1945 Battle of Okinawa and well into the 1950s. "Between 1945 and 1950," in particular, Chalmers Johnson writes, "the Americans occupied what Okinawan land they wanted, regardless of whether it had been publicly or privately owned" (1999:111).

Initially the military forced Okinawans to relocate to refugee camps and prevented them from returning to their homes (C. Johnson 2004b:50-53; Yoshida n.d.). With less land for civilians and the island increasingly overcrowded, between 1954 and 1964, the United States shipped at least 3,218 Okinawan “volunteers” (some of whom had not had their lands taken by the U.S. military) approximately 11,000 miles across the Pacific Ocean to the land-locked country of Bolivia. The original plan for the relocation projected sending 12,000 people in 10 years. The Okinawans were promised new farmland and financial assistance. Upon arrival, most found jungle-covered lands, incomplete housing and roads, disease, and none of the promised aid (Amemiya 1999; C. Johnson 2004b:50-53; Yoshida n.d.). Unreliable rainfall, flooding, unstable rice crops and other problems plagued the Okinawans. By the late 1960s, “there was a steady exodus” to Brazil, Argentina, Okinawa, and Japan; by 1995, about 800 remained with their offspring (Amemiya 1999:63). Okinawa remains home to 75 percent of U.S. bases in Japan though it represents only 1 percent of Japanese land. It also remains the poorest of Japan’s prefectures (C. Johnson 2004b:200).

#### *Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands*

Elsewhere in the Marshall Islands, in the Kwajalein Atoll, the U.S. military displaced hundreds from the end of World War II through the 1960s to create a missile-testing base (recently the site of tests for a still-unproven U.S. missile defense shield). In 1944, after capturing the atoll from Japan, the military removed the population of Kwajalein Island, one of 93 islands in total, to the small island of Ebeye, increasing its population from 20 to 300. The military initially created a labor camp for civilian workers from elsewhere in

the Marshall Islands on Kwajalein Island but soon moved the camp to Ebeye, increasing its population by another 560. By 1951, there were 1,200 laborers and their families living on Ebeye in an area less than 27 square miles (the military occupied the rest), as more Marshallese immigrated with what scholar David Hanlon says was “the lure of employment, wages, material goods, and the general excitement of its urbanlike lifestyle” (1998:189-191). The inhabitants of Bikini and other islands affected by nuclear fallout arrived later in the 1950s as “Ebeye became a dumping ground for all of the problems resulting from American nuclear testing in the Pacific” (Hanlon 1998:187).

In 1960 and 1961, the United States removed the inhabitants of Kwajalein Atoll’s northern islands and Lib Island, south of the atoll. In 1964, the Army displaced inhabitants in the middle of the atoll, including the islands of Meck, Lagan, and Ningi, to clear a path for missile tests splashing down in the world’s largest lagoon. Around 372 more were left in Ebeye. “Concerned to legitimize its use of land in the greater Kwajalein Atoll complex through legal contract,” Hanlon writes, “the United States initially sought an indefinite use agreement and offered a lump sum payment of \$300,000, presented in bundles of one dollar bills, to elicit Marshallese acceptance” (1998:192).

With overcrowding growing progressively worse in Ebeye, in 1967 the TTPI government organized Operation Exodus to remove “unnecessary” people to their home islands. Initially authorities hoped the departures would come on a voluntary basis, but soon the program became a “forced repatriation” of the unemployed and those not paying rent or utility bills. In total, 1,500 were removed. Following protests from the local Marshallese government they were later allowed to return (Hanlon 1998:201-202).

By 1969, Ebeye was called “the most congested, unhealthful, and socially demoralized community in Micronesia,” with a population of more than 4,500 living on approximately one-tenth of a square mile that had become known as the “ghetto of the Pacific” (Hanlon 1998:193; Marks 1986). By 1978, there were more than 8,000 people on the island, giving it the same population density as if the population of the United States moved to Connecticut. By 2001, the population reached more than 12,000 (PCRC 2001). Cholera outbreaks and malnutrition are common (French 2001), sanitation is bad, the environment is polluted, and education and health care are poor (Hanlon 1998:198-199). According to a *New York Times* dispatch, the “lucky few” commute daily to work at low-skill jobs on the U.S. base (French 2001). There most earn little more than \$2 an hour, which, while better than wages elsewhere in the Marshalls, is significantly lower than what U.S. civilians earn on the base (Hanlon 1998:200). One journalist reported in 1986 that only about 10 percent of the population had jobs (Marks 1986). U.S. Representative John Seiberling, visiting the atoll in 1984, summed up the conditions in Ebeye by comparing them to those on the base:

The contrast couldn't be greater or more dramatic. Kwajalein is like Fort Lauderdale or one of our Miami resort areas, with palm-lined beaches, swimming pools, a golf course, people bicycling everywhere, a first-class hospital and a good school; and Ebeye, on the other hand, is an island slum, over-populated, treeless filthy lagoon, littered beaches, a dilapidated hospital, and contaminated water supply, and so forth. [Hanlon 1998:201.]

Although the Marshall Islands technically gained its independence in 1986, it remains in a “Compact of Free Association” with the United States, which has left Kwajalein and the nation as a whole deeply dependent on the base and payments from the U.S. Government (Alexander 1984; French 2001; Marks 1986; Woodard 1999). The

majority of scholarship on the cumulative effect of the United States on the Marshalls and the rest of Micronesia since World War II finds that the societies are less socially and economically healthy and self-sufficient than before the United States assumed control of the islands (Lutz 1984:4).

*The Philippines, Panama, Guam, Hawai'i*

Base displacement also predates the development of the global basing network. The United States took possession of Pearl Harbor in 1887 when officials coerced the indigenous monarchy into giving it exclusive access to the protected bay (Kinzer 2006:15). In the Philippines, Clark Air Base and other U.S. bases were built on land reserved for the indigenous Aetas people. According to McCaffrey, “they ended up combing military trash to survive” (2002:9; Piatek 2006; Simbulan 1985).

In Panama, the United States carried out 19 distinct land expropriations around the Panama Canal Zone between 1908 and 1931, some for 14 bases established in the country and some for the canal. “The expropriations,” historian John Lindsay-Poland explains, “were often carried out by the military, with Panama notified after the fact, or not at all. Panamanian officials sought compensation from the United States, but none was forthcoming.” Until land seizure came under the authority of the State Department in 1928, “the Army was expansionist and expropriated land at will” (Lindsay-Poland 2003:192, 42-43, 28-29). After the seizures, U.S. occupied land became a secret testing ground for toxic gasses and chemical weapons, including through their use on human guinea pigs. The Canal Zone was by treaty a “virtual U.S. colony,” where John Lindsay-Poland says that, “in pursuit of its own strategic aims, the United States sacrificed regard

for Panama's people, its tropical environment, and, often, the empire's own soldiers" (2003:3).

Similarly after the United States seized Guam from Spain in 1898, the U.S. Navy became the administrator of the island, with the commanding officer in Guam serving as governor. In 1899, the Navy designated the entire island a U.S. naval station. The Navy governed the territory until Japan captured it three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. After the United States retook Guam in 1944, the military acquired more than 45 percent of its available land. Only in 1950 did the U.S. Congress make Guam an unincorporated territory of the nation; administration fell under the Department of the Interior until Guam's first elected governor took office in 1971. The military remains a major presence on the island, which is perhaps the most important overseas base, and today controls around one-third of its land (Globalsecurity.org 2003; Brooke 2003). There are now plans for a major expansion of the base (on existing base land) with the shifting of troops from Japan and Europe eastward.

Other displacements took place in Hawai'i. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Navy seized Koho'olawe (also Kahoolawe), the smallest of the eight major Hawai'ian islands, and ordered its inhabitants to leave. The service turned the island, which is "home to some of the most sacred historical places in Hawaiian culture," including 544 archaeological sites, into a weapons testing range (Lewis 2001). In 2000, the Navy returned environmentally devastated Koho'olawe to the State of Hawai'i.<sup>60</sup>

As discussed in chapter 1, it is difficult to gauge the full extent of the base displacement phenomenon without a systematic survey of U.S. overseas bases, or a representative

portion thereof, and the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of base lands. In addition to a historical review, such a survey would have to investigate the conditions under which the United States has established new bases in, among other regions, Central Asia (some are former Soviet facilities) and the ways in which the United States is moving its South Korean bases away from Seoul with the South Korean Government threatening to use powers of eminent domain to displace locals for new base lands. While this should be the subject of future research, the displacement of the Chagossians and at least 13 similar examples of displacement point to a pattern of the U.S. military forcibly displacing numerically-small non-“white,” non-European colonized peoples to build its overseas military installations, the result of which has generally been the impoverishment of the displaced.

### **Race, Numbers, and Powerlessness**

Without careful consideration of the circumstances surrounding each removal, it would be anthropologically unsound to speculate about why the military displaced each group. However, drawing on the Chagossian case and the traits shared by the displaced, some general characterizations can be made. The displacement of the Chagossians and some of the other cases may be characterized as a kind of “strategic population cleansing.” Andrew Bell-Fialkoff’s *Ethnic Cleansing* (1996) defines population cleansing as “a planned, deliberate removal from a certain territory of an undesirable population distinguished by one or more characteristics such as ethnic, religious, race, class, or sexual preference” (1996:3-4). Base displacements are thus examples of strategic population cleansings because they are “directed against...politically unreliable

populations as a whole” and are “usually applied to sensitive military areas” (Bell-Fialkoff 1996:54).

The base displacements should not be considered ethnic cleansings because they were not carried out as a result of a group’s particular ethnicity, even if they have endangered the existence of the displaced as ethnic and indigenous groups. Instead, displaced groups were often removed because U.S. officials viewed them as politically unreliable populations that would likely pose problems for base life. U.S. officials saw them as politically unreliable because of the groups’ ethnicities, because the groups were so-called Third World peoples who were neither of European ancestry nor U.S. citizens. This likely became the basis for many of their expulsions.

Bell-Fialkoff explains how cleansing targets those who are different and seen as a threat to a nation’s institutions:

Cleansing is directed against a [group] that is deemed to be a threat to a collectivity and the integrity of its institutions. Often, the [group] is a minority that conspicuously differs from the rest of the population. Such a minority is perceived as a fifth column that can either rebel against central authorities or ally itself with an external enemy.... Populations in recently acquired territories are also often untrustworthy. It is not surprising, therefore, that cleansing has often been applied to newly conquered territories.<sup>61</sup> [Bell-Fialkoff 1996:57.]

The officials who crafted the Strategic Island Concept and ordered the Chagossians removal saw them and other Third World peoples in this way—as untrustworthy and potentially dangerous fifth columns that might endanger the life of a base.

At another level, the military displaced the Chagossians and similar groups not because of any specific fears or calculations but because military officials prefer not to have to interact with local populations and, just as importantly, because they could. That

is, because officials had the power to do so. In her study of Vieques, Katherine McCaffrey writes, “Bases are frequently established on the political margins of national territory, on lands occupied by ethnic or cultural minorities or otherwise disadvantaged populations” (2002:9-10). While the military generally selects base sites at a regional level on strategic grounds, McCaffrey points to how the selection of specific locations is heavily influenced at a local level by the ease of land acquisition. The ease with which the military can acquire land is in turn strongly related to the relative powerlessness of a group, which is usually closely linked to a number of factors including a group’s ethnicity, socially defined race, nationality, numerical strength, and economic and political power. These factors often determine where bases are built and who is displaced by shaping the vulnerability of a population to displacement. (In the case of Fayetteville, North Carolina’s Fort Bragg Army base, the location of the base was determined in no small part by the ease with which the government could evict black, Scotch, and Native American farmers and sharecroppers, as well as smallholders and renters, the majority of the population in the area (Lutz 2001:26-27).)

In this way, base displacement resembles many forms of violence that tend to afflict the poor, the black, and the powerless. Viewing base displacement within many forms of violence affecting those most vulnerable, one sees the “ease with which humans are capable of reducing the socially vulnerable into expendable nonpersons and assuming the license—even the duty” at times, to take actions that will do them harm (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2005:19). This is what U.S. officials involved in Diego Garcia did with the Chagossians. In planning and ordering the Chagossians’ expulsion, or in carrying out the orders and never challenging the removal, hundreds of U.S. officials

participated in a kind of violence against the Chagossians, treating them as disposables, as “rubbish people,” as less than fully human (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2005:21).

Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois write,

The mad, the differently abled, the mentally vulnerable have often fallen into this category of the unworthy living, as have the very old and infirm, the sick-poor, and, of course, the despised racial, religious, sexual, and ethnic groups of the moment. Erik Eriksen referred to ‘pseudo-speciation’ as the human tendency to classify some individuals or social groups as less than fully human. [Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2005:21.]

While pseudo-speciation is “a prerequisite to genocide” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2005:21), so too it is a subtle part of other forms of violence like base displacement.

### **Racism and Double Displacement**

Race and racism thus seem to play a different role in base displacement than in older forms of empire. Whereas race and racism were the explicit ideologies of European imperialism (DuBois 1965[1946]; Arendt 1951), in more recent history, race and racism appear to play a prominent role in structuring the vulnerability of those who will be displaced while serving as a subtler, internal ideological influence for officials to “assume the license” to displace the racialized (the next chapter discusses this further).

The Chagossian case illustrates this shift. As a people, the Chagossians have been displaced twice—once as enslaved people and indentured laborers taken to work on Chagos by the British and French empires and once expelled from Chagos to Mauritius and Seychelles at the behest of the American Empire. The result in both cases has been the profound disruption and impoverishment of their lives. Though racism played different roles in the displacements, both are examples of how, in different ways, as Leith

Mullings says, “racism works through modes of dispossession,” turning “perceived differences, generally regarded as indelible and unchangeable, into inequality” (2005:684).

### **Numbers Alone?**

One might counter that population size has been more influential in determining which groups the military would displace. In a post-war environment that (largely) frowned upon the type of large-scale population cleansings that characterized previous centuries,<sup>62</sup> the victims of base displacement were indeed removed because they were small, isolated populations—at very least this made removal relatively simple and inexpensive. U.S. officials seem in several cases to have believed that removals were justified by what they saw as the limited impact of removing a small number of people, especially when weighed against the gains to be realized from a base. Henry Kissinger exemplified this attitude when he said of the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands, “There are only 90,000 people out there. Who gives a damn” (Kiste 1974:198). (From the perspective of Chagossians and others, as we have seen, there was nothing limited about the effects of displacement.) But in the Chagossian case, there was certainly a calculation that the likely political costs of removal were minimal because the displaced were so small in number and so powerless that few would notice, let alone protest.

Another island comparison suggests, however, how socially defined race and ethnicity, not just numbers, are fundamental to the base displacement phenomenon. In Japan’s Bonin-Volcano islands (Iwo Jima among them), before World War II there were roughly 7,000 inhabitants. The islanders were the descendents of the islands’ 19<sup>th</sup>

century settlers who came from Japan and in smaller numbers from the United States and Europe.

In 1944, after the start of U.S. attacks on the islands, Japanese officials evacuated the islanders to Japan's main islands. After the U.S. capture of the islands and the end of the war, the Coordinating Committee of the Navy and the Departments of War and State prohibited the return of the local people to allow unhindered military use of the islands. In 1946, U.S. officials "modified" the decision: They would "permit the return of those residents of Caucasian extraction who had been forcibly removed to Japan during the war and who had petitioned the United States to return." A Navy briefing reported that "approximately 130 in this category were repatriated and with their families are now the sole permanent residents of the islands" (Jackson 1964:3-4).

The Navy helped the repatriated Bonin islanders establish self-government with an annually elected Bonin Island Council. The Military Governor created a Bonin-Volcano Trust Fund for the islanders from fees and profits earned on the islands. The islands featured a barbershop, teahouse, laundry, and a cooperative trading company to market agricultural products in Guam. The U.S. Government did not, however, grant the islanders' requests for U.S. citizenship, finding them to be Japanese nationals (Jackson 1964:4-6).

In 1947, Bonin islanders of Japanese descent began petitioning the U.S. and Japanese governments to return. In 1953, the State, Defense, and Interior departments concluded that,

Because of the strategic interest of the United States in the Bonin-Volcano Islands, it is agreed that during the present unstable security situation in the Pacific, the status-quo should be maintained with respect to United

States control over the Bonin-Volcano Islands and with respect to the policy of retaining the Bonin-Volcano Islands closed to further colonization, as established by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee. [Jackson 1964:6.]

President Eisenhower affirmed the policy four years later. In 1961, the U.S. Government paid the islanders of Japanese ancestry \$6 million in compensation in the (ultimately failed) hope of stemming their repatriation claims (Jackson 1964:4-6). The U.S. Government maintained the policy of refusing repatriation to those of Japanese descent until 1968, when under continued pressure the islands were returned to Japanese sovereignty.

At least one similar case exists, on Ascension Island, part of the British territory of Saint Helena in the Atlantic Ocean. There, about 1,000 islanders who are mostly of mixed ancestry, the descendents of English settlers and enslaved Africans, live and work next to a U.S. base in place since World War II. Together the Bonin-Volcanos and Ascension underline how the pattern of base displacement has been shaped to some extent by population size but as importantly by a closely intertwined nexus of a people's skin color, one's status in the colonial hierarchy, and one's relative wealth and power.

## CHAPTER 10

### FOREIGN POLICY AS DEHUMANIZED ABSTRACTION

In early 2005, I asked Robert Murray at his office at the Center for Naval Analyses how he assesses the base now. He said the planners “were enormously prescient” about the importance of the Middle East and southwest Asia. “The base has proved remarkably useful. Refueling, resupply, logistics base.... It is a place that’s proved to be valuable in the context of naval operations in the Middle East—and you can argue about whether you like the military operations in the Middle East, that’s another story. But the base itself has facilitated those operations.”

I asked Murray if there were discussions about the fate of the Chagossians. He said there had been, but that “it was something the British thought they could manage. We didn’t, we didn’t try to get ourselves involved in it. Unless [Jeffery] Kitchen and State did. We had the practical interest in having the base. And the British said that they could manage the transition. And they went about it and some of it was legal and some of it was otherwise. They were doing whatever they were doing. To the best of my knowledge they weren’t consulting with us on the—now maybe that’s not true, but I don’t remember it anyway.”

“And your sense was that you wanted to leave that to them and it was something you didn’t particularly look into, or—” I asked, before Murray jumped in.

“Yeah, we wanted to leave it to the British, I think, to manage that transition of the people and the sovereignty. We saw that as their responsibility. It was their island....

We personally saw, in Defense, no need or opportunity for us to inject ourselves—at least that’s how I saw it at the time.”

Murray’s memory of the Chagossians reflects a striking consistency in former officials’ responses when I asked what they remembered thinking about the Chagossians at the time. Almost all remembered spending little time thinking about the group. The people, the officials said, were never a “priority item.” They were, as James Noyes put it, a “nitty gritty” detail that they never examined. They were something to which officials turned a “blind eye.” Or, as another put it, the removal was just a “*fait accompli*...a given” that never needed any thought. Noyes said that by the time he arrived at the State Department in 1970, there was no policy analysis about Diego Garcia because the base was treated as already being in place. There was no questioning of the British about, “‘What are you guys doing with the natives?’” he said. “It was an accepted part of the scenery.”

Murray explained that the British “relieved us of a lot of problems. I mean, we didn’t have to think through [the question of the removals] anymore. We didn’t have to decide how we were going to manage our force relative to the local population because there wasn’t a local population.” In the minds of officials, even prior to the deportations, the Chagossians were already gone. Once the 1966 agreement was signed under which the British promised to remove the Chagossians, strategically speaking, the expulsion had become a given and the Chagossians had already been removed.

Other issues, however, were not treated as nitty gritty to be left to the British. In the State Department, Stoddart explained that after the start of construction, the embassy in London and the Department left most of the “modalities of the arrangement” to the

Navy and their British military counterparts. The embassy only got involved on declared policy issues like the PSI (pounds per square inch) strength of the runway (with its implications for what aircraft can use a runway).

Indeed, the persistence of Navy officials and others in the national security bureaucracy, including Nitze, Komer, and Kitchen, to focus detailed attention on the creation of the base year after year, despite significant resistance, is a prominent theme in the history of Diego Garcia. This determination required a concerted focus on successive proposals for the base and careful bureaucratic maneuvering to secure funding. Clearly there was a categorization in the minds of officials between those issues worthy of attention and issues so undeserving of attention that they were not even considered issues—after all, the policy was specifically designed to let the British worry about and take care of the population “problem.” Once that policy was in place almost no one in the bureaucracy questioned it.

Some undoubtedly would argue that the Government was justified in having the Chagossians removed because national security interests were sufficiently important to warrant the removals. The history of the base shows something more disturbing, something to which the comments of Murray and others allude. Government officials never justified the expulsion on the basis of national security. In fact they gave the expulsion little thought, never, as far as my research has shown, offering any explicit justification. They simply did it. The history of the base shows that officials wanted the islands cleansed of inhabitants and they took the steps to make it so.

### **A “Dehumanized Pattern of Decision Making”**

In 1971, Anthony Lake, a National Security Council official who resigned from the Nixon administration to protest the invasion of Cambodia, and another former NSC and State Department official, Roger Morris, published an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine diagnosing how Government officials pursued such tragic policy in Vietnam (Lake and Morris 1971; see Power 2002).<sup>63</sup> Lake and Morris note how following publication of the “Pentagon Papers,” many were shocked to see “so little mention of the enormous human costs and consequences of the policy—either here at home or in Indochina” (Lake and Morris 1971:157). This neglect of the human costs of war is far from an aberration, Lake and Morris argue. Instead, they say U.S. policy in Vietnam reflected a basic way of thinking about foreign policy—a “basic mental set”—shared among U.S. policymakers and the public alike. The war and its policies reflected a way of viewing foreign policy as a “lifeless, bloodless set of abstractions” (Lake and Morris 1971:158).

Lake and Morris explain further that “a liberalism attempting to deal with intensely human problems at home abruptly but naturally shifts to abstract concepts when making decisions about events beyond the water’s edge. ‘Nations,’ ‘interests,’ ‘influence,’ ‘prestige’—all are disembodied and dehumanized terms which encourage easy inattention to the real people whose lives our decisions affect or even end” (Lake and Morris 1971:158-159). The policies in Vietnam, they say, can be understood as the unsurprising result of a “dehumanized pattern of decision-making” shared by Republicans and Democrats alike (Lake and Morris 1971). Three decades later, as Samantha Power points out, Lake was the Clinton Administration National Security Advisor who oversaw U.S. policies that may in some cases have been more attuned to

human suffering but still allowed genocides to go largely unchecked in Bosnia and Rwanda (Power 2002:294-295, 365-377).

The planners and policymakers who shaped Diego Garcia policy shared many aspects of this “mental set.” (Many involved in Diego Garcia, like McNamara, Nitze, and Komer, were of course the same officials who crafted policy on Vietnam.) Although hundreds of officials worked in ways small and large over at least 16 years to engineer the expulsion and the development of the base, the history of Diego Garcia reveals striking patterns of thought and action similar to those identified by Lake and Morris. The consistency of thought was especially prominent with regard to the decision to remove the Chagossians. Most glaringly, with only two or three exceptions, there was no opposition to the expulsion. The decision to build a base also found a broad degree of unanimity, although there were pockets of powerfully placed, stubborn resistance on financial grounds.

Within the patterns of thought and action visible in the archival record and my interviews, I find among Government officials a set of shared social, cultural, and psychological dispositions coupled with common bureaucratic practices that help explain why and how officials displaced the Chagossians. This set of dispositions and practices represents a shared, dehumanized approach to foreign policymaking shaped in part by the imperial nature of the United States and inculcated by the bureaucracy in which officials served and the society in which they lived. By “dehumanized” I mean a foreign policymaking that generally ignored the human impacts of officials’ actions.<sup>64</sup> Gusterson (1996) points to a similar process among nuclear weapons designers where the work,

practices, and discourses of a weapons lab “produce” its scientists as individuals, shaping their thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and ways of being in the world.

This is not to suggest that there was complete uniformity among government officials. It is only to say that one can see some generally shared ways of thinking and acting among a specific set of actors working on a specific issue at a specific time. I identify several of the defining qualities of this approach to policymaking through the rest of this chapter.<sup>65</sup>

This approach to policymaking is important because as Derek Gregory says (quoting James Der Derian), “More than a rational calculation of interests” determines the actions of governments and their officials (2004:20). Dispositions, practices, and ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking about oneself and others also shape actions. And so the qualities I identify below help explain how officials came to remove the Chagossians, paying so little attention to their lives and the expulsion’s effects. In this kind of policymaking that generally ignored the human impacts of their actions one sees an important way in which the American Empire shaped the lives of people in the national security bureaucracy, how they thought about and acted in the world, and the injuries they inflicted on others (see Lutz 2001). To any extent that aspects of this approach to foreign policy were and are shared by other citizens of the United States, the impact of American Empire extends further.

### **A Generation Shaped by War**

The men involved in Diego Garcia were almost all from the generation that fought in World War II. “They were fond of pointing out that they were the generation which had

fought the war,” Halberstam notes. Full of confidence from having conquered the Axis, “there was a sense that these were brilliant men, men of force, not cruel, not harsh, but men who acted rather than waited.” It was, as Halberstam observed, “an Olympian age,” and the people crafting foreign policy were its gods, full of “virility” and power, combining traditional notions of American [U.S.] masculinity revolving around physical force with the supposed heights of intellectual power (2001:42-44).

George Vest found that the war experience gave Government officials a “common base.” A small reference to the war, to serving in Italy or in the North African campaign, would provide an immediate bond for the men with whom he worked—to be able to say as a State Department official like Vest did with his colleagues at the Pentagon, “I was an observer at Casino.”

“I was—I just have to say I was one of the lucky generation,” Vest said.

Because our crowd that survived the Depression and realized that you could be very poor and manage, somehow, and then, didn't have to wonder what we were going to do when we graduated from college.... because you were going to go right into the army. And if you survived the war, you then came back, and there was a lot of help, which the government had put into place. And then, the rest of us who then went into the Foreign Service, have been the lucky ones. To live through the whole—50 years when we were trying to build something on the basis of the things that we had managed to do collectively together, in the wartime, and the postwar period.... Our 50 years was—was great. We were lucky.... You had so much that you could do. You had so much common background. It was that commonality, which, you know, just made life so much [] easier and more fun.... We shared so much [in our war experiences] all the time. It was great.

One sees in Vest's words how this generation faced their post-war policymaking as men shaped in profound ways by feelings of accomplishment, power, and possibility stemming from their common histories of Depression, wartime victory, and veterans'

affirmative action (Sacks 1994). Together, these men faced the post-war world with a (largely) unconscious belief that they were pursuing a shared and fundamentally righteous national mission that could not possibly go astray.

### **Belief in the Efficacy of Military Force**

Not surprisingly given the generation's wartime experience, the plans for Diego Garcia and the Strategic Island Concept were premised on using military force to control an increasingly uncontrollable world (Mann 2004:362).<sup>66</sup> As previously discussed, after leaving World War II as the most powerful nation on Earth, the officials who crafted the Diego Garcia policy grew anxious about the relative decline of U.S. power amid the rise of the Soviet Union and China and the uncertainties of decolonization. Shaped by the experience of having watched and participated in the triumphant victory of U.S. military power at war as well as by a growing militarization of the United States (Sherry 1995; Lens 1987; Lutz 2001) and a "strongly interventionist cast of domestic opinion" (Porter 2005:x), officials developed plans to control the future through military force.<sup>67</sup>

### **Assumptions about Masculinity and Male Supremacy**

The power that officials felt and exercised was also related to the fact that every official involved in any significant way in Diego Garcia was a man.<sup>68</sup> In the post-war Olympian age (Halberstam 2001:42-44), the gods of foreign policy were unquestioningly male gods. And among these men, toughness, strength, efficiency, rationality, hardness were the most admired qualities. These were seen as male qualities that were best demonstrated by tough policies involving the use of force and a fearless attitude in

confronting the Soviets. Paraphrasing Adam Hochschild, when you came from a generation raised on war, violence, and toughness, and when war (cold and hot), violence, and toughness remained the unquestioned order of the day, wielding violence efficiently was regarded as a manly virtue (1999:123). Any signs of weakness, doubt, or concerns for human suffering were denigrated as womanly, female, and weak. “To talk of suffering is to lose ‘effectiveness,’ almost to lose one’s grip,” Lake and Morris note of the attitude prevalent within the national security bureaucracy. “It is seen as a sign that one’s ‘rational’ arguments are weak” (Lake and Morris 1971:160). To appeal to suffering, for these men, would have been to appeal to an entity that was not considered a proper part of cost-benefit analysis; it would have been as if one needed to invoke the supernatural, and a decidedly female supernatural, to bolster one’s arguments.

The best and the brightest generation was a male generation that demonstrated its maleness though through exterior displays of force, through a war in Vietnam, and through policies like that on Diego Garcia based on the seizure and cleansing of territory and the deployment of force, rather than, as Halberstam points out, through more interior forms of strength that might have entailed “a good deal of domestic political risk” (2001:746).<sup>69</sup>

### **Rational Economic Analysis**

In this environment privileging rationality and toughness, the rational economic analysis of the Whiz Kids, of “stockpiling” islands as “commodities,” and “investing” in bases in the present to obtain future “benefits,” helped shape a particular version of reality (Cohn 1990; Gusterson 1996).<sup>70</sup> This reality turned islands and the people living on them into

things (commodities), like interchangeable widgets, that could be owned and controlled. (A vice admiral on the military staff of the UN delegation noted that islands as large as Mauritius, Guam, and Bermuda were “little specks of nothing more than [] strategic value” (Lebourgeois 1964).)

This language and form of analysis helped shield officials from the impact of the expulsion on Chagossians’ lives and the emotional impact that a more frank discussion about the human impact of their work might have entailed. The language and analysis reduced Diego Garcia to its strategic value alone and the military, economic, and political gain it might bring to the United States. This erased the Chagossians and any notion that the costs in a cost-benefit analysis might include those felt by the humans affected by policy.

I asked Earl Ravenal the head of the Systems Analysis team that opposed the creation of the base on cost-benefit grounds if any discussion of the Chagossians surfaced in his work. Ravenal said he had “heard about birds” on the island—some flightless rails, he thought—but “very little” about any people. “It was sort of out in the middle of, we thought, nowhere,” he explained. “We thought nowhere because even though someone may have mentioned that there were some coconut farmers there, it didn’t register. I never heard a single thing. Just birds. That’s all.”

“Why do you think it didn’t register?” I asked.

“Well,” Ravenal paused. “The mindset of almost anyone on the political-military side of government, they simply were not sensitized to those kinds of issues,” Ravenal replied. “And I think it would have been my assumption, if you had twelve hundred people there, if you’re going to have a military base there...everyone’s better off getting

them off there. But I would have made the assumption in my mind—but probably not bothered to check it out, I have to admit—that we were going to give them a lot of money and relocate them somewhere. Now if we didn't, I think that's a terrible shame. Because if you take the amount of money that will make someone happy—buy another house and some land or something, learn a trade—it's not a lot of money. I mean when you think about what we're spending on this, we could buy off...almost anyone in the world.”

A perhaps unconscious part of this blindness to the costs borne by the Chagossians seems to have been an assumption that because the group was small in number, their costs, especially when compared to the interests of the U.S. Government, were so small as to be incalculable. Meanwhile, government officials in Washington calculated that there were few if any costs of doing nothing to help the Chagossians after the removals were underway. And to this point, officials have largely been correct: The U.S. Government has faced few political or economic costs as a result of ignoring the Chagossians' plight—a day of House subcommittee testimony and the recent defense of a relatively easily dismissed lawsuit aside—while the Government has enjoyed all the benefits of the base.<sup>71</sup>

### **Nationalism, Ethnocentrism, and Belief in the Correctness of Their Aims and Actions**

With few exceptions, officials never doubted the correctness of their aims for Diego Garcia and the actions they deemed necessary to achieve that objective (see also Mann 2002:362).<sup>72</sup> I asked George Vest if he disagreed in any ways with the Diego policy. “I didn't have that deep a sense, [that] deep a feeling about it,” he explained. “There was

never any conflict. My attitude, which I expressed, was what I call an inner internal marginal attitude. I accepted the premises which led us to do what we were doing there without any real questioning.” That he and the United States were doing good in the world, Vest and others took as a given. Or as James Noyes said, “It was taken as a given good.”

“For all their brilliance and hubris and sense of themselves,” Halberstam says, the best and brightest generation was “swept forward by their belief in the importance of anti-Communism (and the dangers of not paying sufficient homage to it) and by the sense of power and glory, omnipotence and omniscience of America in this century. They were America” (2001:746). Diego Garcia shows how officials’ priorities—for example, about the self-defense of the United States, the protection of national interests, or personal advancement—could eclipse the needs and wishes of the Chagossians and other island peoples. At times the ethnocentrism was so extreme as to almost literally erase the Chagossians. A 1967 CIA Board of National Estimates memorandum described the BIOT as having a land area in square miles so small it was deemed “N/A.” The BIOT’s population earned only four letters: “NEGL,” meaning “negligible” (CIA Board of National Estimates 1967).<sup>73</sup>

### **Racism**

That racism contributed to how officials thought about and treated the Chagossians is clear enough. Race and racism defined two of the main criteria for the selection of Diego Garcia as a base site. First, under the Strategic Island Concept’s criteria, islands selected for base development were to have small populations that could be removed prior to the

start of base construction. Government planners envisioned finding small islands with small native populations that, like the Bikinians, the Government could easily remove.<sup>74</sup> Second, the Strategic Island Concept held that islands selected for base development had to be controlled by the United States or by a Western ally; not by a non-Western, non-white government.

Because Chagossians were “black,” because Chagossians were small in number and lacked any political or economic clout, planners could regard them as insignificant, could disregard them as a factor, and could think of them (in the moments that officials gave them any thought) as “negligible.”<sup>75</sup> “The fact is that nobody cared very much about these populations,” Gary Sick explained. “It was more of a 19<sup>th</sup> century decision, thought-process, than a 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century thought process. And I think that was the bind they got caught in. That this was sort of colonial thinking after the fact, about what you could do.”

### **Attention to Local Peoples Only Out of Self-Interest**

Human considerations were not, of course, absent from officials’ thoughts. The impact of humans on overseas bases was a primary impetus for developing Diego Garcia. Yet the focus on people was entirely directed at ensuring the longevity of the global base network and U.S. geostrategic positioning. Officials assumed local people to be a problem; they designed a base policy to eliminate that problem. “I would say the Americans were pleased to let the British do their dirty work for them,” Sick said, “to clean the place out, to set the thing up, to take care of all the messy political side. And

the United States would then come in and take advantage of the military capabilities. And I think that's sort of the way it worked."

### **Bureaucratic Momentum**

Once policymakers had crafted a strategic plan, the plan and the objectives of the plan took on a life of their own, trumping other considerations. Like the deportation of the Bikinians before them, the removal of the Chagossians was an obstacle, a step in a bureaucratic process to achieve a policy objective. The plan's ends not only justified the means, they also obscured the means, making most officials inclined to forget the means altogether. Noyes says, "It was just a momentum of a policy decision that nobody quarreled with. It was—not discussed. It was taken as a given, to my knowledge."

Once the plan gained momentum within the bureaucracy, moreover, it became increasingly difficult to challenge what was seen as established policy (especially as a relatively minor project among dozens in an average week's busy schedule<sup>76</sup>). "We in OSD never, to the best of my knowledge, spent a lot of time talking about whether that was a good or bad thing," Murray said. "The Brits were going to do it. The Navy wanted it—AHHHH," he continued, punctuating his sentence with a throat clearing. "I don't remember the story that...there were actually people who'd been there for five generations. Maybe that's because I was too casual to notice or maybe that's because I never knew it."

I asked Jock Stoddart, who oversaw much of the implementation of the removals, if anyone ever investigated the reports received from Ambassador Brewer about the Chagossians' poor treatment. "My answer would be, I don't think so," Stoddart

responded. “I doubt if the Navy sent somebody that was interested in human rights out to Diego to look into this. I think the Navy’s attitude was, accept what the British say, and turn a blind eye to whatever was going on.”

State and Defense officials chose the same tack. “It was, I would say, an issue that was lurking in the background but generally ignored,” Stoddart explained. “We w[ere] all leaving the whole problem up to the British—to justify, rationalize, whatever. We were quite aware that our original—the original information that we had received from the British was wrong: That this was an uninhabited archipelago. I think we fully accepted that fact,” he continued. “Despite what our embassy in Port St. Louis [sic] reported, it was just not a priority item.”

### **Bureaucratic Distance**

The few instances in which some Government officials saw the human dimensions of the Diego policy are important to note. The questions and objections raised by the Navy Seabee advance team and by Ambassador Brewer in Mauritius seem to point to the significance of proximity in shaping policymakers’ awareness of the human impacts of their policies. It appears an unlikely coincidence that the two major objections to the treatment of the Chagossians came from some of the only U.S. officials ever to get anywhere near Diego Garcia. (The State Department’s Legal Advisor also raised concerns about the treatment of the Chagossians in 1970, although it is unclear if they were motivated by concern for the Chagossians’ welfare or by a desire to protect the U.S. Government from potential legal liability.)

Samantha Power points to the significance of proximity in U.S. policymakers' reluctance to stop genocide. In the case of the Rwandan genocide, Power writes, "The Americans who wanted the United States to do the most were those who knew Rwanda best" (2002:364). These were also unfortunately the officials who had the least power within the bureaucracy. "In contrast, those with the most pull...had never visited Rwanda or met any Rwandans" (Power 2002:365). This lack of familiarity with and physical distance from the people involved makes it far more likely that killings, in the case of genocide, or expulsions, in the case of the Chagossians, "will become abstractions" (Power 2002:365).<sup>77</sup>

Lake and Morris capture much of the effect of geographical and, as they put it, spiritual distance:

We remember, more clearly than we care to, the well carpeted stillness and isolation of those government offices where some of the Pentagon Papers were first written. The efficient staccato of the typewriter, the antiseptic whiteness of nicely margined memoranda, the affable, authoritative and always urbane men who wrote them—all of it is a spiritual as well as geographic world apart from piles of decomposing bodies in a ditch outside Hue or a village bombed in Laos, the burn ward of a children's hospital in Saigon, or even a cemetery or veteran's hospital here. It was possible in that isolated atmosphere, and perhaps psychologically necessary, to dull one's awareness of the direct link between those memoranda and the human sufferings with which they were concerned. [Lake and Morris 1971:159.]

### **Bureaucratic Power**

Lake and Morris speak to the power of bureaucracy to shape a vision of the world among Government officials disconnected from the suffering of those affected by their policies.

After the 1966 agreement, no one within the U.S. Government was responsible for

considering the human impacts of the base or overseeing treatment of the Chagossians. As Noyes pointed out, there was no human rights office responsible for the Chagossians. This left a bureaucratic hole—or what Ambassador Brewer called “bureaucratic neglect” and the dispersal of responsibility within the U.S. Government (1971:5)—with Chagossians falling outside the purview of official’s work.

The nature of bureaucratic hierarchy also shielded officials from looking carefully at the expulsion policy. High-level policymakers like Nitze, Komer, and the admirals in the Navy effectively crafted the policy. Once they ordered the removal, they left most of the detailed work to their subordinates and to their subordinates’ subordinates. This allowed those at the higher levels to ignore their decision and its human impacts. The subordinates on the other hand could say (as several did to me) that they were not the policymakers, that they were simply carrying out the orders of their superiors and the U.S. Government. One could always consider oneself, as George Vest did, as “a late-time arriver and a presider.”

The division of bureaucratic tasks, especially in a project that developed over so many years, had a similar effect, most notably with Government officials’ knowledge about the nature of Chagossians’ habitation in Chagos. The Navy and others in the government knew there was a settled, native population in Chagos since at least the first survey of Diego Garcia in 1957. At times until after the 1966 agreement, however, British officials represented the Chagossians as (to greater and lesser degrees) a population of migrant laborers. Some U.S. officials unfamiliar with the background of Diego Garcia would genuinely have believed this, while also choosing not to investigate the story further. Others knew the story to be either untrue or suspected as much. Most

officials were, as Sick said, pleased to take the British Government's word on the matter. This allowed the fiction to perpetuate within the bureaucracy by omission alone.

### **Individual Self-Interest**

Individual self-interest made it equally unlikely that officials would challenge orders and policy in a system that fed them, paid their salaries, offered careers, and provided an identity. Adam Hochschild's study of Belgian violence in the Congo is instructive. Because Belgian authorities sanctioned the violence, "for a white man to rebel meant challenging the entire system that provided your livelihood. Everyone around you was participating. By going along with the system, you were paid, promoted, awarded medals" (Hochschild 1999:121-122).<sup>78</sup>

As Brewer's failed protests show, even to have challenged the expulsion would likely have been fruitless save for those at the highest echelons like Nitze, Komer, department secretaries, and the admirals. "The individual bureaucrat cannot squirm out of the apparatus in which he is harnessed," Max Weber wrote half a century earlier. "The professional bureaucrat is chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence. In the great majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march. The official is entrusted with specialized tasks and normally the mechanism cannot be put into motion or arrested by him, but only from the very top" (Lemert 1993:119).

### **Bureaucratic Self-Interest**

Bureaucratic self-interest and inter-departmental competition similarly hindered officials from objecting to the treatment of the Chagossians. When Brewer issued his objections, an Air Force official criticized him severely in a memorandum. Although Brewer's State Department superiors knew the Air Force undersecretary was being "intemperate and at times illogical," they chose not to challenge him on an issue they considered minor and which they perceived might harm other departmental priorities (Cohen 1972).

A similar dynamic seems to have held for the State Department and the Government as a whole in their relationships with the British Government. Of the numerous issues considered by the governments together, U.S. officials were unlikely to challenge the British over the welfare of the Chagossians. I asked Noyes if the U.S. Government had been conscientious in its handling of the people. "That's tough to say," Noyes replied. "It wasn't our—it was a British show and a British responsibility. I suspect within the spectrum of all that goes on between governments, that was not something we probably would have selected to hammer the British on. I don't know. Maybe we should have."

"It would have felt like hammering?" I asked.

"Well—I mean if—" Noyes started hesitatingly. "Or discussing, or pushing, whatever term you want to use. In other words, making an issue out of it, and suggesting that they're not doing a good job. Maybe we did. I don't know."

### **“Like Questioning Apple Pie”**

The insular and hierarchical nature of the bureaucracy also seems to have shifted the ends to which officials were working. Within the bureaucracy, the interests and concerns of the Government, of one's department, and of the President overwhelmed interests exterior to the bureaucracy. In many ways, the common end for officials became the bureaucracy itself. Weber explains again, “The individual bureaucrat is thus forged to the community of all the functionaries who are integrated into the mechanism. They have a common interest in seeing that the mechanism continues its functions and that the societally exercised authority carries on” (Lemert 1993:119).

“It was—the question, the ethical question of the workers and so on,” James Noyes said hesitatingly of the Diego policy, “simply wasn't, wasn't in the spectrum. It wasn't discussed. No one realized, I don't think [] the human aspects of it. Nobody was there or had been there, or was close enough to it, so. It was like questioning apple pie or something.”

## CHAPTER 11

### *LALIT CHAGOSSIEN: THE CHAGOSSIAN STRUGGLE*

In May 1973, the last boatload of Chagossians deported from Chagos refused to disembark in Mauritius. The group of about 125 demanded that they be returned to Chagos or receive compensation and housing. For days the Chagossians remained on board in what a local newspaper called “deplorable” conditions before the Mauritian Government finally convinced them to leave the boat (Le Mauricien 1973). The Government paid adults MRs5, children MRs3, and gave 19 families what turned out to be dilapidated apartments, amidst pigs, cows, and other farm animals, in the slums of Port Louis. Twelve other families found their own housing, crowding into the shacks of relatives and friends (L’Express 1973).<sup>79</sup>

A tradition of resistance among Chagossians—what would become known as *lalit chagossien* [the Chagossian struggle]—started in 1968 as soon as the first islanders were prevented from returning to their homes and stranded in Mauritius. In 1971, when the administrator of the BIOT announced that Diego Garcia would be closed and all its inhabitants displaced, Chagossians protested against leaving “their ‘own country’” (Todd 1971).

After the last boatload was convinced to disembark, protests continued when Chagossians in Mauritius still had received none of their promised resettlement assistance. “We, the inhabitants of Chagos Islands—Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos, Salomon, have been uprooted from those islands because the Mauritian Government sold the islands to the British Government to build a base,” declared a 1975 petition to the

British Government demanding action. “Our ancestors were slaves on those islands, but we know that we are the heirs of those islands,” the signatories wrote. The petition cited failed promises of compensation made by British agents in Chagos. It detailed “at least 40 persons” who “died through sorrow, poverty and lack of food and care” in exile. The Chagossians asked the British Government to “urge” the Mauritian Government to provide land, housing, and jobs or to return them to their islands (Saminaden, et al. 1975).

The petition, along with numerous other pleas to the governments of Britain, the United States, Mauritius, and Seychelles, went unheeded. Finally in 1978, after six years of protests and pressure, the Government of Mauritius paid compensation to some Chagossians from the £650,000 it received from the British Government in 1972. Although a majority requested that the compensation come as housing, eligible Chagossians instead received cash payments. Many families received no money and Chagossians in Seychelles got nothing.

Even for those who received the payments, the money proved “hopelessly inadequate” (Madeley 1985:7). It paid off some debts incurred since their arrival but generally was too little to purchase land or a house, let alone to provide full restitution. Six months later, a group of eight Chagossian women went on a hunger strike to protest their conditions. After living with their families under tarpaulin sheets for two months following the destruction of their rented shacks in a cyclone and their subsequent eviction from emergency housing by the Mauritian Government, the protesters demanded proper housing. “Give us a house; if not, return us to our country, Diego,” one of their flyers read (Le Mauricien 1978).

The hunger strike lasted 21 days in an office of the Mauritian Militant Party (MMM), a leftist opposition party whose leaders, including future Prime Minister Paul Bérenger, had assisted the Chagossians' struggle since the first arrivals in 1968. Later that year, four Chagossians were jailed for resisting the police when Mauritian authorities tore down their shackles (Madeley 1985:7). Both protests yielded few concrete results but added to mounting political momentum.

In 1979, again with MMM assistance, Chagossians engaged British lawyer Bernard Sheridan to negotiate with the British Government about providing additional compensation. Sheridan was already suing the United Kingdom on behalf of Michel Vincatassin, a Chagossian who charged that he had been forcibly removed from his and his ancestors' homeland. British officials reportedly offered £1.25 million of additional compensation to the group on the condition that Vincatassin drop his case and Chagossians sign deeds "in full and final settlement," waiving future suits and "all our claims and rights (if any) of whatsoever nature to return to the British Indian Ocean Territory" (Madeley 1985:6, 8, 15).

Sheridan came to Mauritius offering the money in exchange for the renunciation deeds. Initially many of the impoverished Chagossians signed them (more precisely, as most Chagossians were illiterate, the majority provided thumbprints on deeds written in English). When Chagossian and MMM leaders heard the terms of the deal, they halted the process and sent Sheridan back to London. A support group of Chagossians and Mauritians (many linked to the MMM) wrote to Sheridan to explain that the Chagossians who had "signed" the forms had done so without "alternative legal advice," and "as a

mere formality” to obtain compensation rather than out of agreement with its conditions. No money was disbursed.

Soon after, Chagossians demonstrated in the streets of Mauritius again, launching more hunger strikes and their largest protests yet in 1980 and 1981. One of the leaders was Rita Bancoult. Led by women, like Madame Bancoult, who repeatedly faced police intimidation, violence, and arrest, hundreds of Chagossians marched on the British High Commission, protested in front of government offices, and slept aside the streets of the Mauritian capitol. Chagossians again demanded the right to return to Chagos as well as immediate compensation, decent housing, and jobs. They also asked for recognition as refugees, a demand which was immediately rejected by the Mauritian Government, which considered Chagossians to be Mauritians who could not be refugees on Mauritian soil. A broad coalition of Mauritian political groups and unions, including the MMM and Lalit leaders, supported the Chagossians under the rallying cry *Rann Nu Diego*—Give Us Back Diego—uniting the Chagossians’ struggle with the demands of many Mauritians to return Chagos to Mauritian sovereignty and close the base (Le Mauricien 1981; Lalit 2002:113-117).

After an 18-day hunger strike and violent clashes that included the arrest of 6 Chagossian women and two Mauritian supporters, Mauritian Prime Minister Seewoosagur Ramgoolam left for London to meet British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The two governments agreed to hold talks on compensation with Chagossian representatives. After two rounds of negotiations, the British Government agreed to provide £4 million in compensation, with the Mauritian Government contributing land it valued at £1 million. In exchange, most Chagossians signed or thumb-printed

“renunciation forms” to protect the U.K. Government from further claims for compensation and the right to return. Many Chagossians have later disputed the legality of these forms and their knowledge of their contents (again written in English without translation).

### **Chagossians Take Charge**

In the wake of the compensation agreement, many Chagossians felt that their interests had not been well represented by some of their Mauritian spokespeople. Several, including prominent Chagossian leaders (and former hunger strikers) Charlesia Alexis and Aurelie Lisette Talate, created the first solely Chagossian support organization, the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG).<sup>80</sup> They were joined by Rita Bancoult’s 18-year-old son Louis Olivier Bancoult. They asked Olivier, one of the few Chagossians who had gone to secondary school and was literate, to join the leadership because many felt their lack of literacy had allowed the community to be manipulated in the past. The CRG pressed for the right to return and additional compensation throughout the 1980s and 1990s but showed little progress, gradually losing support within the community.

Another Chagossian organization, the Chagossian Social Committee (CSC), eventually assumed a leadership role under the guidance of its founders Fernand Mandarin and his Mauritian barrister Hervé Lassemillante. The group pursued out-of-court negotiations with the U.K., U.S., and Mauritian governments for compensation and the right to return. While the CSC had little success in pursuing negotiations, the group gained recognition for Chagossians as an indigenous people before the UN.<sup>81</sup>

### **New Approaches**

In 1997, two Chagossian women approached Mauritian attorney Sivakumaren Mardemootoo about bringing a lawsuit against the British Government challenging the legality of the expulsion. Mardemootoo discussed the matter with British solicitor Richard Gifford (of Bernard Sheridans's London firm) and on the strength of their case soon gained British legal aid to pursue the suit. To expand the plaintiff class, Mardemootoo approached CSC leaders to ask about their joining the case. He says he never heard from the CSC and on the day he made his inquiry the two women instructed him to stop working on their behalf. Gifford and Mardemootoo turned to the CRG, whose leaders had previously been interested in bringing a suit against the British. Working closely with Olivier Bancoult, by now the CRG's president, the lawyers filed a 1998 lawsuit that became known as *Regina ex parte Bancoult v. Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs 2000*. To the surprise and attention of people around the world, in November 2000, the British High Court in London found for the Chagossians, ruling that their expulsion was illegal under U.K. law (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2000*).

Almost immediately British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (who as a backbencher had been one of the Chagossians' few supporters in Parliament since the 1970s) announced that the Government would not appeal the judgment. "This Government has not defended what was done or said thirty years ago," Cook said and changed the laws of the BIOT to allow Chagossians to return to all of Chagos except Diego Garcia (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2006*).<sup>82</sup> Lacking the means to charter boats to visit Chagos let alone to resettle and reconstruct their shattered

societies, Chagossians filed a second suit against the Crown for compensation and money to finance a return and reconstruction. For the first time, they were joined in the suit by Chagossians in Seychelles, newly organized as the Chagos Social Committee (Seychelles).<sup>83</sup>

### **New Suits and New Disputes**

Across the Atlantic, Bancoult, the CRG, and the Chagossians in Seychelles enlisted the legal assistance of Michael Tigar, a prominent U.S. litigator known for bringing cases against Henry Kissinger and Augusto Pinochet and for representing clients including activist Angela Davis and Oklahoma City bomber Terry Nichols. Tigar filed a class action lawsuit (*Bancoult v. McNamara*) in Federal District Court against the U.S. Government, government officials who participated in the expulsion, like Robert McNamara and Donald Rumsfeld, and companies that assisted in the base construction, including the Halliburton Corporation. The suit accused the defendants of harms including forced relocation, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, and genocide. They asked the Court to grant the right of return, award compensation, and order an end to employment discrimination preventing Chagossians from working on the base.

This last aspect of the suit has highlighted divisions in the community over the base, although the issue has always remained subsidiary to near unified support for the right of return and compensation.<sup>84</sup> During the 1980-1981 protests, Chagossians protested under the Rann Nu Diego slogan, which included the demand to close the base, and many Chagossians still oppose the base on the grounds that it was the cause of their expulsion. Anthropologist Laura Jeffery quotes a Chagossian from Diego Garcia saying,

“I suffer because they took my country and made it into a base for war” (Jeffery n.d.:10). Others oppose the base because they believe it would endanger resettlement. “If America can bomb Iraq from Diego Garcia,” a second-generation Chagossian told Jeffery, “then Iraq could bomb Diego Garcia” (Jeffery n.d.:10).

Some Chagossians are more tolerant or even supportive of the base. While the CSC opposes the base and despite the CRG’s opposition to the current war in Iraq, the CRG’s position is, according to Bancoult, that “we have no problem with the military base on Diego Garcia” (Jeffery n.d.:11). Some are proud of the role Diego Garcia plays militarily, including one young activist who told Jeffery, “I firmly believe that the construction of this military base was a must for the world’s protection against terrorism and any other mischievous enemy” (Jeffery n.d.:11).

Chagossian feelings about the base must be understood within the context of their struggle to return and gain compensation. Many (mostly men) have been interested in working on the base—and thus finding one way to return to their homeland—since the base began employing non-U.S. or U.K. support personnel. Because discriminatory policies have barred Chagossians from working on the island (Bowman and Lefebvre 1985:n. 28; Gupte 1982), the CRG’s U.S. suit has made an end to this discrimination one of its claims. Others see the base as essential to any resettlement effort, both as a source of employment and, given the only runways in the archipelago, as a regular air link with the outside world.

The intricacies of U.S. law seem also to have played a role in shaping Chagossians’ feelings about the base. Because U.S. law broadly prohibits suits against the U.S. Government that challenge the foreign policy-making power of the U.S.

executive and legislative branches, the CRG and its lawyers have had to distance themselves from any positions appearing to oppose the legitimacy of the base. Instead, they make clear that they are only challenging the legality of the removals. The leftist Mauritian party *Lalit de Klas* [Class Struggle] has criticized what party members describes as a resulting “chorus” from Chagossians repeating “again and again” in “unusually servile language” that they are “*not* against the military base” (Collen and Kitnasamy 2006, emphasis in original).

Others in Mauritius have accused the CRG and Chagossians of damaging Mauritius’s attempts to reclaim sovereignty over Chagos by taking lawsuits to the British High Court and implicitly accepting U.K. jurisdiction over the islands (Boolell 2001; Marimootoo 2000; Minerve 2000). This has been the principle objection of the CSC and its Mauritian lawyer Lassemilliante, who favor negotiation over litigation. The CRG’s Mauritian barrister Mardemootoo has responded that the Chagossian claim is different than that of the Mauritian Government. The Chagossians were harmed by the British Government and are thus addressing their claims to that government. Acknowledging Britain’s *de facto* control over Chagos in bringing the suits, Mardemootoo believes, neither harms nor advances Mauritian sovereignty (see Jeffery n.d.:7; Anyangwe 2001:26-27; Chinniah & Dhunputh 2002:84).

Some Mauritians were further angered when in 2002, Chagossians won the right to full U.K. citizenship and passports and some CRG members celebrated publicly by waving the Union Jack and pictures of the Queen. In May of that year, the U.K. Government changed its citizenship laws making most native-born Chagossians and their first generation offspring, along with other U.K. Overseas Territories citizens, eligible for

the same citizenship as British nationals (including residential rights in Britain).<sup>85</sup> In addition to celebrations that some saw as unseemly and anti-Mauritian, the new passports and ability to move to Britain generated antipathy among many Mauritians.<sup>86</sup>

Some Mauritian commentators (and some Chagossians in the CSC) have also worried that Chagossians' acceptance of U.K. passports may further undermine Mauritius's sovereignty claim (especially if Britain were to assist with a resettlement). Bancoult and the CRG have remained noncommittal on the issue of sovereignty, refusing to say whether they would prefer resettlement of Chagos as a British Overseas Territory or as part of the Republic of Mauritius (Jeffery n.d.:7-8).<sup>87</sup> Many Chagossians have angry or at best ambivalent feelings about Mauritius, the nation from which most have felt excluded since their arrival and which many feel won its independence at their expense (some Mauritians even acknowledge that independence was "bought with the blood of Chagossians" (Teelock 2001:415)).

Publicly, the Mauritian Government has been equally noncommittal about the U.K. lawsuits and U.K. citizenship. At the same time, governing parties (especially the MMM) have offered various other forms of high- and low-profile support to the islanders, including by increasing Government social assistance, renovating two Government-built Chagossian community centers, building a commemorative monument to the expulsion, and awarding Bancoult the nation's second highest medal in recognition of his leadership in the CRG's legal victories.

By contrast, the Mauritian Government and other Mauritians have strongly rejected recognition of the Chagossians as an indigenous people (see Jeffery 2005:114-115). Both the CRG's Bancoult and the CSC's Mandarin have represented Chagossians

as an indigenous people before the UN.<sup>88</sup> Anthropologists, historians, and even the British High Court have concurred about the designation (e.g., Scott 1976:182; I. Walker 1986; Vine 2003; *Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult* 2000). In response, however, prominent Mauritian politicians, including a longtime ally in the MMM's Bérenger, have publicly denied that the Chagossians are indigenous to Chagos. At the 2003 unveiling of a monument commemorating the expulsion, the then Minister for Arts and Culture, Motee Ramdass, reiterated the Mauritian Government's stance that Chagossians are "not autochthonous, not an indigenous population" (Jeffery 2005:114-115). The Government and others are concerned that acknowledging Chagossians as indigenous would threaten Mauritius's sovereignty claim, especially if Chagossians were to resettle the islands.<sup>89</sup>

When the Chagos Refugees Group and other Chagossians have asked the Mauritian Government to recognize the group as refugees, the Government has been similarly resistant (see Jeffery 2005:115-117). In 2003, the CRG's London legal team approached the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to inquire about Chagossians gaining recognition as refugees, given the financial and social benefits generally accompanying recognition. Under international law, a refugee is an individual displaced across a state border so that one resides "outside the country of [one's] nationality" (Phelan 1997:476). To obtain refugee status, the government of the country of residence must support a group's application to the UNHCR.

From the perspective of the CRG and its lawyers in London, the Chagossians were displaced from a British Overseas Territory to Mauritius and Seychelles and are thus eligible for UNHCR recognition. From the perspective of the Mauritian

Government, recognition as refugees would acknowledge that Chagossians had arrived in the island of Mauritius from outside the state, conceding U.K. sovereignty over Chagos and damaging Mauritius's sovereignty claim. Then Deputy Prime Minister Bérenger thus refused the CRG's request to support its UNHCR application because, from the perspective of the Mauritian Government, Chagossians were internally displaced within the state of Mauritius (Jeffery 2005:115).<sup>90</sup> In both cases of Chagossians gaining recognition as an indigenous people and as refugees, and despite close ties between the group and Government leaders, state-level politics surrounding the Mauritian sovereignty claim have restricted the community's access to the UN's supranational legal frameworks.

### **Defeat and Decrees**

In October 2003, Chagossians faced another setback when the British High Court denied their claim for compensation in the new U.K. suit, though the court admitted that Chagossians had been "treated shamefully by successive UK governments" (*Chagos Islanders v. Attorney General* 2003). An appeal was similarly rejected (*Chagos Islanders v. Attorney General* 2004). In December 2004, the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia dismissed the U.S. suit, finding no wrongdoing on the part of the Government or its officials. An appeals court struck down their case in 2006, and the CRG will soon petition the U.S. Supreme Court for another appeal.

Undeterred, Chagossians have filed suit against the U.K. Government in the European Court of Human Rights. They charged violations of their rights on grounds that the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits forced displacement, that

international treaties like the UN Charter prohibit Britain from violating the right to self-determination, and that common law prohibits Britain from violating people's fundamental rights.

Before receiving a European hearing, the British Government made a stunning announcement. In the name of the Queen, the British Government enacted two new Orders in Council (another had created the BIOT in 1965) barring any return to Chagos. In effect, without parliamentary debate or consultation, the British Government used the archaic power of royal decree to overturn the November 2000 court victory and Chagossians' briefly held right of return. (There are signs that the Orders were the result of "intense U.S. pressure" (Tweedle 2006). The islanders returned to the High Court in December 2005 to contest the Queen's decree.

### **A Return?**

For more than five years since the 2000 ruling and for decades before, Chagossians asked the British Government to allow a contingent from the community to visit Chagos to care for and pay respects to their ancestors' graves.<sup>91</sup> On March 30, 2006, after numerous postponements and repeated negotiations, British authorities finally allowed more than 100 Chagossians to travel to Chagos for a 10-day "humanitarian" voyage to visit each of their islands (though not to stay overnight) and to tend to the cemeteries. For the first time in almost 40 years, Rita Bancoult returned to her birthplace in Peros Banhos, with her son Olivier at her side. The trip was widely seen as a concession by the U.K. Government and generated media attention internationally (e.g., Beeston 2006).

Upon arriving back in Mauritius, Olivier Bancoult and a small contingent of Chagossians rushed to London to appear in court for the ruling in their case challenging the Orders in Council barring a return. For the second time, the High Court of Justice ruled their expulsion had been illegal. The Orders in Council were overturned. “The suggestion,” two judges wrote, “that a minister can, through the means of an Order in Council, exile a whole population from a British Overseas Territory and claim that he is doing so for the ‘peace, order and good government’ of the territory is, to us, repugnant” (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2006*:para. 142). Outside the court, Olivier Bancoult said, “We always believed in our struggle. We always believed that what was done to us was unlawful. It is not possible to banish our rights.... We will go back to our native land. It is now very clear that we have the right to do so” (Majendie 2006).

The U.S. Government remains opposed to any return on security grounds. “The use of the facilities on Diego Garcia in major military operations since September 11, 2001, has reinforced the United States’ interest in maintaining secure long-term access to them,” wrote Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Lincoln P. Bloomfield in a letter sent to the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Office in preparation for the case. “We believe that an attempt to resettle any of the islands on the Chagos Archipelago would severely compromise Diego Garcia’s unparalleled security and have a deleterious impact on our military operations, and we appreciate the steps taken by Her Majesty’s Government to prevent such resettlement” (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2006*:para. 96). On June 30, 2006, the British Government announced that it would appeal the High Court’s ruling.

**CONCLUSION:  
THE IMPERIAL PRESENT AND A HUMAN-CENTERED FOREIGN POLICY**

This dissertation described the development of a distinct society in Chagos and how the U.S. Government forcibly uprooted that society to create a military base. Building a base on Diego Garcia and displacing the Chagossians was a revealing response to growing challenges to U.S. dominance in the 1950s and 1960s. Contrary to scholars who argue that the United States became an empire of economics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Diego Garcia shows how the American Empire has continually relied on overseas bases and military force to maintain its imperial control. Diego Garcia also represents a shift in basing policy toward the increasingly discreet deployment of military force with Diego helping to usher in an ongoing move from bases located near population centers to ones isolated from potentially antagonistic locals. Given the base's role as a forbearer of an expanding U.S. military presence in the Middle East, Diego Garcia assumes greater significance as a sign of longstanding efforts by the United States to use its military power in the oil-rich region to preserve its global economic and political dominance (see e.g., Harvey 2003). In the prominent role that Diego has played in ensuring U.S. economic supremacy, moreover, Diego Garcia provides a graphic illustration of how overseas bases have worked in tandem with and undergirded the economic dimensions of U.S. imperial power.

The dissertation further showed how the Chagossians' expulsion is part of a pattern of at least 11 documented population removals around overseas U.S. military facilities affecting non-white, non-European colonized peoples. The study documented how the Chagossians have been impoverished as a result of their removal and suggested

that the other displacements have generally led to impoverishment as well. Among the Government officials who orchestrated the Chagossians' removal, the dissertation identified a dehumanized pattern of foreign policymaking that helped bureaucrats displace the Chagossians with little thought whatsoever. Finally, the study showed how the Chagossians have continually resisted their expulsion, leading an ongoing struggle to return to Chagos and win compensation that appears to pose increasing questions for the future of the BIOT and the base.

In this concluding chapter the dissertation discusses long-term imperial trends that connect the history of Diego Garcia from its settlement to the present. The chapter also considers the implications of other findings from the study.

### **Imperial Continuities: Bases, Oceans, and Navies**

Although the extent to which U.S. dominance has been exercised through overseas bases like Diego Garcia and not through colonies represents a break with previous empires, the post-war American Empire has, like its predecessors, been characterized by military force and at least small-scale territorial acquisition. In this way, Diego Garcia and the base network represent a longstanding imperial trend toward modes of increasingly informal and indirect rule.

The expansion of Diego Garcia into a major naval and air base fulfilled the hopes of people not just in the U.S. Navy, stretching back to Stuart Barber, Horatio Rivero, and Arleigh Burke, but also of French Lieutenant La Fontaine and his vision for “a great number of vessels” anchoring in Diego Garcia's lagoon (Scott 1976:68). In this way Diego Garcia demonstrates additional continuity in the history of imperialism in the role

that navies and bases have played in protecting and projecting imperial power and national economic interests. As Admiral Mahan pointed out, since the beginning of European expansion in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with few exceptions, empires have been naval powers. Although air forces are increasingly playing a parallel role with their naval counterparts, navies have been a tool for empires to send troops to conquer foreign lands, to dominate the flow of trade, and to exert political and economic influence over other nations by threat or actual attack. Although interest in Diego Garcia shifted from spices to oil, the base demonstrates the continuation of this trend, linking the naval empires of France and Britain to the naval empire of the United States, which finally built the base its predecessors coveted.

Similarly, Diego Garcia shows how the “geopolitical attractiveness” of island bases has resonated across the centuries (Quester 1983:162). Island bases have been attractive as protected oases from which empires can use their navies to defend ocean-going commerce. As Stuart Barber realized, without large populations or hinterlands to govern, small islands generally have little vulnerability to attack, making them a cost-effective way to support a navy (Quester 1983:162).

Viewed geographically, moreover, one sees how the small-scale acquisition of territory for island bases has allowed the United States, like the empires before it, to control large swaths of *ocean territory* upon which global trade and a nation’s economic expansion relies. Coupled with a powerful navy, island bases provide the force to effectively rule areas of ocean and any military or commercial traffic that might cross its waters. In the Pacific, controlling bases from Okinawa and Japan’s main islands to Guam and Pearl Harbor has allowed the U.S. Navy to make the ocean an “American lake.”

Maintaining a base on Diego Garcia has helped the United States exert similar control in the Indian Ocean, particularly over oil traffic from the Persian Gulf. In the role that island bases and navies play in patrolling sea lanes and protecting oceangoing commerce, one sees a literal way in which overseas bases undergird the economics of the American Empire. (This also points to how the ability of the U.S. Navy to provide unchallenged control of the Earth's major bodies of water since World War II has been another underappreciated pillar of American Empire.)

### **The Overseas Base Network and the Imperial Present<sup>92</sup>**

There are other important imperial continuities spanning the history of Diego Garcia. The creation of a base as part of Britain's last colony, the BIOT, which was itself created through the dismemberment of the colonies of Mauritius and Seychelles, suggests ways in which the imperial past lives on in the overseas base network in particular as an "imperial present" (see Gregory 2004). Many other important U.S. bases are in fact still colonies or what have recently been colonies. Bases at Thule in Danish Greenland, in Japanese Okinawa, and on Britain's Ascension island are three. Several key bases likewise exist in remaining U.S. colonial possessions. These include facilities in Guam, Puerto Rico (and until recently in Vieques), American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and until gaining post-World War II statehood, Alaska and Hawai'i. Elsewhere in the Pacific after World War II, the United States won basing rights and other colonial rights when the UN granted it trusteeship over the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, previously "mandated" to Japan after World War I. In the Marshall Islands, the United States conducted its nuclear testing in the

Bikinis and retained an important missile testing facility in the Kwajalein Atoll after the islands gained formal independence in 1986 but entered into a protectorate-like “compact of free association” with the United States (Sandars 2000:36).

Other overseas bases exist largely because of relationships between former European powers and their colonies. Bases acquired through lend-lease are a prime example, where the U.S. Government negotiated continued occupation deals after World War II with the help of the still-ruling British. The same is true for post-war French bases in Morocco. In Panama and the Philippines, the United States has benefited from its own neocolonial relationships to maintain important bases near the Panama Canal and in East Asia. The maintenance of U.S. bases in these nations often represents a continuation of colonial relationships in a different form (see also Sandars 2000:13).

Perhaps then Diego Garcia and much of the U.S. global basing network are best understood as a return to an earlier form of imperialism when Britain and France were first interested in colonizing Diego Garcia and other islands in the Indian Ocean. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, islands were initially valued for their military and not their economic value. Bases in Mauritius and Réunion hosted warships used to secure trade with India and later to subdue the subcontinent.

Three centuries later, equipment and supplies from Diego Garcia were among the first arriving in the Persian Gulf to link with U.S. soldiers preparing for war in Iraq. Once the war was underway, B-1, B-2, and B-52 bombers based on Diego Garcia dropped thousands of pounds of ordinance on Iraq’s battlefields. From this perspective the Chagossians’ expulsion is unsurprising: Their ancestors’ enslaved arrival on Diego Garcia and in Chagos was the result of a European empire’s efforts to claim bases in a

strategic ocean; their removal was the result of a similar search by a new empire two centuries later.

### **The Damage Done by Bases**

While the full extent of the base displacement phenomenon remains the subject of important future research, the impoverishment that Chagossians and others have suffered as a result of displacement is part of a larger demonstrated pattern of damage done to local populations by overseas bases. Gerson sums up the effect of bases when he writes, “Bases bring insecurity; the loss of self-determination,” systematic and institutionalized exploitation of women, support for dictators and repression, “as well as the degradation of the culture, values, health, and environment of host nations” (1991:9). Sandars likewise says that bases have often created a “dangerous and unhealthy dependency” on the United States, economically and otherwise. In the Philippines and in Panama, the presence of U.S. bases helped prop up undemocratic repressive regimes and “condone the excesses of the local rulers who enriched themselves while impoverishing their countries” (Sandars 2000:105). In some cases, soldiers based overseas have caused the deaths of locals (accidental and otherwise), most prominently, of late, in South Korea, Okinawa, and Italy.

Cynthia Enloe (1989) has shown how one of the major effects of overseas bases has been the development of organized and officially sanctioned prostitution industries serving base soldiers. In the town of Olongapo, around the U.S. base in Subic Bay, Philippines, there were at one time more than 50,000 prostitutes, “dedicated to the ‘rest and recreation’” of U.S. troops (Monthly Review 2002). Around the Philippines and

elsewhere, another study finds, “American soldiers took advantage of the poverty and desperation of host populations to exploit women, giving rise to troubling levels of prostitution and disease in host communities” (Baker 2004:174).

Regardless of the full extent of the base displacement phenomenon, one can see how the Chagossians’ expulsion and impoverishment is not an aberration in the operation of the overseas base network. Overseas bases have caused widespread damage to local communities ranging from the expropriation of land and property to the profound alteration of communities’ social, cultural, and economic relations. While bases have contributed positively in some ways to their hosts (Baker 2004), Gerson (1991), Enloe (1989, 1990, 1993), and others accurately describe damage to local (and national) communities as fundamental, not incidental, features of the overseas basing system (Lutz (2001) suggests how the same is true among domestic bases). And as we have seen, Diego Garcia and the 13 other cases of base displacement indicate how those injured by bases are not randomly patterned. Damage again generally afflicts the poor, the black, the non-Western, and the powerless.

### **The Effects of Empire and a Humanpolitik**

The damage done by bases to families like Rita Bancoult’s and the ease with which U.S. officials displaced the Chagossians and people like them suggest that an important contribution of this dissertation is its emphasis on the effects of the American Empire. As debates about American Empire continue, the costs of empire—too often ignored or given short shrift by empire’s proponents, as well as by non-anthropologist scholars—must remain at the center of debate. While the focus on effects is in keeping with some

previous anthropological scholarship, the dissertation's attention to the dynamics of empire and to its actors has been equally important in deepening understandings of American Empire. Importantly though, these understandings have produced a more complicated conception of empire's effects, showing how Chagossians' impoverishment was not caused by a vague social force glossed as "U.S. imperialism" but by the specific phenomena of the overseas base network, the pattern of base displacement, and a dehumanized approach to foreign policymaking shared among Government officials.

This kind of multi-faceted anthropological understanding of American Empire, focused on dynamics, actors, and effects, may also offer possibilities for the development of foreign policy alternatives. Most importantly, the dissertation suggests that U.S. foreign policy must avoid the damage it has inflicted on the Chagossians and others around the world. A first step would be an attempt to properly redress damage caused by the American Empire during the development of its overseas base network. As the case of the Chagossians shows, such damage often constitutes ongoing and not just historical injuries, making it still possible for the United States to prevent future harm. Secondly, the dissertation calls into question the legitimacy (legal, political, and moral) of maintaining many of the American Empire's overseas bases—at least as they currently exist—built as many are on continuing colonial relationships, displacement, and other forms of enduring damage to local populations. Indeed the United States undermines its own international legitimacy as long as the bases considered so important by military and political leaders to the security of the nation continue to rely on the insecurity of others (and often the most vulnerable of populations).

Finally, the dissertation points to the need to shift foreign policy and the national security bureaucracy away from deep-seeded imperial instincts, economic and military interests, and structurally engrained hierarchical notions of some human lives being more important than others, and toward a foreign policy and national security bureaucracy founded on considering the human impacts of policy decisions above all else. The dissertation suggests a foreign policy focused on what might be called a “humanpolitik”<sup>93</sup>—a human-centered foreign policy placing human lives, regardless of nation, above perceived and often short-sighted notions of national interest and security.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Possible detainees include Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Osama bin Laden and Abu Zubaydah. Both the U.S. and British governments have denied these charges, although when asked directly in 2004 if detainees were being held on Diego Garcia, Assistant Secretary of State Lawrence DiRita replied, “I don’t know. I simply don’t know” (Hurst 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout I use the word *Kreol* to identify languages and the word *Creole* to identify people of generally (recent) African ancestry who are socially categorized as such in Mauritius and Seychelles.

<sup>3</sup> Diego’s isolation was a double-edged sword. It is centrally located and isolated sufficiently to be protected from all but nuclear sneak attacks but is relatively far from areas of possible military action.

<sup>4</sup> The following excerpt from a 1970 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing is much quoted throughout the literature: “Once an American overseas base is established it takes on a life of its own. Original missions may become outdated but new missions are developed, not only with the intention of keeping the facility going, but often to actually enlarge it. Within the government departments most directly concerned—State and Defense—we found little initiative to reduce or eliminate any of these overseas facilities” (Johnson 2004b:152).

<sup>5</sup> DOD calls this “plant replacement value,” which “represents the reported cost of replacing the facility and its supporting infrastructure using today’s construction cost (labor and material for that particular area) and standards (methodologies and codes).” Johnson says that “one must doubt the accuracy of any such estimates, particularly given the Pentagon’s record of incompetent accounting,” and given that the numbers “probably underestimate real replacement values” (2004b:154).

<sup>6</sup> Although the term is one I prefer not to use given the racial and other hierarchies it implies, it is the term that U.S. officials often used and thus conveys the way they thought of a broad area of mostly colonized and formerly colonized lands with lower levels of industrialization than the United States and its closest allies.

<sup>7</sup> The United States had major advantages in bombers, air defenses, submarines, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and thus in first and second strike nuclear capabilities. The United States had its unparalleled system of bases, a navy with uncontested control of the seas, and a related ability, unmatched by any other power, to deploy its military power almost anywhere in the world (Porter 2005:14, 5-10).

<sup>8</sup> Although my interviewees almost all stressed the importance of the Cold War to understanding Diego Garcia, a striking absence from their comments and the archival record is any concern among officials about the reaction of the Soviet Union or China to U.S. plans for Diego. Government officials were unworried that the Soviets or Chinese would respond militarily by creating bases of their own, increase their naval presence, or make other military moves to resist the creation of a base in a neighboring region. The only fear expressed was that the Soviets and others might inflict some political or propaganda damage on the United States for militarizing a previously peaceful ocean.

<sup>9</sup> I have recently identified potentially three other displacements, in Alaska’s Aleutian Islands and in Hawai’i’s Waikane and Makua valleys, bringing the total to as many as 17 including Diego Garcia.

<sup>10</sup> I have never been employed or paid by Tigar or anyone connected with the suits. The American University law clinic that Tigar supervises paid for some of my research expenses in 2001-2002 and in 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Before discussing the analytic approach I have applied to Diego Garcia, I must explain more about my focus on the U.S. Government and its officials, given the significant role that the British Government and its officials played in carrying out the expulsion. I focus on the U.S. role for three reasons: First, nearly all the literature on Diego Garcia has focused on the role of the British Government in organizing the removal process. The literature has not, other than in passing, examined the role of the U.S. Government in ordering and orchestrating the expulsion. This neglect has left some confusion about the role of the U.S. Government in creating the base and ordering the expulsion. Frequent historical and factual inaccuracies have also appeared in the journalistic and scholarly literature (e.g., to whom the base and the territory belong: Diego Garcia is technically a joint U.S./U.K. base, but with only a handful of British functionaries, it is *de facto* a U.S. base, even as the island and the rest of the Chagos Archipelago are part of the British Indian Ocean Territory). These shortcomings have made a scholarly exploration of the history of the U.S. role long overdue. Second, because I have found that the U.S. Government ordered the expulsion, I believe any analysis of why the Chagossians were exiled must focus on the U.S. role. Third, on a personal level, as one who was born and lives in the United States, I am more immediately concerned about the U.S. Government's role in the exile.

<sup>12</sup> Much of the inspiration for studying Diego Garcia from the perspective of both Chagossians and U.S. Government officials has been an increasing understanding among anthropologists of the importance of studying some of the actors and extralocal forces that shape people's lives. This approach stems from an appreciation of the causal ties between the powerful and the powerless (e.g., Wolf 1982), and a related call to "study up" rather than just down the power hierarchy (Nader 1969). Others (Farmer 1997; Roseberry 2002; Burawoy 2001, 2000; Trouillot 2001) have followed suggesting that anthropologists subject extralocal forces to detailed ethnographic investigation in the way they would small, marginalized societies. Michael Burawoy in particular warns specifically against casually attributing too much simply to abstract "forces." In his extended case method, Burawoy says that ethnographers must carefully examine and detail what occurs outside the local context as "forces become the topic of investigation" (Burawoy 2000:27-29). Paul Farmer offers a useful model for understanding people's suffering in an inherently interconnected world, where the actions of the powerful have such profound effects on the relatively powerless. Like Burawoy, Farmer argues that analysis must be "geographically broad" and "historically deep"—taking into account the determinate influence of people and actions globally and across time—and should explain the role that race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status play in "rendering individuals and groups vulnerable to extreme human suffering" (1997:274). As Farmer suggests, it is not enough to say that a people have suffered or that they are the victims of empire. At the same time, it is not enough to focus on the structural dynamics or even the actors of U.S. foreign policy, while ignoring empire's effects. The study ultimately attempts to do justice anthropologically to both sides of Diego Garcia, both sides of American Empire, by seeking to understand empire's dynamics, actors, and effects.

<sup>13</sup> My thanks to Leith Mullings for her suggestion of this technique.

<sup>14</sup> I was recently told through a third party that *Time* magazine has offered a \$10,000 reward to the first staff member to get on the island.

<sup>15</sup> Gusterson (1996) offers a critical anthropological approach in exploring how U.S. nuclear weapons designers come to believe that it is appropriate to create nuclear weapons. He explicitly rejects explanations rooted in psychopathology and realist political science. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Gusterson explores how nuclear weapons scientists are produced and created by the institutions in which they work and by the practices, discourses, and rituals of these institutions. He offers an anthropological approach to the military world and to the actors of imperialism that treats such actors in the same way as other anthropological subjects, as full human beings, without forgetting to place actors in wider geopolitical context. Carol Cohn's attention to the discourse of defense intellectuals (1990) is a useful complement to Gusterson's institutional focus. Cohn examines how the language of defense intellectuals' not only distances them from the potential human impact of their work, but also how their language shapes a distinct reality, transforming and constraining defense intellectuals' thought. In short, the use of a specialized language and vocabulary changes defense intellectuals' thinking. Like Gusterson, Jennifer Schirmer

(1998) rejects viewing military officers who commit acts of violence as irrational or in some way mentally ill. Schirmer proposes examining violence as a strategy of people in power. Violence and human rights abuses stemming from violence are generally in the interests of military officers and, as such, are “deeply entrenched” in the military mentality, she says. Ultimately, Schirmer argues for using ethnographic techniques rooted in empathy to understand the thinking, beliefs, and mentality of military officers and their use of violence.

<sup>16</sup> Parts of this section draw on Vine 2004.

<sup>17</sup> In writing a history of the habitation of Chagos, there were relatively few historical sources upon which to draw. Prior to the expulsion, few wrote about the Chagossians. The islands now gain mention mostly for the recent history surrounding the creation of the military base on Diego Garcia. The earlier history of the archipelago has remained relatively unknown and has often been muddled by arguments about the expulsion. The best and only full-scale histories of Chagos come from two British administrators who governed the islands: former governor of colonial Mauritius Sir Robert Scott’s *Limuria: The Lesser Dependencies of Mauritius* (1976[1961]) and former commissioner of the British Indian Ocean Territory Richard Edis’s *Peak of Limuria* (2004[1993]). Scott’s *Limuria* provides the most detailed history of Chagos and the other small island dependencies of Mauritius. Scott’s descriptions of island life in the 1950s are useful but more limited, drawn mostly from short visits to the islands and conversations with “people who know the islands well” (1976:296)—that is, based on little contact with the indigenous islanders. Edis’s *Peak of Limuria* supplements Scott’s work, offering corrections, drawn from rare primary sources, to the history of Chagos’s settlement and life around World War II. Other valuable historical data comes from missionary Catholic priest Roger Dussercle, who visited the islands periodically and wrote four volumes about life in Chagos during the 1930s (e.g. Dussercle 1934). A recent article by H. Ly-Tio-Fane and S. Rajabalee (1986) adds some details about the early settlement of the islands, as do broader surveys by Iain Walker (1986; 1993), David Stoddart (1971), and Thomas Bulpin (1958). The most important primary sources are those available in the Mauritius Archives and the Public Records Office (National Archives), in Kew, England. Most helpful among the archival sources proved to be a series of reports from magistrates and other colonial officials who visited Chagos from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 1950s, providing a regular and varied account of daily life on the islands. During some years, visits occurred as frequently as once every six months. Because few officials made more than a handful of visits, the reports offer relatively varied perspectives on housing and health conditions, diet and nutrition, work and wages, social life and authority, and notable island events. Chagossians are also an important source of historical information. Interviews and informal conversations about life on the islands assisted in the crafting of this history. The perspective and voices of prior generations however have gone largely unrecorded. By contrast, people of European descent working for governments, the Catholic Church, and the companies that ran Chagos’s plantations authored the older primary and secondary sources. This imbalance is important to note in the following necessarily partial view of Chagos’s history. It is also important to understand the political context in which some have recently written about Chagos’s history. Since the expulsion, some have defended the removals by arguing that Chagossians were transient workers with no connection to the islands. This argument is, as I will show, clearly false. As many formerly confidential government documents show, even members of the British and U.S. governments acknowledged at the time that many of Chagos’s inhabitants had deeper connections to the islands than that of transients, tracing their heritage in Chagos back several generations (e.g., Todd 1969; House of Representatives 1975:41, 79). In Great Britain, the British High Court settled this issue in its November 2000 ruling (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2000*). The court dismissed the notion that Chagos’s inhabitants were transients, saying, “They were an indigenous people: they were born there, as were one or both of their parents, in many cases one or more of their grandparents, in some cases (it is said) one or more of their great-grandparents. Some may perhaps have traced an earlier indigenous ancestry” (*Queen v. Secretary of State ex parte Bancoult 2000*:para. 1).

<sup>18</sup> Which people first laid eyes and feet on Chagos and the other small islands of the western Indian Ocean may never be resolved. Debates over who first landed on Mauritius have been lively, with scholars proposing a wide variety of peoples including Phoenicians, Palestinians, Greeks, Persians, Egyptians,

Indians, Chinese, Arabs, Malays, and Swahilis (Selvon 2001:7; Bowman 1991:8). Indeed, all of these groups had traditions of sea travel in and around East Africa. Scott writes that Malays and Arabs, “were certainly aware” of what became known as the Mascarene Islands (Mauritius, Réunion, and Rodrigues), “and gave them names” (1976:28). Likewise, there is clear archaeological evidence of Chinese, Arab, and South Indian voyagers reaching Sri Lanka by the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and of the Chinese in Zanzibar, Mozambique, and the Middle East after 1000 (Bopearachchi 1994:72-73). Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee claim that, “Arab and Indian sailors traveling across the Indian Ocean probably used to pause in the spacious bay of Diego Garcia,” although they provide no evidence to support this claim (1986:90; see also Anyangwe 2001:15).

<sup>19</sup> Ly-Tio-Fane and Rajabalee explain that Le Normand won his concession to create a coconut plantation from France’s Governor of Mauritius Vicompte de Souillac in exchange for taxes paid on the plantation’s coconut oil production (1986:91-91).

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps spelled “Dauguet” (Scott 1976) or “Danguet” (Walker 1986)

<sup>21</sup> The records indicate that a minority of these slaves was later returned to Mauritius.

<sup>22</sup> In many cases, it is unlikely that the names listed for enslaved people were actually used by the people. Many of the names are absurd, cruel, and demeaning, making use of colors, days of the week, and other inventions of the person making the list (Barker 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Records for Six Iles indicate a Mr. Duperrel of Mauritius established on the islands without being granted a title and accompanied by some enslaved people (“avec quelques noirs”).

<sup>24</sup> A census document from 1861 records an example of one household of two that included a domestic servant born in Madras working for a woman born in France (Büehmüller and Büehmüller 1861).

<sup>25</sup> For a concise description of copra processing, see I. Walker 1993:563.

<sup>26</sup> It is unclear when this name first developed, but the Catholic priest Dussercle used the term as early as his report from a 1933-1934 mission (1934:9). Madeley says that the term “has been used since the nineteenth century” (1985:n. 5). Although he provides no evidence to support this claim, it is highly likely that Madeley is correct and that the term was in use well before Dussercle’s arrival, probably dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>27</sup> According to Dussercle, 60 percent of laborers were “enfants des îles,” or children of the islands (see below for other calculations of the ratio of people born in Chagos to those born elsewhere). “It is regrettable,” he adds however that the 40 percent of the workers born in Mauritius do not always settle down with the tranquil habits and good order that reigns, despite it all, ordinarily in the Islands” (1934:9-10).

<sup>28</sup> The Catholic priest Father Dussercle, “described it as having become, at this period, a ‘little Babylon,’ in which the inhabitants lived in an exceedingly Bohemian manner,” and the copra was left to rot (Scott 1976:264). I have been unable to uncover additional details about Dussercle’s salacious description.

<sup>29</sup> While infirmaries and dispensaries were available in each of the main island groups, medical services were unable to treat the most severe illnesses and medical problems. People with serious medical needs generally traveled to Mauritius for treatment. While some may have remained in Mauritius for some time, most seem to have returned to Chagos on the next available transport vessel (usually about three to four months later) (Darlow 1953:10, 44). Many Chagossians also took vacations, often referred to as a *promné* [lit. to go out or to go on an outing (Ledikasyon Pu Travayer 1985:189)], to Mauritius, (in later years to Seychelles). The wage system allowed many laborers to save money in company accounts, which they

used in Mauritius to buy furniture and other goods unavailable in Chagos. Others used the vacations to visit relatives. Some took such vacations approximately every three years, at the end a normal contract period. Some formally renewed their contracts in the Mauritian capital, Port Louis, while others, especially those with long ties to the islands, returned under an oral agreement or no explicit agreement at all. Most stayed in Mauritius until the next available boat left for Chagos, although some stayed for longer periods before returning home (Scott 1976:24; Botte 1980:8). Finally, the import of new laborers remained a part of the economic system in Chagos throughout its history. Seychellois workers in particular—for the most part single and male—lived in the islands on what were generally three-year renewable contracts. Many Seychellois and Mauritian-born laborers, began as temporary workers and then settled permanently in Chagos, often marrying or living with a locally born partner. New laborers were to some extent outsiders in a society based around Chagos's permanent inhabitants. At times, Seychellois workers lived in residentially segregated areas, separate from locally born and raised communities. Such was the case in Peros Banhos where “a small contingent of Seychellois...live[d] in a separate section” of Île du Coin (Scott 1976:282). Scott's description of the Salomon group portrays the place of migrants and migration across the archipelago: “The Salomon Islanders are preponderantly native to the group, not generally receptive of strangers from other islands, but absorbing them in the community if, on trial, they show themselves able to adopt its characteristics.... As elsewhere in the Dependencies, the Seychellois, here an unusually small element in the labour force, remain a stranger community” (1976:274). While families (and not just single men) migrated to and from Salomon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the population was more stable and based on family units by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With high birth and low death rates but relatively small overall population growth, Scott finds, “there must have been a continuous emigration from the group, after the family pattern had been established.... Nevertheless, enough families have been consistent in their fondness for the Salomon Islands to have ensured the continued existence of a distinctive, well-balanced community” (1976:274, 277).

<sup>30</sup> The following description of working and living conditions comes from many sources including interviews and conversations with Chagossians and other plantation employees. See also, Scott 1976; I. Walker 1986, 1993; the reports of J. R. Todd; and a series of magistrate reports on Chagos dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>31</sup> Because of the challenges laid against the Chagossians' claim to be the native indigenous people of Chagos, it is necessary to remove any uncertainty about their connection with the islands. A variety of sources from different political and national perspectives, including representatives of the U.K. and U.S. governments, agree that at the time of the expulsion, many of Chagos's inhabitants could trace their ancestry across three to five or more generations born in the archipelago (Todd 1969:19; Ottaway 1975; *Sunday Times* 1975; U.S. Congress 1975:79-80; Scott 1976:23; Walker 1986:9; Powe 1996:640; Winchester 1985:39). Others agree overwhelmingly that the Chagossians were born, raised, and died on the islands, and that they are the descendants of the enslaved people and indentured laborers brought to Chagos in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Kirk 1939; Lavoipierre 1951:5; Ommaney 1952:233; Blood 1957:516; *Peaks* n.d.; Scott 1976:2; Walker 1986:2, 9-10; Walker 1993:562-566; Dedaur 1999:27, 29; Anyangwe 2001:17). Sir Robert Scott provides the best, most authoritative, and, because he wrote prior to the establishment of the BIOT and the forced removal of the Chagossians, most unbiased discussion of the permanent and ongoing nature of habitation. Scott explains that, “the term ‘permanent residents’ is, in fact, intended to designate the true islanders” who were well established in the islands and considered Chagos their home (1976:23). The word “permanent,” he writes, “is used to exclude from the count the managers, accountants, clerks, and others of the headquarters staffs of the companies operating the coconut, fishing, and guano industries: they may live for long periods in the islands, but they go on holiday to Mauritius or the Seychelles every few years and maintain permanent domicile there. It excludes those labourers, usually men from the Seychelles unaccompanied by their families, who engage themselves to work in the islands for about a year at a time, whether or not they regularly renew their engagements after visiting their real homes” (1976:22-23). Even with transient workers in their midst, there was a well-established permanent population rooted in the islands by the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century. Scott writes, “By the middle of the 1870's, the people of East Point, in Diego Garcia, were showing a marked preference for building their own houses, instead of looking to the estates for accommodation. In 1877, the majority of [Magistrate]

Ackroyd's fellow passengers on the *Eva Joshua* were going 'home' to Diego Garcia" (1976:23). Over time, the size of the permanent population relative to transients increased markedly. Scott says that in 1901, "at least a quarter of the total population [of the Lesser Dependencies] ...consisted of temporary labourers and other migratory employees," and perhaps it was as much as one-half of the total population (about 1,400) (1976:24, 23). By the 1950s, the permanent population had grown to approximately 80 to 90 percent of the total population (about 1,700) for the Lesser Dependencies (probably more than 80 percent for Chagos, by this calculation, as Agalega's permanent population was only 60 percent) (Scott 1976:23-24). In 1956, after a visit to the islands, Scott wrote, "I was surprised to find that (except at St. Brandon [not part of Chagos]) a relatively high proportion of residents regard the islands as their permanent home and they have their characteristic way of life, unlike that of those Creoles of Mauritius who most resemble them physically" (1956:3). Anthropologist Walker agrees: "It is clear from an anthropological point of view the Ilois constituted an indigenous population with a unique culture" (1993:566; see also Vine 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Scholars in the basing literature may have underestimated the number of pre-World War II bases. Given the frequency of major U.S. military interventions in Latin America before the war and occupations in Nicaragua, Panama, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, bases and garrisons (as well as U.S. naval power) likely played a key role in the maintenance of U.S. dominance in the region (see e.g., Hall and Pérez Brignoli 2003:288). This is an important subject for clarification and historical research.

<sup>33</sup> In an earlier publication, Smith placed equal weight on bases and economics, writing, "Equally there was a strategic vision concerning the necessity of American bases around the globe to protect global economic interests" (1994:272).

<sup>34</sup> A 1948 quotation illustrates Kennan's realist perspective and the task as he saw it for U.S. policymakers: "We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming" (Lapham 2004:10).

<sup>35</sup> Catherine Lutz suggested this distinction between direct and indirect negotiations.

<sup>36</sup> The battleship *Admiral Scheer* sunk ten ships alone in early 1941 (Edis 2004:62-63).

<sup>37</sup> The troops lived away from the islands' inhabitants but interacted freely with the Chagossians. One Scottish Royal Marine commander Captain J. Alan Thompson had mixed feelings about the people but once concealed himself in the trees to observe a sega. He later described it with Conradian fervor: "The drums grew louder, quicker, the beat deepening to a wild urgency...the dancers' bodies glistened and shone in the heat... couples paired and danced together.... They danced closer, their bodies touching, rubbing.... The endless drumming now a drug, the blood of the living moment, burrowing into muscle and brain, throbbing in the body like an iron pulse, alive, dynamic" (Edis 2004:66). On another occasion Captain Thompson was made to blush by a woman returning from work, who, to the laughter of her companions, in Thompson's words, "suddenly, shamelessly released her fine, brown breasts" (Edis 2004:65).

<sup>38</sup> There are few histories of how the U.S. and U.K. governments created the base on Diego Garcia and expelled the Chagossians. Works by Bandjunis (2001) and Bezboruah (1977), based in part on interviews with some of the key U.S. Government officials involved, provide the best accounts. The latter, by a retired naval officer who participated in the development of the base and who also had access to relevant Navy documents, is a detailed insider's account of the history. The self-published book has been indispensable to my reconstruction of the history but is not the work of a professional historian (most seriously, there are examples of plagiarism (e.g., Bandjunis 2001:52, cf. Sunday Times 1975)). Frequent historical and factual inaccuracies have also appeared in the journalistic and scholarly literature. Most critically, there is significant confusion about the role of the U.S. Government in creating the base and

ordering the expulsion. Many erroneously believe the U.K. Government to be responsible for both. Other inaccuracies include: To whom does the base and the territory belong? What is the nature of the political and military arrangements between the United States and Great Britain? When did interest in the base first develop? What is the relationship between the aborted development of another base on the other Indian Ocean island of Aldabra and Diego Garcia? What did U.S. and U.K. officials know about the Chagossians and when did they know it? Did U.S. and U.K. officials lie or mislead the public, Congress, and Parliament about the Chagossians and plans for the base? In a 2004 article (Vine 2004), I provided initial answers to these and related questions in a detailed but limited history of Diego Garcia. The article drew primarily on British Government documents and a small number of U.S. documents. For this dissertation, I collected thousands of pages of U.S. Government documents and additional U.K. documents over more than two months of archival research. The history also relies on my interviews with former U.S. Government officials who participated in the creation of the base. In this and the following chapter, I build on the core of my 2004 article with these new sources and the important details they provided. It is important to note as well that these chapters attempt to provide an ethnographic history of the base: Beyond a recitation of historical events, I describe the individuals involved in shaping the history, the context in which they acted, and try to represent the language and modes of communication practiced by the actors involved.

<sup>39</sup> The idea is indicated by a curious three-sentence memorandum from shortly before the 1960 elections, found in the Navy archives without its attached proposal. The first and key sentence reads, “The attached proposal by Stuart Barber was intended as an idea to be fed, somehow, to both Presidential candidates.” The memorandum’s subject line reads “South Atlantic and Indian Ocean Monroe Doctrine and Force” (Op-61 1960). If the contents of the proposal can be inferred from its subject, Barber was proposing a version of the Carter Doctrine to intervene in the Persian Gulf region against threats to U.S. interests.

<sup>40</sup> As Bezboruah writes, the Navy “initiated negotiations through Admiral Arleigh Burke to persuade London to detach the Diego Garcia atoll into an independent British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)” (Bezboruah 1977:58). There is thus no doubt that the idea for the base at Diego Garcia was an American, not a British idea. Along with Bandjunis and others, Bezboruah affirms: “BIOT was thus the brainchild of the U.S. Navy” (Bezboruah 1977:58; see also Bandjunis 2001:1-3, Palmer 1992:95, Ryan 1984:133, Mewes 1971).

<sup>41</sup> U.S. officials suggested that facilities for the islands might include pre-positioned military stockpiles; an air base for 2-4 air squadrons and supporting cargo planes, troop carriers, air tankers, antisubmarine patrols, and air logistics operations; an anchorage for an aircraft carrier task force; a communications station; an amphibious staging area; a space tracking facility; fuel and ammunition storage; and secondary support anchorages and logistics runways (U.S. Embassy London 1964b).

<sup>42</sup> Catherine Lutz suggested this might be called “casino militarism” (email to author August 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Agreements governing every detail of an overseas military facility, from their use in times of war to peacetime criminal prosecution of soldiers, were standard practice for overseas bases and the specialty of the Kitchen’s Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs in the State Department.

<sup>44</sup> The British Government also acquired the islands of Desroches from Paul Moulinie (the primary owner in Chagos) and Farquhar (Aldabra was already Crown territory belonging to the Queen).

<sup>45</sup> Stoddart has long been troubled by his role in saving Aldabra and inadvertently helping to clear the way for the Diego Garcia removals. Since the 1970s, he has expended large amounts of his time and money collecting documents about the creation of the base and the expulsion, provided assistance to the Chagossians’ struggle to return, and written detailed letters to politicians in the United States and United Kingdom advocating on their behalf.

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<sup>46</sup> At times the U.S. Government has argued that it did not know there was an indigenous population in Chagos and that it thought the population was composed of transient workers. This argument is difficult to believe. Any cursory inspection of writings on Chagos (most importantly, Scott 1976) would have revealed the existence of generations of Chagossians living in the islands. Even without reading a word, it is hard to imagine that the Navy's first reconnaissance inspection of Diego Garcia in 1957 would have overlooked hundreds of families (unusual in the case of migrant workers) and a fully-functioning society complete with nineteenth-century cemeteries and churches and people tracing their ancestry back as many as five generations in Chagos. The British were clearly well aware of the indigenous population, as their extensive discussions on the subject in memos and letters throughout the 1960s reveal. A secret 1969 letter from the U.S. Embassy in London to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Department confirms U.S. knowledge of "Chagos-born laborers" (Oplinger 1969).

<sup>47</sup> Throughout the development of Diego Garcia and BIOT, U.S. and U.K. government officials sought at least in public to describe the military activities there not as a "base" but as a "station," a "facility," or "post." They usually linked these terms with adjectives like "austere," "limited," or "modest." From early in the development of Diego Garcia, however, the Navy and later the Department of Defense and the Air Force had large visions for the island: first, for naval communications in the Indian Ocean (including to coordinate nuclear submarines newly deployed there to strike the Soviet Union and China); second, as a large harbor for Navy warships and submarines, with enough room to protect an aircraft carrier task force; and third, as an airfield intended first for Navy reconnaissance planes and later for nuclear-bomb-ready B-52 bombers and almost every other plane in the Air Force arsenal (see Bandjunis 2001:8-14; UK Colonial Office 1964; Gibbon et al. 1964:1-2). Faced with the potential for growing opposition, U.S. and U.K. officials insistently avoided describing plans for Diego Garcia as a "base." With the British soon committing to withdraw its troops east of the Suez Canal by 1971, the U.K. Government did not want to be involved in any development perceived to be a new base (Mewes 1971:1). U.S. officials faced opposition to their expansion into the Indian Ocean in Congress, from nations around the Indian Ocean like India, and even within the Pentagon. This opposition was especially intense considering the escalating war in Vietnam and what was then, like Southeast Asia before it, a move into a region almost entirely without a prior U.S. presence.

<sup>48</sup> The Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Plans and Policy explained to Zumwalt that Diego's inhabitants were a mix of Ilois, Mauritians, and Seychellois, and the Navy's position on employing any locals: "The decision not to hire local labor, even for domestic work, was made on the basis that no local economy dependent on the facility should be created. To do so would make it more difficult to remove the workers when the facility becomes operational. If a native community of bars, laundries, etc. grew and then was required to be disbanded, the resultant publicity could become damaging. Another important factor is that presentations to Congress have stressed that there will be no indigenous population and no native labor utilized in the construction." Zumwalt scrawled the following in response: "Better than I had hoped" (Blouin 1970).

<sup>49</sup> The history in this chapter, which stems from Vine et al. 2005, is drawn from several sources. Many published accounts of the expulsion exist (e.g., Ottaway 1975; Winchester 1985; Madeley 1985). Most provide a broad overview of the expulsion. To document the expulsion accurately and verifiably and with more detail than previous histories, this history draws almost exclusively on primary sources: interviews and conversations with Chagossians and others in Mauritius and Seychelles who witnessed events; court documents; and contemporaneous British Government documents describing many of the events of the expulsion as they occurred. Although I have relied on Chagossians' eyewitness accounts, I have tried to verify their accounts with published sources as cited.

<sup>50</sup> As the international development community became increasingly aware of the harmful effects of development projects, Cernea shaped the World Bank's first policies to prevent and mitigate the harms of involuntary displacement. Following the World Bank's example, other major international development institutions, including the Asian Development Bank, adopted similar policies. In academic anthropology and sociology, Cernea has been the major force in establishing important subfields and bodies of literature

on involuntary resettlement. He has also helped formulate theoretical linkages between literature on involuntary displacement and the harms suffered by refugees and other displaced populations. Cernea's work has also represented a significant advance over earlier attempts to understand and model the dangers of displacement. Seminal works by Anthony Oliver-Smith and Art Hansen (e.g., 1982), Thayer Scudder (1973) and Elizabeth Colson (1971; also Scudder and Colson 1989), and others focused on the stresses of displacement and the subsequent coping responses of affected peoples. While stress remains a topic of investigation for some like Chris de Wet (1988), the earlier works are, in retrospect, overly mechanistic and generalized. Each theorizes an automatic stressor-coping mechanism relationship that predicts little about what kind of coping responses the displaced are likely to develop and says even less about which types of stresses are likely to be generated by displacement (Vine et al. 2005).

<sup>51</sup> While these subprocess are the most common among hundreds of cases of involuntary displacement, the IRR model says that some cases will feature the absence of some subprocesses or the presence of other less common ones, while each subprocess will differ in intensity across cases and among groups (e.g., women, children, the elderly) within a population.

<sup>52</sup> The persistence of these poor housing standards left Chagossians vulnerable to new displacements and renewed homelessness, especially to the cyclones that periodically strike Mauritius with especially ferocious effects on the homes of poor families. A 1975 interview with a Chagossian from Diego Garcia describes the damage of the cyclone on a family of nine: "The five [chickens] that were left and the coop were lost in February in Cyclone Gervaise. She also lost during the cyclone her two coconut-straw mattresses that she brought from Diego. She tried to save them, but the wind became too strong and she and the children had to flee to a neighbor's house. When she returned, the mattresses, and most of the iron sheets from the house, were gone. Now she has to gather grass for the children to sleep on" (U.S. Congress, House 1975:111).

<sup>53</sup> These reports seem clearly to suggest increased mortality compared with life in Chagos. Yearly average death figures during the last years in Chagos for individuals born there are 0.75 per year in Diego Garcia, 4.75 per year in Peros Banhos, and 2.33 per year in Salomon (B.I.O.T. Death n.d.).

<sup>54</sup> See also Boswell 2002, for more on this phenomenon among the poor of Mauritius generally, and Colson 1971, on the phenomenon among involuntary displacees as a group.

<sup>55</sup> At least one grandchild of someone born in Chagos has worked on the base in the laundry and in other jobs. His obtaining a job seems to support the claim that Chagossians have been disqualified from employment on the basis of their place of birth or their parents' place of birth.

<sup>56</sup> By the early 1980s, most Chagossians were still living in "ramshackle houses and in dire conditions" (Sylva 1981:3) in the slums of Port Louis. More than 80 percent were living in two or three room "hovels," (Botte 1980:29, 30) with 27 percent of households doubling up with other families (Sylva 1981:3).

<sup>57</sup> This figure is a revision of an earlier finding after final data cleaning and analysis (see Vine et al. 2005:116-119).

<sup>58</sup> Thanks to Satyendra Peerthum for translating the phrase.

<sup>59</sup> The words point to a common narrative (Jeffery 2005) of the expulsion and to the injuries experienced in exile. Among other purposes that the shorthand serves is to allow people to allude to the expulsion and other painful experiences of suffering without having to recite the entirety of the narrative or the specifics of their own painful injuries (including rape, hunger, and crime).

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<sup>60</sup> I have recently learned of land expropriations and possible displacements in the Waikane and Makua valleys.

<sup>61</sup> Though, as the Guam and Puerto Rico cases show, at times cleansing takes place long after conquest.

<sup>62</sup> Contrary to a trend against large-scale cleansings in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, World War I brought expulsions and massacres in Southern Europe during the genocide against Armenians by the Ottoman Turks and the violent population exchanges between Turkey and Greece after the War. World War II made the phenomenon even more widespread. During and after the war, approximately 30 million people were expelled. After the war, huge, violent, and often-deadly expulsions of Germans, Ukrainians, and others, were carried out in Eastern and Central Europe under the euphemistic headings of “repatriations,” “resettlements,” and “population exchanges.” Most significantly, as Mark Kramer explains, these violent expulsions were “explicitly authorized” by the major powers that “decided to condone and even promote fresh bouts of ethnic cleansing at the end of World War II” (2001:1-6).

<sup>63</sup> Inspiration to use Lake and Morris comes from Samantha Power (2002). She points to the irony of Anthony Lake’s own inaction in the face of genocide in Rwanda.

<sup>64</sup> One of the advisors for this dissertation, Leith Mullings, commented, “I think this is begging the question—rather than policy being predicated on a ‘dehumanized pattern...,’ I would say it is predicated on hierarchical notions of some human beings being more deserving and important than others” (personal communication, 14 September 2006). She pointed out further that these notions are deeply rooted ideologically in the history of the United States and its histories of slavery and the expulsion and extermination of Native Americans. I agree with this critique, which calls into question the major conclusion in this chapter, and will explore this line of thought as I develop this work in the future.

<sup>65</sup> While this kind of policymaking, or aspects of it, may describe others actors across a broader time period or among a broader group of leaders or empires, this is not my aim.

<sup>66</sup> James Mann identifies a “belief in the centrality and the efficacy of American military power” among members of the group of “Vulcans” who rose to power in the era following the World War II generation’s debacle in Vietnam (2004:362).

<sup>67</sup> Contrary to what one might assume, State Department officials often exhibited a greater faith in military force than their Defense Department counterparts. With few exceptions, State Department officials were enthusiastic supporters of the base. This support may have been related, in part, to the role played by the office within State that was primarily responsible for Diego Garcia. The Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs—“Pol-Mil,” as it is known—worked closely and enjoyed friendly relationships with Pentagon officials. Far from being concerned about military force, one of the office’s main objectives was enabling the freest exercise of U.S. military power through the negotiation of favorable political and legal arrangements for the use of foreign bases. When marginal concerns emerged from the State Department about Diego Garcia, most often it came from regional desks that oversaw diplomatic relations with countries bordering the Indian Ocean. Belief in the efficacy of military force among civilian officials often appeared as a veneration of the military and its leaders. An exchange I had with the former director of Pol-Mil George Vest exemplifies this trend. Vest was appointed to Pol-Mil after a contentious six-month period as Henry Kissinger’s spokesperson. After serving in the Army in North Africa in World War II, Vest made a career in the Foreign Service, including a placement in the office of the Secretary General of NATO. Vest explained that he was never enthusiastic about Diego Garcia. “We’ve got too many bases around the world,” he said. But this is just an “uninformed civilian view,” Vest added. I remarked that it seemed quite an informed view given his background. “In relative terms,” Vest replied, “I recognize when you’re going to be making judgments on bases and installations and all the rest—particularly when I worked for General Norstadt [at NATO], I began to see all this—the civilian does not know enough, as a rule, to make a judgment.... Cause it’s too complex.”

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<sup>68</sup> The analysis in this section stems from this fact and Enloe's (1990) insistence that scholars make the gender of foreign policy actors a visible part of foreign policy analysis.

<sup>69</sup> Another less aggressive solution to ensure long-term base occupancy would have been to adjust U.S. relations with nations hosting bases or the policies affecting such relationships. This was seemingly never considered. Even if taking control of Diego Garcia had remained the policy, the expulsion was again the toughest of policy options in privileging the military's interests over the Chagossians' rights and any policy of coexistence (an example of which, in the Bonin-Volcano islands, appears at the end of chapter 9).

<sup>70</sup> Carol Cohn (1990) has shown the language of defense intellectuals is a language of "abstraction and euphemism" that distances defense intellectuals from the impact of their decisions and shields them from the emotional force of less oblique discussions. More than a matter of vocabulary alone, language is "transformative," shaping one's thoughts, one's sense of reality, and what is possible in the world. Even further, as Gusterson's work (1996) suggests, language has the power to shape individuals' feelings and consciousness.

<sup>71</sup> The economic and political costs for the United Kingdom have, by design of the original agreement, been far higher and are growing with the Chagossians' ongoing litigation, their recent visit to Chagos and presence in Britain, and related public protest.

<sup>72</sup> Mann identifies among the Vulcans of the Bush administration a "belief in America as a force for good around the globe" (2004:362).

<sup>73</sup> Underlying this ethnocentrism were the related phenomena of nationalism and, as Halberstam identifies, anti-Communism. With the weight of a religion (Ehrenreich 1997), "American" nationalism and the concerns of opposing the Communists blinded Government officials to the lives of others and allowed them to privilege their perceived needs for national self-defense over all else. Diego Garcia was necessary for the defense of the nation; the concerns of those affected by the creation of the base were barely considered and, even if they had been, paled in comparison to the necessity of defending the United States in the Cold War. In the Marshall Islands, U.S. officials displayed a similar attitude: The Navy and the Government justified the removal of the Bikinians as being for the good of mankind (see Weisgall 1994). In other cases, U.S. officials maintained a self-serving belief that U.S. strategic plans were best and even necessary for the world, justified under notions of "collective security" that obscured selfish motivations at play. With Diego Garcia and elsewhere, officials' nationalistic ethnocentrism was so extreme that they unconsciously conflated their own needs for those of humanity, no matter the effects on others. Such assumptions reflect a major theme in U.S. history, in which citizens and their leaders have consistently embraced an idealistic, crusading vision of the United States as a virtuous and moral nation destined to lead all others, correct and pure, almost by definition, in its actions and its motivations (Van Alstyne 1960:202-205).

<sup>74</sup> It is not unreasonable to think that the World War II island hopping campaign in the Pacific influenced more than just officials' ideas about the importance of island bases. The island hopping is likely also to have powerfully shaped ideas about race shared by Navy officials in particular. During the campaign, Navy and other troops had what for almost all of them were their first interactions with local tropical island populations. Given popular ideas at the time (for the most part held to this day), it would have been difficult for sailors and soldiers to think of these islanders as anything but the "primitive" natives they were portrayed as by anthropologists and journalists alike. The Government's widely publicized deportation of the Bikinians after the war and its paternalistic treatment of islanders elsewhere in the Pacific would have only reinforced these views.

<sup>75</sup> Another Navy document described as "minor" the population in Peros Banhos and Salomon (Rivero 1960b).

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<sup>76</sup> “Diego Garcia was all a backwater,” Murray explained, to the major debates in the region focused on Iran, Pakistan and India, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

<sup>77</sup> I asked Gary Sick what U.S. officials knew about the Chagossians. No one knew much, he said, and people were generally pleased to take the word of the British on the matter. “If there were American experts on the population, in anthropology, of the Indian Ocean islands, I never met them, and I doubt very seriously if there were any who were involved in the process.”

<sup>78</sup> The possibility that more might have challenged the expulsion becomes more improbable when one considers that to challenge any policy of the U.S. Government is not simply to challenge one’s immediate superior or an office within the Government. To challenge policy is to challenge one’s entire department, the department’s secretary, and to a significant extent the U.S. Government as a whole. This lesson was communicated explicitly in most telegrams, which when communicating orders or instructions to the embassy in London, for example, would come not in the name of an individual at the State Department but in the name of the “Department of State,” officially signed by the Secretary of State himself. This contributed to the feeling among many officials that they were carrying out the policy dictates of the U.S. Government, matters about which they generally had no input.

<sup>79</sup> Parts of this chapter, which are noted throughout, draw on Jeffery 2005 and Jeffery forthcoming. An altered version of this chapter will form part of Vine and Jeffery n.d.

<sup>80</sup> This section is based on Jeffery 2005:93-97.

<sup>81</sup> Lassemillante and the CSC argue that the expulsion and continued exile of the Chagossians is contrary to UN declarations on human and indigenous rights. For Lassemillante, “the fundamental right of the Chagossian native to return and reside on his homeland” is non-negotiable (Lassemillante 2002: 90). A CSC leaflet showing Mandarin participating in a session at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations proclaims, “To live on our land of origin: A sacred right, wherever our origin may be!” (Comité Social des Chagossiens 1997).

<sup>82</sup> Since Diego Garcia was home to the largest group of islanders prior to the displacement, some Chagossians from Diego Garcia felt that winning the right to return to the other smaller islands was a hollow victory. Blaming the CRG for neglecting the interests of those from Diego Garcia, members of the extended Ramdass and Vincatassin families set up the Diego Garcia Island Council (DGIC). The DGIC campaigned for the inclusion of Diego Garcia in negotiations and litigation concerned with the right to return. In 2001, the DGIC was able to exert considerable influence on Chagossian affairs by managing to coordinate a boycott of a boat trip offered by the UK Government that would have visited Chagossians’ ancestral graves on the outer islands but would not have gone to Diego Garcia. By 2002, the DGIC claimed sixty members who were born on, or were the first-generation offspring of those born on, Diego Garcia (Jeffery forthcoming:9-10).

<sup>83</sup> The group, whose founding was tied to a visit to Seychelles by Mandarin, later changed its name to the Chagossians Committee Seychelles.

<sup>84</sup> The remainder of this section draws substantially on Jeffery 2005:114-117.

<sup>85</sup> The U.K. Government had not intended to extend full citizenship and passports to Chagossians. Following a Parliamentary debate, however, a special clause incorporated Chagossians into the British Overseas Territories Act 2002 on the grounds that their current residency outside a British territory was the result of their involuntary removal by the UK Government (Jeffery forthcoming:7 n. 7).

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<sup>86</sup> Under its independence agreement with Britain, Mauritius granted Chagossians Mauritian citizenship in 1968. Those in Seychelles were not granted automatic citizenship, leaving many there without citizenship and passports for years. In the 1980s, CRG members realized that most Chagossians were still BIOT citizens, carrying with it, as a British Dependent Territory, the right to a British Dependent Territories passport, although not residential rights in Britain (nor, of course, in the BIOT).

<sup>87</sup> Chagossian leadership in the Seychelles and their legal team told Laura Jeffery that they are opposed to Mauritian sovereignty. They argued that Mauritian politics and business are controlled by Indo-Mauritians and that under Mauritian sovereignty Indo-Mauritian business interests would dominate any resettlement. They also feared that Mauritius might prevent Chagossians from returning or that Chagossians might only be able to return as cheap unskilled manual laborers. Furthermore, Seychelles Chagossians suggested that if the Chagos Archipelago was governed as a Mauritian territory subject to Mauritian immigration laws, Seychelles Chagossians (who do not have Mauritian passports) might be prevented from resettling there. The solution to both these problems suggested by the Chagossian leadership in Seychelles was that the Chagos Archipelago should be administered as a British Overseas Territory in which all U.K.-passport-holding Chagossians would be entitled residency. In 2004, the Chagossian coalition's legal team at Sheridans and the Chagossians' legal team in the Seychelles independently started to investigate the possibilities of funding a resettlement project under British sovereignty through the U.K. Department for International Development or European Union development funds. Several Chagossian leaders who have moved to Britain also support U.K. sovereignty since, they believe, Britain has a better understanding of resettlement issues than Mauritius (Jeffery 2005:106).

<sup>88</sup> They are aware of the advantageous nature of the qualification given higher levels of rights accorded to indigenous peoples under international law, including the right to self-determination.

<sup>89</sup> Mauritian politicians also insist that there has never been an indigenous population in Mauritius and its dependencies, since the islands were populated through slavery and indentured labor beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Envisioning Mauritian history in this way, as a nation of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Africa, has been an important aspect of Mauritian popular mythology since independence. Acknowledging Chagossians' claim to indigeneity would not only challenge Mauritian sovereignty and give the group rights over the archipelago's future but would also undermine part of the national myth and, potentially, peace between ethnic groups in the country.

<sup>90</sup> The Seychelles Government has no territorial claim on the Chagos Archipelago, and thus cannot use national sovereignty as a justification for not supporting Seychelles Chagossians' request for recognition as refugees. The problem faced by Chagossians in Seychelles has instead been the Government's longstanding insistence on the equal treatment of all its citizens and its resultant rejection of the request for what it considers to be a form of positive discrimination that would privilege Chagossians over non-Chagossian citizens of Seychelles (Jeffery 2005:116).

<sup>91</sup> In 2000, the British Government allowed Olivier Bancoult and two other Chagossian leaders to briefly visit the islands.

<sup>92</sup> This section takes its title from Neil Smith's suggestion that Derek Gregory's *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (2004) would have been better titled *The Imperial Present* (personal communication 2006).

<sup>93</sup> The search for alternatives is underdeveloped in the dissertation; feminist discourse on "human security" may offer a useful direction for developing these ideas in the future.

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