

Sacralising the Contested
The Chagossian Diaspora and their First
Pilgrimage to the Homeland

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By Mr. Steffen Fagernes Johannessen

Born on 7 August 1977 in Porsgrunn, Norway

Supervisors:

Prof. Dr. Burkhard Schnepel (Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg).

Prof. Dr. Günther Schlee (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale).

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To make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated and continue to dominate historical societies. The things forgotten or not mentioned by history reveal these mechanisms for the manipulation of collective memory.

Jacques LeGoff (1992, 54)

Nothing is as likely to ensure that humans will assert (or invent) their differences than being made aware [...] of the indifference of the state to their predicament. It could not, if I may be allowed the pun, be Otherwise. Nor is it hard to understand why, when faced with such indifference, subordinated groups should stress their cultural distinctiveness in agitating against disempowerment

John L. Comaroff (1996, 174)

A pilgrimage is a return to a place. [...] While tombstones are mostly signs of absence, and mostly silent, at times of pilgrimage they are noisy with the sounds of many presences. Movement makes all the difference. We cannot understand the grave, the destination, without paying attention to the journey beyond it.

Engseng Ho (2006, 7-8)

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INDIAN OCEAN MAP



Illustration 1: Political map of the Western Indian Ocean.

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Steffen F. Johannessen

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States	IWF	Ilois Welfare Fund
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act	JIC	Joint Ilois Committee
AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company	KMLI	Komite Morisyen Losean Indien
BIOT	British Indian Ocean Territory	LDC	Least Developed Country
BMFC	British-Mauritian Fisheries Commission	MBC	Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation
BOTA	British Overseas Territories Act	MFA	Multi Fibre Agreement
CCT	Chagos Conservation Trust	MLF	Muvman Liberasyon Fam
CEN	Chagos Environment Network	MLP	Mauritius Labour Party
CICA	Chagos Islands Community Association	MMM	Mauritian Militant Movement
CI-OF	Comite Ilois Organisation Fraternelle	MPA	Marine Protected Area
CRG	Chagos Refugees Group	MRAG	Marine Resource Assessment Group Ltd.
CSC (Mauritius)	Chagossian Social Committee in Mauritius	MSC	Mauritius Shipping Corporation
CSC (Seychelles)	Chagossian Social Committee in the Seychelles	MSDP	Mauritius Social Democratic Party
DGIC	Diego Garcia Island Council	MSM	Mauritius Socialist Movement
DGS	Diego Garcian Society	NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
EBA	Everything But Arms agreement	NESC	National and Economic Social Council
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
EEC	European Economic Community	OAU	Organisation of African Unity
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone	OF	Organisation Fraternelle
EPZ	Export Processing Zone	PEG	Pew Environment Group
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment	PM	Prime Minister
FNSI	Front National de Soutien aux Îlois	PMXD	Mauritian Party of Xavier Duval
FO	Foreign Office	MSP	Mauritian Socialist Party
GWF	General Workers Federation	TNI	Transnational Institute
ICJ	International Court of Justice	UN	United Nations
IMF	International Monetary Fund	UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
ITF	Ilois Trust Fund	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
		WB	World Bank
		WSF	World Social Forum
		WTO	World Trade Organization

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG IN DEUTSCHER SPRACHE

Gegenstand der vorliegenden Arbeit ist die Untersuchung und Analyse der Tschagos-Gemeinschaft und ihre erste Pilgerreise in den Tschagos-Archipel im März 2006.

Die Tschagossianer

Bei den Tschagossianern handelt es sich um die Nachkommen ehemaliger Bewohner des Tschagos-Archipels. Mit dem Tschagos-Archipel werden eine Gruppe von kleinen, entlegenen Korral Atollen zusammengefasst, die über der Großen Tschagos-Bank im Zentrum des Indischen Ozeans verstreut liegen. Diese Inseln wurden erstmals im späten 18. Jahrhundert besiedelt, als französische Kolonialherren in Mauritius versklavte Arbeiter auf diese Inseln schickten, um von den lokalen Kokosnuss Ressourcen, durch die Produktion von Kopra und Kokosöl, zu profitieren. Die meisten dieser Sklaven kamen ursprünglich aus Madagaskar und verschiedenen afrikanischen Regionen, einschließlich dem heutigen Mosambik, Tansania, Kenia und aus dem Senegal. Zudem wurden nach der Abschaffung der Sklaverei im Jahre 1835 viele indische Kontraktarbeiter importiert, um auf den lokalen Kokosnuss-Plantagen zu arbeiten. Im Laufe der Zeit wurden sie in die lokale Wirtschaft integriert und nahmen, so wie die Sklaven vor ihnen, den katholischen Glauben an.

Am Ende der napoleonischen Kriege kam es zu einem Machtwechsel zwischen Briten und Franzosen und der Tschagos-Archipel wurde zum Bestandteil der britischen Kolonie Mauritius. Die Kokosnussproduktion dauerte fast zwei Jahrhunderte ohne Unterbrechung auf den Tschagos-Inseln an. Im Zuge der Entkolonialisierung in den 1960er Jahren stellte die britische Regierung die Ablösung des Tschagos-Archipels von Mauritius als Bedingung für die Unabhängigkeit von Mauritius. Der Archipel blieb in britischer Hand und so wurde 1965 die letzte Kolonie des Imperiums geschaffen: Das britische Territorium im Indischen Ozean (engl.: British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)). Dieser politische Schritt wurde getan, um Platz für eine große US-Militärbasis auf der größten Insel des Archipels, Diego Garcia, zu schaffen. Bis zum Jahre 1973 brachte die britische Regierung die gesamte Kokosindustrie zum Erliegen und vertrieb die gesamte einheimische Bevölkerung der Tschagos-Inseln auf Mauritius und die Seychellen. Um internationale Gesetze und Vereinbarungen zu umgehen, definierten die britischen Behörden die Inselbewohner neu und präsentierten sie als eine fluktuierende Bevölkerung von Wandervertragsarbeitern. Durch diese strategische Definition galten die Menschen nicht als illegal Vertriebene, sondern kehrten lediglich in ihre zugeschriebene Heimat Mauritius und den Seychellen zurück. Durch die Unterschrift der britischen Monarchin wurden neue Rechtsvorschriften in Kraft gesetzt, die eine Rückkehr auf die Tschagos-Inseln zum kriminellen Akt machten.

Schätzungsweise 2000 Menschen hatten zu diesem Zeitpunkt auf dem Tschagos-Archipel gelebt und gearbeitet. Etwa drei Viertel von ihnen landeten bis 1973 auf Mauritius. Da es kein Wiederansiedlungsprogramm gab, war die vertriebene Bevölkerung unmittelbar mit großer Armut und den damit verbundenen Problemen konfrontiert. Dies löste eine Reihe von Protesten und Demonstrationen aus, die im Jahre 1982 schließlich zu einer Entschädigung an die Tschagos Inselbewohner auf Mauritius führte. Bis heute dauern die Kämpfe um

Kompensation und die Proteste gegen die Unzulänglichkeit der Entschädigungen an. Viele Tschagos Inselbewohner wollen in ihre Heimat zurückkehren, oder zumindest das Recht auf Rückkehr haben. Über die Zeit haben die politischen Kämpfe ihre Form und ihr Gesicht verändert, indem die Protestler beispielsweise verschiedene legale Institutionen in den Kampf gegen ihre politischen Gegner involvierten. Charakteristisch für die heutigen politischen Kämpfe ist, dass sie eine starke ethno-politische Wendung genommen haben. Dies hatte zur Folge, dass die Kämpfe seit den 1990er Jahren zunehmend in globalen Arenen ausgefochten wurden und sich die ehemaligen Inselbewohner so mehr und mehr zu einer transnationalen ethnischen Gemeinschaft oder Diaspora ausbildeten.

Nach Jahrzehnten des politischen Kampfes stellte sich schließlich ein neues und sehr wichtiges Ergebnis ein: Eine Delegation von Hundert Tschagossianern wurde ein „humanitärer Besuch“ zu dem Tschagos-Archipel im Jahr 2006 gewährt. Seit dem Zeitpunkt ihrer Vertreibung war es ihnen zum ersten Mal ermöglicht, einen Tag auf jeder der drei Hauptinselgruppen des Tschagos-Archipels, Salomon, Peros Banhos und Diego Garcia, zu verbringen. Es handelte sich um einen historischen Meilenstein im Zuge ihres politischen Kampfes, welcher für die vertriebenen Inselbewohner von großer Bedeutung war. Allerdings fand diese Veranstaltung in einer sehr komplexen politischen Landschaft statt, wo neben der Diaspora der Tschagossianer auch Vertreter mauritischer, englischer und amerikanischer Behörden, sowie eine aktive transnationale Bewegung zur Entmilitarisierung zugegen waren. Offiziell wurde die Reise in der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Großbritannien und Mauritius angeordnet und eine Delegation beider Regierungen sollten die Passagiere begleiten. Allerdings erhoben sowohl Mauritius, als auch die ehemalige Kolonialmacht Souveränitätsanspruch am Tschagos-Archipel. Die mauritischen Behörden hatten nur ein Jahr zuvor angekündigt, dass sie bereit wären, aus dem britischen Commonwealth auszuscheiden, um die britische Regierung am Internationalen Gerichtshof bezüglich dieser Frage zu verklagen. Hinzukommend wurde die exportorientierte, postkoloniale Wirtschaft von Mauritius mit einer schweren Krise konfrontiert, weil besondere bilaterale Handelsabkommen, von denen Mauritius lange profitiert hatte, gerade abgeschafft wurden. In einem Kontext steigender Arbeitslosigkeit auf Mauritius, aber auch einer sehr aktiven Beteiligung transnationaler Organisationen, wie der Welthandelsorganisation und der Weltbank, begaben sich die Tschagossianer nun auf eine Seefahrt zu einer der wichtigsten Überseeischen Militärbasen der USA, mit Vertretern der britischen und der mauritischen Regierungen, die gleichermaßen ihren Souveränitätsanspruch auf den Zielort der Reise behaupteten.

Im Kontext dieser vielfältigen, politischen Interessen unternahmen die Tschagossianer aktive Schritte, um die Reise in der Öffentlichkeit in Übereinstimmung mit ihrer eigenen politischen Agenda zu bringen. Im Zuge dessen, luden sie Vertreter der Kirche ein, um die Reise zu einer Pilgerfahrt, zu den verfallenen Kapellen und Friedhöfen der Inseln, zu erklären.

Die Arbeit

Diese Doktorarbeit untersucht und analysiert eine der zentralsten Ereignisse in der Geschichte der Diaspora der Tschagossianer: Ihre erste Pilgerfahrt in die Heimat. Die theoretische Abhandlung der vorliegenden Studie zu diesem empirischen Fall ist dementsprechend in

anthropologische Debatten um Pilgerreisen eingebettet. Diese Wallfahrt war in vieler Hinsicht unkonventionell, was bedeutet, dass sie im Rahmen der allgemeinen, theoretischen Debatten um Pilgerreisen neue Perspektiven und zusätzliche Erkenntnisse bietet.

Von besonderem Interesse waren Fragen wie: Wie kann Wallfahrt eine politische Strategie in der heutigen Welt sein? Wie kann die Durchführung einer Wallfahrt in Kontexten mit vielen Parteien (auch Nicht-Pilger), die um das Monopol der Bedeutung eines Bestimmungsortes kämpfen, eine Möglichkeit sein, das Verständnis von Menschen, Routen und Orten zu transformieren? Wie steht Wallfahrt, als eine bestimmte Kategorie von Bewegung, in Relation zu Wallfahrt als Metapher? Und wie kann Wallfahrt mit anderen wichtigen Formen und Geschichten von Bewegungen in Beziehung stehen und wie können sie einander beeinflussen? Wie bereits dargestellt, handelt es sich nicht ausschließlich nur für die Tschagossianer um ein Ereignis von besonderer Bedeutung, da eine ganze Reihe von inter- und transnationaler Parteien involviert sind, die bezüglich der Heimat der Tschagossianer ihre eigenen politischen Interessen verfolgen. Aus diesem Grund handelt es sich bei dieser Pilgerfahrt um einen außergewöhnlichen empirischen Fall, der die Möglichkeit bietet, die transnationale Gemeinschaft der Tschagossianer, in einem sehr besonderen Kontext, der weit über die lokale Ebene hinaus geht, zu studieren. Diese Arbeit untersucht zentrale Vorkommnisse vor, während und nach der Reise und bettet sie in historische, soziale, politische und wirtschaftliche Zusammenhänge ein. Dieser Fall gibt darüber hinaus eine Aussage über die globalen Felder, in denen Pilgerreisen – als eine von unterschiedlichen Kategorien von Mobilität in einer globalisierten Welt – zur politischen Strategie werden kann. Für diese Studie habe ich folgende Forschungsfragen formuliert:

Warum haben die Tschagossianer ihre Reise als Pilger definiert und durchgeführt, und welche Bedeutung hatte dies im Kontext ihres Stattfindens? Welche Aussage gibt dieser Fall über die Tschagos-Gemeinschaft, ihre Kultur, und den sozio-politischen und ideologischen Rahmen, in dem sie leben und kämpfen? Was verrät dieser Fall über Macht und politische Strategien unter den anderen lokalen und globalen Akteuren, die Interesse an den künftigen Status dieser umfangreichen militärischen Anlage haben, und wie beziehen sie sich auf die Tschagossianer? Wie kann Pilgerreisen – als eine bestimmte Art um der Gestaltung und Performanz von Mobilität – eine politische Strategie in einer globalisierten Welt „in Bewegung“ bilden, die durch eine Vielzahl von zeitgenössischer Mobilität charakterisiert ist?

Die Vorgehensweise

Neben umfangreicher Archivforschung wurden empirische Daten für diese Studie innerhalb von zwölf Monaten ethnographischer Feldforschung unter den vertriebenen Tschagossianern auf Mauritius, Großbritannien und den Seychellen gesammelt. Der Großteil dieser Forschungsarbeit vollzog sich auf Mauritius in 2004 und 2006. Seit dieser Zeit wurden auch weitere kürzere Feldforschungsreisen nach Großbritannien und den Seychellen unternommen. Die vorliegende Arbeit macht sehr deutlich, welche Unternehmungen es gab, die Umstände und Hintergründe der Vertreibung der Bewohner des Tschagos-Archipels zu verheimlichen.

30 Jahre später wurden geheime, britische Akten zwar zugänglich gemacht, dennoch behandeln die machthabenden Parteien dieses Thema weiterhin sehr vorsichtig, und nutzen unterschiedliche Strategien, um dieses politisch angespannte Thema zu umgehen, Debatten im Keim zu ersticken, oder die Geschichte einfach umzuschreiben. Die Reise selbst war ein gutes Beispiel für diese Vorgehensweise. Es war nicht gestattet, dass Reporter die Tschagos Inselbewohner zu diesem abgesperrten und militarisierten Archipel begleiteten. Demzufolge hatte ich selbst ebenfalls nicht die Möglichkeit, als teilnehmender Beobachter unter den Passagieren während der 11 tägigen Reise anwesend zu sein.

Dieser Umstand hatte auch Auswirkungen auf den zentralen Fokus und die Auswahl der Methoden in dieser Studie. Anstatt eine engere ethno-kulturelle Studie über die Tschagossianer während dieser ganz besonderen Veranstaltung vorzunehmen, habe ich die Reise in einem breiteren Kontext analysiert. Ich habe die Reise zudem als empirischen Fall herangezogen, um zu untersuchen und aufzuzeigen in welchem kontextuellen Rahmen sich die Tschagos-Gemeinschaft befindet. Darüber hinaus wurde natürlich auch die Reise selbst analysiert. Aber um dies zu tun, musste ich mich auf mehrere andere Quellen von Daten, einschließlich ethnographischer Interviews mit den Passagieren nach ihrer Rückkehr, verlassen. Somit wurde diese Studie in zwei methodischen Schritten durchgeführt: Zuerst habe ich verschiedene Aspekte dieser Reise, einschließlich der Geschichte und die massiven Streitigkeiten und Verhandlungen im Vorfeld verwendet, um unterschiedliche und wichtige Aspekte der Tschagos-Gemeinschaft zu erforschen. Dadurch wurde eine breite kontextuelle Grundlage geschaffen, durch die es möglich wurde, die Pilgerreise selbst zu analysieren.

Aufbau der Arbeit

Das einführende erste Kapitel bietet einen Überblick über die Dissertation. Hier werden wichtige methodische Fragen, sowie die bereits vorhandene Literatur diskutiert und es präsentiert zudem anthropologische Debatten über das Phänomen der Pilgerfahrt, die den übergreifenden theoretischen Rahmen für diese Arbeit bilden sollen.

Mit einem speziellen Fokus auf Mauritius und den Tschagos-Archipel gibt Kapitel 2 einen historischen Abriss zu jenen Inseln im westlichen Indischen Ozean, die für die vorliegende Arbeit von besonderer Relevanz sind. Hier werde ich darstellen, wie diese Inseln entdeckt und besiedelt wurden, welche Rolle sie in der Kolonialwirtschaft spielten und wie die Menschen vor der Zwangsräumung des Tschagos-Archipels arbeiteten und lebten. Darüber hinaus bietet dieses Kapitel eine Einführung in die Geschichte des post-kolonialen Mauritius, um einen wichtigen Aspekt aufzuzeigen, der bei der Reise der Tschagossianer 2006 eine Schlüsselrolle spielte: Durch die wirtschaftlichen und politischen Hinterlassenschaften der Kolonialzeit befindet sich das heute unabhängige Mauritius nach wie vor in einer wirtschaftlichen Abhängigkeit von den westlichen Staaten. Zu diesen Staaten zählen ebenfalls die ehemaligen Kolonialmächte, die noch immer entscheidende territoriale Gebiete kontrollieren, die früher Teil von Mauritius waren, wo runter der Tschagos-Archipel von besonderer Wichtigkeit ist.

Das dritte Kapitel untersucht den ideologischen Rahmen, in den die Pilgerfahrt eingebettet ist. Ordnet man die Reise in die Geschichte des politischen Kampfes der

Tschagossianer ein, wird deutlich, dass diese Pilgerfahrt das Ergebnis jahrzehnter langer Kämpfe und Proteste darstellt. Mit einem besonderem Augenmerk auf die Rolle und dem Wiederaufleben musikalischer Traditionen, zeigt dieses Kapitel, wie sich der Charakter dieses Kampfes im Laufe der Zeit entwickelt und verwandelt hat und dass er mit der politischen Entwicklung auf Mauritius in Zusammenhang steht. In der frühen Zeit nach ihrer Deportation wurden die Tschagossianer in einen erweiterten „nicht-ethnischen“ sozialistischen Aufstand in Mauritius integriert. Ab Mitte der 1980er Jahre nahmen ihre Kämpfe eine neue Wendung und man bemühte sich politisch um kulturelle Anerkennung, innerhalb eines politischen und ideologischen Rahmens einer ethnisch geordneten Welt und einer weitreichenden sedentären Ideologie. Dieses Kapitel zeigt, wie im Zuge dieser ethno-politischen Kämpfe, aus einer vertriebenen Population von Menschen, „die Tschagossianer“ wurden. Zudem zeigt dieses Kapitel auf, dass Menschen die vertrieben worden sind und zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt mit einer Politik um kulturelle Anerkennung innerhalb dieses ideologischen Rahmens beginnen, höchstwahrscheinlich mit dem Dilemma des kulturellen Genozids konfrontiert werden. Es verdeutlicht, wie die Tschagossianer mit diesem Dilemma umgehen, eingenommen einer „Catch 22-Situation“ die entsteht, wenn vertriebene Gruppen nur wenige Mittel besitzen, um zu demonstrieren, dass sie Opfer eines post-facto kulturellen Völkermords geworden sind, außer mittels ihrer eigenen kulturellen Traditionen. Darüber hinaus zeigt dieses Kapitel, dass die Reise 2006 innerhalb eines besonderen politischen und ideologischen Rahmens stattfand, durch den diese Pilgerreise sein bedeutsames politisches Potential bekam.

Kapitel 4 zeichnet die politischen Gewässer auf, die von dem Schiff *Mauritius Trochetia* bei diesem Anlass durchlaufen wurden. Ein genauerer Blick auf die Passagierliste des Schiffes identifiziert die zentralen Akteure, die in die „Politik des Tschagos-Archipels“ involviert waren. Das Kapitel zeigt, dass die zentralen Schwerpunkte dieses politischen Streits, sich mit Fragen der Souveränität und Militarisierung befassen, und verdeutlicht, dass die unterschiedlichen politischen Ziele der Akteure sich gegenseitig ausschließen und weit über die Belange der Tschagossianer hinausgehen. Daraus resultierte eine Art Wettstreit, um die Bedeutung der Tschagos Inseln für die eigenen Interessen zu monopolisieren. Es zeigte sich jedoch, dass die Tschagossianer mit ihren territorialen Ansprüchen sich über die Zeit als relevante politische Akteure durchsetzten, was andere involvierte Parteien nicht länger als irrelevant abtun konnten. In diesem Kontext dehnte sich die Politik des Tschagos-Archipels aus, worin der Wettstreit um die Selbstidentifikation der Tschagossianer zum Bestandteil wurde – d.h. es handelte sich letzten endes um einen Wettstreit, bei dem die involvierten externen Parteien die Selbstidentifikation der Tschagossianer mitbeeinflussen wollten. Diese Tatsache führte zu einer Spaltung innerhalb der transnationalen Gemeinschaft der Tschagossianer.

In Kapitel 5 wird ein narrativer Ansatz verwendet, um dazustellen und zu analysieren, wie die Tschagossianer sich selbst, ihre Situation, die Zeiten und Orte, die ihnen wichtig sind, präsentieren. Ein besonderes Augenmerk soll dabei auf eine Anzahl von Konzepten und Metaphern gelegt werden, die die Tschagossianer immer wieder verwenden, wenn sie über sich selbst und ihre Gemeinschaft sprechen. Diese Konzepte und Metaphern bilden ein intelligibles kulturspezifisches Vokabular, welches die Basis für ein geteiltes Narrativ hinsichtlich ihrer ethnisch-politischen Gemeinschaft darstellt. Es handelt sich dabei um eine dominante Auto/Biographie der Tschagossianer, mittels derer diese Gruppe von Menschen sich selbst als

Tschagossianische Charaktere präsentieren und verstehen. Da diese Konzepte aufgrund der ökonomischen und sozio-politischen Umstände über die Jahre einem stetigen Wandel unterworfen waren, können sie aus diesem Grunde auch als Ausdruck dieser Bedingungen analysiert werden. Das 5. Kapitel zeigt auf, wie das Konzept "Heimat" dran orientiert ist, wie die Tschagossianer ihre Situation im zeitgenössischen Mauritius verstehen. Es zeigt zudem, dass wichtige Perspektiven in den Geschichten, die sie über sich selbst erzählen, aus biblischen Geschichten abgeleitet sind, die im Mittelpunkt ihres katholischen Glaubens stehen. Die Diskurse, die im Vorfeld der Reise 2006 entstanden sind, verdeutlichen den progressiven Charakter dieser Konzepte, und zeigen, dass sie sich inhaltlich immer wieder verändern. Angestoßen durch die physische Pilgerreise, wurde die komplette Geschichte der politischen Kämpfe der Tschagossianer dann als eine metaphorische Wallfahrt neu konzipiert. In diesem neuen Rahmen wurde die physische Pilgerfahrt 2006 plötzlich zu einem „Schritt zum Ziel“ auf eine Meta-Pilgerreise reduziert – d.h. auf die ausgesprochen Ziele ihrer politischen Organisation. Verbundenheit und ein starkes Engagement in dieser Meta-Pilgerreise sind von großer Bedeutung für Militante Tschagossianer, die sich immer wieder zentraler biblischer Analogien bedienen, um sich selbst und ihre Situation zu verstehen. Dies hatte auch Einfluss auf wichtige Entscheidungen, beispielsweise wer bei der Reise 2006 anwesend sein sollte und wer nicht.

Kapitel 6 stellt die Reise und die Tschagos-Gemeinschaft in einen mauritischen Kontext, und zeigt auf wie relevant die Metapher des politischen Lebens als eine Reise von zentraler Bedeutung innerhalb der nationalen Rhetorik von Mauritius ist. Dabei zeigt sich eine Analogie zwischen der Meta-Wallfahrt der Tschagossianer und der symbolischen nationalistischen Rhetorik von Mauritius, als ein Inselstaat mit einer so genannten „multikulturellen“ Gesellschaft, die sich der Metapher eines Hochseeschiffes bedient, um sich selbst zu beschreiben. Dieses Bild wurde durch den mauritischen privaten Sektor, der Welthandelsorganisation und der Weltbank gefördert, die in Zeiten einer Mauritischen Wirtschaftskrise auf die öffentliche Sensibilisierung und das Engagement für „Entwicklung“ drängten. Diese Arbeit postuliert, dass sich aufgrund der besonderen Geschichte, Status und Politik ihres Heimatlandes, sich die Position der Tschagossianer von den anderen, lokalen, ethnischen Gruppen auf Mauritius unterscheidet. Dies gilt sowohl für der Gestaltung und Bestätigung ihrer ethnischen Gemeinschaft, als auch die Bildung und Erhöhung des nationalen Bewusstseins der poly-ethnischen Gesellschaft auf Mauritius. Da die Gemeinschaft der Tschagossianer sich selbst in einem konstituierenden Dialog mit dem Staat befindet und dieser immer wieder innerhalb seiner nationalen Entwicklungsrhetorik reproduziert wird, bilden die Tschagossianer eine wichtige Außengruppe innerhalb einer mauritischen Gesellschaft, welche auf zentrale Weise entlang ethnischer Linien geteilt ist. Daraus resultiert, dass viele Tschagossianer Mauritius als einen Ort betrachten, zu dem sie sich nicht zugehörig fühlen und oft davon sprechen, diesen Ort verlassen zu wollen.

Über das Konzept der Meta-Pilgerfahrt und den Ideen der Tschagossianer über das Verlassen von Mauritius hinaus, ist das zentrale Anliegen in Kapitel 7, die Chagos Gemeinschaft als transnationales soziales Gebilde zu erkunden. Da diese Reise zu zahlreichen intensiven Gesprächen, Streitigkeiten und Interaktionen zwischen allen internationalen Tschagos-Organisationen geführt hat, eignete sie sich hervorragend, um Prozesse der Diasporisierung unter den Tschagossianern zu erforschen. Schließlich wurde die britische

Organisation der Tschagossianer, welche den Teil der Tschagossianer repräsentieren wollten, die nach England migriert waren, von dieser Pilgerreise in die Heimat ausgeschlossen. Dieses Kapitel untersucht die Beweggründe für diese Ausgrenzung, und stellt wichtige Heterogenitäten und Gründe für Meinungsverschiedenheiten innerhalb ihrer transnationalen Gemeinschaft heraus. Es wird die These formuliert, dass diese Heterogenität nicht im Widerspruch zur Diaspora der Tschagossianer steht, sondern zur sozialen Reproduktion beiträgt. Durch einen Blick auf die zentrale Bedeutungen, die militanter Tschagossianer auf Mauritius Mitgliedern ihrer transnationalen Gemeinschaft in Großbritannien zuschreiben und vice versa, wird eine wichtige symbolische Spaltung zwischen beiden Parteien offenkundig: Auf der einen Seite stehen die immigrierten Tschagossianer in die UK und auf der anderen Seite diejenigen, die sowohl im metaphorischen, als auch im physischen Sinne um eine Rückkehr auf die Tschagos Inseln und eine Entschädigung für das erfahrene Unrecht kämpfen. Dieses Kapitel verdeutlicht, dass die Tschagossianer in der Diaspora jetzt von zwei Heimaten sprechen: England und dem Tschagos-Archipel. Allerdings wird der Reise an die jeweiligen Orte eine radikal unterschiedliche Bedeutungen zugeschrieben.

Die Beziehung zwischen diesen beiden unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen wird in Rahmen der propagierten Entwicklungsrhetorik auf Mauritius sehr verständlich. Die Konzeption der Migration nach England entspricht der Terminologie dieser Rhetorik von Entwicklung, wo hingegen eine Dissoziation mit diesen Konzepten von zentraler Bedeutung für den Erfolg der Politik nach ethno-kultureller Anerkennung ist. Diese beiden Dimensionen verhalten sich sehr konstitutiv zueinander. Wallfahrt und Migration von einer ehemaligen Kolonie in das koloniale Zentrum sind daher, zumindest in diesem Fall, in Bezug auf die Bedeutung miteinander eng verbunden. Diese Bedeutungen bieten Pilgerreisen viel Politisches Potenzial in der heutigen Welt.

Bisher wurden ethnographische Daten dieser Reise verwendet, um unterschiedliche Aspekte der Tschagossianer und ihrer transnationalen Gemeinschaft zu veranschaulichen, zu erforschen und zu analysieren. Kapitel 8 entwickelt sich weiter von dieser ausgiebigen Kontextualisierung, um schließlich die Reise selbst zu analysieren. Ein besonderes Augenmerk soll dabei auf die zentralen Handlungen gelegt werden, die die Tschagossianer während der Reise unternahmen, indem sie sich mit sehr großer Sorgfalt und Anstrengung den verlassenen und verfallenen Kirchen und Friedhöfen ihrer Vorfahren widmeten. Es wird behauptet, dass diese Aktivitäten viel mit Erinnerung zu tun haben, was einen wichtigen Stellenwert für den Glauben und die Politik der Tschagossianer einnimmt. Durch die wiederholten Bekundungen ihrer Zugehörigkeit zu den Inseln, war es die Intention der Pilger sowohl die zentrale Bedeutung des angefochtenen Bestimmungsortes zu beeinflussen, als auch die Art und Weise, wie ihre Gemeinschaft sozial erinnert werden sollte. Gleichzeitig bot diese Pilgerfahrt den Tschagossianern eine wichtige und lange gesehnte Möglichkeit, um endlich mit ihren Vorfahren zu kommunizieren und zu bekräftigen, dass sie, trotz der langen Abwesenheit und Vernachlässigung ihrer Gräber, nie vergessen wurden. Diese Vorfahren haben auch in der Politik der Tschagossianer einen wichtigen Stellenwert. In diesem Kapitel wird aufgezeigt, wie die Performanz der Pilgerfahrt – innerhalb des ideologischen Rahmens, der in den vorangegangenen Kapiteln bereits diskutiert wurde – eine mächtige politische Strategie sein kann. Durch ihre Wallfahrt könnten die Tschagossianern die Reise zurückfordern, umdefinieren, und ihr eine neue historische Bedeutung verleihen. Darüber hinaus war es ihnen

auch möglich, die Richtung der Bewegung der zentralsten Reisen ihrer Vergangenheit neu zu definieren und damit eines ihrer Hauptargumente im Kampf gegen ihre politische Gegner zu bekräftigen: dass sie damals in den 1960er und 70er Jahren zwangsdeportiert wurden und nicht einfach nach Mauritius und den Seychellen zurückgekehrt waren.

Resümee

Da sich diese Arbeit mit einer ziemlich unkonventionellen Pilgerfahrt auseinandersetzt, ist dieser Fall auch dazu geeignet, etwas über die Theorie von Pilgerreisen zu sagen. Diese Arbeit zeigt auf, dass die Theorie der Pilgerreise auch sehr fruchtbar sein kann, um umfassendere Themen, als nur das Phänomen Pilgerreise zu verstehen. Dies impliziert zudem, dass die bestehenden Theorien über Pilgerreisen gewinnbringend erweitert werden können. Wie dieser Fall zeigt, müssen zentrale Parteien nicht zwangsläufig Pilger sein, um in die Pilgerreise oder die Aktivitäten um und während der Pilgerreise sehr involviert zu sein. Sie müssen noch nicht mal anwesend sein.

In Verwendung dieses breiten Ansatzes zeigt diese Arbeit zudem auf, dass der Pilgerfahrt, als eine spezielle Form und Metapher von Mobilität in der heutigen globalisierten Welt, zentrale Bedeutungen, in Relation zu einer Reihe von anderen bedeutsamen physischen, metaphorischen und (realen oder fiktiven) historischen Reisen, innewohnen. Die Reise selbst und die Personen, die diese Reise unternommen haben, können nur unzureichend verstanden werden, wenn sie nicht mit die vielen unterschiedlichen Variationen von Reisen, in Beziehung gesetzt werden. Dieser Fokus auf Mobilität mag, im Rahmen der Analyse einer Gruppe, die vor Allem versucht sich als eine angesiedelte, tief in ihre Heimat verwurzelte Gemeinschaft zu etablieren, seltsam erscheinen. Allerdings verdeutlicht diese Arbeit zudem, dass die Konzepte von Mobilität und Sesshaftigkeit in der Tat sehr miteinander verbunden sind, und dass einige Formen zeitgenössischer Mobilität, wie Pilgerschaft, sich besonders gut dazu eignen, um Immobilität und Anhaftung an bestimmte Orte, zu kommunizieren. Somit wird Pilgerschaft zur politischen Strategie.

Dabei scheint es, dass eine große Vielfalt zeitgenössischer Mobilität in der heutigen Welt vorherrscht und dass klare kategoriale Grenzen zwischen verschiedenen Formen der Mobilität schwer zu ziehen sind. Um die Pilgerfahrt als politische Strategie zu verstehen, ist es jedoch notwendig zu berücksichtigen, dass die Subjekte der Studie selbst zwischen den Kategorien unterscheiden, und ein Verständnis davon haben, dass sie sich durch unterschiedliche Ästhetik, Praktiken und Motivationen unterscheiden. Genau diese Tatsache ermöglicht die Transformation einer Reise in eine überzeugende Pilgerfahrt. Darüber hinaus ermöglicht es den Reisenden zudem, die dominante historische Bedeutung ihres Zielortes, als auch die Route dorthin und die Menschen, die diese Reise unternehmen, zu verwandeln. Da eine Wallfahrt im Allgemeinen als eine Reise zu einem heiligen Ort verstanden wird, bedeutet dies im Umkehrschluss, dass die Pilger durch ihre Reise den Bestimmungsort in etwas Sakrales umwandeln können. Tritt der Fall auf, dass viele unterschiedliche Gruppen um das Monopol der Bedeutung eines Bestimmungsortes konkurrieren, dann kann es ein mächtiges politisches Mittel sein, "das Angefochtene zu Sakralisieren" (Engl.: „Sacralising the Contested“). Das bedeutet, dass die Durchführung einer Pilgerreise einen politisch stark bestrittenen Ort oder

Gegenstand neu definieren und ihn in etwas Sakrales erhöhen kann, und ihn im Namen der bestimmten Gruppe, die die Pilger repräsentieren, in Anspruch genommen werden kann.

Auf diese Weise wird die Pilgerfahrt innerhalb einer ethnisch geordneten Welt, die heute angeblich ständig in Bewegung ist, zu einer mächtigen politischen Strategie für Gruppen, die eine Politik der kulturellen Anerkennung verfolgen. Allerdings kann die Verwendung der volkstümliche botanische Terminologie von "Wurzeln", "Kultur" und "diaspora", welche bei solchen Gruppen in diesem Kontext sehr gerne verwendet werden, auch schnell in eine weniger konstruktive Richtung gehen. Diese Begriffe sind ebenfalls mit Themen des Umweltschutzes konzeptionell verbunden, was in den sogenannten höher entwickelten (post)kolonialen Zentren des (post)christlichen Westen, wo viele dieser Gruppen anerkannt werden wollen, in vielen Fällen politisch relevanter als Menschenrechtsfragen sind.

1 DEPARTURE

By sunset on 30 March 2006 the combined cargo and passenger vessel *Mauritius Trochetia* lifted anchor in the harbour of Mauritius' capital Port Louis. The ship was headed 2,200 km northeast towards a remote tropical world of islands by the name of the Chagos Archipelago. This archipelago consists of some 65 coral atolls scattered like necklaces across the vast Great Chagos Bank at the very centre of the Indian Ocean. On this evening, 102 white-clad passengers were making their way to the top deck of the vessel. With red flowers in their hands they were waving and shouting excitedly to some eight hundred relatives, friends, politicians, journalists and supporters who had crowded behind a makeshift security fence on the quay to bid them farewell. They had received these flowers a few hours earlier from the Bishop of Port Louis, who for this special occasion had conducted a grand Catholic ceremony at the St. Sacrement Church – a massive colonial cathedral that rises above Port Louis' cemetery areas and the poor suburban district of Cassis where many of the ship's passengers now live. As the passengers left the quay, they also left the crowd and the media in the harbour with no doubt that they were embarking on a true pilgrimage. And that was indeed their intention.

This voyage was not an ordinary pilgrimage. It was not a journey along a well-established pilgrimage route to a sacred site or a recognised pilgrimage destination. To the passengers this was a *first* pilgrimage. For the high-ranking UK and Mauritian government representatives onboard the same vessel, it was officially a 'humanitarian visit'. For all concerns this was an exceptional journey. No passenger ship sails to the Chagos Archipelago from Port Louis – or from any other harbour for that matter. In fact, for people to stay *on* the islands in the Chagos Archipelago without special permission from British authorities is a criminal offence, although private yachters are known to drop anchor in the northernmost lagoons for months at a time against a mooring fee collected by UK officials. But to those who do not possess such a permit, or a private yacht, these remote coral islands are strictly off-limits. Why? Apparently, because much of Britain's role in the Indian Ocean, or the 'British lake' as these waters were called during colonial times, has been reduced to provide the US military with previously colonised land.

In 1965 British authorities created the last colony of the crumbling empire: the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). This was made by separating the Chagos Archipelago from the colony of Mauritius before the latter became a state independent of Britain in 1968. The tropical islands that comprise the Chagos Archipelago are now all uninhabited. That is, with one major exception: Diego Garcia, the archipelago's largest and southernmost atoll, which now hosts one of the United States' most extensive overseas military bases. The reason for creating the BIOT was to provide the US Pentagon with a strategic plot of Indian Ocean land to develop a Cold War military base. Diego Garcia, a U-shaped atoll found roughly in the centre of the Indian Ocean, offered the US military an ideal natural harbour and a highly strategic airbase site in the region. Evidently, the end of the Cold War did not render this base insignificant. On the contrary, the military facility has continuously been extended. Over the last decades heavy B-2 and B-52 bombers have repeatedly taken off from Diego Garcia to

attack targets in the Middle East, and the island base has been illegally used for the CIA's secret rendition of terrorist suspects *en route* to Guantanamo Bay.

Entangled in this global geo-political history of the Chagos Archipelago is another significant past. It is a shady past – not least because the world's dominant powers have long sought to silence and redefine it. The prohibition on entry to these islands concerns those passengers who embarked on the *Mauritius Trochetia* on 30 March 2006. As a number of abandoned and deteriorating buildings and cemeteries on these restricted islands would confirm to any visitor, the Chagos Archipelago hosted a local population long before the colony was militarised. They were once known as the *Ilois* (i.e. Islanders), but they and their descendants now prefer to be called Chagossians.

In the mid-1960s officials recorded around 1,000 people living in the Chagos Archipelago, but numbers may have been higher. Many of them could trace their history on the islands back many generations. Some possibly to the late 18th century, when French colonisers in Mauritius shipped the first slaves from Madagascar and East Africa to these uninhabited atolls to profit from the production of copra and coconut oil. Coconut production continued uninterrupted well into the second half of the 20th century. By that time sovereignty over the islands had passed from French to British hands. The mode of production had moved from slavery to wage-work, and a number of labourers had been imported from British India, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Under different managers the inhabitants were organised in a quasi-feudal manner. The companies provided food rations, transport and housing materials and they also ran local company shops. Save for a smaller number of male labourers arriving in the late period of copra production, newcomers settled on the islands in their own houses, adopted Catholic beliefs, and integrated along with established families into the local economy.

Life and production in this remarkably remote and isolated archipelago came to an abrupt end. In the 1960s British authorities bought up and ran down the local industries, and then expelled and deported the entire population. This forced mass eviction was executed to meet the Pentagon's requests for an island undisturbed by local populations and less predictable governments of new sovereign states. Following the creation of the BIOT, British authorities issued a BIOT Immigration Ordinance in 1971 that effectively criminalised any person entering or residing in the territory without special permission. By 1973 the entire local population had been evicted to Mauritius and the Seychelles. At that point, perhaps as many as 1,500 people in Mauritius and 500 persons in the Seychelles had worked on the Chagos islands – around three-quarters of them were born there or had lived on the islands for considerable time.

Expelling an entire population and re-mapping the colonial borders of Mauritius before independence violated international agreements. The British Foreign Office therefore came up with a secret plan to circumvent UK responsibilities. Violation of Mauritius' territorial integrity was settled by ensuring consent from the Mauritian political elite through special financial and political agreements. Evicting the local population was handled by redefining the local inhabitants as a floating population of migrant workers on temporary contracts. That way, British authorities could allege that they were not 'evicting' a population but simply 'returning' them to their purported origins in Mauritius and the Seychelles.

In 1973, in the very same harbour where the *Mauritius Trochetia* was lifting anchor in 2006, the last group of evictees refused to disembark the BIOT cargo vessel *Nordvær* (see Illustration 2 and 3). That sit-in, here at the very entry point to Mauritius, marked the start of a

series of Chagossian protests for proper compensation and right to repatriation. Friends and family members who had previously been evicted, or simply denied return tickets after visiting Mauritius, informed *Nordvær's* passengers that no arrangements had been made for them in Mauritius – they were simply being dumped, unemployed and uncompensated, to fend for themselves without food or housing. In the years that followed, many died in abject poverty. People were forced into prostitution, committed suicide, were imprisoned for petty theft or ended up in psychiatric institutions. Only after a series of protests, petitions and hunger strikes were two UK compensation packages totalling £4,650,000 disbursed to 1,344 identified Chagos islanders and children in 1978 and 1982. Families evicted to the Seychelles received nothing. The fact that the majority of these people still inhabit the poorest sections of the Mauritian population shows that their hard-won compensation did little to improve their general condition.

From the 1990s onwards, protesting Chagossian organisations have ‘gone global’ by voicing their history in international forums and by launching claims for proper compensation and the right to repatriation in international courts. To press for negotiation with responsible parties, one organisation was aided by a Mauritian barrister in an attempt to be recognised as Chagos Archipelago autochthons at the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva. A second Mauritian-based organisation launched a case against the UK government in British courts in 1998, which in November 2000 ruled the immigration orders preventing them from returning to the Chagos unlawful. Drawing on the Magna Carta, their lawyers argued that the legislator could only make laws for the peace, order and good governance of the territory, and the court therefore concluded that the Chagossians were to be governed and not removed. Chagossians then pressed for compensation through the British and US legal systems. However, in the UK their claims were rejected for having been brought too late – although central evidence such as UK Foreign Office files from the 1960s and 70s had been classified for thirty years. In the US a Federal District Court rejected Chagossian claims due to doctrines of sovereign immunity and political questions, a decision upheld in 2006 when the Court of Appeals refused to overrule the executive and considered their case a political and military question outside the jurisdiction of the court. Their case, it seemed, was a political matter beyond the auspices of the courts, something which became very apparent in the years that followed. In 2004 the UK government suddenly overruled the High Court judgement by Royal Prerogative. By the signature of the British Queen, two Orders in Council reinstated full immigration control to the whole of BIOT. Little did it help that a British Court ruled in 2006 that these orders were *ultra vires* (i.e. beyond the legal powers of the Monarch), or that the Court of Appeals described the orders an abuse of power by the Queen and upheld the ruling in 2007. In 2008 the House of Lords concluded the ten-year litigation process by ruling contrary to all preceding judgements that the Orders in Council were valid and a matter of national security. While Chagossians were presenting their case before the European Courts of Human Rights two years later, the UK government decided to turn the Chagos Archipelago into the largest protected marine area in the world – an initiative depriving a potentially resettled group of Chagossians access to local resources such as food. Curiously, the militarised area was exempted.

It was in the context of the legal and political proceedings leading up to the House of Lords’ ruling that a hundred Chagossians for the first time were granted a ‘humanitarian visit’

to the Chagos Archipelago. Now, about forty years after the evictions, Chagossians were allowed to spend one day on each of the archipelago's three main island groups: the Salomon Islands, Peros Banhos and Diego Garcia. By this time, Chagos islanders and their children numbered around 5,000 people. To them this voyage was a landmark political victory of strong personal significance – especially to the 900 people still alive who were born on these islands and had struggled for half a lifetime to be able to see their homeland again. But it was also a journey undertaken in a highly politicised context. Participants decided to define and perform it as a pilgrimage for historical, political, social and cultural reasons to be discussed in this thesis.



Illustration 2: The ship Nordvær leaving the Chagos Archipelago with the last group of Chagossians in 1973. Painted by Chagossian artist C. Siatous. Photo: Johannessen 2006



Illustration 3: The Mauritius Trochetia in Port Louis harbour 2006. Painted by Chagossian artist C. Siatous. Photo: Johannessen 2006

From this brief introduction, I shall in the remaining part of this chapter outline the field and focus of this study and present my central research questions. I then consider important literature on the Chagos islanders, and highlight my central empirical and theoretical contributions in this thesis. As my central empirical case revolves around the Chagossian pilgrimage that took place in 2006, I will give a critical outline to the debates on pilgrimage within the field of social anthropology, and also point out how I intend to move beyond this rather narrow theoretical framework in a study of a Chagossian case that necessarily must take far wider, even global, political and ideological forces into account. I thereafter proceed to reflect on central methodological questions, with particular focus on complications related to the process of gathering data for this study. I conclude this chapter by presenting an outline to the central issues that will be explored in the chapters to come.

1.1 LAND IN SIGHT

From our point of departure it is possible to grasp the contours of the field I shall explore over the next chapters. Here I shall map my research field and research focus further by presenting the most central research questions that I shall investigate through this academic journey.

How Chagos islanders performed their first communal journey to the Chagos Archipelago, what it meant to them, and why they decided to perform this journey as a pilgrimage are central questions to be discussed in the coming chapters. However, to fully understand the cultural significance and the political relevance of this pilgrimage, it is also imperative to look beyond the event itself. What was the historical and political context of this journey? How did it come about? Who participated, and who did not? What were the criteria for inclusion and exclusion? Who made these decisions, and how were they justified? What other parties were involved in this journey? How did they comprehend and present it, and for what purpose? Questions like these open for inquiry into matters of much wider anthropological relevance such as: What can it mean, at the beginning of the 21st century, to define and perform a journey as a pilgrimage? How does pilgrimage connect to cultural politics fought in a global arena? And, not least, what can this pilgrimage reveal about the political and ideological frames in which such struggles are pursued?

What I mean to convey here is that even though the empirical case of this particular journey will be central throughout this thesis, I shall not limit my scope of investigation to the pilgrimage and the pilgrimage institution only. By ‘looking beyond the pilgrimage itself’ I refer to the potential for approaching this journey as an exceptionally rich empirical case, which can also form a very fruitful means to explore the Chagossian community in Mauritius and beyond. It is in this respect especially stimulating that this particular event involved all parties that are central to the politics of the Chagos Archipelago. We shall see that a number of disputes, both within and beyond Chagossians’ transnational community, came to the surface in the context of this journey. This revealed important differences in position, opinion and understanding, which indeed have considerable impacts on Chagossians in Mauritius and elsewhere. This journey provided in other words an exceptional case and a springboard to investigate the making of the Chagossian community within the wider social, political, economic and ideological frames they live and struggle.

As I shall reveal in the outline to the following chapters by the end of this chapter, a number of empirical and theoretical issues will be addressed in this thesis. However, the overarching research questions for this study are as follows:

Why did Chagossians define and perform their journey as a pilgrimage, and what did this mean in the context in which it took place? What can this case tell us about the Chagossian community, their culture and the wider socio-political and ideological frames in which they live and struggle? What does it reveal about power and political strategies among other local and global players concerned with their restricted and militarised homeland? And finally, how can pilgrimage, as a particular way of framing and performing movement, form a political strategy in a globalising ‘world on the move’ much defined by a huge variety of contemporary mobility?

Before I go on to explore these questions it is necessary to review central literature on the Chagos islanders, to place this study within the anthropological debates on pilgrimage, and to reflect critically on the most important methodological complications that arose while producing empirical data during my fieldwork. To these matters I now turn.

1.2 THE SEAS OF LITERATURE

No anthropological study was conducted among the Chagos islanders before they had all been expelled from the Chagos Archipelago in 1973. In his detailed MA thesis on the geo-political history of the Chagos Archipelago, Forsberg notes that “the history of the Ilois is largely a lost one” (Forsberg 2005, 19). Valuable information can nonetheless be deduced from a few available reports produced by visiting missionaries (Dussercle 1935), environmental scientists (e.g. Stoddart 1971) and colonial officers (e.g. Pridham 1846, Bourne 1886, Hanning 1931, Noel 1931, Scott 1961, Todd 1969). However, the literature from this period typically reflects contemporary interests of political, economic and scientific elites who seldom saw the value of reporting on the inhabitants’ culture and their way of life. The latter issues, however, gained explanatory relevance in the post-eviction context, which adds value to interesting reports on their condition in Mauritius in the years that followed (e.g. Prosser 1976, Botte 1980, Mundil and Laridon 1981, Madley 1985, Walker 1986). The most informative account of society and culture among Chagos islanders prior to the evictions is doubtless *Limuria: the lesser dependencies of Mauritius* (1961), a substantial volume written by Mauritius’ Governor Sir Robert Scott after his visit to the islands in the mid-1950s. This work has become a standard reference for later publications, including Richard Edis’ informative book on Chagos history *Peak of Limuria: the story of Diego Garcia* (1993). Written by a former BIOT commissioner (including a foreword by the Duke of York), also that publication is representative of a very significant trend, namely that much Chagos history is produced by British colonial officials. Albeit with some quite interesting continuations, this trend was challenged after Chagos islanders won a landmark legal case in British courts in November 2000, which cast their community into public light and triggered new interest in their history and condition.

In the decade preceding the November 2000 judgement a number of classified British Foreign Office files on Chagos islanders’ evictions entered the public domain. These were then exposed by Mauritian journalist H. Marimootoo (1997), and critically presented and discussed after the turn of the millennium by international reporters, lawyers and other authors (e.g. Curtis 2003, Gifford 2004, Pilger 2004, 2006). Publications like these have been crucial to the voicing of a much-silenced Chagossian history. But again, few authors spent substantial time living among poor Chagossian families. The main focus of these publications is not so much the Chagos islanders’ culture and society as the intentions, attitudes and decisions made by powerful western government officials when handling the Chagos case. Central material revolves around the declassified British Foreign Office files, Government and MP’s statements and Court Judgements. Hence, despite these international authors’ more critical approaches, much of the material is still derived from the centre of the colonial regime. This implies certain historical continuities with regard to where the sources of information on the Chagossian community come from.

Focus on the making and the role of this militarised colony in the frame of great international power-games instead of the Chagos islanders’ history, community and culture is also representative of Sand’s impressively well documented book *United States and Britain in Diego Garcia: the future of a controversial base* (2009), which also discusses how the politics of this area lately have extended to matters of environmental protection. A series of articles

published in *Diego Garcia in times of globalisation* (2002) also discuss political aspects of the Chagos Archipelago and its former inhabitants, but with a stronger focus on Chagossians' struggles within the Mauritian context as well as Mauritius' international economic relations. The latter volume is edited by Lalit, a political party on the far left of Mauritius' political landscape whose members have been involved with protesting Chagos islanders since they arrived in Mauritius in the 1970s. In political respects there are therefore traceable differences between this volume and Curtis' and Pilger's more ethno-national oriented publications *Diego Garcia: removing people from history* (Curtis 2003) and *Stealing a Nation* (Pilger 2006).

The first anthropological study among Chagos islanders was conducted in Mauritius in the mid-1980s by Ian Walker (1986). In this thorough MA thesis he discusses the evicted Chagos islanders' position in Mauritius and notes with admirable accuracy that in respect of establishing themselves as one among the many ethnic groups that marks Mauritian society (see Eriksen 1998, Boswell 2006, Hookoomsing, Ludwig, and Schnepel 2009), Chagos islanders were at a decisive point in the making of their history. What he could not foresee was the part he, as an expert on culture and traditions, would play in the ethnification of that community. As anthropologist Rosabelle Boswell (2006) argues in her study of Mauritian society, contrary to Mauritian Creoles (i.e. primarily those Mauritians who identify with African or Malagasy descent) Chagossians have managed to establish themselves as a separate ethnic group within Mauritius' hierarchies of essentialised cultures.

In accordance with the historical developments in the literature discussed above, Chagos islanders also received attention from a handful of anthropologists after the turn of the millennium. To Vine this was a result of Chagossians' legal proceedings as he was asked to assist a US legal team in inquiring into the Chagos islanders' status as indigenous people, what harm and damages Chagossians have endured as a consequence of the displacement, and how this could be compensated. His inquiries have resulted in the publication *Island of shame: the secret history of the US military base on Diego Garcia* (Vine 2009). Reflecting that assignment, Vine has a strong historical and investigative approach to the material, and unveils, in a strong narrative form, how Chagos islanders have been impoverished and the decisive roles the Pentagon and the US government have played in this. The wider framework of this study is a history of US expansionism, more precisely the place of Diego Garcia and the Chagos islanders within what has become a huge network of some 1,000 US military bases placed on strategic sites and islands around the world. With a stronger focus on the UK than the US, Jeffery has also been interested in the Chagos islanders' legal proceedings (Jeffery 2006) and the marginalising effects of forced deportation on their community (Jeffery 2011). Her most recent book *Chagos islanders in Mauritius and the UK: forced displacement and onward migration* (2011) summarises Jeffery's earlier work and extends to compare Chagossians' marginal situation and expressions of that situation in Mauritius and the UK, to where many Chagos islanders have migrated after they were granted full British citizenship in 2002. Compared to Vine's historical-investigative approach, Jeffery is less concerned about the islanders' pre-eviction history and focuses more on how Chagos islanders in Mauritius and the UK cope with issues of identity, memory and cultural authenticity in the present. She points to the importance of a standardised mythico-history that romanticises their past homeland to Chagossian collective identity and shows how this complicates their legal proceedings (Jeffery 2006, 2007, 2011).

Identification and idealised constructions of Chagossians' past are also the focus in Kooy's MA thesis *Piecing together utopia: the case of Chagossian children in Mauritius* (2008). Evers also elaborates on data from this thesis in her *Longing and belonging in real time: how Chagossian children in Mauritius imagine the Chagos islands* (2011). The latter contribution is part of a volume edited by these two authors, *Eviction from the Chagos Islands: displacement and struggle for identity against two world powers*, wherein different scholars working on the Chagos islanders analyse the Chagossian case from the angles of a number of disciplines (Evers and Kooy 2011). In contrast to other work on Chagossians, Kooy and Evers' studies show how stories about the Chagossian homeland are passed on to 9-12-year-old grandchildren of evicted Chagos islanders in Mauritius. Where Jeffery's approach to historical constructions of the homeland centres on the contents of Chagossian songs, Kooy and Evers findings are much based on drawings made by Chagossian children. Idealised constructions of Chagossians' historical homeland were also a central finding in Johannessen's MA thesis *Contested roots: the contemporary exile of Chagossians in Mauritius* (Johannessen 2005), which analysed Chagossians' position within Mauritius' poly-ethnic society. It concluded that an idealised widely shared narrative, constructed around a central set of interconnected emic concepts and metaphors, had emerged within their community. This narrative is most central to Chagossian collective identification and reflects key experiences Chagossians have encountered in Mauritius.

In this thesis I expand on my earlier findings, but the above literature combined with the empirical case of Chagossians pilgrimage allows for a deeper and much broader perspective on the Chagossian community and their condition. My empirical contribution to the study of the Chagossians in this thesis concerns, of course, the case of the Chagossian pilgrimage. But my analysis of this event will be grounded in other empirical data I have collected during my fieldwork in Mauritius, the Seychelles and the UK since 2004. As I have already indicated, this empirical case neither starts nor ends at the quay where the pilgrims departed on 30 March 2006 and returned 12 days later. Preceding this event is a history that is highly important to the journey itself. Consultations leading up to this event started years before, and negotiations were far from over the moment the pilgrims returned to Port Louis. Of great importance in this respect is that this case is not only about the Chagos islanders since a number of other central parties were also very active in this event. Some, but not all of them, had representatives onboard the *Mauritius Trochetia*. Thus, this voyage cannot be understood through a narrow ethno-study of the Chagossians alone – let alone only the pilgrims. This journey was fundamentally entangled in a historical and socio-political (post)colonial context.¹ It is therefore necessary to consider also other parties involved in the politics of their homeland, not least because the pilgrims' identity, their past, and the meaning of their destination, are matters of tense and on-going conflict.

A very central topic missing in the literature on the Chagos islanders is a critical investigation to the wider ideological frames in which they live and manoeuvre politically. These ideological frames have much explanatory potential, not least because they have great

¹ The Chagos Archipelago remains a British colony in practice, but is also claimed by Mauritius. Chagossians are dual citizens of the colonial power (the UK) and the former British colonies to which they were evicted (Mauritius and the Seychelles). As the 'colonial – post-colonial' conceptual distinction obscures more than it illuminates in this case, I shall in the following use the term '(post)colonial'.

impact on their struggles and the reproduction of their community. To consider these broader political and ideological frames is important, because it is within these frames that their journey and their struggles have gained meaning and political potential. By 'wider frames' I principally refer to an ethnically ordered world that rests on a widespread sedentarist ideology. But I shall also discuss my material in light of two other highly important contextual frames which are also missing in the literature on the Chagossians. On the one hand a neoliberal development ideology that is very much present in Mauritius, and on the other Chagossians' Catholic faith which, for reasons that are difficult to understand given its importance to Chagossians' self-understanding, culture and politics, has so far been left unstudied. Such ideological frames are often taken for granted. But as we shall see, they change in the course of time. They are also not disconnected, but derive important meanings from one another. This has of course important implications for the people who manoeuvre within them. Including these dimensions and these shifting ideological frames in this analysis will be among my central contributions to understanding the Chagos islanders' transnational community, condition, culture and politics.

In order to unveil and discuss frameworks that are taken for granted, an historical approach can be fruitful. It is then possible to point out key changes in the political and ideological frames in which Chagossians live, protest and understand themselves. To understand this journey it must be put in a proper historical context, but there is also another dimension of the past that is highly important in this case. This concerns the constant making and re-making of Chagossian history in the present. In these respects the two most central anthropological publications on the Chagos islanders are quite different in their approach. This may have to do with their interest in Chagossians' court proceedings, where history becomes a matter of evidence or inconclusive evidence. Chagossians communicate much about their past. This provides invaluable empirical material. In Vine's (2009) more historical and investigative approach, Chagossians' statements about their own past are primarily used to substantiate and add flesh to historical material and to document past events – much like legal evidence. This gives his book an experience-near form that clearly demonstrates how evicted Chagos islanders suffer relative deprivation in exile. In contrast to Jeffery he does not focus much on how Chagossians' statements about their past are constructs of the present, which according to Jeffery are often historically inaccurate and thus of limited value in the courts (Jeffery 2011, 2006, 2007). On the other hand, Jeffery analyses what differences Chagossian songs composed before and after the evictions can reveal about their past, but offers, in contrast to Vine, limited historical background as to how societies in the Chagos Archipelago have developed and changed over the two centuries. In this thesis I approach the pilgrimage as a rich empirical case and a means to illustrate and explore also wider aspects of the Chagossian community and the world they inhabit. This allows me to discuss important issues about their present, as well as their past.

To understand the Chagossians and their journey in 2006, history is crucial. However, this journey was also highly political, something that indeed reflects the circumstances of their wider community. Since key aspects of these politics concern competing interpretations of their past, it is necessary to combine these two approaches to Chagossian history to understand this event and those who took part in it. This, however, will not be sufficient. The analysis must also include the above-mentioned ideological frames, because there are also limits to how the past can be reconstructed. The past is always intimately connected to establishing certain

identities in the present (Friedman 1992), and identities, as Schlee points out, must also be plausible to others (Schlee 2004, 137). In the social world, then, there are not endless possibilities for constructions of identities or pasts. Moreover, identities make sense to self and others within certain ideological frames. Such frames have their own logics and limitations. Within these frames, people do not manoeuvre independent of established norms and expectations. This has consequences for what people may claim, and how they should behave in order to support their claims. Politicised communities are often much aware of this, and therefore seek opportunities to accommodate such expectations in public as a means to reach their political objectives. This issue can be approached through the concepts of agency and patiency and the dialectics between the two (Schnepel 2000, 2006). Chagossians have indeed been victimised, but as victims they are not, and know they are not, without agency – even if it is limited in important ways. Today Chagossians live, protest and understand themselves within a certain economic, political and ideological order. Such orders are not eternal, but change over time. Moreover, such orders do not only limit people's ability to act. They can also provide new opportunities for people who choose to submit and conform its rules and expectations, and enter and enact certain roles that the framework has to offer. Victims can thus become particular kinds of victims, with particular appeal to NGOs and other external people willing to assist, and thereby acquire patiency as new possibilities for action and active protest open up. Shifting ideological orders can thus vest people with new possibilities to act, not despite the logics and limitations, but because of this. People involved, who may have few resources to bring about desired changes, may become quite aware of how they must conform and compromise to be effective in their political endeavours as they move in and out of these shifting roles and identities. As we shall see, this is also the case with regard to the ideological order in which Chagossians journey and manoeuvre. Here, options for political action go hand in hand with established forms of identification that are not only plausible to others, but must be so in order to be politically effective.

An investigation into the Chagossians' past will also unveil important changes and developments that have taken place within their community over the years. Literature on the Chagos islanders has focused on forced displacement, legal issues, injustices committed against their group by UK and US authorities, the ways Chagossians have been marginalised and suffer in exile, and how Chagossians understand this and how they identify in the post-eviction setting. However, a history of the constant making and remaking of the Chagossian community has in some respects been insufficiently explored (but see Collen and Kistnasamy 2002b). This includes ongoing identification processes related to changing ideological frames, how political negotiations over ethnic pasts and presents produce heterogeneities, disagreements and tensions within and beyond their group, and what effects these processes have on the reproduction of the Chagossian community and their diaspora, as well as for Mauritian society. It is for many reasons important to question the popular image of Chagossians as a very marginal, bounded, homogenous and rather unchanging ethnic group – even if this has become central for mobilising international support. For once, divisions within their group are produced in dialogue with external parties that have very different interests in their homeland. Secondly, tensions and heterogeneities do not contradict the reproduction of their community but raise ethnic awareness and contribute to its social reproduction. Thirdly, the tensions and the disputes Chagossians provoke in public also affect the world around them.

The last point suggests a rather new perspective on the Chagos islanders, namely that they have actually acquired an important position in Mauritius. If we are to understand the Chagossian journey and their community, it is also important to look beyond the issues marginalisation and how Chagossians understand and cope with this, and ask in what ways they are marginal. That Chagossians are victims of the politics of the world's dominant powers is beyond doubt. Their history of forced displacement and marginalisation is grave and severe problems resulting from this remain very evident. Over the years, however, Chagossians have become politically relevant actors, and have, as a community, acquired influence and power that exceed their poor Mauritian neighbours by far. Chagossians still have not been very successful in converting this into other, and much needed, forms of capital and legal rights – at least not since their hard-won compensation in 1982, after which their protests were funnelled into the legal institutions of their political opponents. However, the fact that Chagossians are now taken into consideration by powerful authorities both in Mauritius and abroad means that, at least in some respects, Chagossians can hardly be described as marginal, even if many are illiterate, underemployed, and most of them remain very poor.

Regarding my theoretical contribution, I shall in the following chapters discuss my data with reference to a number of anthropological debates including tradition, globalisation, diasporisation, identity politics, narrative theory, social memory, nationalism, development rhetoric and post-colonial studies. Due to the nature of my core empirical case, the overarching theoretical framework is concerned with theories of pilgrimage and mobility, which I shall turn to outline in the next subchapter. This theoretical focus has led to an inquiry into different forms of contemporary mobility – in both the physical and metaphorical sense. In every report on their community over the last few decades the Chagos islanders have been represented in terms of place, roots and belonging, in the Chagos Archipelago or elsewhere. This has undoubtedly to do with the violent history of their evictions, which has become defining for their community as well as for the literature about them. This focus is surely also due to important legal and political dimensions of their case, and how also this has affected Chagossian self-identification. But in the midst of all the language of roots, settled-ness and placing of origin, the Chagossian community appears no less affected by mobility. In many contexts these issues of 'roots' and 'routes' are highly interwoven, in the sense that the one dimension often makes little sense without the other. As we shall see, in the Mauritian context both dimensions are integrated into a form of poly-ethnic nationalism that is founded on the idea of a nation comprised of peoples that originate from different corners of the world and now inhabit a bounded island-state *en route* to 'development'. If 'pilgrimage' can be seen as a journey not only in the physical sense but also metaphorically (as in 'life as a pilgrimage'), then 'development' can fairly well be understood as a form of meta-movement too. This opens for a number of interesting questions: Are these forms of mobility related? And if so, how are they related? How do they relate to other forms of contemporary mobility such as tourism, migration from a post-colony to its former colonial centre in Europe, or to ideas of political struggles as life-long pilgrimages? Do they derive meaning from one another? Can particular forms of mobility also change how we understand particular places? How do particular forms of mobility affect destinations, places of departure, and the routes between them? How do particular forms of mobility influence the understandings of those who travel? And, are certain

forms of mobility particularly suited to communicate the very opposite, such as being immobile, ‘rooted’ in place, and defined by local tradition?

Questions like these are important to address if we are to find out why Chagossians re-defined their journey from a ‘humanitarian visit’ – as it was officially labelled – to a ‘pilgrimage’, and why Chagossian migrants to the UK were excluded from this journey. I argue that in a globalising world popularly described as being constantly *en route*, different forms of mobility harbour different meanings, and the differences between them gain importance the moment mobility becomes political projects on a global stage. Only by understanding the connections between different forms of mobility, and the ideological frames in which they acquire their essential meanings, can we understand the Chagossian pilgrimage, its role, its meanings and importance, as well as its political potential in their ongoing struggles for compensation and right to repatriation. Approaching the field in this way can also provide new insights into the Chagossian community as well as important dimensions of the world in which they live and struggle.

1.3 MOVING BEYOND AN ‘ANTHROPOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE’

Anthropological debates on pilgrimage have been much influenced by shifts in disciplinary trends over the past few decades. However, throughout these discussions a key question, which is also crucial to this thesis, has formed a centre of debate. This question concerns whether or how pilgrimage can be regarded as a bounded category of action. Surely it is not difficult to imagine the value of studying such widespread social practice for the comparative discipline of anthropology, but it presupposes that pilgrims, irrespective of their particular backgrounds, at some level engage in the same kind of activity. But to what extent are pilgrims actually doing the same thing? And how does pilgrimage differ from other categories of mobility? These questions have been central since anthropological debates on pilgrimage took off after Victor and Edith Turners’ publication *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* in 1978. In this much-debated volume the Turners open by suggesting that:

PILGRIMAGES are probably of ancient origin and can, indeed, be found among peoples classed by some anthropologists as “tribal,” [...]. But pilgrimage as an institutional form does not attain real prominence until the emergence of the major historical religions (Turner and Turner 1978, 1; emphasis in original, my omission).

It is primarily the ‘institutional form’, and not so much the history of pilgrimages, that will concern us here. The Turners’ approach to pilgrimage has been subject to considerable critique, but pilgrimage studies nonetheless tend to start out with an outline of their contribution. This introduction is no exception in that respect. However, by placing the theory section of this thesis in this disciplinary ‘tradition’ I wish to highlight that the Turners’ work has also been part of a wider institutionalisation of pilgrimage. Foremost, their contribution suggested that pilgrimages could actually be regarded as a bounded category of action. Furthermore, this influential work has come to be celebrated as the very study that initiated a relatively recent

debate that now goes by the name ‘the anthropology of pilgrimage’. In what follows I shall outline some of the central arguments brought forward in the wake of this publication. I do this not simply to conform to an anthropological convention but to provide a theoretical background to this thesis and to explain why I have chosen to focus on a pilgrimage in exploring also wider aspects of the Chagossian community and their situation in Mauritius and beyond.

Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture is best understood in light of Victor Turner’s dissatisfaction with contemporary correspondence theories, which sought to explain processes of social integration and often relied on functionalist argumentation. From this perspective, the shrines at the end of the pilgrims’ journey were interpreted as Durkheimian totems – where the god of the shrine was understood as the society itself hypostatized (e.g. Eliade 1969). Also falling under the correspondence category, Marxist-inspired scholars of the 1960s and 70s tended to focus on how pilgrimage as religious institutions served the interests of the privileged classes by contributing to concealing and maintaining societies’ economic structures (e.g. Wolf 1958). Quite contrary to these scholars, the Turners explored rituals’ capacity to transform, and identified pilgrimage as a practice set apart and beyond the structures of society. Drawing on the works of Arnold van Gennep (1960) they understood (Christian) pilgrimage as a *liminoid* phenomenon – the intermediary phase of a three-staged *rite de passage* in which pilgrims found themselves betwixt and between the departure from their home societies and their future reintegration with a new social status upon their return.² *En route*, then, pilgrims moved away from the structural constraints of society to enter a space of ‘anti-structure’ where a state of *communitas* – spontaneous egalitarian relationships of fraternity – would emerge among the co-pilgrims. By identifying pilgrimage as anti-structural and beyond society, the Turners’ could suggest that (Christian) pilgrimage could be studied as a bounded category of action, possibly comparable across time and space.

Empirically however, other scholars reported little indication of what the Turners had so ambitiously suggested. In a study on Andean pilgrimage Sallnow instead observed the very opposite:

On the journey the various parties of pilgrims from different communities maintained a ritualized distance from one another which accentuated, rather than attenuated, the boundaries between them. At the shrine itself, they each maintained their separateness, and never coalesced into a single unified congregation (Sallnow 1981, 176).

This led Sallnow to conclude that what was produced in pilgrimage practice was not *communitas* but “simply a setting in which social interactions can take place *ex novo*” (Sallnow 1981, 176). Also Bowman (1985) objected that the Turners’ model proved dangerously void of political aspects and cultural particularities. In the early 1990s, and very much in the spirit of postmodern deconstructionism, an edited volume was published that directly opposed the Turnerian paradigm (Eade and Sallnow 1991). Far from characterised as places where *communitas* was produced, contributors to this volume understood pilgrimage sites as places

² The Turners found that Christian pilgrimages were less compulsory than most other transition rites. And due to the stronger element of individual choice relying on the decision to embark on a pilgrimage, the Turners characterised pilgrimages as a *liminoid* rather than *liminal* phenomenon.

defined by their potentiality to accommodate contest. At such sites, followers of different secular and religious sects advocating competing interpretations upon the very same symbols tended to be brought together.³ Rejecting the Turners' model as another grand theory, the editors held that to speak of pilgrimage in the singular is nothing but a gross generalisation of heterogeneous and contested social phenomena: "if one can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one can no longer take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of 'pilgrimage' either" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 2-3). The shrines, considered the *raison d'être* of any pilgrimage, were instead understood as "a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices [...] a vessel into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes, prayers and aspirations" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, 15-16; my omission). To underline the multitude of contested meanings projected onto the very same pilgrim destinations by participants of dissimilar socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, the volume was named *Contesting the Sacred*. Hence, precisely what the Turners had excluded from the study of pilgrimage was rather emphasised as a defining feature.

Whether pilgrimage could be seen as a bounded category of action was now doubtful. But Eade and Sallnow's opposing approach to pilgrimages has received considerable critique as well. Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi argue that pilgrimage can indeed include dimensions of both contest as well as *communitas*. They also point out that co-presence of pilgrims from different religious backgrounds at particular pilgrimage destinations can be marked by peaceful coexistence (Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi 2005, 2007). Coleman (2002, 361) criticises the volume for not paying proper respect to a broader Turnerian perspective, noting that the idea of a shrine accommodating multiple discourses is quite compatible with the Turners' argument that dominant symbols are 'semantically open' (cf. Turner and Turner 1978, 245). Although different people project inconsistent interpretations onto the same pilgrimage destinations, their co-presence need not result in conflict and contestation. The heterogeneity emphasised in the critique of the Turners largely refers to inter-group contestation, yet the critics reserve the right to assume intra-group solidarity and shared meaning among members of different cults or sects (Coleman 2002). Explicitly claiming that Eade and Sallnow's deconstruction was overstated, Coleman and Elsner (1995, 202) objected that the editors have invoked the idea of pilgrimage only to dismiss it as a meaningful category of study. That, according to them, is to go too far:

One can argue, however, that while virtually all social practices are open to contestation, not all have the look of a pilgrimage. In other words, the emphasis on the idea of pilgrimage sites being void of intrinsic meaning does tend to ignore the considerable structural similarities in pilgrimage practices within and between traditions. There are indeed parallels in behaviour to be found across time and culture, even if the implications and meanings of such behaviour vary enormously (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 202).

The very interesting observation here is that although pilgrims may disagree about the meanings of their activities and their destinations, there are nonetheless similarities to be found in what the Turners referred to as the 'institutional form' of pilgrimage practice. With regard

³ See Sallnow (1991) and Bowman (1991) in particular.

to pilgrimages, then, it is clarifying to distinguish, as Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi (2005, 12) do, between *belief* on the one hand and *ritual practice* on the other. Taking note of the huge variations in pilgrimage traditions across the world also Morinis observes that in practice “there is also a cross cultural homology” and argues that “it is at this level that a workable general definition must be sought” (Morinis 1992, 3). Hence, alternative definitions of pilgrimage have been suggested in the wake of Eade and Sallnow’s deconstructionist critique. But in accordance with Morinis’ as well as Coleman and Elsner’s observations, proposals tend to be vague and emphasise structural aspects rather than emic understandings.

Morinis’ definition of pilgrimage will be very fruitful for this thesis. This is because it is very inclusive, and also because he takes popular, widespread understandings of pilgrimages into consideration. Noting that pilgrimages are commonly regarded as ‘sacred journeys’ or ‘journeys to a sacred site’, he takes the concept of ‘sacred’ to mean the pursuit of valued cultural ideals and suggests that the word ‘pilgrimage’ “can be put to use wherever journeying and some embodiment of an ideal intersect” (Morinis 1992, 2-3). Accordingly, Morinis defines pilgrimage as “a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal” (Morinis 1992, 4). It is especially the inclusiveness that marks the strength of this definition. From this perspective, pilgrimage can even include individuals pursuing places important to themselves alone, mental or inner journeys that do not need to include physical movement at all, and even people on the search for unknown or hidden goals (Morinis 1992, 4-5). By widening the definition in this way, Morinis opens for continuities and analytical comparisons between varieties of physical as well as mental journeys.

The fascinating aspect here is that pilgrimage can then be studied both as a physical journey and a meaning-making activity. Morinis points out that pilgrimage easily lends itself as a metaphor for framing ‘life as a journey’ (Morinis 1992, 23). And with much relevance for Catholic Chagos islanders, according to Davidson and Gitlitz this metaphor is especially popular in religions where believers aspire to an afterlife or a release from the cycle of death and rebirth: “if pilgrimage is a journey through space whose destination is a holy place, life may be termed a journey through time whose inevitable destination is death, but whose hoped-for destination is something beyond death” (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002, 342). Pilgrimage can thus be a potent metaphor to frame, express and make intelligible particular quests in life – even life itself. As Baumann writes: “Destination, the set purpose of life’s pilgrimage, gives form to the formless, makes a whole out of the fragmentary, lends continuity to the episodic” (Baumann 1996, 22). What is more, by including meta-movement in the understanding of pilgrimage, it is even possible to interrogate interconnections between pilgrimage as mobility on the one hand and pilgrimage as reflexivity on the other (Coleman and Eade 2004, 18). Thus one can explore pilgrimage as mental movement within physical movement and/or physical mobility within the frame of a meta-journey. As I shall discuss in this thesis, such interconnections can be of considerable importance if one approaches pilgrimage from a political angle.

From this very broad understanding of pilgrimage then, it is important to return to the question of pilgrimage as a bounded category of action and ask how pilgrimage differs from other forms of movement. Regarding this question, it is especially the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism that have formed the centre of debate. This is far from strange since

both activities concern people who travel, who use the same infrastructure and also engage in meaning-making activities through their encounters with places, objects and peoples in faraway places. Such observations have led scholars to conclude that “the boundaries separating pilgrimage, touristic travel, and ethnography are indeed blurred” (Badone 2004, 182). However, in respect of the boundaries between these forms of travel there is a crucial distinction to be stressed between the levels of analysis and practice – i.e. between social scientists’ perspectives on the one hand and those of popular discourse on the other. Social scientists have argued that categorical distinctions between these forms of travel obscure more than they illuminate and are therefore hard to maintain (Badone and Roseman 2004). At the same time it is impossible to neglect the fact that subjects of ethnographic study do distinguish between these categories of travel, and they ascribe them quite different meanings. Since this distinction is central to this thesis, I shall in the following outline how anthropologists have approached these forms of mobility in ways that have made it difficult to draw clear boundaries between them. Thereafter I return to the matter of popular distinctions between these forms of travel and discuss the analytical value of including that dimension in pilgrimage studies. By combining insights from both levels we can arrive at a fruitful understanding of pilgrimage as metaphor, practice and performance which has taken on strong significance in a contemporary ‘world on the move’.

Although Morinis’ definition has become widely recognised, one may still object that it comes close to the earlier correspondence theories the Turners sought to challenge. As Morinis also writes: “Because pilgrimage places tend to enshrine collective ideals, pilgrimage is usually a conservative force that reinforces the existing social order” (Morinis 1992, 24). But Morinis has a much broader scope than preceding scholars, by which he among other things avoids the problem of a general division between the sacred and the profane. If pilgrimage is defined as a journey to a place that embodies a valued cultural ideal and is analysed as an activity through which people confirm and reproduce structures and meanings central to their home contexts, then tourism has been analysed in a very similar way. Not for just any reason has tourism, or typically western tourism to non-western tourist destinations, also been labelled ‘the sacred journey’ (Graburn 1977). According to Graburn, western tourists embark on ‘sacred journeys’ on ‘holy-days’ outside normal or profane work-time to fulfil their needs for ‘re-creation’. Central to this re-creational activity are tourists’ encounters with their supposedly less- or undeveloped Others. In tourism, he explains, people from the ‘developed’ world confirm their own ideological circumstances by embarking on journeys to experience “how the other half lives” (Graburn 1977, 31). In a similar fashion Dean MacCannell (1973, 1976) understands tourism as a search for ‘authenticity’ – something that modern westerners experience to be lacking in their own lives. In response to alienating routines of everyday work and life, modern westerners become concerned about the shallowness of their everyday experiences and seek the very opposite in leisure time activities. In western imagery, non-western Others form the constituent counterpart of the ‘developed’ or ‘modern’ societies that western tourists understand themselves to inhabit. Westerners then associate ‘authenticity’ with people inhabiting the non-modern or non-western world. MacCannell’s point is that tourists’ quest for ‘authenticity’ is actually a search for an encounter with alterity, i.e. an encounter that confirms westerners’ worldviews and imaginations of self through the Other. In this way, western tourism to non-western destinations confirms and legitimises structures and ideologies

central to the (post-) industrialised societies from which the tourists depart. Similar to Morinis' approach to pilgrimage, there is clearly also a strong element of correspondence in Graburn and MacCannell's approaches to tourism. Both tourism and pilgrimage are held to serve similar functions, namely confirming and legitimising structures, norms and values embedded in people's home contexts. Hence, the quest for 'authenticity' and the quest for 'the sacred' amount to much the same. But one key difference between the two forms of travel remains here: tourists journey to confirm themselves and their worldviews through encounters with relevant Others. In other words, the correspondence at work in tourism takes, so to say, a detour via alterity. To be more precise, alterity or Otherness within the framework of the myth of 'modern development' constitutes a very widespread imagination that separates modern west from the non-modern rest. In this thesis, however, we shall see that alterity and Otherness within the framework of development is far from irrelevant to contemporary pilgrimages, at least for people who journey as pilgrims for particular political purposes.

Such analytical similarities between pilgrimage and tourism contribute to blurring the boundaries between these forms of mobility. At the outset the distinctions between them are also not obvious if one looks to etymology either: a 'tourist' (from Lat.: *tornus*) refers to someone "who makes a circuitous journey – usually for pleasure – and returns to the starting point" (Smith 1992, 1). Similarly, 'vacation' (from Lat.: *vacare*) means "to leave (one's house) empty" (Graburn 1977, 18-19). Not all that different, a 'pilgrim' translates to 'foreigner' (from Lat.: *peregrinus*; *per-* meaning 'beyond' and *-ager* meaning 'country').⁴ The meaning of this term differs foremost in perspective since a foreigner is not defined by the place she comes from but by a situation of non-belonging to some other place (cf. Smith 1992). It is an out-group label, a term typically applied by hosts inhabiting a destination (or a route) where 'foreigners' or 'pilgrims' journey.

What the etymology of these concepts does suggest is that mobility is not only about places (as in places of departure and destinations) or the paths between them. Central to most forms of mobility is also the issue of direction.⁵ The importance of direction to pilgrimage can be traced back to Eliade's early theories where he described pilgrimage as a religiously motivated journey to the centre of the world – the *axis mundi*. This also resonates with Morinis' definition above. Also Cohen (1992) stresses the issue of direction. He argues that much confusion in tourism studies results from a theoretical misunderstanding by which the categories of 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' become hard to distinguish. According to Cohen, the essential distinction concerns direction. However, that distinction is not to be drawn between the 'pilgrim' and the 'tourist', but between the 'pilgrim' and the 'traveller'. He proposes a sub-classification of the tourist category into 'pilgrim tourists' and 'traveller tourists', and argues that "the pilgrim, and the 'pilgrim tourist' peregrinate *toward* their sociocultural centre, while the traveller and the 'traveller tourist' move in the opposite direction" (Cohen 1992, 37; italics in original). By contrasting 'the pilgrim' with 'the traveller' in this way, Cohen's (1992) understanding of pilgrimage also reveals aspects of correspondence. Unlike 'the traveller' (and the 'traveller tourist') who departs from his own cosmos to enter and discover the unknown

⁴ Online source: www.etymology.com, accessed 25 Jan. 2011.

⁵ Velocity is another important dimension of mobility (see Virilio, 2000), and indeed also for pilgrimage. I have however not found this dimension very significant for my main argument, so I will simply leave it here as suggestion for further research.

beyond his cultural realm of home, ‘pilgrims’ (and ‘pilgrim-tourists’) do not intend to challenge anything. While ‘travellers’ supposedly journey with an open mind, ready to let new experiences modify perspectives they have acquired in their home contexts, ‘pilgrims’ journeys to the centre of their own world to confirm their worldviews. In this sense, a pilgrim is a foreigner and a temporarily exiled person who, in a broader sense of the word, is going ‘home’. Also other scholars have emphasised how pilgrimage contrasts with other forms of mobility in terms of direction. Engseng Ho, for example, stresses that a “pilgrimage is a return to a place” (Ho 2006, 7). The Turners (1978), however, due to their perspective on pilgrimages as *liminoid* phenomenon, had reversed that direction when they suggested that (Christian) pilgrimage centres were instead peripheral spaces of anti-structure away from home. This can perhaps be understood as a matter of different perspectives, but I find it important not to downplay the fact that much of this is indeed paradoxical. This is because what we are faced with here is not only a matter of different perspectives but also different layers and levels of understanding. To grasp this complexity it is necessary to include the idea of pilgrimage as meta-movement and metaphor too. According to Davidson and Gitlitz (2002), regarding pilgrimage as an act of returning is particularly dominant within Christian and Buddhist cosmologies:

For Christians, the pilgrimage of life reverses the order of the traditional earthly pilgrimage in which the traveller returns home after visiting a holy shrine. Christians leave their heavenly home when they are incarnate as human beings, and their souls’ journey through life is a return home to God, after passing through the liminal gateway of death. For Buddhists, too, after the pilgrimage of many lifecycles, the fortunate soul returns to the featureless nirvana from which it sprang (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002, 342).

Intersections between physical and metaphorical pilgrimages, with special reference to the Christian tradition will be important in this study of the Chagossian pilgrimage, which they labelled “back to paradise”.

More recent debates on pilgrimage have been more concerned with identity politics than with complexities of cosmology. One central dimension of these debates is reflected in Cohen’s conceptual distinctions between the ‘open’ traveller and the ‘fixed’ pilgrim. In these debates globalisation has formed the master framework, and pilgrims have been studied as one among many categories of moving people in a world supposedly constantly *en route*. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar world order, a paradigm of globalisation entered the social sciences from the early 1990s (Ho 2006). Much fascinated by the spread and availability of hi-tech and high-speed communication technologies, many scholars then turned to investigating how people coped with movement and connectivity in an era characterised by unprecedented acceleration in global flows of people, ideas, capital and commodities (e.g. Harvey 1989, Giddens 1990, 1991, Hannerz 1992, 1996, Kearney 1995, Appadurai 1996, Ong 1999, Inda and Rosaldo 2002). One result of this change in focus was a shift from classical Malinowskian out-of-the-way village studies to inquiries into how people were affected by increased mobility and long-distance connectivity. This shift also contributed to boosting anthropological interest in pilgrimage, which is also an activity defined by movement. As Morinis (1992) noted in the early days of the globalisation era:

Anthropologists have tended to neglect pilgrimages because they were, by definition, exceptional practices, irregular journeys outside habitual social realms. Pilgrimage eludes the attention of the traditional researcher who takes a fixed socio-cultural unit, such as a village, as the subject of study (Morinis 1992, 2).

There was virtually no anthropological debate on pilgrimage before the Turners' (1978) publication. Since the early 1990s an extensive body of anthropological literature has been produced on the topic, which indicates that this relatively late interest in pilgrimage relates to this wider disciplinary trend and change in academic focus. From then on a new era was portrayed and characterised as a 'world on the move', an ever-shifting world populated by people affected by mobility and connectivity on global scales. Much anthropological production within this paradigm came to concern dialectics between 'hybridity' and 'essentialism' or interconnected processes that Meyer and Geschiere (1999) called 'global flows' and 'cultural closure' – popularly phrased through metaphors of 'routes' versus 'roots' (Basu 2001, Clifford 1997, Friedman 2002, Gilroy 1991, 1993). Interest in these dialectics was much due to observations that, contrary to popular predictions, globalisation processes did not result in worldwide cultural homogenisation or a global village. Not only did people indigenise and attribute different meanings to whatever flows from western (and other) centres at an increasing pace, but recent years also witnessed a growing number of ethno-national and indigenous movements (Anderson 1991 [1983], Comaroff 1996, Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, Inda and Rosaldo 2002, Meyer and Geschiere 1999, Robertson 1992, Sharp 1996, Tambiah 1996, Wilmsen 1996). The splitting of the former Yugoslavia, the new wave of European nationalism (Delanty 1997) and the increasing global market for so-called 'roots-tourism' (Basu 2001, 2004, Peleikis 2009, Schramm 2004) are examples to show that in spite of globalisation processes – or as a reaction to such processes – an increasing number of people engage in activities of cultural closure, typically through identity politics that involve primordialisation, territorialisation and commodification of ethnic- and national identities.

Due to the empirical case at hand and the general framework of this thesis I find it necessary to raise a few reservations in respect of how this globalising world has been represented before I proceed to place pilgrimage studies within these debates. Mobility and connectivity have without doubt increased over the past few decades, but the idea of a supposedly new 'world on the move' has also been criticised for being biased, overstated and for not corresponding with historical and demographic data. The Chagossian case is a prime example that globalisation, understood in terms of freedoms to move and utilise communication technologies, is unequally distributed in today's world. The challenges faced by tourists, cosmopolitans, asylum seekers and refugees are also very different (Massey 1994). It appears that even the scale of international migration is exaggerated. Scholars like Zolberg (2001) and Friedman (2005, 141) stress that in international terms less than 3 per cent are on the move today, while the rest stay more or less put. Friedman notes that international migration was at least as massive a century ago, and places experiences of accelerated movement with jet-set academics and other people positioned in the upper reaches of society. Zolberg shows that a widespread image of a new 'international migration crisis' does not correspond with demographic data. In fact, the spread of such globalisation-related fears has instead legitimised

political measures to strengthen protection of western state borders at the expense of human rights obligations towards refugees and migrant families (Zolberg 2001).

If, in the globalisation era, conservative governments in the West have portrayed international migration as an imminent threat in order to reinforce state border control, many social scientists have on the contrary celebrated such border-crossers as liberating heroes of postmodernity (Manger and Assal 2006). The globalisation paradigm paved the way for new and interesting questions, among which was how space, in much anthropological production, has formed an unquestioned organising principle for studies of culture and social life. Often academic representation of other peoples and cultures had largely taken space for granted, and thus also contributed to confirming a widespread sedentarist ideology. This ideology suggests a metaphysical interconnection between ‘places’, ‘peoples’ and ‘cultures’, and depicts the contemporary world as a mosaic of delimited territories – typically nation states or ethnographic regions (Appadurai 1988, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Malkki 1992, 1995, 1996). Within this framework, people living or moving between borders, such as refugees, migrants, exiles and diaspora populations, became valued research subjects. Not only because they were associated with mobility in the globalisation era, but also because they represented the contemporary subjects that challenged this hegemonic inter-national geography. These were the people who fell between the social categories of the established order. They were, in Douglas’ term ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1966, 36). Since they did not fit the neat ideological picture of a mosaic-style world mapped by clear-cut modern nation states inhabited by national subjects with national cultures, they could also serve the purpose of pointing it out. And instead of embracing and submitting to hegemonic, essentialised and primordial national identities promoted by the state, many appeared to draw on stories of movement and transnational experiences to creatively construct alternative, hybrid and de/territorialised identities (Basu 2001, Clifford 1997, Gilroy 1993, Inda and Rosaldo 2002). As they often seemed to identify with their constructed ‘routes’ rather than with the territorialised ‘roots’ of their host nation, their voices appear to challenge the legitimacy of the nation state – the key invention of modernity. Much unlike conservative western governments then, anthropologists have celebrated these trans-national subjects as the progressive heroes of the globalising postmodern world (Manger and Assal 2006).

In practice this analytical distinction between ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ appears too simple. Many diaspora subjects are prime examples of the fact that people living between borders are also heavily engaged in constructing identities around their ‘roots’ in the homeland (Friedman 2005). As we shall see, the Chagos islanders are no exception. What I shall argue is that such processes of territorialisation and traditionalism are intimately connected to, and often presuppose, the opposite: ideas of change and mobility. The latter terms are also central to popular understandings of development, which in many cases (including that of Mauritius) is presented as a most important metaphorical journey of the modern nation. Within the ideological frames I discuss in this thesis, pilgrimage takes on importance as one of very few forms of contemporary mobility that communicates the very opposite: repeating traditions and attachment to place.⁶

⁶ Nomadism may be another form of repeating mobility much connected to place or region that could communicate much the same.

A source of the above argument can be traced to Zygmunt Baumann (1996). In a globalisation paradigm apparently obsessed with movement, scholars have also valued people on the move as metaphors of contemporary life (Baumann 1996, Clifford 1997). Here also has pilgrimage been regarded as particularly reactionary – heralded, in fact, as the form of contemporary mobility most appropriate to serve as metaphor for ‘modernity’. In his influential paper *From pilgrim to tourist – or a short history of identity* Baumann contrasts the (modern) ‘pilgrim’ with a number of (postmodern) moving characters including ‘the stroller’, ‘the vagabond’, ‘the tourist’ and ‘the player’. He then identifies the ‘pilgrim’ as “the most fitting metaphor for the modern life strategy preoccupied with the daunting task of identity-building” (Baumann 1996, 25-26). After coupling ‘modernity’ with the pilgrim, he suggests that “if the *modern* ‘problem of identity’ was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* ‘problem of identity’ is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open” (Baumann 1996, 18; italics in original). This conforms to the understanding of pilgrims and pilgrimage discussed above. In contrast to the supposedly hybrid, open-minded, postmodern travellers who challenge hegemonic orders and ideologies of rootedness and territorialised identification, pilgrims engage with the opposite, namely activities of essentialism and cultural closure. In a ‘world on the move’ then, the pilgrim has emerged as the moving character that represents the antithesis to the open, hybrid, progressive and even liberating postmodern heroes. One can thus say that although, and also because, the pilgrim is a moving character, the pilgrim has come to represent stasis, repetition and the *status quo* – the reactionary contrast to the forces of change propelled by globalisation.

These distinctions are also important in Coleman and Eade’s edited volume *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (Coleman and Eade 2004). Here the editors understand pilgrimage as one of many kinds of mobility in the twenty-first century, and approach pilgrimage as a form of voluntary displacement that constitutes cultural meaning in a world constantly *en route*. Drawing on Swatos’ observation that globalisation processes can stimulate rediscovery of different kinds of particularism and localism (see Swatos and Tomasi 2002, 120), they point out that “many pilgrim sites, rather than being contexts for the cultivation of anti-structure, can provide arenas for the rhetorical, ideologically charged assertion of apparent continuity, even fixity, in religious and wider social identities” (Coleman and Eade 2004, 15). Inspired also by Meyer and Geschiere’s (1999) dialectics of ‘global flows’ and ‘cultural closure’ as well as Augé’s (1995) concept of ‘non-places’, they suggest that “rhetorical construction of ideologies of localism in pilgrimage discourses may act in opposition to the seeming globalisation promoted by the ‘non-places’ of super modernity” (Coleman and Eade 2004, 15). Illustrative of the volume’s general approach, Schramm questions whether westerners (the people to whom Baumann (1996) apparently refers) actually do strive to ‘keep their options open’ (Schramm 2004). The market for so-called roots or heritage tourism among privileged sections of western societies is expanding, which indicates that instead of embracing openness and fluidity, people inhabiting a ‘world on the move’ respond instead by embarking on journeys to real and imagined homelands to confirm, fix and territorialise their identities. For such inquiries Coleman and Eade’s volume suggests a new and exciting approach to pilgrimage which will be of great importance to my argument in this thesis. Instead of focusing on what defines such ‘sacred journeys’ as distinct, they emphasise the “partial, performative, contested character of appropriating something or someone as ‘holy’” (2004, 18). Favouring

the verb 'sacralise' to the noun 'sacred', they suggest that pilgrimage can be studied as an activity of sacralisation. If places and objects can be rendered sacred by people appropriating them as something holy, then pilgrimage can be studied as a form of cultural closure that promotes localism and particularism in a world constantly *en route*.

In accordance with this approach Wayne Fife (2004) suggests that the definition of pilgrimage should be broadened to include journeys to places that are not yet sacred but which can be rendered sacred through pilgrim activity. Discussing a case of British missionaries, who precisely through journeying to New Guinea in the 19th century created sacred Christian space in a faraway 'pagan' land, Fife suggests that "in addition to the notion of journeying toward a 'sacred space' we need to add the concept of journeying toward a place that can be *made sacred* through the actions of its pilgrims" since "[e]ffort of movement is a defining feature of turning a physical space into a sacred place" (2004, 142-143; italics in original).

One can deduct from this that it is possible to study pilgrimage also as a political strategy – perhaps even a particularly powerful one as it is not often very closely associated with the political domain in popular thought (cf. Morinis 1992, 2). As I have repeatedly emphasised, pilgrimage is typically considered a reactionary practice but, as Coplan's (2003) study of Basotho pilgrims is a brilliant example of, pilgrimage can also form a means to resist. Very much relevant to the argument I shall develop in this thesis, Coplan investigates how pilgrimage can be understood as a 'spiritual strategy' for re-appropriating occupied land on the South Africa-Lesotho border. After the Basotho monarchy lost its land to Orange Free State white settlers in the mid-19th century, the Basotho became farm labourers on their former lands. While repeated petitions to the government and the UN to regain access to the land have not been forthcoming, Coplan registers that recent years have seen a rapid reoccupation of highland caves on occupied land by pilgrims who identify them as 'sacred to the ancestors'. By revitalising rhetoric and identification with pre-colonial spiritual notions that couple religious ideology and sacred territory, local people have thus managed to re-establish autonomous presence in these areas through repeated pilgrimage activity.

In this thesis I shall demonstrate how pilgrimage can be a political strategy and a means to resist. At first glance this seems to conflict with the widespread understanding of pilgrimage as a particularly conservative practice. However, it is important to distinguish between resistance *against* a given economic and socio-political order and resisting *within* that order. Ideologies do not only pacify people. By actively submitting a political struggle to the framework of a particular ideological order, new spaces for active protest and the production of meaning also open up. As I pointed out with reference to Schnepel (2000, 2006) in the subchapter above, victims can then become particular kinds of victims and thereby acquire patency as new possibilities for political action, external assistance and self-reflexiveness emerge within the framework of a new and different order. I argue that pilgrimage has gained considerable potentiality as means to resist within the framework of an ethnically ordered world (Comaroff 1996) that is much informed by a widespread sedentarist ideology (Malkki 1992, 1995, 1996). That pilgrimage at the same time confirms that ideological order is no contradiction.

This can be seen as an extension of Eade and Sallnow's (1991) political approach, which also takes important aspects of correspondence into account. When objecting to the Turners' apolitical analysis, Eade and Sallnow reintroduced politics to the study of pilgrimage.

But in their eagerness to deconstruct that practice, other central political potentialities in pilgrimage disappeared from view. Discussing Lu's study of a Mazu pilgrimage in Taiwan (Lu 2005), Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi (2005) point out that in pilgrimage highly important matters of power, property and identification are negotiated through questions like:

What are the criteria for recruitment, how do pilgrims perceive their cohesion or internal distinctions? [...] Who belongs to the pilgrimage? To whom does the pilgrimage belong? [...] Who has the right to speak on behalf of the pilgrims? Who has the right to influence the image of the pilgrimage in the media? (Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi 2005, 14; my omissions).

These questions reveal that pilgrimage as a political battlefield can extend contests over meaning between different travellers who congregate at pilgrimage centres. The politics of pilgrimage, as the Chagossian case will demonstrate, also include parties who do not journey, and my crucial point here is that in such cases exactly *how* a particular journey is defined can form the core of dispute. If destinations can be made sacred through pilgrimage activity, then the way a journey is defined and performed can be of utmost importance to people who strive to influence public opinion about the meaning of destinations and routes, as well as the group of people who travel. How a journey is defined can make a huge difference to people who wish to rework hegemonic representations of the past and to how they and their co-travellers are identified. Where these issues are at the core of political dispute, self-labelling pilgrims may not be the only party interested in defining their journey.

If the definition of a journey can shape meanings of the route, the destination and the group that travels, then the distinctions between different categories of movement can take on great importance. It is in this respect that it is important to distinguish between theory and practice, or the analytical and the popular dimensions. Scholars may uncover many similarities between pilgrimage, tourism, and ethnographic travel. Analytically this can make it hard to distinguish between them. Nonetheless, subjects of ethnographic study make distinctions and vest the categories with different meanings (Graburn 2004, 135). This is far from surprising since, as many scholars have pointed out, there is a significant "cross cultural homology" to be found in pilgrimage traditions (Morinis 1992, 3). Not all social practices "have the look of a pilgrimage", and there are indeed "parallels in behaviour to be found across time and culture" (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 202). To return to the Turners then, pilgrimage as an 'institutional form' has long since emerged (Turner and Turner 1978, 1; but see Kehl-Bodrogi and Schlee 2005, 20), and I will add that little suggests that globalisation forms a challenge to that. In fact, as Coleman and Eade (2004, 6) point out, travel labelled 'pilgrimages' by their participants seems to flourish in the contemporary world. My point is, to use Geertz' (1973, 93) terminology, that pilgrimage as a *model of* travel can also be *model for* travel and, as Rottenburg points out, models do travel in today's world (Rottenburg 2009, xxvi, 64). So if the contemporary world is marked by an unprecedented acceleration of global flows, then models of travel also travel. In that light it is more likely that globalisation contributes to standardising pilgrimage expressions. Images of travel, travel by media too. Of course, people indigenise and interpret the contents of we may call 'pilgr-images' (i.e. travelling images of pilgrimages) differently, but globalised media nonetheless distributes and shapes people's images of what

proper pilgrimages typically look like. And if something like the contours of a standardised pilgrimage expression emerges, then this model is likely to have an impact on pilgrimage performances – especially, and this is important, if strategic considerations are among the central reasons for defining and performing a particular journey accordingly. Categorical borders between ‘pilgrims’, ‘tourists’ and ‘ethnographers’ may very well be blurred from a certain analytical point of view, but in order to serve as political strategy pilgrimage performance must accommodate certain popular and recognisable expressions by which it can be distinguished from other categories of travel. By performing a journey in accordance with recognised pilgr-images, it is even possible for travellers to circumvent the authority of tradition (in the sense of repetition) and justify claims to undertake a *first* pilgrimage along a route to a destination that is not yet recognised as a pilgrimage site, but which can become one if those who journey decide to travel *as pilgrims*. Given international media coverage, pilgrims can even influence distant people’s understandings of particular routes and destinations – not to forget the travellers’ connection to those destinations. Hence, paying attention to how subjects of study imagine pilgrimage as a bounded category of action can indeed illuminate more than it obscures. Popular distinctions between categories of movement can be important in the contemporary world, i.e. a world characterised by increased mobility for some but where many others suffer the consequences of new restrictions on people’s possibilities to move (cf. Massey 1994, Zolberg 2001, Friedman 2005, Ho 2006). As we shall see, for the latter group pilgrimage can form a political strategy to challenge the legitimacy of borders and immigration restrictions that prevent them from travelling to places of great importance to them.

This, of course, requires a proper empirical study of the subjects in question and the context in which they live, and this is what this anthropological investigation aims to offer. For reasons I shall elaborate on below, I shall undertake this investigation through the study of pilgrimage. Since the Turners’ (1978) publication, scholars have debated how to define pilgrimage, how it differs from other forms of travel, and whether or not it can be regarded as a bounded category of action. A central question raised by Coleman (2002) is whether this is really worth the effort. One thing is clear though: whether scholars construct a generalised category of pilgrimage for theoretical purposes, rework pilgrimage definitions and boundaries or deconstruct it altogether, they all continue to reproduce a very limited debate now known as ‘the anthropology of pilgrimage’. If Coleman is right, this may be a less than fruitful project. This is because such a strong focus on (im)possibilities for generalisation and comparison also dictates and delimits how anthropologists approach their own material. Pilgrimage studies, he emphasises, can offer very rich ethnographic material and therefore:

the most valuable work in this area is that which looks outward, making points about human behaviour through using ‘pilgrimage’ as a case study rather than focussing on the institution itself as a firmly bounded category of action (Coleman 2002, 363).

Also Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi (2005, 2007) suggest that pilgrimage can be studied as an arena. In this thesis I shall take these propositions seriously and approach the Chagossian pilgrimage in 2006 from a very broad perspective. This was an event that eventually came to include all parties involved in the Chagos issue, and hence this journey provided an exceptional empirical case to explore Chagos islanders as a trans-national community within the wider historical,

socio-political and ideological fields they live and struggle. But I shall also make points about the institution of pilgrimage, albeit with one important consideration: Badone and Roseman argue that “rigid dichotomies between pilgrimage and tourism, or pilgrims and tourists, no longer seem tenable in the shifting world of postmodern travel” (Badone and Roseman 2004, 2). My suggestion is to turn the problem round and say that ‘pilgrimage’ is a globalised concept and a practice that derives form, and perhaps some general connotations, through popular distinctions from other forms of travel in the contemporary world, i.e. a world marked by increased movement for some and reinforced restrictions on mobility for others. The aim of this thesis is not to debate analytical boundaries between different categories of travel, but I insist on taking informants’ images of travel seriously and accept that categories of travel are ascribed different connotations in practice. As noted, images of travel also travel in a globalised world and, especially therefore, how one chooses to define and perform a journey can make a considerable difference. Recognising that this journey was not merely a pilgrimage but a *first* pilgrimage, this thesis explores the context of this event and asks why Chagossians framed and performed it accordingly. How can pilgrimage serve as a political strategy in the contemporary world? How can pilgrimage performance define destinations and influence people’s pasts, routes and identities? What ideological presuppositions are silently taken for granted in a world where pilgrimage can form a powerful political strategy? And how does pilgrimage relate to other forms of contemporary movement, such as emigration, tourism and humanitarian visits? As we shall see, pilgrimage, both as movement and metaphor, can form a significant part of political contests over meaning and attention, and in such contests, meanings of routes, destinations and travellers are always emerging.

1.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this thesis I explore the Chagos islanders’ first communal journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. But as already noted the scope of this study goes well beyond a narrow investigation into what happened during this voyage. In the coming chapters I shall also look into their history, discuss the emergence of their transnational ethno-political community and study how Chagossians identify, organise, present and understand themselves and their struggle within the shifting ideological frames of their political activities. To focus on this particular journey and simultaneously also interrogate such wider dimensions of their community may appear unusual, but as I will explain below there are a number of reasons, foremost methodological ones, for why I have settled for this approach.

Since 2004 I have conducted most of my fieldwork around Mauritius’ capital Port Louis, which is where most Chagossians live and from where the *Mauritius Trochetia* departed on 30 March 2006. During my research in 2006 many Chagossians explained that this journey was of great personal importance to them or to other members of their community. They had struggled for decades to be able to return to the place they were born and to the cemeteries where their ancestors were buried. Finally, this was about to materialise at a point when the generation who had spent more than their first childhood years in the Chagos Archipelago and had fronted heavy demonstrations and hunger-strikes in Mauritius in the 1970s and early 80s

were starting to pass away of old age. Over these decades the Chagos Archipelago has not become less significant as a homeland to the evicted islanders. Today it is hugely important in respect of Chagossian identification, political mobilisation and for how they understand the contemporary circumstances under which they live. But this journey was not only important to Chagossians in Mauritius. Chagossians have formed a diaspora since the depopulation of the Chagos Archipelago concluded in 1973, with no living member of their community inhabiting the homeland centre. By this time perhaps as many as 1,500 people in Mauritius and around 500 in the Seychelles had lived and/or worked in the Chagos Archipelago. Chagossians and their children and grandchildren have since moved on to countries like Switzerland, France and Australia, but especially to the UK after they were granted full British citizenship in 2002. During my research in 2006 the number of Chagossians in the UK was rapidly approaching one thousand, and their numbers have continued to rise ever since. When it became clear that British and Mauritian authorities would facilitate a journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006, it quickly developed into a major transnational event. For this evicted and dispersed group of people then, the journey soon developed into one of the most significant events with regard to issues of Chagossian diasporisation and the production of transnational ethnic awareness. It brought Chagossians and their representatives in different countries into dialogue and interaction, but before long it also triggered internal disputes which cast light on important heterogeneities within their transnational community. Also central non-Chagossian parties became engaged in the journey, foremost because the Chagos Archipelago remains an area of significant international disputes. In that context numerous debates, both within and beyond their diaspora, came to the surface. In this way the journey emerged as an extraordinary empirical case to explore the Chagossians' situation, their understanding of this, and the socio-political processes at work in the making of their transnational community.

This is very much in line with Coleman's point that I stressed in the theoretical outline above, i.e. that to use pilgrimage as a case study to look outward and make points about human behaviour can be a more fruitful approach than focusing narrowly on the pilgrimage institution itself (Coleman 2002, 363). I shall accordingly pay considerable attention to the political, historical, economic and cultural context of this pilgrimage and study it both as a celebration of *communitas* and an arena (Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi 2005, 2007). My general approach will then be to explore the Chagossian pilgrimage as social drama (Turner 1957, 1974), i.e. as a public event involving processes of contestation over symbolic representation between different parties, and at the same time a performance that reflects the social life and the relations of power in which it is embedded. As such, this journey can be studied as a means to explore also wider aspects of the Chagossian case. This will include the roles of other external parties involved in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago, how they too influence Chagossian politics, and how they understand themselves, their past, their homeland and their grounds for struggle.

In terms of analysis I have settled for a two-step approach: first I shall use the journey as a means to illustrate and explore wider dimensions of the Chagossian case. This will include the historical, cultural, political, economic and ideological contexts in which they live and frame their struggles. This will then provide a substantial background for the second step, which will be to analyse this particular journey within these broader contextual frames. I hold that only after looking into Chagossian history, culture and politics, as well as their relationships to important parties beyond their transnational community, will it be possible to

understand why Chagossians defined and performed their journey as a pilgrimage and what activities they undertook on the islands meant. My approach will in other words be to first move towards a thick contextualisation – a description of the field that in Geertz' (1973) terminology can be regarded as 'thick' but which also emphasises that cultural meaning is contested, shifting and always in the making. This will in turn enable a critical analysis of their pilgrimage within the webs of politics and meaning it was embedded.

Behind this choice of approach is a most significant methodological consideration, which has to do with the highly politicised context of this journey. *Mauritius Trochetia's* destination on this occasion was a restricted militarised area, policed and off limits to any person who did not hold a special permit. Since the establishment of this colony the authorities that control it have also deliberately silenced and even redefined the history of those who travelled there in 2006. It was less surprising, therefore, that no independent reporter was allowed to accompany the passengers on this journey. Although the journey did take place while I was conducting my fieldwork, I was therefore not able to join the Chagossians to undertake participant observation during this extraordinary event. Like most members of their community, I had to stay behind in Mauritius and wait for them to return with their stories, pictures, videotapes and the relics and souvenirs they had collected while they were away. I was undoubtedly even more motivated to explore and write about this exceptional journey because it was so obviously being silenced, and the thought of giving in to these (and other) silencing politics troubled me a lot. As they turned into an important obstacle to my research, the central question arose: How can an anthropologist explore and analyse an event from which he or she is excluded? It would have been relatively easy to change my research focus to explore, for example, why Chagossian families now migrate to the UK in large numbers, how Chagossians remember their past and what it means to them, or how they now organise as an ethnic minority within Mauritius' poly-ethnic society. However, I soon realised that to change my focus would be to ignore the ethnographic field that was in fact unfolding around me. It quickly appeared to me that this journey ranged far wider than the concrete voyage from Mauritius to the Chagos Archipelago and back again: it soon developed into a central matter that entered most spheres and aspects of Chagossian life – including those aspects I just mentioned above. Negotiations, preparations and discussions regarding this voyage marked almost all communal and political activities among Chagossians during my fieldwork in 2006. In Mauritius this event developed into a most central public discourse. In other words, the journey was the field – and it did not only take place on board the *Mauritius Trochetia*. Local and even international media showed keen interest in this journey, and when this affair entered top-level domestic as well as foreign politics in Mauritius, unveiling central economic and political relations between Mauritius and the UK and the US, who now control the Chagos islands, it became clear that an exploration of this event could reveal much larger issues – such as the wider political, economic and ideological contexts in which Chagossians now frame and fight their struggle. For these reasons, I chose to focus on the journey even though I could not undertake participant observation among the passengers during this voyage.

The fact that I was unable to produce empirical material through participant observation during this journey is my central reason for the two-step approach I outlined above, i.e. to first use the journey as an empirical case to explore the wider socio-political and historical dimensions of their community, and then to move on to analysing the journey against this wider

contextual background. To understand what went on during the days they were away, I had to rely on first-hand data obtained from participants shortly after they returned to Mauritius. These data include passengers' accounts, as well as their photos, audio-visual material and the souvenirs and relics they brought from the Chagos, which they eagerly presented, explained and discussed with me afterwards. I shall emphasise that most of these data do not result from short one-time encounters with the travellers but from highly embedded interviews and conversations undertaken with people whom I came to know well in the course of twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork. Even members and close relatives of the Chagossian household where I lived participated in the journey. To substantiate my interviews and gain a fuller picture of this voyage I asked people to show and explain to me the significance of their photographs and the souvenirs they had collected during their trip. I also invited participants to see and comment on audio-visual material which they and others had recorded while they were away. Of course these techniques do not eliminate the methodological issue that revolves around the difference between on-the-spot participant observation and informants' retrospective presentations of the same events. Nonetheless, I am confident that these techniques affected the quality of my data in positive ways – not least because Chagossians accepted me and included me more and more in their personal and political lives during my fieldwork.

My many experiences with the Chagossians have left me with a strong impression of an including and extraordinarily hospitable group of people. But it is fair to say that at the beginning of my fieldwork my status as a white, male European researcher complicated the issue of access to their community. As I shall explain below, there were two different dimensions to this complication: the first was related to my encounters with people outside their community, and the second was related to my first encounters with Chagossians in Mauritius.

When I first arrived in Mauritius in 2004 I had no Chagossian contacts. I rented a flat in the middle-class area of Beau Bassin, purchased a light motorbike and decided to start by making daily trips to my field site some fifteen minutes downhill in the outskirts of Port Louis. I thought of moving into the area once I got to know people there. However, when I asked Mauritians for directions to these areas I was always warned that I should definitively not go there. Repeatedly I was told that people in these areas would see me as a rich, white tourist who had seriously lost his way to his luxury beach hotel. Talking of severe violence, prostitution and heavy drugs, they said my life would be at risk. I should consider myself lucky if I only got mugged. Some even communicated these dangers by slitting their throat with their finger. As these were about the only stories I initially heard, I became anxious about travelling there alone, especially since I did not speak their language and thus could not explain myself properly. English is the official language in Mauritius and is taught in local schools, but poor people in these districts (and especially the elderly people from the Chagos Archipelago whose schooling over there was at best rudimentary) are seldom able to understand the language let alone express themselves in it. While considering how to proceed with my project I started to learn Kreol – the spoken yet officially unrecognised mother tongue of most Mauritians. It is probably right that these poor quarters around Port Louis are not among the safest in Mauritius for an outsider to spend time in: serious criminal incidences did take place while I was there. But it was not the people living in these areas who prevented me from entering my field site at

the start. It was middle-class Mauritians – people who despite the relatively small size of the island had seldom or never been to these areas. Hence, my initial problem of access was due to rather hysterical middle-class talk about the violent poor and the dangers associated with the areas where the poor live. This was even reflected in the architecture of the apartment I had rented, which like other houses in this middle-class area was fenced off with metal bars on all sides – even above. Apparently Mauritian society was not, as is often portrayed, only about harmonious multi-ethnic coexistence. From the very start I experienced a geographically organised class divide – a divide substantiated by middle-class consciousness expressed through stories about the aggressive poor, stories that seemed to go unchallenged by practices of social avoidance. This was indeed a valuable experience, not least because it clearly revealed the limitations of studying a single ethnic group within Mauritius' complex society. I decided therefore to substantiate my study by also gathering material among other classes and ethno-political communities in Mauritius.

As mentioned, my status also became an obstacle when I started to meet Chagossians as well. This had, without doubt, to do with their history of encounters with white male Europeans interested in their situation. I shall here limit myself to one particularly illustrating example, namely the arrival of a British lawyer in Mauritius on the premise of disbursing UK compensation to Chagos islanders in 1979. To receive their share of the monies, illiterate Chagossians had to sign formal documents written in legal English. Many of those who put their fingerprint on what they thought was a 'receipt' were unaware that they were actually signing off every right to return to their homeland and even their right to sue the British government for what happened to them (Houbert 1981, 472, Madley 1985, 7,15). This was not the first or the last time Chagossians have been tricked by white male Europeans. It must be added here that the disbursement was eventually interrupted, but the point is that Chagossians do not forget incidents like this. They form stories that are told over and over to express how Chagossians have suffered severe and repeated injustice and to explain why they continue to live in poverty. This has clearly contributed to a general distrust among many Chagossians with regard to the actual intentions of newcomers with a similar status as mine. Little did it help, of course, that at the time of my arrival Chagossians were preparing to sue both British and US authorities in international courts. However, these court proceedings would eventually offer me access to the field. To act legally on behalf of the Chagossian community, a Mauritius-based Chagossian organisation named the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) had to collect signatures from the people they represented. As I volunteered to assist the organisation in this work I was able to meet close to the entire Chagossian community in Mauritius. Court actions, like other arenas of conflict, draw very clear lines between friends and foes (Schlee 2004). Hence, my participation in this work became an opportunity to demonstrate that despite my status I was not an agent of their political opponent who had arrived to obtain information to be used against them.

When I returned to Mauritius for my second stint of fieldwork in 2006 I already had many Chagossian contacts. My status was no longer an issue of concern. I had also acquired basic skills in Kreol, which meant that I could conduct interviews and understand conversations in their own language without a translator right from the start. Within a year prior to this fieldwork I had visited some Chagossian friends who had migrated to the UK. When I told them about my plans to return to Mauritius they generously invited me to stay with their family

back in Mauritius in the household they had lived before moving to England. So when I arrived to Mauritius I was very well received. But soon after I got installed I started to experience how their marginal economic situation impacted their everyday lives. The housing standard was far below the relatively cheap flat that I had rented in 2004 (see Illustration 4). During the rainy season the water poured in through holes in the ceiling. The place was cleaner but, as I was told, people here had to clean the house every day to keep rats and insects out. The little house was not in a particularly poor condition compared with our neighbours. Others lived in smaller shacks, and in some of them one could not even stand up straight. Our house was situated in a



Illustration 1: Yard and house entrance at field site.
Photo: Johannessen 2006

complex jungle of shacks and small houses creatively constructed by a mixture of concrete and corrugated iron. They were located around the cemetery areas of Cassis, which is known as one of the slum districts around the Mauritian capital. The houses were organised into 'yards'. Separated by narrow and quite complex pathways, the yards were fenced off by corrugated iron and often guarded by dogs. The yard where I resided was a fenced-off plot of land with two small houses and an outdoor shack with a toilet

and cold-water shower. Like many other Chagossian households, this extended family had invested their share of the 1982 UK compensation in a plot of land and had constructed, repaired and in different ways managed to improve these homes since then. Ten people, comprising four adult siblings and their spouses and children, were living in the two small houses in our yard. As mentioned, a fifth sibling had recently migrated to the UK with her family, and some of the others were saving money to join them. Two dogs guarded the yard, one of which, Spencer, was renowned throughout Cassis for being particularly aggressive. Because these dogs were let loose after eight o'clock every evening, it was impossible to leave or to enter my section of the house without assistance from other household members who could keep the dogs at a distance with a wooden club. Despite the rather rough circumstances, I lived in this household throughout my second stage of fieldwork, getting on very well with this lovely Chagossian family. In innumerable ways they were extremely helpful and forthcoming.

It soon struck me as important that, with few exceptions, people who represent, judge and voice their opinions about Chagossians never really experience how their economic situation affects their everyday lives. Like myself, most come from very different economic and cultural backgrounds. From my field experiences I am quite confident that if one spends considerable time with Chagossians under these circumstances, one can hardly arrive in this field and depart again with unchallenged opinions. Journalists are often prone to this behaviour. Perhaps with best intentions, reporters visit Chagossians for a brief period (or worse, telephone their representatives) to confirm and add substance and faces to a case where the world's

dominant powers (or their own governments) have committed grave injustice against a distant marginal group of people. Of course, this is not only done to increase newspaper sales and turnover. By criticising western governments and framing articles within a globalised terminology of human rights, they may hope to raise public awareness and even contribute to adding domestic pressure on elected governments that are responsible for Chagossians' marginal situation. But what they fail to appreciate, or at least report, is how they also form a significant part of the Chagossian context. Many articles are written by visiting reporters for news-consuming middle-class audiences in the west, and naturally these representations are framed in terminologies both comprehensible and appealing to their target audiences. To acquire an international voice Chagossians must also accommodate these forms of expression and frames of understanding. They must learn the language of their political opponents, some of their laws, and understand some general ideas these faraway audiences hold about their exotic and marginal Others.

It is within these frames that the complexity of this particular field starts to unfold. This not only means that visitors from abroad are part of Chagossian culture and politics on a local level, but that Chagossian culture and politics also relate to global discourses. These discourses are not unrelated to imageries and even self-understandings of 'westerners' – a vast hypothetical group of people we could refer to as the Chagossians' occidental Other. Recalling that Europeans populated the Chagos Archipelago with African and Malagasy slaves and Indian indentured labourers during colonial times and that their descendants were forcefully evicted by the colonial regime to make way for a US military base two centuries later, it is clear that the people forced on and off these islands have been entangled in global politics throughout their recorded history. Nevertheless, Chagossians are represented – and even present themselves – as an extremely localised ethnic group: a bounded, homogenous ethnic community which due to displacement has lost their culture and identity. Complex processes like these can only be understood by also considering the global contexts in which Chagossians now live and struggle. Methodologically, then, the challenge here is as Tsing puts it:

[...] to move from situated, that is 'local,' controversies to widely circulating or 'global' issues of power and knowledge and back, as this allows us to develop understandings of the institutions and dialogues in which both local and global cultural agendas are shaped (Tsing 1994, 279).

The Chagossian pilgrimage formed an exceptional case for exploring a Chagossian situation that has developed in the intersecting field of 'local' and 'global' processes. This includes processes of indigenising the 'global' and standardising the particular, which is what Robertson (1992) refers to as the dialectics of 'glocalisation'.

By way of approaching such processes I have followed people, stories, debates and disputes to conduct multi-sited fieldwork (Marcus 1995) among Chagossians in Mauritius, the UK and the Seychelles. As already mentioned, I also extended my field research to include other groups in Mauritius. I travelled with Chagossians who migrated from Mauritius to England. During some of my visits to the UK I met, on two occasions, Chagossians who had come from Mauritius and the Seychelles to attend hearings in British courts in London. By studying this particular journey from the broad perspective outlined here, I was able to acquire

interesting data on how different subsections of the Chagossian diaspora relate to each other, and also how they relate to other parties beyond their community. The strength of multi-sited fieldwork, however, is not only that it enables the researcher to explore transnational social formations like that of the Chagossian diaspora. According to Mitchell (2007, 63), it also enables the researcher to move beyond the analysis of, for example, a local group marginalised within a wider world system, and then to use empirical material to inquire about aspects of the system itself.

Before I round off these methodological considerations, some important remarks must be made in respect of my role as a person representing Chagossians and how this may have affected the data I obtained during my fieldwork. Before the turn of the millennium, the plight of the Chagos islanders had passed without much notice outside Mauritius. Their powerful political opponents were for a long time rather successful in silencing and rewriting Chagossians' past. The lengthy court proceedings in the UK and the US that started in the late 1990s eventually did not conclude in their favour. In this context, to have their version of history exposed internationally has become a most central concern to politically active Chagossians. Given this agenda, it is not unlikely that many Chagossians considered me a person who could voice their case in beneficial ways. With regard to this, two questions arise: firstly, will standards of scientific inquiry and representation conflict with the political interests of the people that hosted me and generously shared the information on which this thesis rests? Although this thesis also critically discusses the politics of Chagossians and their supporters, I am confident that it will not. This is because any balanced representation of Chagossian history speaks for itself. Their central problem is rather that parties possessing the power to define Chagos history have long and deliberately aimed to silence it and continue to frame it in ways that disparage the evicted islanders. Secondly, did my informants relate to me selectively because I informed them that I was going to write about their group and their situation? In other words, did my role as someone representing the Chagossians affect the quality of my data? For quite some time I needed to correct informants who introduced me to friends and relatives as a journalist – even as a British journalist. Of course, as in my home country of Norway, most people are far more familiar with journalists than with anthropologists. To people giving interviews to someone who is there to write about their situation the roles can easily appear very similar, apart from the fact that the anthropologist sticks around and does not pack up and leave shortly after. During many of my informal interviews – which apart from participant observation were the methods I found most fruitful – it appeared to me that many Chagossians seemed to have many of their answers ready, sometimes responding to questions with phrases that I could find in a local newspaper some days later. It did not even have to be the same person who had uttered the same phrase to a Mauritian journalist. I wondered whether this was because Chagossians responded in ways they wanted (or worse, had agreed) to represent themselves to the public. But even after spending months in the field the same phrases continued to recur: “In Chagos we had everything”, “We were like a big family over there”, “We were sacrificed”, “The Mauritian government sold our homeland for independence”, “Chagossians have been uprooted”, “Chagossians died of sadness”, “I will never forget” and “I will fight until I die”. From spending time with their community I found that phrases like these did not only occur in interview settings, they also came up when I followed them in different contexts. They seemed to appear as acts of speech that had taken on a somewhat

ritualised character. They also occurred in Chagossian songs, and thus appeared as speech acts ritualised by melody. Speech acts refer to the pragmatic functions of language. People do not only use words to pass on information, for example from an informant to an ethnographer. People also *do* things with words (Austin 1962). As I shall elaborate further in this thesis, among the things Chagossians do when they repeatedly utter such phrases is to reproduce their community by narrating themselves as characters within a widely shared, but also contested, story about their group. I mention this here to emphasise the importance of long-term ethnographic fieldwork. Informants with whom I had less social contact sometimes refrained from commenting on controversial issues, and perhaps they sometimes presented themselves according to what they may have imagined would enhance their case and position. Long-term fieldwork, however, allows the anthropologist to follow informants through different social contexts, and therefore includes an element of comparison. This offers opportunities to understand why people say what they say, to whom they most often say it, and what they do when they say it. It is often what people *do* when they speak and not just the ‘truth’ in the modernist sense of the word that is important about informants’ statements. Making history, which has been very important in this case, is also a political battleground that is intimately connected to the establishment of certain identities in the present (Friedman 1992). But as much as people do things with words, people also say things with actions, and in that sense, activities – like journeys – can also be highly political. But political battles are always fought within wider ideological frames, and these are best approached through an analysis that combines anthropological theory with history and ethnographic data. Based on the data I have collected during my fieldwork, this thesis aims to explore political contests to monopolise meanings of paths, places and people within the wider ideological frames these battles are fought.

1.5 SETTING THE COURSE

With special focus on Mauritius and the Chagos Archipelago, I shall in the next chapter give a historical outline to those Western Indian Ocean islands with which this thesis is concerned. After introducing how these islands were discovered and populated and their role in the colonial economy, I discuss how people lived and worked in the Chagos Archipelago before the evictions. To accentuate continuities instead of silently confirming the lionised breach from colonial rule to independence, the chapter ends with an introduction to post-colonial Mauritius. As was reflected in Chagossians’ journey in 2006, crucial economic and political legacies from colonial times have left independent Mauritius economically dependent on western states, including the former colonial powers that continue to control territories once part of Mauritius – most importantly the Chagos Archipelago.

In Chapter 3 I place the journey in a history of Chagossian political struggles and show how this event was an outcome of a four-decade-long fight for compensation and right to repatriation, a process through which Chagossians have gradually become relevant political actors. With special focus on the role and revival of Chagossian musical traditions, I demonstrate that the character of these struggles has transformed in ways that both coincide and correspond with changes in the wider political climate in Mauritius and beyond. I discuss

how the evicted islanders became Chagossians after their politics took an ethnic and performative turn from the mid-1980s, and how they now, within a particular political and ideological framework, cope with much related dilemmas of displacement and cultural genocide. I argue that such ideological frameworks are highly important to consider, not least to understand within what ideological frames their pilgrimage took place and how it acquired its political potential.

In Chapter 4 I map the political waters through which the *Mauritius Trochetia* was traversing on this occasion. From a closer look at the ship's passenger manifest I identify key stakeholders in what I have termed 'the politics of the Chagos Archipelago', and argue that their central lines of political disagreement concern issues of sovereignty and militarisation. In respect of these issues, the different stakeholders pursue mutually exclusive political goals – all of which also exceed Chagossians' own political agenda. As a result, a competition to monopolise meaning onto the Chagos islands has emerged. However, because Chagos islanders have become relevant political actors, external parties can no longer consider their claims to this territory irrelevant. In this setting, the politics of the Chagos Archipelago has extended to include a competition for Chagossian self-identification, i.e. a competition where external parties also seek to influence how Chagos islanders self-identify. This has affected the Chagossian community in the sense that their group has been split along the very lines of these disputes.

In Chapter 5 I analyse how Chagossians understand and present themselves, their situation and the times and places that are important to them. Here I pay special attention to a set of loaded interconnected concepts and metaphors, which they routinely invoke when they talk about themselves and their community. As the meanings of these concepts have been shaped and re-shaped under particular economic and socio-political circumstances over the years, they also reflect, and even reveal a lot about, those conditions. We shall see, for example, that the concept of 'home' derives decisive meanings from Chagossians' practices and understandings of their situation in contemporary Mauritius. Discourses that developed in the run-up to their journey in 2006 also demonstrate that the re-shaping of these concepts is an ongoing process. Triggered by the context of their physical pilgrimage, the complete history of Chagossian struggles was then reconceptualised as a metaphorical pilgrimage. Thus reframed, the physical pilgrimage was reduced to a step *en route* to the destination of a meta-pilgrimage – the political aims of their organisation. We shall see that commitment to this meta-pilgrimage is of immense importance to Chagossians, not least, as I shall return to in Chapter 7, for their diaspora and its social reproduction.

Few people in Mauritius are unfamiliar with lofty metaphors of political life as a journey. Much comparable to the Chagossians' meta-pilgrimage, in Chapter 6 I show how Mauritian nationalist rhetoric portrays the state and its 'multicultural' society by metaphors of a seafaring vessel – an imagery encouraged by powerful national and transnational economic institutions who insisted on the importance of raising public commitment to 'development' at a time of economic crisis. Here I argue that due to their particular history, ambivalent status and the politics of their homeland, Chagossians' position in Mauritius differs from other local ethnic groups in ways that are both important to the reproduction of their community as well as for raising national awareness among Mauritius' poly-ethnic population. Since their community is reproduced in constituent dialogue with the state and its development rhetoric,

Chagossians have emerged as an important Other in a society otherwise much divided along ethnic lines. One significant result is that many Chagossians continue to regard Mauritius as a place of non-belonging from where they frequently speak of leaving.

Chagossian ideas of leaving Mauritius is taken further in Chapter 7 where I explore the Chagossian community as a transnational social formation. The pilgrimage in 2006 generated intense dialogue between all international Chagossian organisations. However, the one claiming to represent Chagossian migrants in the UK was eventually excluded from the event. A study of the motivations for this exclusion unveils important heterogeneities and disagreements within their transnational community that are most central to the Chagossian diaspora. I discuss a highly symbolic split between Chagossian migrants to the UK and those who stay behind to struggle for repatriation and peregrinate to the Chagos Archipelago in a physical as well as a metaphorical sense. We shall see that diasporic Chagossians now speak of two homelands, the UK and the Chagos Archipelago, and that leaving for either of these two places is vested with radically different meanings. While much informed by potent stories derived from the Bible, this socio-cultural division becomes comprehensible within the wider context of Mauritius' much propagated development rhetoric from which a convincing Chagossian politics of cultural recognition must dissociate. An analysis of these connections reveals how pilgrimage and migration from a post-colony to the colonial centre are, at least in this case, very much interrelated in terms of meaning, and that such meanings vest pilgrimage with political potential in today's world.

Thus far, ethnographic data from the journey have primarily been applied to illustrate, analyse and explore dimensions the Chagossian community. Against this thick contextualising background I proceed in Chapter 8 to analyse the journey itself. I devote special attention to the most central activities Chagossians undertook on their journey, namely the considerable efforts they spent on cleaning and clearing the abandoned and deteriorating churches and cemeteries of their ancestors. I argue that these activities had much to do with remembering, a matter of great importance to Chagossians from the perspectives of their faith as well as their politics, two aspects of their politicised community that are very much interconnected. In this chapter I show how pilgrimage performance – within the ideological orders discussed in the foregoing chapters – can be a powerful political strategy. Through pilgrimage performance, Chagossians could reclaim the public event, historicise it, and re-route their own past in a way that is contrary to the most central arguments put forward by their political opponents.

If defining and convincingly performing a journey as a pilgrimage can transform the destination into something sacred, then in cases where different parties compete to monopolise meaning onto a particular place, pilgrimage performance can be a powerful political means to 'sacralise the contested'. That is to say, to actively redefine and elevate what has become politically contested into something sacred and thereby (re)claim it in the name of the group the pilgrims claim to represent. As we shall see, pilgrimage can thus form a powerful political strategy for groups who, in increasing numbers, pursue a politics of cultural recognition within an ethically ordered world that is supposedly constantly on the move. We shall however also see how such political groups' popular botanical language of 'roots' and 'diaspora' can quickly turn in a counterproductive direction as the much related issue of environmental protection takes on more importance than human rights in presumably more developed (post)colonial centres in the (post)Christian West.

2 MAURITIUS AND ITS DEPENDENCIES : FROM COLONISATION TO EMBEDDED AUTONOMY

Mauritius Trochetia's voyage from Mauritius to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 both reflected and revealed important colonial legacies of the Indian Ocean islands I will discuss in this study. For example, during colonial rule the enslaved labourers in the Chagos Archipelago were converted to Christianity. Now a number of their descendants embarked on a Christian pilgrimage to the old chapels and cemeteries these islands. When they arrived, the passengers set out to search for the remains of these constructions, which along with a number of other deteriorating colonial plantation buildings can still be uncovered in these islands' overgrown interior. However, in this particular case, the wording 'colonial times' is misleading, since the British government never decolonised the Chagos Archipelago. This would mean that the pilgrimage was a journey from decolonised to colonised space. But even to map 'colonial times' in this way is problematic: some people onboard the vessel would briskly disagree that these islands are still British. Yet, at the same time, opposition to this form of mapping also contributes to maintaining important bilateral relations that date right back to the colonial era. Concepts like de-colonisation, autonomy and independence are relative and contested in this case, and they also contribute to obscure historical continuities that are important if we want to understand it. Not only were representatives of the Church accompanying the pilgrims on this journey. Mauritian and the British government officials were also onboard the vessel. And while the journey was organised in cooperation between these two governments, both claimed sovereignty to the vessel's destination. Clearly, a compromise had been reached between Mauritian authorities and the former colonial power. In this extraordinary (post)colonial setting, 'colonial times' was apparently not simply 'over there' or a matter of the past.

The above reveals that this journey was very much entangled in a colonial past, something that indeed also reflects core dimensions of the Chagossian community. In order to understand this field it is therefore imperative to place the event in a proper historical framework. This will also be important for a central question put forward in this thesis: why Chagossians performed their journey as a pilgrimage, and what this meant in the highly politicised context in which it took place. These questions can only be answered if one considers both sides of Chagossians' mediated history: their colonial past and the contemporary politics of Chagossian history. As I have already pointed out, in respect of this the two most substantial anthropological publications on the Chagossians by Vine (2009) and Jeffery (2011) differ in their approaches (see Chapter 1.2). As this analysis will show, the past was not only crucial to the journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. It is at the core of the entire Chagossian case. Being Chagossian, and the way their group is socially reproduced, is very much centred on this issue. Despite this, few publications discussing the plight of the Chagossians offer a really thorough historical outline as to how societies in the Chagos Archipelago developed and changed over time (e.g. Curtis 2003, Pilger 2006, Sand 2009b, Jeffery 2011). To do this is very important, notably because of the emergence of popular portrayals of the Chagossians' two-century long history in the archipelago as a single, isolated,

bounded, integrated and homogenous island community that existed almost beyond time – typically ‘a paradise lost’ (Hookoomsing 2011, 41). As this chapter will show this is of course historically inaccurate. I shall later return to discuss how such popular representations are important to contemporary political discourses. Chagossians’ contemporary struggle is fought within a complex (neo)colonial framework. It is entangled in a particular political and economic history, where arguments put forward on the global stage are connected to discourses about their past, which can be traced right back to the centre of the colonial regime before their evictions. But before I can proceed to discuss the politics of Chagossians’ past, and what role pilgrimage and other forms of mobility can play in this, it is important that I outline my own reading of this divisive history.

2.1 DISCOVERY AND COLONISATION

During European colonisation and competition for trade monopolies in India and the Far East, the Indian Ocean islands with which this thesis is concerned were completely transformed. The first European naval explorers who entered the Indian Ocean at the end of the 15th century ventured into waters where established trading networks had extended well beyond the ocean’s littoral for millennia. Three centuries later, European domination of the Indian Ocean was established. From their early attempts to tax and otherwise manipulate established maritime trade around a number of key ports, European colonisers gradually took control over the hinterlands of the ocean’s littoral. From the late 18th century they also started to control production, and thus effectively forced regional commerce into an extensive global economy (Pearson 2003, 11-12, 113-115).

For one significant reason, historical developments in the western and central Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius, the Seychelles, Reunion, Rodrigues, Agalega and the Chagos Archipelago were different. Before European naval expansion into the Indian Ocean, these islands hosted no population. In fact, they qualify among the world’s inhabitable territories that were settled latest. Indian Ocean seafarers had known about these islands for centuries, but without any population and with few valued natural resources they were of little interest to traders from the region (Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 1, Romero-Frías 2003, 19).¹ For a long time, the reefs and shoals surrounding these islands also posed serious hazards to ships and were considered better avoided – at best serving as reference points for navigation in areas that are also frequented by heavy cyclones (Forsberg 2005, 5-6). The importance of these islands changed dramatically after European merchants started valorising their strategic position between the Cape of Good Hope and India, as well as the Far East. Under colonial rule, new and complex societies developed completely from scratch.

¹ The Mascarenes were known to Arabian and Swahili traders in medieval times. Al Sharif El-Edrissi’s map of 1153 shows Rodriguez, Mauritius and Reunion Island with the names Dina Arabi, Dina Mozare and Dina Magrabim. Seafaring people in the Maldives also had knowledge of the Chagos group before the Portuguese rounded the Cape (Romero-Frías 2003, 19). There is no evidence that Polynesians in the 4th and 5th centuries visited these islands on their way to settle in Madagascar (Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 1).

The earliest European pilots who were headed for the Indian subcontinent followed the so-called 'inner route' that Vasco da Gama had staked out with the help of Arabian traders on his first journey to Calicut. Assisted by the seasonal monsoon winds, eastbound ships then followed the African east coast from the Cape up north through the Mozambique Channel before breaking eastwards across the Arabian Sea (Pearson 2003, 19-20). This meant that the islands east of Madagascar were off-route. Hence, they were first 'discovered' by the Portuguese in 1507 and were colonised much later.² The archipelago comprising Reunion, Mauritius and Rodriguez was named the Mascarenes after the Portuguese pilot Pedro Mascarenhas who explored these waters in 1512 (Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 3). As a result of local resistance to European attempts to control established Indian Ocean ports, Mascarenhas also sighted the Chagos Archipelago that year. At their supply station in Mozambique, a six-ship strong Portuguese armada commanded by Dom Garcia de Noronhavi received news that the Portuguese hold of Goa in India was under threat. To assist, the armada was split and a detachment led by Mascarenhas sought a quicker route to India by rounding south of Madagascar. This journey probably resulted in the first European sighting and naming of the Chagos Archipelago and its largest island Dom Garcia, which later became Diego Garcia (Forsberg 2005, 3-4).

All of these islands remained uninhabited until the Dutch East India Company took an interest in Mauritius as a strategic naval supply station on the stretch between the Cape colony and Batavia. The island was claimed by the Dutch in 1598, and named after the Netherlands' Prince Maurice of Nassau. Mauritius' southeast port of Mahebourg was fortified in 1638. The Dutch eventually abandoned the colony in 1710, but by then they had introduced sugar cane, imported the island's first African slaves, overexploited the local ebony forests and driven the infamous dodo to extinction (Pearson 2003, 152, Panyandee 2002). Evidence is lacking, but it is not impossible that runaway slaves could have survived on the island after the Dutch left it – becoming, then, the earliest local ancestors of the Mauritian population.

In respect of early European Indian Ocean trade, the Mascarenes were exceptionally well positioned. Before the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, merchant vessels had to pass around the Cape. Hence, while the Dutch fortified Mauritius, France claimed the neighbouring islands of Reunion and Rodriguez.³ The French had entered the competition for eastern trade monopolies relatively late, which made it difficult to secure a foothold in the region, except, of course, for the western and central Indian Ocean islands that were all uninhabited (Pearson 2003, 152). The first Frenchmen installed on Reunion in 1654, which became France's central supply base for merchant ships on the India route after French colonisation in Madagascar were met with local resistance. In 1715 they took possession of the abandoned neighbouring island of Mauritius to secure better harbours for the French East India Company and prevent it from falling into the hands of their European competitors (Scott 1961, 55).⁴ Soon after the first French colonisers arrived in 1721, Mauritius became France's central Indian Ocean base. To them, however, Mauritius' strategic value was not only due to its potential as a naval supply station. It would also become a strategic base from where they could attack their competitors'

² Mauritius was initially named Cerne after the ship of F. Pereira who first sighted it.

³ Reunion was then named Isle Bourbon.

⁴ Under French rule Mauritius was renamed Isle de France.

ships, especially those of the British.⁵ From 1740 until the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, successive and eventually devastating wars were fought against Britain.⁶ By then, French Mauritius was developed into a slave-based sugar-producing colony with a harbour of such strategic importance that they crowned it the ‘Star and Key of the Indian Ocean’ – an expression that is still found on Mauritius’ coat of arms.

Important developments in French Mauritius and the surrounding islands commenced under the governorship of Mahe de Labourdonnais (1735-1746). Celebrated in today’s Mauritius as the person who brought modern development to the island, Labourdonnais introduced industrial slave-based agriculture, the foundation for the island’s massive sugar economy. After declaring Port Louis the capital of Mauritius, he transformed the settlement into a strategic port city with a fortified and well-equipped harbour for the French East India Company. In the years to come, Port Louis was turned into a commercial centre for maritime traders, planters and commerce raiders operating in the Indian Ocean (Toussaint 1973). This was much in accordance with Labourdonnais’ wider strategic perspectives as he advocated the use of Mauritius as a base for further French expansions in the Indian Ocean. He argued that gaining control over India was best served by dominating the seas, which would depend on securing a number of strategic Indian Ocean naval bases. He therefore encouraged French settlements in Mozambique, Madagascar and the Seychelles (Scott 1961, 53-54). Mozambique and Madagascar were also key sites for slave supplies to the French Mascarenes, and, in addition to serving these islands’ growing agricultural industries, he also planned to use slaves to construct a navy (Toussaint 1966, 155-156). Labourdonnais’ visions were strongly opposed by the Governor General of the French Establishments in India, J. F. Duplex, who considered island colonies unnecessary commitments in a struggle for dominion in India – an achievement from which he believed a French command of the sea would ultimately follow. On their part, the French East India Company did recognise the importance of securing ports on the India route, but as they were far more concerned with trade profits than colonisation Labourdonnais’ plans had little success (Scott 1961, 53-54).

Labourdonnais’ initiatives nonetheless marked the beginning of French colonisation of the uninhabited islands north of Mauritius, including the Chagos Archipelago.⁷ Between 1742 and 1744 Labourdonnais sent explorers from Mauritius to map and survey the notorious archipelagic waters of the Seychelles, the Admirantes, the St. Brandon group and the Chagos Archipelago in hope of finding a shorter route to India. By then, a post for importing tortoises to Mauritius was already established on Rodriguez, and within a decade this easternmost island of the Mascarenes was permanently populated from French Mauritius.⁸ Before the end of the century, Franco-Mauritian businessmen had also been installed with a number of slaves in the Seychelles and the Chagos Archipelago, producing several items for profitable export to Mauritius (Forsberg 2005, 8, McAteer 1991, 11-20, Scott 1961, 53-54, 58-60).

⁵ St. Brandon (Cargados Carajos) north of Mauritius became a French protectorate in 1722.

⁶ Central wars between France and Britain at this time were the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48), the Seven Years War (1756-63), the War of American Independence (1778-83) and the Revolutionary Wars and Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815).

⁷ Far from Labourdonnais’ ambitions, French ventures in Madagascar in the 18th century only resulted in a few slave-trading posts. Attempts at founding a settlement in Kilwa on the African east coast failed in 1772 (Toussaint 1966, 156-157).

⁸ Rodrigues was discovered and named after a Portuguese mariner in 1538.

The French position in the Indian Ocean suffered serious setbacks from the mid-18th century. This not only affected Port Louis, but also the Seychelles and the Chagos Archipelago. At a time of repeated wars, trade blockades and also the French revolution, a very unpredictable political situation arose that paved the way for a highly speculative local economy. Many Port Louis inhabitants became privateers or commerce raiders, officially authorised to attack and plunder British ships. Consequently, the city of Port Louis prospered at the detriment of British shipping while France's direct role in India trade crumbled. This situation generated interest in the uninhabited archipelagos between the Mascarenes and the Indian subcontinent and resulted in further exploration, possessions and ultimately colonisation and settlement of the uninhabited Seychelles and Chagos archipelagos – both of which were under threat of being claimed by the British. The Seychelles had already in 1744 been claimed by the French, who then named the largest island Mahe after Governor Labourdonnais who had initiated the explorations.⁹ The archipelago was formally annexed by the erection of a stone of possession when the Seven Years War broke out in 1756. In 1770 – just in time to forestall a British attempt to lay claim to it as a supply station – twenty-two Frenchmen left Mauritius to settle in the Seychelles with a number of slaves. So when the British ship *Eagle* arrived the following year, they found an archipelago populated by Frenchmen and slaves experimenting with spice gardens and producing vegetables, coffee, tobacco and cotton for export to Mauritius.

The next year the *Eagle* called on an island east in the Chagos Archipelago named after that ship (McAteer 1991, 55-56, Scott 1961, 60). The British had systematically been mapping the Chagos Archipelago in the 1760s, originally due to the threat these waters posed to British shipping (Edis 1993, 24-27), but in 1786 the colonial office in Bombay received orders from London to take possession and settle the largest and southernmost island of the Chagos Group, Diego Garcia, and develop it into a supply station. To plant vegetables and cereals for this purpose, six shiploads of soil were sent by the East India Company from Bombay (Scott 1961, 20, Stoddart 1971, 210). However, when the British detachment arrived later that year, they found Frenchmen from Mauritius and African slaves also engaged here. In 1783, Mauritius' Governor had granted a land concession on Diego Garcia to a Franco-Mauritian sugar plantation owner named Le Normand, who left for the Chagos Archipelago the year after with two ships and a party of 22 African slaves to collect coconuts for export to Mauritius (Vine 2006, 56). The British did not regard Le Normand's activities as a serious French claim to the island. They proceeded to investigate prospects for fortification. Le Normand's group then returned to Mauritius to report on the incident, upon which the French colonial government forwarded complaints to Bombay and sent a frigate to Diego Garcia for closer investigation. When they reached Diego Garcia the following year, the British had already abandoned it. Devoid of proper building materials, they concluded that to fortify this very flat island would be too costly (Forsberg 2005, 12-13). The French crew left behind a stone of possession before the frigate returned to Mauritius, and permanent French presence in the Chagos Archipelago soon followed.

Colonial authorities in Mauritius continued to grant Franco-Mauritian businessmen concessions for collecting coconuts and fishing in the Chagos Archipelago. A Mr Lapotaire

⁹ The archipelago was initially named Labourdonnais Islands. This was later changed to Seychelles in honour of King Louis XV's finance minister, Vicomte des Séchelles.

was the first person to exploit the local coconuts for export to Mauritius on a considerable scale, and his slave-based industry on Diego Garcia developed into a business profitable enough to lay the foundations for long-term settlements in the Chagos Archipelago (Scott 1961, 96-97). But contrary to the Indian Ocean strategies that had been advocated by Labourdonnais, it was not long-term colonisation that dominated the French colonisers' interests in Mauritius when the Chagos islands were populated. Less interested in farming, they speculated instead on making a quick profit and then returning to France (Scott 1961, 96, Saint-Pierre and Wilson 2003, 3). The famous French author Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, who lived in Mauritius from 1768-1770, then described the general attitude among the white population: "Everybody bears a grudge, all want to get rich and leave quickly" (Saint-Pierre and Wilson 2003, 120).¹⁰ It was the highly unpredictable economic and political situation that developed in Mauritius after the French Revolution that triggered the sudden interest in the Chagos Archipelago. News of King Louis XVI's execution arrived in April 1793. Although implementation of a 1794 government decree to abolish slavery in the French colonies met too strong opposition in Mauritius, local Jacobins represented a certain challenge to the colonial elite throughout the decade (cf. Toussaint 1973, 48-50). This instability was further accentuated by the declaration of war between Britain and Holland in 1793. France was then subjected to a tightening blockade, which meant that Mauritius was increasingly cut off from its main source of supplies and its key outlet for the sale of colonial produce. Compared to luxury goods brought to Mauritius by the commerce raiders who plundered British ships, necessary daily life supplies became scarce. This gave way to serious inflation, and by 1803 Mauritian paper money was rendered valueless. Many fortunes were lost, but new economic opportunities also emerged – much to the benefit of local capitalist entrepreneurs and also American maritime traders (Scott 1961, 96-104; Toussaint 1973, 48-50). All these developments had a direct impact in the Chagos Archipelago and were to shape the islands' future.

A steep rise in prices for basic products triggered a booming interest in the Chagos Archipelago and other tropical islands among the Franco-Mauritian colonisers (Scott 1961, 96, Edis 1993, 32). Imports of basic products to Mauritius decreased because of the British blockade of France. This resulted in a lucrative market situation, which was soon followed by an increasing number of neutral American ships calling in to Port Louis with provisions. Among the necessary but scarce products was oil used for cooking, light, and soap. In 1793, coinciding with the outbreak of war, the enforcement of the trade blockade and the news of King Louis XVI's execution, Mauritius' Governor Malartic approached Mr Lapotaire to express his concern about how the Mauritian market was being held to ransom by foreigners who continuously raised the oil prices. Mr Lapotaire, who already imported coconuts from Diego Garcia and extracted coconut oil in Mauritian facilities, suggested that the best way to boost local oil supplies was to install a copra factory on Diego Garcia. Taking this plan into his own hands, he shipped another 25-30 men and a number of slaves to the island. The following year Lapotaire supplied the Mauritian government and the local market with 6,100 litres of coconut oil (Scott 1961, 96-97, Stoddart 1971, 210).

¹⁰Bernadin de Saint-Pierre became famous for his novel *Paul et Virginie* published in 1788, a story also set in French Mauritius before the revolution (Saint-Pierre 1966 [1788]).

Encouraged by Lapotaire's success, other Franco-Mauritians obtained concessions and established coconut industries in Mauritius' dependencies. In 1808, when the British decided to crack down on French commerce raiding by blockading Mauritius and issuing a proclamation to confiscate all American ships in French ports, Franco-Mauritian entrepreneurs were granted new concessions for extracting coconut oil on the Egmont Atoll in the Chagos Archipelago and on Agalega. Disputes over coconut resources then also erupted between French capitalists already established on Diego Garcia (see Scott 1961, 98, Stoddart 1971, 211). According to Scott, these French colonisers may have calculated with a British attack on Mauritius at this time. The Seychelles had surrendered to the British in 1794, but the islands were declared neutral and the port in the capital was turned into a Freeport. Hence, no matter how the fate of Mauritius would change during these volatile times, investments in the dependencies would always generate profits because local produce could from now on be exported either via French Mauritius or via the Freeport in the neutral British Seychelles (Scott 1961, 103-104). In any case, it is clear that even though the Chagos Archipelago had been valued for its strategic position by the French and the British from the mid-18th century, the reason why these islands were settled had to do with profitable opportunities for oil production that arose in Mauritius during the Napoleonic Wars. The settlements that developed in the Chagos Archipelago then ultimately resulted from French attacks on British ships from their 'Star and Key of the Indian Ocean', and the effects the ensuing British blockade of Mauritius had on the local market.

Eventually these commerce raids also provoked the British to attack the French colony, which would be followed by a change in sovereignty to these islands towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The Seychelles had already capitulated to the British in 1794. In 1809 the British seized Rodriguez. Reunion Island fell in 1810, and after a British attack on Port Louis the same year Mauritius also surrendered. Under the treaty of Paris in 1814, all of these Indian Ocean islands became British. These islands, including the smaller 'Oil Islands' of Agalega and the Chagos Archipelago, had until then been administered from Mauritius – a centre whose importance increased substantially after Port Louis replaced Pondicherry as the French headquarters in the Indian Ocean in 1789 (Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 26, 42-43). With these attacks Britain confirmed its Indian Ocean hegemony, giving way, then, for the expression of the Indian Ocean as a 'British lake'.

2.1.1 FROM FRENCH TO BRITISH RULE

Initially the British core interest in these islands was not colonisation or agricultural production, but to provide security for British shipping. Important dimensions of social and economic life would therefore continue much as before after the British takeover in 1810. For once, the French settlers were granted generous conditions for their capitulation: their troops were not to be treated as prisoners of war, while the property, laws, customs and religion of the settlers were to be respected (Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 43). Also, while Port Louis' importance as a strategic military and commercial harbour diminished, Mauritius was transformed into a major mono-crop sugar exporting economy with considerable British assistance. This allowed the French-speaking settlers to turn from investing in Port Louis' speculative market to setting

up prosperous sugarcane industries initially based on slavery. The French landowning class and the British officials soon entered a political partnership: Franco-Mauritian sugar production would provide the necessary revenues to administer the island and maintain troops there, and the British regime provided basic infrastructure and a coercive apparatus for the plantation system (Houbert 1981, 76). A major challenge to this plantation system was the abolition of slavery that would come into force in 1835. But also in this situation, the British administration assisted the French settlers in furthering the island's economic prospects and securing the landowners' position within Mauritius' socio-economic hierarchies. Despite the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, more than 20,000 new slaves entered Mauritius after the British takeover. The French settlers were also offered £2 million compensation for the abolition of slavery, much of which was used to expand sugarcane industries after the import of Mauritian sugar to Britain was granted the same conditions as the West Indies in 1825. After having provided the French settlers with a huge new market for Mauritian sugar within the vast British Empire, the British then facilitated the import of some 450,000 Indian indentured labourers as substitutes for the freed slaves who now left the local plantations in numbers. Due to these incentives, and to the great benefit of the French-speaking settlers of course, Mauritian sugar production increased from 10,869 tonnes in 1825 to an astonishing 165,000 tonnes in 1865 – thus qualifying Mauritius as the chief sugar producer of the British Empire (Houbert 1981, Meisenhelder 1997, Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 48-51).

These incentives boosted the local economy, but they also had other important socio-political effects in Mauritius and its dependencies. By the time of the French capitulation, the formerly unpopulated islands of Mauritius, Reunion, the Seychelles, Rodrigues, Agalega and the Chagos Archipelago were all inhabited by French colonisers and their slaves. The slaves had mainly been imported from Madagascar and the African east coast now known as Mozambique, Tanzania and Kenya. Some also came from Senegal. In 1800, French Mauritius had also hosted some 6,000 Indian slaves. Out of Mauritius' 60,000 inhabitants around that time, the number of slaves in the colony totalled some 50,000. By then a smaller number of Chinese immigrants had also made their way to the French colony. Immigrants and freed slaves now represented some 7 per cent of the Mauritius population; the French colonial elite comprised 9 per cent, while slaves made up no less than 84 per cent. As already mentioned, the abolition of slavery in 1835 was followed by a massive exodus of freed slaves from Mauritian sugar plantations. To replace them, and to keep wages constantly low, Indian indentured labourers were imported in vast numbers. From 1846 to 1972, four years after Mauritius' became independent from Britain, Mauritius' population rose from 158,462 to 850,968. No less than 556,000 were then of Indian origin (Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 29, 43, 45, 47, 55, 67, Dinan 2002, ii, 6, 75).¹¹ These dramatic demographic changes had of course important consequences for Mauritian society, including its economy and politics.

The system of flooding the labour market with cheap Indian indentured labourers continued until 1912, but in practice workers were not free to engage where they wanted before 1922 (Benedict 1980, 150). Described by Tinker (1974) as 'a new system of slavery', the conditions for many of these indentured labourers were not much better than those of the slaves.

¹¹ Descendants of slaves and European colonisers in Mauritius then numbered 237,000. Chinese immigrants made up some 24,000 people (Dinan 2002, 6, 75).

However, some Indians advanced within the local hierarchies to become overseers, job contractors and moneylenders. Therefore, when Franco-Mauritians sold off some of their poorer cultivation areas by the latter half of the 20th century due to increasing competition from European sugar beet producers, some of these Indians had managed to accumulate enough money to become landowners themselves. This opened for the emergence of a new Indo-Mauritian middle-class. Many of their children would gain new opportunities through education, eventually coming to occupy jobs as civil servants and educated professionals. Chinese migrants also continued to arrive with the numerous ships traversing between British India and Mauritius. Many established themselves as artisans and traders, and by opening smaller shops and businesses around the sugar industries they advanced to better socio-economic positions than the landless workers. Over time, these Chinese businessmen, together with Indian small farmers and a number of landless whites and coloureds employed as bureaucrats and professionals, came to constitute the Mauritian petty bourgeoisie (Meisenhelder 1997, 279-280, Seegobin and Collen 1977, 110-112).

The emergence of a more conservative Mauritian middle-class was most welcomed by the colonial administration. With a drop in sugar prices after the major depression, workers on the estates and the docks undertook repeated strikes in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Protesters rallied around the *Mauritius Labour Party* (MLP), a political left wing party founded on a non-ethnic basis in 1936. The MLP demanded higher wages, extended suffrage and the right to strike, and gained wide support from increasingly unionised workers. Colonial authorities responded with violence, but also by facilitating the development of a larger conservative middle-class by purchasing, dividing and selling smaller patches of cane land in 1947 (Seegobin and Collen 1977, 112-113). An increasing number of new small planters then advanced to relatively better positions with economic interests that were compatible with those of the upper-class minority of Franco-Mauritian landowners.¹²

Nevertheless, in the run-up to Mauritian independence the Franco-Mauritian minority found their position threatened due to an extension of suffrage. Eventually two opposing political blocks emerged over the matter of decolonisation: a pro-independence alliance led by the MLP opposed the Mauritius Social Democratic Party (MSDP). The latter was funded by the sugar oligarchy and pressed for a referendum to avoid independence and remain integrated or associated with Britain. Britain was soon to enter the European Economic Community (EEC) and according to its Common Agricultural Policy would then be bound to buy sugar produced in Europe. This would mean the end of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement, which had guaranteed a secure market for more than half of Mauritius' total sugar exports at prices that normally exceeded those on the world market. The MSDP leader, a charismatic Afro-Creole lawyer named Gaëtan Duval, managed to gain considerable support from Mauritians identifying as Afro-Creoles by raising fears about an independent state dominated by Indians under the MLP. This politicising of ethnicity resulted in a great deal of communal agitation, which escalated into ethnic violence before and after the granting of independence in 1968. However, the MSDP was not alone in constructing electorates in ethnic terms. The MLP had long departed from the radical politics of its founding years in the 1930s. Its moderate Indo-

¹² Between 1947 and 1951 membership of the three major unions dropped from 14,120 to 7,413 (Seegobin and Collen 1977, 112-113).

Mauritian leader Sewoosagur Ramgoolam was now being groomed by the British Colonial Office to take over after independence by representing a vast ethnically-defined electoral base made up of rich Indian planters, civil servants and the large Indian sugar proletariat (Houbert 1981, 80).

At the time leading up to Mauritius' independence, a central concern of the British had to do with one of Mauritius' dependencies – the Chagos Archipelago. Because US authorities had developed an interest in Diego Garcia for a Cold War Indian Ocean base, their British ally presented the detachment of the Chagos Archipelago from the colony of Mauritius as a condition for independence, something that Mr Ramgoolam, who headed Mauritius' pro-independence alliance, accepted (de l'Estrac 1983, see also Chapter 4.1.1). This was not the first time Mauritius' territorial borders were altered since the British took over the colony in 1810. In fact, under British colonial rule, Mauritius' borders were dramatically changed many times. Following the peace agreement of Vienna signed between the European powers in 1815, Reunion Island reverted to French control, a situation that remains to this day. Sovereignty of Mauritius and its dependencies was then officially ceded to Britain. In 1903 the Seychelles was detached to form a separate crown colony, and in 1908 and 1921 the islands of Coetivy and Farquhar were respectively added to the Seychelles. In 1958, the French bought the Glorioso islands in the Mozambique Channel, for which concessions to exploit coconuts and phosphates (guano) were administered from the Seychelles. Then, to make the territory available to their US ally, the British created the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965 by separating the Chagos Archipelago from the colony of Mauritius. The Seychellois islands of Farquhar, Aldabra and Desroches were also then included in the BIOT, but were receded to the Seychelles again upon the declaration of Seychelles independence in 1976. When Mauritian decolonisation was approaching, British authorities ruled out the option of a referendum as proposed by the MSDP and decided that the issue of independence would be settled by a General Election. It was a close call. No less than 44 per cent of the population voted against independence (Houbert 1981, 87). What was left of Mauritius, that is the main island along with Rodriguez, Agalega and St. Brandon, was declared independent from Britain on 12 March 1968.

Such territorial rearrangements have left post-independent Mauritius with border disputes with both former colonial powers. On the one hand, due to different readings of the French-British peace agreement after the Napoleonic Wars, the uninhabited 1 km² sandbank of Tromelin (and its 200 NM Exclusive Economic Zone), a declared nature reserve some 500 km east of Madagascar that France uses as a meteorological station, remains a matter of Mauritian-French dispute.¹³ On the other hand, successive Mauritian governments have since 1980 claimed that the separation of the Chagos Archipelago prior to independence was contrary to international law. As the introduction to this chapter indicated, the latter issue was still of great importance when the *Mauritius Trochetia* headed for the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. I shall later say more about such disputes and demonstrate that they cannot be viewed as contests over

¹³ Tromelin Island (named after Captain de Tromelin who confirmed its position in 1776) is part of the French Scattered Indian Ocean Islands. As the uninhabited Juan de Nova, Europa Island, Bassas da India, Banc du Geyser and Glorioso Islands in the Mozambique Channel, French sovereignty of all of these islands is disputed. Tromelin is claimed by Mauritius, both Comoros and Seychelles claim Glorioso, and the remaining islands are claimed by Madagascar. France rejected Mauritius' claims to Tromelin in 1976 (Huth and Allee 2002, 388).

sovereignty alone. In a post-colonial situation increasingly affected by free market regulations, international conflict with former colonial powers can also be an important means of maintaining and influencing vital and long-standing bilateral economic connections with former colonial centres. This can be especially important for colonies like Mauritius, where, due to an enormous expansion and specialisation around sugar production under British rule, other economic activities were suspended. In effect, Mauritius developed into a colonial entity that Houbert describes as ‘doubly dependent on the outside world’: on the one hand, Mauritius became highly dependent on the allocation of preferential quotas on world market prices for sugar while on the other there was now a dependency on the import of commodities that would sustain the populations’ basic needs and, hence, on the development of world market prices for basic imports like rice and cooking oil (Houbert 1981, 77).

Before I turn to outline how colonial legacies like these were still highly important in postcolonial Mauritius even after the turn of the millennium, I shall now introduce the societies that developed in the Chagos Archipelago during French and later British rule. While Mauritius became increasingly dependent on imports of basic goods, industries in the Chagos Archipelago emerged as important suppliers of oil and other products to the local market. As we shall see, many of the patterns described above were also characteristic for developments in the Chagos Archipelago. However, the societies that emerged here developed on groups of small and remote coral atolls where socio-economic conditions were in many respects very different. Not least because these differences have gained great importance to Chagossians’ political struggles today, it is necessary to look into the societies on these islands. Otherwise, it will be impossible to understand the Chagossian community and why they performed their journey in 2006 as a pilgrimage to their ancestors’ graves.

2.2 LIFE AND WORK IN THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO : A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

As discussed above, the central motive for Franco-Mauritian businessmen to occupy, industrialise and populate the remote Chagos Archipelago in the late 18th century was economic. As prices for lamp oil and cooking oil increased as a result of the British blockade, Mauritian capitalists shipped slaves to the Chagos Archipelago to exploit its coconut resources. The coconut industry would remain the islands’ essential economic sector until it was closed down in the early 1970s to make way for a US military base. This surely underlines the islands’ remote location as well as their remarkable shift in significance on the global stage. Until then the Chagos Archipelago had been integrated into the world economy as a hinterland living off coconut production for almost two centuries. It is then no wonder that the coconut industries were the central institution around which social life was organised in the villages that developed around the islands’ plantations. Due to the relative success of these industries, the Chagos Archipelago and the Agalega Islands – another coconut-producing dependency of Mauritius located some 1,500 km west of the Chagos Archipelago – came to be known as the ‘oil islands’. If we want to understand the life and times of the Chagossian population before their expulsions in the early 1970s, it is indispensable to understand how the industries and the

respective labour regimes on the islands developed from around 1800. Only by giving appropriate historical detail about the changes and continuities in these societies will it be possible to analyse the politics of the Chagos Archipelago, the ways Chagossians remember their homeland after their forced departure, and how they performed their journey in 2006. In what follows I shall therefore discuss the organisation of life and work in the Chagos Archipelago during colonial times. As we shall see, significant changes did take place over the years, and despite the remarkable remoteness and solitude of these islands, life and work in the Chagos islands were not unaffected by the outside world. After a brief discussion of the islands' peculiar location I shall introduce the workings of the copra industry, the key product exported from the oil islands, before giving an overview of the development of social organisation in the Chagos Archipelago.

2.2.1 AN ISOLATED WORLD OF ISLANDS

A significant feature of the Chagos Archipelago is the very solitude of these small atolls in the middle of the vast Indian Ocean. Their particular location was a central reason why they were populated at such a late stage, and it was certainly a decisive reason for the UK government to de-populate the islands almost two centuries later. About equidistant from East Africa and Indonesia and some 1,600 km south of India, they qualify among the remotest places on the planet. It is therefore no wonder that connections between the Chagos Archipelago and the outside world were limited long after they were first populated. Until the 1930s, ships arrived from Mauritius only twice a year, bringing supplies and collecting the coconut export products. After that, a new steamship route connected the Chagos Archipelago with Mauritius on a four times a year basis. Over the years, wrecked sailors, whalers and fishermen, military personnel, scientists, colonial officials and missionaries occasionally landed on the islands, but until a wireless radio was installed on Diego Garcia as late as in 1941 these supply ships were the only regular form of communication between the Chagos islands and the world outside (Forsberg 2005, 31, Vine 2009, 33-34).

To travel between the different island groups within the Chagos Archipelago was also not very common. This is a vast area that covers some 544,000 sq. km of water, and Diego Garcia is located more than 200 km south of Peros Banhos and Salomon. Even to embark on the 50 km voyage between the two latter atolls with the small local boats (*pirog*) that were used for travelling within the different island groups could be a dangerous adventure. As late as in the 1950s, according to Scott, the number of people travelling between the archipelago's different island groups on companies' vessels was negligible, and the very few cases were subject to special comment. The Agalegan, he writes, "is a foreigner in Diego Garcia" and "Peros Banhos and the Salamons have their own mild xenophobia" (Scott 1961, 26). Workers regarded themselves as natives of the respective island groups in which they lived rather than of the Chagos Archipelago as a whole (Scott 1961, 23, 26).

Some of these historical observations are not completely consistent with my field data, which show that people had a more complex history of inter-island migration. One Chagossian woman explained that her parents were from Three Brothers while she was born in Salomon. Another man was born in Diego Garcia, but had worked on Peros Banhos before the expulsions.

In fact, many Chagos islanders reported having lived and worked on different islands in the Chagos group. What explains this is that inter-island migration was facilitated by the supply ships, and as the industries on the oil islands merged under larger companies the workers were

The Chagos Archipelago

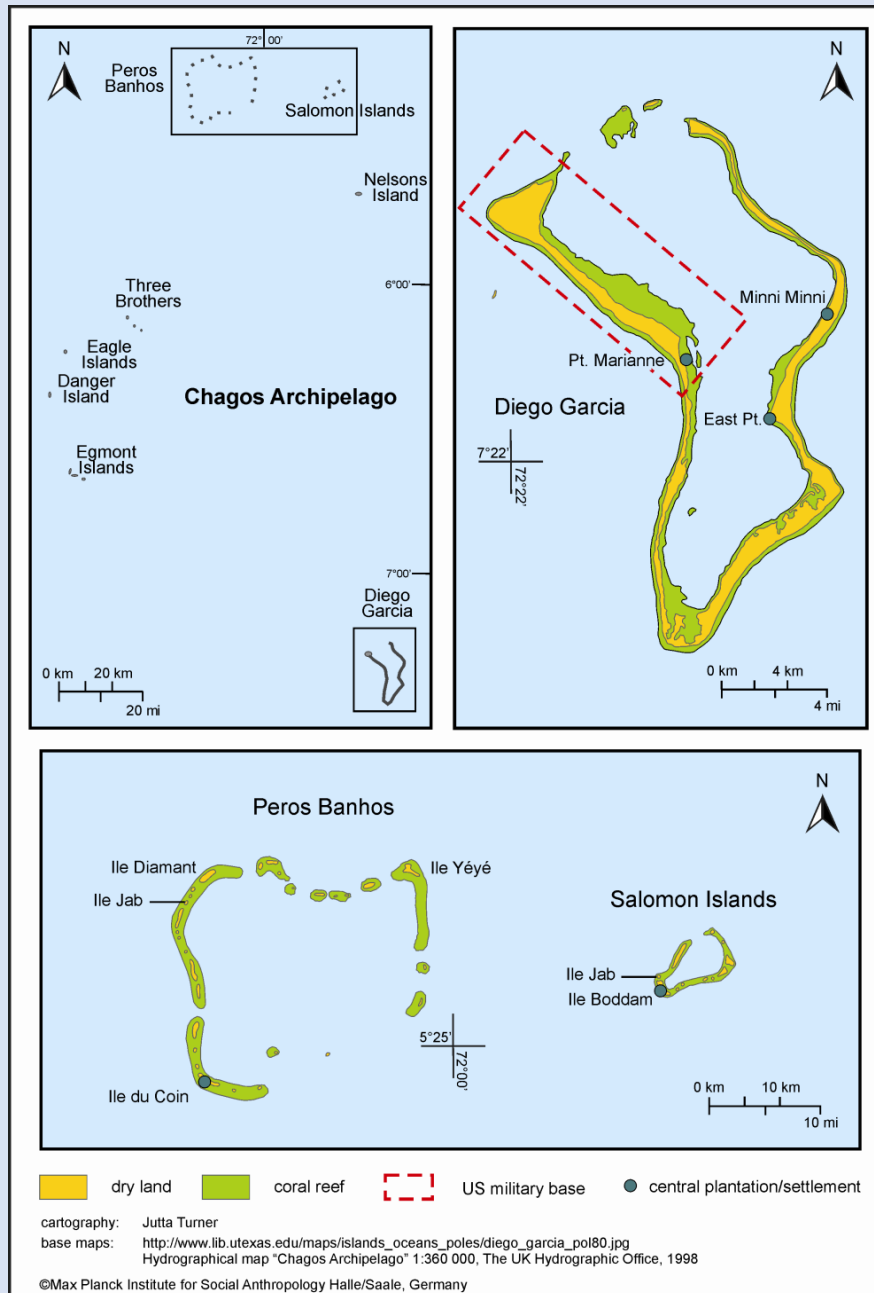


Illustration 5: Islands in the Chagos Archipelago. Names are given in clockwise direction from the central settlement.

no longer tied to employers engaged on one island only. It did occur that whole plantations were closed down and workers were ordered to other estates. The terminations of all production in the westernmost atolls of Three Brothers, Eagle Island and Egmont Atoll in the mid-1930s, and the transfer of people from Diego Garcia to Salomon and Peros Banhos when the US started constructing the base in 1971, represent two cases of such inter-island mass movement (see Scott 260-268, Edis 1993, 78). Many of my informants did in fact experience these last relocations first-hand, which may add to an understanding of why they now remember the Chagos Archipelago as a more integrated place than what appears to have been the case in earlier years.

The remarkable isolation of the Chagos Archipelago is often described in the literature with reference to a handful of curious examples. Here I shall briefly recapture three historical cases, not to repeat the point that the islands were very secluded, but because I find them illustrative of the island's *relative* isolation in very different historical periods.

Firstly, from the late 18th century lepers were shipped from French Mauritius to be quarantined in the faraway Chagos Archipelago in a move to prevent the spread of the much-feared disease on the 'mainland'. In 1809 Mauritius' Governor decided that concession holders should receive and be responsible for all lepers that the government would transfer to the Chagos Archipelago (Scott 1961, 99-100, 256). In addition to the issue of isolating infected people in the secluded archipelago, rumours also had it (at least since 1483, when King Louis XI ordered a shipment of turtle blood from Cape Verde in the hope of curing his curious skin disease) that turtle meat could cure leprosy – and turtles were abundant in the Chagos Archipelago. The isolating of lepers from Mauritius in the Chagos Archipelago seems to have ended in the 1830s (Vine 2006, 59), but immediately before the abolition of slavery in 1835 the number of leprous slaves in the Chagos Archipelago increased considerably. The amount of £2,000,000 was then to be distributed to slave owners in Mauritius and the dependencies as compensation for freeing their 'property'. Fearing spread of the disease before compensation was allocated, Franco-Mauritian slave owners dumped leprous slaves in the Chagos Archipelago before the act was passed (Taylor 2000).

Secondly, the coconut industries remained the central economic activity throughout the entire period of settlement in the Chagos Archipelago. A significant addition to this economy was made briefly during the 1880s, which is often portrayed as a development that could have altered, but eventually did not alter, the isolated status of the Chagos Archipelago. Following the invention of the steam engine and the opening of the Suez Canal, two coaling companies were installed on Diego Garcia. For a while then, Diego Garcia came to serve as a coaling station for steamships traversing from Europe and Australia as well as the Far East. However, due to the development of more efficient engine technologies, they closed down after less than a decade, and steam-liners stopped calling at Diego Garcia (Bourne 1886, Edis 1993, 47-52, Forsberg 2005, 26, Scott 1961, 169-178). Referring to this development as 'the coaling station interlude', Edis writes: "The 1880s saw an intrusion of the outside world into Diego Garcia" but "[a]fter this short lived brush with the developing modern world, the island returned to its sleepy existence as a plantation economy" (Edis 1993, 47, 51).

Thirdly, in October 1914 Diego Garcia was visited by the vessel *Emden*, a German warship that had attacked a number of enemy vessels, practically paralysed merchant shipping in the Bay of Bengal and bombarded a series of fuel tanks near Madras. News would as noted

only reach the Chagos Archipelago when supply ships arrived from Mauritius four times a year, which came in handy for the *Emden's* captain who soon realised that the population of this faraway British colony had not been informed about the outbreak of the First World War. He decided to keep quiet, and only when pursuing British vessels arrived after *Emden's* departure did they realise that they had welcomed, and even repaired and supplied, an enemy vessel (Edis 1993, 52-55, Stoddart 1971, 214).

These three examples are very interesting because they demonstrate the relative isolation of the Chagos Archipelago. Although they often serve to demonstrate the islands' seclusion, they are at the same time examples of the very opposite. Firstly, quarantining and caring for lepers and leprous slaves in the Chagos Archipelago also implied connections with these people and their backgrounds, as well as the illnesses that spread with colonisation throughout the world. Just like the slaves and masters they would encounter in the Chagos, the lepers came from very different places too – although mostly via Mauritius. Not unlike Mauritius, Reunion, Rodriguez, the Seychelles and Agalega, the Chagos Archipelago was populated by people from very different corners of the world. This included France, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal and India. Hence, although the Chagos Archipelago was rather disconnected from its colonial centres in terms of infrequent communication, it was also a meeting place for people from all over the world in an era of extreme global migration (cf. Friedman 2005). Secondly, the ocean not only separates but also connects places. The coaling interlude is a grand example of how new technologies altered the peripheral status of the archipelago: albeit for a short period, Diego Garcia became an important port of call in the 1880s. Large steam-liners that carried passengers between Europe and Australia as well as Javanese pilgrims bound for Mecca called at an island now directly connected to important ports in different parts of the world. This also meant increasing connections with a number of foreign people, including European, Somali and more than a hundred Mauritians imported to work the new establishments (Scott 1961, 170-172). And thirdly, the *Emden* incident shows a remarkable delay in correspondence. However, visits from major First World War warships are not a particularly good illustration that the islands were disconnected from the world outside. In 1914 the *Emden* arrived with a captured British ship named *Buresk*, and the significant piece of news about the war was brought by the Royal Navy who arrived with the *HMS Hampshire* and *Empress of Russia* only a few days later. What is more, far from just a curious event in a remote outpost of the British Empire, the whole episode made newspaper headlines at the colonial centre under the title “High comedy on the High Seas” (Forsberg 2005, 28-29). This was not the first and certainly not the last time military forces had an impact on these islands. More British warships arrived during the Second World War, and in response to Japan's aggressive military expansionism, the RAF established a Flying Boat Base for maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine missions on Diego Garcia. At Point Marianne Cemetery nine war graves still bear witness that the British garrison on Diego Garcia also included members of the Mauritian regiment and the Royal Indian Artillery. A wrecked Catalina flying boat, now iconic to Diego Garcians who remember playing in the damaged machine when they were young, is also found stranded on the East Point beach. Reminiscent of those days are also the old 6” guns at Cannon Point on the North West tip of Diego Garcia – not far from where the US military would set up their major US military facility. After repeated US inspections of the island in 1957, 1964 and 1967, the US Navy arrived to

construct the base in 1971, and only by September that year were all inhabitants forced to leave the island (Edis 1993, 61-68, Forsberg 2005, 34-40, 43-52).

The island societies were relatively isolated until the population in the Chagos Archipelago was evicted in the early 1970s. However, with the development of new technologies such as steam engines and wireless radio, the Chagos Archipelago was increasingly connected to the world outside. Moreover, with and without force, people from a great variety of places met on these islands in the midst of the vast Indian Ocean. And to state the obvious, this of course implies that although these societies were created from scratch from the late 18th century onward, they did not develop without inputs from elsewhere. Not only were they visited by a variety of people throughout the period of settlement, the island societies were also influenced by colonial structures and ideologies and by Christian missionaries, as well as a range of cultural heritages from different parts of the world. The Chagos Archipelago was perhaps more secluded than other colonies, but it cannot be deduced from its peculiar geography that the local societies were unaffected by the outside world. What happened here happened very much in response to the outside world. As I now shall turn to discuss, that also goes for the local coconut industries that were integrated into the world economy.

2.2.2 THE COCONUT INDUSTRY

Copra, the dried kernel of the coconut, is a tropical product which has long been valued for its high oleiferous content and for being relatively easy to cultivate and process. It contains a much higher percentage of oil (63%) than other sources of vegetable fat, which has made it an important raw material for the production of numerous commodities since the 18th century. While first used to process cooking oil, fuel for lamps and also hair pomade, in 18th century Seychelles coconut oil was also used as a substitute for vinegar for disinfecting slaves after lengthy journeys by ship. Later in the 19th century it became an indispensable ingredient for margarine and high-quality soap. Copra industries expanded rapidly with rising European demand for vegetable fat as a lubricant for machinery starting with mechanisation in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. As populations increased across Europe, higher hygiene standards were set and this increased the demand for soap. In addition, the growing class of European industrial labourers could not afford butter made out of expensive animal tallow. Hence, vegetable fat from coconuts came to serve as an important substitute for butter with the rise of the margarine industry. Coconut oil also contains high-quality glycerine, a by-product of soap that was used to produce bombs and explosives up to the First World War (Heersink 1999, 161-163, Forsberg 2005, 15, McAteer 1991, 272 en. 1).

Along with a growing demand for copra in Western countries, coconut industries in tropical areas expanded. Such export-oriented industries were of course very vulnerable to political shifts in Europe, something that particularly affected the copra market in the early 20th century. Copra is a bulky commodity that deteriorates rapidly. With the introduction of steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the once lengthy transport from tropical plantations to European markets was significantly shortened. This meant that the lucrative business of copra processing could then be carried out in Europe. After 1900 therefore, many European countries started to impose an import tax on finished coconut oil, but not on copra

imports in order to favour local processing industries. With the outbreak of the First World War, copra became scarce in Europe due to transport complications and the high demand for margarine and glycerine. German oil industries, which before 1914 had been processing some 80 to 90 per cent of all European copra imports, ran out of supplies in 1917. Speculation in the copra trade therefore ran high towards the end of the war, and prices rocketed sky high by the end of the decade. Intense speculation eventually caused a market collapse in 1920, which left many European oil-processing industries bankrupt. Due to the development of better processing technologies, coconut fat soon faced increasing competition from alternative agricultural products with less oleiferous content, and when copra-processing industries in Europe merged into the large multinational company *Unilever* in 1929, European competition for copra was substantially reduced. Copra prices were kept low, and since the 1950s there has been a long-term decline in these prices on the world market (Heersink 1999, 184-191).

Relative to the commercial aspects of copra and coconut oil on a world basis, the total output in the Chagos Archipelago remained fairly insignificant. In the first half of the 20th century, over nine-tenths of all copra and coconut oil entering the world market came from the Philippine Islands, the Netherlands East Indies, the South Sea Islands, British Malaya and Ceylon. In 1936 the total world export of coconut oil in terms of copra amounted to 1,637,200 metric tonnes. With a total of 6,300 metric tonnes that year, the total share of world market exports from the British colony of Mauritius, which included the Chagos Archipelago, amounted to less than 0.4 per cent. The copra trade also depended heavily on economic and political ties between tropical colonies and their European colonial centres. For example, almost all copra and copra-related products destined for the United Kingdom came from the British colonies of Malaya, Ceylon and the South Sea Islands. But the products were also consumed in the colonies. According to a 1941 report, on a world basis approximately 40 per cent of the annual coconut harvest was consumed in the countries of origin. Hence large parts of coconut produce in the colonies actually never entered the international market (Deasy 1941).

As for the Chagos Archipelago, most exports were destined for Mauritius' main island. Under the concession system that lasted until 1865, proprietors of the estates were under contract to supply the Mauritian government with oil at a certain price. In fact, they monopolised the sale by lowering their prices and offering to purchase imported oil, meaning that importers either had to sell it at a loss or bring it to another port (Pridham 1846, 400). This, however, does not mean that industries in the Chagos were unaffected by global developments, or that they were not integrated into global markets. Under colonial rule Mauritius emerged as a substantial mono-crop sugar-exporting economy, making large-scale agricultural exports to European colonial centres. The Chagos islands, which were dependencies of Mauritius, produced a great deal of oil and copra for the Mauritian market. Vine has captured this situation very well as he describes colonial Chagos as a colony of a colony: "[...] a dependent part of the Mauritian mono-crop sugar cane economy, which was itself a dependent part of French and later British economies. [...] Chagos fulfilled Mauritius' oil needs to keep its sugar cane industry producing for distant European markets" (Vine 2006, 66). It would, however, be inaccurate to deduct from this that the societies in the Chagos were protected and unaffected by changes in the world market for coconut products. The Chagos Archipelago was initially populated as a result of demands for coconut oil arising in Mauritius at a time of war between

European powers, but also later international developments had important impacts on the societies in the Chagos islands. For example, coconut products were also shipped on from Mauritius to Europe, and it appears that the introduction of European import tax on processed coconut oil at the start of the 20th century affected production in the Chagos too. The Seychelles Government introduced copra platforms for drying copra in 1903, and before 1910 it was copra and not oil that had become the main coconut product for export. This is a probable reason why the ‘oil islands’, as Stoddart observed, then all of a sudden “were oil islands no longer” (Stoddart 1971, 214). Also, after the market collapse in 1920 and the low prices for coconut products that followed the European merger and the increased competition from alternative sources of oil, Magistrate for the Lesser Dependencies W.J. Hanning reported on his visit to Agalega in 1931:

The Lesser Dependencies are undergoing a period of acute depression owing to the disastrous fall in the price of copra on the world’s market. There have been practically no sales for the last seven months, as the market price Rs.107 is very much below the cost of production Rs.145. The closing down of the establishments until better prices are offered, is even being considered (Hanning 1931, 3).

At this point coconut industries in Mauritius’ dependencies suffered from severe competition on the world market for oil, particularly soya seed oil from China and Japan. The fall in copra prices also affected these kinds of industries in ways that could be hard to reverse. In the early 1930s, low sales had allowed undergrowth to spread in the production areas, and the germination of fallen coconuts started to create impenetrable areas of coconut trees. Temporary closures of the industries would mean that undergrowth would spread even further, making it too costly to reopen them at a later stage. Foreseeing such developments at a time of economic difficulty, Hanning advised that some measures should be taken to save the coconut industries from extinction (Hanning 1931, 3-4). Within few years of his report, drastic changes took place in the Chagos. In the early 19th century, coconut industries were thriving in the archipelago’s westernmost atolls of Three Brothers, Egmont Atoll (Six Islands) and Eagle Island. The latter atoll offered the only relatively safe anchorage for larger vessels in the western part of the archipelago and therefore came to serve as an *entrepôt* in the Chagos trade. Particularly difficult to access was nearby Danger Island, so its coconuts were harvested only occasionally when adventurous boatmen made their way over from Eagle Island. However, in the early 1930s Egmont Atoll must have suffered severely from the market depression. It was described by a visiting priest as ‘little Babylon’, a place where inhabitants lived in an exceedingly bohemian manner while much copra was left to rot. In 1934, the Paris-based *Société Huilière de Diego et Peros* took over all production in the Chagos Archipelago. The following year the management concluded that Egmont Atoll, Eagle Island and Three Brothers could no longer be worked economically, and subsequently closed down all production in these westernmost atolls before organising a mass relocation of all inhabitants to Salomon and Peros Banhos (Scott 1961, 260-268).

This was not the first nor the last time that coconut industries in the Chagos shifted hands. In fact, alongside important developments beyond the islands the industries centralised more and more over the years. From the first settlements in the late 18th century, when prices

rose on the local market for oil, a number of concession holders from French Mauritius ran competing coconut operations on the different islands. This system continued after the British takeover and the abolition of slavery in 1835, but the concessionaires were able to transform concessions into permanent holdings after 1865. Two decades later plantations in the Chagos started to merge under larger companies: in 1883, coinciding with the establishment of the coaling station on Diego Garcia, the three separate plantations of Minni Minni, East Point and Point Marianne on this island were amalgamated along with the plantations on Peros Banhos into the *Société Huilière de Diego et Peros*. In 1934, during the depressed copra prices, this body fused with *Société Huilière de Salomon, Trois Frères et Six Iles*, which meant that one single company now controlled all production sites in the Chagos Archipelago. Following that merger the population came to be centred on the three island groups of Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos and the Salomon Islands. In 1962, by which time UK-US discussions about the future of Diego Garcia as a military facility were taking place, all islands and production sites were taken over by the Seychelles-based *Chagos-Agalega Company Ltd*. Five years later, in May 1967, the UK government bought all the plantations in the Chagos for £660,000, but the *Chagos-Agalega Company Ltd* continued to lease the islands until the end of the year. *Mouline & Company* then managed the islands on behalf of the BIOT until all industries were run down. When Diego Garcia was “evacuated” in 1971, some inhabitants were employed on the other islands, but such employment did not last very long. Production sites in the Salomon islands closed in 1972, and in 1973 production was also brought to an end on Peros Banhos. Within this period the entire population of both islands was expelled to Mauritius and the Seychelles (Edis 1993, 39, 76-77, Scott 1961, 162, 268, Stoddart 1971, 212, Vine 2006, 82, Todd 1969, 18, Walker 1986, 20).

2.2.3 PRODUCTION AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION IN THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

Throughout the years, the coconut business remained the central economic activity in the Chagos Archipelago. At times copra was processed into oil after it had been exported. For example, in 1809, shortly before the British attacked and seized French Mauritius, a prohibition on oil production in the Chagos was initiated due to the expectation that the British would probably not bother to interfere with copra production in the French archipelago, but might not fail to seize manufactured oil (Scott 1961, 99). Also, following the European tax on processed oil and the introduction of copra drying platforms, the crop became the main product exported to Mauritius from around 1910 (Stoddart 1971, 214).

It would take about 7,000 nuts to produce one tonne of copra. This could be processed into about 615 litres of coconut oil, leaving some 300 kg of a vegetable substance called *poonac* – an important by-product used to feed the local livestock. Methods for producing copra and coconut oil did not undergo major changes during the period of settlement. G.C. Bourne, a colonial official who visited Diego Garcia in the mid-1880s, described the production as task-based, with men and women being given separate jobs in a local chain of production. Each workday, men were responsible for collecting 350 ripe coconuts that had fallen on the ground. Sometimes they would go to nearby islands to bring back coconuts by smaller local sailboats

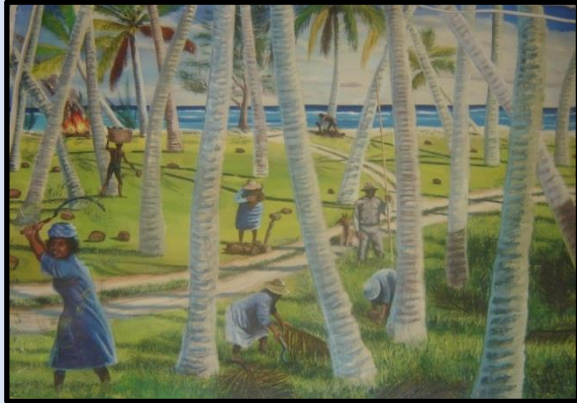


Illustration 6a: Women clearing a field on Diamond Island in Peros Banhos. The white-clad man in the centre represents an overseer who used a long stick to measure out the area to be cleared by each woman.

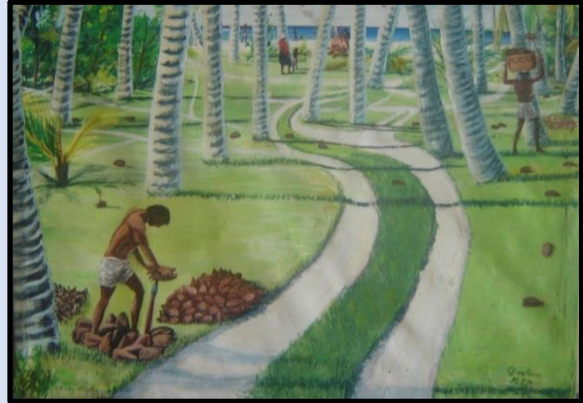


Illustration 6b: Workers collecting and de-husking coconuts on the plantations in the Chagos Archipelago.

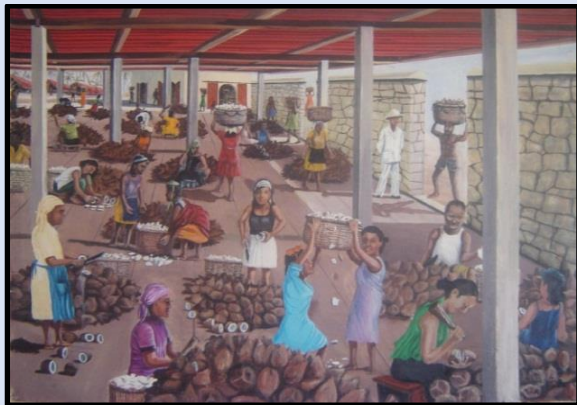


Illustration 6c: The *Kalorifer* on Diego Garcia. To scoop out the flesh of the coconuts and cut it into smaller pieces was a female task. The painting also shows a man entering with de-husked coconuts. In the doorway an overseer controls the process.



Illustration 6d: Female workers on Diego Garcia leaving copra to dry in the sun. A cover could be pulled out to protect the produce from rain. In the background one can also see a vegetable garden, an office, a company shop and copra storage.



Illustration 6e: From dried copra, coconut oil was also extracted in the Chagos. The picture represents male Chagossians operating a donkey-driven mill.



Illustration 6f: Embarking of copra. The painting depicts a quay in Peros Banhos and illustrates the work of transporting and loading processed copra onboard the cargo ship *Mauritius*.

Illustration 6: Paintings of life and work in the Chagos Archipelago around the late 1960s by Chagossian artist C. Siatous. Photos: Johannessen 2006

(*pirog*). An appointed overseer would measure out an area where labourers were supposed to work (see Illustration 6a). After collecting the nuts, male labourers would separate the kernel from the husk by splitting them on a short spear planted in the ground that had a broad blade pointing upwards (see Illustration 6b). The kernels were then brought to the production area to be counted and were handed over to the women (see Illustration 6c). In one day, women were supposed to break 1,300 coconuts and scoop out the kernel – the copra. Carefully protected from rain, the copra was then left to dry in the sun for two to three days before it was transported for grinding in local donkey-driven mills (see Illustration 6c and 6d). These were worked by mill-men responsible for producing some 30 gallons of oil each day. Once collected in casks, the oil was exported to Mauritius by the company's own ship (see Illustration 6f), which then called at Diego Garcia and Peros Banhos three times a year (Bourne 1886, 387-389).

Different plantation managers could to some extent decide the output expected from workers. For example, only two years before Bourne's visit, another manager running three estates on the same island required his male workers to collect, de-husk and break 500 nuts per day (Stoddart 1971, 212). In Agalega around the time of abolition, a manager named Mr Leduc expected even more output from his (former) slaves. He arranged production somewhat differently, but also he organised work according to tasks and gender. Each day a group of men were set to collect 1,500 coconuts. A second group of males working in pairs then de-husked the coconuts, each pair supposed to de-husk 4,500 nuts per day. A third group of men and women sorted and piled the kernel of 1,500 coconuts. Women and children making up a fourth group broke 4,500 nuts (adults) and laid them flesh up to dry in the sun (Scott 1961, 145). This shows that the structure of labour seems to have amounted to much the same on the estates on the different islands, which over time also came to be run by the same companies. Some forty years after the evictions, Chagossian artist Clement Siatous has painted the different stages in the copra production based on his childhood memories from the Chagos Archipelago in the 1960s (see Illustration 6). Strong similarities can be found if the above descriptions from the early 19th century are compared with these paintings, which indicates that the production on the islands did not undergo major technological changes over the years.

This can add to an explanation as to why the output of coconut products remained relatively stable over time. In a good year, the largest island, Diego Garcia, produced as much as all the other oil islands together. Both in 1864 and 1900 the annual output of oil from Diego Garcia was around 455,000 litres (Stoddart 1971, 212, 214). In 1967, total copra production in the BIOT amounted to 1,494 tonnes (Todd 1969, 1). Half of this output, some 707 tonnes of copra from approximately 4.5 million coconuts, would equal some 435,000 litres of processed oil in Diego Garcia. Hence, as also Stoddart points out, the annual output from the Chagos Archipelago had not changed greatly since the mid-19th century (Scott 1961, 244, Stoddart 1971, 214).

However, the islands' relatively stable output of coconut products does not appear to correspond with the population growth in the Chagos Archipelago. Before 1784, the Chagos islands were completely uninhabited. In 1826, a decade before the abolition of slavery, the population on the islands stood at 448 people. The number increased to 760 persons in 1880 (Peerthum 2004), and before the final evictions in 1973 some authors seem to suggest that the population in the Chagos reached about 2,000 (e.g. Pilger 2006, 19). This number is probably overestimated. Reproduced from different available sources, the table below shows that

population numbers in the Chagos Archipelago increased until the early 20th century, peaking at 1,237 people in 1911. Numbers dropped slightly at the time of the depression in the 1930s, but remained relatively stable at more than 1,000 inhabitants until the early 1960s and ended with the last eviction in 1973.

Year	1780	1826	1880	1901	1911	1921	1931	1944	1952	1962	1964	1968	1973
Population	0	448	760	1065	1237	1234	1066	1048	1158	747	993	807	0

Illustration 7: Official number of Chagos islanders in the Chagos Archipelago from 1780 to 1973 Reproduced from Peerthum (2004), Dinan (2002, 95) and Todd (1969, 20, 28, 33).

If the numbers are correct, and if the population did not peak considerably in the years not accounted for here, it is highly unlikely that the population in the Chagos Archipelago reached 2,000 people at any one point – that is, before the US military base on Diego Garcia became operative.¹⁴ This does not mean that the number of people who had lived and worked in the Chagos before the plantations closed down in 1973 or were born to Chagossian parents was not considerably higher. Especially in the late period, younger Chagos islanders left for Mauritius with the supply ships, which again brought new, mostly Seychellois, labourers to the archipelago. Also, the depopulation took place over many years, and those who had left for Mauritius were denied return tickets to the Chagos Archipelago from 1967. Many of them, according to my field data, actually left when they were pregnant to give birth in a proper hospital.

The apparent inconsistency in respect of population growth and the steady output of coconut produce can be explained by the fact that the coconut industry was not the only economic activity in the Chagos group. Economic activities here would over time also include fishing, guano mining, coaling, maize production, dog breeding, honey production, and export of timber, wooden toys, turtle and tortoise shells, cordage, brushes and brooms. The map of East Point village on Diego Garcia below shows a typical Chagossian settlement in the 1960s. This map also shows a school and a teachers' house, a hospital and housing for medical staff and midwife, a mortuary, a church and cemetery, a prison, a canteen, a store, a piggery, a post office and a bakery. In other words, as the coconut industries developed, societies emerged where new kinds of employment became available to the local inhabitants. In addition to people engaged directly in the production of copra and coconut oil, accountants, maids, blacksmiths, bakers, boatmen and boat-builders, carpenters, rat-catchers, medical staff and teachers also came to form part of the islands' societies (Scott 1961).

The map also shows how settlements were organised around the production sites. The islands were run by local managers as private estates, a structure that is clearly expressed through the village's central axis that runs from the jetty (i.e. the island's point of entry and exit) via the manager's office to the manager's residence (*gran kaz*), extending back to the more private family chapel and a family cemetery separate from that of the workers.

¹⁴ In 1955 the Chagos Archipelago could have hosted up to 1,282 people, which could point to a peak in population numbers around this time. According to Scott (1961, 24-25) who visited the islands that year, Mauritius' Lesser Dependencies then hosted around 1,700 people. This included 418 Agalega residents, but it is unclear whether these numbers also include an unspecified number of non-resident workers in St. Brandon.

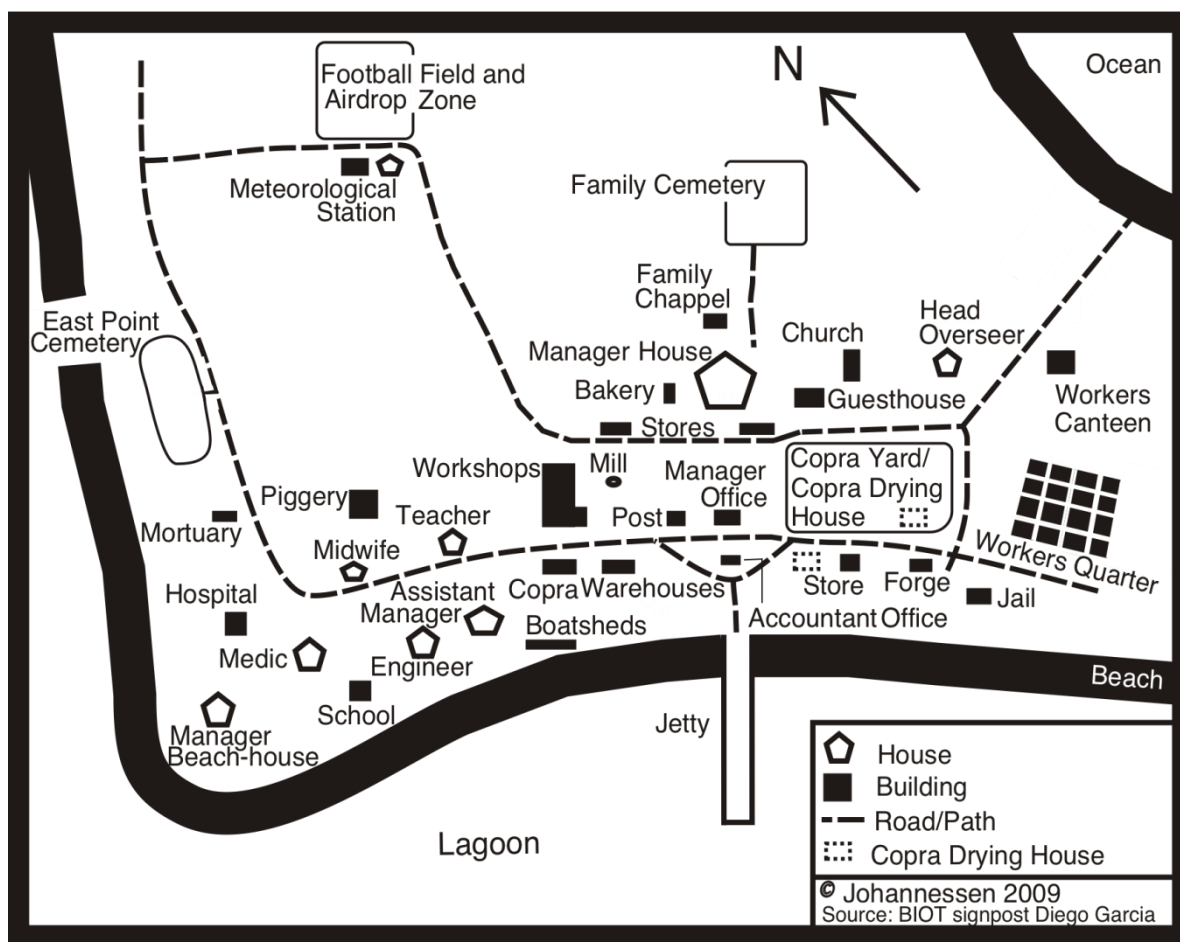


Illustration 8: Map of East Point village on Diego Garcia around 1960.

It is important to note that normally the owners of concessions and proprietors of the plantations did not reside on the islands themselves, but delegated positions of resident plantation managers to other white Europeans from Mauritius. Sub-managers in the Chagos also tended to be white, but overseers employed to supervise the copra workers were recruited among the non-European workforce (Edis 1993, 39-40). Illustration 9 below shows how wages were distributed among employees of *Société Huilière de Diego et Peros* around the end of the 19th century. Along with the above map's illustration of how different categories of employees were housed in different areas around the village, the table below can be taken as an indication of the socio-economic hierarchies in the Chagos group.

Under-manager	\$ 40
Overseer	\$ 10-14
Craftsmen	\$ 5
Field hands	\$ 4
Women	\$ 3

Illustration 9: Monthly wages among employees of the *Société Huilière de Diego et Peros* (end of the 19th century). Source: Edis (1993, 40).

In addition to these wages, workers were also given basic rations of rice, salt, milk and coconut oil. Housing, or housing material, and rudimentary health care was also free. From time to time,

they would also receive some alcohol and tobacco as ‘gratification’. Inhabitants also planted their own vegetable gardens and reared animals including pigs and poultry. Coconuts, fish, octopus, crabs, turtles and wild birds were also plentiful in the archipelago and formed part of a local diet that was much richer than that most Mauritian workers enjoyed throughout the 19th and 20th century. It is important to note, then, that sources indicate how such and other products had been exchanged in a local barter economy. In 1846 Pridham wrote: “The coarse cloth, known by the name of *punjane* in India, is prized by the negroes, who barter their fowls at the price of one yard for a cock or hen” (Pridham 1846, 401). After the abolition of slavery, wages were introduced and monetary exchanges seem to have existed side by side the local barter system. According to Scott, many ‘extras’ could be won by the ex-slaves who now received money for the very same tasks as before: “A few fowls could be exchanged for a dress length; a green turtle would mean a suit of clothes and the equivalent in cash of a fortnight’s wages; a pig would bring in more than a month’s wages” (Scott 1961, 150). Alongside this, there were also other types of economic exchanges: workers’ wages could be spent in the company’s own shops, which were found on every plantation. In addition to locally produced products such as pork and oil, the shops were also equipped with a selection of both basic and luxury items imported from Mauritius. According to a reprinted pricelist from 1875 containing articles for sale in a company shop on Diego Garcia, many of the imported products were sold for around twice the price as the same products on the Mauritian market (see Edis 1993, 42). After slavery was abolished, inhabitants of the Chagos were also free to travel to Mauritius with the ships that called on the islands three to four times a year. The purpose of such trips can be reconstructed from memories of former inhabitants who told me how they and their families went to Mauritius to spend their savings at Port Louis market, or to receive proper health care in cases of injuries or when giving birth.

The above indicates that, albeit to a limited extent, the diversity of employment on the islands made social mobility possible for the inhabitants. In a hierarchical plantation society marked not only by a striking imbalance between the numbers of workers and managers but also by an almost complete absence of state and religious authorities, it is not unlikely that opportunities for advancing to better positions within the local hierarchies might have contributed to the maintenance of social stability. In 1826 the archipelago’s population comprised 9 whites, 22 free people, 42 lepers and no less than 375 slaves (Peethum 2004). A century later, Magistrate Noel reported on his visit to Diego Garcia, where around half of the population in the Chagos resided, that the local manager, his staff of five and their families were running an island plantation populated by no less than 532 people (Noel 1931, 1). These local managers were empowered to imprison insubordinate workers, but severe crimes were to be judged in Mauritius or by magistrates like Noel who visited the archipelago at most once a year. The isolation of the Chagos, the absence of the state and other authorities, and the fact that an exploited population outnumbered the management by far seems to have troubled the latter since the days of slavery. Before abolition, slaves in the Chagos “worked from sunrise to sunset for six days a week” and unfinished tasks were frequently completed on Sundays (Pridham 1846, 402). But as Scott writes: “the very circumstances of isolation and the extent to which managers had consequentially to promote goodwill among their slaves seem to have ensured the due observance of the more respectable provisions governing the management of slaves” (Scott 1961, 113). In a report produced after his visit to Diego Garcia in the 1880s,

Bourne reported (in rather racist language) of recurring workers' revolts that threatened the lives of the islands' leadership. Apparently, managers had to act skilfully to prevent such actions from happening regularly or from having much more decisive consequences:

[I]n fact the employers were entirely in the hands of the negroes, who, in the case of a general and organised outbreak, could easily have made themselves masters of the island. The white men could only keep order by a wise exercise of their power [...]. [N]o priest is resident on the island, nor is there any arrangement for religious or any other education. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that their religion is merely a superstition, and is valueless as a means of moral control. This little group of coral islands, isolated in the midst of a vast ocean, is entirely cut off from the civilising influences of the outer world. Considering their small size, their poor soil, and their remote situation, it is wonderful to think how admirably they have been managed in times past by a few white men, whose sole support in cases of difficulty has been their own energy and strength of character (Bourne 1886, 389-390).

It seems that what Bourne refers to as the few white men's wise exercise of power involved dividing the local population into classes with conflicting interests, not unlike the economic developments around the sugar plantations in Mauritius discussed above. Local managers, Scott wrote eighty years after Bourne's visit, "maintained order partly by personality or prestige, and partly by associating himself with a band of trustees, later called *commandeurs*, who had higher wages and more extensive privileges than the generality of employees" (Scott 1961, 153). Regarding privileges, *commandeurs* or overseers would for example receive 10 per cent of the price for tortoise shells collected by the other workers (Pridham 1846, 400). As is by now evident, managers represented only a small minority in the Chagos, and in the general absence of law-enforcing powers the burdens brought to bear on local workers could not be too extensive (cf. Edis 1993, 40, Scott 1961, 113, 153, Vine 2006, 71). There was, in other words, a power balance to be taken into account, which surely worked to the benefit of the local labourers.

2.2.4 TRANSITION FROM SLAVERY TO WAGE WORK

Sources discussing the shift from slavery to wage work identify a similar dilemma on the part of the management that adds to an explanation as to why a majority of the ex-slaves in the Chagos remained with the industries after the abolition of slavery, whereas a large-scale exodus of freed slaves marked this transition on Mauritian sugar plantations. Emancipation, according to Scott, did not bring about major changes in the Chagos (Scott 1961, 149). This observation is important because it shows that even within one administrative colonial entity there must have been big differences between Chagos and Mauritius' main island. The treatment of the slaves in the Chagos was, according to the standards of those days, described as on the whole praiseworthy: "Occasionally they were hard worked and badly fed, but the contrary was the norm" (Pridham 1846, 402). Apparently, the very particular setting on the islands rendered life under the harshest labour regimes, such as slavery, somewhat bearable even for those who were

at the bottom of the social hierarchy. If we want to find further reasons why abolition failed to bring about major changes in the Chagos, it is important to look at the ways the transition from one labour regime to the other was orchestrated regionally. Smooth transition also had to do with precautions undertaken by the colonial regime. But before I turn to these precautions, I want to point out the impact on slavery in the Chagos itself.

The British parliament had passed legislation to abolish the slave trade in 1807, but it would take more than 30 years before the abolition of slavery came into force in Mauritius. When French Mauritius capitulated to the British in 1810, the implementation of anti-slavery legislation met strong local opposition. Between 1819 and 1827 the production of sugar in Mauritius multiplied eightfold and prices on the London market more than doubled (Scott 1961, 124-129). With the strong demand for slaves continuing, Mauritius' dependencies actually assumed new importance. This had to do with the limited extent to which Britain was able to enforce its own legislation in the new colony of Mauritius. In their attempts to crack down on the illegal slave trade, the British Navy divided the oceans into separate areas of command. One squadron based at the Cape of Good Hope tightened control of the waters between Africa and Mauritius and the Seychelles, but to proceed further east that squadron had to obtain permission from the British Navy's command based in India. Well to the north-east of Mauritius, Diego Garcia then offered a relatively secure haven and thus became an important staging post for French slave traders importing new slaves to the colony illegally. What made the onward shipment possible was that transfers of slaves between Mauritius' dependencies and the main island were considered internal transactions within one administrative unit, and since such transactions remained lawful, slave trading between mainland and dependencies had its heyday after cross-border slave trafficking became illegal (Taylor 2000). Hence, beyond the profitable production of oil outlined above, the profits of slave trading can then be identified as another reason why an exceptionally high number of applications for concessions in the dependencies were made (and granted) between 1810 and 1835.

But as I said above, Britain also took precautions for a smooth transition from slavery to new regimes. Considerable strategic steps were taken both before and after the official abolition of slavery in 1835. In 1829 a Protector of Slaves was appointed. A new ordinance was introduced that gave the slaves the right to marry and which prohibited the dispersal of slave families by sale. Slaves also gained the right to property. Punishments were regulated, and any ill treatment of the slaves became subject to penalty. After abolition, the Chagos islands became subject to occasional inspections by special commissioners. But the slaves were not freed in 1835. Abolition came into full force only in 1839. Before that time, the 'freed' slaves were to be 'apprenticed' to their former owners for four years – supposedly to learn how to become free labourers (Scott 1961, 133-4; Edis 1993, 39). In addition to the special labour relations in the Chagos discussed above, such incentives may very well have contributed to keeping freed slaves on the plantations after abolition, and also the local managers seem to have taken steps to keep their labour force on the islands at this time.

For example, the manager of Agalega, a slave owner by the name of Mr Leduc who was politically active in securing compensation for loss of slave property in the run-up to abolition, took active steps to reduce abolition into a matter of formalities. He then started a school where he taught classes himself and instructed the workers in religion. In 1835 he read the Emancipation Act to his slaves and "followed this up with a homely lecture in Creole on

their status, framing it on the instruction in the catechism which he had been giving to them for over seven years” (Scott 1961, 146). The strategy was successful. His personal slave who had accompanied him for 18 years refused to change his position, leaving the manager with the question of what to do: “take John Bull’s money while keeping his servant?” (Scott 1961, 147). Whether the ex-slaves would remain on the islands or not must have depended much on how the management treated them. Mr Leduc left the plantation in 1839, and within a year his successors had managed the industries so poorly that three-quarters of the workers asked to leave for Mauritius. When Leduc returned, labour relations had deteriorated to the extent that he and the new management found themselves in physical danger (Scott 1961, 146-7). Also in the Chagos islands there had been complaints after abolition that workers were unlawfully being kept against their will, but visiting commissioners arriving in 1859 reported to have found no evidence of this. Nonetheless, most managers in the Chagos had admitted using “every lawful inducement” to persuade workers to stay on the island (Scott 1961, 155).

A combination of the factors discussed above was probably the reason why abolition failed to bring about major changes in the Chagos. However, the continuities in this setting also brought along negative aspects: social differentiation in this particular setting also meant that prospects for social mobility in post-emancipation Chagos were few. Save for the fact that people now received wages for their work, life and production continued much as before (Edis 1993, 38, Scott 1961, 149). Shortly after the abolition came into force, a visitor noted that “the negroes on the Chagos group are now free, that is to say nominally, though perhaps very little change would be found in their condition” (Pridham 1846, 403). And even as late as 1949, a visiting representative of the Mauritian Labour Office commented on ‘patriarchal’ labour relations in the Chagos “dating back to what I imagine to be the slave days, by this I do not imply any oppression but rather a system of benevolent rule with privileges and no rights” (cited in Peerthum 2004).

While the majority of the ex-slaves remained, new workers had to be recruited from elsewhere after abolition. As in Mauritius, although on a much smaller scale, indentured labourers from British India were then brought to work in agricultural industries in the Chagos. According to Botte (1980, 8), at the beginning of the 20th century about 40 per cent of the population of the Chagos were of Indian origin, mostly Tamils. As Vine (2006, 71-72) points out, these numbers may be overestimated. Nonetheless, during my fieldwork many Chagossians reported that (some of) their parents or grandparents were of Indian origin, which supports the proposition that a considerable percentage of Indians became residents on the islands after their contracts expired. To my knowledge, no report discusses any inter-ethnic complications that may have arisen in this situation. Apparently many of them converted to Catholicism, intermarried and integrated into the local economy together with the freed slaves (cf. Peerthum 2004). This prevailing need for importing new labourers also had to do with a considerable gender imbalance on the islands, a matter I shall now turn to discuss.

2.2.5 GENDER, FAMILY AND POWER

Another significant aspect to be considered in this assessment of the social structure of the Chagos Archipelago concerns gender. This is important to address not only because gender

relations must have had considerable impacts on the islands' societies, but also because it has been of utmost importance to Chagossians' post-eviction struggle with regard to gendered political mobilisation and representation in Mauritius and the political question of indigenosity that gained importance when Chagossian politics went global in the 1990s. The following will therefore also be fundamental for understanding the concerns of the next chapters that go well beyond the issue of the extent to which historical reconstructions can be precise.

With respect to gender, the composition of the population in the Chagos was quite remarkable, albeit not very untypical for societies based on imported slave labour. From the earliest establishments in the Chagos Archipelago, the slave-based agricultural industries were very much dominated by males. In 1826, the population of Diego Garcia consisted of 224 men, only 27 women, and 24 children (Edis 1993, 33-34). This gender imbalance prevailed after abolition. In 1880 the same island hosted 227 men, 86 women and 87 children. This tendency was also characteristic for the other Chagos islands (Peerthum 2004).

Several authors suggest that this disproportionate ratio of men to women gave way to a matriarchal society on the islands (MLF 1988, 78, Botte 1980, 22, Madley 1985, 4). In light of the patriarchal management of the industries, as well as the unequal wages offered to men and women as displayed in the table above, this is surely an overstatement. However, it would be a foregone conclusion that women did not play a distinctively important role here. One major reason for this was not only the history of considerable gender imbalance, but also the infrequency of formal marriages. According to a social worker conducting a study of Chagossian women in Mauritius at the end of the 1970s, in the general absence of clergymen inhabitants of the Chagos preferred 'free unions' (*mariage à l'essai*) to official marriages (Botte 1980, 2, 22). As noted, slaves were allowed to marry from 1829. Yet, a decade after the abolition of slavery Pridham wrote that in the Chagos "laws of marriage were unknown" (Pridham 1846, 404). Referring to an unnamed observer in those days, Scott writes: "the state of marriage was virtually unknown in the Chagos Archipelago; and there were no marriage laws. By 'wife' was meant a partner in the household and a woman did not apparently lose her reputation for steadiness by displaying that quality in two or three households" (Scott 1961, 149). On the islands of Agalega, he noted, a most practical "polyandri by negotiation" had come into being (practical also from the perspective of the managers' who strived to maintain peace and order among frustrated men "condemned to perpetual celibacy"), that is, a "gentleman's agreement" where "the husband selected a number of friends as sleeping partners in the martial enterprise." During his visit to the oil islands in the mid 1950s, however, Scott observed that in Agalega "[t]here are numerous very respectable marriages nowadays – the visiting priests see to that – but there is also a system of brides on approval", meaning that the bachelor would marry a woman (locally then referred to as 'poultry keeper') after a trial period where she would prove her domestic skills to him. These observations are not much in line with an understanding of a supposedly matriarchal society. However, gender relations may have been different in the Chagos Archipelago where, as Scott also points out, the gender imbalance was much more pronounced (Scott 1961, 238-39).

Colonial visitors often commented that this situation gave way to considerable promiscuity. For example, a visiting Magistrate named E.P. Brooks reported in 1875 on the sad state of morality on the islands: "Marriage is unknown and all the women appear to live in a

state of concubinage” (cited in Edis 1993, 43). More interesting than the colonial elite’s contempt for sexual relations that differed from the norms in their own societies, it has been argued that the disproportion between men and women and the absence of formal marriages vested women in the Chagos with a certain power and authority. As anthropologist Walker wrote in the mid-1980s:

Particularly in the early days of settlement, the male:female ratio was very high, and it would be reasonable to conclude that women achieved the status of high value commodities due to their scarcity, which gave them greater freedom, and hence greater power, and, although with time the disparity in numbers decreased, the women retained their position of high status. The maintenance of that position was no doubt facilitated by the continued paucity of formal marriages (Walker 1986, 17-18).

After abolition another visitor to the Chagos reported that males “would exert themselves to the utmost to obtain a wife” (cited in Scott 1961, 149). However, reducing the authority of these women to their role as scarce and passive ‘commodities’ is insufficient and highly problematic and does not resonate well with more feminist-minded authors such as Botte (1980) and representatives of *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* (MLF 1988). Botte (1980, 2, 22-23) notes that free unions between partners were easily dissolvable and thus guaranteed women some extent of liberty and independence, which together with matrilineal settlement patterns came to provide women with a certain authority. A male partner would often move into the house of the woman’s mother or somewhere nearby. If the partnership failed, the union could easily be dissolved and the ‘husband’ would then leave the children to be brought up by the mother in her or her mother’s household. Thus, women would often become heads of larger households where a number of children from different and previously dissolved unions resided. According to Botte (1980, 2), women decided about family affairs in such patched households and thus acquired a dominant role.

Data collected among Chagossians during my fieldwork seem to support a similar thesis. An elder Chagossian man living in Mauritius explained: “In Chagos, if you had many children you had a lot of power. If you had a small family you had no power”. From the outset, this statement says less about power relations between men and women. However, if women in the Chagos often had children with more than one partner, and if also men outnumbered women, it is likely that women would have a parental relationship with children more so than the men. Moreover, if men tended to leave their children with the households of their mothers when free unions were dissolved, it is possible that the children of these households would assist their mothers in domestic affairs. And if such households, which also included vegetable gardens and domestic animals, to some extent functioned as economic units within a local system of barter, then women would not need to be economically inferior to males, although they were paid less for their work on the copra plantations than men were. Also other observations during the recent “present” support this reconstruction of past social relations. Looking to Chagossian households in Mauritius today, for example, some of these characteristics appear to have continued. A number of families I visited during my fieldwork comprised siblings and half-siblings of the same mother but different fathers. When relationships between two parents ended, children often resided with their mothers. Also, in

many cases women controlled the household economy, to which the other household members were expected to contribute.

If one considers the composition of the population in the Chagos from the early 20th century, the gender imbalance was no longer very strong. To use figures from Diego Garcia again, the population in 1931 consisted of 182 men, 161 women 189 children. In Peros Banhos that year 129 men, 105 women and 74 children were registered (Noel 1931), and when the latter island group was visited by Scott in the mid-1950s he observed that the women had eventually outnumbered the men (Scott 1961, 25). This matter is also relevant to another question that has taken on great importance to Chagossians after the evictions: whether or not the inhabitants of the Chagos islands formed a settled population before the evictions. As we shall see, the journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 cannot be understood without reference to this issue.

2.2.6 A SETTLED NATIVE POPULATION

Because the Chagos Archipelago was first inhabited in the late 18th century, Chagossians cannot trace their history on these islands to the mists of time. The local population also came to comprise people descending from African and Malagasy slaves, workers from India and some French colonisers. For these reasons the Chagos islanders have a hard time convincing sceptics that they are natives who belong to the islands as a permanent, indigenous population. This question was of course completely irrelevant in earlier times, but in the context of the evictions and Chagossians' ensuing struggles for repatriation it has taken on great importance.

This has to do with the fact that in today's sedentarist world order, certain rights protect people who qualify as 'settled', 'permanent' or 'native' to particular places. Between this category of people on the one hand, and the less privileged category that consists of people on the move such as migrant workers on the other, there is an ambiguous third category: people living in places that have been populated through immigration in recent history. Gender balance has in such cases often been regarded as an indicator as to which of the two former categories of people the residents of such a place 'actually' should fall into (and hence what rights they have). Mauritius' Governor Scott who visited the Chagos islands in 1955 was intrigued by this question and made inquiries that are important in this regard. As already described, societies in the Chagos Archipelago were marked by strong gender imbalance in the early days. Slave masters and managers imported far more men than women for the hard physical work on the plantations, but over time they had children, and hence the male dominance decreased. About twenty years before the island was evacuated, women eventually outnumbered the men on Peros Banhos (Scott 1961, 25). Scott observed that some 150 contract workers arrived to the Chagos Archipelago and the Agalega islands each year to compensate for a 'drift' or 'slow movement' of younger islanders to Mauritius and to keep the labour force up to strength. According to him, such temporary labourers numbered less than one-eighth of the total population. Out of some 1,700 people living in Mauritius' Lesser Dependencies – a category that also included the coconut producing atolls of Agalega and the fishing and guano station of St. Brandon – he classified some 1,500 as 'permanent' inhabitants or 'true islanders'. These concepts are not precisely defined, but Scott specifies that this number excluded all managers,

accountants, clerks, and headquarters staff of the coconut, fishing and guano industries, as well as the exclusively male population of guano diggers and fishermen based on St. Brandon. Also non-permanent were the migratory Seychellois men engaged on annual contracts on the coconut plantations. This number, according to Scott, included some 250 out of the 418 inhabitants of Agalega, which would then leave some 1,250 ‘permanent’ or ‘true islanders’ in the Chagos Archipelago in the mid-1950s (Scott 1961, 22-26).

A related question that has taken on much importance in this regard is whether Chagossians developed a distinct culture on the islands. Matters of remoteness and isolation are often highlighted to support such claims and, as we have seen, the history of the Chagos Archipelago meets these criteria far better than many other places. As I shall move on to discuss in the next chapter, the particular Chagossian *Sega* – a musical tradition practised in the Chagos on Saturday evenings – is now often put forward to confirm that Chagossians developed a distinct culture on the islands. We have, however, seen in this chapter that even though the Chagos Archipelago was remarkably remote and communication with the outside world was very limited, the islands were also in many ways integrated into wider socio-economic systems and influenced by cultural currents from very different parts of the world. That also goes for the *Sega*, which with different variations (often highlighted to express ethnic boundaries) is a musical tradition well known to exist on other Indian Ocean islands as well. Similarly, the language spoken in the Chagos Archipelago differed from the other islands, but it was far from impossible to understand for people from Mauritius, the Seychelles and perhaps even France. Where to draw the boundary between language and dialect is, as in Scandinavia and many other cases, often a political matter that primarily has to do with ethno-national identification and the formation or de-formation of particular socio-political groups. In other words, not even the remote Chagos Archipelago hosted an unchanging, bounded, homogenous society with a population and a local culture unaffected by the outside world. This is to state the obvious, but it is important to do this because it conflicts with popular ideas about native Others that are widespread within and beyond the former colonial centres. In later chapters we shall see that popular ideas about cultures as bounded and localised entities can be very important to real-life politics in today’s world. But it is important to stress that such ideas are fictions only. Not to question such fictions is highly problematic. It puts on marginal peoples the burden of proving the impossible (that their cultural practices or ways of thinking are unaffected by the outside world), which also makes them an easy target for critique from their political opponents. Indeed, if this was to form the criteria for indigeneness or what it means to be natives of a place, then no such group would probably ever have existed. As Appadurai points out: “natives, people confined to and by the places to which they belong, groups unsullied by contact with a larger world, have probably never existed” (Appadurai 1988, 39). Culture must not be mistaken for cultural markers or symbols of ethno-national identity, and cultures are not like islands – they are not bounded, territorial and homogenous. In fact, the diversity of human cultures, Levi-Strauss writes, “depends less on the isolation of the various groups than on the relations between them (Lévi-Strauss 1968, 20). As Selnes clearly explains:

The tendency to reify cultures as something substantial and solid with rather rigorous borders has been and still is a worldwide tendency. Reflections upon the relations of cultures in the world – and subcultures within them – show us a quite fluid, gradualistic

and continuous overlapping of different styles of thoughts, attitudes and behavioural habits. The reality of cultures is like much of other realities: full of floating shades and gradual continuities, where we with our concepts cut it up and try to put it into neat definitional boxes, but we never really catches the real reality. Dynamic and fluid processes can never be adequately depicted in the static structures of concepts. As a saying goes: Cultures are not like islands scattered around in the ocean but more like the streams between them, in the ocean (Selnes 2007, 311).

This points to some of the complexities at work in studies of contemporary culture, but it does not mean that culture in the Chagos Archipelago was not distinct in the sense of being different from that of mainland Mauritius in significant ways. In an interesting passage about the societies in the Chagos in the mid-1950s, Governor Scott wrote:

It is a system peculiar to the Lesser Dependencies and it may fairly be described as indigenous and spontaneous in its emergence, however shaky its early stages may have been. It would probably be completely unsuited to any other part of the world; and it is equally improbable that a system better fitted to the whole character of the Lesser Dependencies could replace it there (Scott 1961, 182).

The interesting part here is not that Chagossian culture was a bounded whole system particularly suited to these islands, but what he writes about its unsuitability elsewhere. A strong indication that culture in the Chagos Archipelago differed significantly from even that of the society with which the Chagos islanders had most contact is that many Chagossians had considerable problems with comprehending important aspects of Mauritian culture and society after they had been evicted. One example of such cultural differences is that after arriving in Mauritius, survival all of a sudden depended on securing cash income, and many did not possess skills that were relevant here. Chagos islanders were also very often cheated by employers and middlemen, and ran into trouble with moneylenders who operated with high interest rates (Botte 1980). Many Chagossians, in other words, did not share the Mauritian population's cultural skills or understandings of the complex capitalist economy that structured so many important human relations in Mauritian society.

It is because of the evictions that the question of whether the inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago were 'permanent', 'native' or 'indigenous' to these islands has taken on importance. To qualify or not for such categories connects to rights in British and international law and thus concerns legalities of historical actions and peoples' juridical rights to valued resources. Especially in cases like that of the Chagossians, where military concerns (or so-called matters of national security) limit the extent to which people can depend on the courts, to qualify accordingly can also affect international public opinion, and hence international support, in favourable ways. The question has for these reasons taken on immense importance for the evicted islanders who struggle for the right to repatriation, and also for UK authorities who need to justify the historical evictions.

That Chagos islanders actually do qualify as 'indigenous' according to most common definitions of the term has been convincingly confirmed by Vine (2003). Other non-governmental authorities have arrived at the same conclusion. In 2000 the British High Court

ruled that on “at least some of the islands there lived in the 1960s a people called the Ilois [...] They were an indigenous people” (cited in Collen and Kistnasamy 2002a, 27). The aim of this thesis is not to discuss definitions of that concept and classify Chagossians accordingly. To understand the Chagossian community and their pilgrimage in 2006 it is important to look beyond these questions and see how they are part of political battles fought within a wider sedentarist world order. For the present purpose of representing Chagossian history, I shall simply note that the material presented by Scott clearly shows that the vast majority of the population in the Chagos in the mid-1950s were born on the islands. According to him, “There are some families which have been established in the islands for five generations and over; many which have been there for two generations and upward” (Scott 1961, 23). As my purpose is to explore the issue of Chagossian belonging as a core of political conflict and a matter of central significance to their first pilgrimage to their homeland, it is highly important to note that the parties in power (whose prime interests in the Chagos Archipelago is not to resettle the evicted population) have not confirmed that status, while most others seem to agree that Chagos islanders are indigenous to the islands.¹⁵

The implications of this will be discussed in the following chapters. In the next chapter I will explore what role cultural traditions developed during colonial times have acquired in Chagossians’ post-eviction struggles that led to their journey in 2006. In order to do this it will be necessary to first outline some central historical developments that took place in Mauritian society after independence. By closing this chapter in this way I also wish to highlight that in important ways the decolonisation of Mauritius was not marked by radical breach – something that stands in stark contrast to the experience of the Chagos islanders whose conditions were completely revolutionised at that point. Crucial economic and political aspects ‘survived’ Mauritius’ transition to an independent nation, and many of these continuities still have decisive impacts on the position of the Chagossians and their struggles – not least on their journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006.

2.3 POSTCOLONIAL MAURITIUS AND ITS DEPENDENCIES

Although Mauritius was decolonised from Britain in 1968, its status as ‘independent’ or ‘autonomous’ has since been relative in ways that are highly significant to this thesis. This is due to certain legacies from colonial times when Mauritius’ economy was first integrated into the wider economy of the French Empire and then into that of the British. As discussed in the foregoing, Mauritius was under British rule developed into a major mono-crop sugar exporting economy that was heavily dependent on British preferential quotas for its sugar exports as well as on imports of basic products to sustain the needs of the population. In Houbert’s words, Mauritius became “doubly dependent on the outside world” (Houbert 1981, 77). This situation was not dramatically changed with Mauritius’ cession to independence. Describing this

¹⁵ In response to the UN adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on 13 Sept 2007, the British Foreign Office stated that within the UK and its overseas territories no minority group or ethnic group falls into the category of indigenous peoples (FCO 2007). Also, the Mauritius government refused in Geneva 1998 to recognise the Chagos islanders as indigenous people (Government of Mauritius 1998).

transition as a mere rearrangement by the colonial powers, Houbert characterised the Mauritius of the early 1980s as a state both independent and dependent. This observation was again confirmed by Meisenhelder who in 1997 described the Mauritian state as one with ‘embedded autonomy’ (Meisenhelder 1997). This characteristic, as we shall see, also held water after the millennium, and became also highly relevant for the journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 – not least because the British-Mauritian sovereignty dispute over its destination also connects the two governments in important ways.

By the time of independence Mauritius was faced with overpopulation, increasing unemployment, lack of investment and repeated outbreaks of violence. The state economy was heavily dependent on one single product – sugar. By now cane production occupied no less than 94 per cent of all cultivated land and accounted for 93 per cent of the country’s exports. After independence, the Mauritian Labour Party (MLP) was a powerful actor that could have operated independently of the local Franco-Mauritian sugar barons, but the successful sugar industry provided an all too important source of state revenue to the new government. In line with suggestions put forward in the Meade Report, a study on Mauritius’ development prospects produced by a British economist less than a decade before independence, the government decided to tax sugar and to use the revenues to create new jobs and improve workers’ conditions through social services such as health care, food subsidies, education and public pensions. In this way, social peace could be maintained while still keeping wages low enough to attract foreign investment. Hence, despite the radical history of the MLP, the Mauritian economy did not undergo drastic changes when power was handed over from the British. In fact, the year following independence the MLP entered a controversial coalition with its former opponent, the right-wing MSDP, to pursue a policy of close collaboration between private and public sectors. The new government thus inherited the British role in office as close partners of the Franco-Mauritian sugar barons. Although the government imposed taxes on the sugar industry, it also aided the same industry by skilfully negotiating exceptionally beneficial trade agreements for Mauritian sugar to supply the European market (Houbert 1981, 87, 101, Meisenhelder 1997, 281-282).

To achieve this, the government soon established close connections with France. By emphasising French colonial heritage and becoming a member of a number of French-speaking organisations, Mauritius was eventually granted the same trade advantages as former French colonies. This meant that even before Britain joined the European Economic Community, the ex-colony had managed to become the first Commonwealth member associated with it. Also, because the output from European sugar beet producers did not cover the increased demand for sugar when Britain entered the EEC, an exception was made to the Common Agricultural Policy whereby Britain would continue to import the same amount of sugar from EEC-associated Commonwealth members. The Lomé Convention guaranteed Mauritius by far the largest share of all African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) sugar-producing countries. Out of an annual quota of 1,4 million tonnes of sugar to the EEC, Mauritius was guaranteed an annual export quota of 500,000 tonnes for favourable prices connected to those for sugar produced in Europe (Houbert 1981, 88-90).¹⁶

¹⁶ Mauritius was included in the Yaoundé Convention in 1973, which granted former French and Belgian colonies trade privileges as EEC associated members. In 1975, the Lomé Convention replaced the Yaoundé Convention.

The close partnership between the public and private sectors in Mauritius was only celebrated. When the controversial coalition government was formed in 1969, a new party was founded, which soon developed into a strong political force to the left of Mauritian politics. The Marxist-inspired Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) accused the government of failing to represent the interests of Mauritian workers and called for redistribution of wealth through direct democracy and the nationalisation of Mauritian sugar estates. The government reacted to the fast-growing MMM support by postponing the upcoming General Election by four years. In cooperation with Mauritian trade unions, particularly the party's own trade union umbrella organisation the General Workers Federation (GWF), the MMM organised a major general strike in 1971 to press for elections and object to a national wage freeze. The government responded by declaring a state of emergency. Civil rights were suspended, trade unions were closed down, the party newspaper was banned and around 50 party and union leaders were imprisoned without trial. Despite these efforts to repress the movement, support for the MMM continued to grow, especially when sugar prices dropped and oil prices – and hence transport costs – rose from the mid-1970s. While the government was forced to reconsider its public spending, workers faced serious unemployment due to the increasing mechanisation of ports and the closure of mills. New general strikes were organised in 1979 by the MMM and associated supporters including the more radical faction *Lalit de Klas* (i.e. 'Class Struggle') to prevent mill closures and for the recognition of trade unions and the right to strike. Due to this successful mobilisation, the 1982 the General Election resulted in a striking 60-0 MMM victory (Seegobin and Collen 1977, V.T.M. 1979, Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 111-114, see also Chapter 3.2).

But even the coming to power of the MMM was marked more by continuity than radical change. When the proclaimed 'anti-ethnic' party decided to ally with the smaller Hindu populist Mauritian Socialist Party (MSP) to widen its electoral base before the elections, the party lost its more radical factions. The MMM continued to move towards the political centre also after coming to power. In exchange for concessions to the sugar oligarchy, devaluation of the rupee, cuts in food subsidies and wage restraints, the former government had in 1979 received soft loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to counter the economic downturn. When the MMM acceded to power they did not oppose these structural adjustments, and after only nine months in office the party split. By founding the Mauritius Socialist Movement (MSM), Prime Minister Areenood Jugnauth remained in his post and continued to rule with the support of the earlier MLP and MSDP regime. Capitalising on an image of having saved Mauritius from a one-party dictatorship, Jugnauth and the MSM headed a series of neoliberal coalition governments advocating a mixed economy of free market capitalism allowing for government intervention until 1995 (Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 116). He was then replaced in office by Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the head of a new MLP-led coalition. Jugnauth returned to the post in 2000, but was replaced by his MMM coalition partner Paul Berenger in 2003 who then became Mauritius' first non-Indian prime minister. Half a year before Chagossians journeyed to the Chagos Archipelago, the 2005 General Elections had again sent the MLP back in power under the leadership of Navinchandra Ramgoolam – the son of Mauritius' first prime minister who once agreed with the British to detach the Chagos islands from Mauritius, which would lead to the expulsions of the Chagos islanders.

Mauritius' special export agreements and revenues from the sugar tax allowed Mauritian governments to diversify the state's vulnerable mono-crop economy. Since all cultivable land was already under cane production, the Franco-Mauritian elite who still owned the larger sugar estates diversified local investments into textile manufacture and tourism (McPherson 2009, 40, Meisenhelder 1997). Whereas the Lomé Convention had granted preferential access for Mauritian exports to the EEC market, Export Processing Zones (EPZ) were set up where investors were also offered duty-free imports, untaxed operations and cheap, educated Mauritian labour. Thus, the government could attract considerable foreign capital. Most new factories concentrated on garments and textiles, and by 1990 almost 600 EPZ firms were employing some 90,000 workers (Meisenhelder 1997, 290, Neveling 2006, 6-7). In the meantime the tourism business was also booming. From 1985 to 2004 the annual number of tourists to Mauritius increased from around 150,000 to 719,000, and within the same time span the average amount of money spent per tourist rose almost sixfold (Schnepel 2009, 292).

Much due to the state's interventions, Mauritius experienced years of extremely rapid economic growth under the successive MSM-headed coalition governments from 1983 until the mid-1990s. Mauritius' impressive economic growth was in other words not a result of *laissez faire* economic principles, but very much a result of the ability of the state to negotiate market access for sugar and, eventually, other goods (Meisenhelder 1997, 290-291). In 1995 Mauritius became member of the WTO, which meant that the special trade agreements that had been central in bringing about this economic 'miracle' were soon to be phased out. In 2000 the Lomé agreement between the sugar-producing ACP countries and the EU expired, and in 2005 the Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA), which had secured export quotas for Mauritian textile and garment industries, was also coming to an end. The Everything But Arms agreement (EBA) could then have replaced it, but it was reserved for states included on the EU's list over Least Developed Countries (LDC) only, which excludes Mauritius. However, the Lomé/Cotonou Agreement upheld the MFA trade regime for a so-called "preparatory period" until 2008.

With the liberalisation of international trade, Mauritius-based industries could barely compete with the more cost-efficient Brazilian sugar industries and Chinese manufacturing businesses without cutting labour costs and centralising and mechanising considerably. The sugar tax had already been abolished in 1994. To impede closure and relocation of EPZ factories, the government consented to import cheaper Asian labourers (Lincoln 2006, 68). However, in contradiction to WTO principles, in 2000 the US government passed the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). With the Multi Fibre Agreement phasing out, the AGOA came to be viewed as a new kind of Lomé Convention in Mauritius – a last opportunity for the local textile sector to survive. Critics, however, argue that the AGOA works to re-colonise African states. Designed to strengthen connections between the US and sub-Saharan African economies, the Act authorises the US President to determine on an annual basis which countries should qualify or remain 'eligible' for trade preferences in terms of quota and duty-free imports of products, notably textile and apparel goods, to the USA. To be granted US trade preferences and keep the US market open to them, African states must accept political and economic conditions to be considered 'eligible'. Since AGOA favours so-called 'Lesser Developed Countries' to Sub Saharan African states with a per capita income exceeding \$1,500, Mauritius was now threatened by relocation of industries and workplaces to other

qualifying states in the region such as Mozambique and Madagascar.¹⁷ In 2004, however, an amendment to the AGOA Act granted Mauritius this status for one year. This was removed in 2006, before it was re-granted again in 2008. Mauritian exports to the US had then, over the last five years, decreased by 62 percent.¹⁸ Since textile and apparel constitute some 90 percent of Mauritius' exports to the USA, it is with this in mind that Mauritian authorities must to consider their stance on the US military base on Diego Garcia when they lobby to fully benefit from the AGOA agreements (Gibbon 2003, Lallah 2002, Martin 2004, Thompson 2004, Staritz 2010).

As should by now be evident, Mauritius' history of benefiting from special international trade preferences dates back to colonial times. Regarding these colonial legacies, Houbert noted in the early 1980s "Mauritius has always been dependent. Entirely created by colonialism, dependence was built into the whole being of Mauritius as an integral part of its economic, social and political structures" (Houbert 1981, 104). Mauritius' extensive economic growth from then onward was very much a result of this, but even this growth did not completely challenge the relativity of the state's status as 'independent'. Meisenhelder describes the Mauritius of the late 1990s as a developmental state characterised by 'embedded autonomy', i.e. a very capable state that manages to negotiate excellent economic agreements abroad and tax domestic industries in times of economic growth, but which remains ultimately dependent on less predictable capital and thus loses power and autonomy to local industries and international financial institutions during times of economic recession. By the turn of the millennium, Mauritius was facing an economic crisis that confirms this observation. The phasing out of Mauritius' special trade agreements followed a serious event that also displayed the vulnerability of the Mauritian economy. In February 1999, Mauritius saw three days of communal rioting after a popular Afro-Creole singer, Kaya, died under suspicious circumstances in police custody. Reasons for are complex, but it is possible to read these massive protests to police violence as an indication that despite Mauritius' economic boom the state had not redistributed and secured wealth and privileges to the favour of the poorer section of Afro-creole people identifying with the dead musician (see Eisenlohr 2006, 1-3, Bunwaree 2002, Eriksen 2004). In any case, the violence suddenly shook Mauritius' image of a peaceful multicultural state, and thereby its reputation as a good investment climate and secure tourist destination.

This formed the context of my fieldwork in Mauritius between 2004 and 2006 and hence also the Chagossians' journey to the Chagos islands. While special trade agreements were being phased out, unemployment was on the rise, and wages and public spending were being cut, the Mauritian government was seriously concerned with securing AGOA benefits with the US. At the same time, the government was addressing the UK for compensation for the loss of its preferential trade agreements, aiming to diversify the economy in the direction of seafood

¹⁷ 'Lesser Developed Countries' under AGOA differ from 'Least Developed Countries' as defined by the UN and EU. Mauritius cannot employ non-qualifying third-country textile inputs in the manufacture of AGOA-eligible apparel exports if the state does not qualify for this status, which according to AGOA legislation was defined as countries that had a GDP per capita of less than US \$ 1.500 in 1998 (www.agoa.info, accessed 3 Nov. 2009).

¹⁸ It was mainly Asian owned firms (most from Hong Kong) that closed down in Mauritius after 2004. In contrast to locally owned companies in Mauritius that mostly exported to the EU markets of Mauritius' former colonial powers, UK and France; it was the Asian owned firms that had supplied the US market. Simultaneously, around 2005, Chinese textiles and clothing exports to the West experienced a massive growth (Staritz 2010).

and information technology. If not entirely dependent on the decisions of these states, Mauritius' autonomy was at this point at least as 'embedded' as before. The practical implications of this, especially for the Chagossians, shall be elaborated in later chapters (see Chapter 4, 6 and 7), but by way of concluding this general outline of Mauritius' embedded autonomy it is important to highlight that these economic dependencies are not unrelated to the territorial dependencies of the former British colony – especially the Chagos Archipelago. In a postcolonial situation increasingly affected by free market regulations, international disputes with former colonial powers over sovereignty, militarisation or other matters can be important means of maintaining and influencing vital and long-standing bilateral economic relations with former colonial centres. It was in the context of this embedded autonomy that the Chagos islanders, together with representatives of the Mauritian and UK governments, peregrinated to the Chagos Archipelago – a colony ruled by the British, used by the US military, and claimed by the government of Mauritius.

2.4 ARRIVALS

To understand the Chagossian case, their community and the journey they undertook in 2006, it is imperative to provide a historical outline of Mauritius and its dependencies. In my efforts to do so I have in this chapter discussed two kinds of Mauritian dependencies: the dependencies of colonial Mauritius, in particular the Chagos Archipelago, and Mauritius' economic dependencies on other states. These are both legacies of colonial times, and as we shall see their interconnectedness was essential for, among other things, bringing about this very journey.

From the above outlines it is clear that the history of life and work in the Chagos Archipelago cannot be properly understood without considering developments beyond these remote and relatively isolated islands. Just like the Mascarenes, the Seychelles and Agalega, the Chagos Archipelago was uninhabited before these islands were 'discovered' by European naval merchants in the 16th century. Before the end of the 18th century they were all populated by Frenchmen and their slaves, chiefly from Madagascar and East Africa. The wider context of these expansions was the European competitions for trade monopolies in India and the Far East, in the heat of which a lucrative wartime market for oil emerged in French Mauritius. This gained the remote tropical Chagos islands importance for French colonisers who seized the opportunity to set up slave-based coconut industries on the islands in the late 18th century. This laid the foundation for societies to live off the uninterrupted production of copra and coconut oil for almost two centuries. If the history of colonisation and migration to the Chagos islands resembles that of Mauritius' main island, the societies in the Chagos would develop under circumstances that also in many ways were different. This includes among other things the local production, the environment, and the extent of the presence of the state. Communication with the outside world was also remarkably limited, but I have stressed that this does not mean that these societies were bounded or unaffected by the world outside. From an age characterised by extreme global migration, people from a number of backgrounds were brought together on these islands. And over time, important changes such as effects brought about by the abolition

of slavery, repeated wars, the development of steam engine technology, missionaries, as well as economic depressions on a world market – which even the remote Chagos Archipelago was integrated into – left their footprints on these societies. If the political and economic significance of these islands was marginal for a long time, then global political developments of the 20th century rendered the islands important again – increasingly so from a military perspective. This would result in the detachment of the Chagos Archipelago from the colony of Mauritius and the expulsion of all inhabitants by 1973. The islands then gained new importance, but these political proceedings could come about only because their inhabitants were irrelevant political actors in a major political power game that involved US, British and Mauritian political elites. In the next chapter we shall see that Chagossians have gradually emerged as relevant political actors through their post-eviction struggles. An important consequence of this is that Chagossians are increasingly taken into consideration when it comes to political matters that concern their homeland. As for Mauritius and its export economy's dependence on preferential international trade agreements that date back to colonial days, the Chagos Archipelago has gained new relevance in an age marked by the increasing liberalisation of international trade.

3 BECOMING CHAGOSSIAN : PROTESTS WITHOUT AND WITHIN AN ETHNICALLY ORDERED WORLD

Unforgettable Land

Hand on the cheek, tears falling from our eyes
Now we think of our island Diego Garcia. It's like an island that has disappeared
Our generation was born on Diego Garcia, my brothers and I was born there
Life over there was of a different kind. We lived well in every way
We did not pay for my family's house. We had food in abundance
When we think about life over there happiness is in our hearts
When we think of life in exile, it makes us ill
How we were able to fish!
But today we live in misery. Now, my brother, we must eat margoz [i.e. these are difficult times]
Perhaps we can do it again some time?
Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos, Boddam Salomon
My island is in the Indian Ocean, with many surrounding islands, they resemble a paradise
Who would remove someone from his island and send him into exile?
A people without a patria is like a tree without roots¹

When the sun descended behind Port Louis' major sugar export terminal on 30 March 2006, hundreds of people were cheering, singing and dancing on the opposite side of Mauritius' main harbour. They had gathered before the *Mauritius Trochetia* on Quay D, just below Les Moulines de la Concorde – a massive modern mill with 16 huge wheat silos that guarantees four months of food supply for a state entirely dependent on imports. These silos cast enormous shadows long before the sun drops behind the sugar export terminal, but the first place they darken after midday is a nearby Chagossian memorial erected on the quay where most passengers onboard the *Mauritius Trochetia* had disembarked after they were evicted from the Chagos Archipelago (see Illustration 31). Before *Mauritius Trochetia* left quay and sailed into the night towards the Chagos Archipelago, people were shouting, taking photos, pointing, waving their hands and trying to make themselves visible to Chagossians who started to appear in uniform white clothing on the top deck of the large vessel. This was a highly emotional moment and in this noisy atmosphere the Chagossian pilgrims and their families they were about to leave behind were singing a number of songs. They had already sung many of these songs during a special ceremony at St. Sacrament Cathedral in Cassis earlier this day, and some of them were to be repeated on different occasions during their voyage in days to come. Among them was the above quoted 'Unforgettable Land' which had been composed for this particular occasion by Olivier Bancoult, the leader of the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) and currently the most central political figure among the displaced islanders. In accordance with the lyrics, many Chagossians present explained that they were singing along with very mixed feelings –

¹ Written in Kreol by Olivier Bancoult; my translation.

not the least because they were now all standing in a highly symbolic place that added considerable meanings to this departure. This evening they were singing songs about their homeland and the evictions right where they once had landed, in a setting where some of them were about to go back for the first time. Some said they remembered the last shipment of evicted Chagos islanders who arrived to this harbour with the British cargo vessel *Nordvær* in 1973. Back then, the passengers had refused to disembark the vessel unless a minimum of social and economic arrangements were made available to them. That particular protest – undertaken at the very entry-point to the newly independent Mauritian state – marked the beginning of a tireless political struggle for proper compensation and the right to return, which still continues today. The materialisation of the journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 was in other words not simply a generous gesture by the authorities that facilitated it. It was an outcome of decades of political protests undertaken by the evicted Chagos islanders. This evening they re-visited this harbour to see their friends and family embarking on a very first journey to their forbidden *patria* – a homeland to a community of *persona non grata*.

In this chapter I shall explore the history of Chagossian protests that eventually led to this journey. As we shall see, after the evictions Chagossian political activism has taken many forms, ranging from public demonstrations, hunger strikes and court actions, to political negotiations and promotion of awareness on global arenas. In this exploration I will pay special attention to Chagossian musical traditions.² Chagossian music has also been discussed by Jeffery (2007, 2011, 57-74). However, my approach and my purpose is rather different, as I shall not be concerned with what Chagossian lyrics produced before and after the evictions may reveal about their actual past or how contemporary idealisations of Chagos history through songs can be a hindrance in the courts. By tracing a biography of Chagossian musical traditions, I shall instead demonstrate a highly significant change in their form of protest, which marks an important shift in the evicted islanders' history of political struggles. During their early years in Mauritius, the evicted islanders had discontinued practicing what they have later crowned as their most central cultural tradition – a musical performance from the Chagos Archipelago now known as the Chagossian *sega*. Closer examination shows that the reintroduction of the Chagossian *sega* coincided with significant changes in the wider political climate in Mauritius in the early 1980s, and that their *sega* from then onwards took on relevance *qua* tradition in a new, and increasingly global, political landscape. Chagossian struggles then took a strong ethno-political turn as they submitted their political activism to a wider framework of what Comaroff (1996) has coined an 'ethnically ordered world' – a neoliberal inter-national order marked by a worldwide increase of ethno-national political movements. As the implications of this change will demonstrate, the evicted islanders' politicised community cannot be properly understood without considering the broader political contexts in which these struggles have been fought. In their process of establishing themselves as a distinct ethnic group within that framework, the evicted islanders soon came to see themselves as victims of cultural genocide. Surely, to claim to be culturally distinct, while at the same time argue that the group has been subject to cultural genocide, is an extraordinary dilemma, which also opens for difficult questions such as how to be recognised as culturally distinct, or how to mobilise a group on

² A different version of this chapter was produced parallel to this thesis and published in a special issue on traditions (Johannessen 2010).

ethnic grounds, if that group has lost what should define it as culturally distinctive? Moreover, is it possible to convince any audience of *post-facto* cultural genocide by means of traditions? In this chapter we shall also see how the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago consolidate this complex situation by giving their traditions new meanings, something that also has consequences for how co-ethnic members born inside or outside the homeland are understood.

In this chapter I shall first introduce the Chagossian *sega*. Following a brief excursus to clarify my approach to the issue of traditions and ethnic politics, I proceed to discuss the changing socio-political circumstances under which the Chagossian *sega* was discontinued and later re-emerged. I then move on to explore problems that arise from ideas of territorialised cultures and displaced populations. The last section explores how Chagos islanders consolidate the issue of displacement and localised cultures by appealing to traditions, which, as we shall see, have formed central part of their political activities since the mid-1980s. This history of political activity will show how the evicted islanders over time emerged as relevant political actors, how they eventually became ‘Chagossians’, and how they have adjusted their political activities according to wider and changing national and international political contexts and ideological frames. The latter issue implies that also their first journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 was performed within a particular ideological framework. That is, a particular framework in which pilgrimage has taken on new political relevance as a potent form of mobility for people who struggle for repatriation or cultural recognition in the contemporary world.

3.1 THE DISAPPEARANCE AND REAPPEARANCE OF THE CHAGOSSIAN SEGA

What today is celebrated as the crown of the evicted Chagos islanders’ cultural traditions is a musical performance known as the Chagossian *sega*. The *sega* can be described as a particularly gendered interplay of dancers and musicians accompanying a lead singer. *Sega* lyrics may draw on humour, satire, nostalgia, direct complaints or critique. They tend to comment on social life and often conclude with a surprising punch line, sometimes by playful use of metaphors or multiple meanings of words. The following song, ‘Leoncine’, a popular and well-known *sega* from the Chagos islands now performed by the Mauritius-based Chagossian *sega* group Grup Tambour Chagos can serve as an example:

My good friend Leoncine liked to come home to my house.
She talked like a friend, she came, and she stole my husband.
She came; she took my husband – on top of the warehouse furnace
This husband is not for you alone – this husband belongs to the company
We split the money in two – you can keep the underwear yourself
My husband did not want you – you parted in anger too.³

³ Traditional *sega* from the Chagos Archipelago as performed by Grup Tambour Chagos (2004); my translation.

With swinging movements of the hips, male and female *sega* dancers engage in a mutual interplay of seduction and search for a partner. During the chorus sections, women fold their long skirts and spin in a way that the skirts will be lifted. Male dancers may then approach and pretend to get a glimpse under the skirts. Sometimes two partners ‘find’ one another and devote most attention to each other, but not always. The two can then go all the way by dancing their way down to the ground with playful sexual overtones. As a rule, however, they never make physical contact. As an indication to the *sega*’s sexual and seductive aspects, ‘going down’ (*an ba*) with a dance partner can sometimes provoke serious jealousy.

Many of my elder Chagossian informants recalled that on Saturday evenings, after a week of hard work in the plantations in the Chagos, people would come together to make large bonfires and dance the *sega* – sometimes until dawn. How the *sega* was performed in the Chagos Archipelago has also been captured on film. A rare movie clip shot on Diego Garcia during the Second World War shows women and men dancing around bonfires in the evening, although in a rather sober variation of the above description (Loader and Donaldson 2006). In this film, the women are dressed in long skirts. Some men are heating their drums (*ravanne*) over the fire, which will tighten the goatskin drumhead and thus improve the instrument’s sound. The moderate *sega* performance in this film somewhat contradicts an image of the ‘wilder’ *sega* of the old days, but there may have been good reasons for these dancers not to go *an ba* in front of the British cameraman. Before the evictions, plantation managers and visiting priests in the Chagos objected to the *sega*, regarding it a pagan and particularly promiscuous and uncivilised practice. Nevertheless, as was also reported by Father Dussercle, a Catholic missionary who visited the islands in the 1930s, and as a number of my informants who were born there also recalls, local authorities were unable to prevent *sega* from taking place in the Chagos Archipelago. Insurgency in fact followed when a manager on Salomon tried to ban the *sega* in 1937 (Dussercle 1935, 66-72, Edis 1993, 59-60, 64-65).

Whereas local authorities were incapable of eradicating the weekly *sega* sessions in the Chagos Archipelago, the practice was in fact discontinued after Chagos islanders were evicted to Mauritius. During my fieldwork, many older people from the Chagos islands disconfirmed that they performed *sega* during their early years in Mauritius. Still in 1980, a Mauritian social worker undertaking a study of their condition wrote that “in Mauritius, the Ilois *sega* nights are not so common, the young people choose partners early among their neighbours in their own community” (Botte 1980, 31). Also Walker, who I shall return to below, referred to the Chagossian *sega* as a disappearing tradition in his MA thesis published in 1986 (Walker 1986, 42).

It is important to note here that the *sega* was not only performed in the Chagos islands. Variations of the *sega* are also performed on the other Mascarenes islands as well as in the Seychelles, and it is therefore better understood as a broader music genre that became quite common in the region. Some also argue that the *sega* extends beyond this region as a similar dance called the *Chica* is also performed in Brazil, Haiti and Martinique (Baker 1984; in Lee 1990, 24). An important connection between these places and the western Indian Ocean islands is the colonial history of the African slave trade, with which also the *sega* is historically associated. Due to the slave trade’s complex routes and many points of departure, the fact that the slaves were captured in different hinterlands beyond the ports, and also taking into account that *sega* performances have changed over the centuries, it is difficult to identify a precise

historical origin. To some extent supported by Boswell, Benoit traces the *sega* to Madagascar (Boswell 2006, 61). This is refuted by Lee (1990, 27), who along with Edis, Botte and Baker agree with Arago that the *sega* originates from the Mozambique region, where comparable cultural practices known as the *chega* or the *tsega* continue to be performed (Edis 1993, 59, Botte 1980, 16, Boswell 2006, 61). Supporting that proposition, Baker notes that the origin of the word ‘*sega*’ is a widespread verbal Bantu root meaning ‘play’, ‘dance’, ‘laugh’ and ‘to have a good time’, which has spread from East Africa with the slave trade and is now pronounced (and performed) differently in a number of post colonies (Baker 1984; in Lee 1990, 24). Schnepel and Schnepel (2009, 278) point out that the *sega* found in Mauritius today is probably also influenced by Arabian, Indian and European music and dance traditions. The issues of origin or creolisation of the *sega* are highly important to constructions of identity in today’s Mauritius. But before I return to discuss this below, it suffices to conclude here that the “*séga* has many roots, or rather it developed out of many diverse roots and sources of inspiration into the multi-layered, multi-faceted, polysemic and hybrid genre it is today” (Schnepel and Schnepel 2009, 278).

Just like in the Chagos, officials and missionaries long sought to suppress and forbid the *sega* in Mauritius too. As documented by Schnepel and Schnepel, in the period of slavery the *sega* was here a clandestine practice and a serious offence subject to penalties such as whipping and even death (Schnepel and Schnepel 2009, 278-280). As I discussed in the foregoing chapter, the state as well as religious authorities were much more present in Mauritius than in the Chagos Archipelago, which means that these authorities would possess more power to have it abolished here. This did not happen. The discontinuation of the Chagossian *sega* after the islanders arrived to Mauritius was therefore not because the dance was suppressed or abolished here. It was not even insignificant. When Chagos islanders landed in Mauritius between 1965 and 1973, the *sega* was widely accepted. In fact, in the late 1950s and the 1960s it was peaking at its height of popularity (Lee 1990, 29). Reasons for the discontinuation of their *sega* tradition must therefore be sought elsewhere.

Their *sega* has now become hugely popular among Chagos islanders, and is performed on many occasions both in Mauritius and beyond. But it does not follow from this that the same practice now means the same, or serve the same purposes, as it did before. The important observation to be discussed here is that at some point in their post-eviction history this tradition re-emerged. My argument is that exploring the shifting contexts in which their *sega* was discontinued and then later revived demonstrates an important shift in the wider political, ideological and economic circumstances under which Chagossians have lived and struggled. As we shall see, the Chagossian *sega* gradually entered the domain of politics. I shall argue that the re-emergence of their *sega* tradition in Mauritius from the mid-1980s onward was in no small part due to a significant change in the wider political landscape in which Chagossian protests were taking place. After clarifying my approach to the issues of traditions and ethnic politics in the next section, I shall return to show that the discontinuation and re-emergence of the Chagossian *sega* correlated with the rise and fall of a general socialist uprising in Mauritius.

3.1.1 ETHNIC POLITICS AND TRADITION AS A CATEGORY OF PRACTICE

In their seminal volume published in 1983, 'The invention of tradition', Hobsbawm and Ranger suggested approaching social practices coined and celebrated as traditions from a political-historical perspective. Although appearing as if they were passed down through generations from the mists of time, closer examination shows that practices identified as traditions are often invented at specific moments in history in order to serve particular political purposes. The authors argued that once formally instituted, traditions tend to take on a conservative force that contributes to the production of social cohesion of desired group formations (such as nation-state citizens), legitimising authority and institutions, and inculcate certain beliefs, values and patterns of behaviour. Moreover, by directing attention away from the political economy, invented traditions can serve as a preventive political instrument for the ruling classes of society (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

However, it is not only people in power who employ traditions for political purposes. In order to better their unfavourable socio-economic situations, in recent years an increasing number of subaltern groups have mobilised by appealing to their traditions in order to be recognised as culturally distinct (e.g. Wilmsen and McAllister 1996). While traditions in such projects are also invented to serve purposes of inclusion, exclusion and social cohesion, they are not introduced with the aim of upholding the *status quo*. In cases like these, traditions rather form a means to resist. They are invented and called upon as an instrument to bring about change. As a first step to be awarded compensation or other forms of positive discrimination on behalf of ethnically or nationally defined groups, traditions are invoked to reclaim, rewrite and voice histories and origins, and thereby underscore claims to be recognised as a culturally distinct category of people.

One precondition for such activities is the plural society. That is to say, a wider ideological context where 'culture' and 'identity' (often regarded as 'things' that people 'have') is accepted as a politically relevant way of marking categories of people as significantly different. This is much in line with what Comaroff (1996) describes as a contemporary 'ethnically ordered world'. He argues that in response to losing power to inter- and transnational economic actors in a globalising neoliberal world, state authorities in many countries reinforce nationalist rhetoric in order to vindicate position and power. While such ethno-national rhetoric has gained relevance as justification for political activity at state level, it is also adopted by other groups and has paved way for a new wave of ethno-national movements within and across state borders. As he writes, "ethnic and nationalist struggles – in fact, identity politics *sui generis* – are (re)making the history of our age with a vengeance" (Comaroff 1996, 162).

Within this order, an increasingly standardised selection of social practices have taken on new relevance *qua* cultural traditions. If recognised as cultural traditions, such practices can serve to communicate group boundaries, which is central to all forms of identity politics. This includes also claims to those territories where such cultural practices (are claimed to) have been developed by particular groups of local people. In his analysis, Hobsbawm (1983, 8) found it fruitful to distinguish between 'genuine' and 'invented' traditions, but because the distinction deprives the empirical case of important complexity I will be less concerned with debating the 'authenticity' of such practices here. Instead I shall borrow Bourdieu's (1991) conceptual

distinction between ‘categories of analysis’, as scientific analytical categorisations of social practices, and ‘categories of practice’, as social practices classified, named and consciously reflected upon by the subjects of study. With these conceptual tools, it is possible to argue that the Chagos islanders’ traditions have moved from the first to the second dimension in the course of their political struggles. Through this process, in which their *sega* eventually came to play a central role *qua* tradition, the evicted islanders also became ‘Chagossians’.

Chagossian identification is a complex and context depending field that involves interactions with a number of relevant Others, and will therefore be further debated in all following chapters (see especially Chapter 4 and 5). Here I shall limit investigation to a historical outline to the Chagossians’ post-evictions struggles, and show how these have gone through significant changes that has also had important impact on how they identify. For the wider argument of this study, it is important to note here that the Chagos islanders did not only consider their pilgrimage in 2006 a result of their decades-long struggle. It was also seen as part of that struggle. My point is that the potential of pilgrimage as political strategy rest very much on the wider ideological framework to be uncovered in this chapter. That is, a framework which gained particular relevance when Cold War politics ended in Mauritius and elsewhere. In the next two sections we shall see that after a long period of discontinuation, the Chagossian *sega* became relevant *qua* tradition at a time of great changes in Mauritius’ wider political climate.

3.2 FIRST PHASE: PROTESTS IN THE FRAME OF A GENERAL SOCIALIST UPRISING

Chagos islanders have literally fought for compensation and the right to return ever since they arrived to Mauritius.⁴ When the last boatload of evictees reached Port Louis harbour in 1973, passengers learned that arrangements promised upon their departure were not being facilitated in Mauritius and refused to disembark the BIOT cargo vessel *Nordvær*. This demonstration, right at the doorstep of the newly independent state, was the first in a range of political protests undertaken by Chagos islanders in the decades to come. Since no resettlement scheme was initiated, unemployment became widespread. In lack of money and housing people lived on the streets, families went hungry and starved. Women were forced into prostitution, and others turned to drugs, alcohol and petty theft. According to a survey conducted by Comité Ilois Organisation Fraternelle (CI-OF), by 1975 at least 44 Chagos islanders had died in poverty, 11 persons had committed suicide, and 16 persons were admitted to psychiatric treatment (reproduced in Vine 2009, 130-131). Reporting on these deaths, 422 evicted families petitioned the UK government for plots of land, housing, employment, and, as would materialise in 2006, to be able to visit the Chagos islands to tend their ancestors’ graves. On 9 September 1975 the

⁴ In contrast to Mauritius, leaders of a recent Chagossian organisation in the Seychelles disconfirmed occurrences of early protests taking place in the Seychelles.

petition was printed in the Washington Post (Ottaway 1975).⁵ This was the first report on the Chagos islanders' evictions in a Western newspaper. From then on, support for the evicted islanders started to grow (Madley 1985, 6, Pilger 2006, 31, Curtis 2003, 421).

However, in the early years the support was primarily local and heavily embedded in the context of a general socialist uprising in Mauritius that emerged in the early 1970s and culminated with a Marxist opposition party coming to power in 1982. At the very same time, the evicted Chagos islanders in Mauritius were after years of heavy protest then awarded UK-Mauritian compensation, which would mark the end of the first phase of their post-eviction struggles.

During this period, the political situation in Mauritius was highly unpredictable. One important effect was that both representatives of the growing socialist opposition as well as representatives of the right-wing faction of the coalition government became involved with the protesting islanders. Both parties not only supported, but also claimed credit for assisting the evicted islanders in their respective party newspapers. It is therefore no wonder that tension among Chagos islanders developed when the increasingly powerful opposition on the one hand organised the islanders in order to stage protests, and representatives of the coalition government, on the other hand, sought to channel their disputes elsewhere by aiding the evictees in launching a court case against the UK government in the British courts. Before I can explain how this tension developed, and eventually climaxed in 1979, the political climate unfolding in Mauritius during this period needs some elaboration.

In 1969, as briefly outlined in the foregoing chapter, an influential Marxist-inspired party was founded in Mauritius. The Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) appealed to trade unions, students and the unemployed, and argued that the poorer sections of the population shared common political interests regardless of their ethnic affiliations. The party soon developed into a powerful opposition on the far left of Mauritian politics (V.T.M. 1979, Addison and Hazareesingh 1999, 111-114, Seegobin and Collen 1977). Seemingly, the MMM did its best to also include the Chagos islanders. Deprived of their homes, their employment, and close to everything they had possessed, they had little to lose and much to protest for. But to the MMM the Chagos issue also represented a powerful case in point. Within the wider context of the Cold War, the MMM regarded the UK-US ventures in the Chagos Archipelago a matter of Western neo-colonial imperialism and argued for the closure of the military base and the return of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritian jurisdiction. The MMM was also founded after decolonisation. And since they therefore had nothing to do with it, the opposition had everything to gain by criticising how the sitting government had handled the Chagos issue in the independence negotiations and hence to what extent the government's achievement of Mauritian independence had failed.

Unsurprisingly one of the parties in government tried to challenge this form of agitation, initiating a development that would cause much friction within the Chagossian community a few years later. One of the evicted islanders who disembarked in Port Louis after *Nordvær's* last journey from the Chagos in 1973 soon came into contact with Gaëtan Duval, the leader of

⁵ In response to the petition UK authorities referred responsibility for the evicted islanders to the Mauritian government. For a discussion on the 1975 Washington Post article see Madley (1985, 6), Pilger (2006, 31) and Curtis (2003, 421).

the far-right Mauritius Social Democratic Party (MSDP). The MSDP had opposed independence before decolonisation. In fact, they eventually walked out of the London constitutional negotiations, and even boycotted the official independence ceremony in 1968. This was not because of the excision of the Chagos Archipelago or the ill treatment of the Chagos islanders. In an official report issued by the MMM government after coming to power in 1982, MSDP representatives were criticised for being “concerned by the conditions of the excision and not by the excision itself” (de l’Estrac 1983, 34). The party was primarily concerned with market access for the Mauritian export economy, and they never opposed the US military establishment on Diego Garcia (de l’Estrac 1983). Whereas the MSDP had vividly opposed the MLP-led pro-independence alliance a few years earlier, they now formed part of an MLP-led coalition government. Along with the landowning Franco-Mauritian upper class, the poorer predominantly Christian sections of the Mauritian population identifying with African descent, the Creoles, had since then been the strongholds of the party. And according to local standards of classification, the increasingly militant people from the Chagos islands could well represent this section of Mauritius’ population in a period of severe civil unrest and decreasing government support. In Duval’s capacity as a British-educated barrister, contact was established with a British law firm. And in February 1975, a writ on behalf of the evicted islanders was issued in the London High Court against the Attorney General for the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.⁶

The UK government had already in 1972 agreed to £ 650,000 compensation to evicted islanders in Mauritius. But the monies were not disbursed by Mauritius’ government until six years later, by which time the value of this limited compensation had decreased dramatically. Between 1973 and 1976 local housing prices were estimated to have risen by 500 per cent (Prosser 1976). When it was eventually distributed in March 1978, MMM newspapers reported the amount scandalously inadequate (Chagos Islanders vs. Attorney General BIOT Commissioner, 2003, Appendix, Para. 468). In June that year, the police removed a number of protesting islanders from Port Louis’ public gardens. The following month the MSDP leader proceeded to the UK to negotiate further compensation with the British government’s legal representative, while at the same time MMM-sympathising organisations including the Comité Ilois - Organisation Fraternelle (CI-OF), the left-wing political party Lalit and the Marxist-feminist organisation Muvman Liberasyon Fam (MLF) rallied with the more militant factions amongst the islanders. The CI-OF had been set up in 1976 to support the displaced population from the Chagos by the Organisation Fraternelle (OF), a loosely-knit organisation associated with the opposition that had supported working-class Creoles since 1970 (Eriksen 1988, 242-243). With the backing of these organisations, albeit without much result, six women from the Chagos conducted a 21-day hunger strike in September 1978. The following month, four islanders were fined and imprisoned for resisting their shackles being pulled down (Madley 1985, 7). In the midst of these repeated protests and hunger strikes, the legal case brought against the UK government was reconsidered and turned into a group-litigation. Thereby, the Chagossian litigant’s British lawyer became recognised as a representative and mediator between the

⁶ The litigation claimed ‘damages, aggravated and exemplary, for intimidation, deprivation of liberty, and assault in the BIOT, Seychelles, and Mauritius in connection with his departure from Diego Garcia, the voyage and subsequent events’ (Chagos Islanders vs. Attorney General BIOT Commissioner 2003, Para. 55).

displaced population, British authorities and the Mauritian government. This, however, must have been decided without the consent of a considerable proportion of the Chagos islanders, because tensions between the two factions grew and the British lawyer's position was soon to be challenged.

In the aftermath of severe general strikes orchestrated by the socialist opposition in August 1979, the UK lawyer arrived in Mauritius to offer the evicted islanders £1.25 million compensation. Economically pressed as they were, many showed up to collect the money. However, when opposition members learned that very poor and illiterate Chagos islanders were in return putting their thumbprint signatures on formal agreements written in legal English, by which they (probably unknowingly) abandoned any future right to sue the UK government and to return to the Chagos islands, they interfered and cancelled the whole operation (Houbert 1981, 472, Madley 1985, 7, 15). In response, the MMM and sympathising organisations, including representatives associated with the Chagossian plaintiff, established the Joint Ilois Committee (JIC) and conveyed a message repealing the signed acceptances to the British lawyer. Reacting to the state of affairs, the Mauritian High Commissioner then warned the UK government that there were now "two Ilois committees with the MMM in the lead and opposed to the settlement terms, especially to the requirement to give up their right to return to the Chagos" (Chagos Islanders vs. Attorney General BIOT Commissioner 2003, Para. 494).

While political support for the MMM grew in Mauritius, the evicted Chagos islanders continued to protest. Receiving publicity in opposition newspapers, female CI-OF associated Chagos islanders went on a new hunger strike in September 1980 (Chagos Islanders vs. Attorney General BIOT Commissioner, 2003, Appendix, Para. 521). It is quite possible that the critical political situation emerging in Mauritius at this point impelled Mauritius' government the next month to voice their very first official claims to regain sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago at the UN 25th General Assembly in October 1980. Now, the government and the opposition at least agreed in this one matter. But who, in these turbulent times, should take the credit for this patriotic stance? Only one month later, the Front National de Soutien aux Îlois (FNSI), an umbrella organisation consisting of the MMM and its recent political ally Mauritian Socialist Party (MSP) as well as a number of local unions and organisations including the MMM's trade union organisation GWF, was founded to mobilise support for the islanders – without compromising Mauritian claims to sovereignty (Walker 1986, 30).⁷

The Chagos islanders' key demonstration in this period started 16 March 1981. Hundreds of evicted islanders then gathered before the British High Commission in Port Louis. As with most of their protests, predominantly women spearheaded the demonstrations. Reasons for this female-dominated militancy may have been many, but among them was a deliberate political strategy, not only to ridicule male police officers fighting women in public, but also to limit excessive police violence. The protesters were unable to provoke any reaction on the part of the High Commissioner, and therefore decided to relocate to conduct a sit-in at the nearby Government House. Violent clashes with the police were followed by several arrests. This provoked eight women to embark on a decisive hunger strike. At the time, a US destroyer,

⁷ The FNSI included the JIC, different socialist organisations, religious bodies and trade union federations. See Walker (1986, 30).

a tanker and a large US aircraft carrier with the paradigmatic name *Independence* were in transit in Port Louis harbour. To prevent contact between the protesters and some 5,000 US marines, officers were stationed around the public garden where the hunger strikes were carried out (Mundil and Laridon 1981, 13-14). On day nine, MLF and Lalit representatives decided to support the protesters. After adopting a political platform in accordance with the MMM programme, the group obstructed Port Louis traffic for two days before blocking the Royal Road leading up to Government House at the time of a Cabinet meeting. After being forced off the street by the police, the protesters reorganised to join the nearby group of hunger-striking Chagossian women. Violence followed again, and the protest resulted in the arrest and detention of eight women, including MLF and Lalit members, under the Public Order Act (Collen and Kistnasamy 2002b). The hunger strikes nevertheless continued. By the end of the month Mauritian authorities were pressed to approach the British High Commissioner. A message was forwarded to London saying that the MSDP leader believed the Marxist opposition was manipulating the evicted islanders, and that since their majority now sided with MMM-supporting organisations, the British lawyer's authority as representative and mediator had diminished (Chagos Islanders vs. Attorney General BIOT Commissioner 2003, Appendix, Para. 531). Twenty days into the hunger strike an agreement was reached. Mauritian authorities consented to dispatch a tripartite delegation including representatives of the government, the MMM opposition, and the evicted Chagos islanders to negotiate further compensation in the UK (Mundil and Laridon 1981).⁸ Although Chagos islanders had hoped for £8 million compensation, they were eventually offered half of this and accepted a £4 million financial compromise with the UK government after Mauritian authorities guaranteed the allocation of £1 million worth of land for a housing project in Mauritius.⁹ However, no money was transferred before the plaintiff withdrew his lawsuit from the UK courts. During my fieldwork, members of the claimant's family recalled experiencing massive pressure from within the community to accept the decision. Eventually this was settled by agreement, and the claimant withdrew his case.

The compensation agreement became formal by signatures of the two governments on 7 July 1982. But British authorities were not signing the agreement with the MLP-led government that had been in office in Mauritius since before independence. No more than one month earlier, the MMM had won a striking political victory. The General Elections of June 1982 sent the MMM to power with all 60 seats in the Legislative Assembly. In October, the check was handed over at a ceremony where Mauritius Foreign Minister proclaimed that the Islanders' sufferings had come to an end (Chagos Islanders vs. Attorney General BIOT Commissioner 2003, Appendix, Para. 581). Thus ended the first phase of the Chagos islanders' political struggles in Mauritius.

⁸ The delegation would consist of single representatives from CIOF, FNSI, and the MSDP, and two delegates each from both the MLP and the MMM (see Mundil and Laridon 1981, Appendix 4, 'Agreement').

⁹ Those initially deported from the Chagos to the Seychelles have failed to receive any compensation.

3.2.1 TRADITIONS AND PROTEST BETWEEN 1973 AND 1982

In view of the political situation in Mauritius from the early 1970s until 1982, especially the important role the MMM played in organising Chagos islanders, it is less surprising that Chagossian cultural traditions like their *sega* were not central to their protests in these years. Divided between Mauritius' far-right and the far-left political fronts, the majority of the evicted islanders were eventually organised by the latter in the style of a Cold War socialist uprising. To call upon traditions to underscore claims of cultural difference was not self-evident in this context. Bonding with Marxist inspired 'anti-ethnic' parties involved in organising a wider class-based political movement, the context offered limited room for ethnic mobilisation.

Hobsbawm notes that also revolutionary movements claim their own traditions (Hobsbawm 1983, 13). Apart from the legal case against the UK government, the islanders' means of resistance – repeated civil disobedience, public demonstrations and hunger strikes – concurred very much with those employed by the rising Marxist opposition. However, Chagos islanders would themselves now hesitate to call these protests 'traditions' – even though they are thought of with pride. This is not least because they would not clearly communicate ethno-cultural boundaries. They took place in Mauritius, and therefore do not link Chagos islanders 'culturally' to their historic homeland which is where, according to them, they developed their own distinct culture. To classify these protests as such would then be to approach traditions as 'category of analysis' only. What the evicted islanders themselves publicly and outspokenly identify as their traditions, such as their *sega*, appears not to have been practiced during this period, and it would also not have been an appropriate means of struggle within this particular context.

A more likely candidate concerns the status of Chagossian women. It was primarily women who spearheaded the public demonstrations during these early years. And over time, as noted in Chapter 2, the Chagos islanders came to acquire a reputation that this female militancy had to do with matriarchal societies in the Chagos Archipelago. Literature on Chagossians tend to locate the causes for this female militancy with the 'traditional' rather than the contemporary context of these protests. The history of few official marriages due to unequal gender distribution and absence of clerics in the Chagos Archipelago, and women's role in bringing up children of different fathers in a society with more liberal sexual norms, are more often identified as causes for this female militancy than political strategies and the growing women's liberation movement in Mauritius at the time (cf. Botte 1980, 2, 12, Madley 1985, 4, MLF 1988, 78, Curtis 2003, Pilger 2006). In fact, for the Mauritian feminist organisation Mouvement Liberasyon Fam, Chagossians came to represent a case in point too, and a number of Chagossian women were also active MLF members at the time (MLF 1988, 78). It must also be added that if understandings of a Chagossian matriarchal 'tradition' rests on the idea of sexually liberated women in the Chagos Archipelago, this idea must also have been informed by the stories and reports that were written by visiting priests and magistrates who themselves had considerable objections to what they regarded as low sexual morals. What these visitors saw as the key externalisation of uncivilised promiscuity was, in fact, the regular Chagossian *sega* party. While these male authorities were incapable of eradicating this practice in the Chagos Archipelago, it was eventually discontinued in a Mauritian Marxist-Feminist context where little room was left for the *sega*, while much room was left for the female qualities that

had been associated with it. Since these understandings connect female militancy in Mauritius with female authority in the Chagos Archipelago, this could have been accepted by Chagos islanders as one of their cultural traditions. However, most Chagossians would also hesitate to include this trait to their own list of ‘traditions’. First of all, the socio-political situation has now changed. Although women still form a slight majority at Chagossian political events, it is now men who head all Chagossian political organisations (see Illustration 10: “A man among men” below). Secondly, those practices Chagos islanders now consider their ‘traditions’ tend to suit an increasingly standardised grammar for communicating inter-ethnic or inter-national differences. Unlike cuisine, clothing, music and dance, female authority (like militancy, protest and hunger-strikes) lacks glocal common-sense connotations to ‘culture’ as well as the potential form of a cultural commodity, which has become highly important to people who struggle to be recognised as culturally distinct in today’s ethnically ordered world.

During my fieldwork many of my Chagossian informants said that they did not perform their *sega* in these early years. They were also quick to answer my questions of why. This, they pointed out, had to do with their experiences of abject poverty. *Sega* also require that participants bring along and share food and drinks, and at that time they could not afford it. This adds much to an explanation of why they did not perform *sega* during these early years. Apparently, occupation with tradition as a ‘category of practice’ requires economic security to advance a most critical level – at least on the part of a group’s political leadership. However, as a means to resist, traditions seem also responsive to wider political and ideological frameworks. As we shall see below, traditions as a ‘category of practice’ only emerged after the socialist project in Mauritius ended and the evictees were granted a limited amount of compensation in 1982. In the wake of these changes, a new political landscape emerged in which a selection of former cultural practices were identified and reintroduced *qua* traditions. Within a new culturalist framework, traditions came to replace hunger strikes and outright civil disobedience as means of protest.

3.3 SECOND PHASE: SUBMITTING THE STRUGGLE TO THE FRAMEWORK OF AN ETHNICALLY ORDERED WORLD

The future of the group in Mauritius is dependent upon a collective decision between integration as a separate group and assimilation within another group. In order for integration to occur, both the group itself and, more importantly, the boundaries of the group must be defined. [...] This] is particularly important in view of the minimal differences between many features of Creole society and corresponding features of Ilois society and in view of the small size of the Ilois community.

– Walker (1986, 47)

After the compensation package in 1982 it was widely recognised in Mauritius that the ‘realistic’ aims of the Chagos islanders had been met. Front National de Soutien aux Îlois (FNSI) regarded its *raison d’être* concluded and was disbanded on the argument that “it was high time to leave the destiny of the Ilois in their own hands.” Constituent groups became less concerned with the plight of the Chagos islanders and regrouped to engage in wider regional issues under the Komite Morisyen Losean Indien (KMLI) (KMLI report 1983, cited in Walker

1986, 30). The Mauritian government also turned in accord with their opinion, but the socialist project failed. After only nine months in government, the MMM split. Together with representatives of the coalition, former party members formed the Militant Socialist Movement (MSM) and joined government with the earlier Labour-MSDP regime. Back in opposition, a reduced MMM assisted the islanders in writing an appeal to Washington for an additional £4 million in compensation. Prime Minister Jugnauth, who had remained in his position, then commented: “It is just stupid. There is no Ilois issue any more. The Ilois have been fully compensated. [...] I have been asked in Parliament if my government will back them. I have said it is all nonsense [...] to me the matter is closed. If anyone raises the issue again, they will be acting in bad faith” (Jugnauth to Africa Magazine Sept. 1984, cited from Madley 1985, 11). According to Walker, an anthropologist conducting his fieldwork among the evicted islanders in the wake of the compensation:

the government, too, recognises that this positive discrimination is not entirely beneficial, and has now made it clear that it regards the Ilois as Mauritians [...] they will not, as a group, be treated preferentially. [...] It is hoped that this policy will stimulate integration of the Ilois into Mauritian society (Walker 1986, 37; my omissions).

A new phase in the struggles of the Chagos islanders can be identified from this point on. After local support declined with the awarding of the 1982 compensation, their political objections and protests took an ethno-performative turn. However, as already indicated in the above as well as the opening quote of this sub-chapter, this change in argumentation did not go unaided by representatives of the key academic discipline in regard to matters of culture and tradition – anthropology. Before turning to how, as a result of anthropological inquiry and examination, the *sega* of the Chagos was reintroduced as a tradition in Mauritius, it is necessary to briefly address how the 1982 compensation award came to provide a new bureaucratic structure through which exclusive Chagossian organisations would emerge.

The 1982 agreement stipulated that a trust fund board should be established. The immediate purpose of this board was to identify the receivers and arrange for the disbursement of the monies. The board would also engage in long-term planning of the mentioned housing project, and promote general social and economic welfare for the group. Thus far, the people from the Chagos islands had pejoratively been referred to as the *Ilois* (‘islander’). When the Ilois Trust Fund Board reserved this designation for the people who were born in the Chagos Archipelago, and also issued identity cards upon registration, the designation became official. 1,344 *Ilois* including children were identified and compensated in this process. With this emerged also a new and important bureaucratic structure. Since the board was also to include five elected representatives from the Chagos islanders, people identified as *Ilois* could now partake in elections to vote their representatives to the board. Hence, exclusive *Ilois* organisations started competing to represent the evicted islanders through communal elections in the period that followed.¹⁰

10 The Mauritian Parliament passed the Ilois Trust Fund Act in July 1982. In addition to 5 elected Ilois, the board included a chairman and five government appointed administrators. In 1984 the designation ‘Ilois’ was defined

Simultaneous to this bureaucratic restructuring, the evicted islanders became subject to anthropological examination for the first time. The work of Iain Walker, a scholar from the University of Edinburgh, would have significant impacts on their community. During his fieldwork, the *sega* of the Chagos, which had been discontinued for two decades by now (at most repeated on a few sporadic occasions), was then reintroduced upon his request. In his MA thesis he noted:

One incident which exemplifies the movement towards retaining disappearing traditions occurred as a result of my expressing interest in the *sega*. Ilois segas have become less frequent in Mauritius [...]. As a result of my interest a *sega* was arranged. [...] Participation was greatest on the part of the elder women; the younger members of the party were not as familiar with the routine. Several weeks later many of the women present at the *sega* formed a group with other Ilois friends and began to record segas at regular sessions (Walker 1986, 42-43).

In 1986, Walker's thesis was published by the KMLI in Mauritius. Under the heading "A Scottish scholar presents a thesis on the islanders" the same year, a Mauritian newspaper also reported on the launching of a music cassette labelled *Sega Ilois*:

Twenty years after their displacement from the Chagos, thanks to 'Komite Morisyen Losean Indien' (KMLI), the islanders could partake in the realisation of a cassette with music from the islands [...]. In an introductory note to the cassette, the KMLI underlines the importance of this work that will fill a double gap: to preserve the oral traditions of the islands and to transmit islander culture to the younger generation. Also, within the context of the OAU [Organisation of African Unity] Ministers of Culture conference, the KMLI regards this cassette to be a contribution from this Afro-Mauritian community to the regional cultural patrimony and to Mauritian patrimony in particular' (Week-End, 20 Apr. 1986).

The anthropologist's interest in the *sega* had lasting effects. During my fieldwork two decades later, the evicted islanders and their children were regularly dancing and rehearsing the Chagossian *sega*. In fact, many of them proudly explained that the *sega* was their most central tradition. However, rather than being understood as a simple contribution to regional or Mauritian patrimony, this was followed by an ethnic mobilisation of the group which came to meet with considerable local scepticism (see Star 11 Aug. 1985, L'Express 9 Apr. 1988). This scepticism was in no small part due to another significant shift to their status that was incompatible with a 'Mauritian' or 'afro-Mauritian' patrimony. Since the BIOT was already established in 1965, Chagos islanders were in fact also citizens of 'the UK and the colonies'. British officials had tried to conceal this as long as possible, and thus also the fact that they had evicted their citizens to other states (Curtis 2003, 424-5). Again encouraged by Gaëtan Duval – the populist Afro Creole MSDP leader who had opposed Mauritian decolonisation from

as "a person who has been identified as such by the Board and has been issued an identity card on or before 14 May 1984" (Lassemillante 1999, 4). The Ilois Welfare Fund replaced the Ilois Trust Fund in 1999.

Britain and later assisted Chagos islanders in their first lawsuit in the UK – some Chagos islanders in Mauritius obtained British passports in 1985.¹¹ Soon, however, their status as dual UK-Mauritian citizens was interpreted as a complication in Mauritius’ claim to sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. The 1982 compensation had proved insufficient to lift the evicted islanders out of general poverty. But when they later demanded better reimbursement and re-invoked the issue of returning to the Chagos by pursuing indigenous status before the UN and also launched new cases against the British government as UK citizens in British courts, their political efforts were often criticised in Mauritius as being anti-patriotic.¹²

In November 1988, another Mauritian newspaper reported on a *sega* performed by a group of evicted islanders who called themselves *Deracines*, meaning ‘uprooted’. The 1982 agreement had stipulated that two housing projects on the outskirts of Port Louis were to be constructed on land allocated by the Mauritian government. In both areas, Ilois community centres were to be built to promote the welfare of the local residents. When initiating the construction of these in April 1988, Prime Minister A. Jugnauth exhorted – and without irony – while laying down the community centre’s first symbolic brick: “You have to forget Diego Garcia. Forget the past. Stop dreaming and live in reality, you have the same rights as all Mauritians” (L’Express 9 Apr. 1988). For sure, constructing a community centre did not, of course, have the effect that members of that group would forget about their past – quite the contrary. When the Prime Minister returned to be present at the official inauguration of the second Ilois community centre later that year, the *Deracines* objected to his earlier call – but now the protest came in the form of a *sega* performance:

Early morning I wake up,
I go to Mr Rogers’ office.
Mr Rogers tell me I have sad news for you,
Your country has been sold for gaining Mauritian independence.¹³

The “Mr Rogers” mentioned in the song refers to the Rogers Group. Founded in 1899 as a commercial and shipping company with its headquarters in Port Louis, it is today the number-one multi-sector industrial enterprise in Mauritius. As the lyrics indicate, many Chagos islanders vividly remember how they first realised they were unable to return home after visiting Mauritius when they were refused tickets at the counter of the Rogers office in Port Louis. As this particular *sega* shows, in the period that followed the compensation, the islanders’ demonstrations took on a new, particularistic and cultural form. Replacing the civil disobedience and hunger strikes characteristic of earlier demonstrations, protests were now expressed through music and dance in a style identified as being particular to their group. Unsurprisingly, left-wing organisations with a substantial history of involvement with their struggles were unhappy with this communalist turn. Lalit representatives have critically described their political shift from this point as not being concerned with matters beyond their own community, characterising the post-compensation period as an ‘identity phase’ marked by the absence of coherent political struggle (Collen and Kistnasamy 2002b, 111).

¹¹ Chagos islanders were granted full British citizenship with the right of abode in the UK in 2002.

¹² For an elaboration on this issue, see Johannessen (2005, 68-74).

¹³ The lyrics were reproduced in Le Mauricien, 2 Nov. 1988.

In the years to come, ethno-cultural argumentation was to become more elaborate as local organisations started to compete to represent the evicted Chagos islanders at the Ilois Trust Fund Board. In Mauritius two rival organisations emerged, which pursue similar goals of better compensation and the right to return to the Chagos Archipelago, but disagree in terms of strategy, notably whether remaining neutral or aligning with Mauritius' claim to sovereignty is more fruitful. These organisations claim to be exclusively communal, although both have operated very closely with external lawyers. For two obvious reasons, both bodies have been heavily occupied with identity politics. First, at the level of the trust fund, internal support could be mobilised in favour of the respective organisations by defining and promoting cultural particularity. Such politics are similar on national and ethnic levels. As Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins point out in regard to elections on a national level:

Electoral candidates routinely construct those whose support they must garner in terms which allow their proposed course of action to be taken on by their audience as their own. That is, they all seek to maximise their appeal through constituting their audience in national terms and defining this identity so as to construe candidate (and political programme) as uniquely expressing national qualities (Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins 2004, 343-344).

Second, having the evicted islanders recognised as an authentic, distinct ethno-cultural group is a major step in the direction of acquiring attention and also positive discrimination for that group. Hence, political and financial support could also be garnered from Western NGOs and other supporters within and beyond the national arena.

3.3.1 GOING GLOBAL AND BECOMING LOCAL

Let the Chagossian people have their compensation. The Americans they think they are so powerful, but I tell you what: the strongest weapon of the world is the word. Look what they did to the natives over there in the Chagos. This is the signature of the British! The British were here in Mauritius too you know, before independence. When they left the people was on their knees. They didn't give a fuck about us. That's the signature of the British. They were in India too. I know this because I read the books. They divided the country, India – Pakistan. On the trains there: only dead people. The Chagossians are like the Maori people. Look at New Zealand. The white people are okay, but the Maoris – they are fucked! That's the signature of the British.

Alfred, Roche Bois, Mauritius 2006

The first Chagossian organisation to 'go global' was the Chagos Social Committee in Mauritius. The CSC (Mauritius) gained wide support among the evicted islanders when they proceeded to have the group recognised as autochthonous to the Chagos islands before the United Nations Working Groups on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva in the late 1990s.¹⁴ Under the paradigmatic heading "a man among men", the flyer reproduced in Illustration 10 depicts the CSC leader, somewhat deviating from the spectacular dresscode with a dark suit-jacket,

¹⁴ Mauritius' government refused to recognise the islander as indigenous in fear of losing out on the claim to sovereignty in Geneva 1998: "the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago cannot, at all, on their own refer to themselves as indigenous peoples and on that assumption claim their return to the Chagos Archipelago" (Government of Mauritius 1998).

outside the Palace of Nations during the indigenous peoples' conference in Geneva 28 July 1997. The slogan reads, "To live on our homeland: a sacred right no matter where our origins

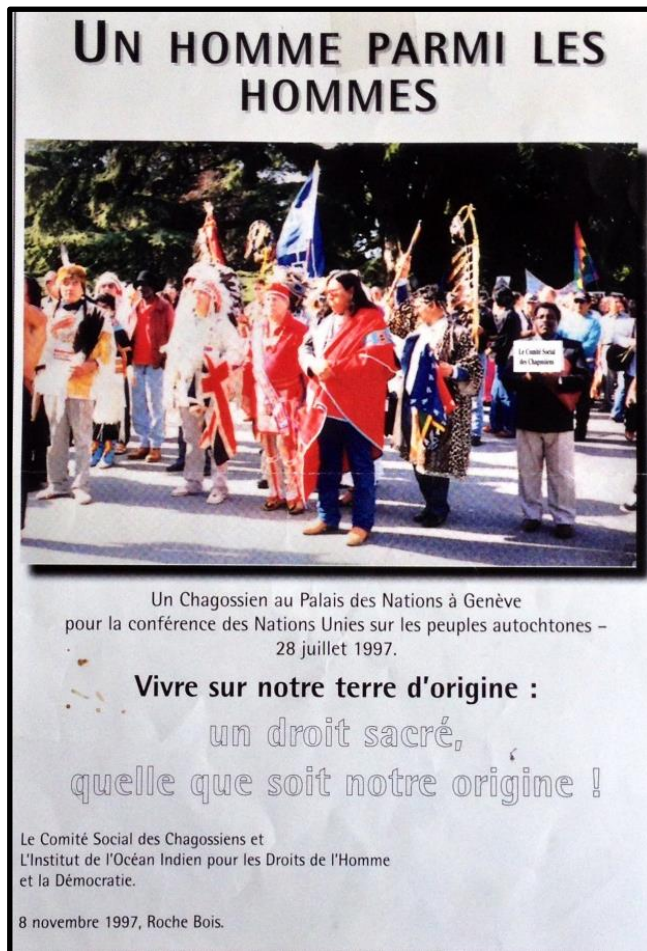


Illustration 10: "A man among men." Flyer depicting the CSC leader among other representatives of indigenous peoples outside the Palace of Nations in Geneva at the Indigenous peoples conference 28 July 1997.

are" (my translations). Assisted by a Mauritian barrister, the CSC (Mauritius) argued that although the islanders could not trace their ancestry on the islands back into the mists of time, the people shipped to the Chagos Archipelago from the late 18th century had little choice but to remain in the very remote and isolated area. Over the years, the descendant population brought the islands into cultivation for the first time, and they developed a society of their own with traditions and cultural traits including local dialects, dances, instruments, games, legends and gender relations particular to the group. These traditions, it was argued, differed significantly from comparable practices found in Mauritius (Lassemillante 1998, 1999). Furthermore, in line with working definitions of indigenous groups that stress the matter of distinct self-identification, the CSC (Mauritius) also suggested a highly welcomed change of designation for the evicted islanders. In this context, according to a text authored

by the barrister who represented the Chagos islanders in Geneva at the time, the lawyer argued:

Our humble opinion is that those who originate from the Chagos and their descendants have the right to the denomination "Chagossian" rather than "Ilois". [...] the bond to the reference territory is concealed (*occulté*). But, the land carries identity. This is one of the reasons why we say "Terre-mère" and "fils du sol". Every man has the right to his identity. The territory plays a primordial role. Chagos is the Chagossians' ancestral land [...]. The debate on identity is fundamental. We cannot treat it as of an intellectual or academic nature. Force and future is conveyed by identity. It is the right of every human being (Lassemillante 1999, 4-5; my translation and omissions).

Translated to English the term *Ilois* simply means 'islander', a designation that since long had developed into a source of social stigma rather than a matter of cultural pride in Mauritius (Walker 1986). Now the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago were grouped under a different, and potentially positive, name. As noted in the foregoing chapter, people living in the Chagos Archipelago had previously tended to identify 'home' with its particular and rather

dispersed island groups. Also, the less specific term *Ilois* did not exclude people from Mauritius' other outer islands such as Agalega. Hence, the new designation grouped them under a unifying name that identified the former inhabitants of the different Chagos islands with one single bounded place: the inaccessible groups of islands that Britain did not decolonise in 1968 or return to the Seychelles in 1976 – and these islands only. From now on the evicted Chagos islanders became widely recognised as the 'Chagossians' from the Chagos Archipelago, a designation that has become highly popular. Unlike what the term *Ilois* suggests, this has contributed to an understanding and acceptance of Chagossians as *one* people from *one* particular place. And even though that place is an archipelago made up of some 65 islets spread across some 544,000 sq. km of water, it is, as Illustration 11 shows, not seldom referred to as one single island.

Very far from aligning with local forces across ethnic lines in an attempt to restructure the political economy, representatives of the evicted population had now definitively departed the socialist framework. In Fraser's terminology they had moved from a politics of redistribution to a politics of recognition (Fraser 1995). The group was now pursuing particularistic aims through a politics of cultural recognition within what Comaroff (1996) called an 'ethnically ordered world'. To qualify for central rights that the UK government had sought to bypass at the time of the islanders' removal, earlier cultural practices from the Chagos islands were now identified as Chagossian traditions and brought forward to underscore claims of cultural difference. Most central among these practices was the Chagossian *sega*.

That the Chagossian *sega* now took on relevance is not strange. Contrary to the Seychelles, which had been populated from Mauritius but where a socialist government promoted 'creoleness' instead of 'multiculturalism' (Haring 2003, 20), ethnic identity had taken on strong relevance in Mauritius (e.g. Hookoomsing, Ludwig, and Schnepel 2009, Eriksen 1998). In this setting, the *sega* emerged as an important, but also contested, way of communicating identity and belonging on both national and ethnic levels. According to Schnepel and Schnepel: "The history of the *séga* is also, and perhaps most importantly, a history of identity construction and identity politics in which several actors pursue similar though not totally congruent, sometimes even opposed claims" (Schnepel and Schnepel 2009, 282). To interpret the *sega* as either an African, or a locally creolised, tradition is not uncontroversial in Mauritius. Mauritians who identify with African descent often trace the *sega* to Mozambique or Madagascar and complain that the government has appropriated their most central ethno-cultural markers, notably the *sega* and the Kreol language, and reframed them as first and foremost national (i.e. locally creolised) cultural expressions.¹⁵ As this group is also ascribed the paradigmatic local designation 'the Creoles', and were long officially classified as 'general population' as opposed to other ethnically/religiously defined groups in Mauritius, they often object that the state deprives them of their cultural identity. According to them, the government appropriate African cultural expressions to promote a Mauritian over-ethnic national identity, to brand Mauritius as a culturally distinct tourist destination, and also to prevent the poorer section of the population descending from the slaves from political mobilisation (see also Boswell 2006). In respect to the *sega*, this situation has given rise to what Schnepel and Schnepel call a "*pars-pro-toto-paradox*" since the "*Séga* was, and still is,

¹⁵ Mauritian Creoles and cultural markers will be further discussed in Chapter 6.



Illustration 11a: Chagossian woman at a Chagossian culture-day at Pointe aux Sables Ilois Community Centre 2004. Her T-shirt reads: "Our Unforgettable Island: Chagos Archipelago".



Illustration 11b: Chagossian man attending a speech by the CRG leader at Mauritius' airport 21 May 2006. The T-shirt reads: "Respect our island, our struggle and our right".



Illustration 11c: Chagossians entering the garden of Clarisse House, the official residence of Mauritius' Prime Minister, in Vacoas 26 Mar. 2006. Invited by the Prime Minister to a 'Get Together' before their journey to the Chagos, members of the CRG wore T-shirts reading: "One people, one island, one struggle".

Illustration 11: Chagossian political T-shirts presenting the Chagos Archipelago as a single island.
Photos: Johannessen 2004 and 2006

mainly associated with only one section of the Mauritian population, namely the so-called Creoles; there is a ‘paradox of belonging’ – of its belonging to one section of the island only and to the island as a whole” (Schnepel and Schnepel 2009, 275). This paradox, the authors argue, is also heightened by the fact that the acknowledged Creole founders and practitioners of the *sega* in Mauritius represent a rather marginalised section of the population. However ironic, the growing acceptance of the *sega* that followed its transformation into a national brand for the tourist industry has also contributed to challenge the local social stigmas of backwardness and low morals associated with the dance itself, and by extension the Creole subsection of the population with which it is most closely associated (Schnepel and Schnepel 2009).

What adds to the complexity of the *sega* in Mauritius is that the Creole category also includes a number of different subgroups, and some of them emphasise, like the state, that the *sega* is a tradition creolised into its relevant form outside of Africa or Madagascar. Like the Rodriguans, the Chagossians highlight variations in *sega* rhythm, dress, dialect and composition of musical instruments, and trace these differences to other places where descendants of slaves developed their *sega* into its distinct, and thus relevant, form (see description below). In that way, *sega* differences even work to communicate sub-ethnic boundaries connected to cultural origins both beyond the shores of Mauritius’ main island as well as Africa or Madagascar. The *sega* has thus become a widespread means to communicate cultural particularity, origin and belonging. And since their *sega* was re-introduced in the mid-1980s, this also goes for the Chagossians.

This point to a related issue that is very important. Chagossians’ responses that their *sega* was not performed in their early years in Mauritius because of the necessity to provide participants with food and drinks indicate also why the *sega* has now become such an important cultural activity. A proper Chagossian *sega* extends its musical expression. It provides a social setting in which also a range of other important cultural markers, such as traditional food, drinks and clothing particular to the Chagos islands, are consumed and put on display. Thus, the *sega* actually serves exceptionally well to promote ethnic boundaries and cultural awareness. By converting such cultural practices and *savoir-faire* into consumable commodities, financial and political support can be promoted. One can thus also argue that the *sega* has moved from expenditure to become a resource.

In accordance with these developments, the use of music to reclaim the past on behalf of an ethnically defined group has even led to the identification of a Chagossian ‘national anthem’. In 2002, the Chagossian artist Olivier Sakir, alias Ton Vié, composed a song that turned into a number-one hit in Mauritius the same year (Ton Vié 2002). Not unlike other national anthems, this song identifies Chagossians as a bounded group of people and links them to a particular land. The anthem thus becomes an important expression of – and a means for reproducing – ethnic or national identity. As Cerulo points out:

National symbols – in particular, national anthems and flags – provide perhaps the strongest, clearest statement of national identity. In essence, they serve as modern totems (in the Durkheimian sense) – signs that bear a special relationship to the nations they represent, distinguishing them from one another and reaffirming their identity boundaries (Cerulo 1993, 244).

As I will come back to below, Chagos islanders have also created their own flag, whose symbolic meanings are much related to the message of this ‘anthem’. In the song ‘Peros Vert’ (i.e. ‘Green Peros’) the singer contemplates on the fate of the uprooted people from the islands in the Chagos Archipelago. He recalls the natural abundance and the sweet life he was living on the islands in the Peros Banhos group where he was born, and to where he is unable to return. The following is an excerpt from the final lines of the song, which point to strong metaphorical imageries of being ‘uprooted’ that are very common among Chagossians today:

Sitting down we imagine all the riches we have left on our small island in the Ocean
Green Peros, its black people, our black people, we were uprooted
Birds singing, dogs barking, I lost my island
Goodbye green Peros, Goodbye Salomon, Goodbye Diego,
which I will never see again. My island.
Sun, soil, my umbilical cord. My island¹⁶

What is not self-evident in these lyrics is the reference to the singer’s umbilical cord. During my fieldwork, Chagossians explained that after women had given birth in the Chagos Archipelago, the umbilical cord was always buried in the ground. This practice has discontinued in Mauritius, but the story of this practice vividly lives on. Apparently much more important than the historical context of this practice, now Chagossians refer to this past activity to confirm and illustrate their longing and belonging to the Chagos Archipelago in a very strong metaphorical language: Like how a child still senses strong attachment to its mother after being physically detached from her upon the cutting of the umbilical cord; Chagossians consider themselves ‘uprooted’ from the soil in the Chagos Archipelago where their umbilical cords were once ‘planted’, but still feel attached to this ‘mother-land’ after they physically separated from it. The juxtaposition of the concepts ‘sun’, ‘soil’ and ‘umbilical cord’ in these lyrics also symbolically expresses that the place where Chagossians can ‘thrive’, ‘grow’ or ‘flourish’ is under the sun in this ‘green’ mother-land, ‘nurtured’ through roots and umbilical cords planted in the local soil.¹⁷

Although this song has acquired the status of a national anthem for their ethnic group, nobody would claim that ‘Peros Vert’ represents a very typical Chagossian musical tradition – which is no requirement and also seldom the practice for other national anthems. With regard to ‘Peros Vert’, the song is not a *sega*, but a *seggae* – i.e. a modern fusion of *sega* and *reggae* music styles. Since it is also performed with electronic instruments, it cannot, unlike their other traditions, be traced back to the Chagos Archipelago through the centuries. Of course, to trace cultural traditions such as the *sega* to times and places beyond the archipelago’s first settlements in the late 18th century would also be contrary to the purpose of underscoring their group’s cultural particularity. As we have seen, the *sega* has now become part of a political argument that emphasises isolated social life in the remote Chagos Archipelago during a very particular period of time. Since this is the place and times relevant for the creation of their group, their *sega* is not traced beyond the shores of the archipelago in the late 18th century.

¹⁶ Ton Vié 2002; my translation.

¹⁷ A more elaborate analysis of the metaphor of the umbilical cord is presented in chapter Chapter 5.1.

Through regular repetitions of this tradition today, their *sega* connects displaced Chagossians and their descendants culturally to their homeland during this particular period – and that is regardless of the fact that the practice was discontinued in Mauritius in the years that followed their evictions.

However, not long after the group of evicted Chagos islanders had managed to establish themselves as a culturally distinct ethnic group under the new designation ‘the Chagossians’, serious concern came to surface as to whether this group was now dying out. In short, the Chagossians now found themselves standing on the doorstep of cultural genocide.

3.3.2 DISPLACEMENT AND CULTURAL GENOCIDE

We are an uprooted people from over there in the Chagos Archipelago
We have no identity. We have no nationality. A small uprooted people living in poverty
You have used the base on Diego Garcia to destroy Afghanistan.
The Ilois people slept outside in front of the [British] embassy.
How many suns have risen, yes, but how many people have left [i.e. died]
We wanted to return, to where our umbilical cords are buried
It is time to get up, to make our voices heard, to show all our suffering for the whole world
We are not searching for gold or for diamonds
Our rights have to be respected. You stole our natal islands; you gave us bitter life in return¹⁸

Recorded in Mauritius and composed by a musician born in the Chagos Archipelago, the above lyrics are from a popular modern-style *sega* named ‘Peuple Deracine’ (i.e. ‘uprooted people’). Like the *sega* performed by the group *Deracines* in response to the Mauritian prime minister in 1988, this song is also a protest. The lyrics criticises the UK and US governments, identifies the evictions as a source of Chagossian sufferings, and calls for mobilisation on the part of their ethnic group. However, as the second line indicates, their politics of recognition has now come to involve claims of cultural genocide. These claims are not groundless, but reflect legal allegations recently brought against the US government.

In the late 1990s, classified British documents related to the Chagos islanders’ expulsions entered the public domain. How British authorities had fabricated a number of strategic lies in order to conceal that there existed a settled population in the Chagos Archipelago was subsequently exposed (e.g. Marimootoo 1997, Lalit 2002, Curtis 2003). Armed with this new evidence, the second Chagossian organisation in Mauritius, the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG), was aided by a British solicitor in launching a new court case against the UK government, and in November 2000 the British High Court ruled in their favour and quashed the 1971 ordinance that prevented Chagossians from entering the BIOT (Gifford 2004). Having their expulsions ruled unlawful and re-established their right to return, the CRG gained wide support within the Chagossian community, especially when they proceeded – although unsuccessfully – to press for compensation in UK and US courts.¹⁹ In December 2001

¹⁸ Serge Elyse (n.d.), ‘Peuple Deracine’; my translation.

¹⁹ The case was dismissed on 21 Dec. 2004 by a judge of the US Federal District Court due to the doctrines of sovereign immunity and political questions. On 16 February 2006, the case was heard before three federal judges in the Court of Appeal. Despite assurances by their lead attorney that the Chagossians were not opposing the US

a class-action suit alleging genocide, torture and forced relocation was launched against the US government. According to the US lead attorney upon a 2006 Court of Appeals hearing, “Genocide occurred when the entire community was destroyed by removing them from the islands by threats and deceit” (cited by St. Antonie, Week-End 19 Feb. 2006).²⁰

The contents of these declassified documents now fuel Chagossian claims of being denied their own identity. Not uncommon are accusations like that of a Diego Garcian elder: “They lied and said we didn’t exist [...] they lied to the United Nations, they lied to the whole world.” Additionally, stories of stigmatisation in Mauritius are frequently invoked to underscore the very same point. During my fieldwork, older Chagossians repeatedly reported how discrimination and prejudice on the part of other Mauritians forced them to under-communicate their true origin in their early years of exile. As such, numerous personal examples of discrimination continue to elucidate and amplify the understanding of being deprived of an earlier ‘real’ Chagossian identity. As they now hold dual Mauritian-British citizenship, such misrecognition is often expressed in terms of competing national statuses. According to an elder woman from the Chagos, “the government want to say I am Mauritian, but I don’t want to say that I am one. I am Chagossian, a native from Chagos – and I am not English, I don’t know how to speak English.” However, with regard to the issue of losing culture and identity, the common sense argument most frequent put forward by Chagossians today is connected directly to the issue of physical displacement. As the song quoted above opens, “We are an uprooted people from over there in the Chagos Archipelago. We have no identity,” Chagossians often hold that they have lost their real culture and real identity precisely because they have been physically separated – or ‘uprooted’ as they put it – from the islands to which they belong.²¹

This is not very dissimilar from the argument put before the UN. In fact, it must be seen as an extension of the very same ideology. Such claims of cultural genocide not only draw on this ideology. They also unveil it, as physical displacement of people becomes a direct violation of the order itself. By ‘order’ I here refer to what Liisa Malkki (1992, 1995) in her studies of exiles and refugees has identified as a widespread ‘sedentarist ideology’ – i.e. an inter-national order that takes for granted the idea of a bounded interconnection between ‘peoples’ ‘cultures’ and ‘places’. In short, this ideology rests on a system of botanical metaphors such as ‘roots’, ‘genealogical trees’, ‘repatriation’, ‘homeland’, ‘mother-/fatherland’, etc. Repeatedly externalised through ritual performances such as burials, or acts of embracing the soil upon return from lengthy journeys, these metaphors and practices come to convey an “assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 7). In other words, a presumed bounded interconnection between a place, a people and a culture, where the imagery of ‘roots’ implicates that social and cultural identity is understood as if nurtured through a particular piece of soil (Fuglerud 2001, 197). Through this widespread metaphorical imagery,

military base, the judges refused in April 2006 to overrule the executive, considering the issue a political and military question beyond the court’s jurisdiction.

²⁰ For an analysis of the Chagossian compensation case in the UK see Jeffery (2006).

²¹ There are parallels between the concepts of ‘cultural genocide’ and ‘ethnocide’ – the latter term was invented by French anthropologist G. Condominas in 1965 (Benthall 2002, 51). While Chagossians indeed regretted losing their ‘real’ identity, ethnocide was not a concept they used during my fieldwork. As this chapter shows, ethnic identity rather appears to have been strengthened (but also transformed) in Mauritius. It is likely that their choice of language is influenced by what is considered to bear legal implications.

the ideology has become deeply embedded in everyday language and is often taken for granted and accepted as ‘natural’ – not so much by scholars any more, but still very often by the people they study.

Before the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva, the CSC (Mauritius) evidently appealed to this sedentarist dogma. But also the claims to cultural genocide that were later put forward by the CRG draw on this logic. One of Malkki’s central points is that within the frame of the contemporary world’s ‘national geographic’, people living across borders challenge the ideology’s system of classification, and thus become somewhat anomalous in the established ‘national order of things’. A great number of people, who often have little else in common, thereby tend to be subsumed under general, ahistorical and depoliticised categories such as ‘refugees’ or ‘exiles’. And as such, they will receive similar kinds of ‘humanitarian’ treatment for their generalised (often presumed to be psychological) problem from ‘the international community’. With reference to Marrus (1985), Malkki argues that “territorially ‘uprooted’ people are easily seen as ‘torn loose from their culture’ (Marrus 1985, 8), because culture is itself a territorialised (and even a botanical and quasi-ecological) concept in so many contexts” (Malkki 1992, 34). If the sedentarist ideology presupposes an interconnection between people, place and culture, then physical displacement within this ideological framework becomes – *a priori* – highly problematic.

I will argue that the ideology described here is closely connected with what Comaroff (1996) termed an ‘ethnically ordered world’. I noted earlier that ethno-national mobilisation takes place within such a world order. This is very much in line with Kuper’s (1996) point that a precondition for genocide is the plural society. If genocide occurs within the frame of an ethnically ordered world, also claims to have fallen victim of cultural genocide precondition that order. This concurs well with the Chagossian example, since these claims came about soon after they had established themselves as a culturally distinct ethnic group. Moreover, that cultural genocide was caused by eviction is something very logical within this order, as it typically draws on a sedentarist ideology within which physical displacement implies cultural genocide *a priori*. This is, of course, not to say that legal claims to cultural genocide raised by displaced groups such as the Chagossians are less valid. That Chagossians have been deprived of a particular way of life is beyond question. I am concerned here with how the concept of cultural genocide relates to this particular ideology, and what implications this can have for displaced people’s understandings and practices when mobilising as ethnic groups. Whether Chagossians have suffered (cultural) genocide as defined by law is, of course, a separate issue. As the Chagossian example also clearly demonstrates, sedentarist principles are protected, and thus also confirmed, by national and international law.²² And this has real effects on people’s

²² The first draft of the UN Genocide Convention extended protection to include also political groups. This was opposed by the Soviet Bloc and was eventually excluded in its final accommodation. In that draft also ‘cultural genocide’ (defined as acts intended to bring about the destruction of language, religion and culture) was suggested criminalised. Whereas the Soviet Bloc favoured this inclusion, it was rejected by Western states and therefore abandoned (Fein 2002, 78, Kuper 1996, 61). Violations of ‘cultural genocide’ or ‘ethnocide’ do not to date bear legal implications. The concepts were nonetheless officially recognised when adopted without a vote under Article 7 of the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 26 August 1994 (UNHCR 1994). Cultural genocide can nevertheless be interpreted as a criminal act since Article 2 of the UN Genocide Convention also criminalizes acts that do not include ‘deliberate killing’, but intentionally ‘causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group’ and ‘deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part’ (UNHCR 1948).

lives and their understandings of the world they inhabit, which extend far beyond questions of legality. What I have argued here is that once having submitted their struggle to the framework of an ethnically ordered world that rests on a sedentarist ideology, and after having established ‘Chagossians’ as a distinct ethnic group by emphasis on the particularity of their cultural traditions from the Chagos Archipelago, claims to cultural genocide could follow logically, because at that point the people had already been displaced. Apparently, then, when already displaced populations like the Chagos islanders at some later point submit to these ideological frames to embark on a struggle for cultural recognition, they may quickly find themselves fighting a desperate struggle against cultural genocide. However, in that situation yet another problem arises: how to convince any audience of *post-facto* cultural genocide?

3.3.3 CATCH-22: ASSERTING CULTURAL GENOCIDE BY MEANS OF TRADITIONS

At first it may appear a paradox to mobilise a particular group through claims of having been deprived of what defines them as distinct. Chagossians nevertheless frequently voice that they have suffered the loss of culture and identity. The lament that ‘we have no identity’ surely appears a contradiction in terms, but it underlines at the same time how such claims to cultural genocide also need to be understood as a variation of ethnic politics. Encouraging a common struggle against the perpetrators of cultural genocide is, indeed, well suited for mobilising a group along ethnic principles. It is, however, important to say here that although these claims form part of a political agenda, it does not mean that ideas of losing ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ are not being felt and experienced as something highly problematic. To the evicted islanders, understandings of being part of a culture threatened to extinction connects to memories of severe deprivations that include deaths of friends and close relatives, and this is often expressed with serious regret. At the same time it is also often assumed, or recognised, that this has been the UK government’s aim ever since their evictions. As an elder Chagossian woman in Mauritius said: “The British make me very angry. They want to say that we never existed. They want that we die out here in Mauritius. But I will never forget.”

Arising in this context is the obvious complication of how to convince any audience of a *post facto* cultural genocide. Beyond reference to external authorities such as British Courts, the UN, a few colonial reports and some contemporary academic writings, it is of course extremely difficult for Chagossians themselves to demonstrate that their group once existed as a culturally distinct people but have now lost their defining criteria of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’. Not only because their powerful political opponents refuse to recognise them as such (see FCO 2007, Government of Mauritius 1998). Historical documentation is also scarce, and access to their cultural heritage is forbidden and subject to strict immigration control. Chagossian traditions have in this context come to play a crucial double role in that they communicate both cultural difference and cultural genocide. Yet the complication still remains, because to claim cultural genocide by means of traditions gives way for a classical Catch-22: On the one hand, not performing traditions can indicate cultural genocide but will not demonstrate the precondition of a distinct culture. On the other hand, performing traditions will ground their cultural particularity, but will disprove cultural genocide at the same time. So how do Chagossians tackle this dilemma?

As stated on cardboard poster exposed on the wall in the CRG office in 2006, a politics of identification is topping the organisation's political agenda. On a list below the heading 'what are our visions, what are our missions?' the first point reads: 'help all Chagossians to find back their dignity, their cultural values, their identity'. Very important in that respect, closely connected to the CRG is a group of *sega* performers named Grup Tambour Chagos (see Illustration 12). Since the *sega* was reintroduced after the initiatives of the Edinburgh University anthropologist in the mid-1980s, it has continued to be rehearsed in the very same community centres that Prime Minister Jugnauth had inaugurated with the words that the islanders should 'forget the past'. Today the Chagossian *sega* has become their most central cultural tradition, and the Grup Tambour Chagos is held to perform it in its most authentic form. The group includes a number of elderly so-called native (*natif*) Chagossian performers, and they only play with non-electronic instruments. With reference to rhythm and particular ways of beating the drum, as well as the style of female dressing, which includes traditionally knit headscarves and long white underskirts, their *sega* is said to be typical of how it used to be played on the Chagos islands before the evictions. These characteristics also distinguish their *sega* from *sega* performances by other groups in Mauritius. When performing for wider audiences, the Grup Tambour Chagos also contributes to financial and political support for the political organisation. Annual Chagossian 'culture days' have for example become very popular. Here, selected cultural practices are transformed into consumable commodities and put on display. Upon an entrance fee, the Grup Tambour Chagos performs on stage. As part of



Illustration 12: Grup Tambour Chagos performing the Sega at a Mauritian youth congress against poverty in Grand Bay 23 May 2004. The event was arranged by the Creole Socio-Cultural Movement and sponsored by a Mauritian beer producer. Photo: Johannessen 2004.

the event, traditional food and drinks are sold by women wearing headscarves knit in a manner held to be typical Chagossian, often combined with CRG T-shirts conveying political messages (see Illustration 11). At other times, the Grup Tambour Chagos perform their *sega* beyond the community centres. For instance, to raise finances and awareness in the run-up to a court hearing in the UK in December 2006, Grup Tambour Chagos toured a number of popular Mauritian tourist destinations. Alongside the *sega* performances, a recent award-winning film entitled ‘Stealing a Nation’ (Pilger 2004) that documents their history was screened in public.

Despite claims to be a well-preserved Chagossian tradition, it is no secret that the *sega* performed by the Grup Tambour Chagos is also a politicised tradition. Alongside aspects held authentic, certain recent transformations are also very apparent. First, during a performance, songs remembered from before the deportations are presented alongside an increasing number of new songs. As Jeffery has shown, the lyrics of the songs composed in the Chagos, and those made after the evictions, differ significantly in that the latter “retrospectively define the colonial Chagos Archipelago as an idyllic island paradise rather than as a complex plantation economy with both positive and negative attributes” (Jeffery 2007, 964). Lyrics composed in the post-eviction era – that is to say, after the *sega* was reintroduced in the 1980s as this chapter has shown – often portray a happy life in a peaceful and abundant Chagos Archipelago. This, as I shall return to discuss in Chapter 5, stands in stark contrast to how Chagossians portray life in Mauritius. Through such contrasts between here and there, the lyrics of more recent songs often identify parties or out-groups responsible for a contemporary situation that is much worse than before. Secondly, the binary spatio-temporal contrasts between here/now and there/then are also reflected in the performers’ costumes, as members of the Grup Tambour Chagos are fully dressed in the colours of the CRG’s political banner. Like many other flags, this banner is a typical rectangular tricolour, and it consists of three horizontal stripes. From top to bottom, the colours are orange, black and blue. The symbol is interpreted along both spatial and temporal lines: spatially, blue and orange are held to represent the bright blue waters of the lagoons and the orange sunsets and sunrises in the Chagos. Originally, the banner was designed by Chagossians migrating to Switzerland, and the black stripe crosscutting the flag initially represented a silhouette of Chagossian coral atolls. Adopted in Mauritius, which has become the political centre of the Chagossian diaspora, the colour black has changed referent. Rather than a silhouette of ‘home’, the black is referred to as *marron* – a concept with strong references to the struggle against slavery. However, although Chagossians’ ancestors were also exploited as slaves in the Chagos Archipelago, the *marron* section of this banner now refers exclusively to their situation in Mauritius after the evictions. Thus, taken together, the colours invoke two places and thereby pinpoint the central problem: the physical displacement of the people and their cultural genocide. When interpreted along temporal lines the orange line at the top refers to the deportations, as in a sunset where people were confused and prevented from seeing clearly. The black middle-section stands for manifestations, hunger strikes and police violence after arriving in Mauritius. The current phase is represented by the blue stripe and refers to change and hope after the November 2000 court victory, the increasing international recognition that followed, the awarding of full British citizenship in 2002, and, of course, the granting of the first journey to the Chagos Archipelago in March 2006. All events are recent achievements of their political organisation. The banner thus represents a complex ensemble, vested with political claims and numerous individual experiences. When performing

their songs dressed in these colours, the *sega* performances of the Grup Tambour Chagos can externalise a message of cultural genocide as well as cultural particularity.

If one takes the sedentarist ideology and the ethnically ordered world for granted, to claim cultural genocide by means of traditions appear like setting up a classical catch-22 situation that grounds the historical legitimacy the argument preconditions, but disproves it the moment it is performed in practice. Nevertheless, in asserting *post-facto* cultural genocide it seems that traditions need to be strengthened – especially in situations like this, where powerful authorities are the opponents, where historical documentations are scarce, and access to cultural heritage such as villages and gravestones is subject to strict control. Traditions may then provide the only way out of the dilemma. In the KMLI's words, traditions may 'fill the gap' and bridge the presumed 'gulf' that follows from ideas of localised cultures and physical displacement within this sedentarist order. To certain extent, the contradictions can also be overcome. As in this case, messages of cultural genocide can be incorporated to the traditional performance through, for example, lyrics or symbolic clothing. But more importantly, even where physical displacement has come to mean cultural genocide, traditions can also be understood as mobile assets, i.e. cultural practices deported to exile with native bodies – which in the Chagossian case was not far from the only thing many inhabitants brought over from the Chagos Archipelago. In this way, Chagossians can express cultural particularity through traditions while still retaining that their 'culture' and 'identity' remain confined to another place – albeit, as we shall see, not entirely without ambivalence.

A significant implication of this is that it has given rise to certain reservations and paved the way for an important division between Chagossians born in the Chagos Archipelago and the generation born outside the homeland. Chagossians accordingly refer to the former group as 'natives' (*natif*) and the latter as 'children' (*zenfant*). Although substantial efforts are made to perform traditions in proper and traditional ways, they are not performed in the Chagos Archipelago. Hence, Chagossians often regret that "it is not the same as in Chagos". In the song quoted at the beginning of this chapter, CRG leader Bancoult concluded in strong botanical metaphors "a people without a patria is like a tree without roots." In an interview from 2002 the composer of 'Peros Vert', Olivier Sakir, explained in the same metaphorical language that this was important because "a people without roots means that it will fall," and then regretted that Chagossian traditions of today are "not the real stuff":

We suffer because we are a people, with a culture and tradition which we are losing. [...] There are people that try to beat the drum and other musical instruments but it is not the real stuff. Our life was music. A worker or anybody, if he did not have anything to do, he would take a drum and beat. Everything was free. The alcohol – wine, bacca, toddy, Monpo wine (the colonial wine) was also given out free. Unfortunately, all these are disappearing. The elderly people suffer. The MBC [Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation] should show the elderly and the culture since there will be no trace left. During the independence of Mauritius, the Mauritians were feasting and drinking and dancing, whereas the Chagossians were in tears (cited in Salomon 2002).

Chagossians' rather complicated relation to this (*sega*) party of Mauritius' independence will be discussed in Chapter 6. For now, the point is that as first-hand witnesses of the lost culture,

'native' Chagossians are ascribed a certain level of authority in cultural matters. The generation born outside the archipelago is excluded from a kind of secret knowledge conceptualised in terms of 'knowing Chagos' (*Konn Chagos*), the 'real' Chagossian culture. Even a central member of the Grup Tambour Chagos put it as follows: "I don't know Chagossian culture, I only know our customs. I was only a few months old when I left Chagos". To many Chagossians today, this underlines the importance of both conserving Chagossian traditions and the urgency of Chagossian repatriation, because when the last displaced Chagossian dies, no-body who knew what Chagos *really* was like will remain, and then the true genocide – and the British government's plan – will definitively be completed.

3.4 RESISTANCE WITHOUT AND WITHIN AN ETHNICALLY ORDERED WORLD

All of a sudden, everyone got 'culture'.

– Marshall Sahlins (1999, 401)

Not only people in power employ traditions for political purposes. As the Chagossian example demonstrates, traditions are also called upon by marginalised groups who seek to change their unfavourable conditions. Cultural traditions form a widely recognised measurement to indicate cultural particularity. And in contemporary politics of cultural recognition – which according to Comaroff (1996) are characteristic of our age – people are more or less required to call upon cultural practices of the past and re-identify a relevant selection of them as 'traditions' particular to their group. To 'have' traditions that are both relevant and significantly different from the traditions of others can serve to legitimise claims of 'being' different, which is a first step to being granted positive discrimination or rights on behalf of a particular group. Traditions can thus be highly important, especially for people who possess few other resources than their own bodies. But the relevance of cultural traditions also depends on wider political frameworks. As we have seen, a set of cultural practices centred on the Chagossian *sega* became important *qua* traditions only after the group departed the socialist context to pursue a politics of recognition within the framework of an ethnically ordered world.

Marxist thinkers would undoubtedly argue that although such movements appear as protest and resistance, such cultural argumentation underscored by reference to traditions simply veil the central political and economic causes of deprivation. Fundamentally, political mobilisation along the lines of ethnicity, culture, race, etc. serves only to reconfirm these categories and the relevance they have acquired in the contemporary world. According to Comaroff "as long as social practice continues to be pursued as if ethnicity did hold the key to the structures of inequality, the protectionism of the dominant and the responses of the dominated alike serve to reproduce an ethnically ordered world" (Comaroff 1987, 320). Marxist scholars would further argue that it also reduces possibilities for a broader political movement of marginalised people, replacing this with a number of zero-sum struggles for aid and attention among the world's poor. It might then be sound to deem 'the politics of cultural recognition' like 'the invention of traditions' as political practices with conservative effects.

However, I hold that an important distinction still needs to be drawn between traditions employed to uphold an established social order and those employed as a means to resist *within* that order. Traditions often leave the impression that they were never actually invented and hence date back to the mists of time – but not always. Sometimes traditions also refer to (real or fictive) historical shifts and communicate continuity and/or change across significant changes in the past. For example, traditions invented for the sake of upholding the given social order typically celebrate the present state of liberation from earlier domination (e.g. national Independence Day celebrations) or a real or fictive historical change where the contemporary establishment is held to have defeated a detrimental and chaotic period of the past (e.g. rituals drawing on the myth of an original matriarchy in male-dominant societies). Conversely, traditions employed as means to resist must as a matter of necessity convey a story where the plot of this narrative structure is inverted. Traditions employed as a means to resist must monopolise a negative definition upon the present. Both radical and reformist social movements opting to change a contemporary situation need to conceptualise the present in negative terms. And because traditions are all about the past in the present, those employed as a means to resist may often convey contrasting (i.e. positive) historical alternatives to the contemporary situation in which they are performed. Traditions are sets of practices that through repetition “normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). As we have seen, contemporary Chagossian traditions also monopolise a ‘suitable historical past’. Dressed in the tricolour of the organisation’s political banner, the *sega* performers of the Grup Tambour Chagos sing and symbolise the story of an affluent and harmonious past existence in the Chagos Archipelago. Simultaneously, the additional black element represents the misery they identify with the present situation in Mauritius. Hence, both the past and the present are represented in these acts. As such, only certain elements of the Chagossian *sega*, such as female dressing, old songs and the way of beating the drum, claim to date back generations.

Crucial to such identity politics is presenting the group to be mobilised as victims, as challenged, threatened, discriminated against or as suffering as a marginalised group within a particular larger context. But as this chapter has shown, the larger context may change. And traditions are not always politically relevant. In this case, traditions first became relevant with the political changes in Mauritius around 1982, when the Chagossian struggle shifted from a socialist/feminist movement to an ethnic one. By stressing the difference between employing traditions to uphold a certain order, and invoking traditions as a means to resist within that order, I am not saying that the Chagossian struggles for recognition do not conservatively contribute to re-inscribe the ethnically ordered world. This struggle, including the claims of cultural genocide, not only draws on this order, but also reconfirms it. However, for subaltern groups it might even be necessary to conform to this order if only to survive as a group – or survive *per se*. Since their politics of recognition commenced in the wake of the 1982 compensation, Chagossians have submitted their political resistance to this order, and they still struggle within this wider political establishment. This surely has conservative effects, but a number of new possibilities also presented themselves to them from that point onward. Actively submitting to this order meant that they could also become particular kinds of victims. That is, victims with particular roles, stages, rights and sets of expectations that can appeal to, or provoke, others beyond their community. Whether willing to assist them in their political

endeavours, or object to their claims, these others now also take active part in performing, producing, defining and communicating Chagossians' history and heritage – often with considerable moral undertones. By actively submitting, and thus becoming 'patients' to this order, new forms of agency have emerged through a reflexive political drama unfolding in dialectic interaction with others. That is, a drama without any clear pre-defined script, but which unfolds within a particular ideological order that extend far beyond the local stage (cf. Schnepel 2000, 2006, Schnepel 2014, 36). Chagossians' political struggles have taken many forms, as we have seen, but since they submitted to this order in the mid-1980s, they could fight for their political cause through new, albeit often long established, institutions.

We shall see that one of the forms of political agency that emerged in this ideological context was pilgrimage. And when Chagossians undertook their pilgrimage in 2006, this performance also sought to establish a 'suitable historical past'. In the context of that journey, much Chagossian music was played and the participants were frequently singing. Many of my informants even explained after the journey that the most emotional moment they experienced in Chagos was when they gathered in the abandoned church in Peros Banhos and sang 'Peros Vert' (see Illustration 25). "Even the British officials who were there started to cry" some added. Repeated during this journey was also the song 'Unforgettable Land' presented in the beginning of this chapter, as was a second song composed by Chagossians for this particular occasion: 'Chagossian Liberation'. This song refers to their history of forced dispersals, but is also a political call that underlines the importance of voice and exposure to their contemporary struggle. It culminates in a hymn to the CRG leader who spearheaded their international court actions from the late 1990s, which also opened for new political negotiations that led to this very journey:

Chagossian Liberation

At sunrise mother calls out: 'Prepare, we are leaving'.
Where are we going? Destination unknown.
We were scattered, like dry leaves in the blowing wind, to different unknown destinations.
I had a younger brother in the Seychelles, a sister in Agalega, and a cousin on St. Brandon.
I myself came to Mauritius.
Uprooted from our natal soil – unconditionally. Willingly or not, Mr Englishman decided.

(...) With the courage and wisdom he [Bancoult] acquired,
a struggle for the small Chagossian people in British courts.
When the Chagossian voice calls out, people silence.
Everyone see liberation today. When the Chagossian voice calls out, people silence.
Liberation today, all people call out:
Liberation for the small Chagossian people, liberation of Olivier Bancoult.²³

Numerous reporters from Mauritius and abroad captured and recorded the voice of that 'small and scattered Chagossian people' when this song was 'called out' in Port Louis harbour on the day of their departure. It was hardly surprising that Chagossian music became important in this context, as it is very common among Chagossians to celebrate important events and political

²³ My omission and translation.

achievements with music and by dancing their *sega*. Moreover, I noted that the Chagossian *sega* has become an important way of expressing ethnic boundaries and reinforcing metaphorical ties to the homeland; and this, as we shall see, was also central to their pilgrimage in 2006. In fact, in important respects, the pilgrimage was also a way of pursuing a politics of ethnic and cultural recognition within the ideological framework this chapter has outlined. It is therefore highly interesting to note that in the context of this journey, no *sega* was performed. ‘Peros Vert’, ‘Unforgettable Land’ and ‘Chagossian Liberation’ were all composed by Chagossians – the two latter for this occasion specifically. But these songs are not *sega*.

This has to do with the incompatibility of cultural connotations that are ascribed *sega* and pilgrimage – two cultural practices, which in regard to the ethnic politics of their community otherwise have very much in common. Historically, as noted, the *sega* was suppressed, forbidden and sought abolished by the colonial authorities. Especially the Catholic Church was much opposed to what they regarded an unholy, uncivilised, promiscuous, pagan practice. By now the *sega* is more than accepted in general, but vis-à-vis the Catholic Church the *sega* still remains a dubious activity. One illustrating example is when *sega* are performed on the road. For different celebrations, but especially those connected with Easter, Chagossians rent buses to travel to Mauritius’ public beaches where they gather for picnics and dance the *Sega*. But the *sega* is also – and often much more intensely – performed inside the bus on the way back and forth (see illustration 13). However, what is interesting in respect to the connotations referred to above is that, whenever the bus passes a church, the music suddenly stops – and then they will start to play again when it is out of sight.



Illustration 13: Chagossians performing the *sega* in a bus. Photo: Johannessen 2004.

In other words, while *sega* and, as we shall see, pilgrimage serve similar political purposes within the ideological framework outlined here, these cultural performances do not go well together. Contrary to pilgrimage, the *sega* is historically associated with something unholy. Also, shame associated with its sexual overtones is still evident by the fact that Chagossians repeatedly stress that their *sega* is different since Chagossian women actually wear long white underskirts when they perform the dance. Furthermore, although Chagossian *sega* lyrics can sometimes communicate issues of suffering and hardship, the act of performing the *sega* is associated with amusement, which is very much in conflict with the piety and self-discipline associated with pilgrimage. During their pilgrimage, therefore, no *sega* was performed. Instead they performed songs with similar lyrics, but without the musical expression, feast and alcohol, which is typical of their *sega*.

3.5 ARRIVALS

While the political climate that developed soon after Mauritius gained independence prevented cultural traditions from taking on particular relevance, traditions became very central to Chagossians' political struggle for cultural recognition from the mid-1980s onward. After arriving to Mauritius, protesting Chagos islanders were integrated to a general socialist uprising where their means of protest largely concurred with strategies also employed by the Marxist opposition. Coinciding with the culmination of this socialist project, Chagos islanders achieved compensation in 1982, and, at a time of dwindling local support, submitted their struggles to the framework of an ethnically ordered world to pursue a politics of cultural recognition on increasingly global arenas. Upon the initiative of an anthropologist, discontinued cultural practices were reintroduced and performed *qua* 'traditions' to underscore claims that the group was culturally distinct. Now protests to the Mauritian and UK governments were expressed through *sega* performances. In this process, when representatives presented their case at the UN conference for indigenous peoples in the late 1990s, the evicted population became 'Chagossians'. But while establishing themselves as a culturally distinct ethnic group, they soon found themselves at the edge of cultural genocide. I have argued that where the ethnically ordered world draws on the logic of a widespread sedentarist ideology, cultural genocide follows as an *a priori* logical consequence of physical displacement. Moreover, if genocide presupposes the plural society, as Kuper (1996) argues, then also claims of suffering cultural genocide come about within the framework of an ethnically ordered world. Because Chagos islanders had already been expelled when they submitted their struggles to a political framework where cultural argumentation became relevant, this meant that cultural genocide had already taken place. Arising in that setting is the problem as to how one can convince any audience of *post-facto* cultural genocide. When faced with lack of official recognition, traditions can be one of few means of asserting that a group used to 'have' a distinct 'culture'. So in order to claim *post-facto* cultural genocide, it seems that traditions need to be strengthened. Displacement does not go well together with territorialised understandings of 'culture' and 'identity', but employing traditions to assert cultural genocide is to run into a Catch-22 situation. The former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago consolidate this

situation, which has arisen within these ideological frames, by giving their traditions new meanings that communicate both cultural genocide and cultural difference at the same time. With certain reservations, these traditions then serve to bridge the conceptual gulf that follows ideas of territorialised cultures and physical displacement as they are converted into traces or evidence of a lost – but distinct – culture, which unfolded in the Chagos Archipelago before the deportations. This, however, has consequences for how co-ethnic members born inside or outside the homeland are understood.

By exploring the discontinuation and reintroduction of traditions in the course of the Chagos islanders' political struggles, this chapter has shown how they emerged as a distinct ethnic group now widely recognised as the Chagossians. Over these years, the evicted islanders have gradually emerged as relevant political actors. A central and much appreciated result of this was their first journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. The changes in the wider political and ideological context in which these struggles have taken place point to something of great importance to the arguments I shall pursue in the next chapters: This exploration indicates that the journey in 2006 was a communal journey in the sense of a voyage undertaken by 'Chagossians' within the framework of an ethnically ordered world that draws on a sedentarist ideology. To understand this journey, this order cannot be taken for granted. As we shall see, pilgrimage, as one among many forms of mobility in the contemporary world, has taken on significant meanings *within* these ideological frames.

4 ALL ABOARD? : THE POLITICS OF THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO AND THE COMPETITION FOR CHAGOSSIAN SELF-IDENTIFICATION

The Chagossian pilgrims did not journey alone. Besides the captain and his crew, a Catholic priest and a pastor of the Community of the Evangelical Church had been invited onboard the *Mauritius Trochetia*. A Mauritian government representative as well as the UK Administrator of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) had also embarked the vessel, as had a doctor, a representative of the Seychelles National Archives and a Royal Navy cameraman who were supposed to document the journey. One could infer from this extraordinary composition of passengers that it represented a mirror-image of the journey's socio-political setting – perhaps an epitome of the politics of the Chagos Archipelago. Although these small and remote islands have escaped much public attention over the years, they form in fact nothing less than a centre of political disputes. But now, evidently, some form of agreement had been reached between British authorities, the government of Mauritius and the Chagossians. Chagossians' decades-long struggles for compensation and right to repatriation are part of those disputes, but controversies connected to their homeland include also several other parties who have their own agendas, and to them the issues of militarisation and sovereignty over these islands are particularly tense. In those respects the US government and a transnational demilitarisation movement play significant roles too. But even though these parties were also central to the realization of Chagossians' journey, none of *Mauritius Trochetia*'s cabins were reserved for their representatives. This means that the proposed epitome needs certain modifications. Any assessment of backroom diplomacies preceding the agreement for the Chagossians' pilgrimage must also consider parties that were not “on stage” during the actual event. Fortunate for this analysis, agreements are often preceded by disputes, and disputes often reveal a lot about wider socio-political settings. Precisely because of the many controversies that came to surface in the run-up to this journey, this particular case provides an exceptional vantage point to map the political waters the *Mauritius Trochetia* traversed in 2006.

To approach this field one could perhaps consider the Chagos Archipelago as a contested resource to which different parties hold strong interest, but this would be inadequate for understanding the complexities of this case. There are not only multiple parties involved, but as we shall see their interests and understandings of the Chagos Archipelago do not converge. A more fruitful first step will be to follow Eade and Sallnow's (1991) understanding of pilgrimage destinations as ‘sites of contest’ – i.e. sites that are particularly contested as pilgrims from different cults or sects not only congregate there, but also compete to monopolise meaning onto the same symbolic destinations (see Chapter 1.3). This approach can reveal a lot about the Chagossian case, but for three important reasons it must be extended to properly explain significant aspects of this particular field of conflict. First, not all parties onboard the *Mauritius Trochetia* were pilgrims. Second, not all parties central in these politics were

participating in the journey. And third, and most important, the approach at hand will not allow for an understanding of how the different external parties relate to, and seek to influence, the group that actually peregrinated to the Chagos Archipelago and the community these pilgrims represented. Another dimension must therefore also be included. Schlee points out that to name the resource is but one aspect of a conflict that never suffices to explain it, one must also consider the issue of “who sides with whom and why?” (Schlee 2004). It is in other words highly important to also understand the politics of identity formation that takes place among the subjects involved in a conflict. The related question, ‘who are the Chagos islanders?’ has been highly politicized ever since British authorities planned the depopulation of the Chagos Archipelago in the 1960s. However, a significant change has taken place since then. As demonstrated in the foregoing chapter, in the course of their post-eviction struggles Chagos islanders have emerged as relevant political actors with a relatively autonomous voice in respect to matters that concern their homeland. In this chapter I shall investigate the relativity of that ‘autonomous’ voice. Since Chagossians became relevant political actors, external parties can no longer identify and represent them to the public as they please. In that setting, a more subtle politics has emerged where external parties seek to sway Chagossian voices to their own favour. In the following I shall present case studies showing that external parties strategically seek to rework key social categories and/or cultural contents with which Chagos islanders self-identify. It appears now that Chagossian self-identification has become a bone of contention. And since multiple parties are involved, these activities take the form of a contest best described as a competition for Chagossian self-identification. Chagos islanders do not go unaffected by these efforts. As we shall see, on a socio-political level, Chagossians have split along lines of disputes most central to parties external to their group.

Before arriving at this level of analysis it will be necessary to give an outline of the politics of the Chagos Archipelago as pursued by key parties beyond their community. I shall therefore first introduce these actors and outline how their interests in the Chagos Archipelago diverge. I then move on to discuss how they, in order to further their own interests, relate to the former inhabitants of that territory. Finally I shall point out how these politics have affected the Chagossian community on a socio-political level.

4.1 *THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO AS A SITE OF CONTEST*

Beyond Chagossians’ struggles for compensation and the right to repatriation, the most significant political disputes regarding the Chagos Archipelago concern the matters of sovereignty and militarisation. Three external parties are particularly involved in these issues: 1) the British Government, 2) Mauritian authorities, and 3) a transnational demilitarisation movement now represented in Mauritius by the radical left political party Lalit. In respect to these two matters, the pronounced aims these three parties are mutually exclusive: First, the British government claims that the Chagos Archipelago belongs to the UK and also defends the US military base on Diego Garcia. Second, the Mauritian government claims that sovereignty to the Chagos Archipelago belongs to their jurisdiction, but does not oppose the US military establishment there. Third, the demilitarisation movement supports Mauritius’

claim to sovereignty over the Chagos, but wants to see the US military base closed down. A number of other issues, including access to resources in the Archipelago such as fishing rights, international trade and diplomacy, environmental protection and symbolic nationalism also form a part of what I (in lack of a more precise concept) shall here refer to as the ‘politics of the Chagos Archipelago’. These issues will be addressed in this and later chapters, but I shall emphasise here that although these issues are important to the parties involved, they do not form the clear-cut officially pronounced lines of political disagreement. In what follows I shall therefore first provide an outline to the issues of sovereignty and militarisation, and in light of this move on to present and discuss the political negotiations that led to the Chagossians’ journey in 2006. This will show how politics of the Chagos Archipelago are exercised in practice. It also reveals how power is unequally distributed among the parties involved and that there are important economic interests at stake here too, something that illustrates Mauritius’ embedded autonomy as discussed in Chapter 2, and the relevance of this to the Chagossian case.

4.1.1 SOVEREIGNTY

The Chagos Archipelago is very small in terms of dry land. Its 65 coral islands total no more than 63 sq. km, and out of this the largest island, Diego Garcia, has an area of 27 sq. km. However, according to the Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) sovereignty to these islands also include a surrounding 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). When this is deducted from the territorial borders of the archipelago’s widely scattered atolls, the total area amounts to no less than 544,000 sq. km, which is more than twice the size of the UK and about 267 times Mauritius’ main island. Both Britain and Mauritius claim sovereignty to the Chagos Archipelago and its EEZ.

The source of this dispute concerns the dismembering of the Chagos Archipelago from the colony of Mauritius in 1965, an action undertaken to make way for a joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia since a US condition with regard to this was the islands should not be subject to any form of external political influence (see Vine 2009, 76-79). At that point, Mauritius’ independence was already being discussed. A declassified UK Foreign Office Memorandum from 1964 mentions that Mauritius would probably be granted independence within few years, and also states that it would be “unacceptable to both the British and the American defence authorities 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 (UK FO Memorandum 20 Oct. 1964; cited in Vine 2009, 77). In order to keep the territory, UK officials presented the excision of the Chagos Archipelago as a condition for Mauritius’ independence. At Mauritius’ Constitutional Conference in London in 1965, British Prime Minister Wilson met with the head of the Mauritian pro-independence alliance, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, in private. And following that meeting, Ramgoolam and members of the alliance agreed to the detachment of the Chagos Archipelago from the Mauritian colony (de l’Estrac 1983).

After Mauritius’ 1982 elections, when Ramgoolam and his MPL party were defeated by the left-wing MMM (see Chapter 3), the new government issued the *Report of the Select Committee on the Excision of the Chagos Archipelago*. Ramgoolam then stated:

A request was made to me. I had to see which was better – to cede out a portion of our territory of which very few people knew, and independence. I thought that Independence was much more primordial and more important than the excision of the island which is very far from here, and which we have never visited, which we could never visit. [...] If I had to choose between independence and the ceding of Diego Garcia, I would have done again the same thing (Ramgoolam, cited in de l’Estrac 1983, 22; my omission).

In Mauritius, this agreement is often referred to as ‘blackmail’, which is in line with the Select Committee’s conclusions. Ramgoolam himself refused to do so, explaining that the excision was made in accordance with provisions of the 1895 Colonial Boundaries Act, adding that in his capacity of representing a state not yet independent from Britain there was little he could do about it (de l’Estrac 1983, cf. Boolell 1996, 27). As I shall return to below, besides the granting of independence, there were also other issues that crossed the table during these discussions.

Soon after consent from the Mauritian representatives was secured, UK authorities created the last colony of the British Empire by Royal Prerogative, i.e. through the powers of the British Monarch. By Order in Council on 8 November 1965, the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) was established. The BIOT first comprised of the Chagos Archipelago, the Farquhar Islands, the Aldabra Group and the islands of Desroches (see map in Illustration 1). The three latter atolls had until then been part of the British colony of the Seychelles. A decade later, they were receded to the Seychelles upon its granting of independence in 1976 in order to boost the image of Britain’s favourite presidential candidate, J. Mancham (Houbert 1981, 84 fn 1). Following a Mauritian general election, where as many as 44 per cent actually voted for the MSDP and thus against independence, Mauritius – excluding the Chagos Archipelago – was declared independent from Britain on 12 March 1968.

Mauritius does not recognize the BIOT today. However, this was not the MLP government’s official stance in the years that followed Mauritian independence, which in no small part had to do with the connections between political elites in Mauritius and the UK. If J. Mancham had been Britain’s favourite in the Seychelles, it was the MLP’s moderate leader Seewoosagur Ramgoolam – or Sir Ramgoolam, as he was knighted five months before the excision of the Chagos Archipelago – who was Britain’s desired candidate to take over after decolonisation in Mauritius. After independence, the Chagos issue was much more a political case in point for the rising left-wing opposition who then rallied with militant factions of the Chagos islanders (cf. Chapter 3). As late as by the end of June 1980, the MLP government confirmed that the Chagos Archipelago was British territory. At that point the official map of independent Mauritius was, with the help of the British Defence Ministry, redrawn so as to exclude the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius’ state territory. In response to objections put forward by the opposition, Mauritius’ Foreign Affairs Minister Harold Walter then exclaimed, “Diego is legally British. There is no getting away from it. This is a fact that cannot be denied. No amount of red ink can make it become blue. In any case, I am not in the hurry to see the Americans go” (Le Mauricien 27 June 1980, cited in Houbert 1981, 84-5 fn 7). In a press

conference the next day, Ramgoolam reiterated that they had ceded Diego Garcia to the British with “our consent in 1965” (cited in Boolell 1996, 29).

At this point, the MLP headed government was becoming increasingly split over the sovereignty issue, and would, within few months, change their official stance on this matter. Early next month, on 4 July 1980, the OAU called for the unconditional return of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius and demilitarisation of Diego Garcia (Huth and Allee 2002, 388-9). When Mauritius’ Foreign Affairs Minister Walter returned from the OAU meeting, the only thing clear about the red and blue ink on the white map was that the colours resembled to those on the Union Jack, which had been lowered on 12 March some 12 years ago: “Diego belongs to Mauritius, there is no disagreement about that...” (Le Mauricien, 10 July 1980; cited in Houbert 1981, 84-5 fn 7), he stated. Sir Ramgoolam was then meeting with UK Prime Minister Thatcher in London. Following these talks, Thatcher replied to the House of Commons on 11 July 1980:

When the Mauritius Council of Ministers agreed in 1965 to the detachment of the Chagos Islands to form part of British Indian Ocean Territory, it was announced that these would be available for the construction of defence facilities and that, in the event of these islands no longer being required for defence purposes, they should revert to Mauritius. This remains the policy of Her Majesty’s Government (House of Commons debates 1980; quoted in de l’Estrac 1983, 25).

Already during the 1965 constitutional talks, Ramgoolam was assured that the islands should be reverted when they were no longer needed. This still remains the British stance on the matter. When Ramgoolam returned to Mauritius a week after his meeting with Thatcher, he mixed up Minister Walter’s ink again when saying, “Great Britain has sovereignty on Diego” (L’Express 17 July 1980; cited in Houbert 1981, 84-5 fn 7). But Mauritius’ official stance would soon change again, and this time permanently. In October that year, Ramgoolam raised the issue of sovereignty in a speech to the 25th UN General Assembly:

It is necessary for me to emphasise that Mauritius, being in the middle of the Indian Ocean, has already at the last meeting of the Organisation of African Unity reaffirmed its claim on Diego Garcia and the Prime Minister of Great Britain in a parliamentary statement has made it known that it will revert to Mauritius when it is no more required for global defence of the west. Our sovereignty having been accepted, we should go farther than that and disband the British Indian Ocean Territory and allow Mauritius to come into its natural heritage as before its independence (Ramgoolam 1980, in Bradley 1999, 87-88).

Successive Mauritian governments have since this statement claimed sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, arguing that the dismemberment was unlawful. This is grounded in two arguments:

Firstly, leaders of the pro-independence delegation to London in 1965 claimed they were misled in the sense that they were only informed of a ‘communication centre’ for maritime shipping and were left in the dark with regard to Britain’s intentions to use Diego Garcia to

construct a US military facility there (Boolell 1996, 27-9). Accordingly, Sir Ramgoolam stated to the Select Committee in the early 1980s that he was never made aware that the USA was in the deal or that the islands would be used for defence purposes (de l'Estrac 1983, 10, 26). The Select Committee however concluded that Ramgoolam must have known about this at the time (de l'Estrac 1983, 35-7). Instead, the Select Committee stressed that it is the 'blackmail' element involved in the independence deal, and not the issue of unawareness on the part of the Mauritian ministers who agreed to it, that puts the legality of the excision into question (de l'Estrac 1983, 35-7).

Whether or not Ramgoolam was aware of this already in 1965 remains a highly controversial question in Mauritius, and, as we shall see below, MLP representatives continue to defend Ramgoolam's position today. In respect to this controversy it is important to note that the Select Committee was chaired and issued by the MLP's rival political party, the MMM, soon after they came to power in 1982. To close down the US base on Diego Garcia and regain sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago had always been central political aims of that Marxist inspired party (cf. Chapter 3). Mauritians therefore had reasons to be sceptical about some of the Select Committee's conclusions. After all, this was about political rivalries too. For the MMM the Chagos issue demonstrated how the MLP's achievement of independence was entangled in shady trade and compensation agreements that both ignored the fate of the Chagos islanders and compromised Mauritian territorial sovereignty. No doubt, voicing these aspects of Mauritius' independence should prevent the elevation Ramgoolam to national hero and father of the nation as the MLP's propaganda apparatus would have wanted to have it. Still today, the MMM is accused of invoking the Chagos issue to criticise the MLP while in opposition, while making few constructive steps whilst in power (e.g. Modeliar 2010). Nonetheless, official files declassified in the late 1990s and later published as a serial by journalist H. Marimootoo in Mauritian newspaper *Week-End* (Marimootoo 1997) do confirm central findings of the Select Committee's report (see Ah-vee 2002, 126-7). In any case, as PM Thatcher's statement above demonstrates, also this argument for retrocession is repudiated by the UK who considers the independence agreement from 1965 to be valid.

Secondly, Mauritian authorities also argue historically. They hold that when Mauritius was ceded from France to become a British colony under the Treaty of Paris in 1814, the Chagos Archipelago was already a dependency of Mauritius administered from the main island. From this point Mauritius, including the Chagos Archipelago, became part of a new British colony (de l'Estrac 1991). The excision of the Chagos Archipelago in 1965 therefore contradicts the UN Declaration 1514 (XV) on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples of 1960, which according to Paragraph 6 states that "Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations" (UN 1960).

New ink was accordingly added to Mauritius' political map when the state became a Republic within the British Commonwealth in 1992. The Chagos Archipelago was then explicitly included as Mauritian territory to the amended constitution, which states that Mauritius includes "the islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, Tromelin, Cargados Carajos and the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia and any other island comprised in the State of Mauritius" (Constitution of Mauritius 1992, Chapter XI – Miscellaneous). Mauritius clearly enjoys far wider international support than the UK for their claim to the Chagos

Archipelago, but the government (including their vast body of supporters) lacks the power to do much about it. Already a month after the creation of the BIOT in 1965, the UN General Assembly resolution 2066 (XX) instructed Britain “to take no action which would dismember the territory of Mauritius and to violate its territorial integrity” (UN 1965). The necessity for retrocession was reiterated by UN Resolution 2232 (XXI) and Resolution 2357 (XXII) in 1966 and 1967 (UN 1966, 1967). As already noted, in 1980 the OAU called for a return of the Chagos to Mauritius, something also the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) did in 1983 (de l’Estrac 1991, 270). Mauritius claimed the EEZ around the Chagos Archipelago since 1984, and Mauritius’ jurisdiction over this area has been recognised by the EU since 1989 (Sand 2009b, 9, 66). In fact, no state other than the UK and the USA recognises the BIOT. Even the UK, by assuring to ‘revert’ the islands to Mauritius when no longer needed, implicitly acknowledges Mauritius’ historical claim to the Chagos Archipelago.

On their part, the US government considers sovereignty to the Chagos Archipelago a matter beyond their concern. While they indeed represent the *raison d’etre* for the whole establishment, US authorities have entered a highly convenient defence agreement with the UK for the use of Diego Garcia, which enables them to use the area without needing to relate to this question at all. Accordingly, US authorities consider the issue of sovereignty a matter of dispute between Mauritius and the UK only (Sand 2009b, 9).

Despite Mauritius’ wide international support it is the UK – if not the USA, as Vine (2009, 7) suggests – who exercise *de facto* control over the Chagos Archipelago. At the time of my fieldwork, Mauritius had no permanent presence in the area, and was left with little more than assurances that the UK and the US shall keep their original promises to not exploit natural resources like oil, minerals and fishing around the Chagos Archipelago (de l’Estrac 1983). In 1994 however, the British-Mauritian Fisheries Commission (BMFC) was established to promote, facilitate and coordinate conservation and scientific research in the waters of the Chagos Archipelago. Mauritius thus became part of the management of the territory, at least on paper, but of course the official statement on this establishment totally excluded the issue of sovereignty. Although lacking international recognition, the Chagos Archipelago is a British colony with official laws and a complete bureaucratic structure: The BIOT’s Chief of State is the British Queen. An official BIOT Commissioner acts as Head of Government, who, together with an official BIOT Administrator, is appointed by the Monarch. These officials are all resident in the UK and not the BIOT. The person representing Britain in the BIOT is the Commanding Officer of some 50 British Marines who are stationed at Diego Garcia.¹ UK officials police the island and also operate the *Pacific Marlin* – a UK vessel patrolling the waters around the archipelago. Costs of running this vessel are partly covered by British economic undertakings within the area, which at the time of my fieldwork included issuing stamps and fishing licenses within BIOT’s 200-mile EEZ that was established in 1991.² Hence, preservation of fishing rights to Mauritius in these waters, as assured by UK officials to the

¹ Online source: www.fco.gov.uk, accessed 10 Dec. 2009.

² According to FCO Parliamentary Under-Secretary Rammel, in 2003 the value of BIOT issued fishing licenses amounted to £564,431 (Online source: UK Government official website: www.publications.parliament.uk, accessed 13 Apr. 2007). This may have been a low-income year. According to The Times, 22 Jan. 2010, the Foreign Office annually earns between £700,000 and £1 million from licences to fish within BIOT’s 200-mile EEZ. Since the last licence expired in 2013 fishing is no longer allowed with the BIOT’s MPA.

Mauritian delegation to London in 1965, was not respected. Fishing vessels with licences from Mauritius has been arrested there.³ Since the early 1990s, the contract to manage fishing in these waters has been held by the Marine Resource Assessment Group Ltd (MRAG) – a company which belongs to the UK Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser and his wife (Pope, *The Times*, 22 Jan. 2010). As I shall return to later, fishing within this zone has recently been criminalised in order to prevent Chagossian repatriation.

4.1.2 MILITARISATION

Recognition of the geo-strategic position of Diego Garcia can be traced to the late 18th century (Forsberg 2005). The first initiative to fortify the islands was undertaken by British officials who planned to develop the islands into a strategic refuelling station on the India route in the mid-1780s (cf. Chapter 2). Also for strategic reasons, an exception to the general rule was made three decades later when the colony of Mauritius passed from the French to the British. Under the Treaty of Paris in 1814 most French colonial possessions were returned to France, except those of considerable strategic importance like Malta, Tobago, St Lucia and Mauritius – including the Seychelles and the Chagos Archipelago. Mauritius neighbouring island, Reunion, was returned to France, to which it still belongs. This selection of strategic islands would then remain British to prevent French power from re-emerging. As described in Chapter 2, although Diego Garcia was visited by major German and British warships, the First World War had little impact on the Chagos Archipelago. During the Second World War the British RAF Coastal Command stationed a few flying boats on Diego Garcia to seek and destroy enemy vessels and submarines in the area (Loader and Donaldson 2006). Hence, the military importance of these islands gradually increased in the 20th century, but it was first during the Cold War that the Chagos Archipelago became truly important in such geo-political terms. But from then on it also acquired major significance. The following therefore focuses on the period after 1945.

The Indian Ocean had been dominated by Britain for about a century, but after WW2 the British Empire was crumbling. This triggered speculations driven by Cold War ideologies about a regional ‘power vacuum’ (Larus 1982, 46), something that legitimised US expansion into the Indian Ocean and offered justification for the US base on Diego Garcia (Todd and ‘Raven’ 1984). An increasing concern to Western powers was to prevent the Soviet Union from throttling down movements of the West by interfering with oil-supplies in the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, Iran received US support to stall Soviet influence in Iraq in the 1960s. (Vivekanandan 1981). After 1945, the USA took over Britain’s position as hegemonic Western power in the region. British presence remained pertinent, but mainly as a close political ally of the USA and provider of colonised land for the US military. As we have seen, when Britain in 1968 announced the withdrawal of all UK forces east of Suez by 1971 (except Hong Kong), arrangements had already been made to develop Diego Garcia into a joint UK-US military facility.

US interest in Diego Garcia related to military strategy developed at the Pentagon in the 1950s known as the ‘Strategic Island Concept’ (see Vine 2009). In the decolonisation

³Mauritius Parliamentary Debate No. 33, 20 Nov. 2007 (Online source: <http://www.gov.mu/portal/goc/assemblysite/file/orans20nov07.pdf>, accessed 4 Feb. 2013).

context US authorities worried that Western influence and control in overseas areas of vital economic importance would no longer be secure. They therefore adopted a policy to procure real estate in the form of strategic islands before jurisdiction were ceded to new independent governments. To this US policy it was central to ensure a minimum degree of external influence. Optimal were therefore unpopulated islands where the UN agreements on self-determination would not apply, and where no new (or soon-to-become) independent state could either interfere or play off Cold War superpowers against one another (Vine 2009, 41-49, 78). As part of an extensive global network of US bases, strategic islands could serve as support facilities and forward operation stations for military forces deployed closer to zones of armed conflict. Diego Garcia was ideally suited from these geo-political perspectives: it was strategically located between East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Indonesia, and the V-shaped atoll made a perfect maritime harbour right in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Also, the Chagos Archipelago did not host a very large population (see Chapter 2). At most 2,000 people had a history of living on these remote islands, and up to the 1960s few would have heard about them. Being also poor and illiterate they possessed few means to object or gain public attention if they would oppose being removed. Moreover, as Sir Ramgoolam's quote above reveals, both the islanders and the lands they lived on were of little importance to Mauritius' political elite. Hence, an agreement with the British colonial power to detach Diego Garcia and the surrounding islands from Mauritius prior to granting its independence was not beyond reach.

After surveying the island in 1957 and later, US officials settled for Diego Garcia during a secret meeting with their British counterparts in London in 1964 (Pilger 2006, 22-3; Sand 2009b, 2). Following the creation of the BIOT in 1965, UK and US representatives signed a secret defence agreement in 1966 that guaranteed the US a 50-year 'lease' of Diego Garcia (plus a 20-year possible extension). In return, the UK government received \$ 14 million, disguised as 'research and development costs' in connection with a Polaris nuclear weapons system they were purchasing from the US for British submarines. Neither the British Parliament, nor the US Congress, was notified of this. Subsequently the UK government bought up and ran down all copra industries on the Chagos islands, and by 1973 they had systematically expelled the islands' total population to Mauritius and the Seychelles (Winchester 1985, 41, Vine 2009, 7).

Construction of US military facilities on Diego Garcia started early 1971 with the setting up of a communications station. Since then, the base has continuously expanded in line with changes in Western interpretations of the global and regional political climate – especially the Middle East. At the time of the oil crises in 1973, the interim airfield on the island was substantially extended and a \$6,1 million project was initiated to dredge the lagoon and develop a harbour for larger vessels (Harris 2003). In 1979 an uprising ousted the Iranian Shah. As the CIA and MI6 had assisted the pro-western royal dictator in coming to power because his predecessor had nationalised Iran oil industries once owned and controlled by the AIOC (later British Petroleum) in 1951, the 1979 uprising also targeted US-installations in Iran and several staff members of the US-embassy were taken hostage. US helicopters used for a failed mission to free these hostages came from Diego Garcia. Following these severe developments in the political constellations of the Middle East, the USA was to take a more proactive military role. Facilities on Diego Garcia were relatively close and were succinctly expanded to provide

support for pre-positioned ships with critical supplies. Quoting from an official US navy website that is no longer available online, *GlobalSecurity.org* and *Military.com* write that after the overthrow of the Shah “Diego Garcia saw the most dramatic build-up of any location since the Vietnam War era”.⁴ According to them, a \$500 million construction program was then initiated, and upon its completion in 1986 Diego Garcia was fully operational.

The Soviet threat had long served to legitimise construction and expansion of the US base on Diego Garcia, but the collapse of the Soviet Union did not change this pattern of US military expansion. Toward the end of the 1980s a \$100 million contract for dredging the Diego Garcia basin was advertised (Harris 2003). Evidently, the end of the Cold War did not eradicate Western concerns for securing Middle East oil supplies. In 1990, Iraq invaded the coastal oil-state of Kuwait.⁵ When predominantly US forces (backed by the UN and financed by Saudi Arabia) commenced to drive out Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the base on Diego Garcia underwent the most intense operational period in its history. Population doubled almost overnight and base-wide workload increased from 300 to 2,000 per cent over peacetime levels. According to *GlobalSecurity.org*, during ‘Operation Desert Storm’ in 1991 Diego Garcia was the only US navy base that launched offensive air strikes. By the turn of the millennium, when a court action against the UK government looked promising in the sense that Chagossians’ right of abode in the Chagos Archipelago might be re-established, a secret letter was sent from the US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, E. Newsom, to the Director for the Americas at Britain’s Foreign Office. Stressing the importance of Diego Garcia as a US military base, Newsom’s letter also revealed US plans for extending the base further:

In carrying out our defence and security responsibilities in the Arabian Gulf, the Middle East, south Asia and east Africa, Diego Garcia represents for us an all but indispensable platform. For this reason, in addition to extensive naval requirements, the USG is seeking the permission of your government to develop the island as a forward operating location for expeditionary air force operations — one of only four such locations worldwide. [...] as resources for defence diminish in other areas, the centrality of the islands for ensuring US and British security interests will only increase (Newsom 2000; my omission).

The importance of Diego Garcia to the US did certainly not decrease after next year’s attacks on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001. Putting this in perspective, *GlobalSecurity.org* reported that during the subsequent US-led War on Terror “aircraft at Diego Garcia dropped more ordnance on Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan than any other unit”.⁶

⁴ Sources: *GlobalSecurity.org*: www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/diego-garcia.htm, accessed 1 Feb. 2010; *Military.org*: http://benefits.military.com/misc/installations/Base_Content.jsp?id=930, accessed 1 Feb. 2010. The US official website is available at <http://www.cnmc.navy.mil/DiegoGarcia/index.htm>, but it is far less informative than the previous official US website: www.dg.navy.mil, accessed 8 Sept. 2006.

⁵ Iraq was backed by the West during the eight-year war against Iran after the revolution. Western support to the Hussein regime changed when Iraq invaded the neighbouring coastal Persian Gulf oil-state of Kuwait, which also borders to Saudi Arabia, and which was granted independence by Britain in 1961.

⁶ Online source: www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/diego-garcia.htm, accessed 1 Feb. 2010.

Diego Garcia now ranks among the US' most important overseas military bases. It is strategically located in the centre of the Indian Ocean and plays key roles as a satellite tracking station, a naval support facility for US military units operating in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. It provides US military with an extensive airfield for heavy long-range military aircrafts. On aerial photographs Diego Garcia resembles a footprint, which explains the militarised island's paradigmatic US nickname 'Footprint of Freedom'. All military facilities are located north on the western arm of the V-shaped atoll, which encloses a dredged lagoon large enough to accommodate an aircraft carrier force of 30 ships and nuclear submarines (see Illustration 5). The 3,7 km long runway is the world's longest slip-form-paved airfield built on crushed coral. From here, heavy B-2 and B-52 bombers capable of carrying nuclear warheads have attacked targets in the Middle East. Diego Garcia normally houses some 3,250 people. Beside some 50 British troops, around 1,700 are US military personnel. The remaining 1,500 are third-country civilian contractors mainly from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Mauritius, but until 2006 no Chagossian was hired as contractor on the US base. At peak periods the resident population on Diego Garcia may reach 6,000 (Sand 2009b, 37). This is more than three times as many people as ever could have lived in the entire archipelago before Chagossians were evicted.

The US-UK military installation on Diego Garcia has met considerable opposition over the years, starting when parties around the Indian Ocean experienced the Cold War weapons race and the nuclear threat entering their region. One side of this was the risks connected to the increase of explosives in the region, but serious concerns were also expressed that foreign powers were likely to get involved in domestic affairs in the ocean's littoral countries to secure strategic harbours and critical supplies. Hence, militarisation therefore also meant regional intra- and inter-state instability. Moreover, newly independent states in the region were also particularly vulnerable to interruption of sea-going trade. As in Mauritius, the economies that had developed during colonial rule depended heavily on imports of necessary basic supplies, which again depended financially on their export-dominated cash crop economies. This meant that any interruption to their shipping and trading links could prove devastating (Copson 1977). For these reasons independent littoral and hinterland states sought to multi-lateralize the issue of Indian Ocean militarisation by appealing to the UN, the OAU and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).⁷

Accordingly, during a NAM meeting in Lusaka in 1970 the Ceylon representative suggested the Indian Ocean to be declared a 'Zone of Peace', a proposal which was brought before the UN 26th General Assembly the following year. On 16 December 1971 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 2832 (XXVI) declaring "the Indian Ocean, within limits to be determined, together with the airspace above and the ocean floor subjacent thereto, is hereby designated for all times as a zone of peace" (UN 1971). The resolution called upon the great powers to eliminate from the Indian Ocean all bases, military installations, logistical supply facilities, nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. To realise these objectives, the General Assembly established an Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, and a final document was adopted without a vote in 1979. Further support was ensured the next year when

⁷ The NAM was founded in 1955 and was during the Cold War an organization comprised of states not formally aligned with either of the two power blocks.

the OAU passed the above mentioned resolution in 1980, which not only stated that the Chagos should be receded to Mauritius, but also that militarisation of Diego Garcia was a threat to Africa and the Indian Ocean. In 1982 the British Labour Party also passed a motion to denuclearise the BIOT (Angwawe 2001, 38-9, Sand 2008, 2009b, 37-8).

The multilateral pressure did evidently not stall US military expansions on Diego Garcia. According to Kumar (1984), the implementation of the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace was unrealistic in terms of the overall political context. More to the point, perhaps, it was never actually taken serious by the great powers. With the notable exception of the Soviet Union, which in 1982 undertook a commitment to use every opportunity to realize the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, central Western powers like the US, UK and France were far from enthusiastic. Regarding the Soviet attitude, it must also be added that by this time all central Soviet cities were located within the range of US submarine-based nuclear missiles deployed in the Arabian Sea (Copson 1977). Also, political tensions between India and China complicated the nuclear free Peace Zone project at the same time as Indira Gandhi declared the Non-Aligned movement as “history’s biggest peace movement” (Gandhi 1983). Not even the end of the Cold War favoured the implementation of an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace. Quite to the contrary, in 1989 key states including the US, Britain and France withdrew from the UN Ad-Hoc Committee on the argument that because superpower rivalry had diminished there was no longer any justification for the Peace Zone or the committee promoting it. The Ad-Hoc Committee continued to meet, but the USA has since objected to its very existence (Sand 2009b, 38, Subron 2002, 88-9).

New steps in the direction of disarming the region were initiated through the Pelindaba Treaty for a Nuclear Arms-Free Africa in 1996, which prohibits the stationing of nuclear explosive devices within the territory of application. Thirteen years later the agreement entered into force in 2009. The treaty seem to include the BIOT, but a footnote specifying that these islands appear “without prejudice to the question of sovereignty” has since been interpreted by the USA, France and the UK as to exclude this area from the treaty (Sand 2009a, b, 38-41, Subron 2002, 95-6). The treaty does also not prohibit visits or transits by foreign nuclear-armed ships and aircrafts, something that according to Sand (2009b, 39) appears to be regarded as ‘normal use’ of the US facility, which not even requires UK approval.

Beyond these inter-national bodies, demilitarisation is also a key concern to a growing trans-national peace movement. Soon after the US invasion of Iraq, a number of transnational NGOs, political organisations and parties met at an anti-war meeting in Jakarta in May 2003 to discuss the existence of some 1,000 US and 200 European military bases on foreign territories worldwide.⁸ Participants arrived at an understanding that such military facilities had severe, but also comparable, consequences on the local level and that numerous people worldwide engaged in very similar struggles to counter such armed foreign occupation. To facilitate cooperation and turn these local struggles into a global movement, steps were taken to promote a transnational network of anti-war campaigners and peace organizations. They also set out to define the network’s means and agenda through active participation in a series of

⁸ See Irwing, Reyes and Zeijden (2007) and Vine (2009) for maps and analysis of overseas US military bases.

Social Forums.⁹ What came to be known as the NO-Bases Network, or the International Network for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases, took off at the 2004 World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai in India. It has since developed into a global network of organizations, national and international coalitions, academics and political parties. Among the network's founders was the Mauritian left-wing party Lalit. As we have seen in Chapter 3 Lalit has a long history of supporting the Chagos islanders, and, as I will come back to below, they were also followed by Chagossian representatives to the WSF in Mumbai in 2004. But the party of course also has its own agenda. The NO-Bases Network was officially launched with their first international conference in Ecuador in 2007, and now operates through email exchanges, a common website, active participation in World- and regional Social Forums, and by organizing international conferences on the subject.¹⁰ On the occasion of the network's first global conference in 2007 the booklet *Outposts of Empire: The case against foreign military bases* was published online by the Transnational Institute (TNI) (Irving, Zeijden, and Reyes 2007).¹¹ The underlying aim of the NO-Bases Network is a that although "it remains important to strengthen each individual campaign against any foreign military base, it is time to challenge the whole structure of bases globally" (Irving, Zeijden, and Reyes 2007, 9).

With emphasis on the politicised issues of sovereignty and militarisation, the above three subchapters have introduced the central actors involved in what I have called 'the politics of the Chagos Archipelago' and outlined their pronounced lines of dispute. As noted, these matters are more complex than the pronounced lines of dispute suggest – sometimes even contradictory. Having outlined the central disagreements between these actors, it is now possible to move on to present the case of the negotiations that led to the Chagossians' journey in 2006. This will illustrate much of the complexities of this field, including the unequal distribution of power between the different parties, limits of cooperation, and also how the post-colonial economy plays a central part in this.

4.2 *NEGOTIATING A JOURNEY TO THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO*

As detailed in the foregoing chapter, the history of Chagossian protest in Mauritius dates back to the time and place of their arrival. In 1974 already they petitioned the UK government for land, housing and employment in Mauritius and asked the UK government for the first time to be allowed to visit the Chagos islands to tend the churches and graves of their ancestors.¹² As is also at the core of investigation in this thesis, this was first facilitated some three decades

⁹ According to their website (www.no-bases.org), representatives of the NO-Bases network have been actively involved in the following Social Forums: European Social Forum in Paris 2003 and London 2004, Americas Social Forum Ecuador 2004, World Social Forum India 2004, Mediterranean Social Forum Spain 2005, World Social Forum Porto Algere, Brazil, 2005.

¹⁰ The official website is available at www.no-bases.org, accessed 5 Oct. 2009.

¹¹ The TNI (founded in 1974) was a central actor in the anti-Vietnam War movement in the USA. TNI now represents an international network of activist-scholars dedicated to critical analyses of global issues, aiming at "providing intellectual support to movements concerned to steer the world in a democratic, equitable and environmentally sustainable direction" (Irving, Reyes and Zeijden 2007, 50). The booklet is available at TNI's official website: <http://www.tni.org/briefing/outposts-empire>, accessed 3 Jan. 2010.

¹² Source: Chagos Islanders vs. Attorney General BIOT Commissioner 2003, Appendix, Para. 406.

later. A key obstacle has long since been that to enter and reside in the Chagos Archipelago without special permission from the UK was turned into a criminal offence with the BIOT Immigration Ordinance of 1971. But in November 2000, this first obstacle was successfully overcome as the Mauritius based organisation, the CRG, won a legal case in the British High Court, which ruled the 1971 Immigration Ordinance unlawful and quashed it. Apparently Chagossians were then no longer prevented from going to the Chagos Archipelago.

US officials had warned British authorities about such a legal outcome. It was around five months prior to this landmark court ruling that US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Newsom sent his letter to the Director for the Americas at British Foreign Office and spelled out the importance of the US military base on Diego Garcia (Newsom 2000). In this letter he also expressed US reservations with regard to a possible Chagossian return to the Chagos Archipelago by pointing to potential terrorist actions and hence suggested that to resettle these islands “would significantly degrade the strategic importance of a vital military asset unique in the region”. He outlined in detail:

If a resident population were established on the Chagos Archipelago, that could well imperil Diego Garcia’s present advantage as a base from which it is possible to conduct sensitive military operations that are important for the security of both our governments but that, for reasons of security, cannot be staged from bases near population centres [...]. Settlements on the outer islands would also immediately raise the alarming prospect of the introduction of surveillance, monitoring and electronic jamming devices that have the potential to disrupt, compromise or place at risk vital military operations (Newsom 2000).

After the ruling, UK Foreign Secretary R. Cook nonetheless announced that the British government accepted the court’s decision and that they would not appeal. On the eve of the ruling however, the 1971 BIOT Immigration Ordinance was replaced by the Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance 2000, under which Chagossians, and they alone, were legally allowed to enter the Chagos Archipelago without obtaining BIOT permission. That is to say, with the significant exception of the archipelago’s sole militarised island, Diego Garcia, where strict immigration control would still apply (Rozenberg, the Telegraph, 4 Nov. 2000).¹³

For Chagossians to travel to the Chagos Archipelago was now legal, but to undertake this journey – let alone to resettle the islands – remained practically impossible without external assistance. By now, except for Diego Garcia, all local infrastructure had collapsed. And, of course, no Chagossian disposed of a suitable vessel. CRG representatives then requested British authorities to facilitate a visit for members of their community. But due to many controversies connected to this destination, another five years were to pass before it materialised. And by then they had lost their hard-won rights as the British government had overruled the Chagossians’ favourable High Court judgement by new signature of the Monarch.

¹³ See also statement by UK Foreign Secretary Cook on 18 Feb. 2002, UK Parliament website: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/press-release/2002/02/foreign-secretary-accept-new04338>, accessed 14 Dec. 2009; and statement by FCO Parliamentary Under-Secretary O’Brien, 22 Oct. 2002, UK Parliament website: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo021022/text/21022w17.htm, accessed 15 Jan. 2009.

Chagossians' first challenge after the court ruling became, in effect, an internal matter. According to the new legislation Chagossians were not allowed to enter Diego Garcia. US authorities also refused to allow them entry to Diego Garcia, even for a brief visit, and to use the island's airstrip (Guardian, 13 Dec. 2000). When on 26 June 2002 the UK government proposed a visit in October that year for 100 Chagossians (which they should approve of) to the Chagos Archipelago, excluding Diego Garcia, the negotiations stranded. Diego Garcia is by far the largest island in the Chagos group, and had, as discussed in Chapter 2, hosted a larger population than the other islands before the evictions. Hence Chagossians declined the invitation on grounds of communal solidarity. According to CRG leader Bancoult: "We refuse in sympathy with all those Chagos islanders who used to live on Diego Garcia" (BBC News, 30 June 2002). Things would become even more complicated. When Chagossians asked the British government to include Diego Garcia, they were told that US authorities had to grant permission. But when Chagossians, assisted by Mauritius' former President C. Uteem, in August 2002 appealed to the US President to have Diego Garcia included, the Bush administration replied that it was Britain's call: "because of the vital role the facility plays in the global war on terrorism, British authorities have denied permission to visit Diego Garcia. We concur and support the decision" (quoted from Leung, CBS News, 13 June 2003). With their High Court victory in 2000, in other words, Chagossians had regained the legal right to return only: First, they did not dispose of a proper vessel, second, Chagossian representatives could not agree to any UK facilitated visit that would exclude Diego Garcia where new immigration restrictions applied, and third, when they asked UK and US authorities for permission to circumvent that rule for an exceptional journey neither of them claimed to be responsible for the decision.

However, not only governments dispose of ships. In the following period Chagossians gained non-governmental support from the trans-national demilitarisation movement introduced above. Greenpeace associated activists along with the Mauritian left-wing party Lalit came up with the idea of bringing the Chagos islanders to the Chagos Archipelago with the Japanese Peace-Boat, an NGO carrying out activities by means of a chartered passenger ship.¹⁴ The idea was launched in the above mentioned WSF in Mumbai in January 2004 where also the NO-Bases Network, of which Lalit is a co-founder, took off (Conteris et al. 2004, Anti-War Assembly Working Group 2004).¹⁵ Also Chagossian representatives were present here, but for reasons I shall outline below cooperation eventually came to a halt. The Peace-Boat action idea received wide support, and it was soon extended to include a whole 'Peace-Flotilla' whereby the Chagossians could journey to their birthplace by participating in a grand demonstration against the US base and the BIOT establishment together with a number of transnational left-wing peace- and environmentalist organisations. If Chagossians were disallowed entry to their homeland, invited journalists could write on-the-spot reports, not only on how the UK failed to obey the rulings of the court, but also how the Chagossian case was intimately connected to other political issues including Western military aggression, neo-colonialism, Human Rights violations and environmental protection (see Collen 2004).

¹⁴ See official NGO website: www.peaceboat.org/english/index.html, accessed 4 Feb. 2009.

¹⁵ See also the Lalit and the No-Bases' official websites at: www.lalitmauritius.org and www.no-bases.org.

During my fieldwork in 2004 it was clear that this offer of alliance was not received with unequivocal support from the Chagossian side. This was mainly due to three reasons, which also demonstrate the insufficiency of framing their community as a group of marginalised victims. Chagossians are indeed very much aware of the realities of the wider political framework, and their leadership is also highly competent with respect to the possibilities and the limits this may offer. Cognisant of this, they are of course not unaware what victimisation and marginalisation means politically. First, however, it is important to point out that a number of my informants were afraid to partake in the Peace-Boat action. As a Chagossian man in his fifties told me:

The boat will first be given a warning shot. And then they will probably shoot at the boat or close by. All cameras and media equipment would be confiscated since this is how they will and must act because it is a secured area. You can't even pass over there with an aeroplane. If you could, then Arab terrorists could arrive with kamikaze boats and blow the base up. Or spies, they could regard us as spies. And if they shot down the boat they could just tell the media that terrorists or spies had tried to enter the base.

Second, not all Chagossians oppose the US base. A couple of my informants were even proud that their homeland had become very important “for the security of the free world”. To many poor and unemployed Chagossians the US base represents both the problem and the solution. They were well aware that the US military base is the reason why they were evicted and why they remain unable to return. They were equally cognisant that the islands no longer have any infrastructures, and that it therefore would be very difficult to sustain themselves in such a remote place. As noted, some 1,500 expatriate civilian contract workers from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Mauritius are employed as artisans and cleaners etc. on Diego Garcia. Many Chagos islanders pointed out that the US base was the only possible source of employment in their homeland. However, no Chagossian was employed on the base in 2004. Their applications were always rejected. Some therefore saw the issue of being prevented from returning as a matter of job discrimination, which also appears to have been the case. According to a former Diego Garcia employment recruiter quoted by the CNN in 2003, Chagossians were not to be employed on the base: “I was given instruction to be careful. They don't want any kind of claim or demonstration” (Benoit Emileien, CNN Insight, 18 June 2003). Only after Chagossians started publicly objecting to employment discrimination in connection with an unsuccessful attempt to obtain compensation through US courts did a handful of former inhabitants obtain work on Diego Garcia in 2006.

Third, CRG representatives changed their attitude to the US military base after they launched their court actions in the UK and the US. Before that, the CRG and Lalit had jointly initiated the Rann nu Diego Committee in 1998, which among other things aimed at dismantling the US base on Diego Garcia and returning the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius (The Rann nu Diego Committee, Recent Campaign Document - 2, 1998; reproduced in Lalit 2002, 211). However, as their struggles were now being mainstreamed into the legal systems of both states now occupying their homeland, they feared that the Peace-Boat action would preclude their legal proceedings. “We have to be realistic” the CRG leader explained to me in an interview. For these reasons Chagossian representatives limited their cooperation despite

the wide support they gained at the WSF in Mumbai in 2004. The CRG leader eventually refused to sign a petition to close the US military base. Knowing that many Chagossians would like to work on the base, and also fearing that the Peace-Boat action would preclude their legal proceedings, Chagossians would only agree to manoeuvre within established law. That is, to lead a group of Chagossians to the unrestricted islands only, and not to Diego Garcia.

As long as the Chagossians were unable to travel to the Chagos by their own means, British authorities saw apparently no need to legally prevent them from doing so. But when the Peace-Boat action was voiced in Mumbai 2004, the possibility of a surprise visit suddenly arose (Snoxell 2008, 3-4). Regardless of the CRG representative's pronounced reservations at this meeting, the UK Government all of a sudden changed opinion about accepting the November 2000 court judgement. Five months after the Peace-Boat initiative was discussed in Mumbai, the UK government reinserted a total ban on BIOT immigration on 10 June 2004. Just like in 1971, BIOT immigration restrictions were issued by Order in Council, i.e. by signature of the Queen, and without any prior notice to the UK Parliament.

To Chagossians this was a huge disappointment and serious political setback. But it also seriously upset the Mauritian government. To them, the issuing of these new immigration orders was a unilateral political move in complete disregard of Mauritius' sovereignty claims. What added to the tensions was that it happened while Mauritius was facing a major economic crisis affecting the two core sectors of the economy. A EU sugar reform was to cut prices on subsidised Mauritian exports by 36 per cent at a time when also the Mauritian textile sector was seriously threatened by outsourcing (Neveling 2006). Three months earlier the Mauritian government had been eager to enter bilateral negotiations with the former colonial power. A letter was then conveyed to notify the UK government that separating the Chagos Archipelago prior to Mauritius independence was contrary to international law – with a clarifying reservation that Mauritius did not oppose the US base on Diego Garcia (Ingram 2004). Mauritian authorities were left without response for months, until, all of a sudden, the UK government issued these 2004 BIOT Immigration Orders. Apparently outraged by the plain disregard for Mauritius' claims to the Chagos that this unilateral move exposed, Mauritius' Prime Minister announced plans of taking Britain to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Soon, however, it became clear to them that Commonwealth members like Mauritius were barred from taking the former colonial power to The Hague. And when the Prime Minister then declared that Mauritius was prepared to leave the Commonwealth in order to sue the UK over the Chagos issue, UK authorities simply issued another ICJ reservation to the Commonwealth agreement that included also former Commonwealth members to be affected by the clause. Besides this, the UK government also amended a 1968 convention by which the UK officially recognizes legal disputes after 1945 to now include disagreements occurring from 1975 only (Etienne, L'Express Outlook, 13 July 2004; Ingram 2004). Pressure on the Mauritian government was also accentuated as these affronting issues were all discussed in the local press. The straw that broke the camel's back was when, in this context, Mauritian authorities learnt that the UK had obtained permission from the US to include Diego Garcia in a visit to the Chagos Archipelago, and had for this purpose directly and unofficially negotiated with the Mauritius Shipping Corporation (MSC) to lease the *Mauritius Trochetia* – a Mauritian state owned vessel – to facilitate a journey for Chagossians to the Chagos Archipelago. Suspecting

this to be another political move to preclude ICJ litigations, Mauritius' government reacted by cancelling the lease altogether (Rainer, L'Express, 15 Jan. 2005 and 20 Jan. 2005).

The MMM headed government in Mauritius was then criticized for demonstrating poor diplomatic skills and for jeopardising Mauritius' economy for sovereignty (e.g. Saminaden and Bookhun, L'Express, 2 May 2005). The government was not re-elected in June 2005, and the case of the Chagos Archipelago surely had an impact in this. Following the elections, the new MLP-led government immediately revoked the ICJ plans and reconfirmed Mauritius' Commonwealth commitments. But the UK did not enter into bilateral talks with Mauritius. Only after the new Prime Minister reiterated Mauritius' sovereignty claim and referred to the plight of the evicted Chagossians before the UN General Assembly on 19 September 2005 did the UK government representatives request the right of response (Ramgoolam 2005b).

Eventually Mauritius' Prime Minister met with his British counterpart by the end of November. Two seemingly unrelated issues were on the agenda of this one top-level political meeting: Mauritius' economic crisis, and the Chagossians' journey to the Chagos Archipelago (Ramgoolam 2005a). During their talks PM Ramgoolam pointed to the insufficiency of a proposed 40 million Euro compensation from the EU to ACP sugar exporting countries, and explained that diversifying the Mauritian economy would cost some 680 million Euros over the next four to five years. Then, over to the Chagossians' visit, a bilateral compromise was drawn up in a Memorandum of Understanding: Expenses were to be shared, both a British and a Mauritian official were to accompany the group, the previously rejected use of the *Mauritius Trochetia* was put at disposal, and, except for a Royal Navy cameraman, media were not to be permitted. Officially the journey was defined a 'humanitarian visit' arranged in cooperation between the two governments (Ramgoolam 2005a, FCO 2006).

4.2.1 THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO IN POSTCOLONIAL TRADE AND DIPLOMACY

The political negotiations leading up to the first Chagossian visit to their homeland is a revealing example of how politics of the Chagos Archipelago is exercised in practice. The above case shows that the archipelago is a centre of many political disputes. It also unveils central actors and their positions, power and limits for cooperation. However, Ramgoolam's mention of sugar and compensation above provides a first indication that although the pronounced lines of political dispute over these islands concern sovereignty and militarisation, these issues are also entangled in matters of postcolonial trade. In this respect the example also shows that this journey, and the Chagossian case as such, can not be understood without considering Mauritius' embedded autonomy as outlined in Chapter 2. To Mauritian authorities the Chagos Archipelago is evidently important in many respects – both in foreign and domestic affairs, if that division still makes sense in a context where these issues are highly interconnected. It is therefore important to clarify how the Chagos Archipelago figures in Mauritian post-colonial trade and diplomacy before I proceed to the chapter's second part where I shall explore how these external parties relate to the Chagos islanders.

Mauritian authorities have not always maintained a consistent position with regard to militarisation and sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. Successive governments have argued for retrocession ever since Ramgoolam first officially stated that sovereignty of these

islands belong to Mauritius before the UN General Assembly in 1980, but more ambivalence has marked the issue of militarisation. As we have seen, demilitarisation of Diego Garcia was very important to the MMM opposition after independence, but also MLP representatives were present at the OAU meeting when this organisation called for demilitarisation of the Chagos Archipelago in 1980. It was only three months after this meeting that Ramgoolam made his point about sovereignty before the UN General Assembly. And in that meeting he addressed the issue of militarisation too – albeit not stating that the base on Diego Garcia should be closed down:

The United States should make arrangements directly with Mauritius for its continued use for defence purposes. And then there are the inhabitants of Diego Garcia who are domiciled in Mauritius and for whom better arrangements should be made. It must be the duty of both the United States and Great Britain to discuss with the Mauritius Government how best to give satisfaction to all concerned and at the same time provide better prospects to the islanders (Ramgoolam 1980, in Bradley 1999, 87-88)

Ramgoolam's statement can be read as an indication that the questions of militarisation and sovereignty are entangled and that these issues are not entirely disconnected from matters of postcolonial trade and diplomacy. Up to the point of my fieldwork, Mauritian authorities had never seriously challenged the use of the Chagos Archipelago for US military purposes. That also goes for the issue of sovereignty. As the case above showed, not even in the very heated debates in the run-up to the Chagossian journey in 2006 was the question of sovereignty brought before the ICJ. In the end, the *Mauritius Trochetia*, a Mauritian state owned vessel, sailed to the US military base with the official BIOT Administrator and a Mauritian government representative on board. For their reluctance to challenge the current UK-US establishment, Mauritian authorities have been subject to considerable critique, especially from the political left (see Lalit 2002). This critique rests on substantial documentation indicating that Mauritius' political elite has used Diego Garcia and the Chagos Archipelago as means to negotiate UK and US trade benefits, and has done so since already before independence. This will shed important light on the above example of the negotiations that lead to the Chagossians' journey. I shall therefore present that critique and argue that Mauritius' disputes with the UK and the US is best understood in the frame of Mauritius' embedded autonomy.

Both the UK and the US had long been crucial to Mauritius' economy because bilateral agreements have granted Mauritian products preferential access to these markets. During the negotiations leading up to the Chagossian journey in 2006, Mauritius was facing a severe economic crisis. After Mauritius became WTO member in 1995, special trade arrangements were phasing out. The Lomé agreement between the sugar-producing ACP countries and the EU expired in 2000, and in 2005 the Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA), which had secured export quotas for Mauritian textile and garment industries to the USA, was also coming to an end (cf. Chapter 2). A relevant question here is why they grant such preferences to Mauritius? If we return to the example above we see that crucial bilateral negotiations with the UK over the end of preferential Mauritian sugar quotas, and compensation for this, only came about after Mauritius' Prime Minister voiced the Chagos issue to the UN General Assembly on 19 September 2005. Apparently, due to UK and US presence in the Chagos Archipelago,

Mauritius' political elite holds a possibility to press for bilateral negotiations with two of their most central trading partners.

This is insufficient to conclude that Mauritian authorities utilise Diego Garcia and the Chagos Archipelago in international diplomacy to enhance Mauritian trade, especially since they vehemently deny it (see Carey 2005). However, negotiations comparable to these are nothing new, but can be traced right back to negotiations over Mauritius' independence. Mauritius pro-independence delegation to London then negotiated £3 million compensation for dismembering the Chagos Archipelago. One can be puzzled by this relatively small sum of money. Many authors claim that during Mauritius' constitutional negotiations, British authorities pressed Mauritius' pro-independence delegation to hurriedly accept the UK's conditions by pretending that they considered the MSDP's option of a straight referendum on independence who then opposed it (e.g. Houbert 1981, 87; Addison and Hazareesingh 1984, 95; Moheeputh, *L'Express* 18 Mar. 2005). However, one shall not forget that in addition to these 3 million Pounds there were also other issues on the table – foremost independence, of course, which the MLP was after. A number of sources also show that on top of this Mauritian politicians proposed a 90 year lease of Diego Garcia, a joint defence agreement, an annual export quota of 300,000 – 400,000 tonnes of sugar for the US market, an export quota of 20,000 tonnes of fish, reduced prices for imports of flour and rice, and immigration quota for Mauritian citizens to the US and the UK (de l'Estrac 1983, Marimootoo 1997, Subron 2002, Ah-vee 2002). The MSDP's understanding of the situation was not very different, even though they eventually walked out of the constitutional negotiations. In fact, they represented in London the interests of Mauritian sugar barons who were opposed to Mauritian independence for fear of losing export quota to Europe. In a meeting on 5 November 1965, only three days before the BIOT was founded, MSDP leader G. Duval said that he agreed “to a base if Mauritius obtains a good price for its sugar and if Great Britain offers us a good ‘contingent of emigrants’” (quoted in Ah-vee 2002, 128; my translation). All in all, this forms an impressive list, which shows that the Mauritian delegation to the London conference in 1965 was already then well aware of the strategic importance of the Chagos Archipelago and did not fail to grasp the place of this territory in postcolonial trade and diplomacy.

This is also in line with official attitudes and negotiations in the period between the excision of the Chagos Archipelago upon Mauritian independence under S. Ramgoolam's MLP-led government, and Chagossians' journey to this disputed militarised territory (with UK and Mauritian official representatives onboard) when his son, N. Ramgoolam, was running the country during my fieldwork in 2006. With regard to the Chagos issue, Mauritius first Prime Minister, S. Ramgoolam, was highly pragmatic, and judging from the case discussed here so was his son. In 1980, the Mauritian newspaper *Le Mauricien* reported that S. Ramgoolam was talking of Diego Garcia as a ‘fortress of peace’ in London and as a ‘threat to peace’ in New Delhi (Houbert 1981, 100, fn 2). When part of his coalition government in 1981, MSDP leader Duval addressed the issue of rampant unemployment and suggested that Mauritius should negotiate with US President Reagan: “Our only chance is if the Americans utilise Mauritius as a supermarket for provisioning the military base on Diego Garcia and if other Mauritians are recruited to work for them” (quoted in Ah-vee 2002, 128; my translation). Mauritian trade with the US-base on Diego Garcia was encouraged and developed under the MSM led coalition governments that ruled from 1983 onward. This included food sales and work-contracts for

Mauritians on the US base. Even in coalition with the MMM, MSM leader Jugnauth affirmed during a visit to the US in 1991 that Mauritius' government agreed to the US base. Referring to the base as a contribution to the stability of the Indian Ocean region, he asked for US permission to install a cold storage for fish in the Chagos Archipelago and requested further preferential quota for Mauritian sugar and textiles to the US market (Ah-vee 2002, 130-1). On 14 November 2000, when Mauritius' bilateral trade agreements started to phase out, and only a few days after the London High Court re-established Chagossians right to return to the Chagos Archipelago, the Foreign Minister of a newly elected MSM-MMM government, A. Gayan, announced: "In the light of the changing security environment in our region Mauritius is not opposed to the USA maintaining the military base on Diego on terms which are mutually acceptable but Mauritius reserves the right to discuss with the USA the modalities for the utilisation of Diego Garcia" (quoted from Ah-vee 2002, 125; emphasis in source). This was a year before the 9/11 attacks in the USA. Adding to this that, even under MMM rule, Mauritius has welcomed US Foreign Secretary Albright and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) – an international agreement granting preferential access of Mauritian textiles to the US market, but preconditions that beneficiary states do not engage in activities undermining US foreign policy (cf. Lallah 2002) – Ah-vee concludes: "Since 1965, sometimes for guarantees on sales of sugar, sometimes for selling frozen fish or textiles to America, have different Mauritian regimes bargained and compromised the integrity of Mauritian territory with American imperialists" (Ah-vee 2002, 132).

Subron (2002) discusses how bilateral negotiations often work in Mauritius. For example, on 11 May 1990 the Mauritian government took steps to include the Chagos issue on the agenda of the UN General Assembly for the first time. This was around the time when the colonial powers used the end of the Cold War as an argument that the UN committee promoting the Indian Ocean Peace Zone was no longer relevant. Before the Assembly's 54th session the Mauritian government prepared an Explanatory Memorandum which concluded: "A just solution to the Chagos issue under the auspices of the UN would greatly contribute to promote peace in the Indian Ocean region, particularly at a time when certain Western countries have decided not to participate in the Indian Ocean Adhoc Committee" (Government of Mauritius 1990, quoted in Subron 2002, 91; my translation). According to Subron, after numerous local press articles pointing out how Mauritius' Government now privileged the question of sovereignty over demilitarisation, the government suddenly withdrew the UN motion on 27 June 1990. Eight years later S. Boolell, who had been Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, explained: "The Mauritian government privileged the textile quota before the academic debate over the Chagos." He added: "We had to choose the immediate economic interest and that was logical" (Boolell 1998, cited in Subron 2002, 92; my translations). On 7 August 1991 the UK unilaterally declared a 200-mile EEZ around the Chagos Archipelago. MMM-leader and Foreign Affairs Minister Berenger then threatened the British government to re-invoke the Chagos issue on the UN agenda and circulated a document describing how the Chagos Archipelago had been illegally dismembered from Mauritius. But again the government failed to follow up. Such examples led Subron to conclude that these moves are "typical for the Mauritian state: threaten to realize the question of Diego at the UN to press the UK to negotiate over sovereignty. At the same time numerous articles appear that describe how the Mauritian state makes many propositions to the UK" (Subron 2002, 94; my translation).

The Chagos Archipelago can apparently form an important political means for Mauritian authorities to pursue bilateral negotiations with two of the state's most central trading partners. This, of course, is something of great importance in the context of Mauritius' embedded autonomy. It is also most effective when the authorities consider militarisation and sovereignty as two separate political questions as they do. Mauritian authorities deny that Diego Garcia and the Chagos Archipelago are utilized in international diplomacy to enhance Mauritian trade (Carey 2005), but the allegations put forward by the Mauritian left that Diego Garcia is used by the government as a means to promote the Mauritian economy are not poorly documented. What is more, these historical arguments appear to have much in common with the empirical case of the negotiations that led to the extraordinary Chagossian journey in 2006. And in that sense they also offer a partial explanation to the 'humanitarian' compromise between Mauritius and the UK which framed this particular journey. As the case demonstrated, post-colonial trade was not absent from negotiations over this journey. In the context of Mauritius' economic crisis, one government was voted out of office in the 2005 elections partly due to their inability to enter bilateral talks with the UK; and the next government, after voicing the Chagos issue to the UN General Assembly, did not fail to bring up the matter of post-colonial trade preferences in terms of compensation for fading sugar-quotas when meeting to discuss the Chagossians' journey.

4.3 A SITE OF CONTEST

I opened this chapter by suggesting that the Chagos Archipelago could be approached as a site of contest. Thus far I have focussed on actors beyond the Chagossian community, and through the above discussions of militarisation and sovereignty I identified key parties involved in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago and outlined their central lines of disagreements. With respect to these two issues the political stances of the UK-US alliance, the demilitarisation movement, and the Mauritian government, are mutually exclusive: The UK holds *de facto* sovereignty to the archipelago and defends the *status quo* of the current UK-US military establishment. Mauritius also claims sovereignty to the Chagos Archipelago, but agrees to the US military establishment on Diego Garcia. And finally, the trans-national demilitarisation movement supports Mauritius' claim to retrocession, but opts for the closure of the US military base. From this it is clear that the Chagos Archipelago is not simply a contested resource. The case of the negotiations leading up to the Chagossians' journey demonstrated that the Chagos Archipelago form a centre of multiple and rather complex disputes, and to the different parties involved the word 'resource' would bear different meanings: It is, among other things, a homeland, a symbol of long-term victimization, and a means to illustrate this to the world for the Chagos islanders; a beneficial alliance with the world's dominant military power to the UK; a strategic military harbour and airfield to the US, a case in point to mobilize transnational resistance for a de-militarized socialist future to the Lilit; and a matter of national pride as well as a means to press for bilateral trade agreements with the UK and the US to Mauritian authorities. Much more could surely be added here. A key point here is that what exactly the Chagos islands represent is not a simple substance, a classical means of production for

economic gain. More than being a resource in a physical sense, these islands also form a resource – or better, different resources – as long as they are part of a conflict. All parties external to the Chagossian community pursue different political agendas, and all of these extend Chagossians’ core political aims of proper compensation and right to repatriation. Due to these conflicting political aims there exists a competition to monopolize meaning onto the Chagos Archipelago. This is a finding that is very much in line with Eade and Sallnow’s (1991) approach to pilgrimage sites as sites of contest, but which extends to include other parties who are not themselves pilgrims, and even some who do not travel at all. As I shall turn to below, this competition does not go without reference to the islands’ former inhabitants. In fact, external parties have long represented, silenced, and/or sought to influence Chagossians to enhance their own political agendas. Such efforts, I will argue, represent a complex form of identity-politics. In those politics the question of ‘who sides with whom and why?’ (Schlee 2004) applies regardless of what kind of resource the Chagos Archipelago represents to the different parties. I shall now turn to discuss how external parties work to influence Chagossian identification in order to pursue their own political interests.

4.4 *THE COMPETITION FOR CHAGOSSIAN SELF-IDENTIFICATION*

With respect to the issues of sovereignty and militarisation, parties other than the evicted Chagos islanders pursue mutually exclusive political aims which all extend the Chagossians’ core political agenda of gaining proper compensation and the right to return. Nonetheless, external parties often claim to speak on behalf of the Chagossians’ own interests: Representatives of the demilitarisation movement hold it vital that the US base is dismantled for the Chagossians to return, Mauritius’ government claim that regaining Mauritian sovereignty to the Chagos is a stepping stone to a future Chagossian return, and, in a very paternalistic manner, the UK government holds that due to possible environmental hazards, for the Chagossians to return to the Chagos could be dangerous to them and is implicitly therefore not *really* in the interest of the evicted population. Some parties surely have strong sympathy for the evicted population, but appeals to their plight also relate to the fact that the Chagossians’ history of expulsion, suffering and mistreatment has a very strong media-appeal. For actors who want to challenge or reform the current UK-US establishment in the Chagos Archipelago, or to gain something from the parties that represent it, invoking the history of the islands’ former inhabitants in public can be favourable. Conversely, those who seek to defend the UK-US establishment undoubtedly profit from silencing or reframing the very same historical drama.

This presupposes that parties involved in these politics recognize that the evicted islanders have a relevant (moral or legal) claim to the Chagos Archipelago. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, Chagossians are not passive spectators to the politics that concern their homeland. Through decades of political struggle they have become relevant political actors, and a consequence of this is that their voices and opinions are now taken into consideration by important others. This has not always been the case. Despite the military importance of Diego

Garcia and the way the Chagos islanders were treated when they were evicted, Chagossian voices received relatively little international attention before the turn of the millennium. Now that their voices are no longer silent, parties beyond the Chagossian community can no longer identify and represent the latter as they please – at least without being subject to objections and public critique from, among others, reporters and very active NGOs. In this new setting, external parties must therefore employ other techniques to sway opinions and public discourse on the Chagos Archipelago to their favour. One such technique is to reframe the whole Chagos issue. But optimal to parties beyond the Chagossian community would be a situation where their own interests and those of the Chagos islanders converge. As we shall see, Chagossians are indeed subject to such influence. To further their own positions, involved parties seek to ally with the evicted population by making them identify with wider political platforms and/or strategic imagined communities that extend the category of ethnic Chagossians. This, as I shall elaborate below, can be understood as a complex form of identity politics that goes beyond previous understandings of Chagossian identity formation (cf. Walker 1986, Johannessen 2005, Kooy 2008, Vine 2009, Jeffery 2011, Evers 2011). What adds to the complexity in this case is that there are multiple stakeholders involved. And since multiple external actors seek to influence the Chagossian agenda in such ways I will argue that it is possible to understand these politics as a competition: A competition for Chagossian self-identification. This competition, we shall see, has effectively resulted in important splits within the socio-political organization of Chagossians in Mauritius and beyond.

4.4.1 POLITICS OF IDENTIFICATION

Politics of identification is a well-explored field in anthropology, although analytical terminology varies. What scholars have described as ‘identity politics’ (Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins 2004), ‘politics of identity formation’ (Sharp 1996), ‘politics of ‘identity’’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) and ‘politics of difference’ (Comaroff 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1992) generally refer to activities of a similar kind: Political strategies concerned with defining and profiling a particular category of people as similar to each other, and at the same time significantly different from others (and often marginalized) within a larger context, in order to promote mobilization of the group identified (*qua* black, *qua* woman, *qua* gay or lesbian, *qua* disabled, *qua* unemployed, or *qua* any other category put forward) to achieve political aims held to represent the common interest of that group. The ethno-political mobilization of Chagos islanders *qua* Chagossians is a good example of such politics of identification (cf. Chapter 3). However, my immediate interest here is not the politics of identification pursued by Chagossian organizations, but rather how “outside” political parties engage in activities of identity formation *vis-à-vis* the Chagossians. Of course, external parties would not aim to include themselves in the social category of ‘Chagossians’, but the reverse may be the case. Hence, activities like this can also be understood as politics of identification. Indeed, as Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins argue, all political activity can be analysed as involving elements of strategic identity-construction:

[T]here is much to be gained through exploring how political activists construct the identities and interests of those whom they wish to organize and mobilize. Thus, rather than reserving the term ‘identity politics’ for a distinctive form of political activity, all political activity may be analyzed as involving (and being accomplished through) the strategic construction of collective identity (Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins 2004, 342).

As we shall see, external parties involved in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago have publicly identified and represented Chagossians in ways that support their own political interests – sometimes on behalf of a much silenced group, and other times in dialogue with members of the Chagossian community. Apparently, along with the increasing international exposure of the Chagossian case, and the gradual transformation of the Chagossian community into relevant political actors, strategies of identification have shifted from the first to the second dimension – now including Chagossians and their increasingly autonomous voices. Contrary to a few decades ago, external parties now seek to influence how, with what, and with whom Chagos islanders self-identify, in interaction with their group.

Anthropologists have since Barth’s (1969) publication *Ethnic groups and boundaries* stressed that social identities are not primordial, permanent or static, but processual, context dependent, changing and always in the making in interplay with others. Such on-going ‘making and unmaking of differences’ (Rottenburg, Schnepel, and Shimada 2006) is very much the case in the poly-ethnic setting of Mauritius where, as Ludwig and Schnepel point out, multiple identities are constantly negotiated and thus exist ‘in action’ (Ludwig and Schnepel 2009, 12). If identities are constructed and reconstructed in on-going interaction with others, then identities can also be strategically manipulated or altered from the outside. This opens for a very powerful political strategy: To alter political aims of a group that mobilises on the basis of common identity, external parties may seek to influence the central social categories and/or cultural contents with which that group identifies. The Chagossian example forms a case where powerful external parties – often precisely those parties from whom social recognition is most wanted or needed – wish to rework, replace or even erase particular social identities to suit their own interests. With respect to such projects, two reservations must be added. First, this must not be taken to mean that there exist no limitations to the fluidity or changeability of social identities. As Schlee (2004, 137) points out, a conservative factor comes into play from the moment identities are socially recognized because social identities also have to be plausible to others. Second, strategic identity formation from the outside is a dicey endeavour that can easily lead to the opposite effect. If it ends up (re)producing senses of communal marginalization (within a certain larger context), it is likely to reinforce established communal identities rather than contributing to altering or erasing them. But if such political efforts are successful, the group in question may eventually self-identify with a new (or additional) social category of people, and/or ascribe new meanings to the social categories with which they already identify. This can be a highly effective political means, especially if one wish to acquire, or legitimise possession of, something to which that particular group has a relevant (legal or moral) claim.

To discuss such activities, the concept of ‘identity-politics’ appears too broad or unrefined to serve as a proper analytical tool. I shall therefore employ Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) more specific analytical concepts of ‘self-identification’ and ‘other-identification’. In a

critical investigation into the concept of ‘identity’ these authors recognise that ‘identity’ has become a widespread social fact both among scholars and subjects of study, but point out that it is not entirely clear what ‘thing’ the noun ‘identity’ actually refers to. Identities are reifications, and the concept appears too inclusive and unrefined to serve the purpose of a fruitful analytical tool in the social sciences. They therefore suggest substituting the noun ‘identity’ –i.e. a ‘thing’ that people ‘have’ (strong form), or fluid and multiple ‘things’ people ‘construct’ (weak form) – with the more processual and dynamic term, ‘identification’, which instead refers to an activity as in something that people ‘do’.

It must be noted here that Brubaker and Cooper’s suggestion to replace the term ‘identity’ by ‘identification’ has been rejected by Donahoe et al. (2009). While agreeing that identities are reifications, they point out that it does not follow that identities are no proper objects of analysis. Both ‘identity’ and ‘identification’ can be useful, they write, but one can not reject the former concept and at the same time accept the latter. I shall therefore stress here that rejecting or defending ‘identity’ is by no means central to my following argument. I refer to Brubaker and Cooper to make use of their analytical distinctions between ‘self-identification’ and ‘other-identification’ and their point that there is a dialectical relationship between the two. This distinction clearly underlines the relational dynamics in identification processes. While ‘self-identification’ refers to how, or with what, a person or a group identifies, ‘other-identification’ designates activities by which people impose social categories and/or cultural contents on others; or, from the reverse perspective that I shall be dealing with here: how (various) others work to impose social categories and/or cultural contents on one particular group of people. It is important to stress here that such other-identification can include other-identification *as self*, and other-identification *as other* – a distinction that respectively refers to a) efforts of including an other part to one’s own identity category (or vice versa), and b) activities of identifying another part as a group to which oneself do not belong.

Brubaker and Cooper note that while self-identification “takes place in dialectical interplay with external identification” it can but need not converge with other-identification (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 15). That observation opens for the possibility to bring politics into this analytical divide. Clearly, to make people self-identify in particular ways can be a powerful means to influence their attitudes, aims and decisions with regard to something those people have a special claim. If a group of people would accept and adopts strategic social categories that external parties use to identify them, or if they start to self-identify with strategic cultural contents ascribed their group by others, then the group may come to understand, adopt and pursue others’ political aims as if they were their own. Strategic other-identification can thus be a very effective political tool. But how people self-identify is not politically relevant in all contexts – especially if they are marginalised to the extent that they possess no autonomous voice. First they must become relevant political actors. As long as they are not, more powerful external parties can simply identify them as they please and thus represent them to the public in ways that suit their own agenda. Muting and silencing are effective ways of preventing people from becoming relevant political actors. But the moment strategies of silencing fail, it seems that self-identification must be considered in political endeavours that concern resources to which other groups has a relevant (moral or legal) claim.

In the remaining part of this chapter I shall discuss how different parties involved in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago employ competing strategies of other-identification *vis-à-*

vis the Chagos islanders to further their own interests. With special reference to the UK government, we shall see how such strategies changed after Chagossians came to acquire a relatively autonomous voice. But precisely because of the politics of identity formation I now turn to discuss, there are also good reasons to explore the relativity of that ‘autonomous’ voice.

4.4.2 BRITISH AUTHORITIES AND CHAGOSSIAN OTHER-IDENTIFICATION

Identification of the Chagos islanders has been of great concern to UK authorities ever since the US base on Diego Garcia came into question. In the early days, however, it was of little political importance how the Chagos islanders self-identified. As a marginal faraway people possessing very few resources, they could be identified and represented at will. British authorities pursued a strategy of silencing to keep it that way, but to keep proceedings related to their evictions secret and withdrawn from the public eye became more complicated over the decades. As the plight of their politically very active community became subject to increasing international exposure, the issue of how Chagos islanders self-identified could no longer simply be brushed aside. Accordingly, it is possible to trace a change in British strategies of Chagossian other-identification that correspond with the emergence of a relatively autonomous Chagossian voice. A voice, that is, which the UK government, through a new politics of identification, has been quite successful in swaying to their own favour.

In the terminology of US officials in the early 1970s Washington wanted the Chagos Archipelago ‘swept’ and ‘sanitised’ (declassified US State Department documents; cited in Pilger 2006, 24). These preconditions left British authorities with two legal complications: The first was to circumvent UN treaties and resolutions forbidding the excision of the Chagos Archipelago from the colony of Mauritius, which, as already discussed, the UK government resolved by securing consent from Mauritius’ political elite. Their second problem was how to rid the Chagos Archipelago of its population without being accountable for violating the inhabitants’ basic rights. On the one hand, the inhabitants could be considered indigenous to the islands due to their considerable history of local settlement (see Chapter 2). On the other hand, after the establishment of the BIOT in 1965 the UK government would exile a population, which, according to their own claim to the territory should be citizens of the UK and colonies to two other (soon to be) independent states. To evict the Chagos islanders and deny them return to the archipelago would contradict Articles 9 and 13 (2) of the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which states that “no one should be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile” and that “everybody has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country” (UN 1948). Of particular concern to UK officials was Article 73 (Chapter XI) of the UN Charter, which demands colonial powers to recognize that the interest of the inhabitants of dependent territories is paramount, and to accept as a ‘sacred trust’ obligations to promote their well-being and assist them in developing self-government (UN 1945).

Secret UK Foreign Office files that entered the public domain from the 1990s clearly show that the 1960s Wilson government carefully planned how to present the Chagos islanders to the public in a way that would make their expulsions appear legal (Marimootoo 1997, Curtis 2003, Pilger 2006). My reading of this is that to resolve the issue the British Colonial Office

adopted a policy of strategic other-identification: If the population of the Chagos were successfully identified as ‘un-settled’ or ‘non-permanent’ the legal problem would not arise. The British government therefore decided to identify the Chagos islanders as migrant workers employed on the coconut plantations in the Chagos Archipelago on temporary contracts. In a declassified 1966 memorandum Colonial Office Official MacKenzie reported: “One of the things we would like to do in the new Territory [...] is to convert all the existing residents into short-term, temporary residents by giving them temporary immigration permits, describing them as inhabitants of Mauritius or the Seychelles” (Colonial Office Minute 6 Jan. 1966; cited in Pilger 2006, 36). By identifying the Chagos islanders as Mauritian and Seychellois contract workers, the UK government could claim that they were not ‘evicting’ a permanent population, but simply ‘returning’ temporary workers from the Chagos Archipelago to their postulated origins in Mauritius and the Seychelles. In this way, then, it could be possible to ‘sweep’ and ‘sanitise’ the Chagos Archipelago without violating UN agreements, and the islanders’ well-being could even be presented as responsibilities of the governments of Mauritius and the Seychelles.

These declassified files leave no doubt that even the highest ranking British officials were well informed about the islands’ history and that the archipelago had been continuously inhabited for little less than two centuries. In a secret document dated 26 July 1968, UK Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart wrote: “We would propose [...] to deny, if necessary, the competence of the United Nations to concern itself with a territory which has no indigenous population. That is just not the case. By any stretch of the English language, there was an indigenous population and the foreign office knew it” (Stewart 26 July 1968, quoted by Dayell 9 Jan. 2001). It nonetheless became British policy to identify and present the Chagos islanders as contract workers from Mauritius and the Seychelles. In 1965 the Foreign Office instructed the British UN representative to mislead the UN General Assembly by stating that the Chagos Archipelago was uninhabited when the UK acquired it. The Chagos islanders were identified and represented as Mauritian and Seychellois labourers, for which the UK held no responsibilities according to the UN Charter (Pilger 2006, 36). Since the group they other-identified here were a marginal faraway people, it appeared at that time little problem for UK authorities to represent them as they pleased. Illustrating the great inequalities in power with respect to self- and other-identification of the Chagos islanders in the 1960s, UK Foreign Office Legal Advisor A. Aust proposed that the government could simply make up the rules as they went along with the operation:

There is nothing wrong in law or in principle to enacting an immigration law which enables the Commissioner to deport inhabitants of BIOT. Even in international law there is no established rule that a citizen has a right to enter or remain in his country of origin/birth/nationality etc. A provision to this effect is contained in Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights but that has not been ratified by us, and thus we do not regard the UK as bound by such a rule. In this respect we are able to make up the rules as we go along and treat the inhabitants of BIOT as not ‘belonging’ to it in any sense (internal FO minute 23 Oct. 1968; cited in Sand 2009b, 23).

In 1970, UK authorities must have been concerned with keeping these proceedings secret. From the very start, the evictions and all other activities concerning the Chagos islanders had been handled with great secrecy. Not even the British Parliament or the US Congress was made aware of the developments. All minutes and reports were kept classified under a British thirty-year secrecy rule, and to minimise unwanted publicity officials were instructed to avoid the words ‘base’ and ‘permanent inhabitants’ (Pilger 2006, 36-7). The headline of a declassified FO memorandum dated 16 Jan. 1970 – “Maintaining the fiction” – clearly demonstrates that the official policy pursued now was a strategy of silencing. Again signed by the UK FO Legal Advisor Aust, the memorandum recommended “to maintain the fiction that the inhabitants of the Chagos are not a permanent or semi-permanent population” (Aust 1970; cited in Curtis 2003, 423). In November that year, E. Emery, the head of the Pacific and Indian Ocean Department at the British Foreign Office, spelled out this official policy in a secret letter to their Colonial Governor in the Seychelles:

We would not wish it to become general knowledge that some of the inhabitants have lived on Diego Garcia for at least two generations and could, therefore, be regarded as ‘belongers’. We shall therefore advise ministers in handling supplementary questions about whether Diego Garcia is inhabited to say there is only a small number of contract labourers from the Seychelles and Mauritius engaged in work on the copra plantations on the island. That is being economical with the truth. [...] Should a Member ask about what would happen to these contract labourers in the event of a base being set up on the island, we hope that, for the present, this can be brushed aside as a hypothetical question (Letter from E. Emery to B. Greatbatch 13 Nov. 1970, quoted by Dayell 9 Jan. 2001; my omission).

Much in line with this, also a decade later a 1980 FO Memorandum to the Foreign Secretary recommended that no journalists should be allowed to visit Diego Garcia, and that Members of Parliament should be discouraged from visiting the territory to prevent unwanted attention (MacAskill and Evans, *The Guardian*, 4 Nov. 2000).

Considering this chapter’s focus on the politics of identification, we can thus say that the strategic other-identification at work in the 1960s and 70s was unilateral. How UK officials identified and represented Chagos islanders was, no doubt, a deliberate policy decided on and executed right from the centre of the colonial regime. In no respect were they negotiating or entering any form of dialogue with Chagos islanders to influence how they self-identified. As long as the proceedings were kept secret this was, at the time, not necessary. As a small group of far-away people possessing no autonomous voice, the Chagos islanders were irrelevant political actors and could practically be identified and represented at will – and thus of course in a way suiting their own political agenda.

By the late 1990s things started to change, especially after Chagossians made international headlines when the British High Court ruled in their favour in November 2000. Three years later, M. Curtis, a former research fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs wrote that “the small flurry of press articles around the court case has been followed by the same silence that largely prevailed in the previous decades. Watchers of television will have remained almost completely in the dark” (Curtis 2003, 415). As the example of the negotiations

before the Chagossian journey also demonstrated, the UK policy of downplaying the Chagossian saga was not over. On 10 June 2004 the British government overruled the 2000 Judgement and, by signature of the Queen, a Royal Prerogative ensured full immigration control to the whole of BIOT. This was done without any prior notice or parliamentary announcement, and it is also highly unlikely that choosing ‘Super Thursday’ for issuing these two new Orders in Council was a coincidence. That day the British press was caught up covering local elections, elections to the European parliament, London Assembly elections as well as London mayoral elections. Hence, when Chagossians were finally granted their first communal visit to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006, it was not surprising that all media was banned from following the Chagossian passengers.

In spite of this the silence was gradually challenged. While the evicted islanders have mobilised with increasing political skills, their protests and international court actions have made international headlines and an increasing number of international reporters, academics, lawyers, NGOs, politicians and filmmakers have followed Curtis (2003) in voicing the plight of the Chagos islanders after the turn of the millennium (e.g. Angwawe 2001, Lalit 2002, Gifford 2004, Pilger 2004, 2006, Johannessen 2005, Kooy 2008, Sand 2009b, Vine 2009, Jeffery 2011, Evers and Kooy 2011).¹⁶ Such publications have played significant roles in challenging the British ‘fiction’ that identified Chagos islanders as unsettled migrant workers from Mauritius and the Seychelles, and thus helped them gain international attention and thereby a possibility to speak on their own behalf. High profiled representatives of the Chagossian community have acquired English language skills – the mother tongue of both powers occupying their homeland – and can in the language of these powers now tell their own version of history and who they are. Today, Chagossians are interviewed in international media and, as I shall return to below, central Chagossian figures travel abroad to vocalise the plight of the Chagossians and the aims of their political organizations. With this growing international attention it is fair to say that the evicted Chagos islanders have now acquired a relatively autonomous voice, which clearly is a situation very different from a few decades ago.

The UK government has responded in different ways to this new situation. In accordance with the strategy of silencing, one has been to reframe the whole Chagos issue into a matter of environmental protection. Reacting to Chagossians’ legal cases in the British courts from the late 1990s, the UK government issued highly controversial feasibility studies of their homeland that conclude in disfavour of Chagossian re-settlement. In a most paternalistic manner the government suggests that it is not *really* in the interest of the Chagos islanders to return to the archipelago due to potential environmental hazards such as flooding and lack of fresh water.¹⁷ Environmental protection has since then effectively reframed public discourse away from the former inhabitants and created new obstacles to the issue of repatriation. Concluding a 10-year litigation process in the UK courts, the House of Lords ruled contrary to

¹⁶ See also UK Chagos Support Association at www.chagossupport.org.uk, accessed 12 Apr. 2013.

¹⁷ Harvard resettlement expert Jenness has objected to the UK government-issued feasibility study’s lack of data and objectivity, concluding that its findings are “erroneous in every assertion” (Online source: www.chagossupport.org.uk, accessed 12 Apr. 2013). The US Army has not indicated any reservations concerning such natural hazards, but seek on the contrary to extend Diego Garcia facilities (see Newsom 2000). UK authorities now also argues that resettlement is too costly, but while the European Commissioner for Development has confirmed that resettlement could be financed by the European Development Fund, the UK government had filed no application to this end by 2007 (Simpson, *The Times*, 13 Feb. 2007). See also Chapter 7.4.4.

all preceding judgements and denied resettlement rights to the Chagos islanders in 2008. When Chagossians then appealed the decision to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the UK government issued a high-profiled online consultation, seeking the views and votes from a worldwide public on whether to establish a Marine Protected Area (MPA) around the BIOT – the largest on the planet (Stevenson 2010, Jeffery 2011, 132-34). The online consultation, which soon received more than a quarter of a million signatures, was heavily criticised for making no mention of either the Chagos islanders or Mauritius’ sovereignty claim. Nonetheless, on 1 April 2010, the UK Foreign Secretary announced the creation of the largest MPA in the world.¹⁸ Doubling the global coverage of protected waters, a 544,000 sq. km zone around the BIOT (exempting the area around the US military base) was declared “no-take” zone, banning commercial fishing and harvest of other resources. In 2010, however, the government’s hidden agenda was clearly revealed when a confidential US diplomatic cable dated 15 May 2009 was disclosed by Wikileaks.org. The cable quotes a UK Foreign Office official admitting that the government was “under pressure” by Chagossians and their supporters and that “we need to find a way to get through the various Chagossian lobbies.” The UK official contended that “establishing a marine park would, in effect, put paid to resettlement claims of the archipelago’s former residents” since the UK’s “environmental lobby is far more powerful than the Chagossians’ advocates.” This would leave “no human footprints” or “Man Fridays” on the archipelago’s uninhabited islands. Hence, conservation has entered the politics of the Chagos Archipelago. In setting up this vast MPA, the UK government put the Human Rights lobby up against what was already recognised as a stronger environmentalist lobby. By shifting focus of public discourse in this way, the government could legitimise, or green-wash, the politics of maintaining strict BIOT immigration control. To the UK government, however, this was clearly a concern that was secondary to the issues of militarisation and sovereignty (Tokola 2009, see also Norton-Taylor and Evans, *The Guardian*, 2 Nov. 2010 and Zeijden 2011). The establishment of the MPA was ruled illegal by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in Hague in 2015.

These measures clearly illustrate a new means to mute Chagossian claims at a time when they were gaining voice. However, developments in the wake of the 2000 High Court ruling indicate a change in British identification politics that also involves Chagossian self-identification. A case in point here is the issue of citizenship, which of course is central to the politics of identification. After Chagos islanders’ were evicted UK officials under-communicated that the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago were citizens of the UK and Colonies. Included to Mauritius’ 1968 constitution was a special section which specified that everyone born in the colony of Mauritius, not as comprised immediately before this date but according to the colony’s borders before the Chagos Archipelago was excised on 8 November 1965, should be regarded as having been born in Mauritius. Hence, although the expulsion of the Chagos islanders was not completed until 1973 – i.e. five years after Mauritius’ independence and eight years after the founding of the BIOT – people born in the Chagos Archipelago became Mauritian citizens from 12 March 1968 (Constitution of Mauritius 1968, Chapter III - Citizenship, Paragraph 20, Section 4). This did not mean that they were not also

¹⁸ Online source: Official UK government website available at: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=22014096>, accessed 25 Feb. 2011.

legally entitled to British citizenship, but from the 1960s British authorities went to great lengths to conceal it (Curtis 2003, 424-5). For example, 21 April 1969 UK Foreign Secretary Stewart warned British Prime Minister Wilson that “some of them may one day claim a right to remain in the BIOT by virtue of their citizenship of the UK and the Colonies” (Stewart 21 Apr. 1969; letter reproduced in Curtis 2003, 424). Again silence became policy. In an exchange between the British High Commissioner to Mauritius and the British Foreign Office 13 January 1971 the former noted before a meeting with the Mauritian Prime Minister: “Naturally, I shall not suggest to him that some of these have also UK nationality,” but that it is “always possible that they may spot this point, in which case, presumably, we shall have to come clean” (cited in Curtis 2003, 424). On Mauritius Independence Day 12 March 1971 the UK Foreign Office replied that it was also “not at present HMG’s policy to advise ‘contract workers’ of their dual citizenship” (cited in Curtis 2003, 424-5; quotation marks in original). Three decades later British authorities wanted to exclude the Chagos islanders from the British Overseas Territories Act 2002 – which would grant full citizenship with right of abode in the UK to inhabitants of British Overseas Territories – on the argument was that no people were resident in the BIOT. Following objections pointing out that Chagossians once lived in the BIOT but were unlawfully expelled by their own government, UK authorities included a specified selection of evicted Chagossians and children to the act (Grimwood 2001). A special supplementary section to the Act (section 6: The Ilois: citizenship) specifies that persons born between 26 April 1969 (the date when PM Wilson authorised the removals) and 1 January 1983 (when the British Nationality act 1981 came into force) to a woman who at the time of her birth was a citizen of the UK and Colonies by virtue of her birth in the BIOT, became British citizens (BOTA 2002). Given British authorities’ initial opposition to include Chagos islanders to the act it is difficult to say to what extent they anticipated beneficial political consequences of granting Chagos islanders full UK citizenship. However, in light of their history of careful considerations when it comes to the Chagos islanders, coupled with material I shall present below, it is not unlikely that strategic considerations also contributed to their reluctant acceptance. Much to the benefit of the UK-US alliance, after the act was passed in 2002 the Chagossian community has split in both physical and political respects. Anticipated or not, at a point when Chagossians were gaining a serious international voice, the granting of UK passports has contributed to split that voice and sway it to the British government’s favour.

Since 2002 an increasing number of Chagossians have migrated to the UK. Imagining that life in the UK offers better employment opportunities and also better education for their children, many more plan to follow (cf. Jeffery 2011). During my fieldwork, a strategy emerged among poor families and would spread widely. This was to collectively set aside enough money to send one passport-entitled family-member to the UK, and then trust that person to find employment and to invest savings in tickets and passports for the rest of the family. Jeffery (2011) makes similar observations, but she does not account for other actors’ constant involvement in negotiations over Chagossian identity-formation, which, as I also have demonstrated in Chapter 3, keeps changing and splitting as Chagossian struggles adjust to new constellations on global scales. One result of this new migration pattern is that many Chagossian nuclear families are now physically separated along the lines of entitlement to British citizenship. Grandchildren of people born in the Chagos who were born outside the UK are not entitled to British passports. Excluded are also Chagossians, and the children of

Chagossians, who came to Mauritius before 1969 – many of whom were then denied tickets to return to the Chagos. During my fieldwork, most Chagossians considered the right to live and work in the UK a most welcome development for themselves and their children. But among the elder generation, many were reluctant and saw few opportunities for themselves in the UK. Many were sad to see that, while they militated for much of their lives and had even undertaken serious hunger strikes to regain their right return to the Chagos, a number of Chagossians were now more occupied with preparing to migrate to the UK. Migrants, who devote time to planning, saving money, learning English, seeking jobs, understanding immigration rules and rights to social services within British bureaucracy, often argue that going to the UK is more ‘realistic’. Seeing this happen in practice, elder militant Chagossians told me how they suspect that the new legislation was another UK strategy aimed at splitting their community and their political agenda. Talking about the many Chagossians that was leaving for England, a Chagossian woman in her late sixties explained during my fieldwork that “they forget about Chagos, they forget about their real homeland and their real identity”.

With regard to politics of identification then, this woman pointed to a very significant development: A number of Chagossians now self-identify as British. And this turn is most beneficial to the UK government: First, in respect of militarisation, Chagossian migration to the UK does not conflict with the presence of the US base on Diego Garcia. Moreover, like the Chagossian representative at the WSF demonstrated by not signing the petition to close the US base, Chagossians who have interests tied up in UK institutions – whether that be the courts, individual employment contracts, or the British social security system – are less likely to object to the military base than those who have not. This particularly goes for Chagossian immigrants to the UK who hope that family members remaining abroad will eventually be able to join them. During my fieldwork in the UK, many Chagossians worried that objections to UK policy on the Chagos matter could provoke the government to stop issuing further UK passports to Chagossians overseas. Second, in respect of sovereignty, if a majority of Chagos islanders self-identify as ‘British’ the UK can justify their claim to sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. The cases of British Falkland Islands and Gibraltar are comparable here and show that British sovereignty to the Chagos could be legitimised through a referendum. The Chagos islanders might be asked then to vote which government they want to belong to. In 1999 British Foreign Secretary R. Cook (who announced the next year that the government would not appeal Chagossians’ legal victory which reinstated their right of return) wrote in his foreword to the British Government’s White Paper on Overseas Territories: “Our Overseas Territories are British for as long as they wish to remain British. [...] And Britain remains committed to those territories which choose to retain the British connection” (Cook 1999; cited from Angwawe 2001, 33-4; my omission). This must also be kept in mind when considering how the UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in 2008 pressed the central Chagossian applicant, CRG leader O. Bancoult, on this issue shortly before Chagossians’ appeal to the House of Lords would end their ten-year litigation process against the UK Government:

MR Keetch: With respect, a British Government might well say, well, look, we would quite like to know what is going to happen? If we fund your return to the islands and we start helping you to do that, are you going to turn round in six months and say, right,

we want to leave the British Overseas Territories and join Mauritius? Surely, that is a legitimate question for us to ask? What is your view?

[...] If people were consulted, what is your gut feeling about what their answer would be? Would they want to become Mauritian, or would they want to stay part of a British Overseas Territory?

Mr Bancoult: Frankly, most of us want to stay British (Bancoult to Keetch 23 Jan. 2008, cited from House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee 2008, 26; emphasis in original, my omission).

The CRG which represents the Chagossian majority today have repeatedly emphasised that the question of sovereignty is beyond their concern. Nonetheless, it tends to reappear, and their organization is often accused of playing into the hands of the British.

More outspokenly in favour of British sovereignty to the archipelago is the Diego Garcia Island Council (DGIC). Founded in the wake of the November 2000 ruling after the UK government excluded Diego Garcia from their re-established right to return, the DGIC was the first group that took advantage of their extended British citizenship. Under the leadership of Allen Vincatassen, the DGIC relocated from Mauritius to the UK in 2002 and has since assisted Chagossians who have followed their example.¹⁹ Migration to England, they hold, is a better option than pursuing compensation and the right of return to the Chagos. In an interview I conducted with Vincatassen in England in 2006 he explained that many Chagossians had been deceived and led to believe that their ‘true identity’ was not British, but Mauritian:

They included us in the [Mauritian] constitution – explicitly, which was the best thing they could do because they wanted the fiction to go forward. But we were British islanders. The wrongs were to not allow these people to know their true identity. So it has always been a doubt in our – in some of the people’s – heads: How are we Mauritians in the constitution of Mauritius? [...] I came here on 16 September 2002, with a group of 19 people, because we just had new passports and full British citizenship. I mean, a long time ago, when I was still young, I knew for a fact, because of my birth certificate, that I was a British citizen in the colonies. So the desire to come over to live in the UK was there when I was very young.

After the introduction of the new passports, many Chagossians have come to self-identify as British like Mr Vincatassen. As an elder Chagossian man in Mauritius put it after he obtained his passport: “Now I will not be exiled any more. I can go to my country and to my proper government.” Or as another young Chagossian who had migrated to the UK declared: “My passport says that now I am in my own country.” As I shall return to in Chapter 7, quite a few Chagossians now even conceptualise migration to the UK as a way of ‘going home’.

As opposed to the situation in the 1960s onwards, the Chagos islanders can no longer be identified and represented at will. Although strategies of silencing and reframing remain British policy, the situation changed after Chagos islanders became politically relevant actors and acquired a relatively autonomous voice. As a result of new citizenship laws, an increasing

¹⁹ For the organisation’s official website, see <http://dieogarciansociety.org/default.aspx>, accessed 3 Jan. 2010.

number of Chagossians now self-identify as British. Many of them have developed aims, interests and agendas that are different than militating for a return to the Chagos Archipelago. This is not necessarily incompatible with militating against the current UK-US establishment in the Chagos, but quite a few Chagossians I met in the UK felt that it would be unwise to oppose UK sovereignty and the US base. Hence, with regard to the politics of the Chagos Archipelago, this development is clearly beneficial to UK and US authorities. Anticipated or not, the British government's new politics of other-identification has been relatively successful in swaying a number of Chagossian voices to their own favour.

4.4.3 MAURITIAN AUTHORITIES AND CHAGOSSIAN OTHER-IDENTIFICATION

Mr President, we continue to claim our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago which was excised by the UK from the then Colony of Mauritius in violation of International Law and UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (...) We are also concerned by the plight of all those Mauritians, commonly known as the Ilois, who were forcibly and in outright violation of their fundamental rights, removed from the islands forming the Archipelago by the then colonial power. We support their legitimate claim for all appropriate remedies.

A. Jugnauth, Prime Minister of Mauritius,
UN General Assembly 11 November 2001

The above quotation shows that Mauritian authorities identify and represent Chagos islanders as 'Mauritians'. To identify the Chagos islanders accordingly is in line with the government's claim that the Chagos Archipelago belongs to Mauritius. Also in accordance with that argument, they do not recognise the Chagos islanders as an indigenous population, which on this ground could claim autonomous rights to this territory. Especially after their landmark court victory in London 2000 Chagossians gained a relatively autonomous voice, but only two years later they were granted full UK citizenship. These developments have made politicians and intellectuals in Mauritius increasingly worried that Chagossians would prefer the UK part of their dual citizenship and hence that they, in the case of a UK sponsored resettlement programme, would want the Chagos Archipelago to remain British. Hence, Mauritian authorities also suspect that granting Chagossians full UK citizenship was a British strategy to maintain sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

During an interview I conducted with the first President of the Mauritian Republic in 2006, Cassem Uteem elaborated on this particular issue. Through his MMM engagement he has supported Chagossians in Mauritius since their early protests in the 1970s, and at the time of my fieldwork in 2006 he was active in assisting Chagossians with organising their pilgrimage. Besides this, he has also been outspokenly in favour of retrocession of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritian jurisdiction, and also for the closure of the US military base on Diego Garcia. During the interview he explained that for the government to achieve its aims it would be necessary to obtain support from the Chagossian community. Like other intellectuals and politicians I met at the time, he was critical of the Immigration Act 2002, and interpreted the granting of UK passports to the Chagossians as a form of British identity politics working to

the disfavour of Mauritius' political interests.²⁰ During the interview he handed me a correspondence letter obtained from the international news agency Reuters dated 16 June 2006, which expressed Argentinean regrets over Britain's refusal to enter into new talks on sovereignty to the Falkland Islands. In the letter, a British embassy spokesperson in Buenos Aires reiterated the British government's position that sovereignty over the Falkland Islands was not a matter for negotiation as long as it went against the wishes of the inhabitants:

For the UK (United Kingdom), this is a matter of principle, of self-determination as set out in the U.N. Charter [...] Unless and until the islanders wish us to do so, no amount of pressure from Argentina will change that because we believe it would be morally unacceptable to force these people to change their government against their will (Reuters, 16 June 2006).²¹

Uteem deduced that the granting of full British citizenship to Chagos islanders in 2002 had much in common with this – it was a British identity politics that served to maintain UK sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago by making Chagos islanders identify as British. He concluded that in order to regain sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago it would be wise, if not necessary, for the Mauritian government to do the same thing:

We have to go through the Chagossians – to make of the Chagossian case our case. If there is a referendum, then where is your claim? The argument will come. And 99 per cent, I don't say 90 per cent, 99 per cent will say 'we will want to stay British'. This is because of the way that Mauritius has treated them. Why shouldn't they say we want to stay British? If you don't have the support of the Chagossians for the sovereignty claim you will not obtain sovereignty.

This clearly demonstrates that Chagos islanders are considered as relevant political actors. At the same time, "to make of the Chagossian case our case" can only be understood politically. In this instance, a strategy considered to be threatened by another external party's attempt to do the same thing. But to go through the Chagossians and make of the Chagossian case the case of the Mauritian government (and not the UK's case) is also a form of other-identification. That is, not necessarily one that seeks to unilaterally identify and represent them in a favourable light to the public – although PM Jugnaut's statement to the UN in the quote above indeed can be read in that way. But a more subtle strategy of other-identification that aims at bringing about favourable self-identifications on the part of the Chagos islanders. As argued, to influence decisions that concern groups that have already acquired an autonomous voice, the latter strategy not only appears more legitimate, but the people concerned may also actively contribute to realizing the aims of the identifier.

²⁰ This is not a completely new worry. In 1985 the first Chagossian obtained a passport of the UK and Colonies (which did not include the right of abode in the UK). When some Chagos islanders affirmed they were British and not Mauritians in 1986, concern was expressed as to whether this formed part of a wider British policy of divide and rule (see *L'Express*, 19 Feb. 1985, *Week-End*, 8 Aug. 1986).

²¹ See also *Mecropress*, 16 June 2006.

Uteem's concern that many Chagossians would choose UK rather than Mauritian citizenship if they were pressed to take a stance concurs with the CRG leader's response to the UK Foreign Affairs Committee two years later. The figure of 99 per cent in favour of UK citizenship is surely overstated, but a general tendency to the UK's favour is consistent with data I collected during my fieldwork in Mauritius. Often referring to the right to live and work in Europe, many Chagossians told me that any Mauritian who would be presented with the same choice would prefer UK to Mauritian citizenship. However, for Chagossians in particular, there is also a significant historical dimension that must be taken into consideration. As Uteem indicated, Chagos islanders have long occupied the lowest strata of Mauritian society. Many Chagossians dissociate with the Mauritian state, and some even refuse to take part in Mauritian elections. Reasons for this are not just poverty. A common argument in the conversations I had with Chagossians on this issue was that Mauritius' political elite had readily accepted a deal with the UK in the 1960s to detach the Chagos Archipelago in exchange for independence and monetary compensation. Hence, many accused Mauritian authorities for having sacrificed Chagossians for Mauritian Independence. For the Mauritian government to be able to 'go through the Chagossians' and 'make of the Chagossian case our case' the dominant historical narrative with which most Chagossians self-identify would therefore need considerable revisions. This does not stop the government from trying. As the following empirical example from my fieldwork shows, in the run-up to the departure in 2006 the Mauritian government sought to sway Chagossian self-identification to their own favour by renegotiating Chagossians' own history as well as the social categories with which they identify. This can be understood as a complex form of other-identification targeted at a group that now possess a relatively autonomous voice. The example also shows that Mauritian authorities have only been moderately successful in this competition for Chagossian self-identification.

On Sunday 27 March 2006, three days before the departure to the Chagos Archipelago, Mauritius' Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam welcomed the Chagossian community in Mauritius for a 'get-together' in the context of the visit to the Chagos Archipelago' at Clarisse House – the Prime Minister's official residence in Vacoas. This was a rare and also a highly symbolic gesture. Shortly after noon, hundreds of Chagossians arrived with buses from the slums of Port Louis to that upper-class area on the island's central plateau. Just in front of the impressive colonial building a large tent was erected in the green spacious garden, and servants were preparing food for the Chagossian guests. As the Chagossians entered and discreetly observed and commented on the extraordinary location, Mauritius' socio-economic divisions became extremely apparent. But the event was also marked by another significant symbolic dimension. The historical expulsion of the Chagos islanders was made possible through a UK-Mauritian independence agreement. For this reason, Chagossians often express strong resentment towards the Mauritian state in general, especially the MLP, and particularly its former leader Seewoosagar Ramgoolam – the late 'father of the nation' who headed the Mauritian pro-independence delegation in the London constitutional talks in the 1960s. At this particular 'get-together' the late S. Ramgoolam represented not only the fictive father of the Mauritian nation. Mauritius is a state with limited social mobility. Most Chagossians have remained poor, and, as it happens, the late 'father of the nation' was also the biological father of Mauritius' new Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam who had invited them. And whereas Ramgoolam senior was accused of having played a key role in the decisions that led to the

Chagossian expulsions, Ramgoolam junior was now asking to be recognized as the Prime Minister who helped the Chagossians to have a journey back home.

Hundreds of Chagossians showed up for the meeting. As they queued and crowded into the tent where the Prime Minister would appear, it was impossible not to notice how the audience separated into two different sections. When the Minister of Local Government officially welcomed the audience at 14.00 hrs. the audience had chosen their seats according to which of the two Chagossian organizations in Mauritius they supported: the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG) and the Chagossian Social Committee (Mauritius). After the welcome, the chairmen of the CSC (Mauritius) and the CRG, Olivier Bancoult and Fernand Mandarin respectively, were invited to give talks. And as they spoke, the divided audience cheered exclusively, or more vigorously, for the representative they supported. Thus, right before the state's central representatives, Chagossians demonstrated the amount of support each of the two organisations held within their community. Expectations of exclusive support to the one or the other organization also appeared to be very strong. Chagossian couples who had not attended told me later they felt obliged to support different organizations, because, among other things, of their family relations with the competing Chagossian political leaders. They therefore decided to stay at home instead of travelling separately. When the meeting concluded with a speech by the Prime Minister, Ramgoolam could also not refrain from commenting on the clearly divided audience. In the jargon of Mauritius' nationalist slogan – unity in diversity – he advised: “You should not create divisions among yourselves. Do not make this mistake! It is through unity that you will win this struggle”. Comparing their situation with India's independence from Britain and the conflicts that led to the separation of India and Pakistan, he warned that the principle of divide and rule has long since been central to British colonial policy. He then went on to propose a far wider ‘unity’ than one between CRG and CSC (Mauritius) members:

[Some Chagossian] people have died and could not return. We are, and we have to be, sad on their behalf. Through mutual consent between England and Mauritius, Tony Blair has accepted the visit. I need one principle, comrade Olivier [CRG leader] and comrade Fernand [CSC leader]: You may have differences among yourselves, but do not make war against us. [...] This is not a lesson in politics, this is a national lesson [...] we need to go for a national attitude, because this concerns the entire Mauritian island and all its dependencies (Ramgoolam 26 Mar. 2006; my recording, translation and omissions).

The Prime Minister called for cooperation with the Mauritian state in a unified struggle to regain sovereignty to the Chagos Archipelago. This was no surprise to anyone present, but his appeal was clearly more welcomed in the CSC supporters' corner. Before the ‘get-together’ countless rectangular CRG banners were produced and distributed among the organization's supporters. They had also handed out uniform white T-shirts, which despite the divided audience, and totally contradicting the geography of the Chagos Archipelago, read “back to paradise – one people, one island, one struggle” (see Illustration 11). Interestingly, the rivalling CSC (Mauritius) used the exact same means of communication, but these symbols were much more in line with government politics. Their rectangular banners were Mauritian flags, and

their uniform white T-shirts displayed a map of the Chagos Archipelago encircled by the colours of the Mauritian flag along with the text: “Chagos is Mauritian soil”. To understand the background for these divisions, it is necessary to make a short excursus to recapture the organizations’ central political disagreements.

Both the CRG and the CSC pursue the right of return to the Chagos Archipelago and proper compensation, but they disagree on how to best achieve these aims. As described in Chapter 3, in the late 1990s the CSC enjoyed support from the majority of Chagossians in Mauritius when they presented a case at the United Nations Working Group for Indigenous Peoples in Geneva to have Chagossians recognized as autochthonous to the Chagos Archipelago. But in 1998, the Mauritian government delegation to Geneva refused to recognize them as such due to the fear of losing out in its claim to sovereignty:

The former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago [...] are to all intents and purposes first and foremost citizens of the republic of Mauritius [...] there have never been any indigenous people on those islands. Therefore the former inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago cannot, at all, on their own refer to themselves as indigenous peoples and on that assumption claim their return to the Chagos Archipelago (Government of Mauritius 1998).

In an interview in 2006, CSC (Mauritius) leader Fernand Mandarin explained to me that his organisation was after this statement invited to support the Mauritian government in launching a case against the UK before the ICJ. At the time the CSC (Mauritius) also considered the option of suing the UK government in British courts and had therefore sought legal advice from a British lawyer. The lawyer however recommended they not bring their case to the British Courts, but instead opt for political negotiations with all parties involved. Accordingly, the organisation decided to join forces with Mauritius government and have since argued that Chagossians are Mauritians and that sovereignty to their homeland belongs to Mauritius. According to Mandarin, the organisation would not support resettlement as long as the US military base remains in the Chagos Archipelago – not even on the outer islands. Hence, because Mauritius current government does not oppose the US military base, the organisation’s strategy was first to seek compensation through political negotiations, and then, when the base closes and sovereignty is ceded to Mauritius, repopulation can take place. Like the Mauritian government, Mandarin also suspected that granting UK citizenship to Chagos islanders in 2002 was a British policy of divide and rule and emphasised in my interview that Chagossian migration to England “is a British strategy: They [Chagossians] forget their real natal soil. The British give them a life – they stop fighting”. By opposing the UK passports and pronouncing in the local press that “we are very much attached to Mauritius” (Week-End, 9 Apr. 2006a; my translation) he confirmed and supported Mauritius’ position in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago. Highly interesting though, while he elaborated on his organisation’s political stance during my interview, Mandarin also expressed himself in a manner that was very similar to that of Mauritius’ former President: “How can we oppose the British?” he asked, before he responded the question himself: “we have to go through the state!”

So when the rivalling Chagos Refugees Group was aided by a British solicitor to file a legal case against the British government in the late 1990s this was indeed contrary to the legal

advice obtained by the CSC (Mauritius), who thereupon objected that since the court action was a strategy of confrontation it effectively terminated any possibility for political negotiation with the involved parties. Soon, however, they lost the majority of supporters to the CRG when the London High Court ruled in the litigant's favour and re-established the right to return to the Chagos Archipelago in November 2000. Contrary to the CSC (Mauritius), and to the regret of Mauritius government, the CRG will not take official side in the sovereignty dispute, claiming this to be their way of remaining open to all parties. As we have seen, partly due to the political nature of their legal case, the CRG did not officially oppose the US base on Diego Garcia either.

At the 'get-together' in 2006 it became quite evident that most Chagossians in Mauritius now supported the CRG. This unofficial competition between the two organizations before the sitting government this day was later discussed and eventually settled with reference to the number of buses each organisation had rented and managed to fill up with supporters. To CRG members' great satisfaction their organization had managed to fill ten buses while the CSC only disposed of two – which were said to be “not even full”. After the meeting, on the steep road leading back down from the upper-class central plateau to the lower-class slum areas around Port Louis, one of the CRG buses managed to overtake that of the CSC. While passengers were cheering and glancing into the bus overtaken, the CRG leader commented on the CSC's defeat: “Now he has to accept it.” This comment was addressed to the CSC's legal representative who also has been outspoken about a pro-British attitude of the CRG in Mauritian public.

Judging from the popularity of the CRG it appears that the Chagossian majority does not fully approve of the Mauritian position in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago. As noted, this has very much to do with how most Chagossians understand their own history. For Prime Minister Ramgoolam to hope for political cooperation with their community it was clear that a warning about British colonial politics coupled with an appeal to Mauritian patriotism would not suffice. Chagossian self-identification and social memory, i.e. the dominant narrative in which most evicted islanders understand themselves as Chagossian characters, had to be re-negotiated. Indicating that he was aware of the issues the evicted population has with the history and position of the Mauritian government, in his speech to the Chagossian community the Prime Minister also sought to re-negotiate the historical events leading up to the Chagossian evictions. Seemingly in defence of his father's involvement in the Chagos issue, Navin Ramgoolam set off with a peculiar claim to speak with a certain authority about their expulsions due to his family relations:

It's not only an injustice, it's an incredible injustice in a century dictated by the international order. Human Rights? Nothing like this could happen in a democracy because what they did was simply illegal, in violation of UN resolutions. How is it possible that people still don't know exactly what happened? How do I know this a little better? Because I have lived, I was born – I was born in a house where this was discussed. [...] Listen! Let's explain a bit about what happened in the British Cabinet with regard to Diego Garcia. Politics have to be exact. We have to pay close attention. When England detached Diego Garcia in 1965, when they confiscated Diego Garcia and the other islands, Mauritius was not independent. There was a lot of secrecy involved. Prime Minister Harold Wilson of the British Labour Party made the decision

to detach them and said: ‘Do not tell Mauritius anything.’ [...] The British never, never ever, made us aware of what they were going to do: To go ahead and give it to the Americans, to lease it to the Americans to create a military base. We didn’t know that. Only later we found out. Then the documents came out in England thirty years later. You have seen them. Some of which stated that [...] the inhabitants have become a problem. [...] They detached and confiscated in secrecy right from the start. That is a violation of Chagossian Human Rights we all have to respect. Despite two UN Resolutions [...] clearly stating that one has no right to detach a country, to dismember a country, before its independence. But unfortunately, unfortunately, they did. But it’s not only you, Chagossian people, people from the Chagos – the whole Mauritian island was victimized (Ramgoolam, Vacoas, 26 Mar. 2006; my recording, translation and omissions).

In this speech the Prime Minister presented both extended social categories as well as alternative cultural contents to influence Chagossian self-identification. Placing guilt and responsibility with the British Government alone he extended the category of ‘the victimized’ to include both Chagossian people and Mauritians. Also, to reframe the Mauritian state from a ‘partner in crime’ to ‘co-victims’ of the British colonial power he also re-negotiated history, or more precisely the most central story of eviction and victimisation with which Chagossians self-identify. However, if this was a strategy to have Chagos islanders accept and support the government’s wider agenda, the event itself demonstrated that the government had only been moderately successful. The case nonetheless clearly shows that Chagossians are now regarded relevant political actors in Mauritius, and that their community has split along decisive points of reference set by Mauritian government policies on the Chagos Archipelago.

4.4.4 THE DEMILITARISATION MOVEMENT AND CHAGOSSIAN OTHER-IDENTIFICATION

‘The US authorities,’ the British State maintained in Court this week, ‘stress the importance of the islands being uninhabited.’ He said, that the Chagossians have had links with political parties whose aims remain to close down the US base. This is an obvious and direct reference to our party LALIT. [...] Bancoult, who is the leader of the group (which is one of three Chagossian groups), and who Lalit has worked with in the past when he was against the military base, immediately put out a statement [...] in which he not only says he is NOT against the military base, but in which he denies his own past, and says he never has been.

www.lalitmauritius.org

The most active representatives of the transnational demilitarisation movement in Mauritius today are members of the radical left political party Lalit. Among their central political aims are closing down the US base on Diego Garcia and retrocession of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius. In Lalit’s view, these two questions along with the return of the Chagossians to the Chagos Archipelago are three interwoven political matters. And to separate and consider these issues independent from one another is, at best, a failure to understand their place in a global neo-colonial context of aggressive western capitalism spearheaded by British and US powers. Lalit members have supported Chagos islanders in their struggles for return and compensation

since the 1970s (cf. Chapter 3). In the above quotation these political connections are highlighted. As late as in 1998 the Rann nu Diego Committee was jointly set up by Lalit and the Chagos Refugees Group. It is worth noting that the name of the committee has a double meaning: 'Return us [i.e. Chagossians] to Diego Garcia' and 'Give us [i.e. Mauritius] Diego Garcia back'. This committee called among other things for retrocession of Chagos to Mauritius and closure of the US military base (The Rann nu Diego Committee, Recent Campaign Document - 2, 1998; reproduced in Lalit 2002, 211). During my first fieldwork in 2004 discussions between Lalit and the CRG were still taking place, but they were rather sporadic and marked by limited political consensus. As already discussed, because of the political nature of their legal actions in the UK and the US, and since many Chagossians hope for employment on the military facility, the CRG do not oppose the US base. Many Mauritians, including Lalit, suspected that the CRG colluded with British authorities and their occupation of the Chagos.

Just like other parties involved in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago, also Lalit and members of the trans-national demilitarisation movement introduced above realise that political cooperation with the Chagos islanders will enhance their own political position. The history of the Chagos islanders represents a humanitarian issue with a strong media appeal. Coupled with issues of colonization, militarisation as well as environmental protection, the tragic story of the marginalised Chagossians and the world's dominant powers' disregard for their human rights makes a powerful case. No wonder Lalit has also engaged in politics of other-identification. The way Lalit, in cooperation with other transnational organisations, sought to arrange for the Chagossians a return to the Chagos with the Japanese Peace-Boat is a good example for such politics. As already outlined, Lalit and other organizations at the WSF in Mumbai in January 2004 proposed that Chagos islanders could return to their homeland as part of a wider manifestation against the US base and the British occupation of the Chagos. "The reason we organized this joint delegation", Lalit representatives later wrote to the NO-Bases Network, "was so as to allow the CRG to see for themselves the support that they could expect from the world anti-bases movement and anti-war movement" (Kistnasamy and Collen 2008). But despite the show of support, CRG representatives were not willing to sign a petition for the closure of the military base. Hence this alliance failed and the action never materialised. During my fieldwork a meeting between CRG and Lalit was arranged on 23 April 2004. One month before that meeting, Lalit had staged a demonstration before the US Embassy in Port Louis to protest against the attacks on Iraq exactly one year after the US bombers had commenced their attacks from Diego Garcia. But when protesters lined up in the street with the message "USA GET OUT OF DIEGO" (see Illustration 14 below) no Chagossian representative was present. During the meeting in April, CRG and Lalit representatives discussed how to proceed with the 'Peace-Flotilla' action. However, the talks were still marked by disagreement over the US base. One Lalit representative argued that it would be beneficial to the CRG to have a clearly pronounced political position with regard to the issues of militarisation and sovereignty.

With a common political platform demanding the closure of the US base, retrocession of the Chagos to Mauritius, and the return of the Chagos islanders they would surely receive wide transnational support. Following this appeal to extend their political agenda, the Lalit representative invited Chagossians to ‘imagine’ how it would be to form part of a truly global movement against all military bases worldwide. In the end, however, a common platform was not agreed upon. CRG members did confirm that the US base was the key reason why they are prevented from returning, but as an elder Chagossian man then concluded: “Some of us want to work there”.



Illustration 14: Lalit demonstration outside US embassy in Port Louis. Photo: Johannessen 2004.

Lalit’s relations with the CRG have since soured. Their ways of influencing what broader political context and agenda Chagossians identify their struggles with has moved from cooperation via negotiation to open criticism. In the above quoted open letter to members of the NO-Bases Network from 2008, Lalit warned that the CRG has “ended up on the other side of the barricade” as a result of the trickery of the British state:

The single-issue campaign to ‘get the Chagossians of Diego Garcia back to their Islands’ has reached the terrible impasse where it finds itself well-nigh colluding with the US military base on Diego Garcia, as well as openly colluding with continued British occupation of this part of Mauritius (Kistnasamy and Collen 2008; quotation marks in original).

The letter also drew attention to the fact that many Chagossians as well as some UK-based support organisations now ignore the underlying political causes and treat the Chagos issue as if it was only a matter of returning the Chagossians to their homeland. After the CRG leader

refused to oppose the US base and even voiced that ‘most of us want to stay British,’ Lalit warned: “We have come to the dead-end of the tactic of ‘concentrating on the purely humanitarian issue’ of the displacement of the people of Diego Garcia” (Kistnasamy and Collen 2008; quotation marks in original). The occasion for the letter was also not arbitrary. It was written shortly before the CRG leader would embark on a US tour to give public speeches on the history of the Chagos islanders. Since he would then also speak on international anti-war platforms Lalit recommended he be asked direct questions about the organization’s stance on the US base so as to not leave anti-war activists with the impression that the CRG is fighting to close the base down and to end British occupation of the Chagos.

Over time then, at least *vis-à-vis* the CRG who now represents the Chagossian majority, Lalit’s strategy has also changed. They have moved from a strategy of cooperation and negotiation aiming to frame Chagossian community’s self-identification within a particular larger context in accordance with the interests of the global anti-war movement, to criticising what they regard as CRG opportunism. Also this reflects a situation where the CRG has gained a relatively autonomous voice. A voice, which due to the political circumstances of the Chagossian evictions, appears as if it is contradicting UK and US interests, but in important respects conforms to, or at least does not directly oppose, key interests these powers hold in the wider politics of the Chagos Archipelago. If Lalit’s critique and their encouragement to disclosure of CRG’s political position in these matters will impact on the extent of international support this organisation can garner, also this can be an effective political means to sway Chagossian political opinion to the favour of the transnational demilitarisation movement’s political agenda.

4.5 ARRIVALS

This mapping of the political waters the *Mauritius Trochetia* traversed in 2006 clearly shows that the politics of the Chagos Archipelago not only concerns the Chagos islanders’ struggles for compensation and right to repatriation. Also British and US authorities, the Mauritian government, as well as a trans-national demilitarisation movement are key actors in significant disputes that concern these islands. Particularly important to these three external parties are the questions of sovereignty and militarisation. However, their pronounced political positions with regard to these two questions are mutually exclusive, and their political aims and objectives also extend beyond Chagossians’ own political agenda.

In light of this, it is inadequate to understand the Chagos Archipelago a contested resource. To the different actors introduced in this chapter, the word ‘resource’ would mean very different things. I have therefore argued in line with Eade and Sallnow (1991) that – although not all participants were pilgrims, and even though some of the central stakeholders did not journey at all – the *Mauritius Trochetia*’s destination on this occasion is best understood as a site of contest, i.e. a place onto which different parties compete to monopolise meaning. From the rather untraditional example of pilgrimage that this case offers, one can thus conclude that Eade and Sallnow’s approach has a broader field of application.

The negotiations that took place in the run-up to the Chagossian journey however showed that the politics of the Chagos Archipelago are, in practice, much more complex than what the pronounced lines of disagreement suggest. In light of the case of Mauritius' embedded autonomy and trade with the UK and the USA, we can say that even the conflict itself form a significant resource, since it can serve to maintain relations with important parties involved. Also the evicted islanders' history and condition has become a sort of resource to parties that aim to challenge the *status quo* of the UK-US establishment. Whether they want to dismantle it altogether, some aspects of it only, or simply wish to press the UK or the US into negotiation over other matters, external parties invoke the historical drama of the Chagos islanders for moral and political support on the international arena. Compared to appealing to abstract laws, UN resolutions, or concepts of neo-colonialism, imperialism and even US military aggression, external parties who co-opt the plight of the Chagossians can make a much more powerful case. Invoking that plight demands defenders of the current UK-US establishment to address a very concrete human drama – a drama with voices, faces, and victims that suffer the consequences of an additional, but certainly not unrelated, repertoire of legal violations. Those who wish to defend the current UK-US establishment certainly have much more to gain on hiding or somehow devaluating that 'resource'. As we have seen many examples of, UK authorities have long sought to silence, downplay, or to reframe the story of the evicted Chagos islanders.

Much because of that powerful human drama, but also due to legal issues, other-identification of the Chagos islanders has long been a central concern to involved parties. Already before the evictions, political actors beyond the Chagos islanders were concerned with how to identify and represent (and not represent) their group to the public. In the early days, UK authorities could simply identify and represent them as they pleased. Accordingly, despite contentions over this matter within government circles, the British Foreign Office decided to identify and present them as a floating population of contract workers from Mauritius and the Seychelles. In that way, they could circumvent international agreements as drawn up by the UN charter when evicting them. Over the years, however, a significant change has taken place. Through their political struggles, as described in the foregoing chapter, Chagos islanders have become relevant political actors, with a relatively autonomous voice and a claim to be taken into consideration in matters that concern their homeland. In this new context, a different, and more subtle, politics of identification has emerged. In a setting where external actors can no longer identify and represent the Chagos islanders at will, strategies have developed where, in order to enhance (also) their own interests, different external parties compete to influence how Chagos islanders understand and present themselves, their past, their homeland and their struggle – in short, how they self-identify. Chagossian self-identification has thus become a bone of contention. A competition for Chagossian self-identification has emerged, where actors beyond the Chagossian community want Chagos islanders to identify as 'victimized Mauritians', 'British citizens', or as a central party within a wider trans-national movement against US military aggression and British occupation. In this competition, external parties, whose political agendas go well beyond the immediate aims of the evicted islanders, propose new or extended social categories, and/or seek to re-negotiate cultural meanings vested in already established ones, in order to sway and influence how Chagossians self-identify. Surely, to 'go through' the Chagossians in this way can be a highly efficient political means. On the one hand, parties who can claim to represent the interests of the Chagossian community, and

thus legitimately invoke their moral drama, will no doubt enhance their political position concerning issues that relate to the Chagos Archipelago. On the other hand, if Chagos islanders come to understand themselves in the frames proposed by external parties, in other words, if self- and other-identification converge, they may even also profit from the active political leadership of the Chagossian diaspora and their transnational networks of supporters.

While Chagossians have acquired a relatively autonomous voice over the years, it is in light of this competition for Chagossian self-identification more than conceivable that this autonomous voice is relative. Indeed, Chagos islanders do not go unaffected by these political efforts. On a socio-political level, their community is now divided along the lines of these external parties' disputes. This shows that the competition for Chagossian self-identification limits the autonomy of their voices. As the global constellation, and with it the agendas of external parties, are changing, Chagossian positioning is constantly renegotiated. Whereas the question of militarisation was a more critical issue in the early years of the Chagossians' struggles, it is now the question of sovereignty that tends to split the political organization of their community. That Chagossian political organizations are now divided along the lines of sovereignty rather than militarisation brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: Was the *Mauritius Trochetia's* passenger list a mirror-image of the politics of the Chagos Archipelago? And if so, was it a mirror-image of the historical trajectory of these politics, or was it rather a mirror-image of the contemporary constellation?

In 2006, the *Mauritius Trochetia's* passengers included only representatives of parties ready to accept a compromise. The presence of both the UK and Mauritian officials on the ship was indeed a compromise, but since they both support the US establishment, it was a compromise on the sovereignty issue alone – and thus merely a confirmation of the presence of the US base. However, UK-Mauritian relations clearly extend the issue of sovereignty to include also economic matters, which surely was important in the context of this journey. Representatives of the US and the demilitarisation movement were not on the passenger list, although they both represent key actors in this political field. For sure, they would never reach a compromise on militarisation, and to these two parties sovereignty is a matter beyond concern and beyond compromise respectively. With regard to these two questions, Chagossians themselves do not speak with a clear and coherent voice, but are, and have long since been, ready to compromise – albeit in different ways. This means that the emergent relatively autonomous Chagossian voice is not only limited by the competition for Chagossian self-identification, it is also funnelled and amplified through these parties. And thus, as also discussed in the foregoing chapter, we should speak not only of 'limits', but also of what possibilities that have emerged for them in this very particular context.

The issue of compromise point to another important aspect of the politics of the Chagos Archipelago, namely the imbalance of power between the parties involved. It is likely that Mauritius' government would not have put a state owned vessel at disposal, and shipped a government representative together with the BIOT administrator to Chagos Archipelago if it was not for Mauritius' embedded autonomy and their pressed economic situation at the time. Also, that the strongest Chagossian organisation does not oppose the US military base, which is the key reason for their expulsions and for why they cannot return, must also be viewed from

the perspective of power-imbalance.²² Images of the massive US military installation that frequently appear in local media have surely contributed to an understanding among many Chagossians that to close a major US military base is not 'realistic'. But power comes into play also in other contexts, including the courts, as in the example of Chagossians who do not oppose US military presence on their homeland because they fear that this would jeopardise their legal proceedings within the British legal system. Militarisation rather presents itself as both the problem and the solution for evicted, poor and unemployed Chagossians who wish to return to a devastated homeland where the sole infrastructure and means of employment available are connected to the military base. Whereas many Chagossians consider militarisation a matter beyond their sphere of influence, sovereignty is presented as a matter of Chagossian 'choices' – of (il)loyalty to the one state or the other. It is along the lines of these 'choices' that Chagossian political mobilisation has split.

Although external parties now engage in a competition for Chagossian self-identification, it does not automatically follow that the latter submit to their efforts. To self-identify as 'Chagossian' needs not contradict additional categories for self-identification such as 'Mauritian' or 'British' of course, but one can hardly deny that these categories are interrelated. Exactly how they are related, ranked and organised in terms of categories and sub-categories that are mutually exclusive or not, their (political) relevance, as well as their central historical and cultural meanings can always be negotiated. This may contribute to sway Chagossians' self-understanding, opinion and even their political agenda. However, awareness of such a competition among Chagossians also provokes objections, and, as we have seen in Chapter 3, feeds into the understanding that they are being subject to political manipulation and even cultural genocide. Evidently, this competition has not (yet) challenged the contemporary salience of ethnic identification among the evicted islanders, but it has nonetheless had important effects on their socio-political organization. What is clear is that Chagossian identification is very much embedded in a wider and rather complex political landscape. What it means to be Chagossian from their own perspective shall be detailed in the next chapter.

²² After my fieldwork, the Chagos Islands Community Association (CICA) was established in the UK in September 2006. The association has taken a critical stance to the military base and supports the Lalit campaign to close the US base on Diego Garcia.

5 “BACK 2 PARADISE” : THE FORMATION AND WORKINGS OF A DOMINANT CHAGOSSIAN AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

Around March 2006, expectations that the Chagossians’ first homecoming in forty years would cause the travellers severe emotional distress were widespread among the Mauritian public. Such apprehension was both reflected in and reinforced by local media. Throughout the event, Mauritian newspapers focussed strongly on Chagossians’ emotions and their childhood memories, producing a range of dramatic headlines such as: “Between nostalgia and the desire to rediscover the lost past”, “Dream-visit comes true”, “Intense emotions on the quay”, “The tears of happiness”, “Diego Garcia: Will it be a shock?”, “Chagos: First emotions off the Salomon coast at noon”, “Unforgettable Chagos!”, “Last stage, strong emotions”, “Three days of intense emotions”, “Painful return...”, “Back from trip down memory lane” and “End of a pilgrimage highly emotional” (Le Mauricien 29 Mar. 2006; News on Sunday 31 Mar. 2006; Le Mauricien 31 Mar. 2006; L’Express 31 Mar. 2006; Star 2 Apr. 2006; Le Mauricien 3 Apr. 2006; Le Mauricien 6 Apr. 2006; Le Matinal 7 Apr. 2006; Week-End 9 Apr. 2006b; L’Express 11 Apr. 2006; L’Express Outlook 11 Apr. 2006; Le Mauricien 11 Apr. 2006; my translations). During my fieldwork, I found that much of this anxiety was based on a presumption that Chagossian passengers could be seriously shocked or traumatized when realizing that their homeland was different today than it was at the time of their removal. Mauritians repeatedly asked me why Chagossians refuse to ‘face the reality’ that their homeland has now lapsed into uninhabitable wilderness and that the huge American military installation on Diego Garcia has turned their homeland into something very far from the tranquil island paradise they so often speak of. Chagossians’ ideas about their homeland, they pointed out, did not correspond with the contemporary landscape these pilgrims were about to encounter. Many meant that Chagossians were ‘living in the past’, sometimes adding that they were poorly educated or ‘not so developed’, and might therefore not be psychologically prepared to encounter the transformed homeland of the present day. Accordingly, many underlined the importance that both priests as well as doctors from the local Brown - Séquard psychiatric hospital would accompany and assist the pilgrims in a situation where myth and reality were on a crash course. As a daily Mauritian newspaper phrased it:

The two doctors on board [...] are prepared to intervene at any moment, notably following any shock possibly caused by finding again their birthplace abandoned for almost 40 years. On their part, the two clerics partaking in the voyage [...] provide the necessary psychological framework considering how certain Chagossians from today on will experience days of intense emotions (Le Mauricien, 3 Apr. 2006).

Also the Catholic priest who accompanied the pilgrims to the Chagos stressed the importance of his role in “preparing the Chagossians spiritually”. In an interview I conducted with him shortly after the voyage, he explained:

When you discover your island abandoned: Traumatic. Before going, Mr Humphries had a Power Point [presentation] to show these people how they are going to see the islands forty years after [their evictions]. That is why there was a kind of apprehension for these people: How, when seeing these islands abandoned completely, how could they react? – The trauma.

The Mr Humphries referred to here was BIOT administrator at the time and also the sole UK official who accompanied the Chagossians on their journey. Less than a week before their departure, he arranged a meeting with all Chagossian participants. He wanted to prepare the passengers psychologically too, and his special precautions included explaining to them that the Chagos Archipelago was no longer how it used to be and he even illustrated this by screening up-to-date pictures of Chagossians’ deteriorated ancestral cemeteries in the Chagos Archipelago. Following his preparative exercise, he revealed to local journalists that this was to spare Chagossians ‘a too grand shock’ (Le Mauricien 29 Mar. 2006; Star 2 Apr. 2006; Week-End 2 Apr. 2006).

The apprehension expressed by journalists, Mauritians, clerics and state officials alike at this moment demonstrates a very strong tendency to psychologise the Chagossian problem. At a time of substantial public attention, the journey appeared to take on therapeutic meanings while much of the Chagossian problem was being re-placed from the particularities of power and political history and into the bodies, minds and emotions of individual Chagossians. The BIOT administrator’s consultation surely contributed to this. But the passengers’ psychological health was not his only, or perhaps main, concern. There was indeed also a political reality behind the setting, which to some extent now disappeared from view, but which had to be taken into consideration. The BIOT administrator was of course well aware of the Chagossians’ very militant past, and his consultation must hence also be understood as an effort to prevent political demonstrations during the journey. The official administrator of their homeland, appointed by the Monarch herself, formulated his precaution: “we expect a sober and dignified visit”. As a man of considerable power in this setting, he did not fail to point out that any further visits in the future would depend on how smooth this first visit went (Le Mauricien 29 Mar. 2006; Star 2 Apr. 2006; Week-End 2 Apr. 2006).

The apprehension expressed at this moment cannot be reduced to political strategies of psychologising the Chagos issue at a time of increased public attention. Indeed, many Chagossians did expect that it would be difficult to arrive in their homeland after all these years and they did not hesitate to emphasise that this would be very emotional. For example, in an interview with a Chagossian woman few hours before she embarked on the journey, she explained to me: “Because of how the island used to be and how it has become now, for me, this will hurt a lot in my body”. Clearly, and just like other Chagossians I spoke with, the woman did not fail to realize that her homeland had changed and deteriorated during her years of absence. Nevertheless, on 30 March 2006 she and the other Chagossian passengers departed Mauritius in uniform T-shirts reading “Back to paradise” – a slogan reifying an image of a

homeland very different from what the public expected that these passengers would encounter. As for example a middleclass Hindu-Mauritian in his mid-thirties asked me: “Why do they believe these islands to be like a paradise? What will they do over there? There is no electricity, no schools, no houses or jobs – nothing.” Such questions, just like the worries referred to above, were not capricious, but very much related to how Chagossians typically present themselves and their situation. In fact, they point to important issues with regard to what it means to be Chagossian, a question I shall inquire into in this chapter.

To explore what it may mean to be Chagossian from their own perspective, I shall look into how Chagossians themselves present themselves and their community. Much of the content of these self-presentations form mnemonic data that revolve around their past and how they now remember the homeland from where they were evicted. Because telling stories about their community is very common among Chagossians, oral data on this is rather easy to access and appears at the same time to be quite important. It is therefore less surprising that this has been subject to anthropological attention already. As I have elaborated elsewhere, Chagossians’ narratives about themselves are constitutive of their collective identity. They are also important with respect to strengthening notions of longing and belonging in a difficult socio-economic context – a context that has stimulated constructions of an idealised homeland that represent the solutions to Chagossians’ contemporary problems (Johannessen 2005, 29-55). Vine also makes use of Chagossians’ representations of their past, but from a more historical-investigative perspective. In documenting what damages and sufferings Chagossians have endured, he invokes their recollections to depict and demonstrate the actual downward socio-economic mobility, the impoverishment and the relative deprivation – including the social, psychological and material damages – they have experienced as a result of their forced displacement (Vine 2009, 126-64). Illustrative of this approach, he notes that this has affected older Chagossians the most since the younger have “little if any memory of Chagos and experienced less disruption in their lives as a result of their expulsion” (Vine 2009, 151). This differs from Jeffery’s approach to such data as she, like Johannessen (2005), to greater extent regards Chagossians’ recollections as constructions informed by their politicised post-eviction setting, a setting where an increasingly standardised narrative or ‘mythico-history’ about their past has emerged. Analysing songs performed by Chagossians today, and comparing the lyrics of those produced before and after the evictions, she holds that Chagossians’ more recent portrayals of their homeland form romanticised collective representations of a past homeland which, when contrasted with accounts of displacement and sufferings in exile, have contributed to galvanise political support for their community. In the courts however, such collective historical representations have been more of a hindrance than help (Jeffery 2006, 57-74, 2007, 2011). Also Kooy (2008) and Evers (2011) investigate Chagossians’ representations of their past, but with a focus on Chagossian children. Based on empirical material, including reflexive drawing exercises produced among Chagossian primary school children in Mauritius, they show that older Chagossians’ collective narratives about their past are successfully passed on to the younger generation. For many children of disadvantaged and troubled Chagossian families then, Chagos has become a coping strategy, providing an alternative idyllic place to daydream about when life in Mauritius become difficult to deal with.

In what follows I shall expand on my earlier findings, and describe and interpret how Chagossians themselves present themselves, their history and condition. In this undertaking, I

will discuss and analyse what I shall refer to as ‘a dominant Chagossian auto/biography’. I have chosen this particular concept for reasons that have to do with analytical, methodological as well as empirical dimensions of my ethnographic material. Analytically: by auto/biography I refer to an emergent, general and widely shared narrative about the Chagos islanders, which Chagossians tend to draw on when they talk about themselves, their community and relevant others. At the core of this narrative is a set of interrelated concepts and metaphors they routinely invoke in order to express, frame and make intelligible a variety of past and present experiences, as well as anticipations of their future. As thoroughly demonstrated in the foregoing chapter, Chagossians are also identified and represented in different ways by others. The slash included to the ‘auto/biography’ concept is meant to underline the on-going social dialectics at work when this general story-of-our-lives is produced, enacted, negotiated, confirmed, and reconfigured in different social encounters. Methodologically: I wish to highlight that my own efforts to present and analyse what I consider the most central aspects of this dominant narrative is not immune to, but part of, the same dialectical processes. It is not uncommon that scientific representation feedback and influence subjects of study. Representing others will always involve an element of selection, but then again, to carefully choose and interpret such empirical material is indeed a researcher’s job, and it is on the background of long term fieldwork that I have found the quotes and empirical cases to be presented below representative and also appropriate to illustrate issues of ethnographic importance. Empirically: Stories are highly important in Chagossians’ social and political lives. During my fieldwork, Chagossians repeatedly emphasised that it was important to them to tell their personal stories, as well as to expose the story of their community to the wider public. One of my close Chagossian informants also insisted that I should write what he called “our life-story book” or “the life-book of the Chagossian people”. Reflecting this, when Chagossians travelled to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 they brought and laid down three book-shaped monuments to commemorate their own history. As the Latin root of the concept ‘biography’ (*bios* and *graphia*) means ‘life-writing’ I find the concept ‘auto/biography’ particularly suitable for the following analysis.

This dominant auto/biography is not a single official story, but more like a general narrative constructed around an elaborate vocabulary of culture specific concepts and metaphors. Every Chagossian has of course his or her own life-story to tell, but they routinely invoke a particular set of concepts to express it. In the following shall discuss emic meanings of those that are most central. These include: our homeland (or Chagos), our misery, our roots, our sadness and our struggle. All these concepts refer to the Chagossian community exclusively, and are also generally agreed upon among members of their group. They are also very much interrelated, and can hardly be understood without reference to one another. Through these concepts, critical past and present experiences become intelligible and communicable within, and to various extent beyond, their community. Exploring these concepts and metaphors shall serve to unveil the contours of an emergent narrative about their community. More in line with my theoretical approach here, one can say that a dominant Chagossian auto/biography has emerged, in which the evicted population understand and present themselves as Chagossian characters. This auto/biography is much centred on imagined differences between ‘Chagos’ and ‘Mauritius’ – a spatial relationship Chagossians routinely express in the form of dichotomies (cf. Johannessen 2005, 39-43). To accentuate that the key

concepts and metaphors that constitute it are fundamentally relational, I have chosen to slightly rephrase the Chagossians' slogan for their journey in 2006 and name this chapter "back 2 paradise".

An important aspect with this dominant auto/biography is that it is responsive to Chagossians' socio-political and economic circumstances. It can and should therefore be understood and analysed in light of this. This also implies that their past is always in the making, constantly confirmed and re-negotiated within a much disadvantaged, but also highly politicised, context. Accordingly, beyond looking to what social, psychological and political functions this dominant auto/biography serves, I will seek to explain how its most central constitutive concepts are produced and reproduced in everyday practices in Chagossians' socio-political lives. With regard to this, we shall also see that in 2006, new political developments took place that led to significant reformulations of the Chagossians' past. These developments relate to a central, but thus far neglected, side of Chagossian culture, namely the role and importance of Christianity and representatives of the church. In the context of their journey in 2006, 'pilgrimage' became adopted as a metaphor for Chagossians' political struggles, effectively transforming understandings of their political history and situation into a meta-pilgrimage.

5.1 *NARRATION AND IDENTIFICATION*

There is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources.

-Macintyre (1981, 216)

A growing interest in issues of human mobility has marked the field of anthropology since the paradigm of globalisation entered the social sciences by the end of the Cold War (Ho 2006, 6). With these changes, narrative theory gained importance. Following the writing culture debates (Clifford and Marcus 1986), anthropologists questioned the spatial organisation of peoples and cultures and pointed out that much anthropological literature had reflected "a spatial distribution of people, tribes, and cultures" whereby space itself had become "a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory and societal organisation is inscribed" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 7). Much due to a disciplinary quest for comparative analysis, anthropological representations had accordingly contributed to incarcerate people to presumably bounded places or regions often defined by ethnographic 'key-concepts' (Appadurai 1988). This spatial organization of peoples, places and cultures reflects a widespread sedentarist ideology which both scholars and their subjects of study have long since taken for granted and accepted as 'natural' (Malkki 1992, 1995, 1996). As Malkki argues, in our contemporary era of nation-states a territorialised system of classification has been established. Within this classification system border-crossers such as 'refugees', 'exiles' and 'displaced people' become somewhat anomalous, and when members of such categories become subject to special management, knowledge and assistance from the so-called 'international community' they are systematically de-historicised and transformed into a

special kind of generalised victims, supposedly sharing a common existential truth like “the refugee experience” (Stein 1981, in Malkki 1995, 508). As discussed in Chapter 3, when this sedentarist order is taken for granted, displacement easily translates to cultural genocide because ‘place’ then remains highly important to people’s understandings of ‘identity’ and ‘culture’.

Such theoretical reflections have gone hand in hand with critical debates on how anthropologists should engage with notions like ‘home’, ‘culture’, ‘tradition’ and ‘identity’. As Clifford wrote in a much-quoted passage: “What does it mean, at the end of the twentieth century to speak [...] of a ‘native land’? What processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity?” (Clifford 1988, 275). This shift from essences to processes has been associated with a change from a ‘modern’ to a ‘postmodern’ theoretical paradigm. In a rather polarized fashion, Basu (2001) elaborates on the differences between them: The ‘modern’ approach takes the sedentarist ideology for granted. From this perspective, ‘identity’ is allied with ‘fixity’, and ‘home’ is understood as “the organization of space over time” (Dawson and Rapport 1998, quoted in Basu 2001, 334). As we have seen, when notions of ‘identity’, ‘home’, ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ are taken to share their essential meaning by being localized in a place of origin or belonging, movement and displacement render these notions problematic. The ‘postmodern’ approach, in contrast, does not presuppose this sedentarist order. Focus relies instead on people’s constructed ‘routes’ rather than territorialized ‘roots’ (Clifford 1997, Gilroy 1991, 1993, Basu 2001, 2004, Friedman 2002). From this analytical perspective, identity and culture are therefore not *a priori* problematic in contexts of displacement – although subjects of study may in practice both formulate and experience it as such.

This ‘postmodern’ approach suggests that identities are constituted by the lived, enacted and performed stories that people tell of themselves and their lives. Accordingly, Macintyre (1981) proposes to understand identity as secondary to the stories people tell of themselves. In his view, focus of study should not be the (one or many) identities individuals or social groups ‘have’ or what cultural contents they are ‘filled’ with. Instead, analysis should start with what is more fundamental than identity, namely the stories of which they form a part: “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (Macintyre 1981, 216). By arguing that identity presupposes stories, he turns the question of identity the other way round: “the characters in a story are not a collection of persons, but the concept of a person is that of a character abstracted from history” (Macintyre 1981, 217). Personal identity then “is just that identity presupposed by the unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires” (Macintyre 1981, 219). In other words, when people tell stories about the world they inhabit they populate these stories with characters – themselves and relevant others. Ultimately, it is by placing oneself (self-identification) and also by being placed by others (other-identification) in such narratives that people acquire identities. Through such narratives emerges a sense of unity (or perhaps unities when we speak of multiple identities) in human life.

Among the benefits of this approach is that notions of ‘home’, ‘identity’, ‘culture’ etc. acquire a non-territorialised analytical meaning. Narratives are understood as a human capability and a mobile resource for identity construction: people make themselves at home in the stories they tell about themselves and their worldviews. Hence, it does not become *a priori*

problematic to analyse culture and identity of displaced people. It also effectively distinguishes the level of analysis from that of local practice in research contexts where social scientists and subjects of study often make use of the very same concepts. Instead of locating a problem with the violation of a supposedly natural connection between such people and their place of origin (which no doubt is common among many subjects of study) this approach rather looks to the subjects' particular socio-political, economic, historical and cultural circumstances.

It is important to note that there are limits to how such narratives can be constructed. They are told and negotiated by real people in real-life social settings under circumstances they have not themselves created. Therefore, how people narrate, present and understand themselves is also subject to power and influence. Although such narratives may be re-negotiated, people can seldom reconstruct them as they please because they must also be plausible to others (see Schlee 2004, 137). Such narratives, to be precise, are stories that people themselves tell about themselves, to themselves, and also to others. Although it often appeared to be the case with regard to the Chagossians, at least with regard to those issues I shall discuss in this chapter, how people present themselves to members of their own community and to others may not correspond. Also, people do not narrate themselves alone, but form characters in other people's stories too. "We are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives" (Macintyre 1981, 213). A further point is that stories people tell of themselves often also draw on already existing narratives. Such existing narratives are often also framed by established ideologies, which, of course, also can include the sedentarist ideology. As Basu (2001) points out, narratives may be considered mobile, but are also very well suited to convey senses of rootedness and ideas of people belonging to particular places. If the imageries of roots, territorialised culture and identity are expressions of a widespread sedentarist ideology, it would indeed be remarkable if such connections to place did not figure frequently in people's narratives about themselves and the world they inhabit. Even so, scientific analytical tools must be independent of the ideological framework, and in this respect narrative theory can be very fruitful.

It is far from uncommon that people conform to the sedentarist order and understand themselves as 'rooted' in, or 'uprooted' from, particular pieces of land. However, what people exactly mean when they talk about their roots is not a given. 'Roots' is not only a travelling concept; it is also indigenised differently by different people. This is indeed a matter of culture, and depends on variations in historical and socio-economic backgrounds throughout the world. I hold that the most fruitful way to explore cultural meanings of concepts like 'roots' is through the spoken and enacted narratives people use to express and contextualise them. To explain them, however, these stories functions (such as mental escape, integration, intelligibility etc.) will not suffice. Instead, they must be understood against the group's particular background, and should be analysed as practices and acts of speech taking place in real-life social settings. Such connections between essences of the stories and the processes through which they are produced shall be central in my following analysis.

From this outline to my approach, I will in what follows explore stories Chagossians themselves tell about themselves. Since it will be important to show how my informants presented themselves, my arguments must be grounded in a number of quotations. However, because many different informants will be 'speaking' here, I have found it necessary to reduce background data to the most relevant contextual aspects. I shall also note that Chagossians'

role as victims telling a western researcher how they have been subject to great historical injustice often marked the general definition of the situation in more formal interview settings. This I find interesting in itself, and should not be disregarded as biased data in the sense of being politicized and therefore not ‘real’ or ‘intimate’ enough. Indeed, the Chagossian community has long since been highly politicized. As one of their central political aims is to expose their sufferings on what has been identified as an international market for aid and attention (cf. Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997), stories about the Chagossians are, of course, informed by their ongoing dialogues and negotiations with international reporters, politicians, NGOs, lawyers, academics and others. Accordingly, formal interview situations were quite comparable to the many other important settings where Chagossians’ stories are communicated, negotiated, confirmed and reproduced. As we shall see, Chagossians presented themselves in very similar ways in informal settings as well, and that goes for narrative structure as well as contents.

5.1.1 NARRATING SPACE: “CHAGOS IS DIFFERENT”

Speculations weather the Chagossian passengers would be seriously shocked or traumatised when seeing the real state of their ‘paradise’ homeland was not out of the blue. While producing life-story interviews with Chagossians and their descendants during my fieldwork I soon realized how central the issue of space was to their ways of presenting themselves. When Chagossian identification was not a social stigma or otherwise completely irrelevant, they repeatedly included descriptions of what the Chagos was like to the stories they told about themselves and their situation. As an elder Chagossian woman in Mauritius put it: “When I close my eyes, I know all the places where people lived”. Descriptions of the Chagos did not only come up in interview-settings, political meetings and other communal gatherings, but also in a range of informal contexts, especially when people commented on everyday challenges. Time and again, the Chagos Archipelago was vividly remembered, even by those who had only seen the Chagos Archipelago in their very early childhood. And strikingly similar representations of the homeland were also portrayed by the younger generation who had never experienced the place at all. With strong uniformity, their homeland was portrayed as an Edenic place of harmony and exceptional affluence, which in many cases went way beyond what other Mauritians would accept as possible. Below I present five quotes extracted from my conversations with different people born in the Chagos Archipelago. Even though their recollections were also expressed in very different contexts, they are highly comparable.

The first passage is a quote from a Chagossian woman in her sixties. Shortly after she was deported to Mauritius, two of her children had died. She has been politically active since the 1970s, took part in the hunger strikes that led to the Chagossian compensations in the early 1980s, and has been arrested twice for partaking in public demonstrations. She was also a central member of the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG), and the quote below is from an interview I made with her at the CRG office in 2004:

I was born in Chagos with all of my family. I gave birth to six children. I got my home without paying. Men and women were working every day. We had our own boat, and

our own land and garden where we planted vegetables. We fed animals: Ducks, chickens, dogs, cats, rabbits, turtles, guinea fowls, turkeys, horses, donkeys, pigs and birds. We had our own sea, beach, fish, octopus, crabs, sea-turtles. There were no electricity bills and no water bills. On Diego there were no diseases such as diabetes, malaria and hypertension or blood pressure. There was only one hospital. But no doctor. There was a nurse and a male nurse. The hospital could take care of the people. Nobody was sick. The hospital was only for giving birth to children. The food was protecting our health. All our food was fresh. People did not die. Maybe every four to five years one person died. And there were no cyclones. We were living like fish in water, happily, peacefully, with no diseases and no pollution. [...] We were earning monthly our wages. What we could not plant we would get in the shop. Things like beans, sugar, tea, and soap. We were working six days a week. Everybody would be changing work. There were thirty-two different kinds of work for the company. The boat came every third month from Mauritius to Diego and brought our rations. Ten kilos of rice, beans, oil, salt and flour. This we did not buy. This food we had in addition to what we raised and planted ourselves.

The CRG office formed an interview setting clearly influenced by members of the organisation coming and going. The woman was an elder Chagossian much respected for knowing Chagos first hand (*konn Chagos*), and she spoke about the homeland with considerable authority. During the interview, other Chagossians often stopped and listened. In between, younger Chagossians eagerly reminded her of details, sometimes shouting out things like “and we had guinea fowls!” Another significant remark came from a Chagossian who saw the need to relativize the woman’s statement that “people did not die”. As if speaking on behalf of the community she pointed out to me, “normally we say ‘rarely people died’”. This interview was rather formal, but remembering Chagos was a clearly social activity extending the interviewer-interviewed relation to include other people present in the politicised space of the CRG office.

The next passage is extracted from an interview produced in a less formal setting, but the representation of the Chagos Archipelago is nonetheless strikingly similar. Quoted below is a Chagossian woman in her late fifties. In 2004 she was living on the outskirts of Port Louis, employed by the Municipality of Port Louis for cleaning the public cemeteries. Our exchange took place in her home. Three young children sat around the same table watching TV, but did not pay much attention to what their grandmother was telling.

During the war in 1945 the boat could not come that often, but we caught and made food ourselves. Eggs, birds, chicken, vegetables, rice and fish we shared among ourselves. The people lived like a family and everybody was sharing. You just had to ask the person who had something and you would get it. “Give me a piece of salted fish”, and you would get a large piece. Not like here in Mauritius, where you have to buy everything and when you make salted fish you will only have a little piece of fish. In the water it was like a field of fish [listing 10-15 different kinds of fish]. You could catch the fish with your hands and you could have the quantity you were able to carry home. The fish is eating other fish because it is so plentiful in the sea. In Trois Freres [in the Western part of the archipelago], the sea is completely filled with fish so you

can actually walk on it. With one line, and one hook you can catch ten fish because the sea is completely filled with fish. Here in Mauritius you have the problem with food, you have to work hard to get money to buy food. And there was no illness, no diseases there. Maybe one would die each year. Here, every day you hear about sickness and death on the radio. And if there was a fight, [it] would last from six in the morning until six in the evening. No tools, like knives were used. The women also would fight like this. People would sit around in a circle to watch the fight. They would take pauses when they were exhausted, and after the fight they would shake hands and go and drink *bakka* [traditional alcoholic brew]. Everyone was one family. Nobody wanted to kill another person. Here in Mauritius, if you lose a fight you will go home and get a knife. In Chagos you would shake hands and go and drink *bakka*. It didn't matter whether you won or lost.

The next three passages are quoted from Chagossians who remembered their homeland in even less formal situations. The first two statements are extracted from longer, open conversations with a Chagossian woman and a Chagossian man respectively. They were both in their late forties, unrelated, and living in different households in poor quarters outside Port Louis. On neither of the occasions was I asking about the Chagos or intentionally leading them to speak about their homeland. The Chagos islands simply became a topic of conversation when their families were about to have dinner.

There was too much of everything over there. When we took the boat to the outer islands we could pick as many eggs as we wanted to, and hit the birds which were flying all around with a stick, just like this [waving her arm], and it would fall down and we could pick it so easy. These birds we could also use for *seraz* [traditional cuisine].

Chagos is not like here. There was no problem with food. You could just go into the water, with water up to here [pointing to his knee], and catch a fish with your hands. If this one was too small, you could just let it out and take a new fish. [...] All people adapted to the environment there. All people had one religion: Catholic. [Here] many people cannot adapt because we don't know this island.

The final quote in this section is from a Chagossian man in his forties who had migrated to England two years earlier and had returned to Mauritius for vacation in 2004. He was now together with his younger brother, and over a beer the three of us had in a Port Louis corner-shop he told him about a friend who had just received a diagnosis of cancer:

It is because all the food we eat now is polluted; it's not natural. Gene-modification! They gene-modify the food they give to the animals, and we eat these animals and plants. Before this, there was no cancer. Only things from the sea are pure, it's the only place where it's not polluted. In Chagos it's different. There it's not polluted and you could live for 200 years.

All five representations above were recorded in Mauritius and extracted from interviews or conversations with people born in the Chagos Archipelago. Although the quotes are from different people in different contexts, they demonstrate strong similarities with regard to people remember their homeland. Much in line with many of the Chagossian songs discussed in Chapter 3, the Chagos Archipelago tends to be portrayed in a certain way: A beautiful unpolluted place marked by affluence and natural abundance. In that exceptional landscape inhabitants enjoyed, shared and consumed fresh food from the pure and bountiful local flora and fauna. Because of this, and since they also undertook hard and regular physical work in the coconut plantations, inhabitants had the benefit of good physical and mental health. These favourable circumstances gave way for a happy, peaceful and egalitarian community. That is to say, a big ‘family’ in the sense of one single ethnic group adhering to one religion only, which adapted to the islands and came to share a common culture, values and traditions. In essence, this was the image Chagossians linked to their slogan for their journey: ‘Back to Paradise’. In order to analyse these representations further it is important to make a brief excursus to address the issue of social memory.

To remember the Chagos Archipelago is a social activity. This does not mean that Chagossians’ recollections are not informed by past experiences, but as Halbwachs specifies, “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs and Coser 1992, 38). Memories are profoundly social because people acquire their impressions in social contexts, and because remembering is always an activity taking place under particular circumstances in the present. Through social remembering people also agree and disagree on what the past was like. Often dominant representations of times and places emerge from such practices. The relative uniformity found in Chagossians’ representations of their past here indicate the social workings of memory, because in principle the Chagossians quoted above could of course have remembered a very wide variety of different things from their homeland. What substantiates this is that many Chagossians born outside the homeland present it in very similar ways. Consider the two following quotations that were produced in semi-formal interviews with Chagossians born in Mauritius who thus never experienced the homeland first hand.

I don’t know very much about Chagos, only what my father has told me about it. But the people from Chagos are very strong and healthy. Not like people from Mauritius [her Mauritian mother is dead whereas her Chagossian father is still living]. Do you know [CRG leader] Olivier’s mother? I think she is 83 years old, but she is very strong, she can walk. Not like the old people from Mauritius who need help. That’s because in Chagos work was very hard, and the food was very rich. Everything was fresh. Fresh fish, fresh coconuts - everything.

Life in Chagos was not the same as in Mauritius. In Mauritius we are [separated] people who live in Pointe aux Sables and Baie du Tombeau and so on. In Chagos all [of us] were together. We fished together. When we had weddings: wedding together. There were many islands, and the people were travelling. On all the islands we had work. The families were living in small houses. Mother, father, sons were living in the houses; grandfather, grandmother [too]. They were living together. All families had their own

chickens. When some people went fishing, [they] shared it with all people. [...] we had our own traditional food, we had our own traditional music, but here in Mauritius we can't do it the same way because we are separated. [Over there] they built another house near, not so far. [Here] it's different, can't do it. Brother Cassis, mother Pointe aux Sables, sister... It's not the same, it's not the same. [...] Chagos is different from Mauritius – different. [I have] learned from my mother and others. *Stories* about what they were doing. People were not ill. But here in Mauritius we have got many problems: hypertension, diabetes and all these things. There were none over there: "You must not eat this, you must not drink that," but on Chagos: "Eat everything!" People lived 80, 86, 90, one hundred years. Old people, when they have come here to Mauritius, they can't live.

These quotes show that Chagossians born in Mauritius present the Chagos Archipelago very similar to the generation of their parents. As Kooy and Evers have demonstrated by exploring children's drawings, this goes to wide extent also for Chagos islanders' grandchildren in Mauritius (Kooy 2008, Evers 2011). As explained by both informants quoted above, the younger generation learn about the homeland through *stories* told by their parents and other elder Chagossians. These are stories populated by healthy and happy Chagossians living under simple, but very bountiful circumstances – in short, and in their Christian terminology: Paradise.

As we saw in the introduction to this chapter many Mauritians find such portrayals of the Chagos Archipelago hard to believe and often dismiss these paradisiacal circumstances as inaccurate or as recollections that have been socially distorted in the course of time. If memory is social then it is of course influenced by social circumstances. The typical mistake (and also a significant way of domination) is to assume that only minorities' memories are social, in the sense of 'inaccurate', 'false' or not founded on 'facts' while retaining that the dominant pasts of the majority and the more powerful are 'factual' and not affected by social circumstances at all. They are of course too. For example, before the evictions Chagos islanders were employed on colonial agricultural plantations in the Chagos Archipelago where, as we have seen, local circumstances worked to the benefit of the employees (see Chapter 2). To most Mauritians this economic system has strong connotations to the severe mistreatment and exploitation of slaves and indentured labourers on the Mauritian sugar estates before 1923. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, in post-independent Mauritius authorities do not seldom call upon the cruelty of colonial times to produce patriotic sentiments among the population. Since that past is now extremely important in Mauritius, Mauritians find nothing paradise-like about agricultural plantations of colonial days. Instead, this dominant past feeds into to their disbelief in Chagossian representations of that era. Perceptions of Chagossians' social memory as problematic became also evident in the British court hearings. In other words, it is an issue of debate in contexts of power outside Mauritius too. When Chagossians launched a compensation case against the UK government after the turn of the millennium they presented, upon their own request, oral evidence about what had happened to them. In 2003 the judge dismissed their case, ruling that their claims had been brought too late. But not only was their case dismissed, the judgement also rejected their claims to properly remember their own past:

Evidence was also given, as if at first hand, about events which the witness could not have seen or heard. As Mr Allen put it, there was an element of “collective” or “folk memory”. As Mr Howell suggested, stories went round which became lodged into people’s minds as events which had happened and then as events which they had witnessed. Those amount to much the same, but the evidence thus given is of little practical help, for it is impossible to know whether it has any foundation in fact or not.¹

Chagossians’ collective representations of their past became, as Jeffery has demonstrated, a hindrance in this legal setting. People were not believed and their recollections did not meet the court’s standards as legal evidence (Jeffery 2006, 71-74, 2011). As the above quotation also demonstrates, Chagossians’ recollections were considered lacking in truth-value. Much to the benefit of British authorities, who up till then had protected key evidence under a UK 30-year secrecy law, Chagossians’ recollections of these events were considered distorted by social circumstances some three decades after they took place. The CRG leader, who was only four years old when he left the Chagos, later told me how he had responded to the disfavoured court ruling with a remarkable comment: “maybe I was too young to remember, but now that I am older, how can I forget?” This was indeed much to the point. But of course, it would not alter the outcome of a court bent on searching for ‘truths’ and ‘facts’ by crosschecking for (in)consistencies in personal recollections and more authoritative pasts located in documents produced by other authors in other times. Of course, all histories are socially constituted. Even an “objectivist history is produced in the context of a certain kind of selfhood, one that is based on a radical separation of the subject from any particular identity, and which objectifies and textualises reality” (Friedman 1992, 194). Hence, the entire court procedure was also a way of socially engaging and re-arranging the past. Especially, according to social sciences theories, to rule Chagossians’ case time-barred was a most powerful way of doing so:

An even more blatant manifestation of the remarkable power of society to relegate the past to irrelevance (and thereby to practical oblivion) is the aptly-named statute of limitations, the ultimate institutionalization of the idea that it is time to put something “behind us”. The very notion of such a statute implies that even events that we all agree happened can nonetheless be mentally banished by society to some “pre-historical” past that is officially forgotten (Zerubavel 1996, 286-87).

The focus in my following discussions of Chagossian recollections shall not concern their potential ‘truth-value’. How people recall their history and the people and places important to them forms empirical data that harbour a lot more than (true or false) information about past events. Such narratives are also speech-acts that carry aspects of pragmatic functions in the contexts within which they are uttered (Austin 1962, Searle 1971, Ewing 1987, 1990). From this perspective, Chagossian recollections become rich data for anthropological analysis. Friedman argues for example that that history “is very much a mythical construction, in the sense that it is a representation of the past linked to the establishment of an identity in the

¹ Chagos Islanders v. Attorney General Her Majesty’s British Indian Ocean Territory Commissioner, 9 Oct. 2003, Para. 161.

present” and that to dispute other people’s accounts of their own history must be understood as a struggle for monopoly on identity in the present (Friedman 1992, 195). This is much in accordance with what I described as a competition for Chagossian identification in the foregoing chapter. As we have seen, the Chagossians’ past has long been a political battlefield involving many parties beyond their ethno-political community. With respect to the statute of limitations referred to above, Chagossians have, contrary to their political opponents, everything to lose on an ‘official forgetting’ that relegates their past to irrelevance. But at the face of it, there seems to be no immediate political gain in presenting their homeland the way Chagossians do either. An extremely bountiful homeland is no political argument as such. To the contrary, outsiders are led to believe that Chagossians are untruthful, or at least exaggerating. But as I shall argue, to understand how Chagossians remember their homeland one must consider the contextual circumstances under which this activity is taking place.

With respect to social memory one intriguing question remains: If remembering is a social activity – at times a political battlefield – why do recollections often remain the same when the social contexts in which they are remembered are constantly subject to change? I have already noted two reasons that I shall briefly recapture here, but also I wish to add a third argument that will be important to the following analysis. First, that memory is profoundly social does not mean that past events are irrelevant to people’s memories. Social circumstances affect experiences in- as well as about the past, but historical events are also part of those social circumstances. Second, remembering is a social activity through which people not only create, but also agree upon, confirm and conform to established representations of the past. And stories about past places and their inhabitants cannot be changed at will. Consistency over time is important to social identities because they must remain plausible to others (Schlee 2004, 137). And third, recollections of the past are affected by the circumstances under which they are socially remembered. This implies that people’s socio-economic conditions can inform the ways pasts and places are remembered. And where certain socio-economic circumstances prevail, dominant ways of representing the past can develop, not only under, but also in reaction to those conditions. According to Friedman (1992), construction of history is both generated by, and constitutive of, social identity: Historical accounts inform the habitus of people from different socio-economic positions in society, and their representations of the past are also selected by habitus-related strategies and hence their socio-economic conditions of existence. How people or groups present and engage with their past is, in other words, much related to their particular socio-economic circumstances. And if remembering is a social activity thus affected, then how people present themselves, their pasts and the places that are important to them can also unveil something about the circumstances under which they live and remember. Where such representations are widely shared and agreed upon, they can tell something about the socio-economic and political circumstances of a particular group – i.e. the circumstances that over time have contributed to the formation of a particular dominant auto/biography about them. In the following I shall approach Chagossian recollections as empirical social facts, as acts of speech uttered in particular social contexts under circumstances they have not themselves created. I will argue that Chagossian representations of their homeland are closely connected to their socio-economic and political circumstances in Mauritius – the society on whose margins most Chagos islanders have lived, struggled and remembered their homeland for about four decades.

As this subchapter is concerned with the narrating of space, the first thing to highlight from Chagossians' representations of their homeland above is that, even though vast distances of water actually separate the Chagos Archipelago's different island-groups, this homeland is now always represented as one place. In the early days, Chagos islanders identified home with the particular island groups in the archipelago (cf. Chapter 2), and before their pilgrimage in 2006 many evicted inhabitants had never visited all three atolls. Nonetheless, as the T-shirts printed by the CRG in the run-up to the pilgrimage read: 'one people, one island, one struggle', the Chagos Archipelago is now represented as a single and bounded place – sometimes paradoxically expressed as one single island (see Illustration 11). This must be understood in light of the evicted islanders' ethno-political struggle that emerged after the socialist project in Mauritius had failed – especially their efforts to territorialise Chagossian culture and identity on an international arena in the 1990s, which also included the launching of the designation 'Chagossian' (cf. Chapter 3).

However, 'Chagos' is not presented as a single and bounded place only. As Chagossians repeatedly emphasised: Chagos is *different*. To be more precise, when people born in the Chagos and their descendants pointed out that "Chagos is different" and "not the same", they were actually saying that this place is not the same *as Mauritius*. That Chagos is *different* is a significant feature of their homeland. If one considers the above recollections carefully one finds that Chagossians repeatedly invoke the spatial terms 'here' and 'over there'. And in the course of narration, almost every description of Chagos is followed by examples and statements about how things are radically different in Mauritius. Chagos is, in other words, a place that is fundamentally *different* – different from Mauritius – and Chagossians express these differences both in the contents as well as in their structure of speech. We can thus say that 'Chagos' is fundamentally relational. The relational logic behind the construction of meaning has been strongly argued by Bateson who defined the elementary unit of information as "a difference which makes a difference" (Bateson 1972, 317-18). With special reference to places, Tsing argues accordingly that "Places are made through their connections with each other, not their isolation" (Tsing 2000, 330). As a place, 'Chagos' acquires its identity not in isolation, but through its relation with 'Mauritius'. Through comparison, or more precisely, through an overwhelming emphasis on contrasts and differences, Chagossians organize space into two interrelated places whereby 'Chagos' and 'Mauritius' stand out in radical opposition. According to Levi-Strauss (1966), thinking through dichotomies is a universal phenomenon of human thought. And, within different cosmologies, dichotomies relate to one another as interrelated sets of binary oppositions. Universal or not, in the Chagossian case such dichotomies between Mauritius and Chagos seem to be much informed by the dualist metaphysics of their Catholic belief which divides and relates heaven : hell :: good : evil :: white : black :: sacred : profane and so on. As an elder Chagossian man told me while we were sitting on a Mauritian beach watching the tide coming in: "Everything appears in two's. Everything in the world is two: good – bad, father – mother, inside – outside, low-tide – high-tide." When I on a later occasion asked him why there were two Chagossian organizations in Mauritius, he answered: "It's not difficult to understand. In the Bible there are two spirits: evil and good. All things [are like this]." To return to Chagossians' pilgrimage slogan and the image of Chagos as Paradise, an elder Chagossian woman in Mauritius spelled the spatial dichotomies out in Christian metaphors to a weekly Mauritian newspaper in 2006: "For me" she said,

“Mauritius is Hell. I have been taken away from my Paradise” (Tirvassen 2006). Chagos is then very much a reflection of Mauritius. Chagossians remember their homeland as a place that is different from Mauritius, and through an overwhelming focus on differences, Chagos and Mauritius acquire relational identities as places in radical opposition. This is not to say that Chagos is simply an imaginary place, a Paradise invented as a refuge to serve the function of mental escape from an otherwise harsh Mauritian reality. Chagos may serve this function in difficult situations, but such an interpretation would not suffice to explain why the homeland is remembered precisely the way it is.

This leads to the questions of relevance and forgetting. What one should notice about the ways Chagossians present their homeland is the particular selection of themes they tend to remember and forget. By forgetting I do not refer to ‘facts’ about the past that people now deny ever existed (e.g. there were no illnesses in the Chagos). To actively deny the existence of documented illnesses in the Chagos is an act of remembering something, which is little different from recalling something about the past that other sources confirm to be ‘true’. By forgetting I rather mean non-issues, i.e. things or events that are not communicated at all. Themes, in other words, that have no place – confirmed or denied – in the stories people tell about their own past. In theory, there are few limits as to what Chagossians *could have* remembered about the Chagos. Nonetheless, in their accounts of their homeland a relatively limited selection of issues tend to reappear. If one takes a closer look at what Chagossians talk about when they recall their homeland one will find that they repeatedly describe the place in terms of employment, money, health, food, housing, gender-equality, social security, distribution of wealth, cyclones, drugs, violence, family relations and inter-ethnic rivalry. That these themes are not forgotten is far from arbitrary. In fact, they have long been particularly relevant to Chagossians’ everyday lives in Mauritius.

As has been thoroughly documented by now, after the evictions Chagossians faced conditions of severe poverty in Mauritius. No resettlement scheme was initiated at the time of their arrival, and unemployment was then widespread in Mauritius. Deprived of their homes, property and employment, Chagossians were also short of education and other relevant working skills. For lack of money and housing many lived on the streets, families went hungry and starved, and many Chagos islanders accumulated debts on high interest rates set by local moneylenders. In that situation some turned to drugs, alcohol, petty theft, and a number of women were forced into prostitution (Botte 1980, Sylva 1981, Madley 1985, Walker 1986, 20-37, Dræbel 1997, Harvey, Sokolowski, and Vine 2009, Vine 2009, 126-64, Jeffery and Vine 2011, Jeffery 2011, 23-36). By 1975, according to a survey conducted by the CI-OF, at least 44 Chagos islanders had died of poverty, 11 persons had committed suicide, and some 16 persons were admitted to psychiatric treatment (survey reproduced in Vine 2009, 130-131). Chagos islanders continue to inhabit the lowest strata of Mauritian society. Un- and underemployment, alcohol abuse and that of other substances, and a number of other poverty-related difficulties still remain pressing problems among Chagossians today. Illiteracy and a lack of relevant qualifications to better employment were well reflected by the fact that forty per cent among people born in the Chagos were unable to write their own name when I conducted my field research in 2004 (Johannessen 2005, 119; Appendix 2). Many remained indebted, and since entry to the Mauritian job market is characterized by a combination of

meritocracy and ethnic preferences, many lose out in the competition for secure and steady employment.

My point is that the themes Chagossians remember about their homeland reflect this socio-economic history to great extent. For example, during my fieldwork I got to know a Chagossian artist named Clement Siatous. At the time he was eagerly painting what he described as his memories from the Chagos Archipelago. A number of his pictures are reproduced in this thesis (see Illustration 2, 3, 6 and 29). Living in the poor quarters outside Port Louis, Clement was not a wealthy man. Often short of money, paint, linen and also customers, almost all of the memories from the Chagos that he painted revolved around employment. In fact, one of his central tasks in life, as he put it, was to document the “thirty-two different kinds of work we had over there”. Adding flesh to the foregoing statements, Clement’s example illustrates the argument that Chagos is relational. What constitutes the Chagos is an inverted generalization of the difficulties Chagossians encounter in Mauritius: In the present there is hardly any work, but in the Chagos in the past there were 32 different kinds of work. This is what abundance looks like for a people who have been denied the basic conditions for making a living under capitalism. Even the exploitation of labour, then, may actually be a good thing to remember under certain circumstances of the present.

What still requires explanation is how memories of the homeland are produced and reproduced. This, I argue, is very much a matter of everyday practice. I noted that Chagossians’ recollections of the Chagos Archipelago tend to be followed by statements about how things are radically different in Mauritius. What is important to notice is that the other way round also appears to be the case. If one approaches the issue of memory from the context in which the remembering takes place then, Chagos and Mauritius are not just different. These places are different in ways that are relevant to their contemporary context and their problems at hand. The above cases of Chagossians eating dinner make good examples: Poor Chagossians cannot afford expensive food. An evening meal typically consists of a large portion of rice with a small piece of inexpensive (often canned or frozen) beef, chicken, liver or salted fish, with some chilli paste on the side. As illustrated above, such food is served with a comment: In Chagos it was different. Over there, they say, there was always lots of fresh, delicious, food. A related example that perhaps resembles many situations in their early years in Mauritius was when I overheard a hungry young boy asking his mother for some evening food. In that case there was no food. Only the comment was served. In some cases, my presence may of course have contributed to such responses, but during my fieldwork I found such comments extremely common and they also tended to recur in many different contexts where Chagossians ran into difficulties. As such, especially among poor and troubled families, remembering the Chagos became very much an everyday practice.

Accordingly, when Chagossians encountered difficult situations in Mauritius they did not remember the Chagos Archipelago as such, but as a place where the particular problem at hand never occurred. Hence, the problems and difficulties Chagossians experience in present situations feed into their understandings of the past. This also explains why Chagossian memories of their homeland revolve around the limited set of themes described above. All of these themes have been of central relevance to Chagossians since they arrived to Mauritius. Ultimately, they have come to define the Chagos Archipelago as a place. And if the very opposites of contemporary problems define the homeland, then Chagos is no less than a

paradise. It is then to large extent a location containing the solution to all contemporary problems. These themes should be understood analytically in the binaries that define Chagossian cosmology, and, from this perspective, recollections of their Paradise homeland can be read as a critique of the socio-economic circumstances under which they live.

As a general feature of their auto/biographies, Chagossians tend to subsume the negative sides of what constitutes the Chagos as paradise under the concept *lamizer*, meaning ‘misery’. This concept is widely known in Mauritius where particularly *lamizer nwar*, which literally means ‘black misery’ and refers to the underprivileged socio-economic situation of dark skinned ‘Creoles’ descended from African slaves, but which is translated in the LPT Creole-English dictionary as ‘abject poverty’ (Ledikasyon pu Travayer 2004, 136). Anyway, Chagossians speak of *nu lamizer* (i.e. ‘our misery’), which draws on the concept of *lamizer nwar*, but refers to their ethnic group exclusively and harbours very particular cultural meanings. This concept also forms constituent part of the stories Chagossians tell of themselves, and as such, it derives important meanings through its relations to the other concepts and metaphors that comprise the dominant Chagossian auto/biography. Consider the following statement of an elder Chagossian woman:

They promised us that when we came to Mauritius we would receive a house, compensation; our children would go to school. All the animals and the vegetables that I had on the island I would get in Mauritius. They told us that everything had been prepared for the Chagossians when we came here. They also promised us work so that we would not live in poverty. When they told us to go to Mauritius I did not want to because I was living in my natal island where I was born. I did not want to come to Mauritius to have poverty and misery [*lamizer*].

Many examples could be added to illustrate this spatial organisation of misery versus paradise, but due to considerations of space I shall limit further empirical material on this concept to one particular observation. When Chagossians explain the meaning of the CRG banner (see Illustration 22) they refer to the black stripe that crosscuts the rectangular *tricolore* as *nu lamizer* (cf. Chapter 3). Being the society in which they not only suffer, but also find their partners, love, marry, give birth, celebrate, and so on, it would be more accurate to say that paradisiacal Chagos is not the inversion of Chagossians’ experiences of ‘Mauritius’, but of *nu lamizer* – i.e. the aspects of Mauritius that are experienced as problematic. Depending on context of course, negative aspects can quickly overshadow the less difficult and joyful moments and thus emerges ‘Mauritius’ as a Hell of a place, and at the same time the Chagos Archipelago shines like a real paradise.

What Chagossians tend to remember about their homeland is an inversion of problems they encounter in Mauritius. This is much because it is on the margins of Mauritius’ society that the remembering is taking place. ‘Chagos’ thus becomes the positive counterpart and the solution to all contemporary problems. Hence, Chagos *is* a paradise – regardless of the ‘actual’ state of the homeland today. This does not mean that their construction of home lacks a political dimension. On the face of it, there is no clear political gain in presenting to the public the Chagos Archipelago in the paradisiacal way Chagossians do. It has rather made them vulnerable to everyday ridicule as much as to dismissals of their claims in UK-courts. However,

Chagossians may of course benefit from presenting their current circumstances in Mauritius as the very opposite of a paradise, which is also how many poor Chagossians express their marginal situation. Thus, the paradise-like homeland appears to have emerged as a reaction to their socio-economic situation, but also in the context of their ethno-political struggles. Memories of Chagos as paradise, as also formulated in the pilgrimage slogan “back to paradise”, must therefore be understood as a comment to Chagossians’ disadvantaged situation. Hence, Chagos is not simply a refuge or an imaginary place for mental escape and withdrawal from the social. Quite the contrary, if Chagos is relational in the way described above, then paintings, songs and statements communicating that: ‘In Chagos we did not need money’, ‘everyone was sharing’, ‘we were like one family’, ‘we had 32 different kinds of work’, ‘there were no drugs or violence’ should be read as an active social critique of Mauritius’ competitive, capitalist, meritocratic and multi-ethnic society – subtly formulated by one of the most disadvantaged section of the population.

5.1.2 EXPRESSIONS OF MORALS AND ATTACHMENT: CHAGOSSIAN ‘ROOTS’

My analysis of ‘Chagos’ and ‘Mauritius’ as interdependent places above went beyond how Chagossians articulate the connections between these two places. Adding to the spatially organised differences discussed above, Chagossians themselves typically use the metaphor of ‘roots’ (*rasinn*) to express connections between these places. For once, this is a way to place themselves as an ‘uprooted’ people within the narrative of this spatial drama. Like the other concepts elaborated in this chapter, the metaphor of ‘roots’ figures frequently in Chagossian self-representations. I have already discussed how this globalised botanical metaphor can be understood as an expression of a widespread sedentarist ideology (cf. Chapter 3). But one cannot deduct from this that ‘roots’ means the same to everyone. In addition to being a travelling concept, people from different backgrounds also indigenize it in their own ways. This section explores how Chagossians conceive of their ‘roots’, which we shall see are attributed quite specific cultural meanings. To capture what ‘roots’ means to Chagossians it will be necessary to look into how, exactly, Chagossians refer to them in the stories they tell about themselves.

Many enthusiastic Chagossians about to embark on the pilgrimage to the Chagos in 2006 said that “we are going back to our roots!” But what did they actually refer to then? When people who were born in the Chagos presented themselves during my fieldwork, they invariably pointed out that they were ‘natives’ (*natif*) who have been ‘uprooted’ (*derasine*) from their ‘natal soil’ (*ter-natal*). Many, even among those who were later born elsewhere, pointed out that “we are an uprooted people” (*nu enn pep derasine*). Often they and their parents explained the problems the evicted generation had experienced with reference to these concepts: Chagossian natives were uprooted and were unable to strike new roots in Mauritius. Surely, whatever Chagossians identified as their roots, place mattered. And to people identifying as Chagossian, their ‘roots’ were located in the Chagos Archipelago. To better understand what they mean when they speak about their roots, the following empirical example will be illustrating.



Illustration 15: Chagossians uprooting a tree in front of family's home. Photo: Johannessen 2006.

During my fieldwork, two Chagossian brothers and I offered to assist one of their sisters' family with the task of levelling the plot of land in front of her house. The intention was to extend their little home a few square meters into the yard. The problem was, however, that a big tree had been standing there (see Illustration 15). After the tree was cut down our job was to get rid of the trunk. Nobody, of course, wanted to have an old trunk in the middle of their house. We started digging the roots out under an extremely hot sun only to find

them too deep and too complex for our tools and our patience. After several days of struggle, we reconsidered our approach and burned the whole thing down with diesel fuel. However, in the course of these physical efforts our task prompted an interesting conversation on roots. One of the brothers, Andrew, commenced:

- Andrew: We have to uproot (*derasine*) the tree. It's like the Chagossians; but that's people, not trees. But we also have roots (*rasinn*).
- Johannessen: What kind of roots do you mean?
- Andrew: Roots are like grandmothers and grandfathers who are buried over there [in the Chagos], and brothers and sisters also. I have a sister who is buried there. Grandmothers and grandfathers, they are large roots (*gran-rasinn*). The umbilical cord (*lombri*) is a small root (*ti-rasinn*).
- Johannessen: What about the Chagossian culture then, the way of life in the Chagos?
- Andrew: That's not roots, that is history. Roots are in the soil (*later*). Life is not in the soil, it is on it.

As becomes clear from the above conversation, although the terms 'roots' and 'uprooting' apply to trees and people alike, the trunk's roots were no more, and no less, than a metaphor for human roots. During this short exchange, the fate of the old trunk became an analogy that could serve to explain Chagossian 'roots'. Describing Chagossian culture as history, Andrew confirmed the idea that the Chagossians lost their culture when they were physically displaced from their homeland. Chagossian 'roots', however, have not ceased to exist. They are not history, but things in the soil over there – things still significant to contemporary life. According to Andrew, Chagossians have two kinds of roots: 'Large roots' and 'small roots'. Whereas 'large roots' refer to deceased family members buried in the soil of the Chagos Archipelago,

‘small-roots’ refer to Chagossians’ umbilical cords.² According to elder Chagossians, an important cultural practice in the Chagos Archipelago was to bury the umbilical cord in the ground somewhere close to where the birth had taken place. Exactly why people did this remains unclear and the few historical sources available are silent about that practice. A former Governor of British Mauritius who visited the Chagos Archipelago in 1955 observed that “it was virtually impossible to induce the women to enter the hospitals, especially for child-bearing. They preferred their own cottages and the services of unofficial and apparently very inexpert midwives” (Scott 1961, 164). One could speculate that the umbilical cord is a highly ambiguous item (at once a bodypart and not a bodypart) particularly potent in constructions of purity and danger (Douglas 1966); and that cutting and removing it easily marks an important social transition whereby a child is physically separated from its mother. In that sense, to bury the umbilical cord in the ground may well have formed part of a *rite de passage* (Van Gennep 1960, Turner 1967) to socially order transitions in status of infants and mothers. In any case, whether or not the umbilical cord used to form part of a transition rite is today of less importance. What is important is that Chagossians now vividly remember that there used to be a cultural practice of burying the umbilical cord in the Chagos. Now the umbilical cord is vested with new symbolic meanings and serves very different functions in the Mauritian context. First of all, this practice has discontinued in Mauritius. But as the following example shall illustrate, to bury the umbilical cord in Mauritius would make little sense in light of its new meanings.

During my fieldwork, I was invited for food and drinks to the family of a Chagossian man. He was born to Chagossian parents in Mauritius, and he had migrated to England a few years ago. Now he was back in Mauritius to visit his family. For a while we chatted while sitting around the living room table until suddenly his sister, who had moved into his house after he moved to England, decided to play a song for us on the stereo. She proudly announced that one of her Chagossian brothers had written it. And as soon as the *seggae* tunes started I recognized that she was playing *Peros Vert*, the song that has popularly been declared Chagossians’ national anthem (see discussion Chapter 3), which meant that her brother was the famous musician Olivier Sakir, also known as Ton Vié. Before the music faded out the three of us were howling along in Kreol: “*Solei, later(,) mo lombri; mo lil, mo lil, mo lil!* Before long, this part of the lyrics triggered an illuminating discussion on Chagossian roots.

The brackets here are included to point out that this particular line can be translated to either ‘sun, soil of my umbilical cord; my island’ or simply ‘sun, soil, my umbilical cord; my island’. Translated in the first way, the phrase refers in particular to the special soil in the Chagos Archipelago, which Chagossians also refer to as ‘natal soil’ (*ter-natal*), ‘Chagossian soil’ (*ter-Chagossian*) and ‘birth-land’ (*pey-natal*). As roots refers to Chagossian bodies and body-parts buried in the soil in the Chagos Archipelago, it is in light of these concepts possible to understand ‘roots’ as something that also turns into soil (or ‘Chagossian soil’) through the

² Chagossians sometimes talk about ‘roots’, in the sense of ‘large roots’, when they speak about their ancestors buried in the Chagos archipelago. Since ancestors’ bodies are classified as ‘large roots’ after they are buried in the soil, roots and ancestors are conceptually connected. However, as will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 8, ancestors’ spirits – their souls – are something else than ‘roots’. In accordance with Andrew’s distinction between roots *in* the soil and that life and culture *on* the soil, quite a few informants pointed out to me that ancestral spirits are neither in nor on the soil, but somewhat hover a few centimetres above the ground. They specified that since they in some sense are dead, spirits, who have not yet left for the Heaven *above*, are not permitted to walk on the ground.

processes of decomposing. In that sense, bodies of previous generations of Chagossians also *constitute* the soil of that bounded place. What supports this reading is that cemetery soil is a substance with potent cultural meanings. If one has crossed a cemetery, some Chagossians explained, one better make sure that no soil sticks to the shoes before returning home since this may provoke ancestor spirits to follow. ‘Roots’, then, are at least something that mixes with the soil of a particular place. And, both in terms of big- and small roots, this something has to do with family and members of their ethnic group.

However, that there is more to the metaphors than this becomes evident if we return to the empirical example. When the tunes of *Peros Vert* faded out, the brother rose from his chair to explain the lyrics: “The umbilical cord is a symbol of the Chagossian people in Mauritius,” he said. “Chagos is the mother – it is the motherland.” While demonstrating with his right hand fingers how the umbilical cord is cut after birth he clarified: “But because of the deportations, the Chagossian people have now been separated from the mother.” With his arms wide apart, one representing the mother/Chagos and the other indicating the child/Chagossians, he concluded: “But the connection is still there!”

To Chagossians, roots are rich in symbolic meaning. The man explained that the connection between the Chagossian people and their homeland is analogous to the connection of a child to its mother: Although the two have been physically separated, the connection, or a sense of attachment, prevails. It is interesting to note here that, quite literally, ‘large roots’ and ‘small roots’ are not unrelated. ‘Large roots’ are deceased family members, while ‘small roots’ refer to the physical item that links generation to generation. Hence, Chagossians refer to a very concrete symbol when they express their attachment to the Chagos Archipelago by metaphors of roots: deceased relatives as well as the bodily item that once physically connected them to their mothers. Many of these mothers, and their mothers again, are buried in the ‘motherland’ – that itself might be called ‘the mother’ as the Chagossian man above articulated it. These potent symbols are all located in the Chagos, or in Chagossian soil to be more precise. The Chagossian man’s explanation above evidently presupposes the context of displacement. In other words, it is an understanding that has emerged in the post-eviction period. In the symbolic universe of this period, to be ‘uprooted’ from the ‘motherland’ and the ‘soil’ of one’s ‘umbilical cord’ means more than physical displacement. People born in the Chagos conceptualise their displacement as a separation from something once physically connected to their own bodies – something first connecting them to their mothers *and* then to the motherland, or the soil in which these mothers are buried. These are new cultural meanings that should be taken into consideration when Chagossians, like an elder Chagossian woman in Mauritius, formulate their attachment to the homeland and their wishes to return: “I want to put my feet where my umbilical cord is buried”.

This leads to the issue of morals, which I shall commence to discuss with reference to the second reading of the last line in *Peros Vert*. Roots is a botanical metaphor, and the wording ‘sun, soil, my umbilical cord’ refers to the very basic but also necessary conditions under which plants and trees can grow and flourish. Also, the ‘mother’ is the character that nurtures its children, and surely the umbilical cord is not irrelevant in that respect. If Chagos represents the ‘motherland’, then this is the land and the soil from which Chagossian roots are ‘nurtured’ and where they can ‘grow’, ‘thrive’ or ‘flourish’. To people who consider themselves rooted in this sense, as I argued in Chapter 3, displacement becomes highly problematic. Where ‘culture’

(from Lat. *cultura*, meaning ‘growing’ or ‘cultivation’) acquires its essential meaning by being localized in a particular place or soil, displacement implies cultural genocide. Save for the option of repatriation, displacement, in the metaphorical sense of ‘uprooting’, has two outcomes: Acculturation or death. If taken proper care of and given the right conditions to ‘grow’, then ‘uprooted people’ may ‘adapt’ or ‘strike new roots’ in the soil of another place. Chagossians, however, claim that they have not been properly cared for. They consider themselves, and are considered by others, as ‘uprooted people’ that have not been able to ‘strike new roots’ in Mauritius. This is a very common way of expressing why Chagossians have suffered a variety of problems after the evictions and also why they remain poor and disadvantaged in Mauritian society. For example, a Chagossian man born in Mauritius explained the suicides and the drug- and alcohol abuses among his parents’ siblings accordingly: “They have been uprooted [...] Here they cannot adapt. They can’t live, because they don’t know this island”. Similarly, a woman born in the Chagos regretted the complete lack of support after she arrived in Mauritius. During a conversation in 2006, she told me that after a short visit to Mauritius in 1965 she went to buy a return ticket to the Chagos at the tickets office in Port Louis. She remembered being told, “Your island has been sold, you have no right to return”. She suddenly found herself separated from her family, home, employment and everything else she had not tucked into her small bag. She then had no contact with her family until they were all deported to Mauritius eight years later. “Nobody helped me”, she said. To express herself she invoked the metaphor of an uprooted tree. Reflecting on how physical separation of Chagossian families tends to repeat itself – first with the evictions to Mauritius and the Seychelles, then the wave of Chagossian migrations to the UK from 2002, and now with her son having obtained work as a cleaner on the US military base on Diego Garcia – she articulated the Chagossian diaspora by the metaphor of the leaves and branches of an uprooted tree: “The tree has been uprooted. Today all the branches have become dry. They hang down. It is only the wood that remains. We are like this. The British, they uprooted that tree. They made it dry out. All the leaves have fallen. We are like this, the Chagossians are like this – I am like this.”

In this quote, the woman answers the central questions: Who uprooted the tree? Who cut the umbilical cord? In other words: Who is responsible? Who made it happen? Who should offer uprooted Chagossians proper conditions to ‘grow’? Here the moralities enter the narrative Chagossians tell of themselves. The concept of ‘uprooting’ refers to an act. It is a verb employed by those who consider themselves victims to it. To ‘be uprooted’ refers to an attack on something established, and implies that what was growing in a particular place has been removed from the soil that nurtures it. This, then, was an unjustifiable, alien act that has severe consequences for the Chagossians concerned. In this sense, uprooting is an act of violence. It points to a relationship between at least two parties, and it effectively distinguishes an in-group of passive victims from an out-group of active perpetrators who decided and executed that particular act. Thus ‘uprooting’ is also normative. It points to matters of guilt and responsibility, and thus furnishes stories Chagossians tell of themselves with important moralities. As the Chagossian woman commented, the British uprooted the tree. It was they who made it dry out.

Chagossians therefore hold that the UK government – who expelled and expropriated them and has not yet sufficiently cared for them – has a moral responsibility towards Chagossians.³

Rootedness has over the years become central to Chagossian ethnic politics, which very much draw on sedentarist ideas about people belonging to particular places. Thus have Chagossian ‘roots’ become particularly relevant in a relatively new socio-political context importantly defined by displacement. In that context, ‘roots’ have taken on new and potent meanings. Much of this is informed by the sedentarist ideology, but this section has also shown that Chagossians attribute specific cultural meanings to their ‘roots’ as well. Chagossians’ concept of ‘uprooting’ is an expression of separation vested with both culture-specific and more widespread meanings. It populates the stories Chagossians themselves tell about themselves with very distinct out-groups and furnishes a dominant Chagossian auto/biography with highly important moralities. I discussed earlier how Chagossians conceive of Mauritius and the place from which they have been separated. Here I have shown how Chagossians express their attachment to that place, and in following section I shall turn to explain how understanding of this separation appears to have been embodied in the form of a particular Chagossian illness.

5.1.3 NARRATIVE INCORPORATED: CHAGOSSIAN ‘SADNESS’

When talking about themselves and their situation Chagossians also frequently refer to something they call *sagren*, which literally means ‘sadness’. *Sagren* is understood as an illness, but as I shall proceed to show, it is an illness very much related to Chagossians’ understanding of their particular situation. It is intimately connected to the other concepts and metaphors I discuss in this chapter, and hence it is also central to what it means to be Chagossian. Just like other illnesses, ‘sadness’ is believed to affect Chagossian minds and bodies. It leaves particular symptoms, and it can cause irrational or deviant behaviour and even death.

Written sources suggest that ‘sadness’ has been a common concept among Chagossians in Mauritius for some time. A WHO report from 1997 described the concept of ‘sadness’ used by Chagossians as nostalgia for the Chagos islands – a profound sadness of facing the impossibility of being able to return to one’s home (Dræbel 1997, 25). Before that, a survey conducted by a Chagossian support organisation in Mauritius in 1980 listed the causes for the frequent suicides and deaths and the widespread abuse of alcohol and drugs as “*unhappiness*, non-adaption of Ilois within the social framework of Mauritius, extreme poverty, particularly lack of food” (Survey conducted by CI-OF; cited in Walker 1986, 20 [italics added]). Further backdating is impossible given the sources at hand. Whether the concept of ‘sadness’ was used in the Chagos Archipelago and what meaning it may possibly have had there remains therefore uncertain. Nevertheless, as we shall see ‘sadness’ is today intimately connected to the vocabulary of ‘uprooting’, ‘misery’, ‘struggle’ and ‘homeland’; and has, like these concepts, acquired particular meanings related to Chagossians’ post-eviction life and times.

What qualifies ‘sadness’ as an illness is that it has symptoms. According to Chagossians, a depressed state of mind or deviant behaviour can be symptoms of ‘sadness’.

³ It is important to remember that Chagossians do not identify the British government as the only part responsible for their uprooting. They know very well that US and the Mauritian authorities also were involved in the decisions that led to their expulsions and accuse them for conspiring with the British (see Chapter 6).

Accordingly, 'sadness' also leaves physical marks on Chagossian bodies. For example, one day a Chagossian man and I were walking around in Cassis on the outskirts of Port Louis. As we sat down on the pavement outside a local corner-shop, he introduced me to a friend. The friend said very little. He only quietly nodded as if to confirm what the Chagossian man was saying as the Chagossian man went on to point and explain to me: "Look at this man's face. Look at him. Look at his eyes. You see that? Look at the colour of his face – all grey." The friend silently shifted between looking down and looking at me while nodding as if he was fully aware that he wore marks on his face, his skin and in his eyes. "This man is Chagossian", the Chagossian man concluded. When we left he turned to me and asked: "You see? You saw his sad face?" The friend in this example was a person with a quite rough appearance. He was obviously poor, very thin, coughing, smoking and drinking rum. From seeing him quite a few times before I knew that his drinking was regular. The point is, when I was directed to his symptoms of 'sadness', the marks were indeed there. His body was indeed marked by a rough situation that probably had lasted for a while. On another occasion I was sitting outside the CRG office in Cassis when a Chagossian man, perhaps in his early fifties, walked by. He was barefooted, with ragged clothing and long rasta-hair. I had seen him walking up and down the street almost every time I had been there. This time an elderly Chagossian woman sitting next to me nodded towards him and said: "Do you see that man? He is a native Chagossian. It has affected him mentally. All the time he is walking, and he never talks. He cannot rest; he always needs to walk and cannot stay in one place." Another Chagossian sitting with us added that she was talking about 'sadness' – he was "not at home" she said.

As noted, 'sadness' can also lead to death. That Chagossians have died from 'sadness' is very common understanding within their community. During my fieldwork for instance, a 32-year-old Chagossian man born in Mauritius told me that he had two uncles who committed suicide after they arrived in Mauritius. From this example of his uncles, he explained the problem of the generation of his Chagossian parents: "When they came here, they couldn't live the same life as they lived on Chagos. For that reason I think many of them have died of sadness." Chagossians very often explain tragic incidents including deaths and suicides with reference to 'sadness' in this way. As such, in the post-eviction situation, 'sadness' serves important social and psychological functions; something that was observed in the 1997 report, which stated that 'sadness' "explains illness and even the deaths of members of the community" (Dræbel 1997, 25). 'Sadness' makes, in other words, losses of Chagossian relatives and friends intelligible. I shall add here that it also explains strange or deviant behaviour; and hence, as an illness that affects people's behaviour it can serve as an excuse for less grave criminal offences like petty theft as well as alcohol- or drug abuse.

The short explanation provided by the Chagossian man above indicates that 'sadness' is foremost associated with the generation born in the Chagos Archipelago. This implies that 'sadness' has to do with Chagossians' displacement. At the same time it shows that also members of the generation born outside the homeland are familiar with 'sadness'. Also they learn the meanings of the central concepts of the stories that explain their relatives' tragedies and misfortunes. I have noted that much of those stories are expressed in the botanical terminologies characteristic for the sedentarist ideology. Also 'sadness' relates to this as it is connected to the concept of 'uprooting': The Chagossian man said that many Chagossians 'died of sadness' and explained that they were unable to 'live the same life' here as they did over

there. They were, in other words, unable to ‘adapt’ or ‘strike new roots’ in a different land. The symptoms of ‘sadness’ described above are clearly connected to Chagossians’ ‘uprooting’ from the homeland in this way too. As I was informed about the Rasta man who was constantly walking: He was not ‘at home’. Affected by ‘sadness’ he was always ‘restless’ and could not ‘stay in one place’.

My empirical findings thus far support the proposition in Dræbel’s report that ‘sadness’ is a form of nostalgia for the homeland, a profound sadness of not being able to return to the homeland (Dræbel 1997, 25). Also Vine agrees with Dræbel that ‘sadness’ relates to the evictions from the homeland. According to him ‘sadness’ (and ‘misery’) represents “Chagossians’ profound sorrow over their expulsion and the profound material suffering the expulsion has caused” (Vine 2009, 161). Discussing his empirical material in light of a number of ‘displacement experts’ Vine suggests even that Chagossians’ ‘sadness’ is comparable to cases of other forcefully displaced people around the world who thereafter suffer from “root shock” of forced displacement (Fullilove 2004, 11), from the “grieving for a lost home” syndrome (Scudder 1973), from “profound cultural landscape bereavement for their lost origins” (Nayak 2000, 96) or from *nervos* (see Scheper-Hughes 1992, 173-87). By way of analysis, I regard comparability and generalizability a less productive approach to investigate this highly interesting cultural material. In respect to human displacement I find comparability and generalization, if not impossible, then at least analytically less fruitful, because the comparative perspective must necessarily neglect these very different people’s particular history, culture, as well as the politics that first of all have caused their situation, and which, secondly, vest it with meaning among the people concerned. Here I also miss reference to the widespread sedentarist ideology with which ethnic identification, origin and politics, as well as legal and environmental issues, are so closely connected in today’s world. However, although the problem is largely psychologised and placed in the minds and bodies of the displaced, Vine notes that its’ causes (at least in the Sheperd-Hugh’s case of *nervos*) are not: The “roots of such afflictions are social, political and economic, with forms of violence becoming embodied by victims” (Vine 2009, 156). Hence, despite the analytical approach, his understanding of Chagossian ‘sadness’ is not ahistorical. He makes a strong case that in addition to the pain of being separated from the homeland, ‘sadness’ works as synecdoche representing all the sufferings – as is reflected in Chagossians accurate portrayals of *de facto* differences between their situation in Chagos and Mauritius – the evictions has caused them.

This points to an important issue, because what ‘sadness’ looks like, how it is represented, or what social and psychological functions sadness serves does not suffice to explain it. I have argued that ‘sadness’ is intimately connected to all the other concepts and metaphors that are central to Chagossian self-representation. I have also explained how Paradisiacal Chagos has emerged as a constantly reproduced reflection of ‘misery’, i.e. Chagossians’ difficult experiences in Mauritius. One could therefore expect that the ways ‘sadness’ is constructed and reproduced also relate to Chagossians’ understandings of their socio-economic and political situation in Mauritius. In light of the empirical examples below one may conclude this to be the case.

On the outskirts of Port Louis, an elder Chagossian man told me that his mother had died shortly after they arrived in Mauritius in 1973. At that time he was fifteen years old. Now, as we talked about this more than thirty years later, he explained: “She died because she was

sad". He paused and then added: "Many people died of sadness." He did not give any further explanation, but after a longer silence he said: "Many people could not adapt because we did not know this island here. When you don't have a job; what do you do? What do you do to live? No place to sleep, no food, it was not a good place to be or to raise children." In this formulation, 'sadness' is closely related to 'misery'. The more general expression of Chagossians' inability to 'adapt' to a new place (after being 'uprooted') is here grounded in Chagossians' particular socio-economic circumstances Mauritius and their understandings of this. Similarly, an elder Chagossian woman explained about those who ran into difficulties after the evictions: "On Diego there were no problems with drugs and alcohol. When people came to Mauritius they did not get a job, so with sadness they stole and went to prison or fell in drug abuse. The people were sad. They were sleeping in the street, no money, no house, no food." Here again, 'Chagos' is invoked as an opposition, not to express uprooting or the other concepts discussed here, but to express 'sadness'. Chagos is different. It is a place without difficulties related to things like drugs, alcohol, housing, money and food. The woman implies, 'sadness' did not exist in the Chagos, but only came into existence in Mauritius.

In light of the relational constructions of 'Chagos' that draw on difficulties Chagossians encounter where they now live and remember, one may also expect to find a counter-concept to 'sadness' in Chagossians' representations of their homeland – especially since 'sadness' also connects to the other concepts and metaphors discussed here. The next empirical examples are derived from two different Chagossian women. Both examples illustrate that when Chagossians speak of their homeland the concept of 'happiness' often come up. Data in the first example is deducted from two different interviews with the same woman. In a documentary film from 2004 she explained how two of her children died from 'sadness' in 1973, only months after she was deported to Mauritius. It belongs to her tragic story that her husband also died of 'sadness' shortly after. Moreover, she was so poor that she was unable to pay for her children's funerals. Their bodies were brought away from the hospital directly, leaving her with no grave to tend and thus no place to localise her grief and sorrow. She explained:

The children died of sadness. When I received the news [that we had to leave the Chagos] I was breastfeeding my child. I thought he was fed with the milk of sadness. The other child was eight years old, he knew from all the talking what was going on. He knew he was leaving his country. That saddened him, and doctors cannot treat sadness (Quoted from interview in Pilger 2004).

I conducted an interview with her the very same year as this documentary came out. She then explained to me about her wishes for the future:

I want to go, I want to return! If the government provided a boat, I would go to Diego with pleasure. I believe I would be very happy there. Even my grandchildren want to go to Chagos, because they have seen the difficulties in Mauritius with unemployment. They want to see how Chagos is. After taking his driver's license one of my grandchildren made two interviews at the Port Louis Municipality, but he has not received an answer yet. If they put a boat to our disposition, I would go immediately.

We have everything there so it would be no problem. Good food, which you don't have to pay for. Eggs and octopus...

The woman explained that her two children were affected by 'sadness' and died, one of whom was affected by 'sadness' through the mother's milk. According to her, then, 'sadness' can be transmitted through body substances from mother to child, and hence, like the symptoms described above, 'sadness' is then clearly located in Chagossian bodies. The above quotes also illustrate that 'sadness' has a counter-expression of 'happiness'. In view of what I have written above, one would expect the two concepts to be located in Mauritius and Chagos respectively. However, a closer look at the quotations above reveals that this is not the case. 'Sadness' clearly concerns the separation of Chagossians from their homeland in this example, but in her retrospective understanding of what happened back then, both children as well as herself were affected by 'sadness' in the Chagos Archipelago before they were evicted. Her eight-year-old son, she said, was old enough to understand that they were about to leave the Chagos Archipelago. And this knowledge caused 'sadness'. We must hence reconsider the spatial organisation of this concept. As this, and particularly the example of the next Chagossian woman will demonstrate, 'sadness' is indeed more complex, and it cannot be fully comprehended simply by placing it in Mauritius with reference to the evictions and how much happier their lives in the Chagos Archipelago was.

During my fieldwork, I found that 'sadness' is not only connected to Chagossians' separation from their homeland. Also separation of people causes 'sadness'. A crucial point I shall pursue here is that absence and separation has been a recurring issue among Chagossians for quite some time; and this is also central to understand how 'sadness' is socially reproduced. First, it is important to point out that it is historically inaccurate to refer to the Chagossians' expulsions as one event. Depopulating the Chagos Archipelago lasted over eight years. Because Chagossians who visited Mauritius during this period were denied tickets to return home, many families were separated for years. This is central for 'sadness' too. During my fieldwork in 2004, another Chagossian woman in Mauritius told me that in 1967 she was in her last month of her pregnancy when in Chagos

A boat came and told the people that if they were pregnant or sick they needed to go to Mauritius for treatment or to give birth. So I went. I had no place to live here, no help getting around or finding the hospital. Three days later, I gave birth to my son. I paid a woman to help me. [...] Then I went to a public tickets office and talked to mister O. He told me: "You cannot return; you have no right to return. All people over there have to come to Mauritius." Because my brothers were ill, they came with the boat in 1972. My parents came in 1973. We had no contact in all these years. In Chagos, my sister died of sadness. I had been looking much after her, and when I didn't come back from Mauritius she refused to eat and died.

Here 'sadness' explains deviant behaviour – refusing to eat – something that eventually led to the tragic death of a young girl. She is now buried over there. She never left the Chagos Archipelago, and hence 'sadness', as recalled by her older Chagossian sister, affected her in the Chagos Archipelago and not in Mauritius. This is similar to the woman I referred to above.

Also in this example is ‘sadness’ connected to the Chagossian evictions, but here it is not communicated as a result of people’s separation from the homeland. Instead the woman refers to the separation of Chagossians from the wider community, and particularly so to the harm this did to the families that were separated during these years. We may therefore conclude that separation of people can cause ‘sadness’ as well.

Separation is a very difficult issue for many Chagossians. And the eviction from the homeland is far from the only instance of separation in their history. During my fieldwork I found that ‘sadness’ marked a number of different situations where separation became an issue. The Chagossian journey to the homeland in 2006 was one such a situation. To many Chagossians this was a highly emotional event, and in this special situation it seemed that ‘happiness’ and ‘sadness’ did not quite suffice to express Chagossians’ feelings. Their vocabulary for expressing emotions appeared rather limited as many verbalised their feelings in terms of quantity: “I am very, very, very emotional”. Others expressed an emotional ambivalence by referring to ‘sadness’ and ‘happiness’ at the same time. During an interview on the morning on 30 March 2006, just before she embarked on her first return journey to the homeland in forty years, the Chagossian woman whose sister had died of ‘sadness’ in the Chagos Archipelago told me:

For me it is a very big thing because I was twenty-two years when I came here. Now I am sixty. I am going to see that island! It’s a grand *story* for me. *Both sadness and happiness*. It is a *new sadness* because we will go to see it but we cannot stay. We have to return. Memories have returned: all the things that were there, now we will find them again. That’s sadness.

Here, ‘happiness’ refers to the reunion between people and their homeland. ‘Sadness’, or the ‘new sadness’ as she put it, concerns the repetition of the separation from home. These two concepts are about feelings; that is, feelings connected to certain memories. And these memories concern separation. The pilgrimage in 2006 provided a new and very potent context for remembering separation, and this then left her with ambivalent feelings of both ‘happiness’ and ‘sadness’. In this particular context, the woman explained, ‘memories have returned’. It was, in other words, a new context that triggered memories of earlier separations, and that, according to her, is ‘sadness’.

It is important to stress here that separation is a recurring issue among Chagossians. In addition to the early separations that were caused by the denial to return to the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius referred to above, Chagossian families were also separated when they were evicted to Mauritius and the Seychelles. Later, the wave of migration to the UK following the award of full UK citizenship to a large number of Chagossians in 2002, added another instance of separation to the above. The following empirical examples from my fieldwork may illustrate how ‘sadness’ worked in other contexts of separation.

At the end of my fieldwork in 2006, I flew from Mauritius to the UK. Since this was about the time when a Chagossian friend had decided to migrate to England, he booked a seat on my flight so that we could travel together. On the day of our departure, his family and his girlfriend accompanied us to the airport. When we were about to say goodbye, most people were crying and the situation was marked by intense ‘sadness’. This may not sound very

untypical or exotic given that much of the same would probably happen to friends and families in other nations. But to understand these emotions one must take into account that, as the woman cited above pointed out, Chagossians have a long and very difficult history of separations. Another situation that I encountered earlier on in the same period of fieldwork adds important insights to my observation at the airport. When Chagos islanders embarked on their first communal return to the Chagos in 2006, I was standing on the quay together with one of the Chagossian women who some months later accompanied us to the airport. One of her brothers was onboard the ship. She was crying. When I asked her why, she responded: “Because I don’t know if he will return. I don’t know if I will see him again”. In this case, the brother was joining a meticulously organised trip that was to last less than two weeks. In many ways, the trip was even a joyful, triumphant event. Her anxiety is perhaps best understood with the words of the above woman who was just about to embark on the same journey: “Memories have returned: all the things that were there, now we will find them again. That’s sadness”. ‘Sadness’, in other words, is caused by different kinds of separations that appear as sequential in Chagossians’ troubled history and therefore have acquired a meaning that could be described as “fate”. Certain contexts trigger memories of earlier and highly difficult separations – including the evictions from the Chagos – and thus make the present appear in a different light. Such meaningful memories do return, the woman explained, and they are ‘sadness’.

This section has shown that ‘sadness’ is an important concept that figures frequently in the stories Chagossians tell of themselves. To Chagossians ‘sadness’ is a social fact. As it forms central part of the stories Chagossians tell about themselves, ‘sadness’ can only be properly understood in relation to the other concepts and metaphors that constitute the dominant Chagossian auto/biography. ‘Sadness’ relates to the central plot of that narrative, namely the separation of Chagossians from their homeland – but also to separation of relatives and friends from one another. As ‘sadness’ is an illness resulting from an historical act of violence, the ‘uprooting’, responsibility for those who died of ‘sadness’ and those who continue to suffer from it is placed with out-groups involved in the decisions that led to the evictions. ‘Sadness’ is hence also a political expression, which has taken on importance and important meanings in the course of the Chagossian ‘struggle’. Foremost, ‘sadness’ is relational. It is about experiences of separation, and memories of earlier separation that are both triggered and reproduced in related contexts. As an illness, ‘sadness’ affects Chagossian minds and bodies. It leaves specific bodily symptoms, it causes deviant behaviour, and people may even die from it. At the same time ‘sadness’, as experienced by Chagossians, cannot be properly understood isolated from the other concepts and metaphors that form the Chagossian auto/biography. In that sense, ‘sadness’ can be understood as the embodiment of the story Chagossians themselves tell about themselves.

5.1.4 ENTER TEMPORALITY: “OUR STRUGGLE”

Also their history of political activity has a central place in the stories Chagossians tell of themselves. Chagossians trace their protests back to the very time and place of their arrival in Mauritius; that is, to 1973 when the last group of evictees refused to disembark the BIOT vessel in Port Louis harbour. Proper compensation and right to repatriation have always topped

Chagossians' political agenda, but as we have seen in Chapter 3, their forms of protests have changed considerably over the years. Also their political strategies, their aims and alliances have not been stable or free from internal disagreements. And, as argued in Chapter 3, the wider political climate has also gone through changes too – something that has affected how Chagossians frame and understand their political struggles. Nevertheless, Chagossians today singularise all these historical political actions and activities by subsuming them under one concept: 'our struggle' (*nu lalit*), or alternatively, 'the Chagossian struggle' (*lalit Chagossien*). This concept is highly important as it leaves the impression of a single, continuous, unified and uncontested ethno-political movement, which can be traced from the present day right back to Chagossians' arrival at the very entry point to Mauritius.

In the foregoing discussions I have shown how important space is to the dominant Chagossian auto/biography. The concept of 'our struggle' adds temporalities to the stories Chagossians tell about themselves. It suggests a *durée* and a sense continuity of Chagossian political activities. To be more precise, in these stories there are two forms of temporalities involved. These succeed one another and are marked by a breach at the point of the Chagossian evictions. First, representations of the Chagos prior to the evictions typically convey a sense of repetitive time defined by tradition and adaptation to rather unchanging local circumstances. Today Chagossians seldom talk about changes that took place in the Chagos before the intrusion of the US military and the evictions that followed. Instead, activities like the chains of local production, daily working hours, weekly Saturday night *sega* parties, and the regular arrivals of company ships every 3 months are structuring pre-eviction time in the Chagos into cycles and repetitions. Such localized ahistorical representations convey a sense of timelessness that adds meaning to concepts of origin, belonging and 'rootedness'. It is important to note here that Chagossians are not unaware of central historical changes and developments that took place in the Chagos Archipelago. But this is not how Chagossians typically recall it when they speak about their past and where they come from. When it comes to change or rupture in these stories, one historical event eclipses them all: the evictions from their homeland. This event the generation born in the Chagos Archipelago experienced first-hand. Second, following that decisive event, post-eviction time carries an element of progression. And that progressive sense of time is structured around the concept of 'our struggle'. This concept places Chagossians in a present that is connected to a continuous, progressive history of communal political activity that dates back to the evictions; and which, by reference to their political aims, always points into the future. For example, almost every Chagossian political speech concludes with the words "the struggle continues" (*lalit pe kontinye*). This formulation is so common among Chagossians that it is also often used as a headline when Mauritian media report on the latest developments in Chagossian political activity. When invoking this phrase, Chagossians and others express a kind of progress *en route* to a future political *telos*. If Chagossian political setbacks are topics of speech, they often add a 'but' to the phrase. Hence, "... but the struggle continues" also becomes a way of positioning a present situation between a particular past and a future in which, if nothing else is certain, 'the struggle' will surely be part. The central *telos* and the *raison d'être* of 'the struggle' are defined by Chagossian political organizations: proper compensation and right to repatriation.

In the post-eviction context that Chagossians identify with loss of culture and cultural identity, 'our struggle' has emerged as an important marker for Chagossian self-identification.

It links up with the other concepts and metaphors discussed here as the key reason and aim of ‘the struggle’ is to end the core concerns outlined above: ‘misery’, ‘sadness’ and the state of ‘uprootedness’, by regaining the right to go ‘home’. All of these concepts lend meaning to ‘the struggle’, which thereby forms integral part of the story Chagossians tell of themselves. As I said, the concept of ‘our struggle’ adds a sense of *durée* and continuity of Chagossian political activities to these stories. In this way, it also invokes a sense of continuity of community. When talking about themselves and their situation, they place themselves as Chagossian characters in a narrative expressing what has ultimately turned into an ethnicised struggle.

As a singularizing concept, ‘our struggle’ also plays important political roles for Chagossian organizations. ‘The struggle’ has and can take on very different forms (cf. Chapter 3). To Chagossian organisations, the concept of ‘our struggle’ downplays internal heterogeneities, disagreements and competitions. The major shift in Chagossians’ support from the CSC to the CRG after the latter organisation’s legal victory in the UK in 2000 evidences that Chagossian organisations cannot take their members for granted. So when political leaders conclude their speeches with ‘... the struggle continues’, this must also be understood in light of internal politics that concerns the competition for Chagossian members. These organisations compete to represent ‘the Chagossian struggle’. By representing ‘our struggle’ they gain legitimacy and support within the community by claims to carry it on from the past and into a possible future when – given that Chagossians continue to support it – their key aims of justice, repatriation and compensation shall be realized. Nonetheless, contrary to what this concept suggests, Chagossian political activity has changed significantly in the course of the years. Today, some of these changes are considered more important than others. One of them concerns gender. In the following passage, an elder militant Chagossian woman in Mauritius explains about the role of Chagossian women in the early demonstrations and their motivations for partaking in ‘the struggle’:

They lied to us. Their promises were not true. No government gave us money when we arrived here. For this we fought hard, with manifestations and hunger strikes. I did not receive compensation. There was no court giving us money. Chagossians performed hunger strikes because they wanted only death. The manifestation started on Monday, and on Tuesday the police told us to go to our houses. We told them that we had no houses. We slept in the ditches by the side of the road. The police beat us up and took us to prison. There were only women in the manifestations. Only women were interested in our struggle. We were released by [MMM opposition leader] Paul Berenger. He talked to [Mauritius’] Prime Minister Ramgoolam about going to London to speak with the British government because he was afraid that people would die. Ramgoolam was the man who sold Diego for Mauritian independence and was responsible for the imprisoned Chagossian women. [...] After this demonstration, Chagossians received 36,000 Rupees compensation to buy houses. For that money, the Ilois Trust Fund built a house for us. We were seven people living in a house with two rooms. Chagossians had no work, no houses, and therefore also no food. That is why we conducted our struggle and claimed back our natal country.

Here the woman confirms that Chagossians' socio-economic situation in Mauritius was a central reason 'the struggle'. To 'want only death' is indeed a straight expression of what Chagossians mean by 'sadness'. Moreover, police violence, imprisonment, no work, no houses and no food refer to 'misery'. In respect to gender, then, she stressed that only women were interested in 'our struggle'. Only women were demonstrating, she said, and the women were imprisoned. Historically speaking this is an overstatement since some men also partook in these demonstrations, but they were indeed fronted and chiefly carried out by women (cf. Chapter 2, 3). The quote clearly shows that this part of 'the Chagossian struggle' remains important to Chagossians today. However, it does not reflect today's situation. At the time of my fieldwork, men headed all Chagossian political organisations.

As Walker has pointed out, this has much to do with the Chagossian community being integrated to a Mauritian context where males dominate political life (Walker 1986). But although men fill the leading positions in Chagossian organisations today, many Chagossian women are central members and are politically very active. To them, especially, the history female militancy remains an important source of pride and dignity. Male leaders therefore often pay respect to these women's contributions to 'the struggle'. They also highlight their maternal kin relations. The case of the 'get-together' at the Prime Minister's official residence in March 2006 I discussed earlier makes a good example (cf. Chapter 4). During his speech at this event, the CRG leader then praised the Chagossian women who fronted the struggle in the 1970s and 80s. Thereafter he added loud: "Thank you mama!" and "Thank you for the education you have given me!"

This pronouncement points to important matters of heading 'the struggle'. During my fieldwork I found two more or less exclusive sets of competences that now qualify Chagossians as leaders of 'the Chagossian struggle'. The CRG leader's reference to education above is twofold and points to a central distinction within the Chagossian community with respect to authority. These competences are, on the one hand, educational skills such as literacy and mastering the English language; and on the other hand, knowing Chagos (*konn Chagos*), a qualification that follows from being elder and having substantial first-hand experience with the homeland. These sets of competences roughly distinguish the younger generation of Chagossians born outside the homeland from the older generation born in Chagos Archipelago. The former are referred to as 'children' (*zenfant*). They have not experienced the homeland and local Chagossian culture first-hand. People born in the Chagos Archipelago are referred to as 'natives' (*natif*). Very few of them have attended school. That is to say, except for the younger ones, but they are at the same time held to be less competent in knowing Chagos. Not many Chagossians are, in other words, associated with both sets of competences. During my fieldwork, many Chagossians spoke of these sets of competences when comparing the two male Chagossians who competed to lead 'the struggle' in Mauritius. The CSC leader, they emphasised, was older than the CRG leader. They therefore respected him for knowing Chagos (*konn Chagos*) better. Often pointing out that the CRG leader was only four years old when he arrived to Mauritius, quite a few elder Chagossians also said they knew Chagos better than him. However, contrary to most of them, the CRG leader was able to attend school in Mauritius, because his mother was very determined on this despite being very poor. He thereby acquired other important skills, like literacy and mastering the English language, which qualify him as a competent Chagossian leader. Returning to the empirical case above, when the CRG

leader praised Chagossian women and his own mother in his speech at the get-together in 2006, he not only connected his leading position in ‘the Chagossian struggle’ to the history of female militancy – a movement in which his mother was very active. By thanking his mother for his education specifically, he implied also, on the one hand, that through her he had come to know Chagos very well; and, on the other hand, that he had acquired other relevant competences through formal education. By stressing education in this setting, he also implied that ‘the struggle’ of today is fought on new and international arenas that require the qualifications he is much respected for. That includes also gender, since this international struggle is closely linked to Mauritian as well as Western lawyers, judges, politicians and religious leaders, who are, with very few exceptions, men – or more precisely well educated men.

To illustrate ‘the Chagossian struggle’ of today, the two following empirical cases make good examples. During the UK court proceedings that followed their legal victory in November 2000, a number of elder Chagossians purchased plane tickets on credit to make their way to the court benches in London. With very few exceptions, they did not understand English – let alone the legal English spoken within the walls of the massive and highly secured building Chagossians said looked like a large cathedral. As Chagossians told me, they travelled there to express their support to their own political leadership and because it was important to them to physically confront the otherwise very absent and abstract powers that prevent them from returning to the Chagos Archipelago. Thus, they also showed political determination and strong commitment to ‘the Chagossian struggle’. The point is that especially since the late 1990s, Chagossian political activities have been channelled into international legal systems. Consequently, decisive parts of ‘the Chagossian struggle’ are no longer fought on the streets or in the public gardens of Port Louis, but through external experts at vast physical and social distances from the slums around Mauritius capital. Chagossians vest much hope and confidence in Western legal representatives who have come to undertake decisive parts of ‘the Chagossian struggle’ for them. These distances were well expressed by representatives of western legal teams who during my fieldwork paid short visits to Mauritius. This was because, as one aspiring male lawyer put it: “We want to tell them what we are doing” and to “show that we are still working for them”. When later asked about prospects for US compensation during a meeting with Chagossians in Mauritius, the same legal representative responded: “Let me put it this way, if you were Americans you would all be millionaires by now.” Such astonishing statements not only raise hopes among poor Chagossians. They also raise debts among those who take up new credits in anticipation of legal victories that apparently never materialize. The immediate response from the Chagossian audience illustrates that many Chagossians lose an overview over their own ‘struggle’ – a struggle fought abroad, in a language most do not master, through foreign legal representatives, and over juridical technicalities that may only appear obvious to lawyers and perhaps their closest Chagossian clients: “Does this mean that we will have American passports too?”

Decisive battles may be fought in international courtrooms, but ‘the Chagossian struggle’ takes place on the local level too. For example, during my fieldwork in Mauritius in 2004 Chagossians engaged in different kinds of work to assist their legal representatives. The CRG had then initiated group-litigations for compensation in UK and US courts, and along with a number of Chagossians I assisted the CRG in collecting Chagossian signatures that would authorise the organisation to act legally on Chagossians’ behalf. This was a major event

that lasted for a whole week and mobilized close to the entire Chagossian community in Mauritius. People who consented automatically also joined formal membership with the CRG. With high hopes that monetary compensation would follow the favourable High Court judgement in 2000, hundreds of Chagossians made their way to the CRG office in Cassis each day to give their consent by signature or fingerprint. To secure consent from people unable to come to the office by their own means, (somewhat symbolic for ‘the struggle’) a ‘native’ Chagossian woman, a male Mauritius born Chagossian ‘child’, and a white male researcher from Europe – Audrey, Fred and I – volunteered to visit the homes of the elderly and the sick. The following is a quotation extracted from my field-notes on one of these occasions:

We went to collect signatures in Cassis. We came to a house – or a yard – fenced off by metal sheets. The area was relatively large and open with two ramshackle houses in one corner. The ground soil was quite stony. A woman in her thirties was sorting cheap rice in the shade of a tree outside where she lived. We came to see her aunt who supposedly lived there. A couple of hens were striding around. A boy played with a wrecked bike and a young girl with no clothing was hacking in the dirt with a piece of a broken table. The woman pointed to the other side of the yard, somewhat separated from this side by a cord with drying clothes. In the opposite corner of the yard, some twenty-five metres away from the main house was a tiny, tiny hut made of corrugated iron sheets. The shelter was approximately two-times-two metres with one door and one open window. To enter I had to bow my head. Inside were only a locker and a bed. The old woman, maybe in her late seventies, was sitting on her bed with a stick in her hand and was constantly making a weeping noise. She obviously was in some sort of pain. We got her fingerprint as signature, thanked her and left. Audrey was upset and expressed contempt for how they were treating the old aunt:

– “In Chagos it was not like this, over there everybody helped one another like a large family. Now she is sitting there alone. You saw how she lived! And that large yard... It’s not the same here. People are separated in different towns and suburbs.”

– “And they are at most friends,” Fred confirmed, “That is why they undertake the struggle to go back to Chagos.”

– “They come to her with food, but that’s all,” Audrey added confirming.

The example shows that although decisive political battles were fought abroad, ‘the struggle’ also takes place on the local level. It also illustrates that Chagossians participate in that struggle to different degree. Some Twenty Chagossians assisted the organisation during these hectic days, and the prospects for compensation mobilised close to their entire community in Mauritius. Throughout my fieldwork, Chagossian political and cultural gatherings always well attended, and many Chagossians – both young and old – frequented the CRG office, which then represented the centre of the Chagossian struggle in Mauritius. The above example also illustrates how central understandings of ‘the struggle’ are informed by local experiences in a quite harsh socio-economic situation. In this example, the neglect of the old Chagossian woman not only provoked serious dismay, but it also stimulated reflections on how things were *different* in the Chagos Archipelago – a homeland then remembered as a place where people were sharing, helping each other, and living together like one large family. Such encounters

and experiences, expressed in terms of differences between here and there, reproduce motivation for partaking in ‘the struggle’. To people like Audrey and Fred, other Chagossians’ neglect and disrespect for their own family-members feed into ideas of a different Chagos – a place very much worth struggling to return to.

The importance of ‘the struggle’ to many Chagossians is also reflected in the way they speak about it. Many, and especially elder Chagossian women who have militated for decades,



Illustration 16: Chagossians decorating the CRG office in Cassis before the journey to the Chagos in 2006. The slogans read: “Back to our unforgotten paradise”, “Historical visit of Chagossians to their homeland – our people, our island, our struggle” and “30th March 2006 a day to remember - our pride is our struggle”.

Photo: Johannessen 2006

formulated ‘the Chagossian struggle’ as a central purpose in their lives. Time and again they reiterated phrases such as: “I will never forget”, “the struggle continues” and “I will continue to struggle until I die”. Many are proud to be part of ‘the struggle’, which of course also ensures broad commitment to the political organisations. Illustrating this, a few days before Chagossians journeyed to their homeland, Chagossians decorated the CRG premises with a large number of political banners (see Illustration 16). Hoisted on top of the roof above the office’ entry, a large white banner declared: “Our Pride is our Struggle”. Related to the issue of pride, Chagossians emphasise that the struggle is – and has always been – hard. Phrases like “the Chagossian struggle is not easy” and “we got nothing for free” are also repeated over and over. Moreover, while pointing to what they call “the fundamental right to live on the land where one was born” they also see their struggle as a just struggle – often phrased as a struggle for “truth against lies”. Accordingly, it was considered of great importance to voice the story about themselves and the history of their community. This was regarded as a central part of

‘the struggle’. As a Chagossian man in his fifties concluded by the end of a life-story interview he gave to me: “...and people don’t know this! That is why we have to tell it to the world. I will continue to struggle until I die”. In other words, voicing that story means a lot to Chagossians. Analytically it means postulating, and seeking recognition for, the particular identity of the characters that populate the dominant Chagossian auto/biography.

As we have seen, the ‘Chagossian struggle’ is intimately connected to all concepts and metaphors elaborated in the foregoing. It adds important temporalities to the dominant Chagossian auto/biography. The concept monopolises past political activities under a single, uncontested, and exclusively communal term. It connects past and present political actions to strategies, hopes and anticipations for the future. And hence, in contrast to the repetitive time that dominates Chagossians’ representations of life in the Chagos Archipelago, the concept of ‘our struggle’ structures post-eviction time in a progressive fashion. In that way ‘the struggle’ communicates a sense of *durée* in a situation that is otherwise importantly defined by rupture, displacement and separations. To form part of ‘the Chagossian struggle’, then, offers a sense of common purpose and direction. Hence, it also offers a sense of continuity of community - that is to say, a sense of permanence in ethnic community.

As I shall proceed to elaborate in the next section, not only to struggle, but also to believe in the *telos* of that struggle, is in certain ways defining for what it means to be Chagossian. I have noted in the foregoing that Chagossians characterise ‘the struggle’ as *hard*, as *just*, and as an on-going fight to unveil the *truth*. Recalling that most Chagossians are Catholics, these three terms, along with the idea of progression towards a future *telos*, may be taken to indicate that Chagossians also ascribe ‘the struggle’ important Christian meanings. Within such a framework, a hard, just, and somewhat enlightening struggle for ‘truth against lies’ easily appears as good against evil. I have noted already that stories Chagossians themselves tell about themselves also draw on other established narratives; and as we shall see, Christian allegories figure frequently in Chagossian self-representations. What is more, in the context of the Chagossians’ pilgrimage to their homeland in 2006, the history of their political struggles was also significantly reformulated. In the context of their physical pilgrimage to their homeland, pilgrimage was adopted as a metaphor for their own political struggles: a long and hard journey towards a particular political *telos* or destination.

5.2 CHAGOSSIAN HISTORY AS META-PILGRIMAGE

When I first arrived to Mauritius in 2004, many Chagossians complained that the Church had never properly assisted them even though almost all of them were Catholics. When I returned to Mauritius in 2006, the situation had changed and such regrets were no longer common. As I have noted, both a Catholic priest and a pastor from the Protestant Evangelical Church in Mauritius accompanied Chagossians on their journey. The latter registered a Bible-based NGO *Mo Pense Toi* (‘I think and care about you’) in July 2004 that actively supports Chagossians with matters of education and literacy, health, housing and other forms of direct relief like distribution of food to poor families. Before, after and during the journey in 2006 the two clergymen attended Chagossian political meetings where they, among other things, led

Chagossians in collective prayers. Way more often than in 2004 Chagossians now emphasised that religious prayers formed part of ‘the Chagossian struggle’. They also frequently framed ‘the Chagossian struggle’ in Christian terminologies and invoked stories from the Bible to express the situation of their community.

In the context of the Chagossians’ voyage to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006, it had become very common among Chagossians and these religious leaders to describe ‘the struggle’ as a journey. And ultimately, in the context of Chagossians’ first pilgrimage to their homeland, religious leaders framed ‘the Chagossian struggle’ as a pilgrimage. Also Chagossians started to embrace this metaphor to express their history of political activity. “The Chagossian struggle is like a pilgrimage” they now often explained. In other words, pilgrimage emerged as a metaphor for ‘the Chagossian struggle’, and this happened in a socio-political context where Chagossians prepared to embark on a physical pilgrimage, spiritually guided by two Christian religious leaders, to their homeland.

It is not uncommon, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, that people formulate quests in life, and even life itself, as a journey. According to Davidson and Gitlitz it is particularly common among Christians to use the pilgrimage metaphor as a way of framing such quests. This is much because also the human soul on earth is understood to be *en route* to its final destination in Heaven in Christian tradition (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002). Chagossians were familiar with this Christian cosmology. In fact, in very many religious gatherings I attended with them, and political meetings too, Chagossians bowed their heads and sung a very popular psalm that most seemed to know by heart. It was named *Kondir mwa*, meaning ‘lead me’ – or ‘drive me’ in other more frequent settings – and is very much about this kind of metaphorical journey:

Lead me, watch over me
Lord, take my hand
Lead me, watch over me.
Show me your way⁴

Along with this psalm, many stories from the Bible had also become important to understandings of life as a journey, or in this case: Chagossian politics as a pilgrimage. In what follows I shall explore what Chagossians meant when they used the pilgrimage metaphor to frame their history of political actions in 2006. As we shall see, other established stories, especially biblical ones, informed the stories Chagossians told about themselves, their community and their struggle. By taking a closer look at these biblical stories and how Chagossians and clergymen referred to them, it is possible to grasp ideas and self-understandings that are of central importance to their struggle and their community.

Stories Chagossians tell about themselves also draw on already established stories and ideologies. As we have seen, beyond the more culture specific contents the imagery of ‘roots’ had strong links to the sedentarist ideology. ‘Sadness’ clearly drew on medical discourses. And their catchphrase ‘back to paradise’ undoubtedly invokes a Christian vocabulary, with a reference to the biblical myth of the Fall: Here Chagos as ‘Paradise’ refers to the Garden of

⁴ Psalm 139; my translation.

Eden in which the innocent original inhabitants (read: native Chagossians) lived in affluence, peace and harmony. Further parallels to the plot of this biblical tale are found in Chagossians' stories about the secretive expulsions of these first inhabitants by the world's dominant powers. As the story goes, the Garden's original inhabitants lived in peace and affluence until evil corrupted their innocent world. The natives were cheated and deceived. The Almighty then expelled the original inhabitants from the Garden and forced them to live under conditions of suffering and hardship in exile, but in the process they also accessed secret knowledge that had been restricted and reserved for the omnipotent (read: the UK government) only. Also other biblical stories are central to the ways Chagossians present and understand themselves, but the most important ones are those that add meaning to 'the Chagossian struggle'. One of them is the Biblical story of future King David's battle against the giant Goliath described in 1 Samuel 17: 1-58 (Holy Bible, NIV, 2007). Chagossians often see their own struggle in that light, where they represent a small group of people fighting against the world's dominant powers – the UK and the US governments. As in the story, the odds look quite poor on the outset. But as I noted, Chagossians see their struggle as a good struggle for truth and justice; and thus, as I shall return to below, with God on their side even a small people can combat a giant. Informed by biblical stories like these, a return to the Chagos Archipelago must not necessarily – despite incredibly powerful opponents – appear impossible. But as I shall explain through the empirical examples that follow, these stories also convey an important lesson: victory is only possible for a community of believers.

Something exploded when I approached the CRG office on 11 May in 2006. From a distance I heard a loud ra-ta-ta-ta... noise, and soon after I could see that the office' entry section was completely covered in smoke. When blasts stopped, I was greeted by celebrating Chagossians. Some started to dance *sega* to Grup Tambour Chagos melodies on the stereo while others were cleaning up the mess from innumerable used firecrackers. Unfortunately I was a minute late. It had just been announced that The British High Court had ruled in their favour and declared the 2004 Orders in Council – which prevented Chagossians from returning to the Chagos Archipelago – null and void. A pickup truck and two other cars, one of them driven by the Catholic pastor who accompanied Chagossians on their pilgrimage to the Chagos six weeks earlier, were loaded with countless CRG banners, celebrating Chagossians and myself. With the local press on our tail, we toured Port Louis' outskirts to convey the message: "We beat the British Queen!" (see Illustration 18). One hour later, we made a stop in Roche Bois and entered the local church. The people silenced and the pastor started to preach: The Chagossian struggle was comparable to that of the Jews, he said. It was thanks to God that the legal victory now had come, and it was time to thank the Lord. While people started to pray, a Chagossian man sitting next to me leaned over and explained in a lowered voice: "We are here to thank God. To make a prayer, because we have won a great victory against the British". All of a sudden he snatched my pen and said: "If you give me this pen, I have to say 'thank you'." He continued: "Many people have prayed for this for a long time, not only yesterday. In the meantime many Chagossians have died. By praying to God, to do grace, also they [i.e. Chagossian ancestors] will know of this great victory." After a short pause he added: "All the people believe that what is impossible for the people is not impossible for God".

I started to comprehend the importance of what he said when we returned to the CRG office that evening. Another Chagossian man then pointed his finger at me and explained in a serious voice: “If you believe you can, you can.” The next morning someone had sprayed the



Illustration 17: ‘Olivier Bancoult, our Moses’. Message flagged on one of eight busses rented and decorated by the CRG 21 May 2006. On the way to welcome the CRG leader who arrived from London at Sir Sewoosagur Ramgoolam Airport, we had a flat tire. Photo: Johannessen 2006.



Illustration 18: “We beat the British Queen!”. Chagossians announcing and celebrating British High Court victory 11 May 2006. Photo: Johannessen 2006.

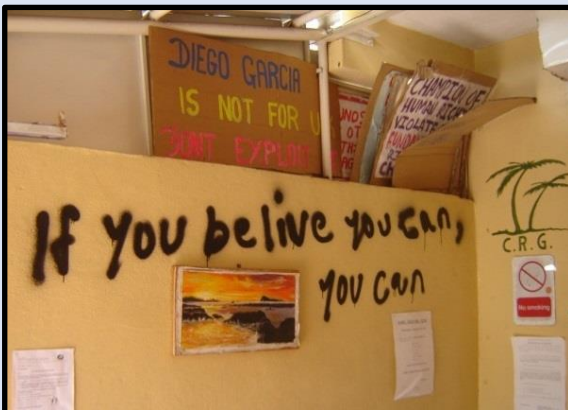


Illustration 19: “If you believe you can, you can” sprayed on the wall inside the entrance to the CRG office on the eve of the favourable UK High Court ruling 11 May 2006. The older cardboard poster above reads ‘Diego Garcia is not for USA - don’t exploit it’. Photo: Johannessen 2006.



Illustration 20: Political banner on the front of a bus reads “if you believe, you can?” One out of eight busses rented and decorated by the CRG when their leader arrived from the London courts to Mauritius on 21 May 2006. Photo: Johannessen 2006.

same message onto the wall inside the entry part to the CRG office (see Illustration 19). A few days later, eight rented busses were packed with Chagossians who wanted to cross Mauritius island to welcome the CRG leader and his delegation at the airport when they arrived from London. 500 posters reading ‘welcome to the Hero’ and ‘Merci Olivier’ were put up around Port Louis the night before. Against the background of the V-shaped atoll of Diego Garcia, the posters showed a picture of Olivier Bancoult as he exited the British High Court in 2000 saluting the people and the press with a V-sign for ‘victory’. When the busses departed, CRG banners were sticking out of the busses’ windows, and the fronts of the vehicles were covered with large white sheets onto which Chagossians had written their messages. On one of them

was the phrase referred to above – albeit slightly reformulated as a rhetorical question: “If you believe, you can?” (see Illustration 20).

In the situation described above the Chagossian man in the Church emphasised the importance of thanking God for the legal victory. Expressing gratitude the way he did can be understood as an reciprocal act of precaution to make sure that God will continue to side with Chagossians in their struggle for justice, truth, compensation and repatriation. “All people believe” he said “that what is impossible for people is not impossible for God.” In other words, though it may be impossible for people to win a struggle against the world’s most powerful governments, it is not impossible for God to let a small community combat such a giant.

Thus the biblical tale of Goliath’s threat to the Israelites until future King David defeated him after forty days of battle lends important meanings to ‘the Chagossian struggle’ and hence the stories Chagossians tell about themselves.⁵ However, from the perspective of this Christian line of thought, a most crucial point is that in order to be successful in such a difficult trial one must believe that winning is possible. To believe in the ultimate victory despite overwhelmingly poor odds is the real trial, because it is ultimately a testimony to belief in God. This point comes to strong expression in another biblical story that has become hugely important to Chagossians. When the priest explained in the church of Roche Bois how ‘the struggle’ is comparable with that of the Jews it was actually the story of Moses he was pointing to. During my fieldwork, especially in 2006, many Chagossians expressed their situation with reference to the story of Moses and the exodus of the Jews from Egypt (Book of Exodus, in Holy Bible, NIV, 2007). In this story the issue of unconditional belief is of central relevance too. It points to the tragedy of those who do not believe and separates the unfaithful from the community.

“I feel like Moses, I am taking my people to the Promised Land” the CRG leader declared on the quay in Port Louis just before he embarked on Chagossians’ first communal journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. CRG leader Olivier Bancoult is in many contexts compared with Moses who led the exiled Jews from slavery in Egypt, across the sea, and, after forty years in the desert, home to their Promised Land. I noted above that Chagossians decorated eight rented busses with banners when they travelled to the airport to welcome the CRG leader who arrived from London. Among the large banners that covered the front of the vehicles one declared: “Olivier Bancoult: Our Moses” (see Illustration 17). Adding flesh to the links between Moses and the CRG leader, many Chagossians also underlined that just like Moses’ Exodus and the Israelites’ forty years of wanderings towards the Promised Land, about forty years had now passed between the Chagossian evictions and their first journey to the Chagos in 2006.⁶ According to the story of Moses, the reason for the Israelites’ forty years of wanderings in the desert was precisely that most of his followers failed to believe that it was possible to conquer and return to the Promised Land, which, like the Chagos, was fortified and

⁵ Also other biblical passages point to this, e.g. in Mark 9:23 a spirit possessed boy’s parents ask Jesus if he can help them: „if you can?” said Jesus. „Everything is possible for one who believes” (Holy Bible, NIV, 2007).

⁶ The number forty (appearing 146 times the Bible) has been understood to refer to symbolic rebirth (it takes about forty years for one generation to be substituted by the next, and forty weeks to bear a child). Christians (most Chagossians included) accordingly fast for forty days before Easter to commemorate Jesus’ forty days of prayer and fasting in the desert to prepare his mission (i.e. salvation and possible rebirth of the community of believers in Heaven) that culminated with the crucifixion and resurrection. Online source: <http://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/40.html>, accessed 10 Apr. 2012.

was inhabited by others when they arrived. From the outskirts of Canaan, Moses sent twelve spies into the city. After forty days they returned with the message that the Promised Land was indeed very fertile, but only two out of the twelve spies believed that the land could be concurred and were willing to try. The rest did not. Unfortunately for them, the Israelites listened to the ten other spies. They gave up, nearly stoned the believers for their unpopular judgement, and wished instead to return to Egypt where they had been enslaved. Moses then told the Israelites that they would wander the wilderness for forty years. That is, until all of those who did not believe that the aim of their mission was possible (i.e. that the occupied homeland could be conquered – despite having God on their side) had died out. Excluding Moses, who eventually also sinned against God, only the believers, and the next generation who had not yet uttered their disbelief in the struggle – and thereby in God – would, as a holy people and a community of true believers, later conquer and enter the Promised Land.

Through these biblical stories ‘the Chagossian struggle’ takes on significant Christian meanings. When Catholic Chagossians in political and religious contexts say: ‘if you believe you can, you can’, this is a statement about their own political struggle, which lends meaning from the biblical stories of Moses and David’s battle against Goliath. The crucial normative issue transferred from these biblical stories is that Chagossians must not cease to believe. If they do, they cannot expect to win a battle against their overwhelmingly powerful political opponents. This formulation carries normative elements that many Chagossians now take quite seriously: You should not give up the struggle and forget what happened. Accordingly, Chagossians reiterate the phrases ‘I will never forget’ and ‘I will continue to fight until I die’ repeatedly when they talk about themselves and their situation. In other words, a ‘true Chagossian’ should not give in and accept *status quo* (i.e. ‘adapt’ and ‘strike new roots’). One should continue to fight, and one should fight with the belief that the realisation of the aims of that fight is possible, because ‘what is impossible for people is not impossible for God’. When taking these Christian ideas a step further, ‘the Chagossian struggle’ emerges as a test and a trial for a community of Chagossian believers – a hard trial, that is, where believing in ‘the struggle’ comes close to believing in God. To believe, despite sufferings, political setbacks and poor odds, that Chagossians can conquer the world’s dominant powers that occupy their paradisiacal Promised Land is, in this sense, also to confirm one’s faith in God. Conversely, to give in, as most of Moses’ followers did, is to doubt the Almighty. And with disbelief, the giant cannot be conquered. This separates the unfaithful from the community of believers. And those who do not believe in the possibility of winning the battle, and by extension the omnipotent God, will lose or perish and never return to Paradise. Hence, Chagossians’ repeated pronouncement: ‘If you believe you can, you can’ connects to central biblical stories and adds important layers of Christian meanings to the stories they themselves tell about themselves.

While it evidently became very important in 2006, the above formulation stressing the matter of belief was not that central among Chagossians during my fieldwork two years earlier. This, along with increased messianic characterisations of Chagossians’ political leadership, was due to the increasing role of the church and church representatives within their community. In 2006, Chagossians turned to the Church to perform their journey as a pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago. During the preparations to this journey, religious leaders formulated ‘the Chagossian struggle’ as a pilgrimage and a trial – a reformulation of their political past that Chagossians welcomed and adopted. ‘The Chagossian struggle’ thus emerged as a long and

difficult journey marked by penance, sacrifice and discipline. This metaphorical journey may be hard, but recalling that Chagossians understand their struggle as a quest for truth and justice, it appears, from a Christian perspective, as a struggle for good against evil. And when judgement one day is passed – in religious and legal respects – the community of persistent believers will eventually have their reward: Returning back to Paradise, which is the aim of Chagossians' political organisations, the destination of their physical journey in 2006, the spiritual pilgrimage of their souls as well as the political pilgrimage of their lives.

Hence, the pilgrimage metaphor that emerged as a way to conceptualise the Chagossian struggle was not out of the blue. In fact, it emerged in the context of Chagossians' physical pilgrimage to their homeland. Preparing and undertaking a physical pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago gave way for adopting 'pilgrimage' as a metaphor to express their history of political activity. As Chagossians and their religious leaders pointed out in 2006, along the route of the metaphorical pilgrimage there are not only obstacles but also rewards. The Catholic priest who followed Chagossians to the Chagos Archipelago, and to the Church in Roche Bois upon their legal victory a few months later, was well aware that Chagossians now conceived of both these events as rewards along the way to their political *telos*. In an interview, he explained to me that when the judgement was passed on 11 May 2006 it was no coincidence that the Catholic lectionary of that day matched this very well:

The reading of the day was Moses who said to the Israelites, 'For forty years you have been suffering. I will give you a land you will be able to go back to.' When Olivier Bancoult called from England to say 'now we win the battle' I read from this passage what God was saying today: that your people will be able to go back to the land. The word of God. [...] When we went on the pilgrimage – that was the visit. But the true fight is to return to the homeland. This visit was part of it. One month after we returned here on April 10, they won this [legal] battle to be able to come back to the islands. That's the real issue. The pilgrimage was part of the struggle. 'Back to paradise' is 'back to live on our islands'.

The very interesting point here is that it was the context of a physical pilgrimage to the homeland that triggered the use of 'pilgrimage' as a metaphor for Chagossians' political struggles. But then, at the same time, the physical pilgrimage about to materialise was transformed and reduced to a step *en route* to the destination of the wider metaphorical pilgrimage. Hence, the first communal journey to the Chagos Archipelago, which Chagossians and invited religious leaders defined and performed as a pilgrimage, became a physical pilgrimage within a meta-pilgrimage. That is, a meta-pilgrimage to a political *telos*: compensation and the legal right to repatriation. This is a considerable reconceptualization of their situation, which emerged from the socio-political context of a physical pilgrimage.

However, pilgrimage as a metaphor not only concerns routes and destinations, it also says something about those who peregrinate. In this terminology Chagossians are framed as a community of pilgrims. Like a fraternal community of pilgrims that are equals before their sacred quest; Chagossians emerge as an ethnic community faithfully dedicated to reach their political destination of justice, compensation and the right to repatriation. This points to a highly important issue that I shall return to discuss in Chapter 7: not all Chagossians are

considered meta-pilgrims in this way. Many, but especially elderly, militant Chagossians, have come to regard Chagossians who migrate to England as not dedicated to the political meta-pilgrimage to return to the homeland. They stop fighting and head for another destination. And not just any other destination, but to the UK where they work and pay taxes to the government responsible for their ‘uprooting’, ‘misery’ and ‘sadness’. During my fieldwork, the latter issue was not something they explicitly held against the migrants. More serious was that migrants, who were said to go to ‘live easy life in England’, were not considered as believers. To many, migration to the UK was synonymous with doubting or giving up ‘the struggle’. Accordingly, migrants to England – or Chagossians who were not identified as proper meta-pilgrims for other reasons – were eventually excluded from their physical pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006.

5.3 *ARRIVALS*

Storytelling forms a central part of Chagossians’ social and political lives. Great many Chagossians find it very important to communicate stories about who they are and where they come from. To friends, family, academics, journalists, lawyers, judges and others, they repeatedly explain how life used to be in the Chagos Archipelago prior to their expulsions, what happened to them, what their situation is like now, how they wish to change it, and how alternative representations by political opponents must be countered. As the foregoing examples show, even across a variety of social contexts, there are strong similarities to be found in the stories young and old Chagossians themselves tell about themselves and their community – not only by invoking the same concepts, but also in terms of content and how they structured these narratives. Time and again, particular phrases and formulations are also reiterated, becoming what we may call ritualized acts of speech. As they reoccur in Chagossian songs as well, one may suggest that such phrases – all central to the stories Chagossians tell about themselves – have become ritualised by melody. This indicates that stories Chagossians themselves tell about themselves and their community, their pasts, and the places that are important to them, are widely shared within their ethno-political group.

Grounded in such similarities, this chapter has outlined and discussed the workings of what I have called a dominant Chagossian auto/biography. That is, an emergent general narrative about the history and condition of the Chagossian community, which has developed in dialogue with relevant others under the changing – and yet also relatively stable – socio-economic and political circumstances Chagossians have been facing, and continue to face, in Mauritius after the evictions. I have outlined the contours of this dominant auto/biography by analysing a selection of important emic concepts and metaphors that Chagossians routinely invoke when they talk about themselves and their community. Personal narratives communicated through these elaborate cultural concepts are, largely, what constitutes this auto/biography. When Chagossian identity is relevant, people position themselves as characters within this general story, and draw on its particular terminology of concepts and metaphors to communicate and make intelligible a variety of personal experiences. These concepts and metaphors furnish the dominant auto/biography with different elements and contents.

The concept of 'home' or 'Chagos' introduces a crucial spatial dimension to this auto/biography. Chagos is different. There is a relational logic as to how and why Chagossians present their homeland as an Edenic paradise of peace and affluence. In Mauritius, Chagos is constantly remembered through encounters with everyday worries and difficulties. Hence, memories of their homeland is constituted by the inversion of relevant socio-economic problems and difficulties they have encountered in Mauritius, much because Chagossian remembering has taken place under difficult circumstances in the latter society over the last four decades. This also explains the ongoing social reproduction of Chagossian belonging and longing for the Chagos Archipelago – a place that appears to hold the solution to all contemporary problems, but which is constituted by them as well. That is, a paradise, which is first and foremost different from what they conceptualise as their 'misery' in Mauritius. Hence, Chagos is relational. It is a place that has acquired its identity, not in isolation, but through its relationship with Chagossians' experiences of Mauritius. But paradisiacal Chagos is not simply an imaginary place that can serve the purpose of a refuge or retreat from the social. It has developed in the course and context of their political struggles and it is voiced and portrayed in public – often in the same breath as complaints about their current difficulties. Hence, constructions of Chagos must also be read as a subtle critique of Mauritius' capitalist society, where Chagossians live and struggle at the very margins.

The concept of 'roots' brings issues of morals and attachment into their dominant auto/biography. Chagossians frequently make use of this term to express their attachment to the homeland. Such botanical metaphors should be read as expressions of a widespread sedentarist ideology. However, although 'roots' is a travelling concept, one cannot assume that it means the same to everyone. To Chagossians, 'roots' harbour quite specific cultural meanings. They speak about different kinds of roots 'over there', including the umbilical cord – something that adds a significant gendered dimension to their relationship to the land they call home. At the same time, what they refer to as their 'uprooting' effectively distinguishes a passive and victimised Chagossian in-group from active and very particular and powerful out-groups. Thus, important moralities also enter and furnish the stories Chagossians tell about themselves, and these are far from ahistorical.

This dominant auto/biography must not be mistaken for simple detached, political rhetoric. It refers to a significant narrative about peoples' lives, which shapes understandings, is enacted in practice, and, as the concept of 'sadness' shows, has even become embodied by the auto/biography's central characters. 'Sadness' is foremost about experiences of separation. It is sustained in the present as new real-life experiences, such as their pilgrimage in 2006, trigger memories of separations that have marked their community in the past. Chagossians describe 'sadness' as an illness. Accordingly, one can die of 'sadness'. It also has respective bodily symptoms, such as leaving physical marks on people's bodies and causing people to behave in ways that are considered deviant. Clearly, 'sadness' serves psychological ends in that it makes intelligible tragic deaths and unfortunate fates among close friends and relatives. But it serves political ends as well, as it entails a strong claim to victimization, which is unsurprising since it has developed in the course of decades of political struggles. 'Sadness' is relational and intimately connected to the other key concepts and metaphors discussed here. To Chagossians, 'sadness' is a social fact with considerable explanatory potentials. As it is so

clearly placed inside and onto Chagossian bodies, affecting those bodies even to the point of death, ‘sadness’ can be understood as the incorporation of the Chagossian auto/biography.

This spatial drama is also central to what Chagossians refer to as their ‘struggle’, a concept that enriches their auto/biography with an important temporal dimension. ‘Our struggle’ is understood as a fight to end ‘misery’ and ‘sadness’ in Mauritius and return to ‘Chagos’ from where they have been ‘uprooted’. By singularising the history of Chagossian political activities in the post-eviction era, and pointing to future aims and actions, it contributes to a sense of continuity of political activity as well as an experience of permanence of community. To Chagossians, who typically describe their situation in terms of rupture, separation, breach, loss of culture and identity, this may seem particularly important. This having been said, conceptualising rupture in this way also means overcoming or bridging rupture, because it is at the same time integrated into a single and possibly coherent narrative with which they can identify.

The concepts and metaphors discussed here are widely recognized within the Chagossian community, and, from the way they make use of them, it is also clear to see that they refer to that community exclusively. Taken together, they form a highly interconnected culture-specific vocabulary, which is generally agreed upon and thus possibly communicable among the evictees and their families. This vocabulary is constitutive of the dominant Chagossian auto/biography. The stories Chagossians themselves tell about themselves by means of this vocabulary is constitutive of their identity and is also fundamental to the way they understand themselves as Chagossians.

This does not mean that the dominant Chagossian auto/biography is fixed and not subject to change. Beyond looking to what social, psychological and political functions this auto/biography serves, I have emphasised how its constitutive concepts are produced in everyday practices in Chagossians’ socio-political lives. This implies that their past is always in the making, constantly re-negotiated within a much disadvantaged, but also highly politicised, context. Jeffery describes changes in Chagossians’ mythico-history as a process of increasing standardisation, which in their case has proved a hindrance “in a world in which claims to rights are increasingly made in the ‘evidence’-based domain of law courts” (Jeffery 2011, 74). However, their auto/biography can also be reformulated and take on new meanings as the socio-political context changes over time. As discussed in Chapter 3, dramatic changes in Mauritius’ wider political climate were followed by new political strategies and related self-understandings within the Chagossian community after they reintroduced their *sega* and started to pursue an ethno-national struggle from the mid-1980s. Where Jeffery’s material on these memory politics are based on Chagossian songs, this early period is not accounted for. It is very likely that their representations of their own past were quite different before they embarked on their ethno-national struggle and became ‘Chagossians’. The argument of increasing standardisation should therefore not be understood as a process dating back to their evictions, but one that has taken place within the particular political and ideological framework of ethnic politics that emerged alongside revived Chagossian musical traditions from the mid-1980s. However, during my fieldwork in 2006, new political developments took place which also led to significant reformulations in representations and understandings of their past. These developments related to a central, but thus far neglected, side of Chagossian culture, namely the role and importance of Christianity and representatives of the church. Chagossians have

long since been Christians, mainly Catholics, and in recent years the church has taken on a more proactive role in their social and political lives. Much due to these Christian influences, their journey in 2006 was framed as a pilgrimage. And the context of this physical pilgrimage gave way for adopting ‘pilgrimage’ as a metaphor for the Chagossian ‘struggle’, effectively transforming understandings of their own political history and situation into a meta-pilgrimage. The physical pilgrimage was thereby reduced to a step *en route* to the political destination of the metaphorical pilgrimage, becoming a physical pilgrimage within a meta-pilgrimage. Their political history was accordingly transformed into an ethnic journey across time, a journey with considerable religious overtones that made hardship, suffering and sacrifices somewhat intelligible. It became a hard trial marked by penance, sacrifice and discipline – a lasting journey with many obstacles, but also some rewards, *en route* to their political destination: compensation and right to repatriation. All events preceding the destination of that meta-pilgrimage thereby merged into a meaningful ensemble of progressive steps *en route*. In Baumann’s words: “Destination, the set purpose of life’s pilgrimage, gives form to the formless, makes a whole out of the fragmentary, lends continuity to the episodic” (Baumann 1996, 22). I noted that with the concept of ‘our struggle’ temporality enters the stories Chagossians tell about themselves. In these stories, the historical point of their evictions marks a change from repetitive to progressive or teleological time structured around this concept. When the ‘struggle’ was reformulated as a metaphorical pilgrimage in 2006, this progressive element was further accentuated, but their auto/biography was not becoming more standardised. The destination of that progressive meta-journey, namely a return to the paradise homeland, entails also an element of a return to non-progressive times as in the timelessness of eternity that is characteristic for Paradise in Christian cosmology. Translated to this case: an ethnic struggle for a future return to their Edenic origin, where sense of time is marked by repetition of tradition, restoration of culture and enduring continuity of local ethnic community.

Stories Chagossians tell about their community and the world they inhabit also draw on already existing stories. With important implications, they often draw on stories from the bible – in particular those of the Fall, King David and Moses. This chapter has shown how the trials of such biblical characters inform the Chagossians’ understanding of their own political struggle. Because the matter of believing is so central to these stories, faith in the Chagossian struggle, and faithful commitment to the meta-pilgrimage and their community of co-pilgrims, have become particularly important. This, as I will return to discuss in Chapter 7, had significant consequences for members of the Chagossian community who now choose to migrate to England – excluded, as they were, from the journey in 2006, as invitation to their physical pilgrimage apparently depended on commitment and contribution to their meta-pilgrimage. Before I come to this, however, I shall in the next chapter turn to discuss Chagossians’ position within Mauritius’ multi-ethnic society, where contemporary nationalism can be understood as another significant meta-journey: a postcolonial journey of national subjects *en route* to ‘development’. These two meta-journeys, I will argue, are very much entangled – each vesting the other with constitutive meanings that are not only central to Chagossians who want to return ‘back to the roots’.

6 A STAIN ON THE MIRROR : CHAGOSSIANS IN MAURITIUS

Chagossians “have done Mauritians a big favour!” professed the bishop of Port Louis during a special Catholic mass in Cassis on the morning of the Chagossians’ departure. Moments before, a sizeable group of white-clad pilgrims had proceeded up the church floor in the grand St. Sacrament Cathedral to receive his blessing along with a red flower to take to the graveyards in the Chagos Archipelago. The bishop then presented the overcrowded nave¹ with a controversial metaphor, by which he criticised Mauritius’ part in the historical detachment of these islands. Invoking this year’s Independence Day slogan, ‘our country, our pride’, that was launched less than a month earlier, he also cast Mauritian nationalism in a critical light: “Our pride is like a person who looks himself in the mirror and says: ‘Me, I am independent’. But when you look closely, you see that there is a stain on the mirror. This is Chagos. The person cannot reflect himself where this stain is.” The bishop went on: “We, Mauritians, did not acknowledge that there was a stain on our independence.” He thanked Chagossians for their political struggles and proclaimed: “Chagossians have stood up and made us aware that we cannot accept this little stain.” “Chagossians did not demand charity,” he continued before switching from Kreol to English to emphasise that “Chagossians are not beggars! They are people with dignity. They are people with rights, and they are people who know how to fight for their dignity!” “This voyage to your natal islands is the beginning of a reparation. No political or military power can fight the power of justice and truth!”

In this chapter I discuss the relationship between the stain and the mirror. I shall in other words take a closer look at Mauritian nationalism, Chagossians’ position within this ideology, and the role of their community in the production of national selves within the state. Mauritius is very much a poly-ethnic society (see Benedict 1965, Eriksen 1998, Bunwaree 2002, 2005, Hookoomsing, Ludwig, and Schnepel 2009). Under the parole of ‘unity in diversity’, Mauritian authorities promote all-inclusive national identification. But alongside this emphasis on the wealth of ethnic and cultural ‘roots’ in official Mauritian nationalism, there is another more subtle ideology that focuses more on the emergence of a common ‘route’. Through the symbolism of a ship, Mauritian nationalist imagery is being framed as a journey of sacrifice and hardship *en route* to a future harbour – a metaphorical journey where the route and the destination are defined by ‘development’. Hence, analogous to how Chagossians now present their ethno-political struggle as a pilgrimage (see Chapter 5), a second a meta-journey comes to surface within this empirical field. That is, a metaphorical journey demanding social stability in the face of increasing inequalities, unemployment and deteriorating working conditions. In this optic, the ‘beggar’ – the supposedly less dignified character the bishop saw the need to dissociate the Chagossian community from – actually plays a key role. In this chapter, I will

¹ The ‘nave’ (from Lat. *navis* meaning ‘ship’) is an ancient Christian symbol which also refers to the centre area of the church where the congregation is seated. As most explicitly expressed in depictions of peregrinating St. Ursula assisting sinners into her vessel, in the Christian tradition life on earth is often presented as a pilgrimage where the faithful peregrinate across the seas of sins to their destination in heaven (see also Chapter 1).

argue that Mauritian nationalism combines ideologies of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘development’. From this perspective, Mauritius’ nationalist parole of ‘unity in diversity’ can be rewritten as ‘unity in development’. With the blend of these ideologies, developmental time also feeds back into local understandings of the plural society, and, therefore, the same nationalist parole can be reworded and investigated in terms of ‘development in diversity’ as well. As we shall see, within Mauritius’ rather complex form of multi-ethnic nationalism, Chagossians have come to hold a special position, a position which in important respects differs from that of other local ethnic groups. To explore the workings of nationalism in poly-ethnic Mauritius is therefore a precondition for understanding the Chagossian community and how it is reproduced on the local level. But a study of Chagossians’ role and position within this context will also show how the ‘stain on the mirror’ unintentionally also contributes to raising national sentiments in a state much divided along ethnic lines.

6.1 *NATIONALISM AND THE PLURAL SOCIETY*

In accordance with Comaroff’s (1996) later publication on the ethnically ordered world and the prevalence of ethno-national struggles in our times discussed in Chapter 3, Anderson objected to popular prophecies that nationalism would give way to forces of globalisation (Anderson 1991 [1983]). Despite the incorporation of new and distant markets to the world economy and the increase and acceleration in transnational flows of capital, ideas, people and commodities, he argued to the contrary that nation-ness has become “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (Anderson 1991, 3). Nationalism can accordingly be defined as a globalised ideology, or secular religion, which asserts that the borders of the nation and the state should correspond, that the national group must be politically independent, and that the national community should retain a superior claim to loyalty. Variations of this definition may be widely recognised (cf. Gellner 1983, Østerud 1994, Eriksen 1998), but it is not unproblematic. Few among the mosaic of sovereign states that map the contemporary world can claim to be mono-ethnic, and how nationalism works in different societies is also not a given. In the following I shall explore the workings of nationalism in Mauritius, a prime example of a poly-ethnic state. I then move on to consider Chagossians’ role and position within that framework. To do this it is first necessary to clarify what is meant by the concept of a ‘nation’.

Anderson (1991, 6) defines ‘nation’ as “an imagined political community”. He points out that as long as ideas of a communion between people extend face-to-face relations with members of a given group, all communities are imagined.² Nations are imagined to be inherently limited and sovereign, with finite (or possibly elastic) borders and with the presumption that other nations exist beyond those borders. Internal social relations are typically conceived of as horizontal comradeships, and co-members of the nation project freedom and emancipation into establishing and inhabiting a sovereign state. Imagined communities became possible through print capitalism, public media, the development of common institutions, the

² ‘Imagined community’ should not be mistaken to mean ‘imaginary’ as in ‘non-real’.

distribution of collective symbols and the spread of new communication technologies. Accordingly, Anderson argues that nationality, nation-ness and nationalism are cultural artefacts of modernity. Observations that nations are often constructed in arbitrary ways and promote horizontal comradeships among their members have led scholars to link nationalism to the fabrication of false consciousness (e.g. Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Hobsbawm 1990). Invented in the early days of modern industrialisation, nationalism can thus be seen as an ideology that conceals unequal distribution of wealth and property and legitimises modern states' monopolies with regard to violence and taxation.

While political dimensions certainly changed dramatically from the dawn of modernity, the concept of the 'nation' predates this era. Østerud (1994) traces the concept back to the Romans who used the Latin word *natio* as a pejorative designation for outsiders and strangers considered inferior to their own group. To them *natio* meant, "alien peoples connected through their place of birth" (Østerud 1994, 16; my translation). Already here we find similarities to a tendency I shall discuss later – how western elites have represented faraway Others as 'natives' whose cultural practices and reasoning are linked and limited to the local places and environments they inhabit (cf. Appadurai 1988). In mediaeval Europe, the derogatory connotations changed when 'nation' became a positive form of self-identification among politically privileged classes. In the enlightenment era 'nation' came to mean 'a sovereign people', becoming a revolutionary concept appropriated by vast groups of people demanding equal political rights. Finally, with decolonisation and the global spread of the nation-state, 'nation' emerged as a widespread designation for inhabitants of all states. The concept then not only denoted legally and politically sovereign populations. Inhabitants of nation-states were ascribed cultural, geographical and historical characteristics and were identified in terms of their differences. Thus, 'nations' also came to mean *particular* peoples (Østerud 1994, 15-22). Forming a particular group that is culturally, geographically and historically different from others is also at the core of what it means to be 'natives' today.

Although the concept of a 'nation' has acquired different meanings and served different purposes in the course of history, it has apparently always been connected to constructions of self and other and hence processes of social inclusion and exclusion. What I want to stress here is that the production of national selves and others today does not only take place at the international level. Similar processes also take place within the state. Discourses of and about out-groups within the state – often minorities dissociated with sedentarist principles such as travelling Romani people, diasporic Jews or Armenians, Sami nomads or state border crossers simply generalised as 'immigrants', 'exiles', 'foreigners' etc. – can also contribute to the production of national awareness among the nation's (supposedly properly rooted) majority. Such processes are at work in Mauritius too, and in those processes Chagossians have a central place. However, as I shall now move on to clarify, much due to its particular history and the composition of the local population, the Mauritian example is rather particular.

6.2 NATIONALISM IN POLY-ETHNIC MAURITIUS: 'UNITY IN DIVERSITY'

Mauritius is a creation of colonial times. It was populated by waves of forced and voluntary immigrants from different parts of Africa, India, China and Europe (cf. Chapter 2). During colonial times, 'race' was made an important organising principle in Mauritius. And even after the state became independent in 1968, much of the population organise along similar lines in important situations – although these lines are now popularly conceptualised in terms of 'ethnicity'. In his influential work on nationalism and ethnicity in Mauritius, Eriksen underlines that Mauritius forms a special case (Eriksen 1998, 143-44, see also Eriksen 1993b, 219): Mauritius was completely uninhabited prior to European colonisation, and no single ethnic group forms a clear majority in Mauritian society. Therefore, neither by majority nor by myths of earliest origin can any local ethnic group claim to represent the Mauritian nation alone. Hence, construction of a Mauritian national identity must be founded on other criteria than a shared cultural past and fictive kinship. Eriksen argues that Mauritian nationalism instead finds expression in two compatible forms, which both carefully consider the possibility of inter-ethnic tensions. On the one hand, Mauritian nationalism is 'multiculturalist' and portrays the nation as a cultural mosaic. On the other hand, it is universalist and presents the nation as supra-ethnic (Eriksen 1998, 144). Before I move on to critically discuss these local forms of nationalism, it is necessary to make a brief excursus to make some clarifying remarks on the popular image of 'multicultural' Mauritius.

6.2.1 MULTICULTURAL MAURITIUS

In official appeals to the population, Mauritius' government frequently declares the wealth of cultures in the country an important resource and encourages ethnic groups to preserve and practise their different cultural traditions (see examples below). This also resonates with how Mauritius is marketed as an attractive tourist destination that offers more than sun and subtropical beaches. The diverse origins of the Mauritian population are far from forgotten in today's Mauritius. Mauritians tend to think of ethnicity as primordial, and often associate ethnic identity with ancestral languages and with pure and distinct cultures that can be traced to particular homelands beyond the Mauritian state (Eriksen 1998, Boswell 2006). During my fieldwork, many Mauritians explained to foreigners, including myself, that they lived in a 'multicultural' society. Many were proud to do so, other were more sceptical. A young Indo-Mauritian man who considered himself a Christian, but had nonetheless just married in accordance with Hindu traditions, referred to the variety of religious traditions that different ethnic groups in Mauritius practice. He explained:

People in Mauritius are very communalist [i.e. give preference to their own ethnic group]. The Government and everyone says: 'Thank God for this and that', 'Pray to God...' 'If God will....' But if they would look into the concept of 'God' they were using they would have a big problem. They only have the word 'God' in common.

Ethnicity is indeed relevant in a number of social contexts in Mauritius. It is an important organising principle when it comes to residence patterns, intermarriage, party politics and political mobilisation, access to the labour market and distribution of wealth and property. Mauritians also place standardised markers like music, dance, cuisine, language and homelands in the domain of 'the cultural', and often use such expressions to communicate and confirm ethnic boundaries. Mauritius can therefore arguably be described as a complex poly-ethnic society, but it does not automatically follow from this that Mauritius' society is multicultural. That Mauritians live in a poly-ethnic society and to some extent organise accordingly does not mean that Mauritians have significantly different understandings of the world they inhabit. This is one of Eriksen's (1998) central arguments. He also convincingly claims that Mauritians are aware that inter-ethnic tensions can escalate into communal violence and therefore exercise complex strategies of compromise and avoidance in inter-ethnic interaction. These strategies tend to follow the logic of 'common denominators': depending on the definition of the situation, Mauritians avoid conflict by interacting on the basis of what they presume to have in common. Issues that can be uncontroversial in intra-ethnic settings could provoke tensions if they were invoked in inter-ethnic situations and are therefore typically avoided. But if Mauritians skilfully apply such strategies in a host of different social settings, this presupposes a high degree of common cultural understanding. Therefore, the much-celebrated Mauritian 'multiculturalism' appears rather superficial: "At the level of everyday representations and practices, Mauritian culture can actually be described as rather uniform, in the sense that there is a wide field of shared premises for communication encompassing most of the population" (Eriksen 1998, 180). In other words, Mauritians have much more than the word 'God' in common. As Eriksen points out, Mauritians share nothing less than a common political culture, a unifying educational system, a common language, universalistic notion of justice and individual rights, and a set of emerging meritocratic criteria for social mobility and access to labour.

During my fieldwork, few Mauritians disagreed that ethnicity played important roles in Mauritian society. More surprising was that many also noted that Mauritians were not all that different after all. As a male, middle-class, Mauritian Hindu in his early forties regretted: "Actually we are all Mauritians. It's only the politicians who want to make war and say that we are not." Pointing to a tendency among local politicians to emphasise local cultural differences he worried that this practice produced dangerous ethnic divisions in society. Such political processes are not unfamiliar to Mauritians. Political parties have a history of shaping their electorates in ethnic terms to secure votes. Through the 'Best Loser System' – a controversial institution supposed to balance the Westminster model of government with regard to Mauritius' poly-ethnic population – ethnic politics is even included in Mauritius' constitution (Bunwaree 2002, 3-4). Candidates standing for the General Elections are supposed to state their ethnic background. Measured against the last official census from 1972, which in ethnic/religious categories mapped the population as 50.3% 'Hindu', 16.1% 'Muslim', 2.9% 'Chinese' and 30.7% 'General Population', the allocation of eight Best Loser Seats is supposed to counter the imbalance of ethnic representation in a parliament elected by the Westminster

‘first past the post’ principle.³ But Mauritians not only criticised the political elite for reproducing an ethnically ordered society. Some also pointed their finger to social scientists seemingly motivated by the idea that poly-ethnic Mauritius forms an extraordinary case of inter-ethnic peace and tolerance. They complained that also academics contribute to reinforcing ethnic divisions by exploring and representing particular ethnic communities within society, and mapping their stereotypes of one another. As one woman asked: “What they are writing might be correct, but is it good?” People on Mauritius’ political left regretted that the general scientific focus in Mauritius had social consequences. To them, reproducing the poly-ethnic society in academic writing meant upholding strategic divisions among the population and obscuring underlying causes of inequality. In this sense, multiculturalism and nationalism have much in common.

Multiculturalism is central in the official nationalist rhetoric in Mauritius. Patriotic slogans and expressions revolve around an apparent contradiction where Mauritian citizens are referred to as a single- and at the same time a plural- and a multicultural nation. As a Mauritian man commented when we were seated in a Port Louis cafe:

In 1982 [the MMM government] invented the slogan ‘one single nation, one single people’. But the Hindus and the Muslims objected to it. And then the government did this ‘unity in diversity’ thing: you say one thing, and then it collapses at the same moment. Here we have two Miss Mauritius; and two, no, even three, different winners of this national spelling competition. And then all these public holidays... The government does this all the time to not offend other communities. Mauritians don’t like to hear the truth. They want it all wrapped up and coated in chocolate.

National unity, or ‘unity in diversity’ as the official parole goes, is repeatedly communicated by the government as an important national aim. Apparently ‘unity in diversity’ is more than a contradiction in terms, an empty phrase, or a difficult aim worth aspiring for. After all, even though the country experienced a considerable economic boom from the mid-1980s, poverty and economic inequalities prevail in Mauritius. And despite the unequal distribution of wealth, property and privileges, Mauritius is widely considered a rare exception in terms of inter-ethnic peace-keeping. As Ludwig and Schnepel (2009) write:

It is also remarkable that all these differences and discrepancies – even though, or maybe precisely because, Mauritians are aware of them in everyday life – have not led to repeated outbreaks of destructive conflicts such as those which we have experienced so dramatically in many regions of the world in the past few decades (Ludwig and Schnepel 2009, 10).

I shall look into awareness of ethnic divisions and tensions in Mauritius in the section below. For now I want to make the point that although cultural differences are surely found within

³ The Best Loser System is frequently criticised and discussed in the Mauritian public (e.g. Lallah 2006 and Sithanen 2008). At time of writing, consultations on a possible reform of the Best Loser System were also announced on the Government’s official websites (www.gov.mu).

Mauritian society, not all of them follow ethnic lines. And in view of the cultural commonalities discussed above, it is not unreasonable to understand Mauritian ‘multiculturalism’ largely as a myth. But as we shall see, this is a highly significant myth. It is a myth the government seldom fails to invoke and one that people in Mauritius very much relate to. It is central to cultural patterns of conflict avoidance too. By reminding people of conflict, it works to prevent conflict – at least certain conflicts – by obscuring local understandings of the political economy. At the same time it also contributes to reproducing the poly-ethnic society. In the following I shall present empirical examples and discuss how nationalism works in Mauritius’ poly-ethnic society.

6.2.2 MAURITIAN NATIONALISMS

According to Eriksen, official nationalism in Mauritius is multiculturalist and supra-ethnic. These two aspects of Mauritian nationalism are complimentary. They represent compromises within Mauritius’ plural society, and they supersede local sub-ethnic identification (Eriksen 1998, 144; see also Eriksen 1993b, 209). Data from my fieldwork support this understanding to wide extent, but from the empirical cases I shall present below Mauritian nationalism can also lend itself to a different reading that also adds explanatory dimensions to Chagossians’ situation both in Mauritius and beyond.

1.1.1.1 MULTICULTURALIST NATIONALISM

The multiculturalist or poly-ethnic aspect of Mauritian nationalism draws on metaphors of Mauritius’ plural society and suggests that the Mauritian nation is identical with the plurality of the distinct cultures that constitute it. To illustrate this Eriksen discusses a ‘composite cultural show’ that took place during Mauritius’ independence celebrations at the time of his fieldwork in the mid-1980s (Eriksen 1998, 144-5). During my fieldwork two decades later, a similar show was arranged on the very same occasion. The ‘composite cultural show’ had in other words become a national tradition on this symbolic day. This year the ‘multicultural’ drama took place at the *Place des Armes* in Port Louis where a makeshift stage had been erected right between the colonial government building and the modern Caudan Waterfront in Port Louis. As the show unfolded, representatives of different ethnic/religious communities in Mauritius succeeded one another in presenting traditional costumes along with music and dances representing their respective ancestral traditions. It is hard to disagree with Eriksen’s conclusion that the aim of this show was to encourage what the government propagates as ‘unity in diversity’, striving “to give significance to metaphors of ‘organic wholes’ composed of incongruous elements but fused in the common destiny of the Mauritian people: that is to say, the whole (the show) signifies something qualitatively different from its parts (the separate performers)” (Eriksen 1998, 144-5).

There is however another important historical dimension to these celebrations that was commemorated more indirectly. At the time of decolonisation, Mauritius was not only declared an independent state, but also a state of emergency. Ethnicity was then highly politicised by political parties who foremost disagreed on the question of independence, and violence broke out in 1965 and 1968. This violence escalated at the time and over the very question of

Mauritius' independence, and is widely remembered as inter-ethnic violence between Afro-Creoles and Hindus and then between Afro-Creoles and Muslims. That this violence was well remembered in Mauritius in the 1980s is confirmed by one of Eriksen's informants who noted that after 1968 "people learnt their lesson and realised that we have to live together even if we are different. There has been no violence between Creoles and Muslims, or Hindus for that matter, later. You might say that this riot was the birth of the Mauritian nation" (Eriksen 1998, 152). Mauritians still remember those incidents in this way. I will argue this is at least in part because the potentiality of inter-ethnic violence is indirectly communicated in appeals for 'unity in diversity' through, among other things, 'composite cultural shows' – by now a national tradition repeated annually on the symbolic commemoration of Mauritian independence. On such occasions national unity acquires both meaning and importance through the opposite, i.e. 'the lesson'. If Mauritians are repeatedly reminded of a 'lesson' that links violence to the plural society, it is not strange that they worry about communal agitation and skilfully avoid conflict in inter-ethnic interaction. The three-day riot that broke out in Mauritius in February 1999 after the popular Afro-Creole singer Kaya was found dead under suspicious circumstances in police custody added permanence to the idea that a poly-ethnic society hosts in itself a latent danger – even though, as Bunwaree (2002, 7) argues, economic inequalities were probably the riots' key underlying reason. Five years later, when I watched the 'composite cultural show' on Mauritius' independence celebration in 2004, one of my informants turned to me and said: "Now everyone is celebrating. But in the evening when this is over people will start to fight." And indeed, when the evening concerts in Port Louis ended there were visible tensions in the streets and most people hurried home as soon as the events concluded. All in all this illustrates that Mauritian authorities do not discourage ethnic identification, but rather promote preservation of different cultural traditions and facilitate ethnic groups' externalisations of their cultural heritages. Authorities accordingly conceptualise the Mauritian nation in terms of 'unity in diversity'. But in this lies also a message that unity cannot be taken for granted in the plural society. Hence, the nationalist slogan is better understood as a warning than a simple remark about the importance of peaceful interethnic coexistence.

In Mauritius a number of symbols and metaphors express and reinforce the idea of a plural Mauritian society (see also Eriksen 1993b, 208, 219 fn 8). The 'rainbow society' refers to the multi-ethnic composition of the Mauritian population. It is held that what makes the rainbow beautiful is that the colours do not blend or overlap, but neighbour each other harmoniously side by side. The national flag is often interpreted in a similar way. Initially its four horizontal stripes of yellow, green, red and blue were intended to represent the sun, the land, the population and the ocean. Nevertheless, most Mauritians I asked during my fieldwork thought the colours referred to Mauritius' main ethnic/religious categories of people: Chinese, Muslims, Hindus and Creoles respectively. Other popular metaphors include the 'fruit salad' and its counter expression, the 'fruit compote'. While the 'fruit salad' symbolises Mauritius' multicultural mosaic, the 'fruit compote' reflects a scenario much opposed by ethnically minded Mauritians: a post-ethnic melting pot, or a one-coloured rainbow, where traditions and cultures are not preserved and kept apart but 'mixed' and reconfigured in new ways. From these metaphors it is easy to see that Mauritius' multiculturalist nationalism contributes to

producing discontent for cultural mixing and hybridity in Mauritius. And this has become a problem for one section of the population – the Mauritian Creoles.

Issues of cultural mixing and hybridity are central to Boswell's (2006) analysis of the Mauritian Creoles – a social category referring to a section of the population that has become closely associated with the 'fruit compote' alternative. Boswell does not wholly concur with the tolerance Eriksen seems to ascribe the Mauritian population. She argues that Mauritians embrace essentialist discourses and primordial understandings of culture, and have yet to grasp post-modern insights claiming that identities are constructed, fluid and always in the making. Such insights, Boswell notes, could challenge local hierarchies and hegemonies founded on cultural primordialism. However, as Mauritians are obsessed with the past, homelands and cultural purity, they seem to suffer some kind of hybridophobia. Boswell finds that the widespread disregard of the hybrid (i.e. a rainbow where the colours are not kept apart or the fruit-compote scenario) is at the core of the problem the Mauritian Creoles are facing. Due to the legacies of slavery, they can hardly invent a credible common ethnic past with ancestry and traditions traceable to a particular homeland. Descending from African and Malagasy slaves, their precise origins are both diverse and largely untraceable. And presumably unlike other Mauritians their cultures and traditions were mixed, lost, appropriated or corrupted in the course of history. But precisely therefore, Mauritian Creoles fit the way hierarchies of cultural essentialism are set in Mauritius. Mauritian Creoles are deemed to remain 'hybrids'. In fact, the word 'Creole' is largely synonymous with 'hybrid' or 'mixed' (as in 'creolisation') in Mauritius. According to Boswell, as long as Mauritian society upholds the myth of essentialised cultures, Mauritian Creoles will continue to be pejoratively associated with a 'non-identity' category – a constitutive counter-category that other Mauritians may use to highlight their own cultural purity. In this regard, Mauritian Creoles are worse off than Chagossians and the Rodriguans who in Mauritius form sub-categories of Mauritian Creoles. But as they can trace their ancestry to the Chagos Archipelago and Rodrigues, they can comfortably fit into the established hierarchies of primordial cultures and pure ethnic origin (Boswell 2006, 11, 166-7).

The Mauritian Creoles I encountered during my fieldwork confirmed many of Boswell's observations. Many of them belonged to the poorer sections of the population. Like other Mauritians, they were much preoccupied with questions of ancestry and primordialism and were, in Boswell's sense, not particularly 'post-modern'. Instead of questioning the ethnic essentialism altogether, there seemed to be a wider consensus that Creoles needed to be recognised as a community on par with the other ethnic communities in Mauritius to change their unfavourable condition. As an elder Mauritian Creole man worried: "If nobody helps this community, the community will disappear like the dodo disappeared from this land." To some, ethnic recognition was about financial compensation for slavery. Some emphasised the importance of elevating the abolition of slavery day as a public holiday in the official Mauritian calendar. Others pointed out that Mauritian Creoles suffered more than others from the fact that Kreol – the mother tongue of most Mauritians – is not recognised as an official language and is therefore not used as first language for teaching in Mauritian schools. Some added that Kreol was also not included in the list of ancestral languages pupils can choose in their studies. Many emphasised that lack of ethnic recognition made it difficult to mobilise Mauritian Creoles as a political pressure group: firstly, potential Creole cultural markers, including Kreol

language and the *sega*, have been appropriated by the state as markers for ‘Mauritian-ness’. Secondly, the social category of ‘general population’, which their group has been put into in the poly-ethnic setting, prevent communal mobilisation because it classifies them together with the aspiring middle class of Coloureds as well as the Franco Mauritian sugar barons and their white descendants. Third, “Unlike the others,” they said, “Creoles have no political leaders.” Much in line with these understandings, a politically active middle-class Mauritian Creole woman formulated their situation accordingly:

Wherever there are Creoles there is a mess. The problem is that the Creoles don’t know who they are. The Creoles want to be Mauritians, but I say that first we have to build something to know how to be Creoles, only then we can be Mauritians. We cannot think as Mauritians and then be Creoles. We are divided in the mind. We are really Mauritians, but vis-à-vis the others [e.g. Indo Mauritians] we are really nothing. And how can you change something if you don’t have the money for posters and advertising? When the government, the capitalists and the media are not with you, how can you organise? The media is the third power controlled by the whites. If you start organising in Roche Bois, by the time you are in Curepipe your reputation will be destroyed. It will be ‘antipatriotic’. The church could have been an institution where the Creoles could have united, but being Catholic includes the whites as well. They [Catholics] unite on the level of an idea, not as a community. And this coupling of two communities from each end of the socio-material hierarchy results in an ‘inferiority complex’ among the Creoles. For the church, everything which is black is bad. There is a white model and a black model. There is a canon of beauty with the white ideal. Black people consume beauty products to straighten their hair and whiten their skin. The African model is like going backwards.

Mauritian Creoles can rightfully be said to suffer from essentialist imaginations in ‘multi-cultural’ Mauritius, and Boswell is right that Mauritian Creoles have the most to gain by a general rejection of the essentialist ethnic discourses. But as the above demonstrates, this is not how Mauritian Creoles perceive the solution to their problems. In their view, the politics of redistribution is intimately connected with the politics of ethnic recognition, and the latter is seen as a necessary step to resolving their problem. Hence, even activists who aim to change their unfavourable conditions fall into a reactionary trap whereby they also recognise and confirm the cultural essentialism that lies at the heart of the very socio-material hierarchies. This, as we have seen, is very much in line with Chagossians’ politics to establish themselves as a distinct ethnic group within the framework of an ethnically ordered world (see Chapter 3). Politics pursued within that framework conform to it and also confirm the order that is at the core of Mauritius’ multiculturalist nationalism. What is remarkable is how well established this cultural understanding of society has become in Mauritius. According to the woman above, Mauritian Creoles have a problem with being Mauritian since the idea of being Mauritian in poly-ethnic Mauritius is possible only if one is first recognised as belonging to an ethnic community on the sub-level (cf. Eriksen 1993b, 209). Apparently, if the Mauritian nation is constructed as something more than, and different from, its constitutive parts, then being part

of the nation translates into a problem for those who feel they are not recognised as belonging to a distinct part.

1.1.1.2 SUPRA-ETHNIC NATIONALISM

Having discussed the multiculturalist side of Mauritian nationalism I shall now consider the supra-ethnic nationalism, the second form of nationalism Eriksen found promoted in Mauritius. This form of nationalism is expressed through symbols that transcend the ethnic, and is constructed as an overarching and encompassing symbolic system that aims to avoid association with any ethnic group in particular. The most important national symbols of this kind include the national flag, Mauritius' Independence Day, the national anthem, the late 'Father of the Nation' Sir S. Ramgoolam, and the English language (which not all Mauritians master, but which is also not associated with any particular group). The Kreol language and the *sega* could also be added to this list, but because Mauritian Creoles object to how the state has appropriated their cultural markers and transformed them into national ones, they effectively also reinforce much ethnic awareness. Eriksen stresses that national symbols transcending the ethnic are few and far between in Mauritius. And since an all-inclusive national identity in Mauritius cannot be constructed on ideas of a common pre-colonial origin or a shared colonial past, national symbolism of this kind is instead directed towards the future: "In its essence, Mauritian nationalism in all its expressions is future oriented; its main force in the 1990s lies in the idea of economic progress, which clearly inspires sentiments of pride and loyalty in the population" (Eriksen 1998, 150-1).

This was before the turn of the millennium. During my fieldwork in 2004 and 2006, Mauritius was faced with a severe economic crisis. The sugar and textile sectors were subject to eroding export preferences, unemployment was on the rise, the FDI was falling, and gaps between the rich and the poor were increasing (Bunwaree 2002, 2005, Neveling 2006, 2010). Also the 2005 and 2006 outbreaks of chikungunya, a mosquito-transmitted viral disease, caused a blow to the tourist sector.⁴ In other words, contrary to the 1980s and 90s the state's economic prospects now looked awfully bleak. Nevertheless – or as I shall argue, precisely therefore – future-oriented nationalism was overwhelmingly present. As already hinted at in the description of the 'composite cultural show' above, the spatial setting for the national independence celebration was also 'future-oriented'. With the old colonial government building at their back, the audience was facing Port Louis waterfront – an exceptional national space and one of Mauritius' most 'modern' landmarks. The Prime Minister's Independence Day speech held at the University of Mauritius in 2004 and the official logo and slogan selected for that occasion are good examples of this form of nationalism. If the Mauritian nation is imagined as something more than, and different from, its constitutive parts, the next examples demonstrate what ideological contents this is constructed around.

⁴ After a heavy outbreak of chikungunya on the neighbouring island Reunion, WHO announced in March 2006 that over 2,500 cases of the mosquito transmitted viral disease were registered in Mauritius. A national Chikungunya committee was set up. Along with 100,000 litres of insecticides, the government ordered spraying and fogging machines to combat the epidemic. According to visiting WTO leader Dr Lee, Mauritius' main concern was the lack of tourist arrivals (Afrol News, 7 Mar. 2006).

On the day prior to the celebration of Mauritius' independence in 2004 I visited the University of Mauritius in Reduit where the Prime Minister was to give a speech. While students, professors and university staff gathered in the yard in front of one of the central buildings, handouts of the Prime Minister's 'message' were distributed. Addressed to the students and signed by Prime Minister himself, the message was dedicated to the 36th anniversary of Mauritius' independence and the 12th anniversary of the Mauritian Republic. The crowd silenced and the Prime Minister started to read:

We have chosen the theme of '**Enn sel nasyon enn sel destin**' [one single nation, one single destiny] for the celebration [...]. This theme invites the whole nation to reflect on our common destiny. [...] The diversity of peoples and cultures of our country is indeed an inestimable wealth. [...] We should all resolve, on this auspicious day, to do our best not only to preserve, but to consolidate **National Unity**. We were all very proud of our youth during the Indian Ocean Islands Games. The whole nation felt such a strong sense of belonging, such a sense of patriotism that our youth gave the best of themselves and went for gold. [...] We shall find the emergence of the IT culture well anchored in our country through the inauguration of the cyber-city at Ebène. The digital highway is expected to allow our country to move forward to new horizons of progress and prosperity. [...] We are living in a fast changing world and our small island-economy has to face many challenges in the on-going process of globalisation. Our only resource is our people. Hence the need for you – the youth and future generations of the country – to be prepared for this challenge. [...] May the same feeling of pride and patriotism that vibrated in each Mauritian during the Indian Ocean Island Games vibrate as we watch the National flag being hoisted up the mast today and may we always strive to go for gold in whatever we undertake to do in the service of our country (Berenger 2004; emphasis in original, my omissions).

The Prime Minister's patriotic speech was practically peppered with symbols that transcend the ethnic and point to a common Mauritian future. These include the concepts of 'destiny', 'emergence', 'IT culture', 'cyber-city', 'digital highway', 'moving forward', 'to new horizons', 'progress and prosperity', 'globalisation', 'future generations' and 'going for gold'. Accordingly, this year's Independence Day slogan was a modified version of the MMM's earlier 'anti-ethnic' parole 'one single nation, one single people', where the latter part was replaced by 'one single destiny'. This adjustment could be read as an indication of the neo-liberal turn of the MMM since the mid-1980s (cf. Chapter 3). It illustrates in any case the problems inherent in the notion of 'a single people' in poly-ethnic Mauritius. And by replacing 'people' with 'destiny' here, the slogan definitively appears more future-oriented.

The supra-ethnic future-oriented nationalism found strong expression in the official Independence Day logo too, which besides decorating the hand-outs of the Prime Minister's speech appeared virtually everywhere in Mauritius around 12 March 2004 (see Illustration 21). Four months earlier the Ministry of Arts and Culture had launched a logo competition where any (but only) Mauritian could submit proposals that should reflect this Independence Day slogan. The winner was awarded Rs. 25,000. Hence, the logo below also reflects national imaginations of a Mauritian citizen (probably quite well-off with computer skills and some



EXPLANATORY NOTE TO NEWLY DESIGNED LOGO

Theme: *Enn Sel Nasyon Enn Sel Destin*

Nou Tou Dan Enn Sel Bato is the main feature of the logo.

A boat has a historical and symbolical significance for Mauritians.

The wordings of the theme *Enn Sel Nasyon, Enn Sel Destin* have been graphically to highlight the message of the boat, whereas the sail reflects the colors of the Mauritian flag. The design as a whole is in modern logotype expression (sic.).

Illustration 21: Mauritius' official Independence Day logo 2004 and official explanatory note.⁵

education) and that person's ideas about what the government would pass as a winner contribution.

Below the slogan "one single nation, one single destiny" (my translation) the logo depicts a greyish or silver-coloured sailing ship in a very clear, plain and simplistic design. According to the explanatory note, the logo's main feature is that "we're all in the same boat" (my translation). The sail carries the colours of the Mauritian flag, which must mean that the boat symbolises post-independent Mauritius – a bounded island state onto which the national flag is planted and hoisted. Mauritius (like the Seychelles and the Maldives) is actually an archipelago consisting of numerous islands. But this symbolic vessel, like most Mauritians, does not refer to the state territory in the plural. According to Collen, a prominent Mauritian writer and central Lalit member:

Often we, Mauritians – no doubt sufficiently 'colonized' to go on falling into the trap – still call the whole country "Ile Maurice". The definition of an "island" is however, well known. It is a piece of land completely surrounded by water. [...] Yet, even government Ministers, even the most senior Ministers, persist in referring to the whole country or "the state" as "Lil Moris" in Kreol, as "L'ile Maurice" in French, and as "the Island of Mauritius" in English (Collen 2002, 147-48)

Representations of Mauritius in the singular, as one single island, support the image of a clearly bounded and delimited state and nation. But these ways of naming and depicting the state silently exclude Mauritius' other islands. Thereby it also under-communicates that Mauritius' outer islands harbour international disputes over sovereignty, something which in this symbolic optic would contribute to blurring these borders. No people figure explicitly in the logo. One could assume they are all hidden inside the boat, but a more probable interpretation is that the

⁵ Online source: Mauritius Government Website, Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/mac/menuitem.8d586a686ee481afa6597adaa0208a0c/?content_id=65fad2467158010VgnVCM10000ca6a12acRCRD, accessed 12 Apr. 2010.

vessel represents the state and the nation at the same time. In accordance with the rainbow-metaphor and the popular interpretations of the Mauritian flag discussed above, the sail's different colours can be read to refer to Mauritius' different ethno-religious communities. There are, at least, no other reasonable explanations for why the colours of the sail should be kept so distinctly apart. It could be added here that a most significant difference between an island and a boat is that the latter can come out of course, and if the ship's crew do not get on with each other or do not maintain or manoeuvre it properly, it may even sink. Hence, the 'unity in diversity' slogan's silent warning of potential communal riots also finds expression in this Independence Day logo. According to the explanatory note, what makes the logo 'modern' is the design. Save for the wavy water-surface just below the boat, the logo is practically stripped of any curvy, 'organic' lines. This could be interpreted as an expression of future orientation, but the logo clearly also refers to the past. During colonial times, Mauritius was an important naval harbour for European ships traversing between India and the Cape of Good Hope. Hence, the logo also reflects Mauritius' colonial heritage – the star and key of the Indian Ocean (cf. Chapter 2). One could infer from the logo that Mauritians, whose ancestors were mostly forced on board the vessel as slaves or indentured labourers in different ports during colonial times, have now taken control of the ship. After independence they steer the ship autonomously. But although they have also 'modernised' it, they are still sailing the same old colonial vessel. What is of key importance here is that the boat is 'moving': the ship is somewhat sailing with the wind. In line with how the 'the past' and 'the future' tend to be visualised in representations of progressive time and linear history (as well as western conventions of reading and writing), the rightward positioning of the boat points to a movement forward in the direction of the future – or in the official terminology, the 'destiny'. This is accentuated with the phrase 'one single nation, one single destiny' that is written in italics in the skies above the boat, whereas the past events commemorated figure in standard format under the water below the boat. I noted that the colours of the flag are clearly separated, but they also appear to support one another as they bend from the lower left towards the top right corner of the logo. Thus, the entire triangular shape of the vessel looks very much like a mathematical graph that indicates some kind of 'accumulation' or 'progression'. That this may not be a too daring interpretation shall become more evident with the examples to follow.

Thus far the above examples support Eriksen's argument that official nationalism in Mauritius is both multiculturalist and supra-ethnic. I have however emphasised that the multiculturalist dimension invokes an element of apprehension: a warning about inter-ethnic tensions akin to those associated with independence itself. Another point I shall make here is that the apparent ambiguity in Mauritian nationalism, the dilemma Mauritian authorities never seem to fail to point out – namely the relation between (dangerous) ethnic communalism and (peaceful) all-inclusive national identification – is no obstacle to Mauritian nationalism. Quite the contrary, it plays a central role with regard to the production of national identification. Whether Mauritius' 'multicultural' population can qualify as a 'nation', or whether ethnicity is an obstacle to Mauritian nation building, are questions that trouble many Mauritians. And as long as these questions are posed and reposed they contribute to the production of national consciousness in Mauritius. As Roy (2007) points out, local discourses of and about the nation-state, and the state of the nation, are constitutive of the nation-state. National themes of discourse (e.g. national crises, national projects, exceptional national places etc.) contribute to

producing national awareness and are therefore central to the formation of national subjects. What makes Roy's arguments particularly relevant here is that they spring from his research in post-colonial India – a state with very strong connections to Mauritius, which is sometimes referred to as Little India (Eisenlohr 2006). According to Roy, the slogan 'unity in diversity' upholds the Indian state as the manager and unifier of a 'naturally' divided nation. Likewise, when Mauritian authorities stress the importance of a nationwide 'unity in diversity', and implicitly remind the population of previous failures of such a unity, they encourage discourse over this very dilemma. Thus the dilemma itself emerges as an important component in local production of national consciousness and commitment to the state. What is more, this does not take focus away from the ethnic – it rather insists on its significance. And in the frame of discourses on the possibility of a plural nation, class fades as a less relevant category for social identification. Instead Mauritians link economic and political power to ethnic discrimination and, as Eriksen (1998, 106) also notes, typically regard conflicts over wealth and power as inter-ethnic zero-sum games. Mauritian nationalism may be complex, but in its local expressions it still forms an important means of preventing conflict and tensions – at least along economic lines.

This is not to say that Mauritian authorities under-communicate economic issues. In fact, they invoke the economy strategically to promote national identification and secure commitment to the state. They also do so in a way that corresponds with local understandings of inter-ethnic zero-sum games. On the national level all the stress on 'unity in diversity' implicitly confirms perceptions of inter-ethnic competition over limited resources. On the international level, however, a poly-national zero-sum game is formulated more explicitly. Against the background of a liberal capitalist world economy, Mauritians are presented as national subjects in hard competition with national subjects of other states. An imagined community of Mauritian nationals is thus carved out through a common national project popularly termed economic 'development' – the *telos* and at the same time the sole scale against which this international competition is measured. In the next section I shall elaborate these issues and argue that Mauritian nationalism is very much an expression of the development ideology. And hence I hold that the nationalist slogan of 'unity in diversity' can be rewritten as 'unity in development'.

6.3 *UNITY IN DEVELOPMENT?*

Eriksen argues that due to the general lack of a unifying common history Mauritian nationalism is oriented towards the future. Its main force in the 1990s lies in the idea of economic progress that inspires sentiments of pride and loyalty among Mauritians. This is also evident in many other postcolonial states "where the nation tends to be identified with progress, education and modernity" (Eriksen 1998, 150-2). Also Bunwaree notes that the economy became a more or less unifying principle when living standards rose during Mauritius' economic boom in the 1980s and 1990s. The state then benefited from "some form of economic nationalism" (Bunwaree 2002, 1), but by the turn of the millennium things had changed. Following severe riots in February 1999, Mauritius was faced with a serious economic crisis. Regretting that the

state seems to have “ignored the need to develop a strong sense of interculturality as well as a Mauritian identity”, Bunwaree writes that “the question that arises now is whether the economy will continue to unite or will it rather divide in this era of jobless growth” (Bunwaree 2002, 1, 3). In the following I shall take these observations further and demonstrate exactly how official Mauritian nationalism is linked to the economy. In light of my empirical material I argue that nationalism in poly-ethnic Mauritius is intimately connected to a forcefully propagated ideology of development. This ideology encompasses both the multicultural and the supra-ethnic dimensions of Mauritian nationalism as it is presented as a meta-journey along a common ‘route’ that allows Mauritians to maintain their different ‘roots’.

For the celebration of Mauritius’ Independence Day 2004, the government had invited a very special guest. He was none other than Mr Supachai Panitchpakdi, the Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO). To invite the WTO Director General to the independence celebrations this year, and even crowning him as the Guest of Honour, caused considerable dismay among Mauritian labour organisations (see Neveling 2010). Due to WTO negotiations, and in accordance with WTO general policies of promoting the liberalisation of international trade, Mauritian export preferences – which date back to the negotiations over Mauritian Independence itself – were now fading out. In consequence, textile factories were closing down and moving to other low-cost production areas. The sugar industry was being rationalised and mechanised. So labourers were being laid off, or had to accept reductions in wages and submit to more ‘flexible’ working hours. By June 2003 unemployment among the labour force had risen to 10.2 per cent. As this trend was expected to continue, rampant unemployment was recognised as the government’s greatest immediate challenge (World Bank 2004, 4). In such an economic situation, integrating social events like Independence Day celebrations take on considerable importance. It therefore seemed strange, if not outrageous, that under these circumstances the government invited the WTO Director General as the Guest of Honour for the national independence celebrations on 12 March 2004.

As expected on this symbolic occasion, the Guest of Honour gave a speech to the public. He recalled how, at the time of decolonisation, the famous Nobel Prize winner economist James Meade failed to foresee the successful economic development that was to take place in Mauritius. Due to overpopulation, unemployment, ethnic tensions and dependency on sugar as a single export commodity, Meade had predicted extremely bleak development prospects. After citing a range of statistical figures indicating progress and rapid growth, Mr Panitchpakdi declared Mauritius “a development success story which is nothing less than a miracle” (Panitchpakdi 2004).

But this ‘miracle’, he said, did not happen by chance. After listing macroeconomic stability, rule of law, human capital, a coherent economic development strategy, judicious use of preferential access to key markets and a staunch belief in free enterprise, he concluded that among the key ingredients to the success was

most importantly the ability to adjust and to turn adverse conditions into economic assets. Mauritius successfully turned the disadvantage of rapid population growth into the blessing of a dynamic and plentiful workforce. You used your ethnic diversity, which could so easily have led instead to social fragmentation, to gain advantageous

business links throughout the world. And you invested heavily in educating your people and in building the institutions needed to support development (Panitchpakdi 2004).

Thus, with reference to ‘miracle’ the narrative of a totally unforeseeable success story was launched as a positive historical example for the economic challenges Mauritius was then facing. Of course, preferential access to key markets has little to do with what the WTO means by ‘free enterprise’. This is rather what the WTO works to eliminate. Nevertheless, in what was framed as an inescapable new reality of liberalisation of international trade and global competition, Mauritians were then encouraged to “sustain the miracle” by transforming Mauritius according to liberal economic principles when the “time of preferential margins is coming to an end” (Panitchpakdi 2006):

Mauritius is fortunate in that economic adjustment is not new to this island. Mauritius of the past diversified from sugar into textiles and then into tourism and financial services. The Mauritius of the future is already taking place with your exciting new vision to transform Mauritius into a diversified, hi-tech and high income services economy. As Mauritius’s competitiveness is tested by global competition, there is no viable alternative but to widen economic opportunities and stimulate growth through openness, liberalization and an improved investment climate. [...] The challenge for Mauritius is to remain globally competitive. Your enterprises will need to be innovative, forward-looking and prepared to adjust constantly to rapid developments. If these words sound familiar to you, it is because they come directly from the Budget Speech of Mauritius for 2003/2004 (Panitchpakdi 2004).

Considering that the circumstance of this speech was the Mauritius’ Independence Day celebrations, it is possible to take these words to mean that Mauritius was now at a stage of becoming truly independent. In this view, liberalisation meant competing on equal footing with all other states, and thus Mauritius was no longer to be marked by ‘embedded autonomy’ as in economically dependent on the West and the former colonial power (cf. Chapter 2). What is highly noteworthy is that Mr Panitchpakdi’s speech to a great extent resembles the words of the Mauritian Prime Minister’s speech quoted earlier. It is no coincidence that these speeches resemble one another. In fact, they are actually founded on a common ideological consensus. These speeches are presented to the public by important authorities on highly symbolic occasions, and as Panitchpakdi’s integrated quote from Mauritius’ Budget Speech reveals, they confirm and even refer to one another. In fact, they echo key points drawn up in a ‘Comprehensive Development Framework Profile’ on Mauritius. That profile was published by the World Bank in 2004 – under a paradigmatic title with direct reference to this year’s Independence Day slogan: ‘Mauritius: One Nation, One Destiny’ (World Bank 2004). Three months before the independence celebrations a roundtable was jointly organised by the World Bank and the NESO, the coordinating body for the Mauritian private sector. Under the heading ‘Key Challenges’ the report warns: “With EU preferences due to be phased out in the next few years [...] it is expected that the “social contract” will need revisiting. Higher unemployment and less generous social benefits could weaken the consensus on which the social contract is based” (World Bank 2004, 20-21; quotation marks in original, my omission). Highlighting the

importance of receiving systematic feedback from the population on the national development strategy, the report suggests that the government should “extensively disseminate the ideas and proposals underpinning [the government’s long term development plan] among the population, to increase commitment to it and further action” (World Bank 2004, 22). To sum up the general argument: Mauritius is poorly positioned geographically with regard to its central foreign markets, which makes transport costly. Also, long established trade preferences have enabled Mauritian labourers to negotiate slightly better wages than labourers in the economies against which Mauritius now will have to compete. In an inescapable new era of liberal international capitalist trade, local industries are compelled to mechanise, rationalise and otherwise reduce costs by cutting wages, introducing more ‘flexible’ working hours, and possibly laying off employees to remain competitive on the international market and to prevent industries from moving to countries with better trading preferences and a cheaper labour force. Along with cuts in production costs, other social benefits provided by the state through customs and taxation also need to be reviewed for the state to attract new investors from abroad. This is what the WTO Director General refers to as ‘improved investment climate’. That workers’ conditions in this ‘climate’ are worsened is not disputed. It is recognised that this can have consequences for ‘the consensus on which the social contract is based’. Therefore, to prevent civil unrest, the report suggests that the government should reframe this situation and *extensively disseminate* ideas and proposals for development for the population as a whole to *feel committed* to it while the economy supposedly ‘progresses’ and ‘develops’ in the direction of the nation’s unquestioned ‘destiny’, i.e. to become ‘developed’ just like the former colonial power and the other nations of the so-called First World. The situation is thus not presented as a straightforward worsening of workers’ and poor Mauritians’ conditions, many of whom depend on the ‘social wage’, i.e. the welfare measures once implemented in Mauritius to attract investment by keeping wages low (Meisenhelder 1997, 288). These conditions are instead framed as temporary sacrifices to be made in the name of the nation while the economy diversifies, ‘advances’ or ‘develops’.

Such sacrifices made in the name of the nation presuppose, of course, a great deal of belief in ‘development’. Since the 1980s social scientists have identified, explored and deconstructed development as a widespread ideology springing out of classical and neoclassical economic theory. It was exported to so-called Third World countries in order among other things to legitimise the abrupt withdrawal of western powers from their colonies. By depoliticising and concealing national and international economic inequalities, and by expanding bureaucratic power, the development ideology tends to serve the interest of local and foreign elites, guaranteeing the prevalence of western economic and cultural hegemony (Chattarjee 1986; Cooper 1996, 1997; Escobar 1988, 1991, 1995; Ferguson 1990, 2006; Rottenburg 2009). As in the example of Mauritius and India discussed here, authorities of ‘developing countries’ have adopted the development ideology and invoke its rhetoric in projects of post-independent nation building. But as Ferguson (2006) argues, the development ideology stands and falls on a fiction and a false assumption regarding the interconnection between political economic status and developmental time:

At the end of empire, a story about the emergence of “new nations” via processes of “modernization” or “development” provided a new grid for interpreting and explaining

the world's inequalities. As the "backward nations" advanced, in this optic, a modern way of life encompassing a whole package of elements – including such things as industrial economy, scientific technology, liberal democratic politics, nuclear families, and secular world views – would become universalized. In the process, poor countries would overcome their poverty, share in the prosperity of the "developed" world, and take their places as equals in a worldwide family of nations. [...] With the world understood as a collection of national societies, global inequalities could be read as the result of the fact that some nations were farther along than others on a track to a unitary "modernity". In this way, the narrative of development mapped history against hierarchy, developmental time against political economic status. With the progressive nature of historical time taken for granted, nations could anticipate their inevitable, if gradual, rise in the global order through a natural process of development. [...] If "backward" nations were not modern, in this picture, it was because they were not yet modern (Ferguson 2006, 177-78; my omissions).

Ferguson observes that development has lost credibility in many African countries. Not as a result of academic critique, but because "the developmental narrative is increasingly visible as a failure [...] also in practical economic terms". Today "most African countries are much farther from economic parity with the First World than they were twenty or thirty years ago". Central to the development ideology is that inhabitants of less developed economies must be patient. But as Africans lose faith in the postulated connection between relative economic status and progressive developmental time, they start to see themselves and their position in the global hierarchies "not as 'less developed', but simply as less" (Ferguson 2006, 189).

Unlike the Africans Ferguson describes, few Mauritians I met during my fieldwork seemed to have lost faith in development – even though Mauritius was facing a severe economic crisis. My point is that this was not without reason. In view of the political speeches, Mauritius' nationalist symbolism and the 'Comprehensive Development Framework Profile' discussed above, it appears that it was precisely in the context of economic crisis – when the development ideology could be put to question – that it became important to disseminate and reinforce the development ideology. Inviting the WTO Director General for the 2004 celebration of Mauritius' independence and even crowning him as the Guest of Honour should thus be interpreted as a means of preventing Mauritians from losing faith in development despite the economic downturn.

Mauritian nationalism at the beginning of the 21st century is intimately connected to the development ideology. On highly symbolic occasions, important authorities disseminate development ideas precisely to secure loyalty and commitment to the state. National identification is produced against the backdrop of a liberal capitalist world economy, in which Mauritians are presented not in local inter-ethnic competition with one another but in an international economic competition with nationals of other states. To advance in this competition translates into a meta-journey of development, which when framed in national terms emerges as a common project for the poly-ethnic nation. In accordance with the Independence Day logo with the note that 'we're all in the same boat', this project legitimises the state and its monopoly on violence and taxation by identifying the government with a 'captain' that is to navigate the state and the economy safely to its 'destined' harbour in the First World. But during the journey

the crew of Mauritian nationals must cooperate and remain loyal despite the rough economic seas and their internal differences. In the merciless open waters of free enterprise and liberal international trade, a supra-ethnic Mauritian national identity is carved out in a battle against Brazilian sugar producers and Chinese textile manufacturers. Yet in the midst of these battles, Mauritians are not asked to forget that their ancestors once embarked the ship in different ports and served their time under very different circumstances. As the captain reminds his crew of this fact, they remain aware that the ship may come out of course or perhaps sink lest they cooperate and stay loyal. In this optic, the state emerges as an important guarantee for both peace and progress. Monopoly on violence and taxation is thus legitimised by how the government warns about, and at the same time guarantees the absence of, violent ethnic conflict, and how it presents itself as the central actor promoting and directing ‘development’ in Mauritius. Why Mauritians did not question development – even at a time of crisis – therefore had to do with powerful political rhetoric.

In accordance with this rhetoric, many Mauritians understood their state and economy as being *en route* to development, typically sandwiched somewhere between the Third and the First World. Such ideas were substantiated through local debates over international economic agreements. An illustrating concern in Mauritius during my fieldwork was that per capita income had become too high. Without some form of special agreement, Mauritian textile industries could therefore no longer qualify for preferential export agreements to US markets under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Media presented Mauritius as too rich and developed to benefit from special treatment, but not yet developed enough to compete on equal footing with other national economies of the world:

Mauritius is squeezed between the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the advanced economies. With a per capita income exceeding US \$ 1,500, it is not qualified for LDC preferential treatment. On the other hand, as a small state economy it can not aspire to be on equal playing field as the WTO imposes on non-LDCs (Ramsahaye, News on Sunday, 21 May 2004).

Within the spatio- and quasi-temporal frame of the development ideology, the scale against which ‘development’ is measured is translated into a route. Changes in the state’s economy can thus be mapped along this route as an ever-progressing journey. In Mauritius, Africa, Madagascar and Europe served as places of reference that added meaning, a sense of mobility and position to this imagined route. As people repeatedly explained: “Mauritius is more developed than Africa, but not as developed as Europe.” Compared to Africa and Madagascar, Mauritians often imagined their state to have moved farther along the route to development, but still lagging behind its former colonial powers and other developed First World states. It is remarkable how all this resonates with the way Chagossians in Mauritius, with the assistance of local religious leaders, reformulated their history of political struggles into a metaphorical pilgrimage (see Chapter 5). The Mauritian development narrative is also framed as a meta-pilgrimage, presented as an imagined journey of penance, patience and sacrifice undertaken collectively by a fraternal group of nationals. Here, too, there are obstacles to be overcome along the way to a destination, which indeed constitutes a valued cultural ideal, i.e. fulfilling the destiny of becoming developed like the former colonial powers. When he encouraged the

population to ‘sustain the miracle’ on Mauritius’ Independence Day 2004, the WTO General Director reframed and reduced the contemporary economic crisis to an obstacle along this route, i.e. a miraculous route of unforeseeable progress that Mauritians supposedly started to travel exactly 36 years ago. Mauritians may not have common historical ‘roots’, but powerful measures are surely taken to create the sense of a common ‘route’.

If Mauritian nationalism is read as an expression of a wider development ideology that encompasses both the multicultural and the supra-ethnic dimensions, then it is not very special. Also in other poly-ethnic postcolonial states such as India, the government propagates the very same image of ‘unity in diversity’ (Roy 2007). With strong similarities to Mauritius, Skaria also points out that in India the “project of development is carried out in the name of the nation; indeed, the nation claims development as its very rationale for existence” (Skaria 2003, 232). As Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal point out:

Development, in its various guises, has surely been the most powerful influence structuring social and economic transformations in the non-Western world in this century. [I]n the post-Second World War period, development became the *raison d’état* of newly independent states. It continues today to colonize our imaginations about how modern men and women can assert their dignity and control their lives (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003, 2-3).

Mauritians are repeatedly reminded of their diverse ‘roots’. It is mainly the propagated common ‘route’ to development that frames the population as ‘one single nation’. Mauritius’ nationalist catchphrase ‘unity in diversity’ can arguably therefore be rewritten as ‘unity in development’.

However, when unity is based on this principle, new divisions emerge. In the introduction to this chapter we saw that the Bishop of Port Louis made an effort to dissociate Chagossians from a stigmatised category of ‘beggars’. In the frame of development the ‘beggar’ becomes a significant character – a free-rider who does not contribute to or sacrifice for the common national project. This is important because when the nation is defined through participation in a common development project, it is in contrast to the ‘beggar’ or the free-rider that people emerge as loyal (and perhaps morally superior) members. The questions thus arise: Who are identified as ‘beggars’ in Mauritius? And if the government promotes both ‘diversity’ and ‘development’ in Mauritius, does developmental time also lend meanings to the poly-ethnic composition of Mauritius’ population? If the ‘unity in diversity’ can be reformulated as ‘unity in development’, we must also ask whether and how ‘development in diversity’ finds expression in Mauritius.

6.4 TIME AND THE ETHNIC: ‘DEVELOPMENT IN DIVERSITY’

What happens to conceptions of ethnicity in contexts where nationalism draws on ideas of development as well as the plural society? Before I turn to analyse Chagossians’ position in Mauritius, it is necessary to understand how Mauritians relate to the nationalist rhetoric,

especially how ethnicity connects to developmental time. An event taking place at Mauritius University a month after the 2004 independence celebrations will serve as opening example.

During my fieldwork I was invited by students of the University of Mauritius to perform in a theatre play. The occasion was an opening ceremony of the Association of Commonwealth Universities council meeting, which was to be held at the University. The play was coined a 'cultural show' and was supposed to represent the history of Mauritius. It seemed, however, more fair to characterise it as an ode to the success story of Mauritian development. Accompanied by 'suitable' music, the entire play was based on people mimicking roles of historical characters. The sole historical persona dramatized was Sir S. Ramgoolam – the 'father of the nation'. All other roles were representations of different local ethnic groups and, by the end, supra-ethnic Mauritian individuals. What makes this case particularly interesting was how the act was so quickly put together. Many parts of the play were only loosely agreed upon before we went on stage. No manuscript was ever presented, and roles were mimicked with little, if any, former rehearsal. So due to lack of time for rehearsals, some of the parts had to be dramatized more or less spontaneously. The students directing the show had apparently put most effort into finding 'authentic' actors. Hence, the reason I was invited to join was that most of the university students looked 'Indian' and they needed a white person to play the role of a French plantation owner from the days of slavery. On stage, I was married to a white German exchange student. Accompanied by massive orchestra music we proceeded through Mauritian sugar fields across the stage. Along the way, I treated my African slaves, who performed backbreaking labour on my sugar estate, very disrespectfully. I was instructed to beat them from time to time, and my wife should indicate how bad they all smelled by protecting her nose. The 'slaves' themselves were played by Mauritian Creoles, and many were not university students. On the 1835 abolition of slavery, the now freed slaves were happily playing drums and dancing *sega*. A lengthy part then followed that depicted the suffering, but hard-working, indentured labourers from India. Eventually these Indians straightened their backs and rose up to unite and hold hands. Independence was acted out soon after, with a proud Indo-Mauritian Seewoosagur Ramgoolam standing straight and still in the spotlight behind his big black glasses while the Mauritian flag was respectfully unfolded and paraded around him. After a dancing session with textiles and fabrics, the final part commenced. The loudspeakers now pumped out up-beat techno music, and the stage was suddenly filled with busy young businesspersons with smart briefcases, mobile phones, white shirts and short hair. As they all hurried their way across the stage, they were bumping into each other as if they were more concerned with talking on their mobiles than noticing people in their immediate presence. Occasionally they would stop for a short exchange of information at certain stands where women in blazers, equipped with laptops and headsets, would give a short and concise reply. Some of these women were pointing at, and somehow positively describing, large drafts and graphs of mathematical figures with blue arrows pointing to the sky and to the future. These graphs depicted extremely positive prognoses, and one would guess that something was running extraordinarily well. Simultaneously, undisturbed and secluded on the other side of the stage, I was now performing a very satisfied European tourist. I was on vacation, relaxing on the beach under an umbrella with my sunglasses, a camera, and my white wife and a child while I waited for a Mauritian waiter to serve me a drink. The show culminated with the voice

of a young woman declaring over the loudspeakers in the university auditorium: “Mauritius: the tiger in the Indian Ocean!”

Considering what went on both on and beyond the stage, this example reveals many important aspects of Mauritian nationalism. As a whole, the act was supposed to represent Mauritius’ history – a history importantly marked by divisions along categories of race and ethnicity. One could hardly fail to see that this version of history was structured around Mauritius’ economy. More precisely, it conformed to the version presented by Mauritius’ Prime Minister and the WTO General Director: a history of successful economic development that included no reference to Chagossians’ evictions or the socialist uprisings in the 1970s and early 80s discussed in Chapter 3. From slavery and indenture, through textiles, to tourism and hi-tech services, successive stages of the act reflected successive stages of a developing Mauritian economy in which the different ethnic groups played their part. By strong emphasis on Mauritius’ independence, slavery and indenture were placed in pre-independent time, clearly separated from the miracle economy of post-independent Mauritius. This focus on economic development was strongly underlined by the sole and concluding phrase uttered during the whole performance: “Mauritius: the tiger in the Indian Ocean!” This declaration placed Mauritius in the league of the exceptionally successful economies of Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, commonly known as ‘the four Asian tigers’.⁶

But the show did not only present an ethnically ordered success story about Mauritius’ economy up to the present. Through large mathematical drafts, functions and figures, the show also pointed into the future. What I shall highlight here is that the very form of these graphs, with their blue arrows bending from the lower left to the top right corner of the illustration boards, resembled to a considerable extent the triangular shape and position of the sailboat depicted under the slogan ‘one single nation, one single destiny’ on the Independence Day logo described above. Moreover, as in ‘one single nation’, the final stage of the play was stripped from the ethnic. With a busy business-like appearance, the actors played out an all-Mauritian, cosmopolitan individualism. However, the students’ efforts to find ‘authentic’ characters to more or less spontaneously act out their historical roles revealed that this non-ethnic individualism did not quite correspond with contemporary social realities. Also, during the preparations the ethnic/racial issue caused a lot of misplaced laughter, particularly with regard to slave roles played by Afro-Creoles who were not university students. However, extreme make-up displaying large scars and bleeding wounds created a sense of distance between slave roles and ethnic authenticity and contributed to easing the situation. In view of these preparations and the uneasiness expressed backstage, it is fair to say that the individualist, post-ethnic cosmopolitanism appeared more as an imagination of the future than a convincing representation of Mauritius’ contemporary society.

This example demonstrates that Mauritians do relate to the official nationalism promoted by the state. This nationalism, I argued, is very much centred on a development ideology whereby Mauritian identity is constructed through competition with foreign Others. At the same time, local authorities seldom fail to stress internal diversity. And as the above example also shows, efforts to mimic a cosmopolitan non-ethnic future did not quite manage

⁶ The Mauritian Export Processing Zone (EPZ) was founded in the early 1970s on the examples of Taiwan and Hong Kong (see Neveling 2006).

to do away with the ethnic. A closer look at how Mauritians conceive of ethnicity within the development framework reveals that Others important to the production of national selves are not only found beyond the Mauritian state but also within Mauritius' poly-ethnic society.

Social scientists inspired by Foucault (1972) have reworked the traditional top-down understanding of nationalist ideology and explored how nationalism is performed, contested and confirmed in local discourses on the level of everyday interaction. Bhabha (1990) points out that nationalism is a product of multiple and sometimes contradicting narratives of and about the nation. Although they can express and confirm, and also challenge the dominant narratives propagated by the authorities, such narratives still contribute to raising national awareness. The production of national subjects from this perspective is not only a matter of official rhetoric or imagining the nation in contrast to nationals of other states. Similar activities of othering occur also within the state. And through discourses about the Others within, people also articulate, construct, experience and perform national identity. Important Others are typically those who (are held to) challenge or deviate from the majority's ideas about the nation and how its members should think and behave, processes that are not uncommon in poly-ethnic Mauritius. But since the idea of the nation is linked to development, development ideas also feed back into the plural society and effectively produce different kinds of Mauritian nationals. These nationals are not only considered 'diverse' in terms of origin, ethnicity and culture, they are also ascribed different positions along the imagined scale of developmental time.

When economic development is disseminated as an important common project for the Mauritian nation, matters of participation and contribution to this project assume importance. Loaded local distinctions are drawn between those considered to contribute to this project, and the free-riders or the 'beggars' who do not. Whereas the former are considered as bringing the national economy up and forwards, the latter represent sand in the development machine. It is typically the poor, unemployed and often illiterate sections of the population living in the slums and the *cites* (i.e. low-cost governmental supported housing areas) who are associated with the latter category, especially in the eyes of Mauritians who have achieved some kind of upward social mobility. These distinctions therefore have a clear class bias. However, economic differences in Mauritius are often associated with the ethnic and are therefore given cultural explanations: different ethnic groups are ascribed particular cultural dispositions with regard to the economy. To a certain degree economic status and ethnicity do correspond in Mauritius, with many Afro-Creoles inhabiting the lowest strata of Mauritian society. Accordingly it is typically members of that group who tend to be associated with the sand in the machine. Not so much because of poverty and underemployment, but because they, presumably due to Afro-Creole cultural dispositions, tend not to choose otherwise. In an interview I held with the first President of the Mauritian Republic he explained:

The Creoles have given us a common language. We owe them for that. They have given the country a national language, the *sega* and the food. Some of it has become a national dish [...]. The Creoles have brought a way of life also, although it is not necessary something we should follow. That is what you might call 'an island way of life': 'Eat, drink and tomorrow we will die'. The Creoles should develop a sense of savings, to save for difficult times. This is the characteristic of the Hindu and the Chinese. These are 'Asian values'. They had a tradition for saving even before banks were set up in

Mauritius. They would put money under the mattress so they could send their children to study abroad. They would buy land or invest in jewellery. In difficult times they could sell it. The Creoles, most of them are living in the *cites*, would sell their land.

What is particularly interesting about ethnic stereotypes in Mauritius is that it relates so much to the economy. In contrast to the hard-working Indians, and the clever and industrious Chinese, who are both considered to have a ‘sense of savings’, the Creoles are considered lazy and not very clever in terms of investments. If the former are ‘Asian values’, the Creoles live an ‘island way of life’. The central distinction here concerns temporality. In contrast to the Indians and Chinese, Creoles are not considered future-oriented or forward-looking but are instead held to be focused on the present. This, of course, conflicts with ‘development’, which is all about changing the present and aiming for a *telos*: a bettered status and economic position in the future. The Afro-Creoles thus become an important reference group in Mauritian society – not only in terms of hybridity. The ‘island way of life’ is more than a straightforward bad example. This Afro-Creole stereotype is what the disseminated national development project cannot afford, but in this way the Afro-Creoles also emerge as an important anti-category that makes development meaningful on the local level.

Through discourses about Others within the nation, ethnicity is reconfirmed and mapped against developmental time. One effect of this is that national consciousness is produced from below. Also poor Afro-Creoles contribute to this by reinterpreting the stereotypes of their group positively to mean ‘uncomplicated’, ‘fair’ or ‘easy-going’ (cf. Eriksen 1998, 54). This also applies for Afro-Creoles who are better off and who often insist on finer categorical distinctions to distinguish themselves from the less advantaged – as a teenage Afro-Creole girl from the middle class area of Rose Hill did when explaining the differences between herself and the Afro-Creoles living in the poor quarters of Roche Bois:

I am Creole. But the Creole is not a group. You have many religions here. But also those who are Christians are very different. It’s a different way of living, eating and dressing. Between Roche Bois and here there is difference in development – development and intelligence. People here are more educated than the Creoles in Roche Bois.

There is a ‘difference in development’ between poor and middle class Afro-Creoles like herself, she explained. By such finer categorisations, middle class Mauritians caught in the Creole category by loaded local markers such as phenotypes seek to escape the ethnic stigma by presenting themselves as less African and more European, also by refusing to speak Kreol and insisting on French or English. Earlier I quoted an Afro-Creole activist who regretted that the ‘African model’ is like ‘going backwards’. When I asked her what she meant she said it had to do with ‘progress’ and meant to be ‘lowered in status’. Therefore, she said, many Afro-Creoles are keen to dissociate from Africa:

The British policy was divide and rule. They have divided the Creole community. Creole people say: ‘I’m not African’. With European culture in the head he finds Africa

poor. He does not identify with it. He identifies with the rich – the Europeans. He thinks he is European.

Although Mauritian development is presented as an all-inclusive project that promotes a national identity that transcends the ethnic, this project also reproduces, encompasses, and confirms ethnic stereotypes. When authorities like the Prime Minister and the WTO Director General exhort on Independence Day that the diverse Mauritian population must work together to achieve economic development, popular understandings of developmental time feed back into the ‘rainbow society’. In this supposedly all-inclusive project, socio-material inequalities are translated into cultural dispositions supposedly characteristic for different ethnic groups in the plural society. The argument often goes: if they would, they could. If Creoles did not always ‘live for the moment’ and spend all their money the same day but were more ‘future-oriented’, saved, and invested like the Indians and the Chinese, then they would not have to be poor. Among the effects is that inequality and poverty is justified as a matter of cultural dispositions among people who are not only disadvantaged. Placed on an imaginary scale mapping developmental time against economic status, they are also considered present-oriented and even less developed.

6.5 *CHAGOSSIANS AND THE MAURITIAN NATION*

With respect to Mauritian nationalism, Chagossians form an exceptional ethnic group in many ways. Complications already start with the basics of the nationalist doctrine, which maintains that the borders of the state and the nation should correspond. Firstly, regarding the borders of the state, all communities in Mauritius trace their ethnic origins to times and places *beyond* the state, while Chagossians’ homeland is found *within* Mauritius – at least according to the Mauritian government. This much Chagossians share with inhabitants of Mauritius’ other outer islands, Rodriguez and Agalega. The important difference is that the Chagos Archipelago is occupied by Mauritius’ former colonial power, the UK. This has long been a high-profiled political issue in Mauritius, where authorities frequently express that to regain sovereignty of these islands is a matter of full decolonisation and national independence. Today British immigration restrictions prevent Chagossians and other Mauritians from entering this homeland, or part of their own country. In contrast to the homelands of other ethnic groups in Mauritius then, it is in practice not completely settled whether the Chagos Archipelago is found within or outside the borders of the Mauritian state. Secondly, Chagossians are left in an ambivalent position also with regard to the borders of the nation. Chagossians in Mauritius now hold dual Mauritian-UK citizenship, which make them citizens of both the coloniser and the colonised. In a Mauritian setting where these dual citizens have become relevant political actors (see Chapter 3), and where regaining sovereignty of their homeland is communicated as important to the state, Chagossians’ loyalty to the Mauritian nation is frequently put to question. In important respects, therefore, Chagossians and the Chagos Archipelago represent the blurred borders of both the Mauritian state as well as the Mauritian nation.

6.5.1 THE NATION AND THE 'CHAGOS ISSUE'

The 'Chagos issue', as it is often referred to, clearly represents more than a territorial dispute in Mauritius. I have noted that nationalism can be understood as a secular religion. In the era of the nation-state, symbols and rituals that express the national community are often treated like sacred things. Aspects of the Chagos issue have much in common with sacred things. For example, the Chagos Archipelago fits Douglas' and Turner's understandings of the sacred as something anomalous which challenges established systems of classifications (Douglas 1966, Turner 1967). With respect to Malkki's concept of the 'national order of things', this disputed territory does not fit into the territorial mosaic of bounded states that map the contemporary world (Malkki 1992, 1995). The Chagos Archipelago violates this order of classification as it is both no longer and not yet Mauritian territory, and at the same time it is also both Mauritian and British. It also qualifies for Durkheim's understanding of the sacred as "things set apart and forbidden" (Durkheim 1915, 62). Not only do strict immigration restrictions apply to this territory, the whole Chagos issue is also covered with much secrecy. Chagos history has long been classified material, and what exactly goes on here, what things – for example weapons – are stationed here, is not open to the public. Even the political decisions to excise the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius at the time of decolonisation are to some extent unclear. In the 1960s, the UK authorities reached a back-room agreement with Mauritius' Prime Minister Ramgoolam. And contrary to the conclusions of an official report published in 1983, Ramgoolam stated that he did not know that the USA was going to use these islands for military purposes (de l'Estrac 1983). What is clear is that Ramgoolam agreed to the detachment in exchange for independence, £3 million compensation and assurances that the UK would take steps to secure favourable trade agreements for Mauritius' economy (see Chapter 4). But selling off state territory for monetary compensation, trade benefits and even independence itself is not uncontroversial. Independence may be elevated to a sacred all-inclusive symbol for the Mauritian nation, but through the lens of Chagos history this landmark achievement is placed right back in the basic, or profane, sphere of economic exchange. As an unemployed Afro-Creole man in his mid-thirties told me during my fieldwork: "One should fight for independence, not sell it." As discussed in Chapter 4, the Chagos Archipelago continues to be connected with matters of international trade, but Mauritian authorities deny this and seek to dissociate it with that sphere by claiming that "sovereignty and territorial integrity of a country has got no price" (Mauritius Foreign Minister M. Dulloo; quoted from Carey 2005; cf. Le Militant 18 June 2004). Hence, intimately connected to Mauritius' independence, sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago is thus presented as an elevated principle – something that, like other sacred things, belongs to a sphere qualitatively different from that of monetary exchange.

All this indicates that the Chagos issue plays important roles with regard to the production of national awareness in Mauritius. Like 'development', regaining sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago from the former colonial power also represents a national struggle that most Mauritians can unite in – regardless of ethnic affiliations and political attitudes to the US military presence on Diego Garcia. As mentioned, such common supra-ethnic national agendas are few and far between in poly-ethnic Mauritius. In domestic politics, therefore, the Chagos issue is a safe political card that is frequently pulled. As a piece of state territory amputated from the rest of Mauritius as a condition for independence, the Chagos Archipelago is presented

not only as a national matter but also as a matter of national pride. As Mauritius' Prime Minister Paul Berenger deplored in 2004 when the UK authorities issued full immigration restrictions to the Chagos Archipelago: "Our pride has been hurt" (Etienne, L'Express Outlook, 13 July 2004). Regaining sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago has always been a central political issue for his party, the MMM. So the following year, when they found out that the UK had negotiated a lease directly with the Mauritius Shipping Corporation for the Mauritian vessel *Mauritius Trochetia* to facilitate a Chagossian visit to their homeland, the MMM government cancelled the lease altogether. Subsequently, however, they were heavily criticised for sacrificing a Mauritius' threatened economy for national pride and eventually lost the 2005 elections to a Labour-headed coalition that proved more forthcoming to compromise on this issue (cf. Chapter 4). In situations like these, the 'Chagos issue' demonstrates how the Mauritius state is at once politically independent but economically dependent (cf. Chapter 2). Here, the 'Chagos issue' calls the very matter of Mauritian self-determination into question. As a piece of national territory occupied by Mauritius' former colonial power – a power on which the Mauritian export economy has long been dependent and an occupation which Mauritian authorities can do very little about – the Chagos issue not only represents the blurred borders of the state and the nation but also its economic dependence and the limitations of its forces. In short, then, the Chagos issue also demonstrates the limits of Mauritius' autonomy.

Hence, the Chagos issue is clearly important with regard to Mauritian nationalism. Although it may appear that the above complications, along with the lengthy and unsuccessful struggle to regain sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago, form obstacles to Mauritian nationalism, I will argue that the contrary is the case. If a unified Mauritian struggle for decolonisation was absent around the time of Mauritian independence, full decolonisation in the sense of regaining sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago forms an all-inclusive Mauritian struggle, which represents Mauritius' most important objection to the former colonial regime. Sovereignty of the Chagos is much more than a territorial dispute and a question of access to local resources. In the face of Mauritius' economic dependence on the very same powers that occupy this territory, it is also a symbolic quest for national independence – the central aim of any nationalist movement. As such, in poly-ethnic Mauritius this struggle represents a rare case through which an over-ethnic national identity can be formed in opposition to the former colonial regime.

6.5.2 CHAGOSSIANS AND THE MAURITIAN RAINBOW

Chagossians have acquired a special in-between position in Mauritius. As the Chagos issue has assumed considerable importance, so has the community of these dual UK-Mauritian citizens who are now considered to have an important say in matters that concern their homeland. In this context the question of loyalty arises. Chagossians favouring the UK part of their dual citizenship are seen as a threat to Mauritius' sovereignty claims. Local newspapers often publish debates over whether Chagossians are becoming 'anglophile'. That this is a tense political matter is evident by the fact that it has caused a split within the Chagossian community in Mauritius (cf. Chapter 4). The CSC on the one hand holds that the Chagos Archipelago belongs to Mauritius. The organisation underlines that Chagossians are Mauritian citizens and

often warns about anglophile sentiments within the Chagossian community. The CRG, on the other hand, argues that sovereignty is beyond their political agenda but because they have close connections to UK lawyers, MPs and NGOs, their disinterest in the sovereignty issue is often questioned. Adding to this suspicion, the CRG also presents Chagossians in Mauritius as ‘exiles’ or ‘refugees’. In Mauritius, where people are no strangers to devastating cyclones, ‘refugees’ means people who have lost their homes. But as opposed to ‘displaced’ or ‘internally displaced’ people, these categories also bring about connotations to groups that in the course of becoming homeless have crossed state borders (cf. Said 1984, Malkki 1995). This adds to the questioning of Chagossians’ loyalty to the imagined community of the Mauritian nation. A Mauritian journalist I spoke to formulated his discontent with the CRG’s open stance accordingly: “Without a position on the sovereignty issue you are against the Mauritian stand. You are either with us or against us – there is no third way.” Hence, Chagossians’ dual UK-Mauritian citizenship in the face of Mauritius’ struggle for full decolonisation from Britain has left them in an ambivalent position in Mauritius.

The questioning of Chagossians’ prime loyalty also relates to how Chagossians actively engage with the propagated symbolism on which Mauritian nationalism is founded. For historical reasons Chagossians cannot easily accept and submit to Mauritius’ supposedly all-inclusive national ideology, and they are quite outspoken about this in public. This not only has important consequences for their community, but also for the production of nationalist sentiments in Mauritius. To explain the processes at work here I shall return to the case of Mauritian independence.

Through annual celebrations on 12 March, Mauritian authorities work to elevate the historical achievement of independence into a myth about the birth of the Mauritian nation. The Chagossians, however, do not take part in these celebrations. But in this they are no exception since it appears that many Mauritians do not find 12 March a very important day. In the mid-1980s Eriksen found the independence celebrations poorly attended (Eriksen 1993a, 5). Although during my fieldwork Port Louis was no longer a ‘dead city’ on these occasions, it still seemed right that most Mauritians considered it ‘just another holiday’ and that the evening parties in the capital were ‘simply parties’ that triggered few patriotic sentiments. Public absence on this occasion dates back to the declaration of independence itself – an achievement that brings about few connotations of heroic emancipation in Mauritius. ‘Liberation’ from the colonial regime was decided by vote, and no less than 44 per cent were opposed to independence. It is not uncommon to associate it with shady back-room agreements between British and Mauritian political elites involving compensation for state territory. But the lack of a countrywide emancipation struggle does not mean that it was a peaceful process. Social tensions ran high at the time. The outbreaks of violence from the mid-1960s related to decolonisation, but it was not directed against the colonial regime. Ethnicity was heavily politicised, especially by the populist MSDP that was supported by the Franco-Mauritian upper class and opposed independence. Accordingly, Houbert writes that the official independence ceremony in 1968 “was not a day of universal rejoicing”. The MSDP, enjoying strong support in the urban areas, boycotted the ceremonies. British soldiers patrolled the streets. In fear of violence the ceremonial visit of Princess Alexandria, the Queen’s official representative, was cancelled, and the symbolic act of lowering the Union Jack – marking of the end of colonisation – was postponed from midnight to midday (Houbert 1981, 87). If many Mauritians do not

participate in Independence Day commemorations today for reason of indifference, Chagossians are absent with a difference. Actually, few people in Mauritius find this day more important than the Chagossians. As the next empirical example will demonstrate, to them it is loaded with significance.

A few days after Mauritius' independence celebrations in 2004, a large number of Chagossians gathered for a 'Chagossian Grand Assembly' in the garden outside the Ilois Community Centre in Pointe aux Sables. The occasion was the arrival of two representatives of a legal team preparing a compensation case on behalf of the Chagossians in US courts. The Americans explained about the proceedings of their work and informed the audience that they needed their signatures to act on their behalf. During the event I spoke to many Chagossian participants. With Mauritius' independence celebrations fresh in mind, they repeatedly told me "we don't celebrate Independence Day." Many added with serious voices that "Chagos was the price Mauritius paid for having Independence Day." As I went about asking, everyone confirmed that they did not partake in these celebrations because independence was directly connected to the expulsions from their homeland. When I asked what they thought about the Mauritian Independence Day slogan "One single nation, one single destiny", they shook their heads, laughed or kept quiet. In the shade of the main building a group of elderly men were talking quietly and passing a Mauritian newspaper to one another. It turned out that it included a lengthy interview with the CRG leader. In view of the journalist's opening question it was clearly no coincidence that it was published in the 'heat' of Mauritius' independence commemorations: "What are you, Olivier Bancoult, a Mauritian, British or a Chagossian?" The article included a picture of a dedicated Chagossian leader explaining behind the desk in his office. Next to the picture, a highlighted statement in quotation marks served as headline: "The 12 March is a day of mourning for the Chagossians" (Antoine, Week-End, 14 Mar. 2004). Particularly two questions in this interview deserve special attention. Firstly, the journalist asked what Chagossians feel when Mauritius' flag is hoisted on Independence Day. The CRG leader responded:

My answer will be shocking, but I must say it. 12th March is a day of mourning for the Chagossians. It is a very sad day, one of the bad memories of our community. It was for the quadricolore to be raised, for Mauritius to become independent, that we were deported from our islands. [...] Every 12th March reminds us of all we have suffered for thirty-seven years. We are those who were sacrificed for independence, which was obtained at the Chagossians' expense. So do not ask us to rejoice on the independence of Mauritius on 12th March. It is a day of mourning for us (Antoine, Week-End 14 Mar. 2004; my translation and omission).

Among Chagossians in Mauritius this is a widespread understanding of the course of historical events, and of course a source of strong resentments. This also points to a crucial issue with regard to how Chagossians' position in Mauritian society is produced and reproduced. To them 12 March has become an event when this sacrifice of their community, along with the sufferings their members have endured throughout the entire post-colonial era, is commemorated. Therefore, if Mauritius' independence celebrations are intended to promote all-inclusive national identification that transcends the ethnic, year after year the exact same

event serves precisely the opposite effect for the Chagossians. Reinterpreted as a special occasion for communal mourning, it has become an important annual event for Chagossians' ethnic borders to be reconfirmed vis-à-vis the imagined community of Mauritian nationals.

Secondly, Mauritius' independence is commonly merited to the first Prime Minister, Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, who headed the pro-independence coalition during the London constitutional talks.⁷ The late MLP leader is accordingly associated with the 'birth' of independent Mauritius. Far beyond the local ethnic group with which he is most closely associated, the Hindu-Mauritians, he is recognised as the 'father of the nation' and considered a national hero – a symbolic status that is rare in this poly-ethnic state. He died in 1985, but had by then "become a 'myth' in his own lifetime in the sense that his unpopular or mistaken judgments were rarely mentioned publicly" (Eriksen 1998, 146). But again, Chagossians offer a different perspective on the national myths. Due to the agreement to excise the Chagos Archipelago in Mauritius' independence negotiations, Chagossians hold Ramgoolam and his Labour Party responsible for their expulsions from the homeland. Moreover, since Ramgoolam was Prime Minister from independence until 1982, they also hold the 'father of the nation' accountable for the general lack of government assistance, as well as for the imprisonments and police violence against protesting Chagossian women during this period (cf. Chapter 3). Far from a hero, then, Chagossians refer to him as a traitor – a traitor who "sacrificed the Chagossians" and "sold the Chagos to have Independence Day for Mauritius".

This resentment was strongly expressed in the newspaper interview with the CRG leader, where one particularly controversial reply was enlarged and highlighted against a grey background: "I still ask how the father of the Mauritian nation, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, could accept that some of his children were deported from their native island" (Antoine, Week-End, 14 Mar. 2004; my translation). Chagossians' status as dual UK-Mauritian citizens is here effectively under-communicated. Fictive kinship metaphors of 'Ramgoolam's children' are not very common in Mauritius, but in this instance the invocation emphasises a grave moral wrongdoing, one with strong parallels to Abraham's dilemma: a (nation's) father's readiness to sacrifice his own son for the Almighty (colonial) power. In any case, here Ramgoolam's status as 'father of the nation' is not simply questioned. His image as a 'national hero' is reinterpreted and presented to the public as a 'national traitor'.

It must be noted that gatherings like the Chagossian Grand Assembly are contexts where ethnic sentiments are highly charged, and Chagossians' responses on that occasion may hence have been influenced by expectations of social sanctions. Also, those who attended are likely to be more politically committed and thus more reluctant to participate in the independence celebrations. However, the considerable number of Chagossians who paid for bus tickets and took the trouble to come speaks for itself. In addition, Chagossians I interviewed in other settings, including Independence Day, confirmed the same attitudes (see below). Some even explained that they refused to partake in the General Elections because they had been deported to Mauritius as a result of the negotiations over independence. Others said they anonymously protested on those occasions by drawing big crosses over the names of all political candidates. Some Chagossians ran into arguments with their co-workers because they refused to go on

⁷ S. Ramgoolam held the post of First Minister in Mauritius the last seven years of British rule. From 1968 to 1982 he was Mauritius' first Prime Minister. He then became Governor General until he died in December 1985.

strike with MLP associated unions or representatives – despite increasingly intolerable working conditions, particularly in the textile sector.

Mauritius' independence celebrations may not be very important to many Mauritians. Chagossians, however, are far from indifferent. To them this is a public holiday loaded with significance, and their absence on this occasion is marked by political boycott. These celebrations are constructed to promote all-inclusive over-ethnic national sentiments. But they fail to include the Chagossians. Chagossians cannot, insofar as they want to stay Chagossian and not revise the content of that category altogether, accept and submit to the supra-ethnic nationalism promoted by Mauritian authorities. This is because the few key symbols on which this nationalist imagery rests are also of central importance to Chagossian self-identification. For historical reasons, Chagossians attribute opposite values to the very same symbols: national heroes become traitors, and independence celebrations are turned into days of mourning. When this is celebrated on 12 March to promote all-inclusive national sentiments beyond the ethnic, the same commemorations serve the opposite effect for the Chagossians. Unlike other ethnic groups in Mauritius, for Chagossians these commemorations invoke a strong sense of exclusion from the nation. And quite contrary to the purpose of the event, Independence Day has instead become a symbolic occasion for Chagossians to reproduce communal sentiments. Year after year then, these celebrations contribute to reify Chagossian ethnic boundaries – not vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in Mauritius, but vis-à-vis the state and the imagined Mauritian nation.

6.5.3 PROCESSES OF NATIONAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

During my fieldwork, many Chagossians reported that they felt more accepted in Mauritian society after their favourable judgement in the British High Court in 2000. Compared with reports on their condition published in the 1980s, this is probably right (cf. Botte 1980, Madley 1985, Walker 1986). However, Chagossians are still regarded as an ethnic group with a suspicious relationship to the former colonial regime in Mauritius, and their prime loyalty to the Mauritian nation is therefore often put to question. For example, most Mauritians do not consider Ramgoolam a 'traitor' as many Chagossians would have it. Some of my Mauritian informants instead placed the same concept with the Chagossians. Claiming to speak on behalf of Mauritians more generally, a Mauritian Hindu in his mid-thirties explained: "The Chagossians; I tell you about the Chagossians or the Ilois. We call them traitors. You cannot trust them. When you turn your back, they can stab you in your back with a knife. They are very dangerous." Another illustrating example is how Mauritians often speak of the CRG's political banner. In a rather distrusting tone, many Mauritians asked me during my fieldwork if I knew what this flag "actually meant". Referring to the CRG leader, a Mauritian woman pointed out: "I see now that he has his own flag. I don't know what he is trying to do. I believe he is aiming to become some kind of Prime Minister." With little irony, another Mauritian man warned: "When they see the flag, the Rodriguans will start to get ideas – it's like the whole empire is falling apart!" Mauritius can of course hardly be described as an empire, but this does reflect local discourses about self-determination in post-colonial Mauritius. Such mistrustful speculations eventually provoked the CRG leader to explain in the official press conference after the Chagossian pilgrimage that the collection of symbols printed onto the CRG banner

represented only traditional tools that Chagossians used on the copra plantations in the Chagos – and “not weapons to make war” (see Illustration 22).

The distrust reflected in these examples is not uncommon in Mauritius. It clearly



Illustration 22: The CRG banner defended by CRG leader Olivier Bancoult in a press conference. Photo: Johannessen 2006.

demonstrates that despite recent changes, Chagossians are still regarded with scepticism. In accordance with the logics of ‘common denominators’ in Mauritius, most Mauritians would hesitate to express attitudes like these in direct interaction with Chagossians (Eriksen 1998), but the example from the press conference shows that Chagossians are well aware of them. A deeper investigation into these matters will show that there are complex social processes at work here which affect both Chagossians and other people in Mauritius in significant ways.

One important point to make first is that in order to change the underprivileged situation of their members, it is absolutely necessary for Chagossian organisations to voice Chagossians’ sufferings, point out historical and contemporary causes and criticise responsible parties. This is exactly what the CRG leader did in the newspaper interview discussed earlier. But through these political endeavours, Chagossian organisations violate a norm of communal behaviour in Mauritius. We have seen that Mauritian authorities encourage multiculturalism in the sense of supporting conservation and the practice of Mauritians’ diverse cultural heritages. But communalism, in the strategic sense of mobilising ethnic groups for political or economic gains on their behalf, is discouraged and socially sanctioned, and as a rule one should “never promote it explicitly in public” (Eriksen 1998, 68, 185). Chagossian political organisations are very

active, and since they are primarily concerned with the ‘Chagos issue’, which is also a central matter to Mauritian authorities, their agenda clearly interferes with that of state politics. Social reactions are therefore particularly provoked when the CRG pursues its own strategies without partnering with the government on this issue. Little does it help, of course, that the government has elevated the issue of regaining sovereignty to a sacred principle for the nation, and that Chagossians, as dual UK-Mauritian citizens, criticise Mauritius’ few key national symbols. Although for many Mauritians it may not be very important to celebrate independence and the national heroes on 12 March, the point is that being absent from and indifferent to these national commemorations is something quite different from boycotting them and publicly reframing national heroes as traitors and Independence Day as a day for communal mourning. Such criticism has important social consequences, among which is that it contributes to a general scepticism towards Chagossians in Mauritius. This in turn reinforces Chagossians’ sense of social exclusion, and consequently underscores the urge for their community to continue to mobilise politically. In this way, Chagossians also contribute to their own social exclusion. As the empirical case below demonstrates, Chagossians are well aware of this, but some have subtle strategies to deal with it.

Anne was a Chagossian woman in her forties when I met her in 2006. She was evicted to Mauritius with most of her family when she was eight. At the time of my fieldwork both her parents had died, and she now lived with three siblings and their families in the poor quarters in Cassis outside Port Louis, just next to the cemeteries. Anne was very religious and she often went to church and to the shrine of Pere Laval, an important pilgrimage site for Catholics in Mauritius. Like most occasions involving her public appearance, she then dressed nicely and straightened her curly hair. One day she told me that her relationship with the church was ambivalent. “I like God,” she said, but explained that she had a spirit inside her that often rebelled when she went to Church and heard about Jesus. It had caused her much harm and embarrassment. Sometimes it talked through her, she said, sometimes in Kreol and sometimes Malagasy. The latter language she did not understand. “The spirit can suddenly say ‘I am not a Catholic,’” she explained. “Maybe I should go to Madagascar,” she said, adding that many people in Mauritius who, with good or bad intentions, want to interfere with spirits go there. Going to Madagascar again came up a few days later. Anne had been working in the Mauritian textile sector for more than a decade. Three years ago, the factory where she had been employed for ten years suddenly closed down. “Working in a factory is not good,” she complained, explaining that “all of a sudden I had no work and I received no pension”. She then found a new job in a different textile factory, but orders were declining due to the erosion of Mauritius’ trade preferences. To cut expenses her wages were significantly reduced, and ever more often she was simply told to return home without payment when she arrived at the factory in the morning. She decided to save money for a ticket and UK passport to find a more secure job in England, and she therefore hoped to get a steadier job with the Municipality of Port Louis tending the cemeteries. Her mother once did this. And tending the cemeteries was now considered better employment than both textile and construction work. At the time of her job interview, more than a hundred people were crowding outside the employment office. When she eventually reached the counter, the representative said: “Oh, you’re from Chagos. Are you going back?” “Not if I get a job here,” she replied. When she did not get the job, she joked half-heartedly, well knowing that the local industry was moving to places with lower

production costs: “Maybe I should go to Madagascar.” When she came home from work a few days later, she explained in frustration that her co-workers were planning a demonstration against the deteriorating working conditions in the textile sector. But because the organisers were associated with the MLP, which Chagossians hold responsible for their deportations, she refused to participate. “I will never march along with that party!” she shouted. When I entered her backyard on Independence Day in 2006, I was therefore very surprised to find her singing Mauritius’ National Anthem for her young niece, who was listening to the song while waving a Mauritian flag. Suddenly a nephew of hers entered the yard. “Hey, are you coming to the party?” he asked me. “Which party?” I replied. “The independence party, a big party in Port Louis with lots of bands. It’s free.” “Well, yes, if you are going,” I answered reluctantly, knowing that Chagossians normally boycott independence celebrations. Anne remained silent for a while, but eventually said: “I will not go”. She patted her chest over her heart and added, “For me it’s not good”. I looked at the niece with the Mauritian flag. Eventually Anne’s sister, the little girl’s mother, realised that I was rather puzzled by the contradicting situation and broke the silence: “We must do it for the children!”

This is a good example of where many Chagossians are positioned in the Mauritian economy. It demonstrates also how Chagossians’ understandings of their own history impact life and work in Mauritius in significant ways, and at the same time that there are differences between the generations: younger Chagossians born in Mauritius are more inclined to consider such independence events simply as good parties. Celebrating Mauritius’ independence for the children in the backyard not only demonstrates subtle backstage strategies that contribute to this change in attitude and curtail senses of exclusion from the nation. It also shows that Chagossians are well aware that their protests and critique of the state have negative consequences for members of their community.

There is also another important dimension to these social processes. As we have seen, perhaps more than in inter-ethnic dialogue with other groups in Mauritius, the Chagossian community is reproduced in dialogue with the state. In this regard, their objections to Mauritius’ supra-ethnic national symbolism play a significant role. Clearly, Chagossians fall outside this part of Mauritius’ supposedly all-inclusive nationalist ideology, but this does not mean that they represent an obstacle to Mauritian nationalism. Quite the contrary. In this respect, they are in fact very important. The empirical case above indicates that Chagossians’ position in Mauritius is far more complex than what Boswell points to when she argues that Chagossians hold a better position than Mauritian Creoles within Mauritius’ hierarchies of cultural essentialism (Boswell 2006, 166). But as we shall see, there are interesting parallels here as well.

Boswell argues that as hybrids *par excellence* Mauritian Creoles represent a ‘non-identity’ category in Mauritius – a local anti-category that serves as a resource for the construction of other primordial ethnicities in Mauritius (Boswell 2006, 11). Chagossians, like Rodriguans, are widely understood to be sub-groups of Mauritian Creoles. But in contrast to the rest of that category – and very much like other ethnic groups in Mauritius – Chagossians and Rodriguans can draw on very specific homelands to secure a comfortable place in Mauritius’ hierarchies of unmixed primordial cultures: “in the cultural hierarchy of Mauritius, the Ilois occupy a more prestigious position than the Créole Morisyen. Their invocation of a distinct history, homeland and tradition is helping them to fit into the integrationist,

multicultural state of Mauritius” (Boswell 2006, 166). Boswell is right that Chagossians do not suffer the same stigma as other Mauritian Creoles with regard to essentialist discourses of and about hybridity and pure cultures. Hence, they suit the multicultural dimension of the official Mauritian nationalism very well. However, two important reservations must be mentioned here.

In the first place, not all Mauritians want Chagossians to fit into this hierarchy, and confuting Chagossians’ claims to be an indigenous population is not too uncommon in Mauritius. During my fieldwork many emphasised that Chagossians’ ancestors came from Africa and India and “got mixed” (i.e. became Creole ‘hybrids’) in the Chagos. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, Chagossians’ indigenous claims conflict with widespread understandings of cultural purity in Mauritius. Members of other local ethnic groups can also trace their ancestry in Mauritius back as long as Chagossians have lived in the Chagos Archipelago. But in this poly-ethnic setting they (prefer to) consider themselves Indo- or Sino-Mauritians rather than indigenous to Mauritius. The second reason has to do with attitudes conforming to official state politics. Not accepting that Chagossians are an indigenous population is to say that they cannot, on these grounds, raise autonomous claims to the Chagos Archipelago. At the time of my fieldwork, this was in line with Mauritian state policy on the matter, a stance that also primarily other-identified Chagossians as Mauritians (instead of British) and thus added weight to Mauritius sovereignty claims (cf. Chapter 4).

Nevertheless, most Mauritians I spoke to agreed to the argument that the Chagos Archipelago was so remote, so isolated, and so much less developed than Mauritius that over the two centuries these islands had been inhabited Chagossians had developed a culture distinct enough for them not to be regarded as ‘hybrids’. Also, among Mauritians particularly concerned with Mauritian Creoles’ situation and their lack of cultural recognition, many invoked the Chagossian community to underline the key difference. As a Mauritian Creole woman pointed out: “At least they know who they are.”

Speaking of identity, it is quite revealing to consider the observation that both Mauritian Creoles and Chagossians are troubled by the idea of having lost their identity. In these claims there are important differences, but there are also similarities. For Mauritian Creoles this problematic relates to local stigmas of cultural/racial ‘hybridity’ and ‘mixing’, the state’s appropriation of possible ethnic markers, and of having no single bounded historical homeland to which traditions and primordial cultures can be traced. For Chagossians, lost identity is primarily seen as a consequence of having been forced to live in a place physically separated from their homeland. Both cases represent a dilemma that preconditions a cultural framework that is prevalent in Mauritius – namely that of an ethnically ordered world resting on a sedentarist ideology (see Chapter 3). But while Mauritian Creoles form a stigmatised anti-category associated with hybridity within this order, Chagossians represent a case of ethnic purity that in fact supersedes every other local ethnic group. Save for the complications of the Mauritian Creoles, all ethnic groups in Mauritius trace their ethnic origins to places outside Mauritius’ main island. They have little problem maintaining that their ethnic identities, cultures and traditions are pure and unpolluted – even though they were not born or have ever set foot in their ancestral homeland. Chagossians, in contrast, communicate that they stand on the edge of cultural genocide now that the generation born in the Chagos Archipelago is aging

and dying outside the homeland. It goes without saying that Chagossians not only conform to these essentialist discourses but also confirm the hierarchies they serve to maintain.

Probably due to her strong focus on primordialism versus hybridity, Boswell fails to see that also Chagossians form an important 'anti-category' in Mauritius. Not in the frame of cultural essentialism and hybridity as in the case of the Mauritian Creoles, but in that of Mauritius' supra-ethnic nationalism. Chagossians are dual UK-Mauritian citizens held to have a suspicious relationship to Mauritius' former colonial regime. Their homeland is not only claimed by both of these states, it is also elevated to a matter of national pride and independence. On top of this, Chagossians form the single ethnic group in Mauritius that cannot align with Mauritius' supposedly all-inclusive supra-ethnic nationalism. Due to their history, the status of their homeland and their dual citizenship, in Mauritius the Chagossians and the Chagos Archipelago represent the blurred borders of both the state and the nation. They are, in Boswell's terminology, the 'hybrids' of the Mauritian nation. And in this they face other, but to some extent comparable, challenges of internal othering.

It may well be that Independence Day is unimportant to most Mauritians. But communal critique of the national symbolism published in local media on this symbolic day is something quite different from marking the celebration by mere absence. Of course, Chagossian organisations must voice the history of sufferings, point to historical causes and place the responsibility for bettering the situation of their members. But this has social consequences. Firstly, such critique casts Chagossians' prime loyalty to the state and the nation into question and contributes to suspicion and the social exclusion of their community in Mauritius. Secondly, this reinforces Chagossians' own sense of social exclusion and thereby underscores their urge to continue to mobilise politically. And thirdly, the Chagossian community emerges as an important out-group within Mauritian society against which an imagined community of Mauritian nationals can be produced. Through these processes, Chagossians come to form another anti-category within Mauritian society, one which is important to the rather difficult project of producing supra-ethnic national identification in Mauritius. There may be few heroes and heroic moments to commemorate on 12 March, but communal attacks on the national symbolism on such occasions can also fuel patriotic sentiments. The moment the national symbols are criticised or rejected they gain importance. When Chagossians publicly disapprove of the key symbols on which the Mauritian nation is constructed, they not only become a suspicious out-group on the blurred borders of the state and the nation whose superior bonds of loyalty are frequently debated, but they also confirm their position as a significant reference group in Mauritius. This can serve a very difficult purpose in the poly-ethnic society: as an anti-category against which an imagined supra-ethnic community of Mauritian nationals can be produced. Also, when they time and time again provoke discourse about the status of their occupied homeland in the post-colonial setting, Chagossians contribute to raising national awareness in Mauritius.

6.5.4 CHAGOSSIANS AND DEVELOPMENTAL TIME

The Chagossian community plays a significant role with regard to Mauritian nationalism. But highly important in respect, as I have argued, is also how authorities disseminate ideas about

economic development. So what role do Chagossians play in this? And if the development ideology feeds into local understandings of ethnicity, what position are Chagossians ascribed on the ideological scale of developmental time? To explore these questions I shall start by looking into important meanings attributed to the Chagossians' homeland in Mauritius.

Mauritian authorities often present the Chagos Archipelago as a potential economic resource. Under the heading, "Chagos, a golden opportunity?" the editors of the Mauritian newspaper *L'Express* accordingly recounted the Prime Minister's key message in a speech held in March 2004: "the sovereignty of the Chagos would be at the core of future development" (*L'Express* 9 Mar. 2004). Prime Minister Berenger then reiterated that in addition to profiting from local resources, including fishing and access to minerals within the archipelago's vast EEZ, Mauritius could also claim rent (and thus acquire foreign currency) for the US base on Diego Garcia. In addition, the rest of the Chagos Archipelago represents another lucrative, and increasingly scarce, resource much compatible with Mauritius' existing economic infrastructure: these remote coral atolls enclose tropical lagoons with splendid palm beaches and exceptionally rich maritime life. They are all abandoned, and traces of local industries have almost disappeared. In this sense, they come very close to widespread imaginations of a tropical paradise – a concept much defined by dissociation from modern development. The very 'undevelopedness' of these islands is integral to a potential economic venture where the government envisions golden opportunities for the niche market of eco-tourism.

To proceed with the argument it is important to point out here that development ideas in Mauritius are also linked to popular rural-urban distinctions. Typically the rural is associated with 'poor', 'illiterate', 'peripheral' and 'traditional' while the urban is associated with 'rich', 'sophisticated', 'central' and 'modern' (Eriksen 1998, 113). During my fieldwork, these distinctions seemed to be important to youngsters living in the poor quarters around Port Louis who often were keen to emphasise that they were living close to the capital. Male youths revealed that being 'urban' was well received by young girls in school and elsewhere. Except for those who had a well-known Chagossian name, they did not need to be identified with their poor background in public spaces like schools – especially if they could afford to display a taste for things associated with a modern urban lifestyle. Possessing a mobile phone was especially important in this respect, as was avoiding bringing one's partner home after school, which would reveal a different, and very much unwanted, image. Although well-off Mauritian families are not known to live in or around the capital city, poor youngsters could nonetheless draw on rural-urban distinctions to gain status in public spaces where their economic background was less apparent. Expressing a modern urban lifestyle in public spaces could be an effective strategy to counter the stigma of poverty since poverty, which development promises to eradicate (but in important respects serves to maintain), was dissociated from symbols of the 'modern' and 'more developed'.

Within these frames, the Chagos Archipelago forms an exceptional national space. I have already pointed out the symbolic architecture of Mauritius' independence celebrations. With the old colonial government building in the background, the audience was facing the national celebrations as they unfolded on a provisional stage erected at the Caudan Waterfront in Port Louis. The prestigious Caudan Waterfront, which was modelled on the V&A Waterfront of Cape Town and opened in 1996, is another exceptional national space in Mauritius. It is a clearly bounded urban show-off area – an exceptionally clean, monitored and patrolled quiet

enclave where tourists can feel more secure than in the busy marketplace. Shops, restaurants and hotels here are more expensive than in the rest of the city. Mauritians come here to go to the cinema, and well-dressed Mauritian couples often stroll around. It is today widely considered the modern part of Mauritius' capital, and most Mauritians speak of it with a sense of pride. The Caudan Waterfront has much in common with the Cyber-city of Ebene referred to in the Prime Minister's speech above. Although the latter is located outside the capital city, they are both 'urban' centres in the sense that these are the places that connect Mauritius to the metropolises of the outside world. While the former is an international commercial area located by Port Louis' harbour, the latter is the centre of international ICT services in Mauritius. These are exceptional national spaces in the sense that they represent the materialisation of the government's propagated promises of development.

In these frames the Chagos Archipelago represents their uncontested opposition: the remote and abandoned Chagos Archipelago is Mauritius' undeveloped rural extreme. This is important because 'development' also requires the 'undeveloped' in order to make sense. On the imagined scale between rural/undeveloped – urban/developed, the Chagos Archipelago forms the constitutive bottom line place of reference within the state. Chagossians returning from their pilgrimage in 2006 added flesh to this when they confirmed local expectations that they would be 'shocked' to see their homeland changed after 40 years by complaining that the old settlements had almost disappeared and lapsed into wilderness (cf. Chapter 5). Chagossians also confirmed those 'shock' expectations when proclaiming their surprise that "Diego Garcia has become an American village!" What apparently complicates the picture here, that the island of Diego Garcia has been 'developed' into a major hi-tech US military base, does not contradict the argument. First and foremost, all the modern hi-tech development associated with the US base is not national or Mauritian. It is rather seen as a bounded foreign space on national territory that some want to keep and others hope to eject. Nonetheless, no places in Mauritius are considered more modern and developed than this US base, while at the same time few if any local places are understood to be less developed than the rest of the Chagos Archipelago. In this sense, the Chagos Archipelago epitomises both poles of the developmental scale: the undeveloped and the superiorly developed – leaving meaningful space for Mauritius somewhere in between. The important point is that the spaces discussed here are intensely debated, and local discourses of and about exceptional national spaces are important to the production of national awareness and identification. These places are vested with meanings derived from a development ideology disseminated to unite members of Mauritius' plural society in a common national project. Thus, the Chagos Archipelago adds important meanings to local development ideas. As a much-debated national space, it forms an important local place of reference against which national development, and the scale itself, becomes meaningful to people.

The idea that the Chagos Archipelago was not developed appeared to be common sense in Mauritius. It was quite usual to overlook the US base and simply speak of the whole Chagos Archipelago as a less- or un-developed place. Mauritians typically described it as a bounded place that had always been 'little developed', and far 'less developed' than Mauritius' main island. Accordingly, in a newspaper interview published soon after Chagossians returned from their pilgrimage, a Mauritian reporter asked an elderly Chagossian woman about her perspectives on resettlement: "Is it not a problem for your family to leave a developed country

for another less developed?” (Tirvassen. *L’Express Outlook*, 12 Apr. 2006). Here it is also taken for granted that the woman as well as the newspaper readers agree on what is meant by ‘developed’ and ‘less developed’ places, and that they grasp the question’s implicit illogicality. This also shows that Chagossians play an active part in local development discourses, which adds to their importance with regard to Mauritian nationalism. Some four decades after their expulsions, Chagossians are no longer strangers to the ways of conceiving and classifying the world that dominates in Mauritius. Hence the woman, a central CRG member, responded to the question:

Mauritius can be more developed than Chagos. I do not refute this fact. But I was born on Diego; I grew up and got six children there! Here, in Mauritius, you need money to survive! In Diego I did not need money. We know how to fish and find our food by other means. I did not have any worry about my children taking drugs or anything similar. Over there, people were healthy. Here, we are being attacked by mosquitoes! (Talatte; cited by Tirvassen, *L’Express Outlook*, 12 Apr. 2006)

Her answer is very much in line with how Chagossians typically remember their homeland as paradise. As we saw in Chapter 5, those memories reflect difficult experiences in Mauritius – a competitive capitalist society where most Chagossians inhabit the lowest economic strata and for whom issues of money, food, health and drugs etc. have long formed part of everyday challenges. Here the woman invoked these issues to describe the difference between a more developed Mauritius and a less developed Chagos – adding also another recent challenge to the story: by ‘mosquitoes’ she referred to the recent Chikungunya epidemic, which contributed to a number of deaths within their community during my fieldwork. Because development discourses are so present in Mauritius they are also part of the context in which Chagossians struggle and understand their own past. Unsurprisingly therefore, her answer reveals that Chagossians’ understandings of their homeland are linked to popular ideas about development too.

It is important to underline here that we are speaking about popular ideas. Development indicators as defined in contemporary development studies, the UN development programme and elsewhere do not only concern a country’s ability to generate wealth or how advanced the local economy is, but include also human indexes, such as quality of life, social well-being, safety, nutrition, health, access to jobs and so on. In fact, by many of these standards, the Chagos Archipelago may well have scored higher, and not lower, than Mauritius’ main island on the development scale – both in reality and in memory. However, as also the above quoted woman’s talk about development with reference to issues of health, nutrition and safety demonstrates, the fact that even Chagossians place the Chagos Archipelago below Mauritius’ main island in terms of development shows that local popular understandings of this concept tend to ignore these more complex development indicators.

To the local media there is therefore a newsworthy element of surprise in the woman’s answer, which concerns how she insists on reversing the common-sense order of things. The journalist’s question is interesting because wanting to leave a more developed- for a less developed country appears as a contradiction – and particularly so at a time in a place where development is vigorously propagated as the nation’s ‘destiny’ and presented as the solution to

contemporary problems. In the optic of Mauritius' 2004 Independence Day logo, the Chagossian woman has already undertaken a voyage from a 'less developed' to a 'more developed' place. Yet there is no doubt in her voice that she prefers to return to the former. She substantiates this by arguing like most Chagossians that the circumstances of their lives have deteriorated significantly in the more developed place. As reflected by the black stripe that crosscuts the CRGs political banner, Chagossians' sufferings start with independence and their deportations to Mauritius, and covers Mauritius' entire post-colonial history. Added that they simultaneously portray colonial times in exceedingly positive terms, the Chagossian community questions the propagated success story of Mauritius' development. Contrary to common understandings, the Chagossian woman pointed out that development is not necessary, or not necessarily something better. Her answer thus harbours a critique of 'development' – a critique that is expressed time and time again when Chagossians present their homeland as a 'paradise'. The potency of these stories, which explains much of the local fascination for them, has to do with how Chagossians question the central ideological premise. They question the otherwise undisputed direction of the movement of the vessel on the Independence Day logo, and thus contradict the logics and promises of development. This is precisely contrary to what the World Bank report advised the government to do at a time of economic crisis – namely to increase commitment to the government's development plans among the population.

What is important to point out here is that this Chagossian critique can neither be read as a rejection nor or a candid threat to the hegemonic ideological understandings. The critique is formulated within the development framework, and it puts little more than the valued direction of the meta-movement in question. It thus both conforms to and confirms those understandings. This is important because even if it is formulated as a critique – or much because of this – it increases development awareness among the public and gives meaning to this abstract concept and the imaginary scale against which it is measured.

In the foregoing I argued that poor and unemployed people tend to be regarded as people who do not contribute to the national development project. Often they are seen as present- rather than future-oriented. Although ascription of such temporal orientations clearly has an economic bias, divisions are typically described in ethnic terms and given cultural explanations, and in Mauritius, cultural explanations draw on ideas of ethnic origins and ancestral homelands. Hence, the Indians' and Chinese' so-called Asian values are associated with advanced Asian Tiger economies, while local understandings of the Afro-Creole culture feed on ideas of less developed economies in Africa and Madagascar. So what about the Chagossians? Are also they ascribed a particular position on the scale of developmental time? Chagossians are also known to inhabit the lower economic strata in Mauritius, and hence if the stigma of present-orientation also applies to them it would support the above argument. The following example indicates this to be the case.

During my fieldwork I was invited to a wedding in Mauritius. The groom revealed to me that he was 'personally Christian', but since both he and his bride came from 'Indian families' the celebration was to follow Hindu traditions. After a ceremonial dinner at the groom's house, I engaged in conversation with an Indo-Mauritian member of the bride's family who turned out to be a Mauritian psychiatrist. When I explained that I was conducting research among the Chagossians he responded that he also had grown up in the poor quarters around

Port Louis. He added that he had known Chagossians in his childhood, and that Chagossians sometimes came to the clinic where he worked. He then stressed his ‘Asian values’ and framed his reservations in ethno-historical terms:

The Indians too were brought here by force to work, but we did not sit down, we worked hard to get a house and some money. If you come to the shop with no money and expect to get a beer; and come again and again day after day – what will happen? You will be kicked out. [Chagossians] don’t want to sacrifice by working every day from nine to five: they don’t want to give up their spare time.

It is interesting to note that the notion of ‘sacrifice’ here takes on contested meanings just like the concept of ‘traitors’ discussed above. While Chagossians portray the father of the nation as a ‘traitor’ who ‘sacrificed’ Chagossians for Mauritian independence, some Mauritians see Chagossians as pro-English ‘traitors’ unwilling to ‘sacrifice’ for the Mauritian nation. More to the point, in the psychiatrist’s statement both present- and future-oriented values come to expression. His formulation clearly illustrates the role of the ‘beggar’, which Port Louis’ bishop (thus not without reason) sought to dissociate Chagossians from. To put it explicitly, the psychiatrist says that if a person repeatedly returns to a shop with expectations of getting a beer (read: prevailing demand or expectation for positive discrimination or compensation on behalf of one’s community), he will eventually be kicked out (read: social exclusion), unless he reconsiders and chooses to sacrifice his spare time and find a nine to five job (read: align with and contribute to the common national project of development). Clearly Chagossians suffer the same stigma as other poor and unemployed people in Mauritius, and their ethnic community falls prey to the same critique as Mauritian Creoles.

But in addition to this, Chagossians are also ascribed a temporal orientation rather particular to their group. And like the Asians and the Creoles, the Chagossians’ homeland also substantiates local understandings of the Chagossian community in Mauritius. Their small and isolated homeland is hardly ‘developed’, and the abandoned coconut industries are widely regarded as a little advanced economy belonging to a past era. Accordingly, Chagossians from this ‘little developed’ place have long been regarded as somewhat ‘less developed’ than other Mauritians. Elderly Chagossians often regretted that they had long been stigmatised in Mauritius for being ‘uncivilised’. As a woman in her mid-sixties recalled: “The children in the school. They thought they could do anything with Chagossians because they were uncivilised.” Another woman explained that a Mauritian man from her neighbourhood had raped her after she arrived in Mauritius: “I was attacked by a man who was tearing off my clothes. And after, he threatened me not to tell his wife about it. They ignored me because I was a savage.” As I noted, many Chagossians pointed out that this stigma was now changing, especially after the favourable British High Court judgement in 2000. As another Chagossian explained:

If people knew we were Chagossian we would not get work because we were not civilised. Before the court case some people didn’t want to register [with the CRG] because of the bad talk about them. But after the court [judgement], Mauritians talk better with the Chagossians. Their attitude changed about 75 per cent after the case.

Much is changing with the increasing recognition of their group. However, elements of stigma can remain while reformulated in new and perhaps less pejorative terms. As a Mauritian journalist commented on how Chagossians speak: “They talk old Kreol. *Creole les isles* [island Kreol] as we call it. They speak with a different accent as if they were singing. I’d say it’s a backwards Kreol, because they are not exposed to radio and such things as we are.” In accordance with such ideas of backwardness, many people I interviewed in Mauritius pointed out that Chagossians, unlike the future-oriented Asians and the present-oriented Creoles, were oriented towards the past. As a woman from the Catholic Church in Mauritius told me:

Going back, that’s what they live with. They always talk about the past. The young ones, they have never had a future. Not even a vision for the future. It is sad when you think about it, when they have only one life. I don’t know if it’s a typical feature of people living in exile. The young ones, they are dressed modern, but their mentality is different. They feel more at home with their stories. If something is happening they will go to the back room where [an elder Chagossian woman] will tell them a story.

As discussed in Chapter 5, when Chagossians encounter difficulties in Mauritius they tend to recall the Chagos and point out how life back then was more favourable than now. Also, a particular concern for many Chagossians, especially the political active ones who speak to the local press, is to have their version of the past recognised to get compensation for what happened to them. For these reasons Chagossians do talk much about the past. However, that historical awareness should contradict a ‘modern’ mentality only makes sense within the framework of developmental time. In that perspective, ‘going back’ and ‘having no (vision for the) future’ is the antithesis to progressive development – as in Mauritius’ Prime Minister talk of ‘moving forward’ along a ‘digital highway’ to ‘new horizons’ of ‘progress and prosperity’. As developmental time feeds back into the Mauritian ‘fruit salad’, Chagossians emerge as an out-group within the poly-ethnic state who, unlike ‘future-oriented’ Asians and ‘present-oriented’ Creoles, are considered exceptionally ‘past-oriented’.

This, then, resonates with what the development ideology preaches in Mauritius: with the liberalisation of international trade, Mauritius must change and thus cannot afford to do as the Creoles, to consume and live for the moment ‘...and tomorrow we will die’. Instead Mauritius must do as the Asians do and accept hard times while patiently investing for the future. This is because the days of preferential treatment are over, and Mauritius can no longer, like the Chagossians, be oriented to the past and expect or demand trade compensation.

In many ways the Chagossians represent an important out-group within the state. Chagossians fuel public debate, not only about the borders of state and the nation and its key symbols but also about the supposedly supra-ethnic project of national development. Again, such discourses raise national awareness as well as also adding local meanings to the development ideology and the scale against which development is measured. For as Skaria argues, although development promises to erase the primitive by bringing about progression, development thought must also embody and insist on the existence of the primitive to make sense (Skaria 2003, 234). Hence, Chagossians form a significant out-group within Mauritius’ poly-ethnic society, which unintentionally contributes to the production of national consciousness, identification and commitment to the state.

6.6 ARRIVALS

With the metaphor of “a stain on the mirror”, the bishop of Port Louis presented the Chagos issue as a stain Mauritians must ignore to be able to see themselves as a free independent nation. However, in Mauritius there is actually considerable focus on the stain that does not fall properly into that category. As the bishop rightly pointed out, Chagossians actively contribute to this through their protests, boycotts, international court actions, and, of course, their pilgrimage in 2006. This has important consequences. In Mauritius, the Chagos issue is a national matter, or a matter of national pride, which in different ways works to raise nationalist sentiments and unite the population on a level that transcends the ethnic. At the same time, it works to reproduce the Chagossian community as an ethnic group on the outside of the so-called multicultural Mauritian nation.

In this chapter I have confirmed and questioned Eriksen’s (1998) earlier observations that Mauritius’ official nationalism is both multicultural and supra-ethnic. Regarding the former dimension, local authorities continue to present Mauritius as a multicultural society and encourage ethnic diversity within the state. I have emphasised, however, that while they still present ethnic and cultural diversity as a valuable resource, authorities seldom fail to convey the message that such diversity can be an obstacle to national unity. As inter-ethnic violence is closely associated with Mauritian decolonisation, Independence Day celebrations become annual events when the national parole of ‘unity in diversity’ also commemorates and silently warns of a latent danger within society. In consequence, state authorities gain legitimacy through multi-ethnic tolerance as well as being a key promoter of inter-ethnic peace, ethnic divisions are maintained, and society’s key line of conflict is directed from the political economy to the ethno-cultural domain. With respect to the second dimension, Mauritian nationalism is indeed also supra-ethnic and future-oriented. However, based on my empirical material I have interpreted its most central contents as a local expression of another widespread ideology that largely goes unquestioned. Well advised by the Mauritius private sector, the World Bank and the WTO, Mauritian authorities now disseminate ideas about economic development in order to raise national awareness and secure public commitment to the state. Apparently, reinforcing ideas of development becomes particularly important at a time of economic crisis. That is, when the development ideology is most likely to be put to question. In these ideological frames, Mauritian nationalism takes the form of a common supra-ethnic project, which, when symbolically expressed as a voyage, emerges as a meta-pilgrimage in the sense of a metaphorical journey to a place or a state believed to embody a valued cultural ideal (Morinis 1992, 4). With strong parallels to Chagossians’ metaphorical pilgrimage discussed in the foregoing chapter, Mauritians are thus invited to see themselves as members of a national crew comprised of different ethnic groups working hard side-by-side on a ship destined for new horizons of progress and prosperity. The current economic crisis is thus reframed and reduced to an obstacle along the way. In this light, the nationalist parole of ‘unity in diversity’ can arguably be rewritten as ‘unity in development’.

Promoting national identification through a combination of multiculturalist and development ideologies also affects local conceptions of ethnicity. Developmental time feeds back into Mauritian understandings of their poly-ethnic society. In effect, economic

inequalities, economic success and upward social mobility, or failure to accomplish this, are ethnically framed and given cultural explanations that are closely linked to capitalist ideas of economic development. Indo- and Sino-Mauritians are accordingly held to incorporate ‘Asian values’ where senses of savings and clever investment are taken as expressions of a ‘future oriented mentality’. But in a society where the nation is constructed around a common project where people are encouraged to cooperate, work hard, and accept sacrifices *en route* to development, lines are drawn between those who understand themselves as contributors and the free-riders, or the ‘beggars’, who emerge as their constituent anti-category. These Others are typically the poor and unemployed. When translated into ethno-cultural terms in Mauritius, the Creoles emerge as sand in the development machine, supposedly due to their present-oriented mentality. That this characteristic is also ascribed to poor Chagossians in Mauritius is therefore unsurprising. But, in contrast to other groups, they are also described as a community particularly oriented toward the past, a characteristic that also resonates with their long stigma of backwardness as well as the image of their homeland as an outdated coconut economy. Indeed, Chagossians often invoke their past, not least to be compensated by the UK – something that has interesting parallels to Mauritius’ compensation pursuits with regard to its long remunerated international trade, which according to the WTO General Director now belongs to a past era. Moreover, many Chagossians do not identify emancipation with development and future economic progress. While agreeing that the Chagos Archipelago is far less developed than Mauritius, they insist that their journey from a less- to a more developed place has meant a serious deterioration of their living conditions and prefer therefore to return to the former. Chagossians thus question the logics and promises of development, which could otherwise be taken for granted by a Mauritian population more than invited to picture itself *en route* on board a post-independent economic miracle. All in all, this places Chagossians as an ethnic group at the bottom end of developmental time in Mauritius. This is, however, precisely what the ideology needs in order to make sense: a reference point from which the idea of development can acquire a sense of meaningful direction.

Unifying national symbols that transcend the ethnic are few and far between in Mauritius, a poly-ethnic state with no precolonial history. The key symbols around which the authorities seek to produce national identification and solidarity include Mauritian independence, the father of the nation, and the success story of Mauritius’ post-independent development. Chagossians find all of them highly problematic and can hardly identify with any one of them. Due to their particular history, they ascribe them radically different meanings. Development does not necessarily mean bettered living conditions, Mauritius’ Independence Day is a day for mourning, and the father of the nation was a traitor who sacrificed their community for Mauritius’ independence. If Mauritian Independence Day commemorations are designed to promote all-inclusive national identification, they fail to include the Chagossians. Instead, they serve the opposite effect. On this occasion, year after year, Chagossians’ ethnic borders are amalgamated vis-à-vis the emergent imagined community of Mauritian nationals.

Because Chagossians also are compelled to voice their critique in order to change their unfavourable situation, they end up contributing to their own social exclusion – a dilemma Chagossians are well aware of. But there are also other important consequences of this. It is probably correct that the few national symbols available in Mauritius are not very important to most Mauritians, but they do gain importance the moment they are criticised. Add to this the

fact that Chagossians are also citizens of the former colonial power and that full decolonisation of their homeland is elevated to a matter of national pride in Mauritius, and Chagossians emerge as a group with a suspicious relationship to the former colonial power whose superior bonds of loyalty is frequently put to question. They thereby also become an important group within society with regard to provoking discourse about the state and the nation. Shouting from a 'stain on the mirror' Chagossians make it impossible for Mauritians to ignore the blurred borders of the state and the nation, provoking questions over critical issues such as economic independence, autonomy and territorial integrity. Hence, with regard to the production of national awareness, identification and commitment to a Mauritian state where unifying symbols are few and not overly potent, Chagossians have come to play an important role. That is, a significant out-group within the poly-ethnic society against which an all-inclusive Mauritian patriotism can emerge.

Due to their history, condition and their position in Mauritian society, Chagossians typically identify emancipation with emigration. Chagossians regularly talk about leaving Mauritius. Especially members of the older generation reiterate that they want to return to the Chagos Archipelago. This is, according to BIOT immigration laws, illegal. However, since Chagossians were granted full British citizenship in 2002, emigration has become a real opportunity that many have decided to seize. Hence, a third kind of journey – both real and imagined – has come to occupy a central place in this empirical field. In the next chapter we shall see that that these forms of movement are not disentangled, and that Chagossians now speak of two homelands beyond Mauritius: the Chagos Archipelago and the UK. In this context, the Mauritian journalist's question: "Is it not a problem for your family to leave a developed country for another less developed?" takes on new importance.

7 MOVING FORWARD OR STAYING BACKWARD : CHAGOSSIAN DIASPORISATION IN AN AGE OF EVICTIONS

From the turn of the millennium, Mauritius' beneficial international trade agreements were phasing out and bilateral relations with the former colonial power were souring, especially after British authorities' swift unilateral reinstatement of full immigration control to the BIOT in 2004. In this heated political context the MMM was elected out of office, and was in 2005 replaced by an MLP-headed government willing to display a less confrontational approach to British authorities. Before long, the new government announced that Mauritius would not withdraw from the Commonwealth to sue the UK in the ICJ over the new BIOT immigration laws (see Chapter 4). They also proved forthcoming with regard to cooperating with the UK in organising a journey for Chagossians to the Chagos Archipelago, agreeing to put the Mauritian vessel *Mauritius Trochetia* at their disposal. This development was most welcome among the Chagossians, many of whom had struggled for decades to see their homeland again. Now, however, a very practical complication to the homecoming scenario surfaced. Not all Chagossians who wished to go could possibly fit into the vessel. The *Mauritius Trochetia* is a combined passenger and containership that can accommodate 108 cabin passengers. Decisions to distribute the one hundred cabin beds initially reserved for Chagossians among their transnational community, which then numbered around 5,000 people, were therefore bound to cause outcry.

The emergence of a Chagossian diaspora, in the sense of a transnational social group with a particular relationship to a common historic homeland, can be traced back to their expulsions from the Chagos Archipelago. When these evictions concluded in 1973, up to 1,500 people in Mauritius, and another 500 people in the Seychelles, were born, or had a considerable history of living and working, in the Chagos Archipelago (see Chapter 2). Many Chagossians have since moved on to Europe and elsewhere, in particular to England after they were granted full UK citizenship in 2002 (see Jeffery 2011). Almost one thousand Chagossians had migrated to England at the time of my fieldwork in 2006. Their numbers continued to increase, reaching about the double by 2010. As a result, Chagossians are now spread across many countries, where different Chagossian organisations now claim to represent the interests of their local members. Hence, when it became clear that members of their community could travel to the Chagos Archipelago with the *Mauritius Trochetia*, quite drastic selections with regard to the passenger list obviously had to be made. This soon brought international Chagossian organisations into heated debates, which would reveal a lot about their transnational community. This brings us to the focus of this chapter.

In this chapter I take a closer look at Chagossian diasporisation. To be able to return to their homeland has long been a matter of great importance to many Chagossians. It is no wonder, therefore, that the makeup of this passenger list triggered engagement among all international Chagossian organisations that were active at the time. This development,

however, would also provide an exceptional opportunity to explore the issue of Chagossian diasporisation. How Chagossians were selected to participate in this first homecoming, along with the heated discussions and negotiations that followed, revealed internal divisions and heterogeneities that are of key importance if we want to understand their transnational community. I shall in the following pay most attention to Chagossians in Mauritius, the Seychelles and the UK, which is where I have conducted fieldwork and where most Chagossians now live. After an outline of my theoretical approach, I shall examine how the global interstate system affects possibilities for a politically unified Chagossian diaspora. I then move on to explore central meanings Chagossians ascribe to diaspora members in other countries, and discuss what role divisions within their transnational community play with regard to Chagossian diasporisation. As we shall see, Chagossians have now come to speak of two homelands beyond their exile, namely the Chagos Archipelago and the UK. These places are vested with different, but not unrelated, meanings. Within the ideological framework Chagossians now manoeuvre, to journey as pilgrims or as migrants to these respective places has come to mean very different things.

7.1 APPROACHING DIASPORAS

Diasporas became an increasingly popular subject of anthropological study from the beginning of the 1990s, coinciding with the end of the Soviet Union and the dawn of the so-called era of globalisation. Accordingly, as Engseng Ho (2006, 4-5) points out, scholars have tended to study diasporas within a master frame of globalisation. That is, a US dominated order and technology regime marked by cheap airline tickets, mobile phones and computer software for transnational communication – an economic *nom de guerre* of American triumphalism on the word of Schivelbusch (2003, 291). This has effectively cast diasporas in a “hypermodern light, emphasizing an ease of mobility and omniscience approaching what used to be said of saints and gods” (Ho 2006, 4). Even though little more than three per cent of the world’s population is, in international terms, actually on the move, and despite the fact that large-scale intercontinental migration predates this supposedly new ‘world on the move’ by centuries (see Zolberg and Benda 2001, Friedman 2005), scientists have pointed out that today’s globalisation processes are producing worldwide multiplication of diasporas (Cohen 1997). In the late 20th century, Clifford writes, “all or most communities have diasporic dimensions” (Clifford 1997, 254). Besides physical migration, this has very much to do with heightened awareness of ethnic origins and diasporic living within an ethnically ordered world – enabled and sustained by new communications technology. A most influential pioneer of diaspora research, William Safran (1991), suggested in the early 1990s that such communities could be understood as:

“expatriate minority communities”: 1) that are dispersed from an original “centre” to at least two “peripheral” places; 2) that maintain a “memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland”; 3) that “believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country”; 4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; 5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration

of this homeland; and 6) of which the group's consciousness and solidarity is "importantly defined" by this continuing relationship with the homeland (Safran 1991, 83-4; quoted in Clifford 1994, 304-5).

While largely concurring with Safran's definition, Robin Cohen notes that two further dimensions should be added: first, that diaspora members also tend to sense a common identity with co-ethnic members in other countries, and second, that diaspora conditions can also offer a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries (Cohen 1997, 180, see also Cohen 1996). The second dimension reflects Cohen's discontent with what he considers a 'victim tradition' in diaspora studies. A rich variety of diaspora communities exist in today's world, he points out. It might therefore be fruitful to distinguish between victim, labour, trade, imperial, and cultural diasporas – even though, Cohen adds, such transnational communities may also incorporate elements typical to different diaspora sub-types. Safran's definition, and Cohen's revisions to it, surely capture important aspects with regard to how a great number of people in today's world understand themselves as members of ethnically, nationally or even racially defined communities, whose places of origin deviate from their places of residence. Clearly then, this also reflects the sedentarist world order and the ethnically ordered world I have discussed in the foregoing (cf. Chapter 3).

A central problem with the above definitions is that they are formulated as lists of criteria. They therefore come close to suggesting diaspora ideal type(s), which in turn reduces other transnational social formations to mere quasi-diasporas (Clifford 1997, 248). Levy and Weingrod (2005, 7-8) contrast such 'typologist' approaches with that of another strand of diaspora scholars who are less concerned with diaspora definitions. This strand of scholars focuses more loosely on diasporic features, and are more interested in how diaspora communities challenge and contradict the institution of the modern nation-state (e.g. Hall 1990, Bhabha 1990, Gilroy 1991, 1993, Appadurai 1996, Clifford 1997). Much concerned with the dialectics of cultural hybridity or openness versus essentialism and cultural closure in postmodern identity construction, they emphasise how diaspora subjects engage in creative cultural mixing. Diaspora subjects, often closely associated with transnational movement, border-crossing experiences and social networks that transcend the state and the nation, seem to construct alternative hybrid identities, which contradict homogenising assimilation policies of those modern nation-states they now inhabit. In much recent literature, Manger and Assal observe, diaspora subjects seem to have "replaced the anti-hegemonic heroism of the earlier working class and subaltern subjects" and are now celebrated as progressive heroes of the globalisation era. "Diaspora populations and cosmopolitans are now seen as liberating agents, as heroes in the post-nationalist era. And in this lies its potential (feared or celebrated) for destabilizing the nation-state" (Manger and Assal 2006, 17). Manger and Assal warn that a dominant scientific focus on tensions between diasporas and their host countries can lead to simplistic dichotomisations of rather complex and heterogeneous social processes. Diasporas must not be mistaken as a particular kind of community, they stress, and they suggest therefore that anthropologists should pay more attention to heterogeneities and dissimilarities within diasporas. Diaspora subjects may hold different, even contradicting, opinions about their own group or what it means to be a member. This, however, does not contradict group solidarity, feelings of commitment, and identification with the same category of people.

Much concerned with this last point, Friedman (2005) argues that the hybridity often ascribed to diaspora subjects' identities relies on a confusion between socio-political organisation and cultural contents. Diaspora formation is foremost based on identification processes, he clarifies. When diaspora members establish themselves in new societies, it is quite obvious that the cultural contents – that is, the meanings people ascribe to the social categories that designate their transnational community – change. Nevertheless, the categories remain: “diasporas in order to exist must also have a definite identity. Otherwise how can we identify them? How are they to identify themselves?” (Friedman 2005, 144). Accordingly, as long as diasporas maintain group identity they are not hybrid. This would be impossible for their social reproduction. Quite the contrary, he adds, diasporas “are some of the prime historical examples of strong ethnic identity and even homogenization, endogamy, endosociality, and symbolic closure” (Friedman 2005, 145).

In this sense, diaspora identities may not be hybrid. Nevertheless, diaspora communities do take on different forms across the contemporary world. And such communities can also be marked by considerable internal heterogeneity. Diaspora subjects may hold different and even contradicting ideas about their own group, something that becomes very clear if one compares members of, let us say, the Indian diaspora in different parts of the world (e.g. Schnepel 2005). This does not mean that there is nothing but diversity or complexities to be accounted for in diaspora studies. Contents may differ, but diaspora members often have more in common than identification with their own designation. In a shrinking world marked by intensified and accelerated communication (Harvey 1989), ideas and ideologies travel much. Political means and objectives often transcend the local. And, of course, also diaspora members identify and understand themselves within the larger state systems that continue to define important aspects of their, and other people's, lives. Also, diaspora members may disagree on the cultural contents ascribed to their own group, but by exploring heterogeneities within diasporas one may also uncover important underlying conflicts, disagreements or common patterns of meaning that make such diversities intelligible. What is more, conflicts and disagreement can also contribute to the production of diaspora awareness, even transnational integration, among diaspora members who have been socially, politically as well as physically divided.

These reflections will be central to the following discussions about the Chagossian diaspora. Friedman's approach to diasporas is much in line with the more general argument I have pursued in this study. Accordingly, I shall in this chapter follow Friedman and approach 'diaspora' not as an analytical term, but broadly defined as a form of social identification taking place in the context of the larger state systems within which diasporas operate:

Diasporas are reflexes of global systemic relations. In the most general sense they can be defined as trans-state or, in the modern epoch, transnational social formations. [...] If transnational social formations can be taken as the most general category, all populations that maintain an identity X upon which a set of activities, cultural, social, and economic are elaborated, a diaspora as a subset would refer to all such organizations that maintained claims on a homeland and a historical relation of dispersal by decent from a historical homeland, real or imagined (Friedman 2005, 148).

This fits well with what I have said about the Chagossians so far. Their displacement, self-understanding and position in Mauritius are clearly related to global systemic relations. Vine has shown how Chagossians are interwoven in a history of US military expansionism (Vine 2009). I shall here be concerned with other, albeit not unrelated, global systemic relations. In the next sections I will discuss two important cases that brought their transnational community into dialogue and interaction. The first case concerns a transnational alliance struck between different international Chagossian organisations in the run-up to a compensation case in British courts. This will demonstrate how larger state systems, or the global order of sovereign nation-states, affect possibilities for their transnational community to unite with a common political agenda. In the second case we return to Chagossians' journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. This event revealed a different transnational alliance that cannot be explained with reference to issues of sovereignty and citizenship, but requires an investigation into other revealing dimensions of their diaspora.

As I noted at the point of concluding the foregoing chapter, to many Chagossians emancipation means ending their exile and leaving Mauritius for a better place. In 2002, this 'exodus' acquired a new dimension. Chagossians were then granted full UK citizenship. This has paved the way for a split within their transnational community, which is expressed in terms of two different routes: while one section stays behind and continue to militate for their right to return to the Chagos Archipelago, an increasing number of Chagossians migrate on to the UK. Among the latter, some have even reframed their origin from territorial location (the Chagos Archipelago) to the state they regard as sovereign to these islands (the UK), and now speak of 'going home to England' – even though neither they nor their ancestors have ever set foot there. In Cohen's terminology, the former section can best be described as a 'victim diaspora', who – as in the Jewish, African, Palestinian and Armenian examples – are characterised by myths of an original homeland and collective memories connected to a critical historical "break event" such as slavery, massacre or deportation. Those who migrate on to England, however, are better understood as a 'labour diaspora' produced by people emigrating in search of work (Cohen 1996, 1997). These categories cast light on important heterogeneities. My objective here, however, is not simply to classify Chagossian groups into different 'kinds' of diaspora. Instead I seek to understand the internal heterogeneities, which the above diaspora types to some extent reflect. By looking into how Chagossians conceptualise, understand and relate to these two different routes out of exile, I hope to uncover more general patterns of meaning, which may reveal something about how these heterogeneities are related. As this chapter will show, these different routes out of exile are, in fact, very much entangled. And central divisions within their transnational community also do not seem to challenge their diaspora. Quite the contrary.

7.2 MAPPING THE LIMITS OF A POLITICALLY UNIFIED CHAGOSSIAN DIASPORA

[...] the recent multiplication of diasporas, as registered in scholarship, should be seen not as a demise of the nation-state, but as a loosening of the post-World War II U.N. settlement, which sought to insert nations

into a fixed configuration of mostly new, independent states polarized across the Yalta Line between the United States and the Soviet Union. Since the dismantling of the latter, scholars have studied diasporas as part of a larger, contemporary phenomenon called globalization [where] problems of absence often find solutions in the products of Microsoft and Boeing (Ho 2006, 4; my omission).

In his explorations of the Hadrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean, Engseong Ho (2006) discusses how 20th century processes of decolonisation and the establishment of an interstate system centred around the United Nations had crucial impact on long established diasporas. “The world inhabited by the Hadrami diaspora disappeared after the Second World War,” Ho writes (2006, 305). A cultural relativist world order then emerged, which came to comprise almost two hundred equally valid nation-states. Much like Malkki’s (1992, 1995) ‘refugees’ and ‘exiles’; diasporas suddenly became anomalous social formations within this new ‘national geographic’.¹

Diasporas were now anomalous: everyone had to become a citizen of a state. In prison terminology, this was the equivalent of a universal lockdown. The opposite was also true: it was to be an age of evictions as well. [...] Unending cycles of diasporic travel and return was no longer permissible. [...] Diasporic persons became minorities within the new nations. Some were then expelled to homelands they had never known; others became permanently stateless” (Ho 2006, 306-7; my omissions).

This ‘age of evictions’ is momentous to the Chagossian diaspora. With decolonisation and the emergence of a global geography completely mapped by independent sovereign states, secure strategic overseas land became less accessible to the US. Mauritius was therefore granted independence on condition that the Chagos Archipelago would remain British. The last colony of the crumbling British Empire, now known (but not internationally recognised) as the BIOT, was then founded. Subsequently, its entire population was evicted to the new or soon-to-be independent states of Mauritius and the Seychelles. Immigration restrictions to the new territory were issued to prevent their return. And to circumvent the so-called ‘sacred trust’ laid down in article 73 of the UN Charter, that UN members shall assist colonised peoples in developing self-government, UK officials also under-communicated that Chagos islanders were British citizens – thus, in practice, turning them into evictable foreigners to the BIOT (cf. Chapter 2; see also Curtis 2003, Pilger 2006, Sand 2009b, Vine 2009). This historic dispersal then, which is the very foundation of Chagossian diasporic identification today, can be traced to the ‘age of evictions’ and the establishment of the global order described by Ho as an interstate system centred around the United Nations. As the first significant alliance between international Chagossian organisations shall reveal, this interstate system continues to affect the Chagossian diaspora in important ways.

Political alliances between Chagossian organisations in different countries are a relatively recent phenomenon. Chagossians in the Seychelles, for example, were not integrated into Chagossians’ early protests in Mauritius that led to the UK compensation in 1982. In fact, those who were evicted to the Seychelles have never received any compensation from the UK.

¹ In the same botanical terminology that Malkki links to the sedentarist ideology (cf. Chapter 3), the etymology of the term ‘diaspora’ is Greek and means the scattering of seeds (see Cohen 1997).

A first significant transnational alliance of this kind was struck after the turn of the millennium. In November 2000 the British High Court ruled in favour of a litigation spearheaded by the Mauritius-based Chagos Refugees Group, which effectively re-established Chagossians' right to return to the Chagos Archipelago.² When the CRG thereafter proceeded to launch compensation claims in UK and US courts, a situation arose whereby Chagossians in different parts of the world could sign up and support these court actions, thus becoming part of a unifying transnational Chagossian struggle with a common political agenda. The Diego Garcia Island Council (DGIC), a Chagossian organisation that relocated from Mauritius to the UK soon after Chagos islanders were awarded full British citizenship in 2002, joined in and supported the CRG's group litigations, as also did the Chagos Social Committee of the Seychelles (CSC (Seychelles)). However, matters related to the global interstate system prevented consent from the entire Chagossian diaspora.

The second Chagossian organization in Mauritius, the Chagos Social Committee dissociated from the transnational alliance. Leaders of the CSC (Mauritius) held that the only viable option for a Chagossian return and compensation was through dialogue with all state governments involved. Fearing that court actions would impede constructive negotiations, they discouraged Chagossians from letting the CRG act legally on their behalf (cf. Chapter 4). What is more, because Chagossians could never (even threaten to) bring the UK before the ICJ without the backing of a UN recognised sovereign state, they had decided to partner up with the Mauritian government and support their claims to sovereignty. Accordingly, they hold that Chagossians are Mauritians, and that suing the UK in Britain is unpatriotic as it implies recognition of British sovereignty of their homeland. For these reasons, CSC (Mauritius) refrained from joining the transnational alliance.

The division among international Chagossian organisations described here points to an important conflict within the Chagossian diaspora. This concerns the nexus between disputed sovereignty over their homeland, and multiple but unevenly distributed citizenships among diaspora members. After Mauritius and the Seychelles were declared independent in 1968 and 1976 respectively, Chagos islanders obtained citizenship for the states to which they had been evicted. Actually, Chagossians already then qualified as citizens of the UK and Colonies according to the 1948 British Nationality Act, but British officials made no effort to communicate this to them (Curtis 2003, 424-5). The first British passport issued to a Chagossian in Mauritius was in 1985, to the son of a founding CRG member (L'Express 19 Feb. 1985). By this time they had become British Dependent Territories Citizens under the British Nationality Act of 1981. The truly significant change in legislation, however, came with the British Overseas Territories Act 2002, which entitled Chagossians to full British citizenship with the right of abode in the UK (see Allen 2007). Thus, while Mauritian authorities consider

² Drawing on the Magna Carta, the lawyers successfully argued that because legislative powers could only make laws for the 'peace, order and good governance' of the colonised territory it would be unlawful to exile the population and legislate to prevent their return. As subjects of the British Crown, Chagossians were to be governed and not removed. The court invalidated the immigration restrictions that prevented the applicant from entering the BIOT. Until the UK government overruled the High Court judgement and issued new immigration restrictions by Royal Prerogative in 2004, Chagossians qualifying as British Dependent Territories Citizens (or British Overseas Territories Citizens from 2002) were no longer disallowed to return to their homeland. On the eve of the ruling, however, the Government issued an amended Immigration Ordinance to prevent Chagossians from returning to the militarised island of Diego Garcia (Gifford 2004, Allen 2007).

Chagossians internally displaced Mauritians, British authorities admit, by granting them UK citizenship, that Chagossians are UK citizens who have been exiled to other states by their own government. Many curiosities surely emerge on the borderlands of this inter-state system. For instance, if Chagossians were to return to the Chagos Archipelago today, they would hold the strangest status as both a colonised and a decolonised population (Angwawe 2001). What is more important is that most Chagossians now hold either dual Mauritian-UK or Seychellois-UK citizenships. And because Chagossians do not aim for self-determination, the unresolved question of whether their homeland will be Mauritian or British in the future continues to affect their diaspora in important ways.³

The first thing to note is that the position held by CSC (Mauritius), who dissociated from the transnational alliance, is incompatible with the interests of their wider transnational community. First, Chagossians in the Seychelles understand this as another case of the neglect of their group. They fear that if the UK renounced sovereignty to Mauritius, they would be treated as foreigners in their historical homeland since they do not possess Mauritian passports. During my fieldwork, CSC (Seychelles) leaders officially announced that they considered the president of the Mauritius-based CRG as head of their organisation too. In my interviews, however, it turned out that their support was not unconditional. Recalling how Chagossians in the Seychelles had never benefited from any UK compensation, the leader of the Seychellois organisation regretted that “they got something we didn’t”, and emphasised that they would support the CRG “only as long as they work for the benefit of all Chagossians.” That is, as long as the sovereignty issue is left aside or corresponds with the UK stance on the matter. Second, also the Diego Garcia Island Council reject the position of the CSC (Mauritius). As a UK-based organisation that not only supports Chagossians who migrate from Mauritius and the Seychelles, but also identifies Chagossian emancipation with emigration to England, the DGIC disfavours the Mauritian part of their dual citizenship.

Transnational Chagossian solidarity thus conflicts with Mauritius’ claims to sovereignty over their homeland. It could therefore be wise of Mauritian authorities to assure Chagossians abroad that immigration restrictions to the Chagos Archipelago, in case of retrocession, would not apply to those who do not possess Mauritian passports. However, the picture is more complicated. It could appear from the above that the entire Chagossian diaspora would not be foreign to their homeland only if sovereignty was retained by the British colonial power. But as we have seen, not all Chagossians are entitled to UK passports either (cf. Chapter 4). The British Overseas Territories Act 2002 (Section 6) specifies that persons born on or after 26 April 1969 and before 1 January 1983 to a woman who at the time of her birth was a citizen of the UK and Colonies by virtue of her birth in the BIOT became British citizens (BOTA 2002). In other words, eligibility for UK citizenship cuts right across Chagossian nuclear families. This of course has many consequences. With regard to Chagossian understandings of future repatriation, the alternative of UK sovereignty excludes parts of the Chagossian diaspora too.

Due to the on-going sovereignty dispute over their homeland, the unequal distribution of citizenships among their diaspora members, and because Chagossians do not aim for self-determination, a Chagossian diaspora unified with a common political agenda is unlikely. In either future scenario, some diasporic Chagossians can expect to be excluded as foreigners to

³ Regarding Chagossians and their prospects for self-determination, see Tong (2011).

their historic homeland. As long as the question of sovereignty is unsettled, at least, tensions within their transnational community are likely to prevail. These tensions result from a global inter-state system that both produced diasporas and turned them into anomalous entities. In this system, immigration restrictions typically follow state citizenship. Faced with these matters, the Chagossian diaspora is divided on the question of sovereignty to their homeland as they fear they will be excluded from a future return. A transnational Chagossian community united in a common political struggle therefore remains complicated.

7.3 CHAGOSSIAN DIASPORISATION

An important point to make here is that the fact that international Chagossian organisations disagree politically does not contradict the emergence of Chagossian diaspora consciousness. Quite the contrary. People identify as ‘Chagossian’ even though they ascribe different cultural contents to that category. Indeed, the period discussed above was marked by an increase in transnational communication between Chagossians. This can be understood as processes of diasporisation (Basok 2003). If the noun ‘diaspora’ refers to dispersal of something that was originally localised (i.e. from Greek meaning ‘scattering of seeds’), the more dynamic term ‘diasporisation’ describes contemporary activities that contribute to localising and uniting something that has been (or is said to have been) scattered, i.e. activities that concern the production and reproduction of diaspora consciousness and solidarity. From this perspective, heterogeneities and disagreements do not necessarily pose a threat to diasporas. Instead, diversities within can in important ways contribute to diasporas’ social reproduction: diaspora subjects may, for example, be expected to ‘take sides’ in conflicts (Schlee 2004). Since diaspora talk is also constitutive of diaspora communities, such disputes also contribute to raising diaspora awareness.

The more recent wave of Chagossian migration to the UK has, in this respect, become very central. During my fieldwork, a large number of Chagossians left, or planned to leave, Mauritius and the Seychelles to live and work in the UK. Not least because this migration pattern was a recent trend, many migrants maintained strong connections with families and friends back in Mauritius. If Chagossians in Mauritius and the Seychelles had little contact before, they now have good chances of meeting in West Sussex County, particularly around Crawley near the UK entry point of Gatwick Airport where many have obtained work. As the examples below will confirm, in the UK, like in Mauritius and the Seychelles, the sovereignty of their homeland was a source of debate too. Alliances between international Chagossian organisations, and especially the disputes between them, provoked vivid discussions among Chagossians here as well. With increased migration and the internationalisation of Chagossian politics, both transnational communication as well as communication about the transnational, intensified. This can be understood in terms of intensification of activities that contribute to raising Chagossian diaspora awareness. In other words, diasporisation in practice.

In regard to such processes, Chagossians’ journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 was indubitably also a highly important event. Although some complained that the considerable amount of money spent on this voyage had been better spent on poor Chagossians who struggle

for food and proper shelter, most Chagossians were very enthusiastic about this journey. The important point is that every Chagossian appeared to have an opinion, and often a strong one, about this event, and these opinions were loaded by hopes and strong emotions. As a Chagossian woman enthusiastically explained after the leaders of the two rivalling Chagossian organisations in Mauritius embarked *Mauritius Trochetia* hand in hand: “now that Olivier and Fernand work together you don’t know what they can achieve!” Preparations for this journey were also marked by tense debates, many of which made headlines in local media (cf. Chapter 5). What seriously sparked these debates was the passenger list. How the one hundred cabin beds initially reserved for Chagossians on board the *Mauritius Trochetia* should be distributed among their transnational community triggered a series of heated disputes between leaders of international Chagossian organisations. This, of course, did not go unnoticed by their members. If, as Cohen (1997, 180) points out, a central diaspora feature is identification with co-ethnic members in other states, then this was indeed diaspora in the making.

In charge of these decisions was the CRG. In the wake of their favourable court ruling in 2000, the Mauritius-based organisation had requested and pressed for this journey to materialise – hopefully on 3 November the following year, which the day when Chagossians mourn their dead. The UK government then agreed in principle, but arrangements were slow. US authorities were opposed, and the attacks on Pentagon and the World Trade Centre in September 2001 became reason to refuse it (Dayell 22 Nov. 2001). In 2002, Chagossians declined a UK invitation for 100 Chagossians to journey to the Chagos Archipelago. This was not only because Diego Garcia was excluded, but also because the UK government would only allow Chagossian passengers they approved of to go. Following Chagossian objections that it was not the business of British authorities to be dictating to them the names of the people to make the trip, CRG leader Olivier Bancoult was, according to himself, given the *carte blanche* by UK Under-Secretary Bill Rammell to make these decisions and formulate the criteria for the people that were to be included (BBC News 30 June 2002; Choonea, *Le Mauricien*, 16 Feb. 2006).

During my fieldwork I was informed that the CRG had arrived at the following three criteria: as far as possible they would (1) seek to invite one member of each Chagossian family, (2) give priority to Chagossian ‘natives’ (i.e. people who were born in the Chagos Archipelago) and to (3) ‘those who had contributed to the struggle’. From these principles, the CRG distributed the vessel’s 100 beds accordingly: 15 places were delegated to the CSC (Seychelles), 10 beds were offered CSC (Mauritius), and, on account of the fact that most Chagos islanders had supported the CRG since the favourable court judgement in 2000, they reserved 75 cabin beds for members of their own organisation.⁴

These decisions did not pass without controversy. First, their rivalling organisation in Mauritius, the CSC (Mauritius), refused to accept the ten cabin beds they were offered as a ‘symbolic gesture’ in a ‘spirit of generosity’ by the CRG, and claimed the right to dispose of 50 cabin beds on behalf of their members. However, after direct consultations with Mauritius’ Prime Minister, the organisation consented to the initial plan (Choonea, *Le Mauricien*, 16 Feb. 2006; *Le Dimanche* 26 Feb. 2006; *Week-End* 4 Mar. 2006). More radical was the reaction of the Diego Garcia Island Council in the UK, which was not offered a single cabin bed. On behalf

⁴ See Olla, *Le Matinal*, 16 Feb. 2006; *Le Mauricien* 25 Feb. 2006.

of Chagossians who had migrated to England, the DGIC demanded the right to distribute 18 places. When this was rejected, the DGIC leader addressed a letter to the British Prime Minister, suggesting that the journey should be cancelled if Chagossians in England, who contribute to the UK economy, were not to be on the passenger list. Needless to say, this move was extremely unpopular with all other Chagossians. Eventually, the DGIC leader withdrew his demands in public, ending up without the authority to distribute any cabin beds among Chagossian migrants to the UK.⁵

Before the demands were withdrawn, however, a most revealing discussion between leaders and lawyers representing different Chagossian organisations was broadcast on Mauritian radio.⁶ A central question in respect to the Chagossian diaspora then emerged as topic of discussion: What would be the criterion by which an organisation could claim to represent the Chagossians? For the two Mauritius-based organisations the answer was simple: the only institution outside their own organisations where Chagossians could be democratically elected to a fill a post was the Ilois Welfare Fund (IWF). The IWF was established in 1999 and emerged from the dismantled Ilois Trust Fund, which was founded in 1982 for the purpose of disbursing the UK compensation awarded to Chagossians the same year. However, the IWF is a Mauritian governmental institution, whose defined purpose is to integrate Chagossians into Mauritian society. Moreover, the IWF Board consists of a chairperson, seven government-appointed representatives, and seven elected representatives from the Chagossian community, and elections to fill these posts take place in Mauritius only. Hence, the UK based DGIC could not agree to this criterion, but they lacked any reasonable alternative, and therefore, through this broadcast *tête-à-tête*, Mauritius was confirmed as the official political centre of the Chagossian diaspora.

The two examples discussed above demonstrate important diversities, disputes and disagreements within the Chagossians' transnational community. That such diversities and disagreements pose a threat to Chagossian diaspora awareness is, however, hard to argue. Such disputes do not challenge the Chagossian diaspora, but rather contribute to its social reproduction.

There is, however, a significant difference between the two cases. While the first transnational alliance that was struck in the context of the compensation claims excluded the CSC (Mauritius), the journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 excluded the UK-based DGIC. This indicates that the latter coalition was founded on criteria other than sovereignty and citizenship. In order to understand this exclusion, we will need to look into the meanings Chagossians ascribe to different sections of their transnational community. This will be the focus of the following investigation.

⁵ In December 2007 the DGIC established the Diego Garcian Society (DGS) to campaign for their right to visit Diego Garcia. A group of 6 Chagossians, including the DGIC leader, were able to go on a brief trip in November 2008. A second journey for their group was arranged in Jan. 2010.

⁶ See *Le Mauricien* 8 Mar. 2006; *Week-End* 12 Mar. 2006; *L'Express* 15 Mar. 2006; *Le Mauricien* 24 Mars 2006.

7.4 *ONE DIASPORA AND TWO HOMELANDS*

In the theoretical outline to this chapter we saw that diaspora definitions stress the role of a real or imagined historic homeland to such communities. This, along with the inter-national political geographies that curtail the likelihood of a Chagossian diaspora unified under a common political agenda, can be understood as other expressions of the sedentarist ideology and the ethnically ordered world that I have discussed in the foregoing (see Chapter 3). The Chagossian case demonstrates that these inter-national political geographies can have outlandish effects on how a homeland is understood. The homeland is indeed crucial to how Chagossians identify. During my fieldwork, however, members of their diaspora were speaking of two different homelands beyond Mauritius – even though no one disputed that they all came from the same islands.

When talking about their homeland, Chagossians usually refer to the islands in the Chagos Archipelago. In rich botanical metaphors, they explain that this is where they and/or their parents and grandparents and so on were born (cf. Chapter 5). Politically speaking, however, this homeland is not a state. It is a *de facto* colonized area, whose disputed political borders extend the local geography. Especially after the awarding of full British citizenship in 2002, some diasporic Chagossians have come to re-interpret their place of birth in terms of sovereignty, and thereby extend the borders of their homeland to include the UK. Hence, some Chagossians now formulate migration to England as a homecoming, even though most of them, including their ancestors, never set foot there. Thus, Chagossians who consider themselves exiled in Mauritius now identify two homelands beyond the host state. That is, the Chagos Archipelago and the UK (often referred to as ‘England’).

The Chagossian diaspora, then, is clearly marked by heterogeneities. However, the aim of this inquiry is not simply to demonstrate that important diversities exist within the Chagossian diaspora (as within any diaspora), but also to seek an explanation to how this heterogeneity can be understood. Only then is it possible to comprehend why the DGIC was excluded from the pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago. In what follows, I shall introduce Anne and Thomas, two Chagossians whose circumstances of life have long been quite comparable, but whose ideas of ‘home’ conflict along the lines described above.

7.4.1 HOME TO THE CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

Ann was born in the Salomon islands in the Chagos Archipelago in 1945. Twenty-two years old, she travelled to Port Louis to give birth in a proper hospital. This was less than a year before Mauritius became independent in March 1968. She was alone, in the latest stage of her pregnancy, and she did not know the city. “I didn’t know where the hospital was,” she explained to me. Her condition soon turned critical. “In the end I just had to pay a woman to help me [with the delivery].” After she had given birth, she went to the ticket office in Port Louis to arrange for their return to the Chagos Archipelago. With much regret, she remembered the words of the man at the counter: “The islands have closed. You don’t have the right to return.” All of a sudden, then, she found herself stranded – alone with an infant, homeless, unemployed and with hardly any money. When her brothers arrived in 1972, it had passed five

years since she last had any contact with her family. The following year, when her parents and the rest of her family were evicted to Mauritius, she was introduced to her five new siblings. She then also learnt that her younger sister had passed away and was now buried back in the Chagos. During my fieldwork in 2006, Ann was still living in the slum districts around the cemeteries on the outskirts of Port Louis. For a number of years she had worked as cemetery cleaner for the Port Louis municipality. Now, at the age of 61, she joined some of her family members fishing with a small open boat to earn an income.

Ever since she left the counter without any return tickets, one of Ann's strongest wishes has been to return home to the Chagos Archipelago. Foremost, she wants to tend the grave of her younger sister. Like most Chagossians, she considers their community sacrificed for Mauritius' independence. For these reasons, she has long been an active member of the CRG and follows Chagossian politics closely. Recently, one of her sons had migrated to find work in England. Just like him, Ann is now entitled to full UK citizenship. Her daughter, however, is not. She lived upstairs in Ann's small house, unemployed and struggling with her male partner who had developed an addiction to heavy drugs. Ann considered herself too old to go to the UK. Besides, she explained, she is not English because she does not speak English. Instead, she hoped to be able to return to live in the Chagos Archipelago where her sister was buried. Her other son had also quite recently left Mauritius, but he was now in the Chagos Archipelago. Along with two others, he was in 2006 among the first Chagossians ever to obtain work on the US military base on Diego Garcia. To Ann, the diasporic situation was far from positive. It was marked by a profound sense of absence.

In 2006, however, Ann was very happy to be able to travel along with many members of the Chagossian diaspora to the Chagos Archipelago. In the morning, shortly before she was to embark on this landmark journey, I conducted an interview with her at her house. She then formulated her situation, and that of the Chagossian diaspora, as follows:

The Chagossians were separated. Some went to the Seychelles. I haven't met all of them, but the day before yesterday I met some, and now we are going [back to Chagos] together. Our situation is very critical. Our family was divided between Mauritius and the Seychelles, and with the right to go to England we split up again. Some have gone to Switzerland, and some have also gone to Agalega. [...] Today everyone lives in different places. Because of that, all the people who used to form a family now constitute branches. [Pointing to the different fingers on her left hand] One goes here, one goes there, one there – it's branches because we are not one. We are not together, we remain separated. Me, here. We are scattered like branches. How do you get from one branch to the other? – No! You cannot cross from one branch to the other! You have to search for a road where you are able to meet those persons. But we remain on our branches. The tree has been uprooted, and today all the branches have dried out. They hang down, and it is only the wood that remains. We are like this. The British uprooted that tree. They made it dry out. All the leaves have fallen. We are like this, the Chagossians are like this – I am like this.

During the interview, a clock hanging on the wall suddenly emitted a loud ringing sound. “Ahh, Bernadette! Do you know Bernadette – a Seychellois?” she asked, “This is a souvenir from

meeting her. Bernadette is an *Ilois* from the Seychelles. We are timed [i.e. synchronised] together. When she went to Bombay she gave me this present. One for me, one for her, and one for Olivier [the CRG leader]. When it rings, I think of her. It rings in all three houses at the same time.”

After coming back from the journey to the Chagos she explained that she had very mixed feelings. She was very happy to have been able to see her homeland again, in particular to visit the graveyard where her sister had been buried. She had also been able to meet her son who works on the military base on Diego Garcia. To return to Mauritius, however, she described as a new sadness (*sagren*). On the way back to Mauritius she could not stop crying, she said. A Chagossian friend had then tried to comfort her by remarking that she should be happy because, unlike most Chagossians, her son had actually been able to return to live in the homeland. But her friend missed the point, she said. It reminded her of the initial separations from her home and her family. Now Ann was leaving the Chagos for the second time, and this time her son was staying behind. She did not know when she would see him again.

7.4.2 HOME TO ENGLAND

During my fieldwork in Mauritius in 2004 one of my very close informants, Thomas, was seriously planning on leaving for England. In 1968 he had arrived from the Chagos to Mauritius together with his mother who was in need of health care. And just like Ann, he and his mother were denied return tickets after the medical consultation. Like many evicted Chagossian men, Thomas obtained work as a docker, loading sugar onboard cargo vessels in Port Louis harbour. But he lost his job in 1980 when mechanisation took over with the opening of the major sugar terminal. At the time of my fieldwork Thomas was living in a government supported low-income housing area just south of the capital, housing financed with money received after the UK compensation in 1982. Besides a small pension, he supported his wife and six children by going fishing in a small open boat and selling some of the catch on the local market. He complained that his house was too small, and he said that he could not afford to send his children to school every day. He explained this, and many of his other problems, with reference to discrimination and stigmatisation of Chagossians in Mauritius, claiming also that Mauritians had sent him to prison twice as an innocent man.

Time and again Thomas stressed that he did not belong in Mauritius. “This is not my government,” he repeatedly said, often adding that “I am outside in Mauritius.” He drew a sharp line between people on dry-land Mauritius on the one hand, and himself as an independent ‘man from the sea’ (i.e. a self-employed fisherman from the Chagos Archipelago) on the other. Accordingly, he proclaimed with some pride that he was not dependent on the host state, and that by living like this Mauritians could not easily exploit him. Having suffered poverty and poverty-related difficulties most of his life, Thomas’ major aim now was to end what he formulated as his ‘exile in Mauritius’. He had accordingly named his small open fishing-boat *Exodus*. During his youngest son’s birthday celebration, he elaborated on why he wanted to leave for England:

I am not Mauritian. I gave my land [the Chagos Archipelago] for the security of the world. I like my [British] government. I and my family want to have a life in England. I'd like to change my life. The British [government] is my government – the government of the Chagossian people. [The Chagos] was a very, very beautiful country. They took it for the security of the world, for protection and security in the Indian Ocean. The terrorist people do not know the meaning of life. I have sacrificed my country for security and protection. I sacrificed my entire world! But I have no protection, no security! The most important values in the world are security and liberty. But where is my security? Where is my liberty?

Thomas' understanding of Chagossian history and the importance of Diego Garcia in global political affairs was very elaborate: "There are five B's in the world," he explained: "Blair, Bush, [Mauritius' PM] Berenger, [CRG leader] Bancoult and Bin Laden." As a Chagossian evicted for the construction of a US-UK military base on Diego Garcia, and for these governments' proclaimed 'war on terror', he saw himself as having made a considerable sacrifice for world security. Although he regretted that he was left with nothing in return, he was, contrary to most Chagossians, for these reasons opposed to Chagossian repatriation to the Chagos Archipelago. He even regarded going back as a danger to the Chagossian community. The Chagos islands had changed radically since the evictions, he explained. The land had 'died' after the US base was established – and so, apparently, had his metaphorical attachment to it:

I say: change your talk [CRG leader] Olivier. The country is for security, not return. The country is very dangerous. It's the Bermuda Triangle. The country is dead – radioactivity! All the fish are dead. The sun has gone. It is black. [...] My country has no root, no life, no people's roots. It's just coral and sand, and no rocks. My country is weak; not like Mauritius, which is hard [i.e. volcanic].

Thomas not only redefined his birthplace in radical opposition to how Chagossians normally represent their homeland as paradise (cf. Chapter 5), he also reformulated Chagossians' place in world history. While most Chagossians consider themselves living away from home, fighting a bitter struggle for their right to return to their roots and their 'natal soil', Thomas saw himself not as rooted but *en route*. One day he explained to me that he had had a horrible nightmare, dreaming that he was falling from a big rock. The day before, Thomas and I had talked about visiting Le Morne. Le Morne is a steep cliff on Mauritius' South West coast from which 19th century runaway African slaves are said to have jumped to escape captivity by approaching armed troops sent to convey the message that slavery had been abolished. Thomas was both excited and anxious about going there, but we nevertheless went. Apparently he found what he had suspected: "It is the same rock," he said. He took his dream as a confirmation of his African origin, and concluded, "I am exodus." Now, by going to England, he said he was about to complete the fifth and final exodus of the Chagossian people: mainland Africa – Madagascar – Mauritius – Chagos Archipelago – Mauritius – England.

After Chagossians were granted full British citizenship in 2002, he saw the opportunity to go "home" to his "proper country" and his "true government". "Chagos has the British flag," he explained. Now "the British government has opened the door". After he had financed his

British passport, of which he was very proud, he sold his apartment to afford a one-way ticket to England. He left his wife and children at his sister's place, and hoped to be able to save parts of the UK social service allowances to bring his family over at a later point. Back in Norway after my first stint of fieldwork, I received a phone call from the UK. Without any further introduction a familiar voice announced: "Steffen, I'm inside!" Thomas had migrated to England. However, to keep contact with his family back in Mauritius, he soon accumulated a £500 phone bill and was thrown out of the Bed and Breakfast where he was accommodated. One year later, in December 2005, I visited Thomas in Crawley. By then, two of his sons had joined him and were now helping to save money to cover the tickets for the rest of the family. Just now, his wife was on the way, so we went to nearby Gatwick airport to welcome her. Being Mauritian, she was not in possession of a UK passport, so the family was only hoping that she would be allowed to stay. Thomas then called his children through a payphone to tell them that their mother had landed safely. Until then I had not experienced Thomas much emotionally moved, but this moment was different. Having hung up on his crying daughter he sadly explained: "I have 'exod' my family. My children have no father in Mauritius. I am happy that my wife is here. But I'm not free because my children are still there." Elaborating on the separation, he concluded:

Exile means 'not yet here' [in England]. [CRG leader] Olivier should tell the people to come here. The door is open! But he is closing the door! His government is the British government, but he is opposing his true government. Angie [an elder Chagossian woman well respected for her militant past who migrated from Mauritius to the UK] understands change, but all the people with Olivier Bancoult – they don't understand change. The world is turning [demonstrating by pedalling his fingers 'forward'], but Olivier wants to turn the world around the other way [fingers pedalling in reverse]. We who have come to England do not accept a return to the Chagos. It's a good spirit [pedalling fingers forwards], they come here instead. Don't go to the Chagos! [Pedalling fingers backwards again.]

Thomas repeatedly used this body language when he spoke of returning to the Chagos. He also did this when he talked about past events and things he remembered. "*Mo retour mo lespri*," he then often repeated, a phrase he translated to "I return back my mind", and accompanied with finger-pedalling in reverse. In this body language, then, going to England meant going forward and into the future. But as Thomas now found himself separated from family members back in Mauritius, he greatly opposed Chagossians' court proceedings against the British government and those Chagossians who wanted to return to the Chagos Archipelago. At the time, rumours in Crawley had it that the legal proceedings could provoke the UK government to 'close the door' by putting an end to the issuing of further British passports.

7.4.3 THE DOORS OUT OF EXILE

At first glance, Ann and Thomas' accounts of their homelands and their contemporary situations appear wide apart. How they describe the Chagos Archipelago differs considerably,

and they literally identify two different Chagossian homelands beyond Mauritius. While Ann refers to the Chagos Archipelago as her homeland, Tomas places his homeland in England. Even so, the two have very much in common. With regard to their background, they are about the same age. They were born in the Chagos, and were both denied return tickets after coming to Mauritius for health services in the late 1960s. Both Ann and Thomas have no formal education and have lived under very poor conditions with their families on the outskirts of Port Louis most of their lives. Both are dual Mauritian-UK citizens, but identify strongly as ‘Chagossians’. They express strong historical connections to the Chagos Archipelago, and are also much concerned about the wider Chagossian community. Both consider themselves away from home in Mauritius, and relate their sufferings to their historical displacement. As the examples also reveal, Ann and Thomas alike have struggled, and continue to struggle, with issues of absence and separation from close family members.

It is worth emphasising here that the issues of absence and separation is a most central concern to Chagossians, who routinely conceptualise their situation in terms of ‘uprooting’, ‘sadness’ and ‘misery’, as described in Chapter 5. The cases of Ann and Thomas show that these matters not only refer to their historical evictions, but also to contemporary experiences of diasporic living. This aspect of diasporas has been underexplored. According to Ho (2006), with ‘globalisation’ as a master framework for diaspora studies, experiences of absence have effectively disappeared from scrutiny. “While globalization denies absence by rushing around to cover it up, diasporas do the opposite. They acknowledge absence and chronically explore its meanings and markings” (Ho 2006, 4). The above examples confirm how absence and (memories of earlier) separation are at the core of the Chagossian diaspora. Clearly, Ann and Thomas do not celebrate the new time-space compressing communications technology as a solution.

It is important to recognise that, although Ann and Thomas place their homeland in different parts of the world, it is in the Mauritian context that their understandings of homeland and displacement have acquired the meanings that have become so important to them. That senses of attachment and belonging to place gain relevance in contexts of displacement and brutal separation is by no means extraordinary. My point is that although the portrayals and geographies of home differ in Ann and Thomas’ representations, their aims and understandings have been generated within the same socio-economic context. That is, a context which has led many Chagossians to identify Mauritius as a place of exile and non-belonging, and where understandings of emancipation accordingly have become closely associated with emigration. If the Chagos Archipelago is foremost a place that is *different* from Mauritius (see Chapter 5), then the idea of ending displacement can be no less prevalent than the wish to return home. This may appear as two sides of the same coin, but the point is that it is the urge to end their displacement, and not where to go to do it, which is the basic and highly potent idea that both Ann and Thomas share.

Chagossians often talk about leaving Mauritius. While many do in fact move away, different factors also prevent people from leaving. The degree to which Chagossians are socially and economically integrated to Mauritius differs, of course. So even if they could, not everyone would leave. The more impoverished may have less to leave behind, but they often lack the capital (such as money, education, language skills and resourceful social contacts) to get them started. Also awareness of this fact prevented people from migrating. Why

Chagossians do not migrate in even larger numbers is mostly due to their financial situation and, of course, restrictions on immigration. People, and especially those of a less resourceful background, are not as mobile as capital, commodities, information and ideas in this globalising world ‘on the move’ (e.g. Massey 1994). Chagossian politics and their juridical proceedings have long revolved around their right of abode in the Chagos Archipelago. This is a matter of great importance to Ann, whose first obstacle to return to her homeland is a matter of BIOT immigration laws. For Thomas, the awarding of full British citizenship in 2002 became a solution. His economic situation, along with the fact that his closest family members are not entitled to British passports, however prevent him from ‘becoming free’ in the sense of living together with his family in England. When describing how established diasporas became subject to a ‘universal lockdown’ with the institutionalisation of the post-WW2 international geography, Engseng Ho deliberately invoked a prison terminology (Ho 2006, 306). Strikingly comparable, Chagossians formulate their place within the same order by metaphors of ‘locks’ and ‘doors’. When referring to the immigration restrictions issued by the British government to prevent entry to the BIOT in 1971 and again in 2004, many Chagossians explained that the UK ‘closed the door’ to the Chagos. Thomas, who embraced the awarding of UK citizenship, accordingly explained that the UK government then ‘opened the door’ to England. However, he feared that they would ‘close the door’ again if Chagossians continue to protest in order to have the other door, the door to the Chagos Archipelago, reopened. While these doors refer to British immigration restrictions, their keys are seen as fragile and subject to constant negotiation. Chagossian history has proven how suddenly, and very undemocratically, the British government can change the locks on these doors. From a Chagossian perspective, these are the doors out of exile. That these doors are open is the precondition for any Chagossian exodus.

Chagossians’ senses of non-belonging in Mauritius, and their wishes to escape exile and end their displacement, are much related to having long formed part of the poorest section of the Mauritian population and having been stigmatised as inferior and uncivilised in that society. When granted full British citizenship in 2002, the stage was set for new ways of self- and other-identification. Officially Chagossians were then fully recognised as British citizens, which in Mauritius meant citizens of their host-states’ former colonial power – a state serving as an important model for Mauritian development, and a nation typically imagined as ‘more developed’ (cf. Chapter 6). Thomas welcomed and embraced this form of identification, but Ann did not. Yet others had different ways of coping with it: some youngsters, for example, would not tell anyone, because it revealed their economic background and at the same time put them in a position where they could be tricked into being ‘loved for their passports’ only. The examples of Ann and Thomas clearly demonstrate diversities within the Chagossian diaspora. But as we have seen, even in these examples there are many similarities. In this investigation I shall also be concerned with how this heterogeneity can be understood. I will therefore now turn to trace what is best described as a (neo)colonial discourse between the UK government and Chagossians and their supporters. In light of this discourse, it is possible to see how the two cases are entangled. Their ideas may be different, but they are far from disconnected.

7.5 *CHAGOSSIANS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT IN (NEO)COLONIAL DISCOURSE*

Chagossian legal history has left many Chagossians and international supporters with the impression that court justice hardly applies to UK and US authorities. Parallel to long-term (and eventually unsuccessful) proceedings within the legal systems of these states, they have therefore continued to put pressure on all governments involved by exposing Chagossian history and voicing how their community has suffered as a result of the displacement. In short, and in accordance with much of what has been said throughout this thesis, a most central and frequent argument goes as follows: Chagossians are natives born in the Chagos Archipelago just like their ancestors who were buried in the soil of that land. Once they lived a settled life on those islands. For generations Chagossians worked the local coconut plantations and tended their private vegetable gardens, and hence brought these previously uninhabited islands into cultivation. During two centuries of habitation in the environment of these remote and isolated atolls, they developed their own distinct culture and created a place of belonging. Because they were forcefully uprooted from the place to which they are very much attached, Chagossians have found it difficult, if not impossible, to re-settle and strike new roots in (the soil of) another land, and they continue to suffer as a result of this.

In an anthropological perspective, this perfectly conforms to Malkki's sedentarist ideology (Malkki 1992, 1995; cf. Chapters 3 and 5). But Chagossians and their supporters also ground this argument in a wider juridical language. They draw on an extensive repertoire of legal sources including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the ancient British law of the Magna Carta, which lend authority to the sedentarist logics. Chagossian organisations have long collaborated with legal representatives who frame their arguments in comparable ways. While contesting the legality of the 2004 BIOT immigration ordinances before the UK House of Lords in 2008, for example, the central Chagossian applicant argued in accordance with the Magna Carta that the right of abode was so sacred and fundamental that the British monarch under no circumstances could remove it (Law Society, 2008). Chagossians are not unaware of the general contents of such laws, but typically they subsume them under the concept 'the law', and interchangeably refer to this in terms of what they call their 'fundamental right', 'birth-right', 'basic right' or 'sacred right' to explain that 'to live on the land where one is born' is a fundamental legal principle which they, as an uprooted population, have been deprived of. This principle is a sedentarist one, which connects Chagossians' extensive imagery of roots, soil, motherland, culture and so on to British and international law, and thereby vests the botanical metaphors of rootedness with authority from international legal institutions.

Chagossians' sedentarist argument does not fall out of the blue. We have seen that Chagossians' homeland is a centre of multiple disputes and that different parties work to monopolise meaning onto these islands (cf. Chapter 4). Chagossians and their supporters are therefore very much occupied with countering the voices of others. Of particular concern in this respect is the strategic representation of the Chagos Archipelago and its inhabitants that was deliberately invented by the British Foreign Office from the 1960s. Because Chagossian political argumentation can be seen as a response and objection to the colonial government's

strategic representations, and because British authorities continue to follow up this critique in related ways, one can arguably claim that a (neo)colonial discourse is in the making.⁷

This discourse revolves around the relationship between Chagossians and the Chagos Archipelago, and springs out of the British government's claim that Chagossians did not belong there in the sense of not being a settled 'native' population. Chagossian political claims are framed by this discourse, and therefore unintentionally also confirm central elements of colonial thought when they object to the coloniser's version of their own past. I need to point out here that it has already been convincingly argued that according to the most common definitions Chagossians do qualify as an indigenous population (see Vine 2003). My aim here is not to put this under scrutiny. Another point to make is that juridical definitions, laws and legal bodies do not exist outside history. They are part and product of social realities, and also contribute to (re)producing such realities. Here I shall contextualise these arguments by tracing a general (neo)colonial discourse, which has significant implications for how Chagossians have come to understand and relate to their transnational community.

From the late 1990s, secret official documents entering the public domain revealed how British authorities in the 1960s and 70s deliberately worked to silence and redefine the Chagossian expulsions by representing the inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago as migrant contract workers (Marimootoo 1997, Curtis 2003, Pilger 2006, Sand 2009b, Vine 2009). In 1970, the Head of the UK Foreign Office Pacific Dependent Territories Department wrote:

We would not wish it to become general knowledge that some of the inhabitants have lived on Diego Garcia for at least two generations and could, therefore, be regarded as 'belongers.' We shall therefore advise ministers [...] to say there is only a small number of contract labourers from the Seychelles and Mauritius engaged with work in the copra plantations on the island (cited in Curtis 2003, 422-3).

To circumvent responsibilities drawn up in the UN Charter, and to escape related ethno-national objections, the UK government reduced publicity to the minimum and reframed the operation in terms of economic relations. British officials were well aware that if Chagossians were to be regarded as a 'permanent' or 'settled' population, they could qualify for rights under United Nations Article 73 that would oblige the UK to promote their well-being and to assist them in developing self-government. In the words of another British Foreign Office official a few years earlier, their problem was that "to recognise that there are permanent inhabitants will imply that there is a population whose democratic rights will have to be safeguarded" (Brook-Turner, Colonial Office Memorandum, 1966; cited in Curtis 2003, 421). If the inhabitants of these islands could instead be presented as a floating population of migrant contract workers from Mauritius and the Seychelles, then the mass cancelling of employment, the ejection from people's homes and the expulsions of the archipelago's entire population could presumably pass without much consideration.

Chagossians and their network of supporters do not question the legal inequalities between 'permanent inhabitants' and 'migrant contract labourers', which opened the possibility for the UK government to go ahead with the operation. Instead, they object that the

⁷ Since the BIOT remains a *de facto* British colony, I here use the formulation '(neo)colonial'.

UK government deliberately classified Chagos islanders in the wrong category: Chagossians were not migrants, but settled people. Hence, in their efforts to re-qualify Chagossians for the UN rights that the Foreign Office set out to circumvent, critics unintentionally also confirm these distinctions. By ethno-national sedentarist rhetoric, very often grounded in arguments of Foreign Office officials' own words, critics accuse British authorities of 'stealing a nation' (Pilger 2006) and object that the UK government has turned the evictees into 'unpeople' (Curtis 2003) or "non-people [...] merely people living there temporarily – migrant workers and other transients" (BBC News, 3 Nov. 2000). No doubt, these critics have contributed immensely to giving exposure to Chagossian history and the illegalities committed to them. However, a central element of these Chagossian discourses is that when critics object (and rightly so) to British officials' racist indifference, the people subject to the racism also tend to be exoticised as 'natives.'

When voicing the plight of the Chagossians to international audiences, supporters highlight that Chagossians are 'natives'. Today Chagossians born in the Chagos Archipelago also self-identify as natives (*natif*). Natives (from Lat.: *nativus* i.e. 'innate' or 'produced by birth'), however, is a concept heavily vested with Eurocentric (neo)colonial ideas, which connote far more than simply people being born in a particular place. One could argue that if the concept now has a ring of romanticism to cultural relativists in the West, it also exposes certain ignorance with respect to the political history of Western colonial expansionism. During colonial times 'natives' was a general label ascribed to inhabitants of different non-European places where Europeans held political power. Imagined to be less civilised, natives were placed somewhat behind Europeans along an imaginary (often racist) scale of human development. Such Eurocentric ideas professed that 'natives' were less able to take care of themselves and needed, like children, to be brought up by their civilised colonial masters. This has served to legitimise colonial conquest, exploitation and domination in many parts of the world. But 'natives' did not disappear with decolonisation. Ideas of exotic native others is now big business, which with great force continues to be reproduced through the global tourist industry (e.g. Urry 2002, Schnepel and Schnepel 2011) and western practices of literary representation. Regarding the latter, western scholars have often neglected the political history of the non-European people they have studied (Wolf 1982). Instead, distant people, their cultural practices, and even their ways of thinking, have been analysed and represented in terms of the particular natural surroundings of the (supposedly bounded) places they inhabit. It may be instructive to ask, "What does it mean to be a native of some place if it means something more, or other, than being from that place?" Addressing problems of literary representation in the anthropological discipline, Appadurai once posed this exact question and argued that natives "are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are also those who are somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places" (Appadurai 1988, 37). Through the anthropological quest for comparative analyses, particular key concepts have been associated with different geographical areas, which in turn have resulted in a disciplinary repertoire of essentialised regions. As inhabitants of these areas have been studied and represented accordingly, these presumably bounded places have become prisons containing natives. Quasi-ecological arguments have on a subtle level tended to imprison 'natives' in the particular places they inhabit. What 'natives' think, feel and believe has been accredited a

boundedness connected to the concreteness of place – i.e. the circumstances of what these respective places permit:

All the language of niches, of foraging, of material skill, of slowly evolved technologies, is actually also a language of incarceration. In this instance, confinement is not simply a function of the mysterious, even metaphysical attachment of native to physical places, but a function of their adaptations to their environments. [...] When we ask where this concreteness typically inheres, it is to be found in the specifics of flora, fauna, topology, settlement patterns, and the like; in a word, in the concreteness of place. Thus, the confinement of native ways of thinking reflects in an important way their attachment to particular places. The science of the concrete can thus be written as the poetry of confinement (Appadurai 1988, 37-8; my omission).

How ‘natives’ now often express their attachment to particular places through botanical metaphors of ‘roots’ and ‘motherlands’ in politicised dialogue with western powers is not disentangled from how western elites have long framed and presented faraway Others. Through different activities that range from colonialism and tourism to academic and other forms of representation, ‘natives’ have been confined to times and places other than those who visit, exploit, explore, analyse or author their faraway societies (Fabian 1983). The designation has in turn emerged as the ahistorical, unchanging, immobile, and culturally and ecologically determined counterpart to presumably more dynamic and adaptable members of ‘developed’ Western societies.

When western supporters identify Chagossians as natives, and Chagossians even self-identify in the same way, this actually says a lot about the (neo)colonial setting in which Chagossians – once deprived of their livelihood by their colonial masters – must now frame their history and struggles to acquire voice within the same western societies. We have seen that the language of native-ness, belonging and uprooting, which is characteristic for the Chagossian argument presented above, harbours cultural contents that are quite particular to their group (cf. Chapter 5). But this language is also embedded in, and informed by, a wider (neo)colonial tradition. The vocabulary clearly draws on a widespread sedentarist ideology which presumes a bounded interconnection between people, place and culture, and which is widely accepted as natural in the contemporary era of sovereign nation-states (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Malkki 1992). If Chagossian self- and other-identification is framed in this way, it is because it is produced through on-going opposition and critiques of how the colonial regime has other-identified them. Through this critique of the colonial regime, however, Chagossians and their supporters conform to and also confirm the sedentarist ideology. Conforming to this order has now become a resource, much because it finds strong resonance among western audiences. However, as discussed in the foregoing chapter, the flipside is that by identifying as ‘natives’, Chagossians also reproduce their own social stigma of being ‘backward’ in the context of Mauritius’ capitalist development ideology.

This contributes to explaining why a (neo)colonial discourse over Chagossian repatriation over the years has turned very ‘green’ in the sense of taking on ecological argumentations in a bitter contest to connect or disconnect Chagos islanders to or from the environment of their homeland. In fact, important political decisions have throughout BIOT

history been based on ecological arguments that revolve around what does and does not belong there. Despite drastic changes to the area's entry restrictions, environmentalists have not been excluded. Actually, if it was not for the potency of ecological argumentation, the Chagos islanders may well never have been evicted. The Pentagon's first choice for their Indian Ocean base was not Diego Garcia but the Aldabra atoll by the northern entry to the Mozambique Channel (see Illustration 1). Aldabra was therefore also placed within the borders of the colony when the BIOT was founded in 1965. Today 'the Aldabra affair' refers to a successful political campaign undertaken by conservationists and environmental scientists spearheaded by the British Royal Society that contributed to stalling US military development on Aldabra. Environmental activists launched plans to extensively document the biodiversity of the atoll – now referred to as the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean – and brought to the public that Aldabra was a precarious breeding ground for rare giant tortoises. Military activity, they warned, would conflict with the reptiles' mating habits. In 1966, UK Defence Minister Denis Healey addressed their critique: "As I understand it, the island of Aldabra is inhabited – like Her Majesty's Opposition Front bench – by giant turtles, frigate birds and boobies. Nevertheless it may well provide useful facilities for aircraft".⁸ In a context of a UK financial crisis and where environmental activists continued to champion the cause of the turtles, the military proceedings were dropped. The plans instead materialised on Diego Garcia almost 3,000 km east of Aldabra, where the local environment had long been subject to human transformation through the agricultural industries (Stoddart 1968, Vine 2009, 98; see also www.aldabra.org).

These transformations commenced when the Chagos Archipelago was colonised and populated in the late 18th century. Not much was written about the inhabitants before the evictions started in the mid-1960s, but a significant exception is the book *Limuria: The Lesser Dependencies of Mauritius* by Robert Scott who visited the archipelago in 1955 (Scott 1961). 'Limuria' refers to an already rejected scientific hypothesis that was constructed to explain certain discontinuities in the distribution of biodiversity by proposing that an Indian Ocean landmass had sunk beneath the ocean in ancient times due to geological change. This book offers considerable insights into life and work on these atolls before the evictions, but it also exemplifies colonial practices of incarceration when the author – a British Governor of colonial Mauritius – emphasises "the effects of the environment as a natural cause. The islands have shaped their own society; on its qualities it deserves to survive; and it probably has the vitality necessary for survival". "[R]oots have been struck and, as it is hoped will appear from the later chapters, a society peculiarly suited to the islands have [sic] been developed" (Scott 1961, 27).

Evidently, Scott's employers did not fancy his views. In the years that followed, the ecological portrayal of Chagossians' society was to be heavily opposed by the British government and presented in different, albeit related, terms. Bent on evicting the archipelago's inhabitants, UK officials understood that if the local population would – like plants and animals – be regarded as 'native', 'indigenous' or 'autochthon' to these islands, to expel what 'belonged' to them would be contrary to the United Nations Charter. It therefore became vital for British authorities not to leave the public with the impression that the inhabitants were a settled permanent population with historical ties and cultural roots in the archipelago. In 1968 Foreign Office legal advisor Aust suggested "we are able to make up the rules as we go along

⁸ D. Healey, 1966. Quoted online at www.aldabra.org, accessed 12 May 2009.

and treat inhabitants of BIOT as not ‘belonging’ to it in any sense” (Internal FO minute dated 23 Oct. 1968; cited in Sand 2009b, 23). The following year a secret letter to Prime Minister Wilson from the Labour Foreign Secretary proposed that “we could continue to refer to the inhabitants generally as essentially migrant contract labourers and their families” and added that it would be helpful “if we can present any move as a change of employment for contract workers [...] rather than as a population resettlement” (Stewart 1969; cited in Curtis 2003, 422). In other words, the UK government invented a cover story with the deliberate aim of dissociating Chagos islanders from the place they had lived and worked for generations. Planned and executed right from the centre of the British colonial regime, the policy was that the inhabitants of the Chagos Archipelago should be presented as a floating non-permanent population of contract workers who would not be ‘evicted’ but instead ‘returned’ to Mauritius and the Seychelles.

Today Chagossians and their international supporters seek to re-associate the expelled population with the archipelago’s flora and fauna by invoking an extensive imagery of botanical metaphors about a population ‘uprooted’ from the ‘natal soil’ of their ‘motherland’. As we have seen, efforts are made to expose the remains of an earlier distinct — and thus settled — Chagossian culture (cf. Chapter 3). To confirm and lend authority to this counter-argument, critics frequently quote colonial documents that show how British officials deliberately and strategically set out to dissociate Chagossians from the islands’ environment. Perhaps the most forceful quote to illustrate this derived from a 1966 exchange of notes where UK Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary Gore-Booth informs British diplomat and Senior Official D. Greenhill: “The object of the exercise is to get some rocks which will remain *ours*. There will be no indigenous population except seagulls who have not yet got a Committee” (cited from Pilger 2006, 30; italics in source). Confirming the metaphors, Greenhill replied by invoking fictional characters renowned precisely for their ambivalent belonging to their local environment: “Unfortunately, along with the birds go some few Tarzans or Man Fridays whose origins are obscure and who are hopefully being wished on to Mauritius” (ibid.). By quoting representatives of the colonial regime in this way, critics effectively display the racist indifference in officials’ attitudes to their ‘native’ Others and also show that to dissociate Chagos islanders from the local environment was a deliberate UK strategy. But such quotes are also republished to confirm that Chagossians are indeed ‘natives’ (i.e. UK authorities knew it, but deliberately lied and denied it). However, by invoking such counter-arguments critics unintentionally also confirm the sedentarist order, which, through re-classifying Chagossians as un-settled, made it possible for the colonial regime to circumvent responsibility for their actions in the first place. These dynamics can be seen in light of what Shore and Wright call the power to define: “dominant discourses work by setting up the terms of reference and disallowing or marginalising alternatives” (Shore and Wright 1997, 14). When critics ground their arguments in the colonial officials’ own words, the discourse’s terms of reference become very explicit. Now international media also reproduce Chagossian history in quasi-ecological frames. According to a sympathising BBC journalist:

Unfortunately, Aldabra was the breeding ground for rare giant tortoises [...] whose cause would be championed noisily by publicity-aware ecologists. The alternative was the Chagos islands [...] home to some 1800 people – many descendants of slaves – but

no tortoises [...] and when it came to having rights, the local population proved to have considerably less clout than giant tortoises. [...] British politicians, diplomats and civil servants began a campaign – in their own words – ‘to maintain the pretence there were no permanent inhabitants’ on the islands. The inhabitants therefore became non-people. To the outside world there must be no inhabitants, merely people living there temporarily – migrant workers and other transients” (BBC News, 3 Nov. 2000).

Without altering the discourse’s terms of reference, the critics’ ‘green’ counter-arguments have more recently triggered a political backfire. During Chagossians’ litigation processes in the UK, the British government decided to commission a feasibility study of the Chagos Archipelago, supposedly to determine whether the archipelago’s environment could sustain a resettled human population. Surprisingly perhaps, the study concluded that resettlement was not feasible. The central argument against resettlement concerned the islands’ environment, or more precisely, potential impacts of future environmental change: global warming could cause dangerous natural hazards to the low-lying atolls. Flooding, seismic activity and lack of freshwater could threaten life. It was even suggested that human settlement on the fragile atolls could accelerate global warming.⁹

Other environmental experts have torn the report apart, judging the conclusions “erroneous in every assertion” (Jenness; in Curtis 2003, 429). One of the report’s consultants later stated that the government had manipulated the study’s conclusions since suggestions in favour of resettlement were contrary to their interests (Benoit Emileien, CNN Insight, 18 June 2003; Philip and Kennedy, Times Online, 22 Apr. 2010). The conclusions did indeed also conflict with the facts that the islands have been populated for almost two centuries, that these tropical atolls are among the most humid places on earth and that the archipelago now hosts a major and expanding US military base, which, without doubt represents the most significant threat to the local environment. Beside the highly explosive nature of what is now stored in the area, thousands of trees were bulldozed down to make way for the US base on Diego Garcia. Reefs were blasted and the basin was dredged to turn the lagoon into an operational military harbour. To serve as construction material, local corals were dynamited and harvested on large scales while additional landfill imported from Malaysia introduced invasive alien plant species to the islands. Since the 1980s, registered fuel spills from the US base amount to approximately 4,470,000 litres and hundreds of tonnes of human sewage and watery waste have been poured into the coral lagoon since the base was established. No wonder the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1994 vetoed the inclusion of BIOT in Britain’s ratification of the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (Sand 2009b, 51-56; The Independent, 18 Mar. 2014).

Beyond the feasibility report’s controversial conclusions, the argument also conveyed a significant symbolic message: apparently the myth of Limuria, which was included to the titles of governor Scott’s and BOIT Commissioner Edis’ books on the history of these islands, was about to come true: The Chagos Archipelago could sink beneath the water, geological

⁹ Online source: UK Parliament Website, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmcaff/501/501we16.htm>, accessed 10 Mar. 2009.

ruptures could threaten life, and human activity could lead to the discontinuation of the islands' rich biodiversity! Addressed in the exact 'green' terminology of the critics, the government's report seemed to suggest that the archipelago was too fragile for people to belong to. Metaphorically speaking, if the soil to which Chagossians vividly claim to be rooted would not erode into the sea altogether, a return would still be unfeasible because the land could not nurture Chagossian roots due to the lack of fresh water.

Since conservation of the Archipelago has taken on such prominence, arguments in favour of a Chagossian resettlement could hardly neglect the matter of environmental protection. Henceforth, Chagossian supporters in the UK responded by launching a PR campaign with the paradigmatic name "Let *Them* Return" (italics original!). Among the outcomes of the campaign was the publication of an alternative resettlement report, which concluded that

[...] there are no valid environmental or economic reasons that stand in the way of the resettlement of a relatively small number of Chagossian families on islands in Peros Banhos and Salomon. The environmental risks described in the earlier feasibility studies cannot be regarded as insuperable given the willingness of Chagossians to contribute to conserving the assets on which their livelihoods, and long term survival on the islands, will depend (Howell 2008, 34).

Among the central objections to the government-issued report was the outright neglect of the natives who had inhabited the islands for generations. Interestingly, unlike the government-issued feasibility study, the alternative resettlement report did pay attention to the islands' evicted natives. At the same time the authors, also unlike those of the government-issued report, did not enter the environment of the restricted place to which the natives are held to belong. Very much in accordance with the 'green' discourse' terms of reference, the alternative report suggested that Chagossians could return to their homeland as guardians of their own environment. Along with controlled fishing, low-impact eco-tourism and the manufacture of bio-diesel from local resources, if trained by conservation experts the exiled natives could return to their homeland and sustain themselves as protectors of their own environment. According to the campaign's official website:

The outer islands retain their great natural diversity and beauty. But they and a restored Chagossian community will now be in the front-line of adaptation to climate change. The islands, their coral reefs and the archipelago's marine resources will all benefit from active management by a people committed to protecting their own homes and livelihoods.¹⁰

More recently, while Chagossians awaited a decision on their case from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the British government launched what must be described as the ultimate 'green' argument. Concerned with US environmental inattention despite having caused "significant ecosystem disturbance in developing Diego Garcia", the BIOT

¹⁰ Online source: www.letthemreturn.com, accessed 2 Nov. 2009.

Conservation Advisor and former government representative on Diego Garcia, J. Topp, reported in 1996 that “conservation is about the only field of endeavour in which we can earn credit for being in the Indian Ocean where other countries do not want us” (cited in Sand 2009b, 56). The British regime’s answer to the alternative resettlement report and the Chagossians’ ECHR action would reflect that significant remark. Environmentalists and organisations often celebrate the Chagos Archipelago as one of the most pristine reef systems in the world. This includes the UK-based Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) – a supposedly non-political charity founded in 1992 by J. Topp himself and chaired by former FCO BIOT commissioners and members of HM Diplomatic Service. According to their official website: “The isolation of the Chagos, far from maritime trade routes, and restrictions on access to the islands means that they and the adjoining reef areas enjoy an exceptionally pure environment, free from the contamination normally associated with human activity”.¹¹ This is very much in line with the controversial government-issued feasibility study that concluded in disfavour of Chagossian resettlement. With the massive and polluting US military presence in the Chagos Archipelago in mind, this all seems to confirm Harper’s observations from Madagascar: “The image of indigenous peoples as integral to images of the untamed wild runs, oddly, hand-in-hand with the image of indigenous people as destroyers of biodiversity. It is precisely indigenous interaction with the land that is pointed to as a chief cause of species depletion” (Harper 2002, 227). In 2009, the CCT along with the international conservation charity Pew Environment Group (PEG) mounted a campaign recommending that the UK government should establish a Maritime Protected Area (MPA) around the Chagos Archipelago. A number of international conservation bodies were soon brought together under the Chagos Environment Network (CEN), and in November that year, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office launched an open Internet consultation on whether to establish an MPA in the BIOT and the extent of protection that should apply to the area (see Stevenson 2010). The online consultation over what became known as Britain’s Great Barrier Reef was soon criticised for not providing proper information about the history and context of the Chagos islanders and Mauritius’ claims to the archipelago, and for not considering these parties’ interest. To Chagossians’ and human rights activists’ regret, the environmentalists triumphed, and on 1 April 2010 the UK government founded the world’s largest Maritime Protected Area around the Chagos Archipelago. The implementation of a 544,000 sq. km absolute no-take zone in this area – which was one of the alternatives proposed in the online consultation – meant that economic activities such as fishing, construction, tourism and the like were from now on ruled out. In other words, if Chagossians should return to the archipelago (as guardians of their environment or not) they would not be able to sustain themselves without breaking conservation restrictions that now applied to their homeland. Unsurprising perhaps, the militarised area, the chief source of local environmental risk and damage, was exempted.

The government’s real agenda was revealed in December 2010 when WikiLeaks released a recent secret diplomatic US embassy cable. British FCO Overseas Territories Director Colin Roberts had in May 2009 presented the idea of establishing the world’s largest maritime park around the BIOT to the US political counsellor. He assured US representatives that it would have no impact on the base on Diego Garcia, but admitted that the UK government

¹¹ Online source: www.chagosconservationtrust.org, accessed 5 Sept. 2009.

was “under pressure” to permit resettlement. He referred among other things to Chagossians’ ECHR “right of return” lawsuit and explained, “there are proposals (for a marine park) that could provide Chagossians with warden jobs”. However, the “environmental lobby is far more powerful than the Chagossians’ advocates” in the UK, he explained, and “establishing a marine park would, in effect, put paid to resettlement claims of the archipelago’s former residents” (Tokola 2009, see also Zeijden 2011).

Nothing, of course, is natural about natives being rooted in particular homelands. It is nonetheless a powerful quasi-ecological imagery that is widely accepted as a social fact. How natives understand themselves, behave and organise are not disconnected from global historical processes. How many Chagossians now understand and present themselves is influenced by a (neo)colonial discourse which clearly draws on a sedentarist ideology widely accepted as ‘natural’ within an ethnically ordered world mapped by almost 200 UN- recognised sovereign states. As we have seen, this discourse can be traced right back to the centre of the colonial regime at the time of British decolonisation, taking on political importance in the 1960s with a political conspiracy regarding how to handle a group of faraway native Others, and developing into the ‘green’ extreme by 2010. As in the example of Ann, many Chagossians now present and understand themselves in accordance with Eurocentric ideas about natives – the conceptual counter-category to modern selves in so-called developed western societies. But as the example of Thomas revealed, not all Chagossians self-identify in this way. With this (neo)colonial discourse as backdrop it is possible to see how the examples of Ann and Thomas are related.

7.6 *EXODUS IN DEVELOPMENT*

The inter-national order discussed above does not only map the world in spatial terms, as in the spatial organisation of nations and cultures across the globe. It also organises the world in a significant quasi-temporal manner, by ranking states as ‘undeveloped’, ‘developing’ or ‘developed’ (and similar concepts). As discussed in Chapter 6, development ideas are at the core of Mauritian nationalism, and in this Chagossians play important roles. Chagossians question key national symbols, including the logics of development, and have emerged as a significant out-group within society through which local people debate and make sense of the government’s national development rhetoric.

Not unrelated to this, many Chagossians reported that they had long been stigmatised as ‘savages’ and ‘uncivilised’ people in Mauritius. It appeared, however, that the authority of the British courts has helped them turning their Otherness from a social stigma to a matter of cultural pride. In the public eye they had moved, so to speak, from ‘uncivilised savages’ in the direction of ‘differently civilised natives’, i.e. a particular people with a distinct culture rooted in the Chagos Archipelago. This distinction can mean a world of difference to many Chagossians, but it is important to note that the two formulations are not radically different. ‘Natives’ still harbour quasi-temporal connotations, and more recent characteristics such as ‘not so developed people’ who speak a ‘backward language’ and ‘live in the past’ always ‘looking back’ and ‘cannot change or adapt’ to modern Mauritian society are no less quasi-temporal. These, too, portray people as stuck with their territorialised past in the present, caught

in the repetition of cultural tradition – in other words, not changing and not keeping pace with a modern world developing along progressive teleological time. Also these formulations are thus connected to the time of the primitive, which according to Skaria (2003) is constitutive of the development ideology. If ‘rootedness’ stands for immobile and ‘backwardness’ stands for unchanging, these concepts respectively represent the spatial and temporal anti-categories to development. Natives, incarcerated in the place and time of the Other, incorporate such highly stasis-loaded reference categories through which the more dynamic notions of ‘change’, ‘progression’ and ‘development’ become meaningful.¹² When Chagossians are presented, and present themselves as natives, they therefore not only draw on the sedentarist order, but also on central elements of the development ideology. These ideological spatio-temporal dimensions then also connect to the ‘green’ (neo)colonial discourse about the native Other presented above.

These connections are central to understanding the Chagossian diaspora, a transnational community marked by an important internal division that I have exemplified by the cases of Ann and Thomas. Their ways of presenting themselves, their community and homeland appear wide apart, but their understandings have emerged in contexts that are quite comparable. There are therefore good reasons to believe that their understandings are related on a more abstract level.

Ann, on the one hand, portrayed her diaspora experiences in a manner that is very much in line with the dominant Chagossian auto/biography discussed in Chapter 5. She strongly identifies as a Chagossian native, and expresses a strong wish to return to her roots in the Chagos Archipelago. Her powerful metaphor of an uprooted tree with dried-out branches and leaves that have fallen underscores the idea of rootedness, and also a fundamental immobility. Thus, the way Ann communicates her experiences corresponds very much with the wider (neo)colonial discourse about the native Other – or in her case, the native self. The way Thomas presents himself, on the other hand, is not in accordance with these ideas of the native Other – actually quite to the contrary. The Chagos is dangerously radioactive, he said. The land is weak and it has no people’s roots. He sacrificed Chagos for a US-led War on Terror, and wanted to leave Mauritius for a homeland he identified with England. In other words, even though he was born in the Chagos Archipelago, he does not consider himself, or other diaspora members, ‘rooted’ there. Thomas saw himself *en route* instead, just about to embark on the fifth and final exodus of his diasporic people. That final destination is England, the (former) colonial power. He describes going there as a way of ‘moving forward’, demonstrating this by pedalling his fingers in one direction and switching to reverse when objecting to Chagossians who do not ‘change’ but instead want to ‘turn the world the other way round’.

In light of this, Ann and Thomas’ accounts appear to reflect both sides of the (neo)colonial discourse. Respectively, Thomas and Ann identify with qualities attributed to the mobile and changing western explorer and the explored native Other incarcerated in time and place. This division, as I have argued, is also central to the development ideology, which is very present in Mauritius. Just like Ann, Thomas saw himself displaced to Mauritius, but instead of identifying as an uprooted native fighting an existential struggle against the UK

¹² See Skaria (2003) for a similar argument with regard to India’s scheduled tribes’ role in governments’ development rhetoric.

government to be able to return to his roots in the Chagos Archipelago, he identifies home with the British government and the presumably developed state of the colonial regime. In other words, he identifies with the expansive (mobile and changing) coloniser and not the (immobile and unchanging) native Other, which the coloniser has incarcerated – or in the Chagossian case, later sought to de-incarcerate – in the distant corners of his empire. Thomas’ route out of exile, then, has very much in common with the disseminated route, or meta-pilgrimage, that was designed to promote Mauritian nationalism (cf. Chapter 6). Within the same Mauritian ‘unity in development’ context, Ann and Thomas’ accounts represent two constitutive ways of coping with what we may call ‘exodus in development’.

This all may sound very black and white, and it must be noted that many Chagossians who now migrate to England do not re-formulate their belonging as explicitly as Thomas does. I have chosen his example because it is particularly illustrative of a fundamental and defining heterogeneity within the Chagossian diaspora. To substantiate this, I shall now turn to an interview I conducted in the UK with the leader of the DGIC, the UK-based Chagossian organisation that arranged the very first Chagossian group migration to the UK after the Chagossians were granted full British passports in 2002. Here, the division discussed above was formulated very explicitly.

While taking a walk with DGIC leader Allen Vincatessen around his new neighbourhood in Crawley in the UK, he explained to me that many Chagossians now migrate with unrealistic ideas that life in the UK will be easy. He pointed to Mauritian beaches filled with rich European tourists and exclaimed, “I call it a direct colonial response!” Chagossians in Mauritius were too preoccupied with their past, he regretted, and went on to explain that unlike those who stay behind and keep militating for compensation and the right to repatriation in the Chagos Archipelago, preoccupation with the past did not reflect the attitude of those who now come to England. These Chagossians, he said, had made a hard, but important, decision to leave the past behind and ‘move forward’. He then recalled the heated debates that had preceded the first Chagossian group-migration from Mauritius to the UK in 2002, which he had organised:

The big question was, “Where do we go Allen? Where will we live? Will we be on the streets in the UK because we don’t have a place there?” [...] There were so many rumours about compensation in Mauritius. People were just focusing on compensation and compensation. Many people were told that next month you will be paid compensation because it was this case that started in the US. Because compensations had been paid, even if it was peanuts-like, in the past, they thought that this is going to happen, and that was the hope of the community. But I knew that the government was refusing so I made up my mind. I said to the [DGIC] committee, “Look, there is one thing that we need to do. It’s either a yes or a no – to be or not to be! The passport has come like a life-jacket to us, if we put the life-jacket on us we are safe; if we don’t take the life-jacket, we will drown. So as we have the citizenship now, it is better that we move forward, and not to stay backward!”

The divide between the West and the Other is here communicated very explicitly. Quoting Shakespeare, and invoking an image of Chagossians either drowning in Mauritius or floating

around at the UK entry point of Gatwick Airport in British life-jackets, he turned the question of migration to the UK into a Kirkegaardian existential decision: Live or die, float or drown, yes or no – ‘move forward’ or ‘stay backward’.

That this dilemma was formulated in the frame of capitalist development became very apparent when he continued to explain how the organisation envisioned that the Chagossian diaspora could one day return to the Chagos Archipelago. Instead of pursuing a direct return to the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius and the Seychelles by argument of settling past injustices with the UK government, the DGIC envisioned an alternative route via the UK. In the terminology of ‘moving forward’ rather than ‘staying backward’, Vincatessen staked out an alternative Chagossian route much in accordance with ideas of progressive development steps. First Chagossians should migrate to England, then they should be educated in British schools, and thereafter they could present their claim to return in a manner corresponding with the logics of capitalist development. That is, instead of representing a ‘cost’ to the UK government by insisting on compensation for what happened in the past, Chagossians could eventually reclaim their homeland by the argument that they had acquired proper education that enabled them to run profitable businesses in the Chagos Archipelago. Since this would mean paying taxes and thus contributing to the UK economy, this was not to be understood as a claim to settle past injustices but more as an investment – an economic offer the UK government cannot resist.

This example illustrates the same division within the Chagossian diaspora, which may have been there before, but which surely has gained importance after the awarding of full British citizenship in 2002. This divide does not only externalise in migration to the UK, but also in discussions that such migration trigger. The latter became very apparent in 2006, when Chagossians were planning their journey to the Chagos Archipelago. The UK-based DGIC was then excluded. Hence, unlike the names of the other active Chagossian organisations at the time, the DGIC was not inscribed on the stone monuments the pilgrims laid down on the three main island groups in the Chagos Archipelago. In fact, with the sole exception of one Chagossian woman, the CRG ex-secretary whose children had insisted that she moved to the UK to seek medical treatment unavailable in Mauritius about eight months before this departure, no Chagossian migrant to the UK participated in this journey. To my question as to why the DGIC was excluded, the CRG leader told me that the organisation was not contributing to the Chagossian struggle, and that now, all of a sudden, the DGIC leader “wants to go first class”. The weight and meaning of this argument will become clear in the next example.

Within weeks before Chagossians embarked on their journey in 2006, the CRG set up a Chagossian meeting at one of their two community centres in Mauritius. The CRG leader was outraged. The DGIC leader had written to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and demanded the voyage cancelled if Chagossians in England were not invited. He read the letter aloud and then concluded:

Since 2002 some people have settled in England because we’ve got British passports. It’s okay that some leave with these passports. But we say: “We are not finished yet.” There is a struggle: a struggle for compensation, a struggle to return to our soil, a struggle against the British for our rights. We will never forget this! But what is going on in England? The ‘governor’, the ‘governor’ of Diego Garcia in England [i.e. the

DGIC leader], is bringing Chagossians over there. We all know how they arrive... By negotiating with the governments, we have now got the right to go back, also to Diego Garcia.

Discussions then moved on to revolve around a revealing dilemma: due to her political support to the CRG, one place onboard the *Mauritius Trochetia* had been reserved for a Chagossian woman now living in Switzerland. But it turned out that she could not participate because her husband was ill, and she had asked if she could offer her place to Angie – the elderly Chagossian woman Thomas referred to above who had ‘understood change’ and had migrated from Mauritius to the UK. After explaining the situation, the CRG leader addressed the Chagossian audience: “I ask you, what do you think?” People started discussing. Soon louder voices cut through the audience’s buzz and mumble: “No!” and “Do not agree!” Then the matter was settled. Shortly after, contact was made by telephone with the woman in Switzerland. From her seat in the audience, an elderly Chagossian woman conveyed the answer on behalf of the group:

I have suffered with Angie. I have protested with her. I have conducted hunger strikes with her. Thank you, but I am very sorry. We cannot give your place to Angie, because Angie has spoken to journalists and said, “The struggle is ending and we are not going to get Diego Garcia so I go to England.” I am very sorry.

It must be stressed here that Angie was a central character within the Chagossian community. She has been politically active ever since her arrival in Mauritius, and has a history of hunger strikes, severe police beatings and imprisonment. She also writes poetry and songs about her past. No one can, in other words, question her historical contribution to the Chagossian struggle. But now she had migrated to England. This migration was, however, not in itself reason to exclude her. Rather, it was what the migration meant that mattered. She was accused of having told journalists that the struggle was over, and had therefore left for England. In other words, she had given up. Her migration to England demonstrated that she had ceased to believe in the central principle of the Chagossian struggle: “if you believe you can, you can” (cf. Chapter 5).

This contributes to explaining why also the DGIC was excluded from the journey. Leaving for England is not only a physical journey; it is also a highly symbolic act, which is far from uncontroversial within the Chagossian community. Migrants are often held to dissociate with the *real* Chagossian struggle, i.e. the struggle for proper compensation and repatriation to the Chagos Archipelago. With regard to this, there are two important points to be made:

The first point relates to the general Chagossian cultural auto/biography discussed in Chapter 5, where we saw that Chagossians’ recollections of the Chagos Archipelago mirror difficulties they have experienced in Mauritius’ competitive capitalist society. In exceedingly positive terms they describe Chagos as *different* from Mauritius. While the two places relate to one another through constitutive opposition, they stand out as qualitatively different. This is not the case with the relation between ‘England’ and ‘Mauritius’, which appear to merely differ in degree. England, Mauritius’ former colonial power and model-state for Mauritian

development, represents another competitive capitalist state and another government that has committed wrongs to their community. Accordingly, to many Chagossians ‘England’ is not qualitatively different from ‘Mauritius’, but simply ‘more developed’ – a place that offers better jobs and better wages, has larger supermarkets, better schools, and a better welfare system (as in the life-jackets at Gatwick Airport). Within the frame of Mauritian nationalism then, instead of contributing to the propagated meta-journey of national development by patiently working to transform Mauritius into a developed First World country, Chagossians can with their new passports so to say “go first class” to enjoy the fruits promised to inhabitants of such a country. Migration to England thus becomes an alternative way of embarking on Mauritius’ disseminated route to ‘development’. To choose this route, however, also means embracing, accepting, or, at least, being associated with central values ascribed to Mauritius’ capitalist society, which are also the values that the Chagossian community has defined itself in opposition to. In contrast to Mauritius, they say, the Chagos was a place Chagossians “shared everything and did not use money”. England, compared to Mauritius, is a ‘more developed’ state, which, in their words has “the strongest currency in the world” and where “little work is much money”. In terms of meaning then, migration to England contradicts Chagossians’ struggle to return to the Chagos.

This leads to my second point. Especially among elderly militant Chagossians, leaving for England has also become synonymous with quitting the Chagossian struggle. When this is taken to mean ceasing to believe in this struggle, it violates the bible-derived principle discussed in Chapter 5 that one must not doubt that returning to the Promised Land is possible. But to them, migrants symbolically also leave their true origin behind. Both in spatial and temporal terms, they dissociate with the project of incarceration, i.e. the project of being natives. According to an elderly woman from Diego Garcia, Chagossians who migrate to England “forget their identity”, they “forget about their real homeland. They forget about the real struggle”. Although not all migrants do so, some Chagossians indeed welcome and embrace the opposite side of the colonial dichotomy. For Thomas, for example, full British citizenship has not only opened a new door out of exile, it has also opened for the possibility to identify with the colonial power – the constituent counterpart to the native self. Accordingly, Thomas’ self-representation is not first and foremost grounded in botanical metaphors of roots and cultural tradition. Instead he explicitly highlights his routes, and embraces the values of ‘change’ and ‘forwardness’ – all of which only make sense in relation to the static characteristics of ‘natives’ as immobile and unchangeable, which he so vividly opposes.

This significant heterogeneity within the Chagossian diaspora must be understood in light of the context in which Chagossians struggle. As we have seen, core ideas around which these differences revolve are also found in the disseminated Mauritian development rhetoric as well as in the decades-long ‘green’ (neo)colonial discourse about the place of Chagossian natives in the environment of the Chagos Archipelago, which can be traced to the centre of the British colonial regime. An important point to make is that in order to change their situation, Chagossians must present themselves in a related way to western audiences, which, of course, is not to dispute that many also understand themselves accordingly. To the benefit of British authorities who granted them passports in 2002, the way Thomas self-identifies conflicts with Chagossians’ ethno-cultural politics. This, of course, triggers much discussion and debate within the Chagossian diaspora. But as I have argued, disagreements and debates over internal

divisions do not challenge the Chagossian diaspora, but rather contribute to its social reproduction.

7.7 ARRIVALS

While media often leave the impression that Chagossians form a homogenous community, Chagossians are neither entirely consistent in their political aims nor in their opinions about their own diaspora. To understand the Chagossian diaspora and how it is reproduced, it is necessary to comprehend these internal heterogeneities. In this chapter I have discussed two cases of transnational Chagossian collaboration where divisions within their transnational community came to the surface and also brought diasporic Chagossians into heated debate.

The first example discussed an alliance struck between international Chagossian organisations during their preparations for compensation claims in international courts. This case demonstrated that the global interstate system, which emerged around the time of the Chagossian evictions, had, and continues to have, significant impacts on their diaspora. Their expulsion and dispersal in this ‘age of evictions’ marked the beginning of a Chagossian diaspora much defined by their relation to their historical homeland. But within this world order, a Chagossian diaspora united under a common political agenda also became problematic. The unsettled UK-Mauritian sovereignty dispute and the unequal distribution of citizenships among diasporic Chagossians have paved way for a split within their transnational community, because in any of the two future scenarios some diasporic Chagossians fear they will be treated as foreigners to their historic homeland.

The second example displayed a different transnational alliance. When diasporic Chagossians journeyed to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006, their UK-based organization was excluded. To understand the grounds for this internal division, it is necessary to comprehend what migration to England has come to mean to members of their community. A large number of Chagossians have migrated to the UK since they were awarded full British citizenship in 2002. In this context, new geographies of ‘homeland’ have emerged, and diasporic Chagossians now speak of two homelands: the Chagos Archipelago and the UK (or England). This points to an important divide within their transnational community. In Cohen’s (1997) terminology, those who migrate to work in the UK can be said to represent a ‘labour diaspora’, whereas those who stay behind and militate for compensation and the right to repatriate the Chagos Archipelago can be described as a ‘victim diaspora’. Instead of debating these typologies (which also Cohen points out are not absolute), I have sought to understand how the two are related, primarily by investigating how Chagossians conceive of, and engage with, this divide in practice. The examples of Ann and Thomas were meant to illustrate this division, and I argued that their very different ideas, aims and opinions could not be understood irrespective of the fact that their understandings have emerged within the same historic, economic and socio-political context. To make sense of their divergent views, this chapter has analysed them in light of Mauritius’ development ideology and a significant ‘green’ (neo)colonial discourse that concerns the relationship between Chagossians and the homeland environment. This latter discourse reflects much colonial thought, but of particular importance is the conceptual pairing

of the presumably more mobile and dynamic Western explorer and his constituent native Other incarcerated in times and places other than his own. Apparently, one section of the Chagossian diaspora (the victim diaspora) conforms to images of the native Other, as a culturally distinct people deeply rooted in the Chagos Archipelago. The other section (the labour diaspora) has become associated, and sometimes self-identifies, with the constituent counterpart – the western self. While many Chagossians migrate to England as citizens of Mauritius' former colonial power, some, like Thomas, identify as British, re-place their homeland in England, and embrace those key values from which the native Other is set apart: 'change', 'mobility', 'forwardness' and 'progression'.

These values are also at the core of the development ideology, which, as discussed in Chapter 6, is well-known in Mauritius where authorities disseminate development ideas by metaphors of a national journey: through citizens' sacrifice, hard work, cooperation and patience Mauritius shall one day reach its 'destiny' and become, like the former colonial power, member of the family of First World states. Chagossian understandings of the new wave of UK migration are much entangled in this Mauritian meta-journey to a fully developed state. While the UK represents a model state for Mauritian development, 'Chagos' as a place is at the same time constructed in constitutive contrast to 'Mauritius', as we saw in Chapter 5. Hence, UK migration has come to imply accepting and welcoming ideals that are both contrary to their homeland in the Chagos Archipelago as well as the image of the rooted native – which of course is central to Chagossian cultural politics. Chagossian migrants to the UK were accordingly accused of forgetting about their 'real' homeland, their 'real' Chagossian identity, and of leaving the 'real' Chagossian struggle. When this is taken to mean that migrants stop believing in the Chagossian struggle, this borders to treason in the frame of their significant bible-derived principle 'if you believe you can, you can'. Accordingly, Chagossians' contribution to the struggle – or more precisely, the (victim diaspora's) 'real' struggle – was a central criterion when it came down to distributing *Mauritius Trochetia's* one hundred cabin beds in 2006. And for this, Chagossian migrants to the UK were not rewarded, but rather disciplined. Both the UK-based DGIC's demand for eighteen places onboard, and the Chagossian woman in Switzerland's request to offer her place to a Chagossian living in the UK, were turned down.

This brings us back to one of the initial questions posed in the beginning of this chapter. Beyond shedding light on the discreditable ways state governments have treated the Chagossians over the years, there is little left in the Chagossian example to support the proposition that diaspora subjects challenge the institution of the modern nation state. Chagossian organisations manoeuvre within and between state systems, and seek out the opportunities they can offer. This also goes for the supposedly progressive hybridity that has been associated with diaspora identification. Politically active members of Chagossians' 'victim diaspora' section may refuse to identify as 'Mauritian' and/or 'British', but how they do identify is everything but hybrid in the sense of non-primordial or de-territorialised. As for the 'labour diaspora' section, many re-territorialise identity in the UK. Some apparently dismiss 'rootedness' and embrace instead values of 'change'. But 'change' here should not be mistaken to indicate some open, fluid or hybrid, post-modern form of identification. To the contrary, it is a central term derived from the ideological context of modernity, and refers to 'forwardness' and 'progression' as the opposite of tradition and 'backwardness'. In other

words, expressions that are not challenging, but rather constitutive of developmental time and the native Other incarcerated in place.

Chagossians clearly share many diaspora features identified as typical by Safran (1991), Cohen (1996, 1997) and others. Especially if diasporas seem to multiply in today's world, such commonalities should also be understood as reflections of the globalising sedentarist and capitalist orders and ideologies in which they gain relevance. It is within and in-between these spaces that the Chagossian diaspora is produced and reproduced. Within these frames, marginalised people, dispersed or not, may need to present themselves in accordance with Eurocentric images of the native Other in order to acquire voice in media and other decisive institutions in the West. Of course, many thus also come to understand themselves accordingly. At the same time, one cannot reduce the Chagossian diaspora to passive victims of ideologies and (neo)colonial discourse. Chagossians have been severely victimised, and a major section of their transnational community corresponds well with how Cohen (1997) characterises the 'victim diaspora'. But it is important to note that Chagossians have not come to constitute a diaspora *although* they are victims. It is precisely *because* they are victims that a Chagossian diaspora has emerged.

This leads to the final point of this chapter. Despite internal differences, Chagos islanders do not cease to identify as 'Chagossians'. Cultural meanings ascribed to that social category clearly differ and changes over time, but their group identity is not (and could not be) hybrid. Chagossians have evidently not given way for British policies and simply ceased to exist as a social group. Quite the contrary. With the internationalisation of Chagossian politics, diaspora awareness surely intensified. Both cases discussed in this chapter brought diasporic Chagossians into heated debate. Such disagreements and internal heterogeneities make diaspora members speak out, reflect on their community and even 'take sides' (see Schlee 2004). Internal political disputes, negotiations over homeland meanings and diaspora membership, and discussions about group loyalty and legitimate ethnic representation, are highly important in this regard. If this is where diaspora consciousness is produced and reproduced, this is diasporisation in practice. Internal heterogeneity, in other words, is to large extent defining for the Chagossian diaspora. Diversities within their transnational community, then, do not challenge the Chagossian diaspora, but rather contribute to its social reproduction.

To understand central processes, aspects and dimensions of Chagossians' transnational community, I have in this chapter identified important cultural meanings Chagossians ascribe to the recent wave of UK migration and discussed how these meanings relate to the two meta-journeys that were outlined in the two foregoing chapters: the Chagossians' struggle to return to the Chagos Archipelago, and Mauritius' national journey of development. Mobility may be defining of the globalising world of our age. In that world, however, different forms of mobility have acquired cultural meanings and connotations that also transcend the local level. As we shall see in the next chapter, how people choose to define and perform mobility in today's world can therefore make a great difference.

8 REMEMBERING AND THE DEAD : THE CHAGOSSIAN RETURN TO THEIR ANCESTORS' GRAVES

In March 2006, Chagos islanders journeyed to their homeland for their very first time.¹ After four decades of struggle for repatriation, UK and Mauritian authorities granted them one day on each of the three main island groups in the Chagos Archipelago. With great enthusiasm, Chagossian organisations proclaimed that 'this is a historic journey' and insisted that their departure on 30 March 2006 was 'a day to remember'. While getting ready, an elderly Chagossian woman explained a few hours before that departure that one of her most important wishes was about to come true: "After forty years I will now be able to lay flowers on my father's grave to honour his memory." Remembering the ancestors and honouring their memory on the Chagos islands appeared to preoccupy most Chagossian passengers this morning. Later, on returning to Mauritius, many said they felt a sense of relief. By on-site work and prayers, they had paid their ancestors respect, honoured their memory, and had finally explained to their ancestors that despite their long absence – gravely demonstrated by the neglected state of the local cemeteries – they had never forgotten about them.

At this moment 'remembering' appeared to be on everyone's lips, but as the above indicates this concept had different dimensions. On the one hand, Chagossians found it highly important to define and perform the journey in a way that would not be forgotten, but would enter history as a landmark Chagossian achievement through newspapers and other media across the world.² On the other hand, the journey was of utmost significance because of how Chagossians relate to their ancestors who had been buried and abandoned in the archipelago's cemeteries. Remembering here, then, referred to two highly important dimensions of their journey: their political agenda as well as to cultural beliefs and practices concerning the dead. This chapter takes a closer look at Chagossians' first communal journey to their homeland and proposes an analysis that takes both dimensions into account.³ This will reveal that these dimensions are closely interwoven. Ancestors have indeed gained new relevance and meanings in the context of Chagossians' politicised situation, while beliefs and practices concerning the dead add meaning to and fuel interest in their political struggle.

Before proceeding, I shall briefly recap an important methodological challenge discussed in the introduction. Thus far we have seen that the Chagos Archipelago is a site of political contest, a place onto which different actors seek to monopolise history and meaning. In the context of this particular journey, authorities sought to control and silence the event by, among other things, prohibiting independent reporters from following the passengers. Political tensions have surely contributed to make this journey an ideal event to capture Chagossian history, politics and culture. However, the political circumstances of their destination prevented

¹ A short visit was arranged for CRG leader Bancoult and two other Chagossian men in 2000.

² See Ramsamy, *Le Mauricien*, 30 Jan. 2006.

³ A different version of this chapter was produced parallel to this thesis and published in a multi disciplinary edited volume on the Chagossian community (see Johannessen 2011).

also me from undertaking participant observation among the travellers during the event. I had to rely on first-hand data obtained from participants after the journey. These include passengers' accounts, as well as their photos, audio-visual material, souvenirs and relics that they brought from the Chagos, and which they excitedly presented, explained, discussed and consumed with me afterwards. To ground the following arguments, I shall supplement this information with first-hand data obtained in other relevant field situations. As I explained, I have chosen to meet this methodological challenge by a two-step approach: so far, I have approached the journey as an empirical case and a means to explore wider socio-political dimensions of the Chagossian community. Against this extensive contextual background, I shall now proceed to analyse how they performed their journey and what went on during this extraordinary event. As we shall see, how a journey is performed can make a significant difference for people who struggle for cultural recognition and land rights in a contemporary world supposedly constantly *en route*.

8.1 *PEREGRINATING TO THE ANCESTORS' GRAVES*

The Chagos islanders' first communal journey to the Chagos Archipelago started in Port Louis harbour in Mauritius on 30 March 2006. Chagossian participants from the Seychelles had arrived a few days earlier, underscoring that this extraordinary event was a journey taking place between Mauritius, the contemporary political centre of the Chagossian diaspora, and the Chagos islands. Until then, this route was not a recognised pilgrimage route, and the journey's destination was not an established pilgrimage site. Nonetheless, Chagossians defined and performed the journey as a pilgrimage, with the passengers dressing and behaving as pilgrims. They were all dressed in white, they agreed that alcohol was not to be brought along, and no *sega* dances were performed. Following a special morning mass in the massive Cathedral of Cassis, the Port Louis Bishop blessed the travellers before they embarked on the vessel. Very few persons attending this departure would doubt that this journey – which was officially labelled a humanitarian visit – was a proper pilgrimage, especially when the leaders of the two rival Mauritius-based Chagossian organisations, now referred to as 'enemy brothers', joined hands before some 800 spectators on the quay and announced that "We bury our differences in Mauritius and go home as brothers." As the ship left the quay, Chagossians had gathered on the upper deck of the vessel. From here, they were waving to the crowd with red flowers in their hands, some of which they had received from the Bishop during the morning mass, that were to be laid down at a very special destination: their ancestors' graves in the abandoned cemeteries of the Chagos Archipelago. Chagossians performed a pilgrimage, they self-identified as pilgrims, and, no less important, they were also widely other-identified as pilgrims.

In addition to the captain and his crew, 108 people took part in the journey. These people included the British Administrator of the BIOT, an official representative of Mauritius' government, a pastor and a reverend from Mauritius, a doctor and a British Royal Navy cameraman. Among those who arrived from the Seychelles, a place on board was also reserved for a representative of the Seychelles National Archives. As for the Chagossian passengers, the

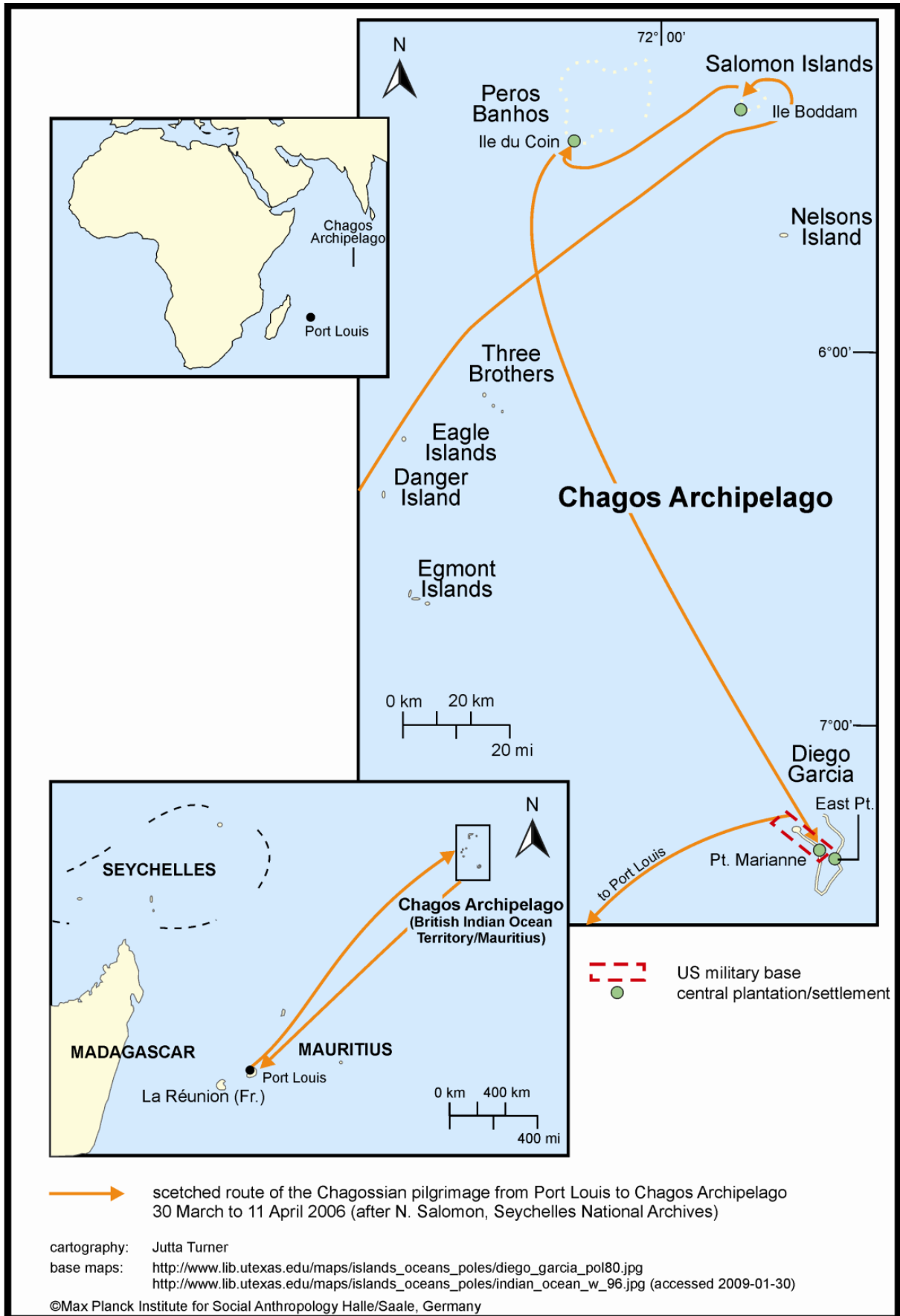


Illustration 23: The route of the Chagossian pilgrimage March - April 2006

Mauritius-based CRG had reserved seventy-five beds for their own members and had set aside fifteen places for the CSC (Seychelles) and ten places for the CSC (Mauritius). After negotiations with the authorities, a Chagossian nurse and a Chagossian stonemason residing in Mauritius also participated in the journey. The latter was responsible for three plaques of commemoration that were to be laid down on each of the main island groups. Among the 102 Chagossian travellers, ninety-six persons were ‘natives’ (*natif*) – a term Chagossians use to distinguish Chagossians born in the archipelago from the term ‘children’ (*zenfan*), which refers to those born outside this homeland.

The journey was completed in eleven days. During this time, passengers spent four days on board the *Mauritius Trochetia* before their first landing on the archipelago’s northernmost atolls. Chagossians were allowed to spend one single day on each of the archipelago’s three main island groups. During the three succeeding days, Chagossians revisited the atolls of Salomon, Peros Banhos and Diego Garcia respectively (see Illustration 23). All the nights were spent onboard the ship. After another four days of journey, the group returned to disembark in Port Louis harbour.

Each day throughout the journey, the two religious leaders conducted Christian ceremonies based on the Catholic Church’s daily liturgy mass readings. According to the Catholic priest, who I interviewed soon after the journey, these biblical words were then elaborated on “in order to explain to Chagossians what God was telling them this day”. Marking a breach of this pattern, a very special ceremony was organised after two days of travel when the westernmost Chagos islands appeared on the horizon. These islands, namely the Egmont Atoll, Eagle Island and Three Brothers, were also once inhabited. They were settled in the first half of the 19th century, but for economic reasons the copra company transferred all the inhabitants to Salomon and Peros Banhos in 1935 (Scott 1961, 268). As these islands came into view, the captain was asked to reduce the speed of the vessel, and a special mass was held on the ship’s rear deck (CRG 2006) to commemorate and pray for the souls of the ancestors that were buried on these islands. On this occasion, the priests and the passengers also commemorated and prayed for other Chagossians who had died along the route from the Chagos during their evictions. Special attention was given to the deceased mother of one of the passengers who had committed suicide by throwing herself overboard somewhere along the route to Mauritius in the early 1970s. To honour these ancestors, the ship’s horn was blown and the passengers dropped flowers overboard into the open sea.

According to one of the religious leaders and herself, when the ship passed these islands and was approaching the Salomon atolls, a Chagossian woman now living in Mauritius contacted one of the priests. She wanted to explain that her mother was born on Three Brothers, and that she and her son were later born in the Salomon group. In order to confirm this, she showed her son’s birth certificate – an important document she had kept safe for many years – to the priest and to the British representative on board. She explained to me in an interview I held with her after the journey that she had brought this birth certificate along to “show to the Americans”. However, there was no contact between Chagossians and US representatives during the journey. She was also not able to speak English, and she therefore held the document up in front of a detachment of British officials stationed in the Chagos Archipelago instead. “They are all the same,” she explained to me. While she was there it was important to her to

tell them, and also to literally document, that she and her family were born right there in the Chagos Archipelago.

Off the archipelago's coast, the *Mauritius Trochetia* was assisted by a British Fisheries patrol. A detachment of British Royal Marines based in the area assisted and monitored the



Illustration 24: Guests and hosts: Newspaper illustration of Chagossians arriving to the BIOT (Benoît, in L'Express 30 March 2006).

Chagossians during their stay. According to my interviews, Chagossians held different opinions about them. Some emphasised that they were grateful for the Marines' assistance, while others said that their presence made them feel like visitors in their own homeland. Many also added that they were displeased with not being able to do whatever, or go wherever, they wanted in their own homeland. As was also well illustrated in a Mauritian newspaper, as the event unfolded there appeared to be some apprehension with regard to distribution of the roles of 'guests' and 'hosts' (see Illustration 24).

When Chagossians arrived on the different islands, the activities took

on a highly repetitive pattern: in order to enjoy a maximum of time on the particular islands where people had been born, Chagossians identified as 'native' to the different island groups were the first to land and the last to go back to the boat. British marines assisted Chagossians ashore and back to the vessel again by means of a rubber dinghy. Audio-visual documentation

recorded during the event shows dramatic and highly emotional scenes of the first Chagossians stepping onto the beaches (Salomon 2006, CRG 2006). Literally at the feet of the British officials who aided them ashore, Chagossians knelt down to embrace and kiss the soil of the land. Many were crying, some seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the



Illustration 25: Performing masses for the ancestors in Peros Banhos chapel. Photo: N. Salomon (2006).

situation, while others were angry and shouted that the islands belonged to them.

Chagossians then proceeded to locate the local chapel. Like all other infrastructure on the islands, these buildings had been left abandoned and had seriously deteriorated in the course of the years. These were the buildings where many of the passengers had been baptised, where they had received their first communion, had married, and/or had taken part in funeral masses. When they had found the chapels, Chagossians started to clean the spaces within the deteriorated buildings. They cut trees and cleared the ground of vegetation that had been left to grow freely for four decades. After this work was completed, masses were held in commemoration of Chagossian ancestors who had been buried, and later abandoned, in the Chagos (see Illustration 25).

Following these ceremonies, the pilgrims proceeded to the islands' cemeteries. Much to their regret, the old graves were in a deplorable state (see Illustration 26 below). As with the local churches, the cemetery area was also cleared and cleaned before the travellers concluded with communal prayers for the spirits of the deceased. Among what was left of the coral rock tombstones, individual people searched for the graves of their deceased relatives and honoured them by cleaning, by prayer, and by laying flowers they had brought from Mauritius. Flowers were also brought to these cemeteries on behalf of those Chagossians who were unable to come along. After these activities, some time was left to explore the islands. People searched for what was left of their old houses, or looked for the places where their family's house used to be. People also identified what was left of the buildings in the abandoned villages. Some went swimming in the lagoon, and some started repeating the former plantation work of de-husking ripe coconuts that had fallen from the palm trees. Coconuts were then opened, shared and consumed on the spot, and some were also brought to Mauritius and the Seychelles as souvenirs. Everyone collected souvenirs, or relics. Bottles were filled with sand, and coconuts, coconut-crabs (*sipay*), shells, stones and pieces of coral were collected and taken along, as was also old tools and utensils from places in the forest that people identified as the location of their former homes. Photos were taken and films were made. A large number of photos depicted distant Chagos islands peaking on the Indian Ocean horizon, indicating the excitement onboard when people were approaching their homeland. Others showed the islands' churches, the cemeteries, and a variety of plantation buildings with Chagossian pilgrims posing in the front. Many photographs also documented the old wells on the islands. To illustrate the Chagossian 'paradise', or "the beauty of the land" as many explained, many postcard-like sceneries of the deserted tropical islands' palm beaches was pictured. Among the photos taken by the woman referred to above was her son's birth certificate, now placed on the sandy ground of the Salomon islands, the land where he had been born.

Many photos also depicted a third communal ceremony that was held on each of the three destinations before the voyagers returned to the vessel. In commemoration of the visit, stone monuments in the shape of open books were laid down at each destination with the English inscription: "In remembrance of our visit to the Chagos Archipelago this [date] April 2006. [Name of island]. Heartfelt thoughts to our beloved we have left behind here. In God we trust and hope." The monuments were signed 'Chagossian community', along with the acronyms of the three participating Chagossian organisations. The stonemason was then responsible for inscribing the exact dates of the different landings into the open spaces on these monuments.

Security was sharpened when the ship arrived at the military deep-water quay on the northwestern arm of Diego Garcia – or ‘Footprint of Freedom’, as residing US forces call this V-shaped atoll. British officials then confiscated all cameras, which were not redistributed until Chagossians had left the militarised area. Here they travelled by bus. Due south of the base, many were aggrieved to find a large signboard erected at Point Marianne, one of the island’s main Chagossian settlements. The signboard informed of nine soldiers of the Indian Artillery and the Mauritius Regiment who had died while stationed on Diego Garcia during World War 2, but failed to mention that they were buried in a Chagossian cemetery. Also a monument honouring three US officers whose plane had come down during the Gulf War in 1990 had been erected in their old cemetery.

On the Eastern side of the lagoon, however, many Chagossians were much pleased to see that the British Forces had restored parts of the old East Point village. Also during the 1990 war against Iraq, the 25th anniversary of the BIOT establishment had been celebrated on Diego Garcia, a celebration that had included a ceremonial symbolic tree-planting and the granting of a flag and a coat of arms with the motto: *In tutela nostra, Limuria*, meaning: ‘Limuria is in our thrust’. Along with this, a conservation fund was initiated to restore and preserve the main buildings on this old plantation (Edis 1993, 84-85). When Chagossians now arrived sixteen years later, much of East Point village was therefore well maintained. However, they also found that their home village had been turned into a museum – probably the most inaccessible museum in the world for a general public, not to mention the evicted villagers who had struggled almost forty years to get there. Since the old chapel and the cemetery had been conserved, conducting the religious ceremonies for the deceased did not require the extensive work of cleaning and clearing. Afterwards, the oldest and the youngest ‘native’ participants jointly and ceremoniously planted a symbolic tree on the island, just as British officials did in 1990. Before leaving, a social gathering was held together with a group of 45 Mauritians working on the US base, and also three Chagossians who after repeated objections to employment discrimination had obtained employment contracts in 2006. The latter then handed over a symbolic gift: a *ravanne*, a flat goat-skinned drum Chagossians and other people in the Western Indian Ocean use to play the *sega*. Painted onto the goatskin surface of this particular drum was the V-shaped atoll of Diego Garcia – a shape that has become iconic for Chagossians since their favourable court judgment in 2000, when the CRG leader exited the British High Courts performing Churchill’s legendary V-sign for ‘victory’ to the crowd and the media.

Little deviated from the original plan – or as the CRG leader emphasised by switching from Kreol to English in the official press conference I attended after the journey: everything went “according to the law”. Before the journey, I had discussed with some participants whether they thought of staging a protest on the islands and perhaps refuse to return to the vessel, since many imagined that this could be beneficial in terms of raising awareness about their situation. In fact, one evening during the journey a Chagossian man had, according to the CSC (Mauritius) leader, suggested that they should disobey the orders of the British Marines and refuse to go back to the ship. However, nobody approved, so the protest did not take place. In view of Chagossians’ history of militancy, their discipline was remarkable. A scenario where UK officials would chase and force Chagos islanders off their homeland once again would surely cause a blow to the aid-like image of this ‘humanitarian visit’. The BIOT administrator had also therefore presented the Chagossian passengers with a highly strategic choice

beforehand: if the journey was performed in a ‘sober’ and ‘dignified’ manner, the UK government could be forthcoming in arranging future visits. Apparently, Chagossians consented and followed the overall instructions. After eleven days, the *Mauritius Trochetia* returned to Port Louis where the pilgrims were welcomed by their relatives and supporters, not on the quay, as some regretted, but in a makeshift tent erected behind the customs.

8.2 *CLEANING FOR THE DEAD*

As I shall return to below, political considerations played an important role in the decision to define and perform the journey as a pilgrimage to their ancestors’ graves. However, the way they chose to undertake their journey was also far from irrelevant with regard to cultural practices and beliefs about ancestors and spirits of the dead. Churches and cemeteries were constructed on the main islands in the Chagos Archipelago before the evictions, and these constructions, or the remains of them, remain highly significant to Chagossians today.

The overwhelming majority of Chagossians are Catholic. However, especially when it comes to issues of death, funerals and the ancestor spirits, cultural beliefs and practices among Chagossians show clear elements of syncretism. Historically, and in accordance with French colonial regulations, the Malagasy and African slaves shipped to the plantations in the Chagos Archipelago were converted to Catholicism. In practice, however, visits of religious authorities to these remote islands were both irregular and far between. Walker (1986) points out that this may have contributed to preserving alternative cultural ideas and activities – particularly those in connection with death and funerals, which, unlike other Christian transition rites such as baptism, first communion or marriage, could not be postponed until the next religious authority came by. During my fieldwork I also found that such beliefs and practices, which many of my informants convincingly traced back to the Chagos Archipelago before the evictions, were not strange to other Mauritians of African or Malagasy descent in the poor quarters where I lived. It is also interesting to note that similar practices are still found in Madagascar (cf. Evers 2002). How this can be taken as an indication of common pre-colonial origin is beyond the scope of my analysis, and the point here is not to trace cultural beliefs and practices that are regarded by the Church as mere superstition to certain times and places outside the Chagos. Before I turn to elaborate on what these practices and beliefs are actually about, I shall simply credit Walker for this sound and interesting observation, and point out that these beliefs and practices are not exclusively Chagossian. What is particular to Chagossians, however, is that they, in contrast to other ethnic groups who also at some point in colonial history arrived in Mauritius, have quite recently been separated from the place where their ancestors are buried. With respect to the dead, this makes a considerable difference.

Over the next few pages I shall discuss the significance of the cemeteries in the Chagos Archipelago and explore the field of cultural meanings Chagossians ascribe the dead. In this endeavour I shall pay special attention to an important empirical observation: in view of the limited hours Chagossians were allowed to stay ashore on the different islands, their time and efforts spent on cleaning and clearing the abandoned churches and cemeteries were considerable. A central dilemma for Chagos islanders is that they have been physically

separated from these cemeteries and graves, which during their absence have deteriorated and lapsed into jungle and wilderness. The disappearance of manifest cultural heritage in the homeland is a serious matter to Chagossians who fight for cultural recognition, but Chagossians also understand this as a problem for their ancestors – and ancestors are powerful characters.

8.2.1 DISPLACED DESCENDANTS AND THEIR ANCESTORS

When Chagossians explained about their expulsions, their homeland and the abandoned cemeteries in the Chagos, I was particularly intrigued to understand that by 1973 the British government had not rid the islands of all Chagossians. According to many evicted islanders, ‘Chagossians’ also included the ancestors. Like them, they had been born in the archipelago, but they had died there and were buried on the islands before the evictions. Many Chagossians explained that the Chagos islands still hosted their ancestors’ spirits. Apparently, when Chagossian pilgrims cleaned and cleared the cemeteries and churches in the Chagos, prayed and conducted masses in the local churches, and laid flowers on their ancestors’ graves, these were also ways of interacting with the dead, or more precisely, the souls or spirits of deceased Chagossians who had been separated from their descendants and whose graves had deteriorated during four decades of neglect. To better understand the meaning of this interaction, the social life of spirits must be explored in more detail. Looking into how Chagossians, who now inhabit the cemetery areas on the outskirts of Port Louis, perform funeral rituals will serve as a fruitful introduction.

When a Chagossian person dies in Mauritius, the corpse is displayed for family and visitors at the house of the deceased. Before the burial, the body is brought from the house to the church for a final mass. During the following eight days, prayers are regularly said at the house of the deceased. During these days, acquainted persons pay their respects by bringing small red flowers to the family’s house. The funeral ritual reaches its climax on the last evening when friends and relatives gather at the house. A draped and decorated altar with a crucifix and at least two lit candles is erected in a room inside the house (see Illustration 28). A white cloth is hung from the wall behind the altar, onto which the same red flowers are attached over two crossed pieces of palm leaf. After repeated prayers, the ritual culminates precisely at midnight when a household member then exits the house and announces: *kass lafler*, meaning ‘remove/destroy the flowers’. While the closest relatives observe the proceedings only, friends and in-laws rush to detach the flowers from the cloth and put them in plastic bags that are to be carried away from the house as quick as possible. As a Chagossian man in Cassis outside Port Louis stressed: “Ten minutes is okay, a quarter past can be too late.”

The reason for the urgency is that the composite of the flowers stuffed into the plastic bags is held to comprise the spirit of the deceased. Through this ritual, the spirit is to be thrown out of the house where it used to live. Very determined, two or three male non-household members leave the house with the bags of flowers. When I attended two other males in this ritual during my fieldwork, the rules were very clear. We had to hurry, but we could not run, and we should not be interrupted along the way. As was normal, we headed for the closest street junction where the plastic bags were to be emptied. The choice of a junction was crucial because it is to serve to confuse the spirit from finding the way back to the house. To form a

barrier between the way leading back to the house and the spirit, the two candles brought from the altar in the house were placed some meters apart and were lit again at the junction; and with much urgency, the bags were emptied with the flowers left on the opposite side to the house. We then returned back quickly and directly, but we should never look back since one may then be frightened to see the personal spirit (*nam*) of the deceased. Although the *nam* cannot cross the barrier constructed by the two candles, one should not give the *nam* a clue of the direction home from the junction. Also, the ritual concerns the link between the earthly and the world of the spirits, so the group may therefore be followed back by other unknown spirits (*jab*), and turning around at this point may provoke them. In order to obstruct such spirits, some may also smoke during the undertaking. Finally, to make sure that no spirit has followed us back to the house, we had to enter the gate of the yard walking backwards.⁴

The seriousness of such beliefs is demonstrated by the fact that many Chagossians I spoke to were convinced of the existence of *jab*, and explained that they either had themselves experienced their presence or knew others who had. Chagossians and other Mauritians competent in English, including local priests, often translated *jab* (from Fr.: *diable*, i.e. 'devil') as 'ghost'. A great number of other Chagossians agreed with the church, and regarded *jab* to be a superstition. Nonetheless, whether *jab* was a superstition or not was very much a justified theme for debate. And many were not sure what to believe. It appeared that in particular contexts, as the case of the funerary ritual described above demonstrates, people who under other circumstances would reject their existence then took spirits quite seriously.

A most crucial point here is that, just like for living people, it is considered 'normal' that any *jab* (i.e. the spirit of an unknown deceased person) wants to go and live in a house. And the *nam* (i.e. the spirit of a particular deceased person) wants in particular to remain in, or return home to, its own house. In the funerary ritual, the medium of flowers was therefore used to transport the *nam* out of the house, and very active steps were taken to prevent the *nam* and other *jab* from returning home. During my fieldwork, many told me about encounters with spirits that had visited or occupied people's houses. In most of the examples, such encounters involved the spirits of deceased relatives who returned to places where they used to live. Quite a few admitted that they feared such spirits, who due to some unresolved business with the living had turned evil. So not all spirits are evil. Reasons for them to turn evil could be that they had been called upon by witch doctors (*longanis*) to cause people harm, that they had died in ways they considered 'unnatural' such as abortion, murder or execution, that they had been treated unjustly like the slaves, or that they had simply been neglected and forgotten by the living. Due to such spirits, when leaving the cemeteries after a funeral, or after having taken a shortcut through the cemetery to a neighbour's house, some people dip their hands in the water basins by the cemetery gate to throw water over their shoulders. This is called to *puss jab*, which can be translated as to 'scare off', 'push away' or 'kick out spirits'. If this is not done, an elderly Chagossian woman informed me, "a *jab* may wait for you at the [cemetery] gate and pass behind you when you exit". She also added that if it follows you home, you might need to engage a witch-doctor "to pull it out of the house and block it at the cemetery". Throwing water

⁴ Botte (1980, 12-14) and Walker (1986, 16) reported on similar practices in the 1980s and suggest they are of African, Malagasy and Tamil origin. Chagossians claim that they originate from Madagascar. It must be added that witchcraft and other practices that involve spirits but deviate from the official religions are in the Mauritian public often held to originate from (and exist in a purer form in) that 'less developed' state.

over the shoulder is only one of a number of ways to prevent spirits from following people to their houses. Smoking, as in the case of the ritual described above, is another means to *puss jab*, as is being loud. Therefore, when I asked Chagossians about *jab* – something that may provoke *jabs* to come – many people’s first response was sudden and unusual loudness, often

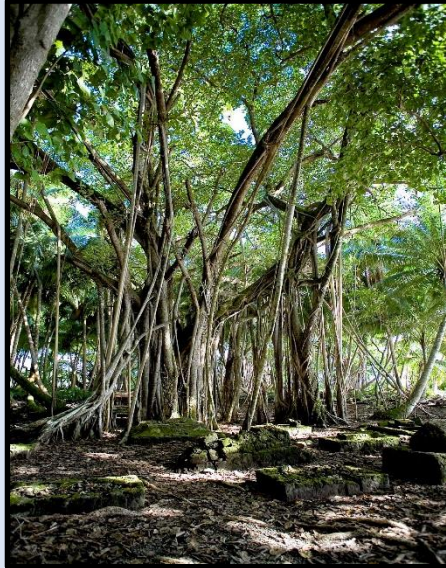


Illustration 26: Abandoned cemetery in the Chagos Archipelago. Photo: CD donated Chagossian pilgrims during journey 2006.



Illustration 27: Abandoned manager's house in Peros Banhos. Photo: Karin Sinninger 2005.



Illustration 28: Funeral altar erected in the house of a deceased person. Photo: Johannessen 2006



Illustration 29: Painting of an abandoned house in the Chagos Archipelago by Chagossian artist C. Siatous. Photo: Johannessen 2006

in the form of laughter, before they elaborated further on the topic. Cleaning one’s shoes after one has walked within the cemetery area is yet another way of preventing *jab* from following people to their houses. I was told that these precautions were most important if there were infants or young children living in the household, because they were more vulnerable to the

spirits' activities. Although I did not witness it myself, I was told that after a dead person's coffin was nailed outside the house, just before the mourners would proceed to the mass and the burial, the youngest person in the household was sometimes lifted over across the coffin. This practice was considered a precaution to make sure that the *nam* of the deceased would not kill the most vulnerable family member so that it could take its spirit along to the afterlife.

Another crucial point here is that people who are related to a deceased person are supposed to prevent the spirit from going home to its earthly place of residence. Chagossians explained to me that friends and neighbours could also assist the family by scaring off its spirit if it should return to the house at a later point. In this respect, the lengthy funeral practice has a most practical side: it serves to inform local people that a certain person is actually dead, knowledge that is important if the person's spirit would do what is 'normal'. That is, to return to its house later on. As an elder Chagossian man explained: "Suppose I die. After they have undertaken this [funeral ritual] I cannot come back here. I can perhaps come to Port Louis, but here people know that I am dead." The spirit of a dead person is often said to be confused after the physical body has died, and many pointed out that it might not be clear to the spirit that its body has died. Therefore, by preventing the spirit from returning home to the house where it used to live, one also assists the spirit to find its proper way to the afterlife in heaven.

That the living have filial duties to help the spirits of their ancestors to enter heaven is also central to Catholic belief, and in this respect, meanings of the local concepts of *jab* and *nam* often overlap with the Catholic concept of the soul (*lespri*). This syncretism becomes quite apparent in connection with the annual Catholic celebration of All Souls Day, or *tu-jab* (i.e. 'all-jab', from Fr.: *Toussaint*) as some elderly Chagossian women called it. Following All Saints Day, which is a day to commemorate the souls of those who have already entered heaven, All Souls Day is a day to honour the memory of deceased relatives who remain suffering in purgatory. By prayers and good works, the living may actively contribute to removing the sins on their souls and thereby help them to leave this liminal intermediary stage to finally enter heaven. Normally this involves going to the cemeteries to pray for their ancestors, cleaning and tending their graves, and laying flowers in honour of their memory. It is understandable, therefore, that these were precisely the activities that Chagossians prioritised and undertook during their first journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006, and why they had hoped to revisit these graves on this particular day.

The state of the cemeteries in the Chagos has long been a central concern to Chagossians. On All Souls Day, they have repeatedly protested before the British High Commission in Port Louis, objecting that they are prevented from fulfilling their religious obligations towards their ancestors. As they are unable to access these graveyards, Chagossians instead proceed to a memorial commemorating their exile in Port Louis harbour, where they pray for their ancestors and drop their flowers into the sea (see description and Illustration 30 below). Many Chagossians reported that All Souls Day was especially difficult for them. Clearly, being separated from the ancestors' graves and wanting to go back was more than a straight political claim to repatriation covered in religious argumentation. When explaining how they were unable to properly undertake their filial duties and honour the memory of ancestors in the Chagos, many pointed out that the ancestors probably disliked the fact that their graves have long been abandoned and left to deteriorate. Many felt that this was their responsibility, and said that they wanted to go back, not only to tend these graves, but also to

apologise to their ancestors and to explain to them that despite their absence they had not forgotten about them.

In light of the funeral practices discussed above, it turns out that being separated from an abandoned homeland where the ancestors are buried creates a particular dilemma. As noted, most Mauritians trace their ethnic origin to places beyond Mauritius' main island, so in this respect Chagossians are no exception. But unlike them, the graves of Chagossians' ancestors are located in a restricted area where descendants have long been *persona non grata*. Since Chagossians' arrival in Mauritius was also relatively recent, their homeland hosts the graves of very close relatives, which include their own parents, siblings and even children. This context gives rise to a very particular dilemma: Both the cemeteries and the houses in the Chagos Archipelago are abandoned and falling apart. So if the spirits of the dead want to escape the cemeteries to return to live in the local houses – preferably those in which they used to live – there are no descendants there to prevent them from doing so. No relevant persons (UK and US military personnel, environmental scientists and yachters do not know them) are there to prevent them from doing what is 'normal', to leave the deteriorating graveyards and return to live in the abandoned houses. For this reason, some Chagossians held that it was only safe to go back to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 because two priests would accompany and assist them by, among other things, conducting masses and praying for the souls of the dead in the local churches. Some held it outright dangerous, and said that they did not want to join the pilgrims because of spirits, which due to their long neglect had turned evil and angry. After hesitantly admitting that he did not want to return because of such bad spirits, a Chagossian man explained his fears to me by putting on a breath-taking performance: stiff, determined, and with seemingly uncontrolled shaking, he stumbled slowly towards me with one arm raised and the other holding a strangling grip over his own throat. With his eyes and his mouth wide open and the tongue hanging out, he uttered a deep monotonous sound while he was shaking his head quickly from side to side. He stopped after half a minute or so, when he realised that his performance had also left me rather shaken. He explained:

There are cemeteries over there, some of them dating back to the days of slavery. Many of them came from Madagascar. There was voodoo – bringing dead people alive. There are many trees over there. Every tree guards a *nam*. Abandoned cemeteries and abandoned houses: a lot of *jab*. When there are no people there, the *jab* goes back to the abandoned houses. This is what I am afraid of. The trees grow wild. In a year, they grow big and turn into wild/brutal trees (*piéd brit*). Many people who died before are buried there. The *nam* can turn bad. Especially if they died in a non-natural way, like by abortion or by accident. A tree is a guardian. Every tree hosts one spirit because they are alive. You should not talk about it, that's very dangerous. Then the *jab* might come here in Mauritius. Since they closed the islands down, there is a lot of *jab* over there. Open the islands again and the *jab* will go.

“Open the islands again and the *jab* will go,” the man said. If the ‘door’ to the Chagos had been ‘closed’ by British immigration laws, it was re-opened for three days in 2006. Whereas some saw this as something rather risky, to most others it was a rare opportunity. If Chagossians had long been unable to undertake their religious obligations on All Souls Day, they could do it

now. At last they were able to tend their ancestors' graves, to lay flowers to honour their memory, to pray for their souls, and to communicate to them that, despite many years of absence and neglect, they had never forgotten them. To convey the same message for other Chagossians who could not participate, the pilgrims brought flowers to the cemeteries for them. These activities, Chagossians said, were not only important to themselves, but also to the ancestors. According to an elderly Chagossian woman:

Here, when performing the mass for the dead, you bring your flowers. You bring them to the cemetery and put them on the tomb. [...] In Chagos, all *jab* have not had their mass in a long time. They will like it a lot. For some time they have lived in their houses, but now they are able to say 'thank you', now they are able to do us a great favour, a great favour because we have not forgotten them. They are also Chagossians just like us. When they lived, they were like us. They could come and go like us, but they are dead; they have remained over there. They are able to give us a big prayer [...] like, to help the Chagossians get compensation and return.

Their first pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago thus gave the former inhabitants the possibility to properly fulfil their commitments to their ancestors. Thus, by clearing and cleaning the cemeteries, and praying and performing masses for their ancestors on the islands, they were assisting the spirits to find their proper way to the afterlife in heaven. After the journey, many participants therefore said they felt a sense of relief – especially, some explained, since this enabled them to explain and apologise for their absence to close relatives who were buried there. As an elderly Chagossian woman had objected when she was told that they had to leave the cemeteries to go back to the boat: "Let me empty my sack!" meaning 'give me the time I need to express to my ancestors all of what I have carried inside me'.

The above also illustrates the interrelatedness of Chagossians politics and religious beliefs. To many Chagossians it makes little sense to separate belief in God, spirits and ancestors from a political domain. Chagossians both pray and protest for their right to return. From an outsider's perspective, the chances of succeeding in a political struggle against the world's dominant powers may seem bleak. From the perspective of many Chagossians, however, this is a 'good' struggle for 'truth and justice', and hence 'if you believe you can, you can'. So given that people believe, 'truth and justice' may well prevail because 'what is impossible for man is not impossible for God' (cf. Chapter 5). Moreover, like the woman quoted above, some hoped that the pilgrims' prayers for their ancestors, the religious ceremonies, and the good works of cleaning and tending their graves could have a political impact. The ancestors in the Chagos Archipelago would probably be very content with this. Hopefully they would understand that despite the long neglect of their graves and despite the descendants' long absence, the latter had not forgotten about them. If this sacrificial work pleased the ancestors, then living Chagossians could be given something in return. Perhaps divine assistance to realise the central aims of their political organisations – to live on the land where their ancestors are buried.

8.3 *CLEANING FOR THE LIVING*

How Chagossians relate to their ancestors was surely important with regard to how they chose to perform their journey, but Chagossians do not leave their fate to faith alone. There were also straightforward political considerations that made it take the form it eventually did. Previous chapters have shown that different parties involved in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago have re-framed and/or silenced Chagos history to legitimise political actions and/or further their own causes. The Chagos Archipelago is a site of multiple disputes where different parties seek to define what these islands, and their former inhabitants, do and do not represent.

Chagossians are aware and much concerned about how their own history is tilted and silenced by other more powerful parties. As an elderly Chagossian woman explained during my fieldwork: “The Chagossian struggle is a struggle for remembering against forgetting.” Despite the British Foreign Office’s extensive efforts to conceal their actions and intentions from the 1960s onward, Chagossians are very much aware that British authorities deliberately defined and represented them as a non-permanent population in order to frame their evictions in terms that would not violate international law. However, few, if any, view the evictions as an isolated act of discrimination. They identify a pattern of discrimination and concealment dating from the time of their expulsions right up to the present day. In 2006 about twenty Chagossians travelled from the slums of Mauritius to London to attend a court hearing concerning the legality of the 2004 Orders in Council (issued by signature of the Monarch without any prior notice) that prevent them from entering and residing in the Chagos. They staged a protest in front of the High Court, displaying cardboard posters that among other things read, “Don’t wipe us off the map!” This powerful expression is representative for how Chagossians see their history from the 1960s as entangled in an extensive British politics of forgetting: a silent extinction of their community and its history. As a Chagossian man in Mauritius explained: “The British want to say that we don’t exist.” Since the 1980s, I have argued, Chagossians have fought and framed their struggle as an ethnic struggle in the context of a world order where a sedentarist ideology is very much taken for granted. Within these frames the above expressions not only refer to a British politics of silencing or forgetting, but also to a politics of ethno-cultural (non-)recognition in which not being recognised as a *settled* people has come close to meaning not being recognised as people *per se*, as in the concepts of ‘non-people’ or ‘unpeople’ discussed in Chapter 7.

Chagossians are not passive spectators to the contest to monopolise meaning onto the Chagos islands. Politically active Chagossians, of which there are many, realise that in order to be awarded proper compensation and the right to repatriation they must actively involve themselves in shaping and defending their own history. Compared to political opponents like the UK and US governments, their resources have always been extremely limited. Nonetheless, for voicing their version of the past and the meaning of the place they come from, some occasions serve the purpose better than others; and the Chagos islanders’ first communal return to their homeland was one such opportunity. Few doubted that international media would be interested in covering this unique event, and if handled properly it could very well have favourable impacts on how the Chagos Archipelago would be socially remembered. To

Chagossian organisations, therefore, the extent to which the journey would be exposed and how it would be portrayed became very important.

Chagossians were not the only party conscious of that question: British authorities had banned media from following the passengers and defined the event as a ‘humanitarian visit’ (S.R.A. Le Dimanche, 26 Feb. 2006). ‘Humanitarianism’ has long been associated with the neutral, impartial and apolitical, which as demonstrated by Barnett (2001) is a false assertion. Critical scholars have explored humanitarianism as an ideology that sustains global relations of domination and complements power strategies of advanced capitalist states in the name of human solidarity and amelioration of human sufferings. A way for the West, in other words, to govern in a new form after colonization (e.g. Chaulia 2006, Chimni 2000, Curtis 2001, Rieff 2003). The point here is that by labelling the Chagossian journey ‘humanitarian’, the event was effectively decontextualized. ‘Humanitarian’ is a general concept pertinent to a range of different situations. For instance, ‘humanitarian crisis’ can be put to use almost regardless of where it takes place, who it concerns and what has caused it. As in ‘humanitarian bombing’, ‘-war’ or ‘-intervention’, the concept can even serve to legitimise grave acts of violence by foreign military powers. The critical issue here is that when the term ‘humanitarian’ is put to use, it works to remove the event or situation at hand from its proper historical and political context – casting the assister in an apolitical, impartial and benevolent light, while transforming the assisted into generalised victims. As Malkki writes: “These humanitarian representational practices and the standardized interventions that go with them have the effect, as they currently stand, of producing anonymous corporeality and speechlessness” (Malkki 1996, 389). What is more, a ‘humanitarian visit’ refers to a very different kind of journey, one typically undertaken by wealthy and powerful persons who do not suffer themselves, but who travel to visit someone who does. Officials, politicians and religious leaders go on humanitarian visits – not marginalised people from the slums of the South. So do celebrities, like actress Angelina Jolie and U2 singer Bono. Hence, officially declaring the Chagossian journey a ‘humanitarian visit’ not only decontextualized the event, but it was also quite misleading. In view of how the Chagos issue has been handled over the last four decades, it is hard to interpret this official framing of the event, not to mention controlling publicity by banning the media, as anything other than another effort to depoliticise, de-historicise and silence the controversial Chagos issue.

The ban on independent reporters on the journey disappointed, but hardly surprised, Chagossians who saw this event’s potential for further publicising their political cause. Chagossians were also concerned with another dimension of silencing that came on top of the media ban and the humanitarian framing. Half a year before the journey, Mauritius’ general elections were much influenced by the phasing out of Mauritius’ bilateral trade agreements. When the election campaign started on 1 May 2005 the ‘Social Alliance’ opposition had accused the sitting government of “not knowing how to negotiate” – accepting sugar export reductions in the corridors without negotiating any compensation – and “today 35,000 planters know the truth” (Ramgoolam, cited in Saminaden and Bhookhun, *L’Express*, 2 May 2005; my translation). Coalition member Panglose from the PMXD then added: “If you wage war with the Americans and the British, do you think they will do us a favour? This shows that our politics is no good” (Ibid.). In the wake of the elections, which the Social Alliance eventually won, Chagossians sensed that their journey was being re-politicised and absorbed into local

political debates on whether Mauritius' sovereignty claims to the Chagos Archipelago conflicted with the state's economic interests.

The only place and times independent reporters could capture the Chagossian event live on camera was in Port Louis harbour on the day of their departure, and when they returned. Therefore, how Chagossians would board the *Mauritius Trochetia* and leave Port Louis harbour assumed great importance. When the Mauritian government then suggested a programme for this departure, Chagossians objected. During a CRG meeting I attended not long before the journey, it became clear that the Chagossian organisation considered the government's suggestion an attempt to capitalise on their journey. And it appeared they were most concerned about the government's suggestion that Chagossians should dance the *sega* on the quay. As discussed in Chapter 3 and 6, the *sega* is complex identity marker often understood to have been appropriated from the Mauritian Creoles by the state and turned into a national dance. We saw also that in certain respects, the Chagossian *sega* differs from other *sega* performances. However, distinctions that are significant on a local level may not be obvious to untrained eyes and ears. For Chagossians to perform their *sega* in this setting could therefore leave different impressions, for example that they were travelling to the Chagos Archipelago – not only as Chagossians – but also as Mauritians, or Mauritian Creoles, one of the many ethnic groups that comprise the multi-ethnic Mauritian 'rainbow' society. In either case, their destination would then appear more Mauritian. This would be in line with the political framework of the ten Chagossian participants from CSC (Mauritius) who embarked *Mauritius Trochetia* in white T-shirts reading 'Chagos is Mauritian soil'. However, it was the CRG with its seventy-five participating members that was in a position to define the event. To them, as well as to the fifteen passengers from the Seychelles, following the government's programme was completely out of the question. By the end of the CRG meeting, the leader therefore concluded: "We are not going to play tam-tam for them. Decisions are taken over our heads. And journalists will be there. If we cannot have our own programme, we will go directly on the boat. There will be no political discussions – period." As it turned out, they had a very different framing in mind. And in that framework, there was no room for the *sega*.

In this politicised context, the CRG took active steps to reclaim the journey. To reframe the event in accordance with their own political agenda they approached the Catholic Church to have the 'humanitarian visit' redefined as a 'pilgrimage'. The pilgrimage framing, then, developed in reaction to something else. In the next three sections, I shall explain how Chagossians historicised the event and reclaimed the route and the destination in the name of their ethnic community. To perform a pilgrimage, we shall see, can be a powerful political strategy in today's world. Clearly, Chagossian passengers were not only cleaning for the dead, but also for the future of those who are still alive.

8.3.1 HISTORICISING THE JOURNEY

If one follows the road from the city centre to Port Louis' industrial harbour, one of the side streets divides in two just before the quay drops into the ocean. If not to board a ship, very few people would ever think of visiting this policed, secluded corner of the island. However, after the morning mass in Cassis cathedral concluded on 30 March 2006, hundreds of people



Illustration 30: Chagossian memorial in Port Louis Harbour Photo: Johannessen 2006.

proceeded to this particular junction. But they gathered there not because the *Mauritius Trochetia*, the vessel that within a few hours was going to take the Chagossians to the archipelago, was anchored there. In fact, it was not. People came here because this was the quay where evicted Chagossians landed from the mid-1960s, and where they undertook their first demonstration by refusing to disembark the BIOT cargo ship *Nordvær* in

1973. To publicly commemorate this long-silenced history (at a place hardly accessible to the public!), the quay area was later rearranged and was in November 2003 inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Mauritius as an official memorial site (see Illustration 30 and 31).

The split road leaves a highly symbolic triangular space, constructed to commemorate the exile of the Chagossians at their very point of entry to Mauritius. On an elevated platform before the quay a tall stone monument reads: "In testimony to the uprooting and the exile of the Chagossians who arrived at this quay between 1965 and 1973. God was with us until our arrival here. He will fight for us" (my translation). Behind the monument, a white concrete wall fences the memorial from the quay and the waterway exit. A Chagossian artist, Clement Siatous, has decorated the wall



Illustration 31: Chagossian pilgrims at the Chagossian memorial 30 March 2006. From left to right: CSC leader F. Mandarin, CRG leader O. Bancoult, Father Mongelard, Rev. M. Li-Hing. In the background are the Les Moulines de la Concorde wheat silos. Photo: Johannessen 2006.

with two colourful paintings, one at the extreme of each side. To the very left, the side that points into the harbour and the city of Port Louis, is a picture of the wharf where the monument now stands. The picture represents the quay in the early 1970s and displays the BIOT vessel *Nordvær*, which was used to deport the Chagossians from their homeland. On the far right end of the wall, the side that points out of the harbour and towards the sea, a painting depicts a deserted sandy beach in the Peros Banhos group. Much like in the song *Peros Vert* (i.e. ‘Green Peros’, see Chapter 3), the beach is covered in greenery and plenty of palm trees that rise towards a wide blue sky and borders on the calm turquoise waters of a lagoon. The painter who took me to this monument during my fieldwork in 2004 named the latter painting “Peros’ inside border”, referring to the border where the sea meets the sand inside the lagoon of Peros Banhos – the deserted island group in the Chagos Archipelago where the painter was born and brought up. The relation between the two paintings accentuates the symbolic architecture of the memorial: not only is the memorial placed at Chagossians’ historic entry point to Mauritius, the site is also somewhat squeezed in between a split road. Instead of leading directly onto the quay, the road bends off in two different directions. One side of the road turns in the direction of Mauritius and the city of Port Louis while the other curves out of the harbour and towards the ocean’s horizon. Respectively, these roads also pass on the side of one of the paintings, which to Chagossians represents ‘exile’ (the picture of *Nordvær*) and ‘home’ (the picture of the Chagos). Each year Chagossians in Mauritius come here for three occasions that are significant to their community. These include the abolition of slavery day, which in Mauritius is a public holiday commemorated on 1 February, and 3 November, the day when the British High Court re-established Chagossians’ right to return to their homeland in 2000. A third occasion that has already been mentioned is the annual Catholic celebration of All Souls Day. As Chagossians are prevented from visiting the graves of their ancestors in the Chagos, they come here instead to pray, commemorate and honour the dead. Off the quay where they once landed, they throw their flowers into the water – the element that connects Mauritius to the sandy borders of Peros Banhos and the other islands in the Chagos Archipelago. Since the celebration of All Souls Day takes place on 2 November, and the following day marks the date when the UK High Court re-established their right to return, Chagossians commemorate these events jointly and thus also underscores how they are related.

The Chagossian departure did not coincide with any of these three occasions. Nonetheless, before they proceeded to embark the *Mauritius Trochetia* at a quay nearby, the passengers, their leaders, and the accompanying pastor and the priest assembled on the memorial’s podium to pray (see Illustration 31). Before the platform, hundreds of friends, relatives, supporters and reporters bowed their heads, prayed and commemorated the Chagossian evictions. This was a significant moment. As both participants and audience congregated at the memorial site on this occasion, this special site came to mark the symbolic place of departure for the very first Chagossian journey to the Chagos Archipelago. Through this activity and co-presence, a very clear claim to historical repetition was conveyed: the Chagossians had landed right here four decades ago, and the voyage about to materialise was going to be a journey in the footsteps of the Chagossian evictions. By congregating where Chagos islanders back then had disembarked from the *Nordvær* before proceeding to board the *Mauritius Trochetia*, Chagossians conveyed a clear message that they were about to travel

along a historical route – a route along which they were about to undertake a ‘historical journey’.

8.3.2 RE-ROUTING THE PAST

By congregating to commemorate the Chagossian evictions at the memorial site in Port Louis harbour immediately before their first communal journey to the Chagos, Chagossians historicised their journey. Through this symbolic co-presence and -activity they conveyed that Chagossians would travel along a very particular route in the days to come. More precisely, the same route that the British government had made them travel about forty years ago. However, in political and legal respects, the crucial issue is not *that* the route between Mauritius and the Chagos Archipelago is a historical route. Despite extensive efforts by the UK authorities to downplay and minimise exposure of their case, nobody, not even the British government, refutes that Chagossians were once dispatched along this route. The controversial issue has never been *whether* all the people residing in the Chagos Archipelago were shipped to Mauritius and the Seychelles in the 1960s and 1970s. The decisive point is rather *how* this shipment was defined, and continues to be defined. The interesting point here is that this central question literally boils down to the direction of movement that took place between these islands. In this respect, the act of reframing the journey from a ‘humanitarian visit’ to a ‘pilgrimage’ becomes highly significant. Central to any pilgrimage is not only the destination, but also the journey itself.

It would make little difference if Chagossians only claimed to repeat the historical route when journeying to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. UK Officials involved in depopulating these islands during the Cold War speculated that UN laws would not be violated if they managed to represent the evictions as a *return* of migrant workers to their postulated origins in Mauritius and the Seychelles. It is particularly this version of their past that Chagossians object to. A ‘humanitarian visit’, as the officials had defined it, was very much contrary to their argument. A ‘visit’ (Lat.: *visitare*, i.e. ‘to go to see’, or ‘to come to inspect’) is a movement away from home and back again. In this sense, it is closely connected to both ‘tourism’ (Lat.: *turnus*), which refers to “someone who makes a circuitous journey – usually for pleasure – and returns to the starting point” (Smith 1992, 1) and ‘vacation’ (Lat.: *vacare*), which means “to leave (one’s house) empty” (Graburn 1977, 18-19). The wording ‘humanitarian’, of course, adds a philanthropic flavour to it; but nonetheless, a ‘visit’ (humanitarian or not) is to go some place that is *not home* and to return again. In stark contrast, a ‘pilgrimage’ is a movement in the opposite direction. As Cohen points out, “pilgrimage and tourism differ in terms of the direction of the journey undertaken” (Cohen 1992, 37). Unlike tourists, pilgrims have a special connection to their destination. In line with Cohen, and most significant to the argument put forward here, Engseng Ho (2006) argues that a pilgrimage is a movement towards a destination that is the origin: “A pilgrimage is a return to a place” (Ho 2006, 7). As is evident from a statement made by the CRG leader to the press before the departure, this is highly significant for the Chagossian case: “Contrary to what people think, this will not be a pleasure trip, but much more a pilgrimage to our homeland, a return to the sources” (Yvon, Le Mauricien, 25

Feb. 2006; my translation). ‘Sources’, here, can also be translated by ‘roots’ and is a strong expression of origin – the place where it all began (to grow).

To reframe the voyage as a pilgrimage surely also contributed to historicising the journey, but it is important to understand how this was a critical statement about the direction of passage between Mauritius and Chagos, which together with the claim to historical repetition makes a powerful political argument. Rewriting the direction of movement that took place along this historic route is at the core of Chagossian politics. That is, their struggle to reclaim their rights as a settled population through recognition as an ethnic group with a distinct culture that can be traced back to its origins in the Chagos Archipelago. When Chagossians were evicted, the British government deprived them of these rights and legitimised it by asserting that the Chagos islanders were a non-permanent population that originated elsewhere (see Chapters 1, 4 and 7). According to their strategic version invented in the 1960s and 1970s, the people in the Chagos were *returned* to Mauritius and the Seychelles. In 2006, officials confirmed this direction of movement again when proposing that Chagossians were *visitors* to the Chagos islands. By performing a ‘pilgrimage’ instead of a ‘visit’, however, Chagossians were not only reclaiming and historicising the event, they were also re-routing their past. As pilgrims, they performed *a return in the opposite direction* – from exile in Mauritius and the Seychelles to their homeland. Thus, by re-defining the journey as a pilgrimage, Chagossians could object to the British version of their past and claim to qualify for UN laws issued to protect settled populations, which British authorities sought to circumvent at the time of the evictions.

8.4 SACRALISING THE CONTESTED

By redefining their journey as a pilgrimage along a particular historical route, Chagossians sought to reclaim the public event and object to the British version of their past. However, to convince the public that the journey actually was a pilgrimage they also had to perform it as such, which was a challenge since their journey deviated from typical pilgrimages in central respects. The Chagos Archipelago did not host an established pilgrimage destination, and the passage between Mauritius and these islands was not a recognised pilgrimage route. To be regarded as pilgrims, the passengers could therefore not draw on the argument of tradition and simply repeat established pilgrimage practice. If this was a pilgrimage, it was the *first* one. For that reason, performance became especially important. Chagossians could only claim to be pilgrims if they convincingly performed the journey as such.

It is necessary at this point to recapture two important questions discussed in the theoretical introduction to this thesis, namely ‘what is a pilgrimage?’ and ‘how are pilgrims different from other categories of travellers?’ As noted, the great variety in contemporary travel makes it difficult to classify mobility into mutually exclusive categories, such as ‘pilgrimages’, ‘touristic journeys’, ‘travels’ or even ‘ethnographic journeys’. In practice, there are too many in-between cases, which, if approached from an empirical angle, render categorical borders blurred and overlapping. Instead of proposing an exclusive definition of pilgrimage, I suggested a more pragmatic approach: Mobility in the contemporary world takes many forms.

This may pose a challenge to scholars troubled with the analytical question of identifying exclusive features that define pilgrimage as a distinct category of mobility. However, that in-between cases exist, and that they blur the categorical boundaries, does not mean that the different categories no longer make sense to people. On the contrary, it is often the in-between cases, and not those that conform to the norm, that provoke debate. Moreover, in such debates, it is often not the exact placing of the borders that form the focus, but rather the different categories' stereotypical expressions. For instance, travellers often highlight that they are not tourists themselves, and justify this by adding that tourists are typically so and so. Or someone encountering a group claiming to be pilgrims may question whether they 'really are' pilgrims since, for example, pilgrims do not 'normally' travel on first class tickets. In other words, prototype characteristics of different forms of mobility are often voiced and confirmed through boundary debates. This does not make the borders between the categories clearer, but the different categories can appear more distinct. Thus, despite – if not also because of – blurred borders, categories of movement do not automatically cease to make sense to people.

Instead of pursuing a list of exclusive criteria, I shall say that 'pilgrims' and 'pilgrimages' are what people associate with these concepts. That is, what people think that the terms mean, what the practices look like to them, and how they themselves choose to perform them. This, of course, implies that they do not mean the same to everyone. However, if increasing trans-local communication and accelerating flows of information, ideas and images mark the so-called globalised era in which these subjects live, then 'pilgrims' and 'tourists' are (if they were not long ago) becoming globalised concepts. Of course, people from different cultural backgrounds will indigenise these concepts and ascribe them different meanings. But at the same time, one cannot turn a blind eye to the emergence of certain institutional forms. As a number of scholars have noticed, considerable cross-cultural similarities exist in the ways that pilgrimages are performed (Turner and Turner 1978, 1; Morinis 1992, 3; Coleman and Elsner 1995, 202). Models do travel in the contemporary world (Rottenburg 2009, xxvi, 64). What the above material suggests is that also models of travel do travel. Moreover, certain characteristics of such 'travelling models of travel' have become significant to people in (and *en route* to) different parts of the world. My reason for stressing this here is that 'travelling models of travel' become hugely important to people like Chagossians who want to define a journey undertaken for the very first time as a 'pilgrimage' and consider international media exposure to be of central importance. Such travelling models *of* travel also form important models *for* travel – models one can re-perform to make a claim in a globalising world on the move, or in the age of evictions as Ho (2006) would have put it. This refers to what I have termed pilgr-images. As I shall elaborate below, by performing a journey in accordance with such models, one may *create* both a pilgrimage route and a pilgrimage destination. Once this has been done, people can come to hold stronger claims, among other things, to repeat such a journey in the future.

When the *Mauritius Trochetia* lifted anchor on 30 March 2006, few people coming to bid Chagossians farewell would doubt that they were witnessing a true pilgrimage. This probably goes for a substantial number of media consumers in and beyond Mauritius as well. That this image became dominant was far from arbitrary. Chagossians put a lot of effort into making it a pilgrimage. The CRG had beforehand instituted a special pilgrimage committee to prepare and organise their departure and arrival. "They came to us," the Catholic priest who



Illustration 32: Chagossian woman ringing the church bells in St. Sacrement church in Cassis on the morning of Chagossians' departure. The back of her T-shirt reads "back to our paradise."

Photo: Johannessen 2006

with the 'road to Heaven'. It is associated with innocence, purity, sacrifice and symbolic rebirth, which are central to transition rites (including pilgrimage) along the metaphorical journey of the Christian soul this 'road' refers to. In regard to pilgrimages, one may add here that dressing in white is also common in the much-exposed Islamic tradition of *Hajj*, the massive annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca.⁵ In the Hindu context, white is the colour of mourning – a meaning clearly compatible with what Chagossians now wanted to convey. Chagossians also have historical connections



Illustration 33: Chagossian pilgrims about to enter St. Sacrement church in Cassis 30 March 2006.

Photo: Johannessen 2006

later joined them on their journey explained to me in an interview after they came back to Mauritius. Also the other religious leader who accompanied them on their journey, along with another member of his Christian support group, *Mo Pense Twa*, was part of that committee. As was a younger Chagossian CRG member whose father had been born in the Chagos Archipelago. The pilgrimage committee was chaired by no other person than C. Uteem, former president of the Mauritian Republic. When the CRG leader publicly introduced this committee on 15 February 2006, he explained that "we want to give the voyage a solemn and sober character." This was no pleasure-trip, he stressed, but a historical journey of devotion and meditation that would be marked by intense emotions (cf. Choonea, *Le Mauricien*, 16 Feb. 2006; Olla, *Le Matinal*, 16 Feb. 2006).

Before the journey, the passengers were also encouraged to dress in white – "for the sake of the symbolism" as a central CRG member put it during a communal meeting. The women should also wear white headscarves (see Illustration 33). In Christian tradition, the colour white symbolises the joy and glory connected

⁵ Pilgrimage among members of the Shinto religion in Japan is another example.

to India (see Chapter 2). Some are now also married to Mauritian Hindus. Nonetheless, their contemporary connections to Hindu beliefs are weak. From their perspective, dressing in white would, as the CRG leader stressed, give the journey a solemn and sober character different from a ‘pleasure trip’. Within their community, the meaning of white most frequently comes to expression in their *sega*, as Chagossians point to their long white undershirts when they stress that, in comparison to that of Mauritian creoles and others, their *sega* is less vulgar, i.e. more sober. With regard to solemnness, as all pilgrims were clad in white, they not only conveyed their united commitment to an important religious event, but underscored also their own role as innocent victims who have been sacrificed in the shady politics of the powers that would also be represented (but differently dressed) on board the vessel. To further distinguish their journey from a ‘pleasure trip’, they were also quick to exclude activities that would counter this expression. Indeed, central CRG members were very clear that they did not want to be mistaken for a group of tourists.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, tourism has come to represent a structural opposite to pilgrimage, and not only in terms of the direction of the movement undertaken. While ‘tourism’ tends to be associated with the profane – with materialism, consumption, pleasure, and superficial hedonism – ‘pilgrimage’ draws on ideas of the sacred, spirituality, fasting, minimalism, hardship, penance and commitment. The opposing ideas ascribed to these two forms of mobility are intimately connected to a wider dualist metaphysics that is particularly widespread in the (post-) Christian West (Badone 2004, 183), and which for historical reasons is also familiar to people in the post-colonies. It is with these oppositions in mind that the above quoted statement by the CRG leader fully makes sense: “Contrary to what people think, this will not be a pleasure trip but much more a pilgrimage to our homeland, a return to the sources” (Yvon, Le Mauricien, 25 Feb. 2006; my translation). Tourists and pilgrims clearly share many common characteristics. As Turner and Turner once wrote: “A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist” (1978, 20). However, from the perspective of performance, and with the dualist metaphysics in mind, one could easily argue that to appear less a tourist is to appear more a pilgrim (and vice versa). Unlike tourism, in other words, a proper pilgrimage is not a pleasure trip.

To be pilgrims, and not visiting tourists, Chagossians downplayed aspects of celebration and amusement. Any talk of being happy to see their homeland again was seldom uttered without also emphasising that Chagossians had struggled long and hard for this journey, and that it was not going to be easy for them to travel so far, to see how their homeland had changed, or to confront childhood memories they presumed would be triggered when they arrived there. In line with this, when they arrived on the Chagos islands they spent considerable time and efforts on hard physical work, namely cleaning and clearing the local churches and cemeteries. Moreover, even though Chagossians often mark political achievements by dancing their *sega*, no *sega* was performed during the entire journey. As noted, the departure programme that Mauritian authorities suggested included Chagossians dancing their traditional *sega*. The reason why the latter objected was not only that they saw it as an attempt by the government to capitalise on their journey. As discussed in Chapter 3, during colonial times the *sega* was common among slaves in the Western Indian Ocean. Church representatives, however, regarded it as a pagan and particularly promiscuous practice, and sought to discontinue the tradition (Schnepel and Schnepel 2009, 278-80). That these connotations still

rest with the *sega* becomes very evident when Chagossians, who often dance and celebrate in rented buses *en route* to picnics and communal gatherings, stop playing their *sega* when passing churches along the way. In other words, framing the journey as a Christian pilgrimage gave little room for *sega* performances. They also agreed that alcohol, also a central ingredient to *sega* events, should not be brought along. This was also due to the fact that the journey took place during the Catholic celebration of Lent (*karem*), a forty-day fast before Easter. Chagossians are committed to this religious practice to very different degrees, but in this context it took on relevance in the sense of adding another dimension of piety.

It also made a significant difference that the Church offered its support. Given that pilgrimages are commonly understood as journeys to a sacred site (Morinis 1992, 2), people associate pilgrimage destinations with something ‘sacred’. Of course, meanings of these concepts differ across cultures, but again, my agenda is not to define these terms but to look into how people engage with them. It is for example often the case that objects regarded as ‘sacred’ are found within the domain of expertise of certain authorities. In Christian contexts, church representatives are normally those who control and engage with objects regarded as ‘sacred’ to the community of believers. Where religious institutions are well established, new objects can also become recognised as such if authorities declare and engage with them accordingly. On this occasion, Chagossians not only asked the church to define their journey a pilgrimage. They also invited church representatives, including a top-ranking religious authority, to perform it as one. The bishop of Port Louis led a grand mass in the massive Cathedral of Cassis on the day of their departure. White-clad Chagossians entered the cathedral, proceeded up the church floor, and received red flowers from him, which they were to take with them and lay at their destination. At the Chagossian memorial in the harbour, passengers and audience gathered in common prayer led by the invited Catholic priest and the pastor from the Community Evangelical Church. Port Louis’ bishop thereafter reappeared on the quayside to bless the travellers shortly before they embarked the *Mauritius Trochetia*. Throughout the journey, the two invited religious leaders would then guide Chagossians spiritually, and conduct masses in special places in the archipelago that are commonly regarded as sacred to communities of Christian believers. That is, the local churches and cemeteries. In this way, Chagossians positioned their journey within a Christian framework. Religious leaders did not only pronounce that the journey was a pilgrimage, they took active part in the performance. Backed and supported by this significant institution, Chagossians could, through their performance, convince the public that they were indeed undertaking a pilgrimage – even though it was the first one. But the fact that it was the first one also conveyed an important claim.

When convincingly performing a pilgrimage, something happens to the route and destination. It is in large part pilgrimage activity that confirms sites and objects at the destinations as something ‘sacred’. And if travellers convincingly perform a journey as a such, they may elevate their destination into something ‘sacred’ (Coleman and Eade 2004, Fife 2004). To have political impact, this of course presupposes that not only the travellers self-identify as pilgrims. The status of the destination can only be transformed and elevated in that way if the journey also is recognised as a pilgrimage. The travellers must, in other words, also be other-identified as pilgrims. To achieve this, their behaviour cannot deviate too much from other pilgrimage activity, but must conform to a certain pilgrim-image – a travelling model, or an

emergent ‘institutional form’ as the Turners (1978, 1) put it. For travellers who wish to be recognised as pilgrims, it is paramount to emphasise aspects like suffering, penance, hardship, ascetics and commitment along the route to a certain destination, and then to treat whatever defines that destination with respect and devotion. This is not because of an analytical definition of the term ‘pilgrimage’, but is due to widespread similarities in practice, which, at least in part, have emerged in opposition to other forms of travel, such as commercial tourism.

If people can transform and elevate (and not only confirm) their destination into something ‘sacred’ through pilgrimage practice, then pilgrimage performance can also form a strategy. Depending on how their movement is defined, performed and perceived, travellers can sacralise their destinations. This also works the other way round: mass tourism, which is often regarded as the structural opposite to pilgrimage, has a tendency to de-sacralise destinations which the tourist industry has profiled as something extraordinary (Bruner 1991, Graburn 1995, Taylor 2001, Badone 2004, Schramm 2004). Chagossians stressed that they were not tourists, but pilgrims; and by defining their journey as a pilgrimage, and convincingly performing it as such, they were sacralising their destination. In view of the wider political context of this journey, especially the competition to monopolise meaning onto the Chagos islands, it is possible to interpret the Chagossian pilgrimage as a strategy of site sacralisation: as one among a number of parties competing to monopolise meaning onto these islands, Chagossians were *sacralising the contested* through pilgrimage performance.

It is important to understand that ‘the contested’ here not only refers to the land called the Chagos Archipelago but also to stories about that land – highly political (hi)stories that include or exclude the Chagos islanders in different ways. To Chagossians, ‘the contested’ would refer to the relation between themselves and that land, and in this respect it is crucial to note that things regarded as sacred are typically associated with particular social groups. Churches are, for example, symbolic constructions regarded as sacred to communities of Christian believers. When someone treats such objects disrespectfully, it is often taken as a strong sign of disrespect towards the particular social group that considers them special. Such sites and objects often form powerful symbols, which are important to processes of constructing and confirming collective identities. Although it seems implicit to the Turners’ (1971) argumentation that pilgrims, who presumably leave the structures of their home societies behind to enter a state of *communitas* with their fellow travellers, identify only as pilgrims, this is not the case. Eade and Sallnow’s critique in *Contesting the Sacred* (1991) was based on the observation that pilgrims from different backgrounds actually maintain social distance at established pilgrimage destinations. They ascribe different meanings to the shrines, and they compete to define their meanings instead of entering a state of *communitas* with other pilgrims. The passengers who by the end of March 2006 embarked the *Mauritius Trochetia* were not just pilgrims – they were *Chagossian* pilgrims. By performing their pilgrimage, Chagossians not only sacralised their destination, they also declared it sacred to themselves, exclusively – a community defined in ethnic terms.

It is in this light that it becomes interesting to consider their pronounced pilgrimage destination, the graves of their ancestors. This is what they sacralised, and declared sacred to themselves, through their pilgrimage performance. The centrality of that destination came to clear expression when Chagossians explained that what upset them the most was how the cemeteries in the Chagos had been left to erode and lapse into jungle and wilderness. As an

elderly Chagossian woman explained how the dense vegetation on Peros Banhos prevented her from searching for her old house, “Dirt everywhere! [...] The cemeteries and the churches – everything was overgrown! It was impossible to walk there. Coconuts on coconuts. Donkey in the Church! A coconut tree growing from the floor in the church! Only on Diego was it proper.” Many passengers reported that they were sad to see how their old villages had deteriorated, but the state of the islands’ cemeteries was completely unacceptable. Many complained that this made them feel particularly disrespected, and regretted that British authorities, who control the area, had allowed this to happen. To them, the neglect of these graves meant disrespecting their community; and by voicing these regrets, they implicitly also asked to be recognised as a distinct ethnic group.

That Chagossians pronounced the islands’ cemeteries their pilgrimage destination must be understood in light of their wider political argument. In their objection to the UK government, Chagossians have, especially since the 1980s, pursued their political aims within the frames of an ethnically ordered world and a widespread sedentarist ideology (cf. Chapter 3). This comes to strong expression at the Chagossians’ pilgrimage destination. Within this ideological order, graveyards form particularly potent symbols for territorial origin and belonging. Named and dated, a gravestone is a commemorative monument that marks a deceased person’s place of burial. As is the practice in many parts of the world, Chagossians bury their dead in the soil. In a very physical sense, buried bodies transform into soil – mixing and becoming part of local soil when decomposing. Connections between man and ground are also not strange to Christian funerary practices. According to Genesis (3:19) in the Old Testament, which is often read on funeral occasions: “Since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Holy Bible, NIV, 2007). Most Chagossians are Catholic. They also refer to the soil in the Chagos when stating their origin, and place their roots within the cemeteries on these islands. As discussed earlier, Chagossian ‘roots’ refer to bodies of their ancestors who have been buried in Chagossian soil, or ‘natal soil’ (*ter natal*) – an expression also referring to the practice of burying or planting the umbilical cord, i.e. ‘small roots’ (*ti rasinn*), in Chagossian soil after birth.

Cemeteries, however, consist of many graves. Not seldom are they organised so that people of different classes, religious backgrounds, skin colour or ethnic identity are buried in different sections within the cemetery area, if not in completely different cemeteries. To these pilgrims, only the latter social category mattered. These were Chagossian cemeteries, an issue that was clearly expressed when Chagossians objected to the appropriation of cemetery space by official BIOT signposts that failed to mention that the war graves were found in old Chagossian graveyards. Henceforth, the pilgrims’ destination was more than a location where their close relatives are buried. Here, in Chagossian soil, lay deceased relatives of the entire Chagossian community. The cemeteries thus became a symbolic location – a place where not only close kin are buried, but also a potent symbol of metaphorical kinship. From the perspective of the sedentarist ideology, cemeteries like these can form strong symbols of territorial belonging. These are places where bodies of deceased relatives mix with local soil – becoming part of the soil for ‘rooted’ communities who understand themselves in territorialised, often ethno-national, terms. In this way, such sites are central when it comes to the naturalisation of ideas that people belong to particular places, and vice versa: that places belong to particular people.

These cemeteries represent the materialisation of Chagossian belonging. The gravestones located there stand as silent testimonies to this. In this light, it is not hard to understand why the voyagers so vigorously objected to their state of neglect – not to mention how local BIOT signposts failed to mention that the non-Chagossian soldiers who died during the war were actually buried in Chagossian cemeteries. These graveyards are significant to Chagossians in many ways, but politically they are especially important because they represent the most authentic testimonies and evidence that Chagossians lived on the islands for generations. Contrary to the argument of the British Colonial Office, these graves suggest that the Chagos islanders were indeed a settled population – a population belonging to the islands.

A number of activities the Chagossian pilgrims undertook on the islands reflect this political issue. Chagossians, in many respects, performed belonging while they were there. Literally at the feet of the British Marines who helped them ashore, highly emotional Chagossians immediately knelt down to embrace the soil of their homeland, thus communicating that this was a reunion, and not a visit. Cleaning the local chapels and cemeteries, performing masses for their ancestors and laying flowers on their graves also demonstrated their belonging and historical ties to the Chagos islands. Collecting, and later also using and consuming, relics and souvenirs also expressed Chagossians' historical place in



**Illustration 34: Souvenirs collected and brought to Mauritius from the Chagos Archipelago: Crabs (*sipay*), coconuts, bottles with sand, shells and pieces of coral.
Photos: Johannessen 2006.**

the local environment. Photos were important in this respect. Many Chagossians photographed the wells on the islands, and when presenting them later it became clear that their importance

concerned the UK government-issued feasibility study suggesting that a re-settled population in the Chagos could not sustain itself due to lack of fresh water. Other photos depicted Chagossians de-husking coconuts, or from their perspective: natives performing traditional skills remembered from the time they worked on the islands' plantations. Many pictures also showed former inhabitants posing in front of deteriorated plantation buildings or places in the forest where they remembered that their house once stood. As for the Chagossian woman who brought her son's birth certificate 'to show to the Americans' but never met any Americans, she showed the British marines the document that confirmed that she had given birth to her son on that very island. Moments later, according to herself, she put the document onto the ground to take a symbolic photo of the 'uprooted' son's birth certificate on the Chagossians' natal soil (*ter natal*). Speaking of soil, all of the pilgrims filled bottles with sand to be taken back with them (see Illustration 34). Some also found rusty metal utensils around the places where they remembered they had lived, claiming it was equipment once used by their parents. Relics and souvenirs were not only taken back for people to see and touch, certain things were also collected so that their relatives in Mauritius and the Seychelles could taste and consume the local environment they and/or their parents had grown up in. For example, after the journey I was invited to taste crabs (*sipay*) and coconuts that the pilgrims had collected and brought from the islands. While we were eating, everyone agreed that the food tasted better than what one could possibly purchase at the market in Port Louis. Like Chagossian natives, the food was said to come from an exceptionally healthy environment, which made the big difference. With regard to relics and souvenirs and the issue of territorial belonging, a most symbolic use of material objects from the Chagos was how Chagossian soil was used in the burial of a native Chagossian woman after the pilgrimage. Indeed, many evicted Chagossians expressed a wish to be buried in the Chagos Archipelago. According to the CRG leader, this particular woman was old and unable to partake in the pilgrimage. In her place, her son, who was evicted from the Salomon islands at the age of two, joined them. From the Chagos, he brought her a bottle of sand. She died shortly after. Expressing the issue of exile and belonging in a most symbolic way, the bottled sand from her birthplace (*ter natal*) was poured inside the woman's coffin just before it was nailed and then buried in Mauritian soil.

While Chagossians' claims to belong to the Chagos islands are much based on ecological argumentation, it is interesting to note that it was actually the local flora and fauna that was now taking over the old Chagossian settlements. Everything was overgrown, as the woman quoted above complained. However by distinguishing 'dirt' from what is 'proper' she also pointed out that the uprooted Chagossians' absence had negative impacts on the islands to which they, as natives, belong. From this perspective, the most central activity the pilgrims undertook on the islands, namely cleaning and clearing the churches and the cemetery areas, can be understood as a way of demonstrating the importance of Chagossian presence in the local environment: to be 'proper' the islands also need their people.

To be sure, there were many dimensions to this cleaning and clearing activity. To the pilgrims it was particularly important to save these monuments before they collapsed and disappeared in the wilderness. Both before and after the journey, Chagossians speculated that the gradual disappearance of the old villages in the Chagos Archipelago had always been the aim and intention of the British government. As an elderly Chagossian man explained: "The British say we did not exist. They say: 'Forget about the Chagossians!' But they lie! We have

cemeteries over there. My mother is buried over there, my father is buried over there, my grandfather also.” That these graveyards were now seriously deteriorating was therefore not only seen an issue of disrespect towards their ancestors and the ethnic community of Chagossians. It was also a central political problem. Many coupled the issue of these disappearing settlements and graveyards with the fact that the whole generation of Chagossian ‘natives’ were now aging and dying in exile. And with both ‘natives’ and their old settlements disappearing, Chagossians’ version of their contested past was somewhat losing ground against the alternative colonial story saying that no permanent inhabitants existed in the Chagos Archipelago. Chagossians regard these cemeteries as evidence that Chagossians lived on the islands for generations, and cleaning and clearing these very special sites must therefore also be understood as a way of saving the most ‘authentic’ testimonies to Chagossian belonging.

It is possible to understand the three new monuments that Chagossians brought and laid at each of the main island groups as a response to this dilemma. Despite the high percentage of illiteracy among ‘native’ Chagossians, these memorials were shaped as open books. Chagossians I spoke to during my fieldwork were very happy with these monuments and interpreted their shape as if indicating some kind of bookish documentation. As one Chagossian commented: “It’s a book. A book which says we were there.” Others even compared the form with the shape of the Bible. In either case, the form seemed to be understood as a claim to ‘truth’ or ‘historical fact’. A typical ‘fact’, of course, should be precise. And as such, onto the ‘pages’ somewhere in the middle of these ‘books’, the Chagossian stonemason engraved the exact historical dates Chagossians landed on the different islands. By cleaning and clearing the old cemeteries, the voyagers could save and re-expose the most central testimonies to Chagossian belonging. They could, so to say, reclaim their historical place within the local landscape. But recovering the old cemeteries would not suffice to convey their core political issue, namely that Chagossians had been evicted and that they had struggled for forty years for their right to repatriation. With the new monuments, however, the pilgrims could also inscribe Chagossian post-eviction history onto the islands. In a way similar to how colonial powers more than two centuries ago had claimed sovereignty to the Chagos Archipelago and other uninhabited Indian Ocean islands by leaving behind a stone of possession, Chagossian pilgrims left their own stones to communicate that the islands belonged to them. With these monuments, they were literally signing each of the archipelago’s three main island groups in the name of the evicted ‘Chagossian community’ – a signature excluding the organisation representing Chagossian migrants to the UK. Beyond the rhetorical truth claims that these book-shaped monuments were able to convey, the new memorials also referred to the old cemeteries – the more ‘authentic’ local testimonies that the pilgrims had now recovered. While these pre-eviction monuments had deteriorated, the new monuments explained their contemporary significance. And as open books, of course, the future of the Chagossian struggle was yet to be written.

8.5 ARRIVALS

The empirical case of the journey to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006 clearly demonstrates that Chagossians are not passive spectators to the politics that concern their homeland. This first communal journey marked a much longed for opportunity for their community in two interconnected ways. Firstly, it enabled Chagossians to finally honour, show respect and carry out filial duties toward their ancestors by on-site prayers and good works. Secondly, the journey provided an exceptional opportunity to voice Chagossians' political claims. Regarding the latter, authorities had taken political precautions by banning independent reporters from accompanying the passengers, declaring the journey a 'humanitarian visit', and also making it clear to the Chagossian passengers that future visits could be arranged if they behaved in a sober and dignified manner, in other words, without protest during the event. These precautions must be understood in light of Chagos history and the wider politics of the Chagos Archipelago in which different parties, including the UK and Mauritian governments who facilitated the event, work to monopolise meaning onto the Chagos islands. In this competition, Chagossians are active participants, and their political means include both protest and prayer. When Chagossians, after decades of political activity, were for their first time allowed and able to journey to the Chagos islands, they took active steps to reclaim, redefine, historicise and re-route this so-called 'humanitarian visit' in accordance with their own political agenda.

Under these politicised circumstances, Chagossians invited the Church to assist in transforming their journey into a pilgrimage to the cemeteries in the Chagos Archipelago. There were many reasons for this decision. Firstly, performing a pilgrimage was a way of reclaiming a public event defined otherwise by those in power, and secondly it was a way of turning the most crucial political issue to accord with their own political claims. As argued, contrary to a 'visit' (humanitarian or not) a 'pilgrimage' is not simply a journey away from home and back again. It is a return. It is a movement towards a destination to which pilgrims are not complete strangers, but have a very special connection. By redefining and performing the journey as a pilgrimage, Chagossians thus objected to the strategic story once invented by the British colonial regime – namely that Chagossians originated elsewhere and were, as temporary contract labourers in the Chagos, simply returned and not evicted or exiled to Mauritius and the Seychelles. By journeying as pilgrims in their own footsteps four decades after the evictions, Chagossians could claim to *return* to, and not simply visit the place to which they claim to belong. Thirdly, through pilgrimage performance Chagossians could also transform their destination. Where 'pilgrimage' is taken to mean 'a journey to a sacred site', travellers can sacralise their destinations by declaring their journey a pilgrimage and convincingly performing it as such. Chagossians (and the religious leaders that accompanied them) could thus declare and elevate their destination into something sacred, or more precisely, sacred to their own ethnic community. Within the framework of an ethnically ordered world, pilgrimage can in this way form a powerful political strategy for people who struggle for recognition and rights to occupied land.

It is in this respect not without significance that Chagossians singled out the graves of their ancestors in the Chagos as their central pilgrimage destination. Chagossians have, especially since the 1980s, framed their struggles for compensation and the right to repatriation

as an ethnic struggle. Their emergent argumentation has become deeply anchored in the naturalised logics of a widespread sedentarist ideology. From a Chagossian perspective, these cemeteries are more than places where individual and family graves are located. They are ethnic cemeteries. That is, cemeteries of ancestors comprehended in ethnic terms. These are highly symbolic sites where generations of Chagossian ancestors have been buried in Chagossian soil. Especially to those who self-identify as ‘natives’ and draw on Chagossians’ extensive repertoire of botanical metaphors to express their attachment to ‘the motherland’, these cemeteries represent, in the words of the CRG leader, ‘the sources’. This is where Chagossian ‘roots’ are buried. These understandings are culture-specific as well as ideological, and at the same time they are closely related to Chagossians’ political argumentation. Firstly, cleaning and clearing the old and deteriorating cemeteries in the Chagos meant saving the most significant material evidence for their core political argument. What these graves demonstrate is that Chagossians were not, as the FCO would have it, a floating population engaged on temporary contracts in the local copra industries, but a ‘rooted’ population with a history of local settlement dating back many generations. Secondly, by placing their pilgrimage destination where they place their roots, Chagossians invoked the sedentarist ideology’s naturalised principle of a presupposed metaphysical interconnection between people, place and culture, and declared the contested islands a homeland sacred to themselves – a territorialised ethnic community of Chagossians ‘uprooted’ from ‘Chagossian soil’.

This points to important and so far un-investigated interconnections between Chagossian politics and religious beliefs – two aspects of Chagossian culture that have (e)mmerged through their political history. Chagossian culture is not detached from politics, and the ways they understand and pursue their political aims are also far from deprived of cultural contents. The socio-economic and ideological contexts in which Chagossians live and struggle influence their politics and how they understand themselves and their struggle. One should therefore not be surprised to find that how Chagossians conceive of their ancestors in many ways also relates to their own contemporary socio-political circumstances. The Chagossian woman who explained that the ancestors “are also Chagossians just like us” more than indicated this. Indeed, Chagos islanders did not become ‘Chagossians’ until the 1990s, and that surely also goes for their ancestors (cf. Chapter 3). But also many other qualities and characteristics Chagossians ascribe to their ancestors relate to issues that are of central importance to themselves and their political struggle today:

Firstly, highly important to Chagossian culture and politics are sedentarist principles, which connect people with bounded places and naturalise those connections through botanical metaphors. Now, if trees are considered to be guardians of Chagossian spirits that have ‘remained over there’, then the ancestors, just like the descendants, are somewhat ‘rooted’ in the Chagos Archipelago. Secondly, Chagossians often complain about lack of help and assistance, regretting especially that they were simply abandoned on the quay of Port Louis and had to fend for themselves. Similarly, Chagossians point out that their ancestors were also abandoned in the Chagos Archipelago and also did not receive assistance from the living to proceed to the afterlife. Thirdly, Chagossians do not only consider their physical separation from the homeland a central problem for themselves, but communicate that this separation is also a problem for their ancestors. Unjust treatment, like slavery or the Chagossian evictions, causes frustration and anger to both descendants and ancestors. Both Chagossians and their

ancestors appear to have some unfinished business, and exist in a state of transition, or exile, in the sense that they have not yet arrived where they should be, and would have been, if they had not been treated unjustly in the past. Fourthly, Chagossians have been forcefully ejected from their homes and have fought very long to be able to return home. As this chapter has shown, wanting to return home is also a central attribute of the dead, and it is considered 'natural' for spirits and the living alike to want to return home to the place they used to live. In Chagossian funerary practices it is therefore important to actively eject the spirits (*nam*) from their homes and to take measures to prevent them from returning home to where they used to live. Both ejection from peoples' homes, and being prevented from returning to them, are, as we have seen, most central elements of Chagossian history. Fifthly, to be remembered is also a key issue for Chagossians today. "Don't wipe us off the map" one of their slogans went as they demonstrated before the British High Court in 2008. Over the last few decades, Chagossians have struggled against what they understand as a British policy of forgetting, or a struggle of 'remembering against forgetting' as they called it, and they therefore put considerable effort into voicing their story to international media and courts. The pilgrimage in 2006 was indeed a means to this end, but remembering was here not only seen as important to those who peregrinated: Chagossians went there to honour the memories of the dead, they said, and this was highly important to the ancestors too. The state of the local cemeteries clearly demonstrated that Chagossians had not tended their graves for decades – not even on All Souls Day, and many Chagossians therefore felt that it was important to explain this neglect to the ancestors. After the journey many Chagossians also said they felt a sense of relief. Very much like their political struggle for remembering against forgetting then, Chagossians could now finally tell their ancestors that they had never forgotten about them – even though it must have appeared that way due to their long absence and the neglect of the graves. Sixthly, these activities did not exclude the dead, but were a way of interacting with them. As the Chagossian woman pointed out, conducting masses for their ancestors in the Chagos Archipelago would probably please the ancestors, and Chagossians' on-site prayers and good works could make them happy. In return, as a way of saying 'thank you', the ancestors would perhaps help Chagossians – also in their political endeavours to return to the homeland where these ancestors are buried.

Central elements of Chagossian funeral practices, I noted, can be traced to the Chagos Archipelago before the evictions, and similar practices are not strange to, for example, their Catholic Afro-Mauritian neighbours in Mauritius. An interesting question for further research would be how practices of ejecting ancestor spirits from their houses and preventing them from returning home not only relates to Chagossian experiences in the frame of the sedentarist ideology in which they pursue their political aims, but also to defining historical experiences their forefathers shared in common – namely forceful eviction from homes and families through slavery. What this research has shown is that, within the frames of this ideology, cemeteries, gravestones and even central qualities and characteristics of the ancestors have taken on new meanings and new importance for evicted Chagossians in the context of their contemporary struggles for compensation and the right to repatriation. And if the orders discussed here are widespread, then pilgrimage performance can form a powerful political strategy also for other people who struggle to reappropriate occupied land in the contemporary world.

9 CONCLUSIONS : SACRALISING THE CONTESTED

In this study I have explored and analysed the Chagossian community through the empirical case of their first pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago. In March 2006, thirty-three years after the last Chagos islander was deported from these islands, a hundred Chagossians journeyed from Mauritius to the BIOT – a *de facto* British colony that now hosts a major US military base. At the time of their departure, crucial international trade agreements were being phased out in Mauritius, and bilateral relations with the UK, the former colonial power, were souring. In the midst of this situation, Mauritian and British authorities agreed to facilitate for the evicted inhabitants a humanitarian visit to the Chagos Archipelago – a restricted militarised destination to which both governments claim sovereignty. To specify the scope and focus of this explorative study, I formulated the following research questions:

Why did Chagossians define and perform their journey as a pilgrimage, and what did this mean in the context in which it took place? What can this case tell us about the Chagossian community, their culture and the wider socio-political and ideological frames in which they live and struggle? What does it reveal about power and political strategies among other local and global players concerned with their restricted and militarised homeland? And finally, how can pilgrimage, as a particular way of framing and performing movement, form a political strategy in a globalising ‘world on the move’ much defined by a huge variety of contemporary mobility?

Findings from this study have interesting implications for the anthropology of pilgrimage, but as the above research questions reveal, contributing to those theoretical debates has not been my central aim. As suggested by Coleman (2002, 363) and Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi (2005, 2007), I have instead chosen to approach pilgrimage as an arena, and have accordingly explored it as a particularly rich empirical case in order to understand wider aspects of the Chagossian community and the world in which they live and struggle. To their community, this journey was a landmark event, which could therefore reveal much about Chagossian culture and politics. As it also involved and provoked other parties that are central in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago, the event provided an exceptional vantage point to explore the meanings and makings of their community in interaction, conflict and dialogue with their most relevant Others. Today, Chagossians are spread across many countries. Their political supporters and opponents include inter- and trans-national parties and organisations, whose agendas extend far beyond Mauritius. This complex event accordingly triggered a number of disputes, and opened up new spaces for negotiation, that exposed political strategies, positions and limits for cooperation among key parties both within and beyond their transnational community. At once local and global in scale, this journey thus paved the way for discussions on wider global issues – most importantly, processes of resistance, mobility and localisation in a globalising world.

This study is grounded in ethnographic field data collected among a Chagossian community positioned within a particular landscape of conflict and negotiation. I have presented and analysed this empirical case in two steps. I first made use of the empirical case of this

pilgrimage as a means to bring to light Chagossian history, to map and discuss the political and ideological context of their struggles, and to understand central social and cultural aspects of their transnational community. This, then, provided the dense background of understanding necessary to discuss and analyse what went on during the journey itself.

This explorative study has resulted in a number of findings and conclusions. In the following I will first summarise my main findings from the foregoing chapters. I shall then point out how my investigations into this particular journey may contribute to, and expand, the rather limited debate now known as the anthropology of pilgrimage.

9.1 *SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS*

On many levels, the Chagossians' past is very present in their lives. A proper historical approach is therefore necessary to understand their community and the meanings of their various activities. Equally important however, are insights into the politics of how their past is constructed and mediated by other parties. As this case clearly demonstrates, history can be framed and manipulated to achieve particular political goals, a matter that involves power – the power to define. For the Chagos islanders, such politics have been a defining issue ever since their evictions. In this study I have emphasised that it is also necessary to consider the wider, often taken for granted, ideological frames within which their past is constructed, and how these frames have changed over time. With regard to such frames, I have paid particular attention to the sedentarist ideology and the ethnically ordered world, as well as the development ideology that came to strong expression in Mauritian nationalism. These frameworks have not been sufficiently explored in previous studies of the Chagossian community. To study their community with these changing, but also entangled, ideological frames in mind, has much explanatory potential.

With regard to history, we have seen that the Chagos Archipelago was first populated in the late 18th century. At a time when war with Britain boosted Mauritian prices on vegetable fat, French colonisers sent slaves of African and Malagasy origins to produce copra and coconut oil on these islands. In 1835, two decades after sovereignty to Mauritius and its dependencies shifted from French to British hands, slavery was abolished. The ex-slaves then did not flee these plantations, as was the case with the Mauritian sugar plantations, something that had to do with a very tangible local balance of power. Labour relations were not unaffected by the fact that the state was largely absent while the workers outnumbered the local management by far. As we have seen, however, local managers also had other strategies to keep their ex-slaves working on their plantations. Like in Mauritius, however, Indian indentured labourers were thereafter sent here to keep production up to speed. Life and work on these remarkably remote atolls was relatively isolated. However, as among other things the composition of the population, changes in the market for copra and organisation of labour demonstrate, these island societies were nonetheless much defined by global developments. Like Mauritius, they were colonial constructions. Different economic ventures were initiated and closed down again during the period of settlement, but coconut production continued

uninterruptedly under different managers for almost two centuries. In the early 1970s, these industries were deliberately run down because of new developments on the global arena.

To form part of a global US military strategy developed at a time of decolonisation and Cold War politics, the Chagos Archipelago was detached from Mauritius in 1965 and subsequently turned into a major US military base in what then became the last colony of the British Empire, the BIOT. In line with US requests, all inhabitants were expelled to Mauritius and the Seychelles by 1973. Here they were very much left to fend for themselves. Before long, severe poverty related problems arose, which resulted in many deaths and suicides. Many evicted islanders also had difficulties understanding Mauritius' capitalist society, something which (beyond the selection of cultural markers Chagossians later revived and now perform to signal their ethno-cultural particularity) demonstrates that culture within the plantation system in the Chagos Archipelago differed significantly from Mauritius. Violating Mauritius' territorial integrity, and evicting all inhabitants from the Chagos islands, violated international laws. The massive US armament of Diego Garcia has also not been an uncontroversial matter. These historical events have later therefore integrated Mauritian authorities, the Chagos islanders and British and US governments into complex, and ongoing, international conflicts and thus also opened up for negotiations between these parties. These conflicts revolve around a variety of issues, spanning from militarisation, sovereignty, access to land and local resources, international trade, human rights, to environmental protection. As we have seen, however, these conflicts are not unconnected.

Today, the period from the late 18th century until the mid-1970s has become the relevant history of origin for a diaspora community that strongly self-identifies as Chagossians. But this history of origin first gained real political importance in the 1960s, when the UK government decided to evict the archipelago's entire population. To circumvent international laws, British authorities then deliberately re-defined the islanders' past and presented them as a floating population of contract workers from Mauritius and the Seychelles. When the last shipment of evicted Chagos islanders arrived in Mauritius in 1973, the passengers staged their first protest in Port Louis harbour. This marked the beginning of a decades-long struggle for compensation and right to repatriation, in which competing representations of Chagossians past became their central concern. When Chagossians embarked on their pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago from the same harbour in 2006, the setting was therefore loaded with symbolic significance. Chagossians were determined to turn this to their advantage and to demonstrate, through this public event, the fallacy of the British authorities' version of their past.

This study has shown that in the course of their years of protest, Chagossians gradually went from being irrelevant to becoming relevant political actors with a considerable say in the politics that concern the Chagos Archipelago. It has also shown that over those years the character of their struggles has changed, and that it has changed in ways that correspond with the emergence of a new ideological climate in Mauritius and beyond. With the culmination of a significant Marxist-inspired opposition movement in Mauritius in the early 1980s, Chagos islanders went from being espoused to this 'anti-ethnic' uprising to actively submitting their struggle to a new and different ideological framework. Stimulated also by an anthropologist's interest in their discontinued cultural traditions at the time, Chagossians have thereafter pursued an ever more elaborate politics of cultural recognition within the ideological framework of what Comaroff (1996) has termed an 'ethnically ordered world'. That order, I have argued, is

in important respects informed by a widespread sedentarist ideology that presupposes bounded interconnections between ‘peoples’, ‘places’ and ‘cultures’. After Chagossians obtained compensation in 1982, local support diminished; but when Chagossians took their ethno-political struggle to an international level in the 1990s, this corresponded with global political trends that opened for renewed support internationally: from the early 1990s, in the so-called era of globalisation, national and ethnic recognition emerged as a widespread form of politics, also in the West (e.g. Wilmsen and McAllister 1996). But as we have seen, ethnic politics pursued within these ideological frames can give rise to curious dilemmas for displaced peoples, dilemmas that are likely to apply to cases beyond the Chagossians’. When people who are already displaced embark on a struggle for ethno-cultural recognition within the frames of an order where ‘culture’ is inextricably connected to ‘place’, they may, at the very point when they must invent themselves anew, easily also understand themselves as an ethno-cultural group that is dying out. And if the ethno-politics then extend to arguments of cultural genocide, they may quickly face another paradox – at least in cases where historical sources are scarce and homelands are transformed or controlled by others. People may then have few means of demonstrating cultural distinctiveness other than their own bodies, which implies that cultural traditions must be revived and strengthened. However, arguing for cultural genocide by means of traditions is a Catch-22: tradition disproves the cultural genocide at the same time as it proves what the genocide presupposes, namely that the group formed a culturally distinct population before they were removed. It was within this wider ideological framework that the Chagossian journey in 2006 took place. It is also within these frames that pilgrimage has acquired the political potentials I have discussed in this study.

Grounded in data from the heated disputes and negotiations that surfaced in the run-up to this journey, I have shown how the Chagossians’ destination can be understood as a site of contest. Among the central parties involved in the politics of the Chagos Archipelago, there exists a competition to monopolise meaning onto these islands. Chagossians represent one of these parties, and their pilgrimage in 2006 was clearly part of that contest. This reveals how active Chagossians are in shaping the meanings of these islands and thereby their own history. Central in this competition are also UK and US governments, Mauritian authorities, as well as a transnational demilitarisation movement. Although international trade, environmental protection, access to local resources and Human Rights are important matters in this politicised field, the official lines of disagreement between these parties concern sovereignty and militarisation. We have seen that in those respects, their political positions are mutually exclusive. What is more, their aims all extend the Chagossians’ own agenda. In the course of time, however, there has been a significant change: in contrast to times before Chagossians became relevant political actors, all external parties now relate to the Chagossians. In this situation, the politics of the Chagos Archipelago have been extended to include what I have described as a competition for Chagossian identification. That is, a competition wherein external parties seek to influence how the evicted islanders self-identify in order to enhance their own agenda. This also has consequences for the Chagossian community. As we have seen, important political splits within their community now correspond with these lines of dispute.

These disputes and ideological frames add meaning to how Chagossians understand themselves and their struggles. In this study I have analysed how members of their community understand themselves as characters in an emergent, and widely shared, narrative about their

ethnic group. To highlight the social dialectics at work in the making of this narrative, I devised the concept of a Chagossian ‘auto/biography’, which here refers to the ever-emergent story Chagossians themselves tell about themselves and their community, both to themselves and to others. This narrative is not told by Chagossians alone. Hence, it is also much influenced by how other parties present their history – in some cases radically different. This auto/biography is clearly also informed by the sedentarist ideology, which is strongly reflected in an important set of interconnected concepts and metaphors on which this ‘story of our lives’ rests. These include the concepts of ‘roots’, ‘home’, ‘sadness’, ‘misery’ and ‘struggle’. People present and understand themselves as Chagossians through this vocabulary, thus becoming Chagossian characters placed and positioned within intelligible stories about the history and condition of their ethnic community. As we have seen, these concepts and metaphors are not unfamiliar to people beyond their group, but Chagossians vest them with important culture-specific meanings that refer exclusively to their group. Together they form an interconnected vocabulary furnished with meanings, moralities and relevant out-groups, which tells a lot about what it means to be Chagossian from their perspective. These cultural concepts they also reveal something about Chagossians’ circumstances since they have emerged, and become important and meaningful, in a particular socio-political context. As we have seen, the ‘homeland’ is very much a reflection of Chagossians’ social, political and economic circumstances in Mauritius – a place from which the Chagos Archipelago is foremost *different*. As also reflected in the ‘back to paradise’ slogan for the Chagossians’ journey in 2006, Chagos is thus relational. Over time, it has emerged as a distinct and meaningful place through encounters with challenges and difficulties in Mauritius. It has become a ‘paradise’ in the sense of a place defined by non-existence and inversion of those exact difficulties. Chagossian belonging, and their longing for the homeland, is thereby produced and reproduced in everyday practice. This feeds into ideas that Mauritius is a place they will one day leave for someplace better, which also comes to expression in new patterns of migration.

This auto/biography is always in the making. This does not mean that it is only subject to increasing standardisation, which studies discussing materials from the courts suggest (see Jeffery 2011). As we have seen, in the context of their physical pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago, the Chagossians’ entire post-eviction history of political struggles was reconceptualised as a metaphorical pilgrimage. This past was then reframed and formulated as a hard journey with trials, obstacles and rewards along the way to a political destination – compensation and right to repatriation. Thus reformulated, the physical pilgrimage about to materialise was then reduced to a step *en route* to the political destination of this meta-pilgrimage. As I have demonstrated, strong commitment to this meta-pilgrimage was of great importance to many Chagossians, not least because it has taken on significant meanings and moralities from their Catholic beliefs and now draws on biblical stories of the Fall and the Exodus as well as Christian understandings of the soul’s journey on earth. The parallels are strong and they are many: In the beginning, there was peace, harmony and affluence in the Garden/Chagos. Then came the Fall and the deception with the secret UK-US agreement, after which all inhabitants were expelled from the Garden and were deemed to live and suffer under hard conditions in exile. In 2006, much like the Israelites, Chagossians followed the CRG leader, now referred to as Moses, across the sea to their Promised Land after some 40 years in exile, and found it occupied and fortified by powerful others. To believe that returning to the

Promised Land despite poor odds is possible is most central in the Exodus as it translates into a question of believing in the almighty God. Chagossians spoke of their struggle in similar terms: 'if you believe you can, you can' because 'what is impossible for man is not impossible for God'. In this light, it becomes hugely important not to cease to believe that Chagossians can reach the destination of their meta-pilgrimage. Chagossians understand their struggles as a fight for truth and justice that is carried out by a small people against the Goliath-like dominant powers of the world. From their perspective, this difficult meta-pilgrimage requires steady belief and true commitment along the way.

Another influential metaphorical journey is found in Mauritian nationalism. In respect of this, I have found that Chagossians and their homeland are rather important. This adds complexity to the general understanding that Chagossians form a very marginal group in Mauritius. Many Chagossians remain very poor and struggle with related issues such as unemployment, housing, health, drugs, school dropout and so on. But Chagossians also have powerful supporters, within both Mauritian government circles as well as the British parliament. Converting this potential into economic capital has been met with limited success thus far, but as a community they have acquired influence and importance exceeding most of their poor Mauritian neighbours by far. This position, however, also affects their community, and Mauritian society, in important ways. Boswell (2006, 166-7) rightly points out that Chagossians in Mauritius, like most other groups in this poly-ethnic state, fit into established local hierarchies of essentialised cultures, and that they accordingly do not suffer the local stigma of 'hybridity' like the Mauritian Creoles do. She convincingly argues that the cultural hybridity ascribed Mauritian Creoles effectively turn them into an important local anti-category that serves as a resource for the construction of other primordial ethnicities in Mauritius. My point is that Chagossians form a different, and no less significant, out-group in Mauritian society. Because their evictions were part of the UK-Mauritian independence agreement, Chagossians cannot easily accept the state's nationalist rhetoric, even though it is presented as a supra-ethnic project constructed to encompass all local ethnic groups. History has left Mauritius with few all-including nationalist symbols (see Eriksen 1998, 143ff, Bunwaree 2002). To the important ones that exist, Chagossians ascribe exceedingly negative values: the Father of the nation is a traitor, and Independence Day is a day of mourning. When the latter is celebrated on March 12 every year, it serves the opposite effect of its intention for the Chagossians. It has become a very potent annual occasion for confirming community borders in dialogue, ironically, with the state's rhetoric of inclusion. Mauritians in general do not appear very moved or seduced by these nationalist celebrations. However, the national symbols gain importance the moment they are criticised. When Chagossians, in order to change their disadvantaged situation, publicly object that the Father of the Mauritian nation sacrificed them for the sake of independence, their loyalty to the Mauritian nation is quickly put to question. Little does it help, of course, that they are now dual Mauritian-UK citizens, and that Mauritian authorities formulate the state's ambition to regain sovereignty over Chagossians' British-controlled homeland as a sacred principle. These processes, of course, feed into and confirm Chagossian experiences of local exclusion, and hence also contribute to reproducing support for their political organisations. At the same time, Chagossians emerge as an important Other within Mauritian society: a community on the very (blurred) borders of both the state and the nation, with a suspicious relationship to the former colonial regime, which in this capacity

contributes to raising national awareness in Mauritius. This, for sure, is not unimportant in a densely populated postcolonial society like Mauritius, which is marked by great economic differences and social divisions along the lines of ethnicity, religion and class and where all-including national symbols are far between.

When this study was undertaken, Mauritian nationalism was gaining importance. The phasing out of vital international trade agreements gave rise to increasing unemployment and deteriorating working conditions. As I have demonstrated, the government was then advised and assisted by powerful organisations including the World Bank and WTO to disseminate development ideas among the population in order to secure commitment to a common national project. On Independence Day, this project was expressed in a symbolic nationalist rhetoric whereby the state was represented as a ship sailing under the heading “one single nation, one single destiny”, where ‘destiny’ referred to becoming ‘developed’ much like Mauritius’ former colonial powers. Mauritians were accordingly encouraged to cooperate, be patient, work hard, and accept sacrifices in order to overcome an economic crisis, which in this optic was reduced to an obstacle *en route* to this presumably inevitable destination. Such a metaphorical journey can clearly form an effective means to prevent civil unrest among people who are not as mobile as their workplaces, which in times these relocate to places with better prospects for profit (i.e. cheaper labour and beneficial trade agreements). I reworded the Mauritius nationalist slogan ‘unity in diversity’ into ‘unity in development’ to highlight these findings. However, central elements of this propagated development project were also feeding back into local understandings of Mauritius’ poly-ethnic society, something that opened for an exploration into what I then termed ‘diversity in development’. In the frame of this supposedly all-including development project, some people were considered to contribute more than others. This perspective transforms the poor and unemployed into parasites or sand in the development machinery. In Mauritius’ ethnic-minded society, (lack of) contribution and commitment to development was translated into ethnic stereotypes. Different temporal orientations, closely connected with capitalist thinking, were held characteristics for different ethnic groups. Economic inequalities, and hierarchies of power and political privilege, were thus being explained, and to some extent legitimised, in terms of cultural differences. Like many Mauritian Creoles, Chagossians often struggle with poverty and unemployment. Accordingly, and in contrast to ‘future-oriented’ Sino- and Indo-Mauritians, these groups were described as ‘present-oriented’ (i.e. not saving and investing, but earning and spending short-sightedly in the present). The ascribed stereotype that is particular to Chagossians, however, is that they above all are ‘past-oriented’, i.e. constantly pursuing compensation for injustices committed to them in the past, and being nostalgic about a remote small-island coconut economy of colonial days. If this is a recent expression, it is not entirely disconnected from Chagossians’ earlier stigma in Mauritius of being ‘backward’, which, to be able to change their situation, is also reproduced unintentionally through exoticising cultural politics pursued vis-à-vis their relevant Others in ‘developed’ western states. This demonstrates how the indigenous discourse can be double edged: giving legitimacy to their land claims, while placing them as a constitutive native Other at the bottom end of the development scale.

Chagossians’ role as an important out-group within Mauritius’ poly-ethnic society also concerns ‘development’ – the most central ingredient in contemporary Mauritian nationalism. In a society where ‘development’ is powerfully presented as an undisputed aim and a solution

to people's problems, Chagossians' critique makes an important contradiction. Contrary to the promises of development, they complain and demonstrate that the circumstances of their lives have deteriorated significantly after they came to Mauritius. For about four decades they have struggled, not only to secure very basic needs such as food and health, but also to leave this 'more developed' place for a 'less developed' one. To many Chagossians, this is emancipation. In this way, Chagossians also question the logics of development and provoke public debate. However, their critique must not be read as a rejection of the general ideological order. It is formulated within the frames of development, and it puts only the valued direction of movement along this meta-journey to question. Skaria argues that although 'development' promises to erase the primitive by bringing about progression, development thought must also embody and insist on the existence of the primitive in order to make sense (Skaria 2003, 234). Hence, Chagossians' critique not only conforms to and confirms the ideological order; it also adds constituent meanings to the idea of development and the imaginary scale against which development is measured.

The metaphorical journeys described above – Mauritian development and the framing of the Chagossian struggle as a pilgrimage – do not only coexist. They are also related. They also have real and important impacts on Chagossians' transnational community. The Chagossian diaspora, I have demonstrated, is not devoid of internal heterogeneities, frictions and political splits. Some can be explained by Chagossian qualms concerning future repatriation, which have arisen in a situation where sovereignty to their homeland is unsettled while citizenships are unequally distributed within the diaspora. The most significant internal heterogeneity, however, has to do with these two meta-journeys. This came to strong expression in 2006, when Chagossian migrants to the UK were excluded from the pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago. Central meanings that Chagossians ascribe to those metaphorical journeys were passed on to the two most significant physical journeys within their transnational community since the turn of the millennium: Chagossian migration to the UK, and their pilgrimage to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006. Many Chagossians have welcomed the opportunity to migrate to the UK that arose after they were granted full British citizenship in 2002. Some even reformulated this as a return to their real country and government. We thus see an example of a diaspora with two historic homelands, whose members nevertheless trace their history of origin to the very same place. However, for how Chagossians actually conceptualised their (planned) journey to the UK, a language of return was all but typical. Instead, they conceptualised it in another terminology well-known in Mauritius, a terminology of change, progression, moving forward etc., which is the language of the disseminated development ideology – a metaphorical journey through which the state and the economy shall become developed much like the former colonial power, the UK. Militant Chagossians in Mauritius, however, object that changes in their living conditions have been inversely proportional to the promises of development. Also, they cannot embrace the development language of change and forwardness, because it is contrary to – and also constitutive of – the language of roots and tradition necessary for a convincing cultural politics. As already noted, sturdy commitment to their meta-pilgrimage was highly important to many Chagossians in Mauritius. Fighting for the right to return to their homeland in the Chagos Archipelago was, according to them, the 'real' Chagossian struggle. In their perspective, migration to the UK became a way of quitting, giving up, and taking the easy way out. When seen as a matter of

ceasing to believe that reaching the goal, or destination, of the Chagossian struggle is possible, migration took on deeper religious meanings transferred from stories of other journeys described in the Bible. The division within their transnational community, which comes to expression in these real and metaphorical journeys, is very important. On the one hand it explains, from their perspective, the general exclusion of Chagossians in the UK from the pilgrimage in 2006. Besides being regarded as not contributing to the ‘real’ Chagossian struggle, and having ceased to believe in it, they were associated with ideas and values that form the constitutive opposite of the cultural politics Chagossians sought to convey through this pilgrimage. On the other hand, it plays important roles with regard to their diaspora. Diversity in opinion, contravening plans for the future, failing international political alliances, and ongoing disputes between different Chagossian organizations are issues that matter to people and thus contribute to raising diaspora awareness. To partake, take side and position oneself in debates like these is diasporisation in practice. Accordingly, these internal heterogeneities do not challenge the Chagossian diaspora, but rather contribute to its social reproduction.

Chagossians’ journey in 2006 must be understood as an outcome of decades of political struggles. Much aware of Chagossians’ militant past, the authorities took a number of strategic precautions before Chagossians finally could travel to the Chagos Archipelago. They no longer insisted on approving the list of Chagossian passengers, but independent reporters were banned and the journey was officially defined as a ‘humanitarian visit’. Chagossians were also told to behave in a sober and dignified manner during the event if they wanted future visits to the islands to be facilitated. Such measures contributed to depoliticise and silence the event, and also to ensure that people would abide by the overall instructions and not turn it into a demonstration. Despite their militant history, Chagossians conformed to those rules, but they bent the journey into a most clever form of protest within the spaces that this event could offer: they invited the church, and then redefined and performed the journey as a pilgrimage to their ancestors’ graves.

As we have seen, there were important cultural and religious reasons for choosing to journey in this way. Spirits of the ancestors are important to many Chagossians, but problematic issues have arisen because of the historical evictions that have made it impossible for Chagossians to undertake their filial duties. In the Chagossian perspective, ancestors’ spirits left with lack of mass and prayers in a land of deteriorating graveyards and abandoned villages can be quite problematic. These issues, I have argued, also reflect the situation of the living, and adds meaning and importance to their political struggles. For example, much like Chagossians want to return home, they also considered it normal that the spirits want to return to their old houses. And much like Chagossians’ decades-long fight against a British politics of forgetting (of which this journey was a part), Chagossians regretted that their ancestors must feel forgotten too. They therefore travelled to honour their memory, tend their graves, pray and tell the ancestors that, despite the abandoned and overgrown state of their burial places, they were in fact never forgotten. In these ways they carried out long-neglected filial duties, nurtured their relations with their ancestors, and could then – as some pointed out – hope for some divine reciprocal assistance with their contemporary political endeavours.

This cultural and religious dimension of their journey, then, was not separable from their political agenda. But their choice of defining and performing their journey as a pilgrimage

had political dimensions extending this by far. In this way, they could reclaim the public event and frame it in accordance with their own political agenda. They historicised the event by gathering in common prayer on the nearby quay where they landed four decades earlier, thus communicating that they were about to journey along the historical route of their evictions. However, the core political issue has never been whether Chagossians were once shipped along this route, but rather what connection they have with the Chagos Archipelago. This boils down to a matter of direction. At the time of their removals, UK authorities deliberately circumvented legal responsibilities by defining and presenting the inhabitants as migrant contract workers. In that perspective, they did not ‘evict’ Chagos islanders, but ‘returned’ them to their postulated origins in Mauritius and the Seychelles. In 2006 this framing was again sought by official terming that suggested that Chagossians were now ‘visiting’ the Chagos Archipelago. By rejecting this, and actively redefining and performing their journey as pilgrims to their ancestors’ graves, Chagossians re-seized control over the definition of direction. By conducting a pilgrimage, they reclaimed and re-routed their own past, and ‘returned’ in the opposite direction. Instead of a (humanitarian) visit away from home and back again, the journey became a return – a homecoming to a place of important historical and cultural connections. These connections were demonstrated in many ways during their journey, most powerfully by engaging with the pilgrimage’s very destination, the graves of their ancestors, which form the strongest material testimonies to Chagossian belonging in the Chagos Archipelago. Clearing and cleaning these deteriorated sites, and erecting new monuments in the name of their community that explained their contemporary relevance, were ways to re-inscribe their community onto the abandoned local landscape and thus re-appropriate the land they call home. Also, it was a way to make their claim last, and to preserve evidence, like in Chagossians’ many international court cases, but in a different ritual setting they had defined themselves and where general public opinion replaced British Lords and other juridical authorities with the role of the judge.

All this shows that the 2006 journey was not an ordinary pilgrimage. It was also not an ordinary pilgrimage in the sense of a journey along an established pilgrimage route to a recognised pilgrimage destination. No pilgrimage route or pilgrimage destination existed before this event. But by adopting the symbolism and aesthetics of pilgrimage, and by defining and performing their journey accordingly, Chagossians could convincingly claim to undertake a pilgrimage – even though it was the first one. If destinations are made sacred through the activities of pilgrims (Fife 2004, 142-3, Coleman and Eade 2004, 18), Chagossians could transform their destination into something sacred through pilgrimage performance, i.e. by defining and convincingly performing what is widely referred to as a ‘sacred journey’ or a ‘journey to a sacred site’ (see Morinis 1992, 2-3). In this way, pilgrimage performance can be a strategy of site sacralisation. But as I have argued, this also affects the understanding of those who journey. When Chagossians peregrinated to their ancestors’ graves, they did not primarily journey to confirm their faith and community as Christian believers, but as a group confirming their ethnic community and its territorial origin. This, we have seen, has not always been their central form of political identification. This pilgrimage took place within an ethnically ordered world much informed by a sedentarist ideology, which emerged as a highly important ideological framework from the mid-1980s. Within this order, as this study shows, pilgrimage has gained important political potentials. When acting within that framework, however,

Chagossians were not only sacralising their destination, as in the processes that Coleman and Eade (2004) and Fife (2004) discuss. And, since no other religious cults or sects here competed to define a pilgrimage destination already defined as sacred, Chagossians were not simply 'contesting the sacred' in Eade and Sallnow's (1991) sense either - even though the Chagos Archipelago is indeed a site of contest onto which multiple parties compete to monopolise meaning. As I shall return to below, these two approaches have been highly influential in recent pilgrimage research, and they have proved very fruitful in this study too. Yet, when Chagossians peregrinated to the Chagos Archipelago in 2006, they were doing something different and something more. I conclude that Chagossians were rather 'sacralising the contested'. That is, reclaiming a highly contested destination by elevating it into something sacred for their own ethnic community through pilgrimage performance. In this way, pilgrimage has become an option for political resistance, but it is an option that largely presupposes (but also confirms) an ethnically ordered world much informed by a widespread sedentarist ideology.

9.2 CHAGOSSIAN JOURNEYS WITHIN AND BEYOND AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE

This study confirms Coleman's (2002, 363) point that since pilgrimages often provide very rich empirical material, it can be more fruitful to approach them as case studies to make general points about human behaviour than to limit the focus of inquiry to a narrow theoretical debate about the institution of pilgrimage. This should not be mistaken to mean that the anthropology of pilgrimage has little to offer such broader studies. Alongside other analytical perspectives, many theories from these debates have contributed to understanding the empirical cases presented here. I shall now turn the tables and consider what implications the Chagossian case has for these theoretical debates.

It was never the aim of this study to arrive at a general analytical definition of pilgrimage. This study rather underlines how important it is to understand pilgrimages in their particular contexts. It would hardly be possible to understand the Chagossians' pilgrimage without proper respect for the political, historical, economic, cultural and religious dimensions in which it was embedded. To argue this, however, is not to reject the value of comparing pilgrimages, or to say that general theorising around the institution of pilgrimage, is futile. In this study I have discussed how pilgrimages can be understood within wider and quite widespread ideological frameworks in a globalising world, such as the sedentarist ideology and the ethnically ordered world. Particularly therefore, findings from this case may have comparative value. The main contributions to the anthropology of pilgrimage that can be deduced from this study primarily concern political dimensions. In the early 1990s, Eade and Sallnow (1991) reintroduced politics to these debates as they objected to the Turners' (1978) general theorising around the pilgrimage institution. But as this study demonstrates, with their strong focus on deconstructing pilgrimage as a bounded category of action, a fuller political potential of pilgrimage disappeared from view.

This study draws on Eade and Sallnow's (1991) observation that pilgrims from different sects or cults promote competing interpretations of the very same pilgrimage destinations. Likewise, the Chagos Archipelago is a site of contest and a place over which different parties compete to monopolise meaning. But the Chagossian case shows that key competitions over pilgrim sites' meanings can involve non-pilgrims too. Also parties that do not identify as pilgrims, including people who do not even journey to the site in question at all, can hold crucial interests in how a pilgrimage site is defined. As we have seen, pilgrims can be hugely motivated and engaged in competitions to define the meaning of their destination vis-à-vis parties who do not peregrinate, but possess the power to define the same site by other means. In fact, they may choose to peregrinate for that very reason. Much will disappear from view, in other words, if this theoretical perspective is reserved for pilgrims only, or just for those who actually do travel.

The Chagossian case also adds interesting dimensions to the much-debated question of whether or not pilgrimage can be regarded as a bounded category of action. Eade and Sallnow (1991) argued against this and deconstructed the institution altogether. Later studies, well positioned within the paradigm of globalisation, were also sceptical to this – albeit for different reasons. For example, Badone and Roseman (2004, 2) point to the difficulties of drawing clear categorical borders between the vast varieties of travel in a globalising world constantly *en route*. This is an important observation, but it is equally important to acknowledge that subjects of study do distinguish between different categories of travel (Graburn 2004, 135). This was highly relevant in the Chagossian case, and is in fact at the core of a central argument developed in this study. Chagossians were remarkably concerned with distinguishing between different forms of travel. They strongly objected to the official definition of their journey as a 'humanitarian visit'. They actively redefined it as a 'pilgrimage'. They stressed the importance of not appearing as a group of 'tourists', and eventually excluded the organisation representing Chagossian 'migrants' to the UK from their journey. Before I can move on to discuss the importance of this, it is necessary to clarify a few points about the boundaries of the pilgrimage category.

First of all, it is important to separate between, on the one hand, social scientists' analytical challenges in defining what distinguishes (a variety of) pilgrimages from other forms of mobility in today's world; and, on the other hand, how subjects of study identify different forms of mobility in practice. Both aspects relate to other forms of mobility by dissociation. But as much as boundaries between analytical categories need not correspond with identification in practice, identification in practice does not require a very clear analytical definition. Subjects of study categorise activities on their own. And once established, they have real impacts on the social world. People often identify social activities with reference to stereotypical expressions or sets of characteristics that make them distinct. Looking at this the other way round, a political resource suddenly emerges: people can perform and express activities characteristically and distinctively in order to have them identified according to established social categories. Such politics draw on how people identify things or activities in practice, and not how social scientists draw (or cannot draw) clear analytical boundaries between them. In this study, it is primarily the former aspect of the pilgrimage category I have been concerned with.

In light of this it becomes hugely interesting that a number of scholars have observed the emergence of an “institutional form” of pilgrimage (Turner and Turner 1978, 1). There is a “cross cultural homology” in pilgrimage traditions (Morinis 1992, 3). Not all social practices have “the look of a pilgrimage” and there are “parallels in behaviour to be found across time and culture” (Coleman and Elsner 1995, 202). An important point I have made in this study is that globalisation does not necessarily challenge this. The case of the Chagossian pilgrimage, which was staged on an international arena, supports the proposition that globalisation not only contributes to blurring the borders between different categories of mobility. The reverse is also the case. First of all, increasing numbers of unclear, in-between forms of mobility provoke debates on what a proper pilgrimage is, and thereby heighten awareness of typical pilgrimage expressions.¹ Second, put in Geertz’ terminology, *models of travel* can also be *models for travel* (Geertz 1973, 93). Moreover, models also travel in the contemporary world (Rottenburg 2009, xxvi, 64). And in a globalising world marked by unprecedented acceleration of global flows, so do models of travel. Travelling images of pilgrimages – what I have termed ‘pilgr-images’ – are facilitated by communication technologies and globalised media too. And this can contribute to shaping and standardising pilgrimage expressions. Of course, people will interpret and indigenise these pilgr-images differently. My point, however, is that if any contours of something like ‘the look of a pilgrimage’ emerge, this is likely to have an impact on contemporary pilgrimage performances. Especially, as has been thoroughly demonstrated by the Chagossian case, if strategic considerations are among the key reasons for defining and performing a particular journey accordingly. Categorical borders between different forms of travel may be blurred from an analytical and a most general empirical perspective. But in order to serve as political strategy, pilgrimage performances must accommodate certain popular and recognisable expressions by which they can be identified and clearly distinguished from other categories of travel.

If one wants to come to terms with the political potential in pilgrimage practice, it is therefore especially important to acknowledge how subjects of study do distinguish between different categories of movement. This has to do with the potential to transform in pilgrimage practice. With transformation I am not suggesting a return to the understanding of pilgrimage as a *rite de passage* (Turner and Turner 1978), although I agree with Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi (2005, 2007) that elements of *communitas* and transformation in pilgrims’ social status can be found alongside contestation in pilgrimage practice. My argument here draws on Coleman and Eade’s (2004, 18) proposal to approach pilgrimage as an activity of sacralisation, an activity through which places and objects can be rendered sacred by people appropriating them as something holy. Fife suggests in a similar vein: “Efforts of movement is a defining feature of turning a physical space into a sacred place,” and therefore, “in addition to the notion of journeying toward a ‘sacred space’ we need to add the concept of journeying toward a place that can be *made sacred* through the actions of its pilgrims” (Fife 2004, 142-143 [italics in original]). This approach has been rewarding for understanding the empirical material presented in this thesis. But the Chagossian case also suggests that the argument of transformation should be extended. As we have seen, not only is the destination transformed

¹ The emergence of a so-called ‘anthropology of pilgrimage’ in the early 1990s (alongside other debates on mobility and displacement) is in itself an expression of this.

through pilgrimage practice. The politics of pilgrimage can be as much about a) transforming and re-directing a particular route, and b) pursuing changes in respect of how those who peregrinate (and their wider in-group) are identified and recognised by others. I now turn to discuss these two points.

As the Chagossian case clearly shows, also the route along which people journey can gain new meanings through pilgrimage activity. This can make a world of difference to people who struggle to define their own past. When depopulating the Chagos Archipelago in the 1960s and 70s, the UK government circumvented responsibilities as drawn up in the UN Charter by strategically defining the removals not as an ‘eviction’ of people from their homes, but as a ‘return of migrant workers’ to other purported origins. Four decades later, the Chagossian journey was officially defined a ‘humanitarian visit’. To undertake a *visit* – humanitarian or not – would be in line with the colonial regime’s strategic representation of Chagossians’ past. Visitors (like tourists and vacationers) journey away from home and then return back home again. Nothing in this concept suggests they have a special historical connection to their destination. Neither does it vest those who journey with any authority to define what this destination means, let alone claim any rights to it. A pilgrimage, on the contrary, is a journey in the opposite direction (Cohen 1992, 37, Davidson and Gitlitz 2002, 342, Ho 2006, 342). Pilgrims *return* to a place, a place to which they (and the imagined community they represent) claim to already have a very special connection. This is accentuated by such movement’s association with asceticism, piousness and penance, which suggests that motivations other than discovery, leisure or pleasure-seeking hedonism form the central aim of the journey. By redefining and performing their journey as a pilgrimage, Chagossians could re-route their own past and make a powerful claim that they were ‘returning’ in the opposite direction to the movement of ‘return’ that was proposed, and again sought confirmed, by the authorities. Thus they could claim to qualify for central rights within the sedentarist world order, which apply to people recognised as settled or belonging to particular places, and not to ‘floating populations’ – the ‘un-people’ or ‘non-people’ of that world.

This leads to the political implications that pilgrimage performance can have for the understandings of those who journey. The Chagossian case demonstrates that renegotiating meanings of routes and destinations through pilgrimage can also impact the identification of those who journey, even their wider in-group. As Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi (2005, 14) note, a significant element of appropriation is involved in pilgrimage. Pilgrimage as site sacralisation presupposes subjects, since pilgrimage sites (and possibly routes) are also made sacred to someone. Coleman and Eade point out that pilgrimage can be understood as a form of cultural closure promoting localism and particularism in a world constantly *en route*, and that pilgrim sites “can provide arenas for the rhetorical, ideologically charged assertion of apparent continuity, even fixity, in religious and wider social identities” (Coleman and Eade 2004, 15). The Chagossian case confirms that pilgrimage can contribute to establishing or confirming social identities, but the interesting question is what ‘wider social identities’ beyond religious ones are especially prone to be established or confirmed through pilgrimage practice in today’s world? The Chagossian case demonstrates that pilgrimage, especially when approached as a strategy of site sacralisation, goes hand in hand with territorialised identities. Pilgrimage connects exceptionally well with sedentarist principles – especially in cases where tombs, graves or cemeteries define the pilgrims’ destination. Symbolically, few material markers

connect peoples to places stronger than the graves of one's (real or fictive) kin. Pilgrimage therefore links remarkably well with ethno-cultural politics too, which has emerged as a widespread form of political protest in the era of globalisation (e.g. Wilmsen and McAllister 1996). Chagossian politics conform to this pattern. But I will also add that their efforts at fixing identities and promoting localism and particularism in Chagossian identification can hardly be analysed as a form of cultural closure in the sense of a reaction to uncertainty and unpredictability arising from global flows in a shifting and ever-changing globalised world that is constantly *en route*. The localism and particularism promoted in Chagossian identification spring out of something much more concrete, and is foremost a matter of widespread sedentarist principles, which are also laid down in the UN Charter and protected by a number of international laws and agreements. Chagossians object to other parties' power and ability to circumvent those laws and agreements. Therefore, although we have seen that issues of mobility are clearly defining for Chagossian identification and self-understanding, it is primarily heavy restrictions on movement that mark and motivate their community. Their territorialised identities are most crucially constructed around the *impossibility* to move where they want. The drama, pathos and their insistence on the historical importance of this particular pilgrimage underlined that their ability to journey to the Chagos in 2006 was an exception to the rule. At the same time the pilgrimage was a means to turn this exception into regularity in the sense of repetition of tradition, and thereby, like the Basotho pilgrims on the South Africa-Lesotho border who lost their land to Orange Free State white settlers discussed by Coplan (2004), attempt to re-establish some form of autonomous Chagossian presence in their homeland through repeated pilgrimage activity: on the occasion of All Souls Day in 2009, 18 CRG members returned to the Chagos Archipelago to place flowers on their ancestors' graves.

Although I have emphasised issues of contestation and transformation here, this does not mean that there is no correspondence at work in pilgrimage practice. As Schlee and Kehl-Bodrogi (2005, 2007) argue, pilgrimage can include both contestation and celebration of *communitas*. In accordance with Morinis' pilgrimage definition, Chagossians were indeed journeying in quest of a place held to embody a culturally valued ideal (Morinis 1992, 4). Their community, and cultural meanings of key importance to them, were very much expressed and confirmed through this journey. Such correspondence does not necessarily contradict elements of contestation and transformation. My point is that there is an important distinction to be drawn between different levels of analysis. I have argued that pilgrimage can form a political strategy and a means to resist, but that it is important to acknowledge that such resistance takes place within wider ideological frames. As we have seen, over the years victimised Chagos islanders became relevant political actors. Especially from the mid-1980s, they submitted their struggle to an ethnically ordered world much informed by a widespread sedentarist ideology, and then embarked on a politics of cultural recognition. Within this order, different roles are already established. Victimised people become particular kinds of victims. Certain expectations with regard to conduct and self-presentation apply, and certain laws take, in practice, precedence over others. When Chagossians submitted their political struggle to this new ideological framework, new possibilities for active protest and negotiation opened up for them – in this instance an ethno-political struggle for recognition on a global stage, of which participants also become self-reflexive as they move in and out of social roles available within the new framework. In other words, they acquired patency (Schnepel 2000, 2006). This

enabled them to enter established institutions, starting with UN working Groups for Indigenous Peoples and then moving on into international courts. Assisted by lawyers, politicians and others, Chagossian protest was effectively disciplined and funnelled away from the streets and from more radical issues like general economic injustice and military occupation, to clarify matters of legal or illegal immigration laws within the highly controlled ritual spaces of the courts. Chagossians' pilgrimage in 2006 was a different arena, but the ideological framework to which they had submitted enabled them to actively turn this ancient institution into a means to resist. The pilgrimage thus became a form of resistance intended to promote transformation and change. Yet, this resistance found place within certain wider ideological frames, which through pilgrimage was not challenged but rather confirmed. In pilgrimage, then, resistance, transformation and correspondence can be at work simultaneously on different levels.

A significant finding in this empirical study concerns the entanglement of journeys – both physical and metaphorical ones. If the definition of a journey can transform the meanings of the destination, the route as well as those who journey, distinctions between different categories of movement can surely assume considerable importance. To pay close attention to why subjects of study identify their journeys as pilgrimages can therefore be illuminating. But as identification is relational, pilgrimage derives constitutive meanings through the other forms of movement it is held to differ from. Chagossians vividly contrasted pilgrimage with other forms of mobility. They objected to being labelled 'visitors'. When it came to performing this journey, it was imperative not to appear as a group of 'tourists'. They also dissociated strongly with Chagossian 'migrants' to the UK. In this case, and probably many other cases, these forms of mobility are clearly not unrelated. In fact, they are informed by the dualist metaphysics embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In important respects, pilgrimage and tourism are conceptual opposites. In their edited volume on the intersections between these forms of travel, Badone and Roseman write: "The popular depiction of the tourist as a superficial hedonist seems far removed from the image of the pious pilgrim motivated by faith to undertake arduous and ascetic journeys to centres of

Pilgrimage	Tourism
Sacred	Secular
Asceticism	Money
Poverty	Consumption
Good	Evil
High	Low
Spiritual	Material

Illustration 35: Popular ascription to pilgrimage and tourism as opposing categories of travel (reproduced from Badone 2004).

religious devotion" (Badone and Roseman 2004, 2, see also Schramm 2004, 134). Pilgrims, they point out, tend to be regarded as structural forerunners to modern secular tourism – pre-modern travellers undertaking a religious journey. Invoking the Turners' observation that "[a] tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist" (Turner and Turner 1978, 20), they want to deconstruct

and then move on to highlight similarities between simplistic popular dichotomies of *sacred* pilgrimage and *secular* tourism. Later in that volume, Badone (2004) traces categorical distinctions between frivolous, materialistic and hedonistic tourists, and serious and ascetic pilgrims (and ethnographers), to popular dichotomies in the Judeo-Christian tradition that remain central to the general worldviews of modern westerners (see Illustration 35). According to Badone (2004, 183), these dichotomies relate to the mythic paradigm of the Fall – a trope typically confirmed and reinforced through tourism. Drawing on the works of Bruner (1993), Fabian (1983), MacCannell (1976) and Taylor (2001), Badone understands tourism as an encounter with the

Other, i.e. faraway peoples and places representing the ‘authentic’, ‘natural’, ‘original’, ‘primitive’, ‘unpolluted’ or ‘spiritually pure’ constituent counterparts to central ideas about the modern west. Associating the Other with the lost sacredness of western culture (Taylor 2001, 10), western tourists travelling to non-western destinations seek to experience the privileged original, the primitive, childlike, unpolluted and pure existence of some prior time. They are, as Bruner (1993, 324) writes, returning to *the Garden* from which everything modern or western is considered a contemporary degradation.

There are remarkable parallels between this and how Chagossians conceptualised their journey. ‘Back to paradise’, as their main slogan declared, was by no means less a return to the Garden from where everything modern (or Mauritian) was considered a contemporary degradation. Chagossians however insisted they were ‘pilgrims’ and not ‘tourists’. This suggests that elements of common understanding are found in both concepts. However, along the very same Judeo-Christian informed divide between the modern (post-Fall) west and the non-modern (pre-Fall) rest, the roles of self and Other is reorganised. To shed light on this, and to understand the political significance of this difference, it is instructive to consider certain parallels to correspondence. I argued that elements of correspondence are found in both pilgrimage and tourism. However, the correspondence at work in tourism is typically centred on a quest for alterity, as in confirming (modern) selves through encounters with (non-modern) Others. Certainly, such encounters bring about transformations too, especially within host societies (e.g. Bruner 1991). At tourist destinations, sites and people often change to accommodate ‘the tourist gaze’. That is, tourists’ imaginations (typically shaped, reinforced and standardised by travel companies) about local populations’ particular cultures in those places (Urry 2002). This is also typical for Mauritius, which is a very popular tourist destination (see Schnepel 2009, Schnepel and Schnepel 2009, 2011). Such changes are complex, not least because they often revolve around the issue of remaining the same and not changing at all, in the sense of reviving and conserving local cultural traditions that date back to earlier times. Hosts often invest in accommodating tourists’ desires for authentic experiences through staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973, 1976), an economy based on confirming Otherness through staged cultural events for consumption of the authentic and exotic non-modern. Thereby they can draw on local cultural distinctiveness to turn destinations into valued commodities in a competitive global tourist market. One can see such performances as a form of cultural closure. Authentic or not, they are part of a big and widespread business of essentialism, which indeed promotes localism and particularism in a globalising world. The important point here is that by performing “a kind of living museum” for tourists (MacCannell 1973, 596), local people act out their role as their visitors’ exotic, non-modern or even primitive Other. But there is more to this than a simple confirmation of tourists’ self-image. Such activities demonstrate that the ideological divide between the ‘modern west’ and the ‘non-modern rest’ resonates in the post-colonies, where it has real and effective impact on local people’s lives. It also shows that when faced with widespread western preconceptions, people are not passive, but turn Otherness to their own advantage. An important point to make here is that pilgrimage can also form a setting for staging authenticity. The potentials in this clearly extend the tourism business. In ways impossible for tourism, pilgrimage gives room for those who journey to take on this role of the Other. Pilgrimage can be a powerful way of – and also offer a convincing stage for – acting out

the authentic Other vis-à-vis audiences in the so-called modern west, especially for people already associated with the so-called non-modern world such as indigenous peoples.

There are strong conceptual connections between ‘natives’ and ‘pilgrimage’. The rhetoric of pilgrims returning to a shrine or an ancient grave is more than compatible with the sedentarist ideology presupposing bounded interconnections between peoples, cultures and places. The purest contemporary expressions of these imageries are found in discourses about the place of natives and indigenous populations in their local environments (cf. Appadurai 1988). As American Indian tribal Chairman Lee Marshall revealingly stated in a public hearing about the repatriation of the Havasupai people on 18 May 1971: “I am the Grand Canyon” (Hirst 2006). Marginalised groups can have much to gain by accommodating stereotypes of the native Other. Especially so, if they aim to re-appropriate occupied land or gain access to local resources controlled and exploited by western powers. As the tourism business demonstrates, such imageries have a strong appeal to people in western countries. Marginalised groups can increase their chances of acquiring voice in western media if they adopt the appropriate rhetoric and act accordingly. In this way, they may appeal to electorates in western states, and thereby hope to put pressure on those foreign governments they hold responsible for their current condition. International NGOs can offer significant assistance in such cases. In such activism, there is evidently a strong element of neo-colonialism involved, and one must add that in cases of severe deprivation marginalised people may even be forced to accommodate western imageries only to have their histories of deprivation noticed. The point to make here is that pilgrimage activity can be effective in this regard. In today’s world, both ‘natives’ and ‘pilgrimage’ derive central meanings through the constituent counter-category of the ‘modern’. Accordingly, pilgrimage easily and convincingly lends itself to politics of cultural recognition. By peregrinating, natives can sacralise and incarcerate themselves into their destinations, and thereby support and authenticate claims to land and resources connected to them.

For mobility to work as a political strategy, performance is crucial. To perform a journey as tourists, or visitors, is a poor means to monopolise meaning or support claims to land or other resources at a certain destination. Tourism communicates that the traveller is a temporary guest away from home, with no significant connections to the destination, and hence little if any authority to define its meaning – let alone to claim any rights to it. This is not to say that sacralisation is unimportant in tourism, but the sacralisation at work here is a commercial strategy to transform sites into attractive tourist destinations, and not a result of tourists’ presence or how they journey there.² If places can be made sacred through pilgrim activity, tourism rather works the other way round and de-sacralises the aura of authenticity that has been invested in such places (Badone 2004, Bruner 1991, Graburn 1995, Schramm 2004, Taylor 2001). Tourism is widely regarded as an agent of modernisation that brings about irreversible changes to faraway Others’ ‘natural’ environment and ways of life. Coming in to play here is the trope of the Fall and the disappearance of the pre-modern Garden. Tourism is seen as a driving force in this regard, contributing to what Clifford (1986) termed the ‘trope of the vanishing primitive’ – a view in western imagery whereby non-westerners exist on the edge

² MacCannell (1976) discusses how places and objects are transformed into attractive tourist destinations through processes of sight sacralisation that include naming, framing, elevation, enshrinement, and mechanical and social reproduction. See Fine and Speer (1985) for a discussion on MacCannell’s sight sacralisation and how tour guide performances can be understood in this way.

of change due to irreversible forces of modernisation (cf. Bruner 1991). Hence, for mobility to work as political strategy in the way discussed here, it is imperative that those who journey leave no impression of being modern tourists. In their performance, they should accordingly avoid displaying typical expressions of leisure, hedonism, superficial materialism and individualism. They should rather journey as a uniform group of ascetic travellers seriously devoted to whatever their destination may symbolise, and adopt aesthetics and rhetoric in accordance with the emergent pilgrim-image. By defining and convincingly performing a journey as a pilgrimage, it is even possible to bypass the argument of tradition and justify claims to undertake a *first* pilgrimage along a route to a destination that is not recognised as a pilgrimage route or pilgrimage site, but which can become so through the movement of those who journey.

However, tourists were not the only category of travellers Chagossian pilgrims dissociated from. That Chagossian migrants to England were excluded from this journey suggests that migration and pilgrimage are related too. It is important to emphasise that the form of migration I refer to here concerns migration from a post-colony to its former colonial centre. We have seen that Chagossians conceptualise migration to the UK in a terminology characteristic for another prominent discourse in Mauritius, namely the much-propagated rhetoric of national development. I detailed above how the ideological divide between the so-called modern West and its Other relates to popular distinctions between pilgrimage and tourism. This divide is no less important to the development discourse that clearly informs Chagossians' conceptualisation of migration to the UK. This suggests that understandings of these forms of mobility – tourism, pilgrimage and migration – are interconnected, for the Chagossians at least, but possibly also in other cases.

This, as we have seen, has to do with the economy and how the economy is framed and disseminated on the local level – particularly forcefully so at times of economic crisis. Local impacts of the tourist industry are far from insignificant in Mauritius, but it is off the mark to presume that the ideological divide between the so-called modern west and its Other is mainly reinforced locally by tourism. Most persuasively, it is conveyed through an official nationalist rhetoric I have termed 'unity in development'. The development ideology provides prevailing structures of poverty and inequality with a quasi-evolutionary justification by asserting that less developed countries will in some future become developed like those in the modern west – typically the former colonial powers (Ferguson 2006). Framed in simplistic categories appearing as economic stages, presented and promised by well-respected (inter)national authorities, such portrayals of the state and the state of the state-economy add flesh and meaning to the ideological divide between the modern west and its Other on the local level.

The development rhetoric – which in the Mauritian case was expressed through the symbolism of a ship *en route* to its destiny – is centred on the concepts of 'mobility' and 'change'. These two concepts are in many ways central in this study, especially in relation to their opposites. In Christian tradition, the 'immobile' and 'unchanging' are key attributes of the utmost sacred, God himself. They distinguish an infinite and eternal Creator from his creation – the material world of humankind that exists, moves and changes in time. Today we find these loaded concepts of the 'immobile' and 'unchanging' at the core of widespread romantic understandings of natives as rooted, pre-modern people caught up in timeless repetition of cultural traditions suited to their local environment. That also this imagery takes on sacred dimensions comes to expression in quests for alterity in modern secular tourism. But

the 'immobile' and 'unchanging' are also central to development, a concept closely associated with the material man-engineered modern world. Development is all about change. It presents itself as a *departure* from the 'immobile' and 'unchanging'. For that reason, development must also insist on these two concepts in order to make sense.

Development thus presents itself as a journey across time. That is, a metaphorical journey of transitions through which less developed societies and their economies become developed like Western model societies – typically the former colonial power. The Chagossian case suggests that in post-colonial states, where such development rhetoric is prevalent, the development discourse can inform local understandings of migration to the former colonial centre. Migration is, of course, a physical journey across space, but it is also a journey imagined one way or another. If both development and migration are imagined as journeys, and the destination in both cases concern the former colonial centre, they already have much in common. This can open for a conceptualisation of such migration in a terminology of 'moving forward', 'change', 'progression', 'openness', 'forwardness', 'future-orientation' and even 'development' itself. Thus, migration from the post-colonies to the former colonial centre can be conceptualised and understood as a journey to development. In post-colonial states, such migration presents itself as a favourable alternative to propagated meta-journeys of national development, which are more prone to be wrapped in a pilgrimage rhetoric of hard work and sacrifice *en route* to a future Promised Land. Especially, at times of economic crisis. While many families then lose their basic economic security, local authorities can, as the Mauritian example demonstrates, then be advised and assisted by powerful transnational institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF to propagate the development ideology to prevent social unrest. However, to be, or to become, unemployed within the context of this framework, may easily translate into a social stigma of not contributing to an important common development project. When Chagossians in Mauritius chose to migrate to the UK, they took, so to speak, the disseminated Mauritian 'destiny' in their own hands. As the way they talked about it confirms, they, too, embarked on a journey to development, but along a different route than the one encouraged by Mauritian and other authorities – arriving, albeit physically, at the so-called developed colonial centre that also represents a model for Mauritian development.

This reveals the contours of an interesting conflict. All the above concepts of 'forwardness', 'progression' and 'change' etc. are what indigenous peoples, natives and other groups engaged in contemporary ethno-cultural politics must dissociate from. If they wish to be recognised by the public or those in power as a culturally distinct group, they must insist on at least some elements of the immobile and unchanging. If one section of a group is much devoted to identity politics of this kind, they may easily regard co-ethnic members who migrate to the colonial centre as 'traitors' who 'give up' and 'take the easy way out' (something that also can take on deep religious meanings). Of course, those who migrate need not view themselves in the same way. They may well embrace values of 'change' and 'openness' as encouraged by the state. But this is likely to appear problematic to marginalised groups that must accommodate western images of the authentic native Other to be recognised as culturally distinct, which, in the frame of an ethnically ordered world, is an important first step to achieving autonomous voice and positive discrimination. As argued, tourism is often considered an agent of modernisation. When migration to a colonial centre is expressed in the terminology of development, it works in much the same way and pollutes and de-sacralises the

aura of authenticity that other members of their ethnic community strive to produce and maintain. I noted that for movement as a strategy of site-sacralisation to work, it is imperative that those who journey do not appear as a group of tourists. For people who define and perform their journey as a pilgrimage for such a purpose, it easily appears equally important to dissociate from their in-group's emigrants.

How political opponents will counter such ethno-political activism can take many forms. One strategy that has gained ground and potency over the last few decades is to partner up with one of the strongest political lobbies in the west, the international environmentalist lobby, and declare contested areas nature reserves. This can effectively exclude local people from their homes, lands and local resources, and can also be hugely popular among people (and voters) at the centre who remain unaffected by new restrictions on entry and access to eco-hotspots in other parts of the world. This study has shown that there is also a discursive logic to such 'green' counter-strategies. In line with established discourses about rooted natives and homelands promoted by their opponents, which are often grounded in reports of earlier colonial authorities, also the conservationist discourse draws on ecological argumentation. And in the (post-)Christian West, the environmentalist discourse is no less furnished with moralities derived from the trope of the Fall. In its purest form – and here lies the potentiality of conservationism as counter-strategy – modernity and environmental degradation are associated with all humans. In biblical terms: After the Fall, there was no room for any humans in the Garden. Today, such a Garden can in practice be created by those who possess the power to declare space inaccessible to people. This can then be legitimised with an appeal to environmental degradation and associated (post-)Christian moralities. For those excluded, there is little room left for political negotiation at this stage of the quasi-ecological discourse. If the discourse is not rejected altogether, it must concern whether local people form a group that is Other enough (i.e. dissociated with modernity) to be accepted within the Garden. To remain relevant political actors in the continuation of this green neo-colonial discourse, they must accommodate a dominant imagery of the Other and present themselves as natives, 'attached' and 'rooted' like plants and trees in the land to which they claim to belong – forced, more or less, to exclude themselves from the category of modern humans. They could, as Chagossians and their supporters have proposed, become 'guardians of their own environment'. In such political contests, 'natives' must dissociate from the 'modern' if they wish to be recognised as such. This implies that travelling natives can hardly be tourists. If other parties define them as such (or as visitors for that matter), they are obstructing their political claims. As 'rooted' and 'traditional' populations, natives do not go well with mobility and change. These are key qualities associated with their constituent modern Other, sometimes including migrating co-ethnic members who have, so to speak, moved on. Travelling natives, therefore, are typically forcefully displaced, removed, deported or uprooted by someone else. Or, where there is an element of choice involved, they journey as pilgrims, since repeated travels along established routes to destinations they claim to be connected to, hardly qualify as mobility at all. With repetition, mobility becomes tradition and thus turns into the opposite of change.

In this thesis I have explored pilgrimage both as a physical journey and as a metaphor. A number of scholars have pointed out that pilgrimage easily lends itself as a metaphor to frame quests in life – even life itself (Morinis 1992, 23, Baumann 1996, 22, Davidson and Gitlitz

2002, 342, Coleman and Eade 2004, 18). This was evidently also the case in Mauritius. This study demonstrates that also meta-journeys can have powerful political dimensions. Mauritian nationalism, for example, was framed as a meta-journey marked by sacrifice and hard work *en route* to a valued common destiny. The current economic crisis was thereby reframed and reduced to another obstacle (among earlier obstacles and rewards) along the way to progress and prosperity, serving the political purpose of securing commitment to the state in the face of deteriorating economic conditions. This study also shows that pilgrimage can be a powerful metaphor to re-frame political protest movements. In the run-up to their journey in 2006, Chagossians' entire post-eviction history of political actions was re-conceptualised as a meta-pilgrimage. This particular past was then more than monopolised into one coherent 'struggle'. It took on new meanings too. Framed as a long and hard pilgrimage, with obstacles and rewards *en route* to a political destination, Chagossians' past and present sufferings were cast into new light, even taking on important meanings from other journeys like the biblical story of the Exodus. In decisive ways, then, the Chagossian pilgrimage was entangled in a number of journeys. This demonstrates the limitations of studying pilgrimages as an institution in itself. One could rather conclude that to study a pilgrimage (and other journeys) may require understanding of those other physical, historical, textual, metaphorical, and imagined journeys to which it is most intimately related.

Coleman and Eade (2004, 18) point to the potential gains of interrogating interconnections between pilgrimage as movement and reflexivity. This is very much what I have done in this study. A highly interesting finding in respect of this is how the particular context of a physical pilgrimage can elicit the use of pilgrimage as a metaphor for a political struggle, which then effectively re-frames that struggle as a metaphorical pilgrimage to a common political destination. The physical pilgrimage about to materialise then becomes meaningful within that frame as it is reduced to a step *en route* to the destination of the metaphorical pilgrimage – in this case, compensation and right to repatriation. The 'back to paradise' slogan for the Chagossians' journey in 2006 eventually then referred to the destination of their physical as well as their metaphorical pilgrimage. Reaching that contested destination required steady belief and commitment on the part of those who not only physically and metaphorically journeyed towards it, but also sacralised it as they peregrinated along the route that would place their roots where they really mattered.

As we have seen, that destination is always in the making. At this point in time it was a paradise, at once a destination and a place of origin for the pilgrims and the wider ethnic community they represented. As this study has shown however, Chagossians' socio-political circumstances have changed before, and they can rapidly change again. To what extent a politics of placing roots and (re)directing routes will matter in the future is therefore not a given. Chagossians' journey in 2006 was well positioned within the frame of a sedentarist ideology and the ethnically ordered world. This order, I have argued, vest pilgrimages with important political potentials. But we have also seen that pilgrimage was far from the only form of political activism Chagossians have undertaken since they submitted to this ideological framework in the 1980s. Many new possibilities for political action then emerged. Chagossians have since revitalised, exposed and recorded their cultural traditions, pursued indigenous status in the UN, initiated legal claims over matters of unlawful exile and cultural genocide in international courts, fought to be recognised as British citizens, and even argued to be allowed

to live and work in the Chagos Archipelago as guardians of their own environment. In this perspective, pilgrimage does not appear very different from other political activities. It rather becomes one among many possible political strategies within a particular world order. The question, which then emerges, is whether the concept of ‘sacralising the contested’ should be reserved for pilgrimages only? Indeed, this concept was derived from the debates on pilgrimage, and I constructed it to explain central processes at work in Chagossians’ pilgrimage in 2006. The concept is a synthesis, which draws, on the one hand, on Eade and Sallnow’s finding that pilgrims are ‘contesting the sacred’, meaning that pilgrims from different backgrounds compete to define meanings of established pilgrimage destinations. And, on the other hand, it draws on the sacralisation processes described by Coleman and Eade (2004) and Fife (2004), which concerns how destinations can be made sacred through the activities of pilgrims. The broader historical and socio-political perspectives in which I have analysed this particular pilgrimage prompt the question of whether the pilgrimage was the only way the Chagossians were sacralising the contested. As we have seen, an important division has developed within the Chagossian diaspora. One section of their transnational community sacralised the contested by peregrinating, in both physical and metaphorical sense, to their homeland in the Chagos Archipelago. The other section, which was excluded from the physical pilgrimage in 2006, had migrated to England as British citizens. Chagossian understanding of this migration was very much informed by Mauritian nationalism. Moreover, this nationalism was expressed as a pilgrimage too. Some Chagossians even re-placed their homeland within UK political borders and conceptualised their migration to the colonial centre as a homecoming. The question I will leave open at the end of this study is whether, or in what ways, the section of the Chagossian community who embraced the UK passports – perhaps the most sacred object of the sedentarist ideology and the ethnically ordered world – were also doing much the same thing.

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